

“Distrust everyone in whom the impulse to punish is powerful!”
--- Friedrich Nietzsche

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Cash for the poor
DIRECT cash transfer to over five lakh Amphan-hit families in West Bengal is what chief minister Mamata Banerjee would do by way of government support to mitigate the sufferings of the cyclone-hit families. She is said to have taken the advice of Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee before making the announcement on Friday. While the Opposition belittled her offer by saying she had made empty offers in the past, the positive side of this initiative cannot be ignored. Money, once given, would reach directly into the hands of the affected people. This means middlemen – in the form of agents of politicians and local government functionaries – would not take a cut from the money on offer.

The central government’s Rs 20 lakh crore stimulus package to re-energise the down-and-out national economy, announced in five tranches by finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman recently might or might not see the desired results. It remains to be seen how such flow of money would work in a positive manner at the ground level or looted right and left as had been the case in the past. One good thing PM Modi did after he came to power in Delhi in 2014 was the opening of bank accounts for the poor families. Most such families got something by way of reimbursement of subsidies etc. In other words, now people are getting money from the government, unlike a scenario of the past when people had to pay taxes to the government in a one-way traffic. Affluent economies that have earnings from oil wealth etc could afford to pay their citizens money in regular doses. The rulers shared the benefits from the natural wealth with the people, though in small sums. India has huge coal deposits, but it adopts the short-cut of importing coal.

In a nation of 1.3 billion plus people, some 80 per cent of them are of poor and lower middle-class background, and feeding them would require huge amounts every month. Still, the partly free and partly subsidized ration schemes for BPL families are the telling signs of the times. When a government spends money hugely for upkeep of the poor by way of giving them free food, chances are also that a generation of indolent people will make the nation poorer by doing no work. Governments that come to power for five years have a one-point agenda, namely to create vote banks out of various sections of the people so that they can win the next polls and remain in power. But national interests should remain paramount.

TO THE EDITOR

The decrepit Dawki bridge

Editor,
Dawki Bridge is one of the most exemplary suspension bridge in the state of Meghalaya that was built over the Umngot River during British-era. The bridge is a heritage structure constructed in 1932. The bridge acts as a life-line connection for the indigenous people of Riwar area, which is also strategically and commercially important to the state. It connects East Khasi Hills and West Jaintia Hills district at Dawki Bakur and also connects the National Highway to Bangladesh(NH40)
Over the years with extensive exports and transportation of lime/ boulder stones by of over 300 trucks daily which ply over this bridge which are owned and operated by ravenous exporters the old and decrepit suspension bridge is imperiled.
In the last 7 years as a concerned local resident I have observed that the bridge is in a debilitated state with the rampant plying of heavy trucks. And by the looks of it, it seems like the bridge is exclusively under the possession and control of

the quarry owners and exporters from Nongiri Elaka (Pynursla/Rngain) and even from Nongstoin. And it’s no longer safe for the commuters and pedestrians. It seems that apparent monopoly and control of the bridge and the narrow road stretch of about 15 km has caused havoc, distress ,frustration and anger for the locals on daily basis, especially on Bakur Market Day (Sngi lew Bakur-Dawki) that occurs once after every fourth day of the week. As a result this causes heavy traffic jam for long hours and there are incidents where farmers, small local businessmen fail to reach the market on time and had to walk few kilometers to do their transactions which consequently has a huge negative impact. This also poses several challenges and danger to public transport and commuters in the area at large. Government has failed and neglected to maintain, renovate or repair the bridge. It has even ignored to address this issue because just painting the bridge once in 2-3 years is not enough.
For the record, the foundation stone was laid on 13 November 2009 to replace the existing single-lane hanging bridge by the then Union Minister of State

for Roads, Transport and Highways, Mahadev S. Khandela. However as per initial estimate, the new 165-metre Reinforced Concrete bridge was to be completed in 2011 at a cost of 21.12 crores. In fact, the bridge has completed its living span. Eleven long years have passed but the bridge at Dawki Bakur has not seen the light of the day as the construction failed to take off.
With the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic in the state it is tough to watch the world coming to a standstill. The pandemic has caused a global reduction in economic activity and although this is a major cause for concern, the ramping down of human activity appears to have had a positive impact on the environment and particularly on the shaky old bridge. After unfruitful appeal to the Government and effete NGOs, time has come to knock the doors of the High Court through Public Interest Litigation in order to impel the Government authorities to regulate vehicular movement, widening of the long narrow road and to come up with the alternate solutions to save the bridge for the common good of all in the post covid19 period.

Yours etc.,
Lop Stevenson
Kheglah
Vice President NEHUSU
2019-20

India enters unlocking stage

Editor,
As India exits the fourth phase of the lockdown, there has been significant rise in covid-19 cases in the country. The lockdown and its restrictions will continue only in containment zones. Termed Unlock-1, the guidelines would come into effect from June 1, 2020 and would be effective till June 30, 2020. There will be a graded easing of restrictions in three phases outside the containment zones. The resumption of all activities will be announced only after June. Unfortunately, the disease continues spread exponentially with confirmed cases reaching nearly two lakhs. The only relieving aspect of the virus spread is that fatality rate is very low in contrast with that of some other countries. The rise in the number of infections has caused panic among the public that the cases will only rise when the lockdown is lifted. But lockdowns in succession

have made people restless and they are now seen in large numbers in public places. They feign ignorance about the gravity of the situation. Lockdown norms are not strictly adhered to.
According to National Institute of Mental Health and Neuro Sciences (NIMHANS), if the infection cases continue to be the same, there are chances that at least 50% of India’s population could be infected by December this year. Many factors have contributed to the rise in the number of positive cases. Reverse migration of migrant workers, students and professionals, repatriation, lack of strict enforcement of quarantine and social distancing, spread of the disease among healthcare workers, ineffective contact tracing, low testing rates and so on have led to rise in positive cases. The numbers will go up from June onwards and there may be community spread. By December end, half of the population is likely to be infected with the virus. The good news is that only 5-10% of the cases will have to be treated with high-flow oxygen and only 5% would require ventilator support.
We need to consider the likely scenarios and be prepared to face them. States must gear up with

medical infrastructure to handle the rising cases, especially those cases that will require intensive medical care and treatment. People must take all necessary precautions and preventive measures. Given the high population of the country and lack of awareness among the public and the tendency to violate pandemic protocols, infection cases are likely to increase. Enforcing the use of masks and social distancing norms and isolation of everyone with symptoms is the only protection against infection.
All states have to scale up testing and widen community surveillance. We can use symptom-based surveillance of households for community testing using community volunteers. Future transmission must be monitored so that it will help in decisions involving health system readiness and other mitigation measures. There are many impediments on the way and we will need to face the challenges.
Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Via email

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Of God and Caesar

By HH Mohrmen

whether he is in the treasury bench or with the Opposition or in between.
Adelbert’s actions are the epitome of people who are wear their religion on their sleeves. It is a consequence of spiritual arrogance that is prevailing amongst the members of many churches now. These are people who think that only their religion is true; only their holy book is important and the other religions are not favoured by God. Since their God is superior, they presume that they can do anything on those whose religions they consider inferior and insignificant. Secularism is where your freedom ends and the rights of the other citizens begins. In short it means respecting each other’s religious beliefs. It is remembering that one’s freedom to swing one’s stick ends where one’s neighbour’s nose begins. It is matter of the spirit, yet some people like to show their religious fervour not realizing that religion is like one’s private parts (pardon my language), not meant for public display.
From the statement in the press, this is what Adelbert said on the floor of the House, verbatim, "We should take COVID-19 as a punishment as we are sinful human beings, hypocrisy, abortion, recognising same sex marriage are going on all around the world. This is not just a war against the invisible enemy but a fight against our faith." The question is that if the pandemic is a punishment from God then why is Adelbert supporting the Government’s fight against it? One would not expect him to seek for help people because it is the will of God. One would expect that he accepts it gracefully and do nothing but pray because acting against the will of God is a sin. How many people agree with him that the pandemic is a punishment from God?
He is against what the scientists the world over who have corroborated their findings about this disease. He is not accepting that COVID-19 is a virus which jumps species? If the scientists come up with a cure to the disease will he not accept it? Or if in one year’s time scientists come up with a vaccination will he

not administer himself or his near and dear ones with the vaccine because the virus is a punishment as commanded by God himself? One would expect that politicians like him would weigh their words before they make statements especially in the floor of the House, but sadly his over-zealous nature got over him.
Adelbert’s statement saying, ‘We should take COVID-19 ... not just a war against the invisible enemy but a fight against our faith...’is wrong in the first place. From this statement and his using the Bible which is the holy book of the Christians it is inferred that Adelbert is taking for granted that all Meghalayans are Christians. Who gave him the right to assume that all citizens of Meghalayans are Christians? This is the height of holier than thou attitude which is emerging in many Christians now replacing the real Christ of the synoptic gospels. Where is the Jesus who is humble and teaches love and forgiveness? And instead of trying to be Christ-like to love our neighbours, we want them to be punished for being different from us!
In Adelbert’s sweeping statement one may ask, ‘Where is Jesus who taught us to pray, “Forgive us and our sins as we forgive others?” Where is the loving and forgiving father whom Jesus has spoken about through his sermons and parables in the gospels? Instead of trying to be Christ-like, we immerse ourselves in the holier than thou attitude calling others sinners. The loving and forgiving father is now being replaced by the vindictive God of fury whom Jesus has spoken about through his sermons and parables in the gospels? Instead of trying to be Christ-like, we immerse ourselves in the holier than thou attitude calling others sinners. The loving and forgiving father is now being replaced by the vindictive God of fury whom Jesus has spoken about through his sermons and parables in the gospels? Instead of trying to be Christ-like, we immerse ourselves in the holier than thou attitude calling others sinners. 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“Biodiversity starts in the distant past and it points toward the future.”
-- Frans Lanting

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The slippery India-China tangle

THE recent Chinese incursion into areas in Ladakh is a warning to India not join the US and side with Trump on the ‘punish China for the Wuhan virus’ episode. Lake Pangong Tso in Ladakh is one of the most peaceful borders that China and India share. On the Chinese side of the border a lot of infrastructure has come up, whereas, on the Indian side, there are just a few military establishments with a sprinkling of locals engaged in mountain farming. History is a great teacher but politicians often prefer to forget history and deal with issues as if they were created yesterday. History is a grim reminder that in 1993 there was an Agreement on maintaining peace and status quo along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) along the India-China Border. This Agreement was an outcome of Rajiv Gandhi’s visit to China in 1988 and his meeting with Chinese President Deng Xiaoping. Later, Indian Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh also signed an Agreement for Border Defence Cooperation in 2013 with Chinese premier Li Keqiang. After the 1962 misadventure when the Chinese came right up to Tezpur in Assam but retreated for reasons best known to the Indian military establishment, no such aggression was repeated.

Experts believe that if the Ministry of External Affairs were to faithfully follow up on the successive treaties then the Doklam face-off of 2017 where the Chinese violated the LAC and made incursions into Ladakh would not have happened. Strangely, the Chinese continually reveal their inscrutable nature. In September 2014 when Chinese President Xi Jinping visited India, the Chinese made a surprise move with major troops build-up along the LAC. The Chinese don’t seem to worry too much about treaties. Their sole preoccupation is to secure China’s territorial and economic future at any and all costs. The present stand-off too is a warning to India, not join the anti-China campaign of the western world and not especially to align with the US which has vowed to pull out all economic investments from China to punish it for releasing the Coronavirus (Covid19) on an unsuspecting world in November–December 2019.

At no time in history has any country been censured as China has today. From allegations of manufacturing the coronavirus in the virology institute at Wuhan and spreading it to the world, to threats of pulverizing China’s economic interests, Xi Jinping has had to take it all. For India, the Chinese incursions along the over 2,100-mile LAC is but an attempt to put pressure on the Modi Government not to join the western, anti-China lobby.

Serenading success or ruining failure

The buck stops at Modi’s door

By Poonam I Kaushish

If you can’t dazzle them with brilliance battle them with bull. A truism which comes to mind as the Modi Sarkar rolls out its first year report card nee facts, figures, data and statistics of 2.0, no matter statistics are unreliable facts from reliable figures.

Sure, the Prime Minister can overwhelm with his speaking skills and optics continuing to ride the wings of glory and fame for a new order of aache din. The message must be resounding and messianic. If his first tenure was about ‘Swachh Bharat’ to ‘Make in India’, now it’s Aatma Nirbhar, and ‘Go vocal on local.’ Namo’s progress is a study in chutzpah and grandeur.

Certainly, he’s the smartest politician since Indira Gandhi, has won two full majorities, projects himself as protector and father figure and has contempt for the Lutyens lobby and Khan Market Gang. His macho “56 inch ke chhathi” persona is built on his oratory skills, decisiveness and his connect and identity with the aam aadmi.

Perhaps, that explains his perceived arrogance running a one-man rock band albeit concentrating power in the PMO. A one-way street full of staccato monologue, no dialogue and questions are a strict no-no. He uses Modisque ‘direct marketing’ format and delivers a speech every 1.9 days (45.6 hours) and counting.

He has destroyed all Opposition which is in shambles, fragmented, leaderless and directionless in its elusive quest for a coherent narrative to take on the BJP defines Modi’s first year of 2.0 in office. He has saturated airwaves, social and digital media with his relentless onslaught of ushering in change.

Yet when one draws up the balance-sheet of his Government, can the Prime Minister brush under the carpet the fact that the situation sadly continues to remain stagnant ---status quo ante? Has Modi walked his talk of Saath Hai, Vishwaas Hai...Ho Raha Vikas Hai and delivered? Has he brought about inclusiveness, made minorities comfortable and won their confidence? And where are the jobs, the promised development, infrastructure, quality education even Aache Din? Or, should one believe his de-

tractors who see Modi as a filibuster of a “fundamentalist Party”?

As the BJP Government marks its first anniversary 2.0, the year is likely to be celebrated, though subdued, for fulfillment of its decades-old “core” ideological Hindutva demands of building a Ram temple at Ayodhya (judicial order) and nullification of Article 370, which gave the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir special status.

Two other achievements were criminalising the practice of instant divorce among Muslim men and successfully pushing through the contentious Citizenship (Amendment) Act which seeks to grant citizenship to Hindu, Jain, Sikh, Christian and Parsi from Muslim majority Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh on grounds of religious persecution,

Politically, while the BJP juggernaut rolls on, the electoral rewards show the Party wanting, whereby it underperformed in 5 State Assembly polls compared to its massive 303 MPs Lok Sabha win. With the NaMo factor absent the Party performed below par in Maharashtra, where its traditional ally Shiv Sena joined hands with the Opposition NCP and Congress to form the Government and in Haryana it was forced to ally with Chautala’s JJP to rule.

The Party suffered a big defeat in Jharkhand where it lost power and fared poorly in Delhi. It however, managed to turn the tables in Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh as defections from the JD(S) and Congress saw veteran saffron warhorses Yediyurappa and SS Chouhan as Chief Ministers. Undeniably, as the heart-wrenching migrant crisis continues to unfold it exposes the Government’s floundering and dithering. Stories abound of men and pregnant women carrying mal-nourished children begging for water and food, driven by hunger and joblessness, pushed around by police as they trudge slowly back home on foot or packed in container trucks; run over by goods trains and speeding trucks on highways or falling dead out of exhaustion.

It’s been nine weeks since this exodus began, and no one from the Government has reached out to these millions with even empty sympathy. Instead, they preen around reeling figures of the Shramik trains, money deposited under various schemes like the Garib Kalyan Yojana. Yet the urban and rural poor continue to suffer.

It took the pandemic to showcase that India is grappling with catastrophic suffering on two fronts: Health and Economic. On both counts the level of Government preparedness is as non-existent now as it was earlier. We barely have a health infrastructure which is plagued by heartlessness, lethargy, corruption and bereft of cure and consolation. At best it is rickety. Think. Public investment in health is barely 1% of the GDP? Consequently, public health is in the ICU despite, Government’s cut throat projections and assertions of ‘all’s good.’

Appallingly, the country is crippled by shortage of over 600,000 doctors and two million nurses. there is only one allopathic doctor per 10,189 people, one hospital bed per 2046 persons and one State-run hospital per 90,343 people, one million allopathic doctors for 1.3 billion people of which only 10% work in public health sector and 700 million have no access to specialist care as 80% of specialists live in urban areas.

Startlingly, Modi has still to address key developmental issues that continue to exercise people: employment, enforcing basic state functions like law and order, preventing crime against women and children, inflation, illiteracy and ill-health which are the touchstone of the much-hyped and illusory deal of roti, kapada aur makan. Look at the irony. Cell-phones go abegging, yet people continue to beg for food.

The most notable failure of the Government is that its catchy slogan of minimum government, maximum governance touted as a new power paradigm of providing baggage-free good governance to unshackle moribund laws and State has come to bite him and how! Today, alas, the Government

has its fingers in all economic and social policies for change. Down to deciding if people should eat meat and drink.

Moreover, there is political disquiet over Modi’s failure to curb his fringe rabid Hindutva brigands who espouse communal polarization. This has corroded inter-community relations, to an extent where discrimination against the minority community seems to be par for the course. Less said the better about allegations of Saffronisation of education.

What next? Politically, can Modi change India? Certainly, he is no magician who can cure India of its over 70 years ills expediently, despite his brand of politics. Towards that end he needs to relive what he ad nauseum chants, “The real meaning of politics is not power but service.” He needs to invigorate the system and fortify democratic institutions.

There is no gainsaying that NaMo and his Hindutva cahoots can no longer afford to be complacent or traditional as the young voters do not have the patience for inane diatribe, they demand a better deal for their tomorrow. He can enhance his Government’s performance by addressing weak areas and can covert threats into opportunities.

Time now to stop being smug, ostrich-like cooed in the misconception that ‘all is well’ as it reels of statistics, umpteenth yojnas and continues to pat itself for a job well done. Milking ‘Go vocal on Atmanirbhar’ will not fill malnourished hungry stomachs. People need roti, kapada, makaan and naukri. Besides, Saath and Vishwas alone about Vikas will not usher Aache Din.

All in all, the task is cumbersome and steep. The clock continues to tick as shrewd Modi continues his promises juggernaut. He has to live up to huge expectations generated by his 3D media campaign on twitter, U tube, social networking sites and Man ki baat.

Certainly he has redefined politics and promises further change. Importantly, can and will Modi be able to reconstruct the language of democracy. Remember, leaders don’t build democracies; people do. ----- INFA

Understanding biodiversity

Ecological balance vital

By Dhurjati Mukherjee

The rapid decline in biodiversity, faster than any time in history, with one million species facing extinction, many within decades, has triggered worldwide concern and scientists are engrossed over what transformative action is needed to save our natural systems.

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) was set up to protect life on earth and be the basis for all environmental debate. The UN declared the decade as ‘International Decade of Biodiversity.’ However, protecting wealth and ensuring judicious measures haven’t been taken by most nations as the decade draws to an end this year. Will a new conference scheduled in October evolve some strategy with definite targets, in the backdrop that the World Environment Day has chosen ‘Biodiversity’ as the theme, indicating the thrust on the subject in 2020.

Humanity’s culpability in what many scientists believe to be a planetary emergency has been reaffirmed by a detailed and depressing Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report by international experts, based on thousands of scientific studies whose findings are indeed quite grim.

A major report published by the Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services (IPBES) in 2019 found that an average of 25 per cent of all animal and plant species assessed face extinction, many within decades. This translates into around 1 million species that face extinction unless urgent and drastic action is taken to protect them. Moreover, the recently released State of India’s Birds Report 2020’ showed that while our national bird peacock is doing well, over a hundred species of birds face extinction.

It may also be mentioned that the IPBES Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services last year, compiled by 145 experts/authors from 50 countries with inputs from 310 contributing authors over the past three years, is another comprehensive report ever completed and builds on the landmark Millennium Ecosystem Assessment of 2005, introducing innovative ways of evaluating evidence. The Report assessed changes over the past five decades, providing a comprehensive picture of the relationship between economic development pathways and their impacts on nature and offers a range of possible scenarios for the coming decades.

Biodiversity ensures natural sustainability for all life on the planet. For example, more abundant crops and fresher air. Over 3 billion people depend on marine and coastal biodiversity, while over 1.6 billion people rely on forests for livelihood. The loss of biodiversity affects lives of over 1 billion people living in drylands. Thus, biological diversity continues to be a subject of intense research to investigate and further broaden our knowledge as only 1.3 million of an estimated 10 million species of plants and animals have been identified till date.

Research is ongoing over economic linkages of biological wealth, which unfortunately is not well circulated in discussions on environment and development. Though there is a vague understanding of the multiplicity of species on planet earth, there is no clarity on how this diversity gives stability to life and also provides ecosystem services to villagers and city dwellers. A book, ‘The Sixth Extinction’ by Elizabeth Kolbert, published a few

years back, warned of a devastating sequel with plant and animal species on land and sea disappearing at a rapid pace and their habitats destroyed by human activities.

In India, it is ironic that it was the first country to enact a Biodiversity Act in 2002 and the National Biodiversity Authority was established a year later. The Act was built on three goals of CBD – conservation of biodiversity, encouraging its sustainable use and ensuring the benefits arising from its use are equitably shared with those who helped in conserving the country’s biological wealth. It put in place a 3-tier structure to manage biological diversity and there are State biodiversity boards with some even having biodiversity committees in many local bodies.

International attempts have been made at measuring economic benefits from biodiversity. A report ‘The Economics of Ecosystems & Biodiversity’ (TEEB) estimated benefits of US \$3.7 trillion from avoiding greenhouse gas emissions through forest conservation, which happens to be just one ecosystem service function from biodiversity.

A new instrument called Reducing Emissions from Deforestation & Degradation of Forests’ (REED) was introduced at the Copenhagen conference in 2009 to channel funds for forests’ preservation. But not much headway was made since and clearing of forests and destruction of wetlands globally continues.

Natural diversity in form of food crops and land structure has been the basis of agricultural research and food security of the earth’s growing population. Experts agree that the present 7-8 billion population and its rapid pace of growth would need at least four planets to provide them a livable lifestyle. The obvious answer to solving the current problems lies in agri-biotechnologies by mixing and matching genetic traits from within and outside the species; this could be the driver for global, including India’s, agricultural growth and productivity increase.

Besides, pharmaceutical and biotechnological industries draw their unique molecules from naturally occurring biological diversity. This diversity is the basis for the pharma sector. Around 25-35% if not more of the \$649 billion pharmaceutical market is derived from genetic resources. Bio-prospecting and process of looking for plant and animal genes need to be geared up in India as the market is expected to grow to \$300 million from around \$60-\$70 million presently.

India has unique distinction in this sector, as companies are making significant investments in bio-manufacturing to enter global markets and global pharma entities are looking to us as their manufacturing base. Another report published a few years’ back states China holds 8.5% of global concentration of capacity and employment, India 8% and Japan and some other Asian countries 9.2%. These areas have been growing rapidly in bio-manufacturing capacity than the global average.

In view of huge economic benefits of biological diversity in our daily life, the Government needs to be serious, given we have a huge population and rising pollution. While Delhi gets its drinking water from the Himalayas, Mumbai and Bengaluru get it from the Western Ghats and Chennai is also dependent on the Ghats to trap and release water into the Krishna River. ---INFA

TO THE EDITOR

Patal Lok courts controversy

Editor,
One wonders why some crowd-pleasing film-makers feed their audience with trash. Nothing could be more disgusting than that we are being served with visual feasts that only hurt our hearts. Without a sense of guilt, the producers churn up a film in the name of creativity and put certain communities down, hurting their collective sentiments and pride.

Recently, Bollywood actress Anushka Sharma, who has produced a web series *Patal Lok*, streaming from Amazon Prime, has hurt the sentiments of the Nepali speaking Gorkha communities in India. What was offensive to the Gorkha people of Northeast India is that a Nepali-speaking female character in that series has been demeaned and hurled obscenities at. Many organizations immediately went up in arms against this sexually racial slur. Not just that, a Lawyers’ Guild from West Bengal immediately filed a suit against the producer. The situation is now very charged up. Two Members of Parliament from West Bengal and Sikkim have shot letters to the Min-

istry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi expressing deep displeasure and condemning the particular scene in the series. Congress MP from Assam – Gaurav Gogoi, son of former Chief Minister of Assam - Tarun Gogoi, in his letter to the Minister vociferously berated the show and demanded that he take prompt action. The Assam MP has aptly underlined the unmatched contribution of the Gorkha communities to the country, particularly in nation-building. Without any exaggeration, it can be said that even prior to India’s independence the Gorkhas were the most trusted warriors to fight for the country besides their predominant presence now in every segment of defence service in the country. Why do filmmakers only carry racial prejudices against the people bearing the chinky/mongoloid feature, particularly from Northeast India? Is taking delight in hurting other communities not a perverse act?

This apart, the film series has come as a shocker to the Sikh communities as well. Manjinder Singh Sirsa, the former Akali Dal political leader and Delhi Sikh Gurudwara Prabandhak has also sent a legal notice to AMAZON Prime objecting to the contents and idea

behind this show, as Sikh communities are outrageously stereotyped and shown in the bad light.

Visual fun and entertainment at the cost of social humiliation, and disrespect to any community should not be tolerated. People are not insensitive beings to consume whatever is put forth for commercial gains. They are human beings endowed with the good sense of differentiating between good and bad, love and hatred. So no film producer/director should serve perverse entertainment. People will not put up with cinematic feasts that hurt our pride and dignity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

America pays for racism

Editor,
Massive protests over the death of a black man in Minnesota has now spread to over 30 cities in the US and fires burned unchecked even while people ignore curfews and are engaged in large scale-arson. George Floyd, a black man was killed on Monday after one of the officers, who was responding to a call about an alleged counterfeit bill used at a store, knelt on his neck while he was handcuffed

and lying face down on the ground. Unable to breathe, Floyd called out, “I can’t breathe,” but the police officer kept pressing his knee on Floyd’s neck for almost eight minutes in a most cruel and sadistic manner. By the time the police officer released his knee, the hapless Floyd later died of in police custody. The officer, Derek Chauvin and the three others were fired the next day.

The police officer’s deliberate act of suffocating Floyd to death was captured on the cell phone by an onlooker and it soon went viral on social media platforms. Outraged at the way Floyd had been strangled to death by the police officer, people flowed to the streets and mass protests were taken out. Protesters also started looting shops and malls and police started shooting. A police station was engulfed in a fire set by protesters. It is true that racial discrimination is still persistent all over the world to a lesser degree. Race has contaminated American solidarity, making it impossible for poor whites, threatened by job loss, globalization and the death of carbon-intensive industries, to make common cause with African-Americans, Hispanic-Americans and immigrants. The essence of Ameri-

can ethos is to be liberal towards African-Americans or other non-whites, so how did such a reprehensible thing occur? But this act of the white police officer was widely criticized as being based on racial discrimination. It is a mystery why the mindset of the white Americans is still espoused to racial supremacy when dealing with the problems of African-Americans. Whenever there is an instance of racial discrimination reported from outside America, we have seen Americans shedding crocodile tears. Paradoxically, now in their own country, a black man was strangled to death by a white police officer in a petty case of fraudulence. Is America going back to 18th century when the black people were treated as slaves? It is indeed an affront to Abraham Lincoln who put an end to slavery in 1862.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Via email

Time to open up

Editor,
It is very unfortunate that there is no roadmap nor planning for the last 63 days ever since the lockdown was imposed. There is a new notification published every week regarding activities and timings which are by and large confusing to the general

Yours etc.,
S Sarkar,
Via email

"Action, looks, words, steps, form the alphabet by which you may spell character."

--- Johann Kaspar Lavater

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.292 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, JUNE 3, 2020

Back to basics

WITH a modicum of order getting restored across the nation, other than in hotspots like Mumbai, it’s time now to look forward. Train services have begun since Monday, seeing a schedule of over 200 trains in all directions, while flight operations are also resuming. Malls would open soon and so will most other closed establishments. Among the serious questions at hand, for the government, is how Parliament functioning could resume. Also how will classes resume in educational institutions with social distancing norms in place? Term elections to Rajya Sabha will take place soon, and Parliament’s Monsoon session too cannot be kept on hold for too long. Talk is that, before the start of the Parliament session, a Union Cabinet reshuffle is on the cards. All eyes are now fixed on the serious hit that the economy has taken owing to Covid-19. Speculations are that a new finance minister will step in to replace Nirmala Sitharaman. The Covid-19 front does not give the Government much room for comfort. India’s position on the global Covid map has descended in a week’s time from the 10th to the seventh position. Infections are in the range of around two lakh. The only comfort is that so far the pandemic is mostly under control except for hotspots in about 10 cities which have defied governmental efforts to check its spread. Now Mumbai with its population shut indoors for two months, is faced with a cyclone threat as well, which could also aggravate the Covid crisis there.

Stimulus packages by themselves might not salvage the national economy from the present mess it is in. A negative growth rate will bring its own share of problems on the jobs and livelihood fronts, seriously straining every human nerve. The big promises coming from Prime Minister Narendra Modi these days should be seen, in sum, as attempts at raising the confidence levels of the nation. It is time for the PM, as leader of the nation, to prove he means business when it comes to governance. The first term of the Modi government saw frequent changes in portfolios of ministers. The ailment of some senior ministers like Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj, not to mention Manohar Parrikar, only added to the governance handicap at the highest levels. A reshuffle of the cabinet – formed only a year ago – is well within the powers of the Prime Minister, but this cannot be an ongoing trend. This is also time for focused attention on reviving the economy, and the Government must make use of the best talents at its disposal to take growth forward.

A Prayer that Agitates

Representative with a Prayer:

When Adelbert Nongrum, MLA, prayed in the Meghalaya State Assembly; the sanctum sanctorum of Democracy, some said he brought Religion to the House; some saw a person with deep faith or a believer; still some said it was a political ploy, others are still thinking where they stand on this issue. But there are those who were abhorred by his actions, for they understand that this is a House that must keep religion at bay; while others are still contemplating, for to denounce it affects their religious convictions. Only the MLA knows what his motive was. He is answerable to God, not to us. If he genuinely did it with a clean heart, God will bless him.

My first reaction when I saw the news online was confusion. I disagreed with what he did, but after giving much thought, my understanding evolved in a different direction. In this article, I am not trying to support any individuals or institutions; insinuating blame or attributing wrong judgements to any entity. My aim here is to illuminate the issue according to my limited understanding, which is open to any corrections or constructive criticisms.

To paraphrase, when the MLA associated Covid-19 as a punishment from God, no one could prove or disprove whether God is responsible for it. So logically, we cannot proceed to ridicule or refute the MLA, for uttering such statements, because first we have to establish the existence or the absence of God since science is not a methodology that deals with the ontology (study of being, becoming, and existence) of God. That is the realm of philosophy and theology but these too can only propose postulations (assumptions, reasoning) and counter-postulations. The existence or absence of God is a personal experience, a mental or para-psychological affiliation or a spiritual one. So when any one says, ‘God is responsible or is not responsible, we cannot do

or say anything about that as we have no tools (didactic or dialectic) to deal with the statement. Even Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who presided over the trial of Jesus Christ and ordered his crucifixion, could not sense (prove or disprove) that the ‘son of man’ was in front of him, when he said, ‘.... I came to the world to testify the truth’ (John 18:37).

Again, on the existence or absence of God, if my memory serves me well, a friend once told me the story of a seasoned drunkard, who walked near a mosque. He was shouting, swearing, singing etc. People nearby told him to go somewhere and not to shout there, for it is a Godly place; a holy site. The drunkard replied, “Fine! I will go away from here, but show me a place where there is no God, so that I can go there.” None of them were able to reply.

Who knows, what is the motive of the MLA? None of us can attribute any motive(s) but only assumptions. Let us give him the benefit of the doubt. I think he did it following his heart’s devotion; a prayer is not an ill will or an immoral gesture. He is the only MLA from a party afflicted by party politics. He was also known for his emotional lability (outburst), if we remember his past political interactions, opinions and deliberations. I am not here to certify his deeds, but if I am not mistaken, most of his constituents voted for him because they considered him a straightforward personality a genuine grassroots politician, a worker. Watching the quality and the nature of deliberations in the assembly recently, there are instances that make us concerned and which are serious in nature. To cite a few examples, the Health Minister’s incorrect information on incinerators; use of offensive language by a certain member, Agriculture Minister mixing up data etc. If the legislative assembly is a temple of democracy and sacred space for policy and law making, then everyone must respect and honour its sanctity. A legislative assembly is not a place for obfuscation of facts or truth. We are not allowed to

obscure the truth. If that is entertained or accepted, then what is the harm of a verbal prayer?

The prayer by the MLA was an emotional response towards the present crisis but not a rational response in relation to rules and conduct of the House. In this pandemic environment where chaos is the order, not the disorder, certain individuals are likely to act on the basis of their bounded rationality or environment of influence. As a matter of fact, we have already set precedence and created an atmosphere since the beginning of this crisis where religion or religious paraphernalia has been part of the administrative instrument, (from plate banging, candle lighting, Meghalaya prays etc..) to tackle this crisis and bring people together, because we felt that we are dealing with an unpredictable virus that even science cannot curtail nor terminate. We should also remember that in 2018 when this Government was formed, before starting the work the CM arranged a prayer for his cabinet, in the presence of a church elder (The Statesman 6th March 2018). If religion is a private affair, it must be a private affair, right from day one.

Politics and Religion: In the Bible New Testament Jesus said “Give to Caesar, the things that are Caesar’s, To God the things that are God’s” (Mathew 22:21). As followers of Christianity, we understand that we must not mix religion and politics. We have seen so many historical and recent negative repercussions because of that mix. Even the socio-political scenario in our country and polity, is hard to delineate between religion and politics. Religion has fused with politics, and religion too is politics. When elections come certain religious denominations from their pulpit explicitly and implicitly canvass for certain candidates or parties. In India, politics is religion; it blends very well, adding spice to political discourse and electioneering. If politics is also the art of captivating an audience to common cause and objectives, religion too can be considered as a form of politics. Since the Protestant

Teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic

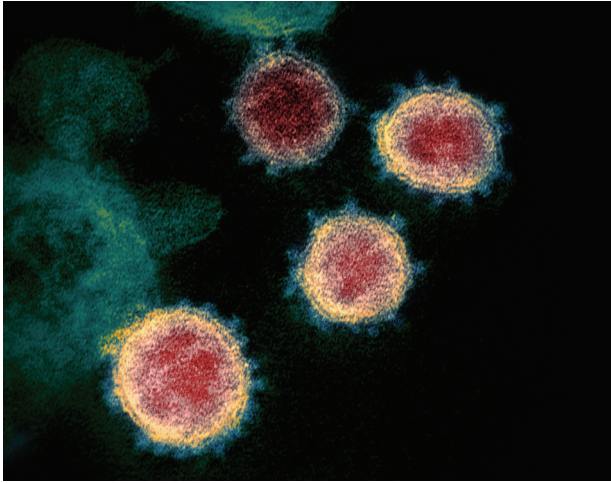
By Preeti Syiemlieh

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought an abrupt halt to our daily ‘normal’ routine. Every day we hear and read about people struggling to meet their basic needs, people losing their livelihood, people dying and losing their loved ones to COVID-19. It would be safe to assume that humans everywhere are facing some kind of hardship due to this pandemic.

It’s been more than 2 months that a nationwide lockdown has been imposed in India. To maintain physical distancing, places which require huge gathering such as markets, offices, cinema halls, restaurants, educational institutions have been closed. Strategies such as work from home and online classes/mentoring has been adopted by various organisations and educational institutions to maintain some level of productivity while also adhering to physical distancing. Globally as well as in India and even in our State, educational institutions have adopted online classes method to teach students. Platforms

real time, it is unfortunate to say that these teachers failed miserably in real life. Priority is given to completion of course and pressuring students to submit assignments on time. Here, some may argue that the teachers are being instructed by the administrators and that their hands are tied but this doesn’t justify the indifference shown by some of the teacher’s towards their students during these trying times.

Aren’t we all in the same storm? Or are some of us are just too oblivious to what is happening around us and the realities of our society?. Definitely the teachers and administrators in these educational institutions are also part of this society and are facing similar hardship which the students are also experiencing. There is the general fear of this disease, the uncertainty of their livelihoods and future. As people are quarantining themselves in their own homes, there are some issues which I would like to highlight which I gathered through media reports and a general sense of how a society works.



such as Zoom, Google meet and Whatsapp are used for connecting with students and assignments are given to assess the student’s learning progress (or rather to just complete the course, the teachers would know better). Conducting online classes to educate students during a global pandemic sounds very noble but how it translates in reality is something which prompted me to write this article. I am not going to comment on the socio-economic disparity among students which the online class method fails to consider, for which much has been written and are available in various media sources.

I am writing this as a guardian who is concerned about the lack of understanding or rather insensitivity of educational institutions, particularly of the teachers, for the mental health of their students.

Various international and national organisations such as WHO (World Health Organisation) and Indian Psychiatric Society have stated that the effects of COVID-19 are not limited only to our physical health but also affect the psychological and emotional health of a large number of people. According to a survey conducted by the Indian Psychiatry Society, within a week of the start of the lockdown, the number of reported cases of mental illness in India had risen by 20% (source: The Print dated May 23rd 2020).

I have a ward, who is studying in one of the most prestigious private institutions of Meghalaya, enrolled in a programme where she has been taught by her teachers to be empathetic towards others, the importance of self-care and mental well-being. But during this pandemic, when the students really needed the teachers to step up their game and practically show how those lessons taught in class can be applied in

During this pandemic, people (students and teachers alike) may be not be living in the most favourable home environment. Some of them may have an abusive parent, spouse or other family members. Some may have lost their source of income; some may have elderly or sick family members to care for; some may be struggling to even get up of their beds and perform their daily duties. All these issues coupled with the uncertainty brought about by this pandemic do not provide for most of the students a suitable state of mind for healthy learning. Education is beyond completing the course, assignments and good grades. And a teacher who is passionate about positively nurturing their students will understand this.

When all this is over, when we are back to our normal routine and students are back in their schools/ colleges what will be remembered, appreciated and have a bearing in the student’s life for the long run is NOT the amount of assignments the teachers forced them to complete, the PPTs and articles circulated, the Zoom meetings and links to YouTube videos. What will be remembered is the empathy the teachers showed towards the students’ problems, teachers meeting them half way or even beyond to navigate these challenges with compassion as they impart learning and most importantly for not being a cause for the student’s mental health to deteriorate.

Lastly, I am also very aware that there are teachers, who are standing against the administration and their colleagues, to voice out the challenges faced by the students. These teachers truly care for the holistic development of the young minds in our society and not just about providing information.

TO THE EDITOR

Wanted factual reports

Editor,
Apropos the report on the state of affairs in quarantine centres in the city (ST May 29, 2020), I am made to understand from my sources in the district administration, that the arrangement at Polo is meant simply as a transportation point where returnees are being sorted to be sent to different quarantine centres and NOT for quarantining anybody. In fact, most of the returnees from Haryana have been quarantined at the Pastoral Centre which has proper facilities following all the necessary guidelines. Moreover, most of the returnees are housed at the newly constructed campuses of NIFT and IIM Shillong, Mawdiangdiang boasting of state of the art amenities. Therefore, I request you to kindly do some fact-checking before reporting on such a sensitive matter, which will not only lower the morale of the frontline workers, but also make light of all the efforts made to ensure that the virus is contained.

However, it is important that the press highlight any lacunae on the part of the district administration, based on factual evidences in order to plug the loopholes. Further, it may be

mentioned that in order to beat the virus, we will require the united efforts of all concerned to ensure the health and safety of the people of the state. I also urge upon all returnees to share some responsibility in ensuring that they complete the mandatory quarantine period following all the necessary standard operating procedures (SOPs), in order to safeguard against community transmission of the deadly virus.

Yours etc.,
IBlah,
Shillong

Double standards of NEHU VC

Editor,
North-Eastern Hill University has the statutory provision for the formation of Teachers association, Non-teaching employees association and Students Association. These Associations are guided by their respective constitutions, approved and accepted by the University. The annual election of the NEHU teachers’ association (NEHUTA) is conducted through the election committee constituted internally by the NEHUTA as per its constitution. However, for the election of Non-teaching and Students association, the election

committee is constituted by the University administration. The one year term of NEHUTA ended in the second week of May 2020, while for Non-teaching employees association’s the term ended in the last week of May 2020. It is learnt that the election of Non-teaching employees association for 2020-22 could not be conducted by the NEHU administration due to unavoidable situation of COVID-19 pandemic. It is quite understandable that under these circumstances as the election could not be conducted by NEHU, the Vice-Chancellor, has extended the term of present Non-teaching staff council till the newly elected body takes over. However, the dual character of the NEHU administration is evident from the fact that for NEHUTA which could not conduct election due to COVID, the body has been treated as defunct. The Vice-Chancellor informed NEHUTA that any communication with the University from any Office bearer/ member of the Executive committee (2019-2020) of the incumbent body would not be entertained, as the term of office of the Executive Committee (EC) has expired.

At this juncture it is pertinent to quote the

relevant Clause-8 of the Constitution of NEHUTA, “The term of office of the EC shall be one year. If at the end of the year a new EC could not be constituted because of any unavoidable situation, the incumbent EC shall continue to hold office in care-taker capacity till the next EC takes over. The matter shall, however, have to be subsequently reported to the General Body for approval.”

Now the question arises as to why two sets of rules are being applied for the Associations. If elections for Non-teaching Employees Association could be exempted in view of the pandemic but the Vice-Chancellor has no problem in extending the term of the present Non-teaching Staff Council, why is NEHUTA denied the same privilege since the circumstances are the same? Why has the Vice-Chancellor, NEHU decided not to entertain any communication with incumbent EC of NEHUTA, even though there is a constitutional provision for doing so? This arbitrariness and double standard adopted by the present Vice Chancellor is not good for the overall health of the University.

Yours etc.,
Prof. SB Prasad
Member, Executive Committee,
NEHUTA (2019-20)

Need for strategic online classes....

Editor,
It is indeed truly said that, “For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them.”

There is a need to conduct strategic online classes instead of using the online platform just for sending assignments and deadlines for submission. It is seen that many students are at times confused and even overburdened when they are given several assignments by different subject teachers in a day without any proper explanation on the chapter, thereby compelling students to read and comprehend the chapter by themselves only. It must be understood that sending students for extra coaching is not possible in this pandemic. So the students are solely dependent on online classes. Moreover, it is also found that there is hardly any interaction between the students and teachers during online class sessions as most schools conduct classes through WhatsApp by creating groups of different classes but with access to the groups for sending messages limited to admins (i.e, teachers only). Thus no interactive learning is taking place and the

students are left alone with their doubts.

Hence instead of using the online platform just for sending assignments, some strategic methods such a designing proper routine day-wise, scheduling proper timing of classes, preparing lesson plans for making the learning interesting, online interactive session at least once a week with students, recording student’s attendance according to their response etc, should be adopted.

It is well understood that taking virtual classes is challenging and making learning as easy and interesting as normal classes is not easy but if teachers put in a little extra care and effort as mentioned above and classes are conducted in a planned manner, learning can be much more fun and interesting for students. There may be many more suggestions but being a faculty of Christ Senior Secondary School, Nongsder, Umiam , I am sharing this experience with all as our school has adopted the above-mentioned methods right from the inception of our online classes and we have been quite successful in drawing the attention of our students towards e-learning.

Yours etc.,
Debu Sarkar,
Shillong- 4

“New markets could be created by rural potentials, which could lead to rise in the employment.”
-- A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXII No.293SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 4, 2020

Decoding notifications
COVID-19 has resulted in a flurry of government notifications leaving the citizen non-plussed. On a daily basis there are at least three notifications, some lacking clarity and left to the interpretation of individuals. Agreed that there is no easy way of managing the Lockdown and now ensuring that the Unlocking does not result in chaos, but the fact remains that citizens have now reached a point of Lockdown anxiety. The anxiety is visible. Citizens don’t want further restrictions on the pursuit of their livelihoods. Government may have tried to help people with free rations but it would be naive to believe that all the poor and destitute have access to such rations. There is always a gap between the needy and the public distribution system. There are numerous poor people in Meghalaya that do not have ration cards. Sometimes it’s not easy to provide the necessary documents unless the Dorbar Shnong plays a proactive role and negotiates on behalf of the residents in their respective Shnong.

Speaking about notifications, the one pertaining to playing of odd and even numbered vehicles is most confusing. If a person has a curfew pass does he/she have to follow the odd-even rule? Why are private vehicles restricted from plying when people need to do their grocery shopping and choose to do so from the new suburban markets that have sprung up beyond Shillong? Who will the farmers and vendors sell their products to if people are restricted from visiting the markets? Naturally, many apply for curfew passes on false pretexts! Sooner than later the State has to open up because any further shutting down of small and medium businesses will have a very deleterious effect on the livelihoods and incomes of people. For how long can the owners of shopping establishments exempt rent from their tenants? They too rely on the rentals for their livelihoods.

There is rage and anxiety that is building up but which is still kept under check. It is important for those in Government who craft daily notifications to also feel the pulse of the people. When some shops are allowed to open and others are not, it is not a fair deal. Not especially in a place like Police Bazar where only stand-alone shops have been allowed to open while shopping complexes such as Reliance Trends et al are still closed. Shop owners inside those complexes also pay the heaviest rent. How are the shop owners and the building owners negotiating their terms?

Then there are drivers of commercial vehicles whose earnings have come to an abrupt halt. The drivers have not been paid since the lockdown because the vehicles owners claim they too have no income. These are real life situations that need to be taken into account by Government before it comes up with the next and the next notification.

On being vocal for local

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Today, the novel coronavirus pandemic has brought into focus the value of the local economy. It is time for ‘localness’. It is now the pool around which subsistence is to be managed. In the uncertainty of resumption of normal interstate travel there is an opportunity for the local economy to take-off by way of resource mobilization, employment, business processes and livelihoods. Contemporarily, ‘self-reliant India’ is the new direction through emphasis on economy, infrastructure, IT governance systems, demography advantages and supply chains (demand). The thinking of the central government is that if India were locally self-reliant then the chaos of recent days would not have happened. Be that as it may, it is true that a locally self-reliant economy can mitigate the ill-effects of globalization and its negatives (like this pandemic) far better. This is because the demand-supply relationship, consumerism, gainful employment, skill-sets, etc are all robust internally. To some this might seem a ‘utopian thought’; but, it is possible. After all, necessity is the mother of invention! Hence, being vocal for local is the new way to go. However, amidst this new direction that the country is taking; where does Meghalaya fit in? Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, any developmental process/intervention is basically a relationship between demand and supply. This happens across all nuances (economic, social, cultural, religion, political, etc). The more robust the demand-supply equation, the more self-reliant is the local economy. As such, the ‘vocal’ aspect indicates the ‘demand-orientation’ which is to be met by the ‘local’ aspect indicating the ‘supply-capabilities’. Both of them are to be present in tandem. The absence of one or the other will defeat the efforts for a locally self-reliant economy. As a starting point, for everything to work out well there is a need for consumerism of local products/services. There needs to be a demand for indigenous items on a wider scale. Where there is a choice between a localized produce and the other; the selection must obviously be the local one. This argument may seem fascist; but, it is not. The choice still rests upon the consumer; and a conscious consumer will know what is right. More importantly, this demand (vocal) must be met by localized supply. Now, this is more challenging. It is a sticky wicket.

This is because consumerism may increase in a day; but the supply to meet it

takes time. For example, a child may ask for rice from his/her mother anytime; but it will take at least twenty minutes to prepare it. In addition, there is a question of being competitive as compared to other more established brands; like in case of potato chips, how do local chips compete with established brands like Lays/ Uncle Chips? These are pertinent issues that would have to be addressed in this journey of being self-reliant.

Secondly, agriculture is the lifeblood of our rural areas and the backbone of

holistic development. Sadly, Meghalaya’s net sown area (around 10%) is far less than the north-east average (around 18%). Yes, the topography of our land is generally difficult for farming, however, our traditional practices of agriculture, Jhum cultivation, subsistence orientation, etc are equally to be blamed. Point being, Meghalaya will not achieve inclusive growth unless agriculture is made the pivot of development. In this development, ‘value addition’ is paramount. Here comes the role of food processing (and



Meghalaya. We may glorify the manufacturing and services sector all we like, but the undeniable truth remains that agriculture is our strength. If our agriculture and allied activities are strong then the people will have a livelihood. It is only then that we will be able to see inclusive growth. Well, this is pretty obvious to see; after all around 70% of the population of the state depends on agriculture for

even higher up the value chain; agro-based industries). The food processing units will ensure ‘vertical integration’ of the agricultural produce thereby giving better returns to our farmers/ stakeholders. Like in the case of potato chips given above; we could scale up our processing combined with branding/marketing assistance through agencies like Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA) and

“As a starting point, for everything to work out well there is a need for consumerism of local products/services. There needs to be a demand for indigenous items on a wider scale. Where there is a choice between a localized produce and the other; the selection must obviously be the local one.”

their livelihood. As such, Meghalaya’s self-reliance deeply depends upon the ramping up of its agricultural sector. In addition, niche areas like animal husbandry, horticulture, floriculture, pisciculture, etc will provide the necessary push towards

Meghalaya Institute of Entrepreneurship (MIE), etc.

Thirdly, there are documentations on emerging economies that portray agriculture as being unattractive and the rural areas as a bane. However, this is not true. Simple logic; if we

do not do agriculture then what do we eat? In addition, ramping up on agriculture is of benefit to all. This is because it is the platform for rural tourism under the model of ecotourism/community-based tourism. The fact is elementary; there can be no rural tourism without agriculture. If that were so; then rural tourism would simply involve visitors making a round-trip of a particular village in a day. This is of no benefit to anyone and if anything it is detrimental to rural growth. What is really needed is a rural tourism package (say, 2 nights and 3 days) which ensures that tourist stay back at a particular village and enjoying its sights and sounds. In the process, they learn about the people, culture, practices, livelihoods, etc. In return, the village gets an economic benefit out of longer stays by tourists; not to forget the valuable relationships created. This can be developed as a high-end tourism brand! Well, this model of tourism development is pretty straight-forward. However, it only works if agriculture is strong. This is what Switzerland primarily does and what Punjab/Haryana currently thrives on. Amidst all this, the demand for rural tourism has to come first from the local market. Today, every Meghalayan is a client. This is where ‘being vocal for local’ really comes into play. So, let us get on with it!

Lastly, self-reliance by being vocal for local is inbuilt in the Indian ethos as represented in India’s fight for independence. Now, we are fighting for economic independence. That way this is a ‘dêja vu’ of sorts. However, in an inter-connected globalised economy self-reliance cannot be myopic. It cannot be cut-off from the outside world. In fact, it has to look externally through internal socio-economic achievements. As a case in point, locally processed potato chips can become a local fad; but beyond that, ways and means for it being exported must also be explored. As such, while focusing on the reviving of the state economy it is important to see things in the long-term. As a starting point, focus must be laid on agriculture. It has to be a primary emphasis. Beyond that, we can look at building the other service sectors. To this end, the creation of an effective business environment for the setting up of food processing and agro-based units can be highly productive in the long-term. This will rejuvenate the local economy and thereby act as a hallmark of ‘being vocal for local’.

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

MDA, a government for the elected

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

When crisis and disaster occurs, the top priority of government and authorities is to stand by its citizens ensuring adequate protection and support from all possible threats and danger. And this is what governments around the world are doing for their people. Whereas here in Meghalaya our Government seems to be more concerned about something else, especially for those who might not even be their voters. Whatever be the reason behind this, citizens of the state have the right to know. Or is this because of the mounting pressure from those who have financed them during the last general election?

When the fear and trauma from the pandemic has not even subsided, the recent announcement and decision by the state cabinet to bring back migrant workers is not pleasant news at all. And I believe it is the same feeling with most people too. What assurance does the Government have to ensure that these migrant workers are not carrier of the disease? On the other hand, the claim by the Government that the State needs skilled workers from outside is a blatant and direct insult to our indigenous workers. In other words we can say that this statement reflects the attitude of the Government towards its own electorate. It puts them at the level of those who are not fit to do anything except for voting during elections. If the people of the state lack skills and expertise of any kind, is it not the duty of the Government to create opportunities for them? Otherwise what is the point of electing such a Government? This action by the State Government doesn’t in any way inspire confidence among the general population.

At a time when people are rushing home due to the pandemic and countries too are restricting visas for foreign nationals, our State Government is doing just the opposite. Whose interest does a migrant worker serve at this point of time? What type of high tech machine do we have in the state where that our local people are not capable of operating? These things need more clarification from the authorities concerned. In fact this is the opportunity where local people can acquire employment and skills during difficult times. I do not think that skills are only the reason for the Government’s intention to bring back migrant workers. One of the reasons can be the cost factor which is lesser than that paid to local workers and this is beneficial for construction work and for contractors. But during an emergency situation this is also risky as it could trigger a bigger explosion of the pandemic.

So where do you put the citizens of the state if that happens? From this perspective, it shows that the intention of the MDA Government is to appease only their fellow comrades in the party or constituency who are badly affected by the drain of migrant workers. But to compromise health and harmony in the present situation with such silly things is very wrong and unfortunate. I also wonder why other small parties like PDF, HSPDP, BJP, UDP, and independents do not disagree with this idea. Those who claim they are working hard for the people but are hand in gloves for the same purpose are only serving themselves. It is ironic and shameful for them because of their blatant lies to the electorates.

If coalition partners of the MDA are people oriented parties, they should raise their voices against any wrong move by the ruling partner. Do they have the guts to bring down the coalition when people of the State are in danger because of mismanagement by the Government? No I don’t think so. These people are calculative. They know that once they switch sides they are nothing. The fact is that they know that the Opposition has more capable legislators. Therefore, they can’t afford to lose their position for now since most of them are all first time MLAs and ministers. It is a sad state of affairs for the State and this is the picture and quality of our representatives. While our own people are crying and dying because of loss of jobs, I am afraid that the action of the Government with the consensus of its partners will only create jealousy and enmity among different groups of people. Does the Government want more trouble? Had it not experienced enough turmoil from past incidents such as Ichamati, Them Metor and others? The Government should clarify as to what is the urgency of bringing migrants workers back? Where are the pending construction works that need immediate attention which cannot be postponed for a while? The idea to bring workers back is contradicting the efforts of containing the pandemic. At this point of time I think the priority should be on containment of the disease. And let the new normal decide what is suitable and appropriate for the entire state. The Government should have avoided this provocative approach because the state and its people can no longer afford more curfews and lockdowns. Let the new beginning usher in a new way of life where we can see Meghalaya a state free from any disturbances and clashes that hinder the overall progress of the State.

TO THE EDITOR

Gratitude for Meghalaya Govt’s efforts

Editor,
There is chaos everywhere as a result of the pandemic, particularly for those stranded outside their home state. However, in the midst of this chaos, there is a story of hope which needs to be told. While the train journey from Delhi to Guwahati was horrendous, this was more than made up by the treatment we received from the time we were picked up at the Guwahati Railway Station up until this day. The service delivery system has been swift and systematic. It seems to me that everyone involved in the pick-up from Guwahati Railway station and the quarantine process is well prepared and experienced. Each person involved in the processes has been clearly briefed regarding their roles and knows precisely what their duties are.

On our arrival in Meghalaya we were quarantined in a government observation centre for close observation until the declaration

of our screening test results. My experience at the quarantine centre was very pleasant and I enjoyed the services rendered by the centre (who doesn’t enjoy good warm food at regular intervals without the pangs of manual labour?!). In a nutshell, the quarantine centre was clean, well maintained; the food was excellent and service was prompt. The Meghalaya government took complete responsibility from the moment of our arrival at Guwahati right up to the declaration of our test results and thereafter, dropping each one of us at our homes, and all of this free of cost!

What was even more heartening was to see the community’s active involvement in combating COVID 19 in the state alongside government officials and volunteers. This responsibility is extended to the community through the headmen and their associates who proactively engaged themselves in assessing and inspecting the houses of those who opt for home quarantine. The headmen then invite a team comprising the Block Development

Officer (BDO) and a designated doctor for final inspection of the houses and together give due approval if the criteria are met. The ASHA workers and a designated doctor make regular home visits to check on those being quarantined at home. This responsibility is also vested with the village headman and his associates who strictly monitor things. I would also like to highlight that I have not been to the community quarantine centre which is again taken care of by the community but got positive response as well from here.

Given the unpredictable weather conditions in Shillong, the workers faced them all bravely, be it in the day, late night or early in the morning. They are always there. It bears mention that some of them are posted outdoors, so we can imagine the pain they bear. I could see the dedication of each and everyone involved, right from the house keeping staff, the security personnel, the sanitation workers, those in charge of transportation and registration to the nurses, doctors and of course the leadership of those in Government

which is reflected through these staff. I know that I haven’t mentioned everything and missed out many important key players who work behind the scene but these are some of my experiences so far with the staff I have encountered. Having been a beneficiary of this Government service, I have nothing to offer but my gratitude and appreciation for all the hard work put in, together in this fight against COVID 19 by the entire team. Thank you, God Bless Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,
Baiarbha Massar
A returnee from Delhi

Christianity and Covid

Editor,
Two recent pieces in The Shillong Times, “Of God and Caesar” by HH Mohrmen (June 2, 2020) and “A Prayer that Agitates” by UD Tmar (June 4, 2020) should be read side by side. The latter is heavy with Biblical verses and doctrinal injunctions. The conflation of these quotes, with simplistic explanations of the over-

lap of religion and politics hardly relate to the matter at hand.

First of all, it is pointless to speculate on the MLA’s motives. His views and practice of religion is his personal space, to which he is fully entitled. As a representative of the people we are only concerned with his secular service consistent with his assigned political role. Secondly, this issue has got nothing to do with the existence or absence of God, and certainly cannot be covered in two paragraphs. A complete library will not give us an answer.

On the other hand, the article by HH Mohrmen presents an articulate analysis of the incident in the Assembly. He begins by probing the political propensities which lead to such events. After quoting the statement on the floor of the legislature he proceeds to dismantle its argument, on both societal and religious grounds. He brings in a cultural context to conclude that while Christianity is a religion of compassion, it has hurt the sentiments of many in the state of Meghalaya.

Each function of society

has its own location of orderly practice, be it education, health or the stock exchange. Imagine the disturbance to parliament if Muslims start praying, Hindus perform pujas and Sikhs and Parsis read loudly from their holy books. Parliament and legislatures must proceed in their own proper protocols.

There are some Christians in our community who have espoused a misplaced connection between Christianity and Covid. One sees these comments in social media posts. Particularly damaging are the statements that discriminate already marginalised sections. In the deaths of poor labourers, destitute women and innocent children are we really seeing the curse of God? How can that be part of a gospel of compassion?

The history of pandemics shows us that separation of religion from rational practice is a good policy. England, in the Middle Ages, experienced several outbreaks of the plague. When deaths surpassed thirty in any town, they banned assemblies, feasts, archery contests, and other mass gatherings. Since it was believed

that it was impossible to become infected during the act of worship, church services were not included in the ban, leading to fresh cases.

In a secular, democratic country and in any enlightened society, especially a multi-faith community, religion should not become spectacle. There are Biblical injunctions against that. There are also 93 verses in the Bible that advocate praying in private.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C. Kharkongor
Via email

A despotic State Govt

Editor,
In no other state but Meghalaya do we see the Govt. (specifically under the leadership of Mr. P. Tynsong) snatching away the powers and functions of the Deputy Commissioners (DCs). The DCs are responsible for the general administration in the district. But it is the opposite in Meghalaya. In no other state has the role of the DCs been confiscated by the State Govt., except in Meghalaya. The CM is hid-

ing, and afraid to take up important decisions relating to sensitive issues of the people of Meghalaya. Where is he? Why is the Deputy CM always briefing the media? Who is to be blamed? Mr CM please take responsibility and accountability for what is happening and will happen, in the State. Many announcements made publicly by the Deputy CM are in contradiction to the notice published by the DCs. What is this? The public are in confusion and chaos. Whose notifications will they follow? What is wrong, Mr. CM? The Deputy CM and the cabinet ministers seem to have no little respect even for the Union Home Ministry. Several announcements made by them happened before the decisions of the central govt (MHA) were communicated here. This Govt. is essentially despotic and lacks seriousness and the art of governance. The State Govt entirely ignores and overlooks the people, the Dorbar Shnong, DCs, and the Union Home Ministry. Where are we heading?

Yours etc.,
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong-02

“Life is a flower of which love is the honey.”
— Victor Hugo

The Shillong Times

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Games Mallya plays
FUGITIVE Vijay Mallya has virtually reached a dead end in his legal battle in the UK to stay put in that country and avoid returning to India. But there still are the ifs and buts as to whether he would ultimately face the music vis-à-vis his banking liabilities and other criminal charges. Curiously, the last word on his extradition is not heard yet. Those linked to the UK government say there are fresh legal hurdles of a confidential nature and it would take time to resolve them. The King of Good Times has been playing with the law both in India and abroad for a long time, virtually buying time and testing the patience of the investigating agencies like CBI and ED. Also, how serious is the Indian government about getting him extradited is a matter of conjecture. The issue, per se, is not about Vijay Mallya. Larger issues are involved in this case, and several other cases of Indian businessmen running away with huge loans taken from banks and parking them in tax havens abroad. These cases are hanging fire too. These men allegedly took advantage of the weak financial/banking systems in India, explored or exploited the loopholes, used their links to those in power, and escaped from the country with moneybags.

In the 2014 parliament elections, a promise made by Narendra Modi was that he would get back the money “looted” from India and kept in safe havens abroad, and put them into the accounts of poor Indians. Six years through his governance, hardly any breakthrough has been achieved in fixing the guilty or getting the money back even to the banks. Bank after bank, mostly public sector ones, are facing serious odds due to this and are courting steps like amalgamation. It must be admitted that a government does not have all the powers with it to handle matters like this. The last word often lies with the judiciary, not with an elected government or elected leader. Hence with matters relating to loan defaulters, they often cite excuses and take legal recourse to first delay the payment and then altogether avoid repayment. The government is seen writing off millions and millions of NPAs, or bad debts. Businessmen are adept at using their money power and engaging in influence-peddling to escape from the laws of the land. Courts can only function within the existing laws, and the final responsibility is with the government to find ways and means to effect a turnaround in the situation.

TO THE EDITOR

Reinvigorate Mother Earth

Editor,
This year June 5, 2020 will mark the 46th anniversary of the World Environment Day and the theme this time around is, "Time for Nature," with a view to determine the role by which Mother Earth provides us the essential commodities and infrastructure that supports us in our daily needs and development. Every year on this special occasion the entire world comes together in various platforms to celebrate this day with various programs and functions etc. But it will be different this year as the people can't come together but what can we do this time? We can plant at least one tree to rejuvenate Mother Earth.
Yes with the global pandemic and almost all the country at a standstill, Mother Earth plays its part in bringing new vitality and structure to human development, and this we witnessed in almost all the locations of the world where river, air, animals, birds and other creatures come alive again. It's times for us to rethink and reframe our thoughts because Mother Earth is sending us messages that we ought not to harm or mistreat nature and that if we do so then we will suffer and all the infrastructure

and development that we have attained will collapse and definitely we will become extinct. As long as Mother Earth cares for us it's time for us to cherish those gifts and do our part to reduce the harm to the environment.
Yours etc.,
Badonkupar Mairom
Shella

North Shillong MLA in the news

Editor,
Apropos the articles "Reject fanaticism in any form" (ST.May 28, 2020), "Of God and Caesar" (ST. June 1, 2020), " a prayer that agitates" (ST. June 3, 2020), "Christianity and Covid-19" (ST. June 4, 2020), reading through the letters, I am pleased to see that people read, analyse, write and debate on issues in the public domain (the media). This is a healthy civilized democratic process. I appeal to the reading public to come out in the media and express themselves on issues affecting the daily lives of the public at large. In fact, there are so many issues which pertain to life and death of the people of the state but people are shy, reluctant or afraid to come out in the media. In fact, in times like this when physical and social distancing is not possible let us keep interacting, expressing and

debating through the media including print, electronic and of course, the social media. But let us be truthful, creative, constructive and maintain social etiquette.
Coming to the three articles above and one letter to the Editor on the issue of the North Shillong MLA, Adelbert Nongrum praying in the Assembly, on May 22, last, I must be candid in saying that the articles and the letter have sufficiently educated the MLA concerned (perhaps other MLAs as well) and has put him in his place. In fact the article of H.H Mohrmen, Ubahunlang Dkhar and that of Albert Thyrniang have given the MLA a proper dressing down, especially the other one that has badly hit him below the belt. Yes, there are some elements in the articles which are over the top, however, it is a fact that what he did in the Assembly on May 22, last was unprecedented and has exposed his lack of knowledge of the Rules and Conduct of Business in the House and also revealed his sentimental approach to the Covid issue. Again, we all know that he is a man of prayer and even in the District Council Legislative Assembly last time he knelt down on the floor praying silently immediately after he was elected CEM of the KHADC. Members present then were stunned. Praying to God is his private faith

and for his spiritual well-being, but not in the Assembly.
Coming to the issue of religion and politics as mentioned in the articles, many have expressed views against mixing religion and politics. Those who advocate this are themselves hypocrites. Many do preach loud and clear to others not to mix religion with politics but openly, compulsively and without any compunction do just the opposite. In this connection, I wish to point out what Mahatma Gandhi and Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa said. The former said, "Anyone who says that religion has nothing to do with politics does not understand what religion is." Bishop Tutu said, "I am puzzled about what kind of Bible people are reading when they suggest that Religion and Politics do not mix."
Personally I believe that all major religions teach us to do good and to shun evil deeds. The crux of the matter is that God has not entered the politics of today otherwise He would have cleansed it. Politics is the noble art of service without regard for selfish interests. Politics becomes bad because some people made it bad but politics is not bad in itself. I repeat it is a noble art of service. The problem is that in the day to day practice of politics by many politicians, the good

teachings of their religions have not entered politics to purify it. It may be reminded that Jesus Christ was the greatest politician on earth. He brought in a new brand of politics through His life of love and charity to all men in order to demolish the traditional deep rooted politics of hatred and revenge, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, taught and preached by His predecessors, the scribes and Pharisees.
Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein,
Shillong-2

Atmanirbhar Bharat to protect Environment
Editor,
The world is dealing with COVID-19 challenges. It has affected all economic activities. Millions of people have become jobless now and they are looking at government to create livelihoods. Government of India has announced Atmnirbhar Bharat to fight against the Corona crisis. This is a mega project to boost the Indian economy in order to be self-reliant in every sector. Atmnirbhar Bharat is a nation-wide program to cover industries, health and many more areas. It aims to provide job opportunities and self employment in India. It is

also projected to make Swadeshi at local level. Providing opportunities to make nation self sustaining is a major goal of this program.
E n v i r o n m e n t a l challenges are also increasing manifold. Global warming is at an alarming stage. Many scientific reports say that India, China and Bangladesh will face extreme challenges of global warming in the coming years. Increasing pollution and over exploitation of natural resources are major reasons for this. Government must connect Atmnirbhar Bharat with environment conservation. It can also boost sustainable development. Promoting and using unconventional energy resources under this project can be helpful to save the environment. At the local level Atmnirbhar Bharat activities can combine people with environmental issues. It will lead us to a better and safer future. Saving our nature and earth for upcoming generations is our moral responsibility.
Yours etc.,
Sandeep Bhatt,
Khandwa, Madhya Pradesh

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.

World Environment Day amidst Covid-19: Time For Nature

By Patricia Mukhim

suddenly joining forces with others because the hashtag is sexy and has some reputed people commenting on it. So we join forces and suddenly become bleeding heart environmentalists, who will however, not care a hoot about using single-use plastics and dumping them anywhere to be eaten by cows and dogs that choke to death. Here again, no one will lift a finger to raise a stink. And today being World Enviorment Day it might be a good time to remind ourselves how we pollute the rivers incessantly with used sanitary napkins, babies’ nappies, complete with the gel and the faecal matter all thrown in. And the same people will also join the hashtag bandwagon because its fashionable!
There is a huge problem when we live in a third world country with basic civic amenities lacking and use all the products dumped on us by the First World. These products are meant to reduce time and drudgery because instead of washing cloth nappies and menstrual cloth we are introduced to the use-and-throw elements of modern civilization. But throw where? Imagine, baby diapers (Huggies etc.) today travel to every village of Meghalaya but those villages have no waste collection and processing system. So all the diapers and sanitary napkins land up in rivers. Further downstream people drink and bathe in the same waters.
Covid-19 was and is supposed to teach us lessons on caring for the environment and developing real life environment warriors, not social network soldiers who feel that a post with a hashtag has solved the earth’s problems. Speaking from experience of cleaning the rivers of Shillong and beyond since August last year and interrupted only by the invisible bug, most schools and colleges don’t encourage their students to volunteer for this “dirty” work. There’s just Kiddies Corner School and Bethany

Society along with Women’s College, KL Bajoria College, Martin Luther Christian University and a few individuals and groups like MakeSomeoneSmile and Jiva-City Hut Dhaba that have been faithfully and consistently involved in the river cleaning project, week after week.
So when it comes to real life education most schools and colleges are still very far removed from it. The principals/heads are happy to just send their students with placards on World Environment Day to listen to some boring lectures on what they should and should not do; given a food packet and then return to school. That’s what World Environment Day is distilled to in this country. Then of course there are tree plantation programmes but the trees are never really looked after. Most are eaten up by grazing goats and cattle or are pulled out by destructive humans. Clearly World Environment Day has become a placebo; a symbolic observance because the environment isn’t getting any better. In fact its getting worse; nature is fighting back and how!
Yesterday I visited SANKER that sanatorium where those needing to be rehabilitated and detoxified from alcohol and drugs or needing mental health therapy find healing. The place is replete with greenery; it has a fish pond and an endless variety of fruit trees and foliage. It’s a perfect place to find solitude as well as regain mental and spiritual health. SANKER is spread over seven acres of land but unlike most people who want to build up everything down to the last square feet of land and even encroach into the main road and highway if possible, Dr Sandi Syiem the SANKER, CEO and his team believe in conserving the greenery and using only minimum space for housing inmates and staff. Alas! Not too many people think its important set aside space for greenery.
What is also remarkable

is that SANKER is located around the Mawlai Mawroh forested area belonging to the Syiem clan, of which the Syiem of Myllem is the custodian. That whole forest is a catchment area and should be left as it is. A couple of years ago the then Syiem of Myllem, Latho Manik was about to alienate parts of this forested land to settle some myntris of the Hima Myllem. But that project was shelved after citizens raised the banner of protest. It is the onus of the Syiem of Myllem, whoever, he is to conserve our dwindling forest and catchment areas.
Recently, there was a move to turn that forested area in Mawroh into a market. Now why would a forest be turned into a market? Can’t the Dorbar Shnong and political leaders find some alternative space? A forest, is a forest and should be allowed to remain so. There is too much human intervention anyway and that’s a dangerous thing to happen. In Meghalaya today there is and has been a growing gluttony for land. Those with money want to buy up every available space and will use their connections to get access even to forested land.
Talking about the shrinking forest canopy, our attention should be drawn to the forest belt from Lawjynriew, through Lumpynngad, Risa Colony, Cleve Colony, Malki, Lumparing etc., and stretching on to Laitkor. Although this is reserved forest there are human activities happening inside the forests. The forest canopy in most parts is shrinking. It is learnt that some MLAs have been pressurizing the Forest Department to grant them permission for commercial projects. This is a dangerous proposition and people should remain vigilant about such avaricious ambitions.
More than lectures, we should set aside ‘Time For Nature;’ listen to the sounds of nature, visit the rivers and streams and feel what the river feels and what the earth says. Only then can we reconnect to nature and heal ourselves even as we help to heal Mother Earth.

There will be no time to rewrite history

By Ananya S Guha

The Corona virus has caused collateral damage as seen in the tragic plight of migrant workers. When the lockdown was announced in haste the government and the policy makers did not think of India’s poor. All they did was to keep the wealthy and white collared job holders in mind which is the very anti-thesis of a policy which goes against the interests of India’s millions of people, who struggle to make daily ends meet. Estimates say this reverse migration is the second largest human exodus after the partition of India. Both the central and state governments are mute spectators to this tragedy unfolding before our very eyes every day. Children losing their parents in accidents, a pregnant woman lying in the bus terminal and many more are images which should haunt the conscience of a nation but is there a conscience? When a disconsolate woman is weeping and saying she has been without food and water for days, where are our political leaders who glamourise the country before an

grossly apathetic?
Are we a country which does not think of our poor, our construction workers, our farmers and labourers? No, wait. We think of them during elections, we think of them when we haggle to pay a paise less. This whirlpool of selfish interests and paradox has enmeshed our lives social and political. Today even lip sympathy is missing as our political class is busy pointing accusing fingers at each other. Will they stop only when these people rise in rebellion and protests? But their voices are muffled and muted. We can’t even hang our heads in shame as we have no head or heart. When day after day we hear the same grisly story there is no announcement except the welcome stricture of the highest court in the country. And what we did not do was to give them food and some money. Was this a tall order? Initially an effete announcement was made that they should not travel homeward but stay put in the place they were working in. But this did not assuage or allay their fears, that they would be disregarded by



international audience? Where are they or are they busy squabbling among themselves and in the same breath saying that they are burning political differences to fight the maelstrom that Covid 19 is causing? But isn’t this a fall-out of this malaise? Why are they silent? Are they penurious of basic human emotions and feelings?
Accidents after accidents are taking place day after day, because no transportation is arranged for migrant workers. They do not exist in our list of priorities because the entire political machinery is geared towards a pro- rich outlook. Every day we watch on television the sordid stories of such people, we who are comfortably ensconced in our homes and assured of our daily meals.
Even homilies are not made. What is done is announcing an economic package which will not touch their lives. They are made untouchables and left to die in railway stations or highways, children are orphaned and of course we are busy analysing statistics arising out of the corona crisis. And what will be their statistics, only death, death and death? Some may even say, why are they going home? Home is their emotional security and bond, when they have been literally thrown out of their jobs. Their callous employers aren’t even bothered about this fall-out. What should have been done is now a redundant question. What should be done now is more pertinent. Even as haphazardly shramik trains are organised there is no food or water. How can the government be it state or central be so

their employers. Some while leaving Mumbai vowed not to come back again. They were hurt to the core and we keep on hurting them.
Where will we go from here? How will we look back on this tragedy which we have allowed? This will surely be a slur on the nation, with history as a reckoner. The whole world is watching. But there are many of us weeping silently and helplessly but perhaps as Tennyson had said, these are idle tears. Yes we watch idly as they die, protest and weep. But even their shouting has not moved us. When we are crying hoarse about economic packages, where were they in our scheme of things?
Let us face it they do not matter in our agenda of things not when our country is run by politicians who tweak rules and ideals to suit their own vested interests and this both at the state and Centre. Why was the Congress party showing such an interest in Uttar Pradesh, and not in Maharashtra where it is part of the ruling alliance? There is no doubt that the Lockdown in view of the corona crisis was needed but why were not the poor and the destitute our consideration?. What about street children? And India has millions of them.
We have failed miserably our poor whom we commission to do our thankless work, our domestic work but whom we use as tools in our politics of hate and indifference. As of now our conscience is not stricken, as we are busy warding of Covid threats but the insufferable plight of these bonded labourers will be in time to come a long saga of our history. And then, there will be no time to rewrite it.

“If you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”
--- Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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The China-India tangle

IN India every issue is clouded by partisan politics. Take the instance of the India-China tussle in Ladakh’s Galwan Valley and Pangong Tso over a month now where there has been a massive build-up of Chinese troops who have allegedly crossed the Line of Actual Control (LAC) despite treaties to respect those boundaries. Interestingly, while the Indian Government remains tight-lipped about the matter and the people of India are fired up over this intrusion to the point of giving a call to boycott Chinese products, an open source intelligence (OSINT) network going by the nomenclature of ‘DetResFa’ which has today become one of the most sought after sources of information on the continuing border tensions is explaining the ground situation to us. DetResFa has captured satellite images of troops movement from both sides – India and China. DetResFa informs that China did not have a free run over the area. In fact India’s retaliatory tactics took China by surprise. The Chinese known for their propaganda have been feeding their people with exaggerated accounts of the intrusion to Indian territory beyond the LAC. This is the normal ploy that countries adopt when there is internal strife. They feed their people propaganda about external threats. This, they hope, will unite disparate people haunted by the Covid-19 virus infection which first broke out in Wuhan, China and has now travelled the whole world and claimed millions of lives.

It would have been in order for the Defence Minister of India to brief the people with facts rather than retreat into a zone of silence. The information vacuum has been filled by open-source intelligence (OSINT) analysts, who have access to the latest commercial satellite imagery and who use their digital skills to provide vivid images of the high altitude battlefield and what is happening there. DetResFa has laid to rest speculations about the Chinese occupying large chunks of Indian territory. The Chinese have been building up forces for a while now but India seems to have been caught by surprise. In any case the Chinese have been engaged in infrastructure building along their side of the border for a long time. DetResFa says Chinese belligerence is also a result of its need to interfere in India’s internal affairs post the revocation of Article 370 and the changed status of Ladakh. In both countries the conventional and social media are agog with largely jingoistic fervour. India has joined Trump in blaming China for not informing the world about Covid-19 and also the World Health Organisation (WHO) for aiding and abetting China in the spread of the deadly virus. China in turn is trying to caution India not to join forces with the US. Meanwhile the stand-off continues.

Right now China should be vulnerable to the ‘gang-up’ of nations against it over the origins’ of the coronavirus pandemic. But, for all that, Chinese incursion against India is unstoppable. The Chinese PLA is all over and above this side of the LAC. “Quick” Chinese incursions” have become the order of the Chinese day, says a ‘conflict analyst.’ But, it emerges



later, that he’s friendly with the Indian establishment and could be a RAW implant! Now, he says, with rare aplomb, PLA troops haven’t set up tent in India’s territory though they roamed about in the Galwan Valley in eastern Ladakh for nearly two weeks!

That’s the problem. Everything India-China is kind of hazy. Nothing is clear. Nobody takes the trouble to clarify. The Modi Government makes no statements. Modi gets into a huddle with the NSA and CDS, along with the EAM, to discuss Ladakh and China but at the end of the meeting nobody expounds on what was discussed and what was decided. It’s like the pakora-population of Akhand Bharat/India don’t need to be told anything of importance except advised to remain masked and tasked with what Modi tells you in his monthly ‘Mann ki Baat’

By Sushil Kutty

Or, is it weekly? Shucks, who the heck knows or wants to know. The pakorawallas of India are doubly scared – scared of the Trump-called ‘China/Wuhan virus’ looking us up and scared of the inscrutable Chinese PLA running amok this side of the LAC. But, before that becomes a horrific reality,

Modi Government’s China Policy? Modi himself appears so reticent on China that it gives one the impression that he’s been silenced by the ‘Wuhan Spirit.’ It can’t be the ‘Wuhan virus.’ The reality is when it comes to China and President Xi Jinping, Prime Minister Narendra Modi comes out as a paler

than opponents, rivals of each other. The question remains, does India have it in her to look China in the eye? No. India is a sucker for always giving up to the Chinese aggression. India lacks the toughness and fibre to take on China. Does not matter whether it’s Nehru or Modi at the helm. Doesn’t make a whit of a difference!

Point is, the Indian leadership always kowtows to the Chinese. It goes the other way around. The global pandemic of COVID 19 has shaken the world to its core. It has caused a lot of pain and suffering to families across the world, ravaged economies and ruined livelihoods but it gave an opportunity for the natural world to breathe again as the anthropogenic stresses on, it eased. It shows us that there is hope for a cleaner and safer world for us if only we use our resources wisely.

The pandemic has caused unseparable loss but we cannot ignore the help it has given nature and the animal kingdom to rejuvenate and heal. With human beings staying home, nature has shown

shouldn’t Mr. Modi tell all mute Indians where’s the LAC, and where are the soldiers of the Indian Army? Do we have possession of our half (or quarter?) of the Pangong Tso Lake? And what about our ‘four fingers’ in the Galwan Valley pie?

Point is Indians by and large are fed up of being kept in the dark by the Modi government on crucial issues concerning the nation. Narendra Modi thinks his subjects are simpletons; folks who hardly think of intellectual and highbrow stuff like military strikes across the LAC. So, what Indians get to know about the LAC is from the statements made by the Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson and what’s published in the Chinese propaganda mouthpiece, the Global Times. And what GT publishes are horror stories of how powerful and ruthless the Chinese PLA is!

The fact of the matter is, one fails to understand the

version of President Donald Trump, who everybody knows cannot make up his mind whether to cozy up to Xi Jinping or blast China out of the trench.

It is common knowledge that over since Narendra Modi took charge of India’s reign/reins, China has been running up a score against India even as Xi Jinping kept Modi in China’s loop with a pat here and a smile there. With slow rides on the Sabarwal swing and hard stares over Doklam, Modi and Xi slipped Chinese tea in Wuhan with a brotherly hug. But this summit-less camaraderie with Xi Jinping did not make much sense when looked through the lens of geostrategic real-politik. The sneaking suspicion remained that China was taking India for a ride!

Xi’s conceit, China is not a friend of India. Why should it be? China and India are adversaries. They cannot be anything other

overboard trying hard to be ‘goody-goody’ endowed with a generous big heart. Which other country would sit quiet for 58 years and not reclaim Aksai Chin, which is 38,000 square km huge? The so-called Hindu nationalist party, the BJP, kept strumming the guitar and parroted: ‘Do not worry, let the BJP come to power, just you wait and see.’ But when it came the BJP’s time, Modi is as diffident as the ones before him. ‘Modi Hai To Mumkin Hai’ has no equivalent in Mandarin!

So even if China’s up the creek without a paddle, which it’s not, India under the Modi government can do zilch to China. With the incursions across the LAC, China is warning India to stay out of Trump’s reach. Does Modi have it in him to push back with equal determination? Like his Australian counterpart Morrison, Can India get in China’s eye? Can Modi force Xi to back-off? (IPA Service)

Mother Earth in the midst of a pandemic

By Labamaryca Tariang

“We inter-breathe with the rain forests, we drink from the oceans. They are part of our own body.” Thich Nhat Hanh

The global pandemic of COVID 19 has shaken the world to its core. It has caused a lot of pain and suffering to families across the world, ravaged economies and ruined livelihoods but it gave an opportunity for the natural world to breathe again as the anthropogenic stresses on, it eased. It shows us that there is hope for a cleaner and safer world for us if only we use our resources wisely.

The pandemic has caused unseparable loss but we cannot ignore the help it has given nature and the animal kingdom to rejuvenate and heal. With human beings staying home, nature has shown

safety reasons it seems like an imprisonment at times, but you ought to realize how we have destroyed natural habitats and pushed multiple species to extinction.

We have over exploited resources and even captured animals in zoos. For the longest time, we have been spectators and even participants in their pain and suffering. Even in our own state of Meghalaya, we have spotted deer, elephants and other wildlife more frequently since the lockdown. It seems to be a constant reminder that we are actually responsible for so much of the wrongdoings in the world. We have damaged the world and now we are bearing the consequences. And yet even now we haven’t fully learnt our lessons.



signs that if given time and space it can recuperate. We are left to ponder on the various ways in which we are actually responsible for the degradation in our environment.

Research has shown how due to the restrictions on air travel, the shutting down of factories and industries, there has been a drastic decrease in the air pollution not just in our

Even with the positive impacts happening we still manage to litter and cause damage. We now have to worry about the masks that have been thrown everywhere. We need to be more responsible for our actions. The pandemic has also led to an increase in deforestation and illegal mining as some people have taken advantage of reduced surveillance on such

Today researchers are calling for strengthening the fight against Covid19 and also for biodiversity protection as part of the world’s recovery strategy. But this is not something new. Scientists and conservationists have been stating for years that the sustainable development is the only way to conserve our planet.

country, but also around the world. Cities like New York, Beijing and Delhi have seen clearer skies and cleaner air. Greenhouse gases around the world have reduced up to 30% since the lockdown. Even our very own Meghalaya has seen a drastic improvement in the air quality, but I know this phase will end soon because of the restrictions that have been eased. It is now our responsibility to help our state remain in the good air quality it is in, to the people of Meghalaya let’s do our bit.

Today researchers are calling for strengthening the fight against Covid19 and also for biodiversity protection as part of the world’s recovery strategy. But this is not something new. Scientists and conservationists have been stating for years that the sustainable development is the only way to conserve our planet.

Rivers have become clearer and riverine biodiversity is thriving even in previously uninhabited places. We also notice how when we have been asked to stay home for our own

matters. The theme for The World Environment Day 2020 is ‘TIME FOR NATURE.’ The year 2020 has taught us the need to allow nature to breathe and help it rejuvenate. We have taken away so much from mother Earth. But through this lockdown we have learnt how a little contribution can change so much. So let us contribute in our own little ways and help our planet. If we don’t act now there will not be much left for our future generations. Mother Earth has given us so much to be thankful for now it’s our turn to help her recover so much that has been lost.

Having reflected at length during these two months of lockdown it is time we also list out action plans on how to rejuvenate the environment that we have so degraded out of our mindless pursuit of wealth and convenience. As students we have our own roles to play and we should take responsibility now!

Let us all do our bit for a better and more habitable earth not just for us but for our rich biodiversity and for the generations to come.

TO THE EDITOR

A welcoming and conserving heart

Editor,
“Atithidevo Bhava” a welcoming concept of treating guests is indeed a very wonderful practice that perhaps all proud Indians follow. It is, in fact, a code of conduct for most of the communities and societies in India. An interesting fact and perhaps something which we do not get heed of is that we do get guests coming from faraway lands of the world and these guests do not require any ID card or passport, they just come when the nature approves of their departure and arrival. Their only approving authority is nature itself. These guests are not here to be welcomed, they are here to be conserved. So, the question from the statement itself can be inferred as to why are we not able to see birds as we used to earlier? Let us introspect and try to recollect a stereotypical statement, “Mynta ki por te ym juh iohi sim shuh” (these days we don’t see too many birds). Indeed we see lesser birds even in places where they are frequented. 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A history of pandemic viruses

By Parag Ranjan Dutta

On September 1, 1939, Hitler attacked Poland. There was more than one reason that prompted him to do so. Anti-semitism definitely played a major role. Hitler did not invent the hatred of Jews. Jews remained the victims of discrimination since the middle ages. In the 14th century Jews were blamed for plague epidemic in Europe and even accused of poisoning the wells. Hitler too possibly believed in that.

The noted Swedish filmmaker Inger Bergman’s 1957 epic movie, The Seventh Seal, was based on a historical fantasy. The movie is set in Sweden during the Black Death, about the journey of a medieval knight who played the game of chess the whole night with death (Grim Reaper) who comes to collect his soul.

Many of the world’s epidemics have been traced back to China that led the entire world to point their fingers to that country. Peter Navarro, Assistant to Donald Trump and Director of Trade and Manufacturing Policy went to the extent of describing China as ‘disease incubator.’

All these narratives describe one epidemic disease or the other. Here is my humble quest to find the chronological history of pandemic diseases.

Black Death, also known as plague is the most fatal pandemic recorded in human history that wiped out 70-200 million in Europe and Africa. It is believed to have originated in Central or East Asia and travelled along the silk route to Crimean Peninsula located on the northern of the Black Sea. Black Death, also known as Bubonic Plague is caused by bacteria that circulates among wild rodents living in great numbers in a region, called a ‘plague focus’ or ‘plague reservoir’. Transmission occurred via flees that feed on infected wild rodents. It is believed that flees living on black rats most likely

carried the virus from Crimea when they travelled to Europe on merchant ships spreading the virus all along the countries of Europe and Africa bordering the Mediterranean Sea.

The plague reached Constantinople (present day Istanbul), Sicily and the Italian peninsula and in October 1347 reached mainland Europe when 12 ships from Black Sea anchored at the Sicilian port of Messina. To their utter surprise the local residents found that almost all the sailors aboard were dead and those still alive were very ill, their bodies covered with black boils oozing out blood. Immediately the authorities ordered the death ships out of the harbour, but it spread like wild fires that killed about 25 million people in Europe, about 30 percent of its population. Even before the merchant ships arrived at the port of Messina Europeans already heard of rumours of a Great Pestilence travelling along a deadly path from the east.

The phrase ‘black death’- describing death as black is very old. Even the great Greek poet Homer used the word in his epic poem Odyssey. The medieval people called it ‘blue sickness’ or La Pest. The term bubonic comes from the medieval Latin-bubo via Italian Bilbo- meaning pustule, growth or swelling. Though originally thought to have originated in Asia recent studies have revealed that the pathogen responsible for Black Death may have existed in Europe as early as 3000 B.C. By the end of 1348 all the low countries of Europe namely Germany, France, England and Italy came within the folds of plague. By the middle of 1348 the French cities of Paris, Bordeaux, and Lyon came under the grip of plague. Eastern Europe felt in 1350.

Without any knowledge of biology Europeans believed that Black Death was a wrath of the God for their sins. Many even blamed the Jews for their different bloodline and religious belief and they were solely responsible for this catastrophe.



Thousands of Jews were massacred and burnt alive; and many thousands fled to safer East Europe. The famous Italian poet Giovanni Boccaccio wrote on the plague- in Decameron (a collection of hundred tales by Boccaccio) “at the beginning of the malady, certain swellings, either on the groin or under the armpits waxed to the bigness of a common apple, others to the size of an egg, some more some less and these the vulgar named the plague boils”.

Though the World War I

ended on 11th November 1918 people continued to die in the spring due to the most severe pandemic of the last century, known as Spanish influenza that swept through both Europe and America. It continued for three years that infected about 500 million, about one third of the world’s population. About 40 million people died of this virus infection.

The deadly pandemic stretched from the US and Europe to remote islands of the Pacific and Greenland. It was believed that

the flu was caused by a deadly virus that originated in birds, which are nature’s primeval hosts of pandemic flu. During the war, Spain remained neutral and the deadly virus very likely reached Spain as a result of heavy movement of Spanish and Portuguese migrant workers to and from France. Initially a strange form of disease appeared in Madrid and since the beginning the epidemic has been called Spanish flu (or the ‘Spanish Lady’).

Evidences indicated that it

was unlikely to have originated and spread from Spain. Some indicated that the influenza epidemic started in British Army camps. Spain remained neutral during the war and as there was freedom of press the Spanish newspapers published influenza related deaths. But the press in the allied countries hid information regarding casualties of their civilian and military population. It was dubbed as Spanish flu because it was thought at that time to have originated in Spain. It is definite that Spanish flu did not originate in Spain and scientists are still unsure about its source but China, France, and Britain have been suggested as potential sources of the virus.

The case of Spanish flu was first reported not in Spain but at a military base in Kansas, US, on March 11, 1918, when the cook Albert Gitchell, the first recorded victim fell ill due to flu. This facility at Fort Riley was meant for training American army during the World War.

In that morning of 1918, Gitchell was getting ready for breakfast but instead had to report to the hospital complaining of sore throat, fever and headache. By noon about 100 more from the army developed similar symptoms. It did not end with the initial outbreak. These were recurrence of such outbreaks in different parts of America. A recent study of 2005 suggested that it actually started in New York. The killer disease eventually killed 675,000 Americans and an estimated number of 20-50 million people around the world. During the catastrophe a nursery rhyme became very popular in the United States and children used to chant:

I had a little bird/And its name was Enza/I opened the window/And in-flew Enza

Alfred Crosby in his book – America’s Forgotten Pandemic; The Influenza of 1918 published in 1990 tells the chilling story of world’s deadliest flu pandemic.

The killer disease soon travelled to Europe when American soldiers headed to Europe to join the war and help the Allies

on the battlefields of France. After the war ended on November 1918 when the American President Woodrow Wilson reached Paris to officially end the war and sign the Treaty of Versailles even he contracted the disease while negotiating the treaty.

According to the noted Australian flu virologist Kennedy Shortridge, the Chair Professor of Microbiology at the University of Hong Kong the Spanish flu of 1918 might have begun as bird flu in Canton in 1888. It was generally believed that the source of this deadly flu was China. According to him all flu pandemics that can be traced have always begun in Guangdong, a very densely populated Province of China, where people, pigs, fowls, and ducks live together. He believed that the Chinese workers who travelled to France to dig trenches for the Allied Forces might have carried the virus strain.

It is definite that Spanish flu did not originate in Spain scientists are still unsure about its source but China, France and Britain have been suggested as the potential sources of the virus. The irony of history is that it has a different story to tell the whole world today.

Chinese workers contribution to WWI helped shape Europe- said an expert on Chinese history. According to Frances Wood the great war could have been lost due to a great shortage of manpower from the Allies, especially France and Britain, if the vast army of Chinese workers did not enter Europe. A total number of 140,000 Chinese workers served on the western front during the war time. Most of them served in the British Chinese Labour Corps and the rest with the French.

So it was neither the Chinese nor Spain was responsible for this pandemic disease. But the name remains. The influenza pandemic of 1918-20 will always be known as Spanish flu.

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

Testing tea for COVID protection

By Dr Siddhartha Sharma

The pandemic that COVID-19 has created around the globe needs no description. As there is no vaccine yet or a specific drug against this virus, various suggestions, speculations and probabilities have been doing the round. Amongst these was the use of Green Tea for curing the disease in China, which subsequently many authorities have refuted.

However, it would be interesting to study what normal therapeutic affects does the compounds viz. methylxanthine, theophylline and theobromine which are present in tea, coffee and cocoa have. This review article takes a look at the available data pertaining to the contribution of xanthine and other tea extracts in the treatment of respiratory diseases caused by viral infection in general.

At the outset, it will be pertinent to clarify that this study does not recommend anything with regard to cure or protection of COVID-19, but wish to bring forward to researchers, some existing reports for further focused research in this field relating to COVID-19 due to the beneficial properties of these compounds.

Properties of tea

Tea, the finished product of the plant Camellia sinensis, mainly contains polyphenols (catechins) and caffeine amongst other phytochemicals. These are present in Green Tea, Oolong Tea and Black Tea. Black tea contains two other characteristic compounds called Theaflavin and Thearubigin formed due to the oxidation of part of the polyphenols.

Caffeine (trimethylxanthine) occurs with small quantities of the ophylline and the obromine, the compounds generally called methylxanthine. Apart from tea, these compounds are present in coffee, cocoa / chocolate in varying proportions. All of these compounds have several physiological effects on the human body and drinking 5-10 cups of tea can help in assimilating them. Huge experimental efforts in recent years have confirmed that methylxanthines have a great potential in preven-

tion, therapy and/or management of a variety of diseases.

Methylxanthines, bronchodilators, display benefits in diseases involving cell death in the nervous system and in neurodegenerative and respiratory diseases, diabetes and cancer. Other reports mention that methylxanthines in coffee, tea and cacao have protective effects on the respiratory system and beneficial in diseases of the airways with increasing prevalence in children, in particular in asthma and cough.

Theobromine and caffeine improve lung function and produce bronchodilatation in asthma patients and found to suppress cough without the side effects displayed by other antitussive drugs, such as codeine. Theobromine stimulates the heart, being a vasodilator, meaning it can open up the blood



The tea garden in Upper Shillong. (ST)

vessels and cause the blood pressure to drop.

Clinically evaluated in different countries by Texas-based PernixTM and London-based SeekTM, theobromine is a first-in-class non-codeine non-opioid drug for cough that has successfully completed trials and regulatory review in South Korea (sold as AnyCoughTM).

Theophylline has been used for various decades in the treatment of asthma and is still among the most prescribed drugs. Theophylline also has a bronchodilator action and decreases inflammation

underlying asthma and is used to prevent and treat wheezing, shortness of breath, and chest tightness caused by asthma, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and other lung diseases. It relaxes and opens air passages in the lungs, making it easier to breathe.

Experiments showed that both black and green teas and their isolated constituents contribute to the preventive and therapeutic armamentarium against HIV infection in humans as EGCG (epigallocatechin gallate) was found to exhibit inhibitory effects on the life cycle of HIV-1. It was also proved experimentally that the antioxidant properties of tea can inactivate influenza virus. Adenovirus infects the mucous membranes of the respiratory and urinary tracts as well as the linings of the eyes and intestine causing conjunctivitis,

inflicted diseases including those affecting the respiratory and cardiovascular system. There are also reports of methylxanthine and theobromine being used as a medicine against respiratory diseases caused by influenza virus, asthma and also in managing infections by HIV-1.

Methylxanthine is considered to have a bronchodilating effect that could be effective in managing asthma and other respiratory diseases. Methylxanthine has been reported to be effective against gram-positive bacteria. Pneumonia is one disease caused by a gram-positive bacterium.

Both Theobromine and Theophylline have similar properties as methylxanthine, according to the reports and are also used to treat cases relating to asthma and other related respiratory / lung diseases. Over and above this, the obromine being a vasodilator can regulate the blood pressure. Crude tea extract has been reported to be effective against Bovine-corona virus. The four theaflavins in tea have the ability to govern viral infectivity. Therefore, under the present circumstances, more focused research is required to be carried out to see if the bio-chemicals of tea can be used in any way against COVID 19.

Studies have to be carried out to see if tea when used as a beverage can help or certain chemicals have to be extracted from the beverage and can be used. The bio-synthesis of caffeine by tea leaf extracts is also possible. Availability is not an issue with tea being the most commonly available and accessible product. The concentrations of bio-chemicals are high in good quality tea but reduce with drop in quality. However, as the virus causing Covid19, SAR-CoV-2 is a new mutant, it has to be seen whether the phytochemicals of tea works against this virus also, as in others. Moreover, it has to be investigated whether tea extracts can be used as a supporting drug or used to improve the general immune system during Covid19 infection which by itself should be beneficial in combating the disease.

(The author is former senior general manager at J Thomas & Co. Pvt. Ltd)

Centenary of a young management tool

By Ranjan Das Gupta

Sangita Reddy looks silently at the street below the 5th floor of her hospital. From the height of where she sits the people walking down Jubilee Hills appear insignificant yet they form a part of her life. Then she is reminiscent of the legendary Pat Boon number Moody River More Deadly. She knows well that Moody River is more deadly than the knaviest knife as corona plays its deadly game throughout the world. As a health baroness she decides to transcend barriers of class to bring best of medical treatment for the Indian people. Her efforts in healthcare public relations are truly praiseworthy.

2020 is the centenary of the youngest tool of management, public relations. A hundred years ago public relations practice first started in the US. Then it grew up in Britain. The well-known definition of public relations is by Sam Black. He defined the profession as a deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish relations between an organisation and its various public — a technique which gradually every management has started to recognise.

In India, after independence the railways and the Tatas initially started practising public relations. Soon more of the core sectors, FMCGS, pharmaceuticals, hospitality and healthcare industries started opting for public relations. In recent times, it has spread to education, legal and even consultancy sectors. Certain religious bodies like Ramakrishna Mission also practice public relations. Almost every government and public sector requires public relations.

The activity of a public relations person is to maintain good relations with the media. A continuous flow of news from an organisation, countering news which destroys the organisation’s image and providing truthful information is the main work of public relations. It also encompasses government relations, employee relations, relations with shareholders and statutory bodies. Generally the motto of public relations is to advise management, suggest developing ways and remedies. A public relations practitioner seldom has a decision taking ability.

Another important aspect of public relations is that the PR can never come into the limelight. He or she helps to project properly views and policies of the top management remaining in the background. An over ambitious person is never a good PR. In India now often a PR professional acts as a corporate spokesperson. This is not an

ethical practice. Similarly, a public relations exercise should not hide but confess the truth. Keeping away facts and false projection of news is bound to boomerang.

There is a sea of difference between public relations and propaganda. Dr Goebbels excelled in propaganda of the Third Reich. It was anti-public relations. Many times a public relations person has to act as a ‘yes man’ and is a victim of circumstances. Only intelligence and tactful dealing of the situation helps him to not be a scapegoat. As George Bernard Shaw rightly said getting annoyed is bad public relations.

It is common sense that a communication cannot reach each and every soul. Yet the best of efforts should be undertaken to approach as many people as possible in one go. When Imperial Tobacco Company changed to Indian Tobacco Company in 1969-70, the public relations exercise was a lesson for everyone in the profession. Similarly, in the 80s, Escort’s valiant effort not to be taken over by Apeejay Group was another brilliant public relations activity.

Macro and small organisations either do not require or cannot afford to keep a public relations department. They generally get PR work conducted by their marketing departments or receptionists. They cannot be blamed for this specially in the present economic morass.

In 1991, Dev Anand visited Jawaharlal Nehru University to interact with the students. A group of young pupils started mocking him singing Khoya Khoya Chand in a ridiculous manner. Without getting angry the evergreen hero flashed his famous toothless smile and asked why they were laughing. Within minutes there was pin drop silence. With a heartwarming speech on education values Dev Anand won over the countless students who were not ready to bid goodbye to him. An ideal example of public relations.

Narada Muni, son of Lord Brahma, was the public relation idol of the divine. General Jayanta Chowdhury’s public relations in the Indian army from officers to the common sepoy was instrumental for helping India win the 1965 Indo Pak War.

In its centenary public relations should be more humane transcending barriers of winning and dining of PR professionals, media personalities and others of the same work culture. It is fearful to notice that public relations is at its lowest ebb in recent times.

(The author is a Kolkata-based freelance journalist)

Fight for rights of the public

By Ranjan K Baruah

Lock down and corona are buzzing words since last two months. It is bringing more questions than answers in front of us. In this context none of us can easily think of new jobs or employment. The mega Rs 20 lakh crore stimulus package announced by our Prime Minister is a measure to save the lockdown-battered economy and focuses on tax breaks for small businesses as well as incentives for domestic manufacturing.

There is no doubt that the goal is to build a self-reliant India and this total package is equivalent to 10 per cent of India's GDP.

If implemented properly, millions of individual should be benefited. But announcing packages means there are possibilities that all amounts may not reach the right place due to poor governance and corruption. Here comes the opportunity for people who are interested to work for social justice and get engaged in advocacy works. Advocacy work can be a career option where we work with community and raise their and make them heard.

Advocacy is an activity by an individual or group that aims to influence decisions within political, economic and social institutions. Advocacy includes activities and publications to influence public policy, laws and budgets by using facts, their relationships, the media and messaging to educate government officials and the public. It can include many activities that a person or organisation undertakes, including media campaigns, public speaking, commissioning and publishing research. Let us not get confused with words like advocate as both the words are different. To

get engaged in advocacy or social advocacy it is not necessary to be a lawyer but if a lawyer does it then s/he gets more advantage.

Social advocacy is not new and this approach continues to be used by individuals and groups in a wide variety of issues. Many organisations specialise in social advocacy addressing and fighting the injustice suffered by a group or individual. Social advocacy has proven to be very effective in bringing about big and small change in the society. This field requires people who are persistent, patient, organised and most of all passionate, who will work in a way to bring positive solutions.

I am talking about social advocacy as it is the time to get engaged and make sure all reliefs and announced packages make real sense. Students who have studied social work or development studies or legal studies may easily come to this field but they need other skills too.

Economic packages bring hopes and opportunities during crisis but effective implementation is a must and for this, there must be people engaged in advocacy so that people are well-informed. Let us make sure that poor people and others who are supposed to get relief get everything. Few aspirants may take it up as a full-time profession and engage in advocacy works. They may work with NGOs, research organisations, media etc. Let us stay positive and face the challenges due to lock down.

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

By Rajdeep Pathak

Aj Samajhna hoga/janwar kaun hai/ Bohut hi byathit hai man (Have to understand today/who is the animal/the mind is very upset).

These above lines in Hindi taken from a Facebook post by Navendu Mishra (a social thinker) with image of a graphite pencil work on paper of a baby and mother elephant standing together raises innumerable questions on human behaviour and how far humans can go in their acts of barbarism. The image of the pregnant animal, which was fed pineapple stuffed with crackers and left to die, has caught the attention of national and international media and invited severe criticisms from environmentalists, animal activists, sports persons, film stars and common citizens.

It was on May 27 that the pregnant elephant strayed into a village in Kerala's Palakkad in search of food. Here it was fed a pineapple stuffed with crackers. The crackers stuffed inside the pineapple exploded in the jumbo's mouth and caused severe injuries. Unable to withstand the pain, the 15-year-old elephant started running around the village. Eye witnesses said even as the elephant was experiencing excruciating pain, it did not cause any damage.

The elephant had reached the Velliya River while running across the village and stood inside the water body. The forest department took two elephants, Neelakanthan and Surendran, for the rescue operation. The elephant, however, did not step out of the river and died while standing in it.

The incident caught headlines when forest official Mohan Krishnan took to Facebook and shared an emotional note. Krishnan wrote, "She trusted everyone. When the pineapple she ate exploded, she must have been shocked not thinking about herself but about the child she was going to give birth to in 18 to 20 months."

While Kerala is boasting about its health infrastructures in managing the pandemic COVID-19 in a systematic manner, this horrifying incident has caused more damage to the growing reputation of the state. It was also in early last November that Kerala was in the news for such a disaster that had befallen on a pregnant cat which was found hanging inside a house in Vanchiyoor district.

The cat that was heavily pregnant was found hanging from the pillar with a knot tied around her neck with the other end of the rope being tied in another knot around

The beast in us



the pillar. It was also a Facebook post of animal rights activist Parvathy Mohan that prompted the police to take immediate action, including a postmortem.

Meanwhile, as the outpour of grief and anger has been continuing over this heinous act of the death of the pregnant elephant, forest officials citing 'no conclusive evidence' came up with a report — perhaps to douse off the flames of anger — that the elephant must have eaten food that was set as a trap by farmers to prevent wild boars from destroying crops.

However, on June 3, a top forest officer told PTI that another female elephant had died in a similar incident in April in Pathanapuram forest range area under Punalur division in Kollam district.

"It was very weak. When the forest officials approached, the elephant ran into the forest and joined the herd of elephants waiting there. But the next day, the elephant was again found alienated from its herd. Proper treatment was given but unfortunately it succumbed to its wounds," he said.

If Kerala has often been in news for its successful literacy programmes, it has also more than often been in the news for its treatment of elephants. Multiple reports suggest the abuse of captive elephants in the state. And Kerala alone does not figure on the list of keeping elephants in captivity. Stories from Rajasthan, Assam and Tamil Nadu also tell the same tale. Chained, beaten and exploited like slaves, this is the sorry state of over 4,000 captive elephants in India, which according to a World Animal Protection report, is widely considered the "birthplace of taming elephants

for use by humans" — a practice which began thousands of years ago.

As per conservation status, the Indian Elephant has been listed as endangered due to loss of habitat and poaching. Also, according to the count in 2019, the estimated population of the Asian Elephants in India is placed at 27,785 to 31,368 in wild areas.

In her researched and published report on the condition of temple elephants, filmmaker Audrey Gaffney has recorded the vicious form of atrocities on the jumbos. She writes, "They are the country's icon but behind the dazzle of religious festivals, these giants of the wild are painfully abused in Kerala".

She further adds: "They are the world's forgotten elephant victims of mankind. While the world has focused on the threat of extinction to Africa's elephants caused by the ivory poaching crisis and the cruelty of tourist elephant rides in Thailand and Cambodia, the plight of their captive counterparts in India has remained largely hidden — or ignored — from public gaze."

Gaffney further records: "The southern coastal state of Kerala has the highest number of festival elephants, about 500 out of 3,500-4,000 across the country. 'Action for Elephants' UK (AfE) brands Kerala "ground zero for elephant torture", and has called their illegal treatment "the worst case of animal cruelty in the world".

Soutik Biswas, BBC Correspondent in India in his report 'The tragic lives of India's mistreated captive elephants' (April 24, 2018) points a similar state of affairs. He writes: "In southern India, 'pachyderms' are rented out during religious festivals for noisy parades and processions, including weddings and shop and hotel openings. They travel long distances in open vehicles and walk on tarred roads

in the scorching sun for hours". This has a drastic affect on their health.

Activists within India and abroad have raised concern about the atrocities on the jumbos. They have cited issues of poor space, restricted diet in comparison to their requirement of 100 kinds of roots, shoots, grasses, foliage and tubers in natural surroundings free from captivity. Vets have also time and again pointed to their malnourishment, citing that they suffer from intestinal infection, septicemia and lung-related infections. More than anything else, it is the long effect of the barbaric torture inflicted on this otherwise gentle creature that has reduced the life expectancy of captive elephants below 40 years from 70-75 years a couple of decades ago, records Soutik.

Union Minister Smriti Irani while terming the recent incident a 'heinous crime' has remarked that "the question that needs to be ascertained is if this is a trend, one needs to break that chain right away. And if this is a trend specific to that particular area then it should have been concern that some kind of solution was brought forth by the state government".

The Supreme Court has outlawed the sale and exhibition of elephants in fairs and has even directed authorities to ban use of elephants in religious functions. It is believed that over 350 captive elephants in Kerala and Rajasthan are illegal — they don't have any ownership papers. This is despite the fact that there are powerful animal protection laws and adequate guidelines to protect 'captive' elephants. But not enough is being done.

According to government figures from a reply to Parliament in 2019, the mean number of elephant deaths per year in India was 56.6. The Hindu reported in February 2019. According to the last Elephant Census conducted by the government, 75 elephants died in 2018.

While these silent animals are hired by different agencies — from politicians for their campaign processions to companies for promoting their goods in trade fairs — when it comes to their shelter and proper care, it is a far cry. There are many reports that suggest that these animals are used for lucrative trade and can easily fetch from Rs 50,000-70,000 on a single day during religious festivals for their appearance and the cruelty inflicted upon the elephants is unfathomable.

Filmmaker Sangita Iyer, who was born and raised in Kerala, has in her award-winning 2016 film 'God In Shackles' revealed the murky picture of the equally murky business of festivals and brutal atrocities that the poor creature bears silently. There are many like Sangita or Audrey who are speaking the truth and raising campaigns to save the elephants.

The greatest advantage for speaking the truth is that one need not have to remember what one had said. If this statement is true enough, it is time the Kerala administration rises up to the occasion of taking the strictest of actions against the perpetrators of killing the pregnant elephant and ensuring that no such incidents occur in future.

Mahatma Gandhi had said, "The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated". Hope this nation that at almost every stroke dwells on the Gandhian principles of non-violence and peace, also follows what this man had said on treating the animals and not stoop so low in killing a creature in search of food.

(The author is programme executive at Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti, Gandhi Darshan, Rajhat)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 7, 2020

Venus is forming an angle of 135 degrees with Jupiter on your solar return chart thus promising a lot for you this year. Your financial condition will remain stable and strong. Additional sources of income too could be tapped. Money and wealth will keep coming. Your expenses too will rise but your budget will remain under control. You will also come in contact with lot of influential person. Your government related work will move fast. You will also settle tax disputes with authorities. You will have great imagination and ability to foresee things at your workplace. You will also conceive new ideas and get them implemented. Health of family members will remain ok.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

Self-confidence and action are highlighted and you tend to instinctively know the right course of action to take in most situations. Good work opportunities crop up for those working with overseas connections. You probably should be prudent as there is a tendency to create financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. At home, you would resolve your conflicts and move ahead in harmony. Stress may crop up at unexpected turns and this would require you to look at some lifestyle changes and even incorporate some techniques like exercise and meditation.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Economy in the home and management of manpower and finances at work keep you in control of situations. You further your business by expanding in related fields of activity with good chances of collaborations. You would have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You would have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives, friends and loved ones. You take on a dreamy and philosophical outlook. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with hitherto unapproachable people. Your hobbies, leisure time and time spent with children come into focus. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

This week brings harmonious relations with friends, colleagues, loved ones, family and children. 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 would be more determined and diligent. On the financial front, progress would be steady and solid. The need to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you during this period. Your domestic life takes on top priority. Making yourself feel comfortable and secure is paramount, and you have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support of the family. You may be tempted to spend extra money on material goods.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

Good financial returns are on the cards as your meticulous planning pays off. A promotion at work or gainful business opportunity starts. You win many a point with your dynamic energy and communication skills. Your personal charm and charisma take you through complicated situations. You would spend a lot of money on clothes, furniture, and entertainment. Domestic relationships and the home environment would be harmonious and peaceful. This is an excellent period in which you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships with loved ones.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Professional situations turn in your favor. You would be able to face truths, deal with emotional choices and difficult situations. You would be able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve. With mastery in your field you meet deadlines. Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. It is best to accept challenges that life offers you and keep going through ups and downs realizing that this too shall pass. You would be compassionate and generous with family, friends and relatives and earn respect from them. There will be a fluctuation in moods before a balance is achieved.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent. You would successfully use your charm and your sense of humor to make peace and harmony in personal and professional relations. Romance brings a sense of belonging and feeling of security. You exhibit an ability to adapt to most situations. You would be willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar

situations. News and visitors from far off places are likely to arrive. You are nurturing and caring in personal relationships. You are blessed with good mood and health for most of the week.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

Excellent opportunities for people in show business, entertainment and related fields are in the offing. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly in your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. It would be better to go for long-term investments and speculations for financial gains.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

You would use your talent and knowledge together in personal and professional life. You would get familiar with new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. Strong existing relationships are likely to grow and transform. Your finances could also improve as long as you employ strategy and work in a disciplined manner. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. You would also form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. This is a favorable period for people in fine arts, hospitality and other related fields. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you are coming across as especially cooperative and graceful.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender love and care. New ideas and concepts floated by you at your work place will be appreciated. You may take up new assignments and project that would bring creativity and invention of new ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. There may be gains from shares and assets in hand. You impress people with your talent and charisma and invite fresh opportunities. This is a good time for teachers, salespersons and those in related fields of communication.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

You would be able to maintain balance of the head and heart in professional and in personal relations. Family is supportive, children are loving and friends extend hospitality and love. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of efforts and then find this has established a strong professional base with your hard work and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is a good time to organize your workplace, tools and thoughts.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

Your courage and confidence will keep your hopes alive. You can attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with seniors at work. Increased energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favor you. Take advantage of time and utilize your energy accordingly. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. There's nothing wrong with a bit of self-centeredness. You are highly motivated to make money which enhances your energy for new moneymaking projects. You might spend a lot of time in making short frequent trips, visiting friends and relatives. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature and fine arts are highlighted.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

A wonderful professional opportunity takes you towards success. A personal meeting will lead to romance, love and a long lasting relationship. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your 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. This helps you to build your self confidence and strengthen your financial position. You would take up assignments and projects which would end on a winning note for you. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. Physical energy and good health enable you to incorporate a busy schedule and work commitments.

‘UN must provide hope’

By Arul Louis

As the global organisation reaches its landmark birth-day of 75 years and looks to the sprint to a century mark, it must provide the world with hope “without which we cannot survive as a human race”, according to Tijjani Muhammad-Bande, the president of the UN General Assembly.

He said during an exclusive interview to IANS that the UN has to “continue to give hope that the multinational system is key to the survival of the world. And (what) we must address as we look at the future is hope, without which we cannot survive as a human race. We need to have hope and this is key. Now without hope nothing happens”.

Amid scepticism among some about multilateralism and the UN itself, he was asked about what he thought were the achievements of the UN.

“We have had with the support of the United Nations an end to apartheid as you know, an end to colonialism, which is important,” he said.

But the most important achievement is the absence of a major world conflict like World War II, he said. “What is important is that if you absent the United Nations, the failure you have is really anarchy,” he said. “And the



moral burden for all of us if we are unable to cooperate with other human beings is huge.”

He added, “Even if it doesn't exist, United Nations will be created if we are going to have peace.”

“Even though we have regional conflicts, we haven't had the kind of crisis that brought about the creation of the United Nations,” he said.

He said that in addition, the UN has brought “the attention of the world to issue of rights of minorities, rights of individuals, the issue of respect. These norms are extremely important for all

countries”.

An educator who was the vice-chancellor of the Usman Danfodio University and the director-general of the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies in Nigeria before becoming a diplomat, he is steering General Assembly, which is the most representative body of 193-member organisation, through its most serious crisis since World War II because of the COVID-19 pandemic that has paralysed the world.

He has had to devise new methods of conducting the essential businesses of the General Assembly as it deals with the crisis.

The UN, which was founded in 1945 over the ruins wrought by World War II, is set to celebrate its 75th anniversary in September.

Even though it was still a British colony, India was a founding member of the world organisation.

The celebrations of the 75th anniversary are under the cloud of the coronavirus pandemic which has disrupted world travel and is likely to continue into September to require social distancing muting the observance.

Under these circumstances, all nations “must come together to send a message that the United Nations is important”, he said.

The pandemic has shown the interdependency of countries, he added.

(IANS)

"Be your character what it will, it will be known; and nobody will take it upon your word."

— Lord Chesterfield

The Shillong Times

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Back to politics, polls

WITH public activities resuming to substantial levels, politics might soon be back in active mode. As the assembly polls in Bihar should take place by October, Home Minister, Amit Shah addressed a ‘virtual rally’ of party members via video mode on Sunday. What, however, is not clear yet is how the elections or the voting process can take place by maintaining social distancing norms. The Election Commission is yet to take a call on this. Bihar is where a key battle between the rival political formations – UPA and NDA – will be staged first. BJP seems comfortable with a continuation of the alliance with Nitish Kumar, who has been around as chief minister for many years and might by now be a tired face before the voters. With RJD leader Lalu Prasad grooming his next generation in style to lead the party’s charge from the front, the Congress is bound to stand by the alliance because the party no longer has an independent existence there. Bihar is where the migrant labour matters in the coming polls. They had experienced the worst deal from the lockdown. Most of them back in their own homes, they, as a bloc could tilt the balance either way.

The assembly polls in Bihar will be followed by polls in Punjab, West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala etc and these would, together, take on the form of a mini general election, gauging the mood of the nation across regions. Question is, how the polling exercise will be carried through in the present season of restrictions on public activities. The Covid scenario is progressively worsening in India, the nation going down to the fifth position from tenth a week ago, globally, and likely heading for an ill-reputation as the worst Covid-hit nation. While the pandemic scenario is well under control in most parts of the nation, regions like Mumbai, Pune, Ahmedabad, Tamil Nadu, Delhi etc are steadily pushing the rise in number of daily infection rates. It has crossed the 10,000 mark a day already. What this goes to show is that full resumption of public activities in the country will not happen in the near future. A vaccine for the virus will take its own time. Obviously, with the political cacophony missing at least outside of the TV debates, life remained quiet for two months. If the people were breathing easy, the politicians on the other side were feeling suffocated. A round of elections in Bihar and elsewhere could put life back into the democratic process as a whole – for better or for worse.

TO THE EDITOR

Shop numbering needs relook

Editor,
As a concerned citizen of Shillong I would like to draw the attention of the District Administration as well as the Government that the experiment with shop numbering in Police Bazar, GS Road, Keatinge Road, Jail Road, Quinton Road, Garikhana, Qualapaty is for the purpose of social distancing, but it is creating more hardships to the business establishment and to the residents of these areas. Most of the essential items groceries, vegetables and fruits shops are closed though as it is creating more hardships to the business establishment and to the residents of these areas. In fact the experiment with shop numbering in the above areas has confused the citizens. A customer can't identify the product of a shop by its number, in fact many such citizens including me, have travelled to Police Bazar and GS.Road to buy the product of their needs but had to return empty handed. Further this kind of experiment with the business establishment is

not evident in other localities like Laitemkhrah, Nongthymmai etc. All other areas are running without numbers and without any limitations. The District Administration is perhaps concerned about the post Lockdown period but at the same time it must look at the small traders and daily wage earners who are badly affected by this lockdown. They also should be allowed to run their businesses without any discrimination. The District Authority must also look at the rates of essential commodities which have spiralled especially of vegetables, fish, and chicken which are changing different markets. It is difficult for the poor to afford to run their lives in this crisis. It will be a relief for the common citizen if the District Administration can keep a check on prices of essential commodities. Government officials can survive even with salary cuts but to pay the salaries, Government needs revenue and businesses have to run. The District Administration should consider the balance between Business and Administration. Then the Government is appealing to all business establishments not to deduct the salaries of the employees of their business establishments in this period

The World Environment Day (WED) celebration passed off rather quietly this year due to the pandemic which has affected the entire globe. There was no festival like celebration and even in Meghalaya it was a low-key affair because no public gathering was allowed. The Government observed the day with the Chief Minister planting a tree at the State Secretariat with no lecture and the absence of the usual pomp and festivity.

If not for the pandemic there would have been mega events to celebrate the day. The planning and execution of the event would have cost a lot of money and hundreds of vehicles used to ferry people which only helps increase carbon footprints in the state. All along WED celebration used to be a time for the ruling dispensation to declare their love for nature and make public their plans to conserve the environment, which is conveniently forgotten after the lunch is served. In Meghalaya, last year it was the one million trees campaign which the people of the state have (not surprisingly) forgotten about altogether. No one would have cost a lot of money and hundreds of trees were planted and how many survived? Or is there any plan to replace those which have not survived? But nature in its own way has responded to how humans have treated mother earth.

The vanishing vehicular and industrial pollution due to COVID-19 pandemic has shown that the Lockdown has improved the condition of the earth's atmosphere without any intervention from humans. The pandemic has demonstrated one very important fact - that nature has the power to heal itself, if we only stop our harmful activities and leave it alone to itself. We have witnessed with our own eyes that when people of the earth leave nature to itself in three months time, it quickly restores itself. The Lockdown has not only helped clean up the atmosphere but it has claimed even the size of the hole in the ozone layer is reduced due to the positive impact of the Lockdown on the planet.

Obviously humans and their destructive activities

of crisis, follow all statutory norms and deposit PF etc., but on the other hand it is not allowing them to run their businesses. And restricting opening of shops is not going to achieve the goal. The Government must suffer irrespective of caste and creed. Eventually the Government may suffer for not adopting correct policies.

Yours etc.,
A concerned citizen.
Name withheld on request

Eerie silence from Govt

Editor,
The eerie silence from the Government of Meghalaya and local population against the shooting of a businessman, Dharamvir Bansal, speaks loudly about the government is living in. The open statement by the HNLCL militant group justifying the act is shameful. The spokesperson alleged that the businessman was shot at because he didn't employ local youths and was

are the root cause of all the problems we see in the world today. And by simply staying put and doing nothing, humans have inadvertently helped heal the earth. We must therefore understand that if we are the cause of all that is wrong with the earth we live in, we should also be the solution to the problem. But the question as usual is how can humans help heal



the world again? The outcome of COVID-19 Lockdown with regards to the environment has given us hope and we can help change the course towards which the earth is heading and it is not beyond our reach to save the earth.

The pandemic has taught us another very important lesson which is that the work to protect and help conserve the environment is also at the individual capacity. How effective have the functions and celebrations that were organised from time to time been in protecting the environment? That we don't know! Again if one is to consider from what had happened in the state during the Lockdown, then Meghalaya still has a long way to go especially with regards to protection of wild life. While on one hand the quality of the water in the rivers and streams has improved and at the same time the quality of the air too has improved, in Meghalaya there was rampant killing of wild life in the during the lockdown.

Deer was hunted and killed and even a bear which is in the list of endangered species of animals was killed by some people in the state. A video of certain public representative went viral in which he along with his friends were alleged to have making a lot of money from the state. The rational is ridiculous and ill-suited to a democratic free market, capitalist economy which gives an individual full freedom to earn his or her livelihood, as per his or her own terms, as long as it is legal. Was it Dharamvir's responsibility to provide jobs or is that the onus of the Government of Meghalaya? Can a profit making entity or businessman afford to employ unskilled as it is a particular business demands? Similarly can the HNLCL afford to recruit less skilled cadres who don't know how to shoot or kill?

To the question of what the businessmen are giving in return, let it be made amply clear that all non-tribal business establishments are paying their due taxes which go to the state's coffers. There are also lakhs of businessman from outside the state whose tax money is channelled by the state government to the Government of Meghalaya which in turn is the source of income for lakhs of citizens of the state. At this juncture, it is important to ask a fundamental question. What does the state of Meghalaya provide to India and its citizens in return? Entry and Exit check points, a Resident Act that bars Indian citizens (could be the same tax- paying

violated Lockdown orders, but it seems like they are also involved in mass killing of fishes in the stream of certain rivers. The party was involved in dewatering the entire stream and killing of aquatic lives which includes a turtle in the stream. And of course this act is also a threat to the biodiversity that exists in the water of the creek. Obviously the State Wildlife Department needs



to work harder to educate the people of the State and make them aware of the need to protect wildlife. If the people, including a public representative are still engaged in activity which is against the Wild Life Act, then Meghalaya state still has a long way to go to protect its wildlife and biodiversity.

Another important lesson that one can learn from the pandemic is that despite all the negativity that is going around, there is a glimmer of light which gives people hope. There is hope beyond despair and like the saying goes, it is hope which helps people carry on a move forward with whatever they are doing in spite of all the odds stacked against them. It is not all over yet and like the proverbial phoenix people will rise again from the ashes of the pandemic and restart their lives, but life will not be the same again after this lockdown.

The hope is that in the new normal that COVID-19 pandemic will usher in, people will also start living life which is favourable for the environment and the earth, the only place humans can call home. The new normal is simple because it involves going back to basics which means changing our attitudes in the way we treat the environment. It is simple

businessman) from staying more than 2 days without permission? What has been the contribution of the state in the larger scheme of things? Ever thought why the Central Government punishes in so much money to a state that is perpetually begging and has no well thought-out roadmap to increase its revenue. What have organizations like HNLCL and KSU given to the people of Hymntiew besides terrorizing innocent people who just want to earn a livelihood? Do such organizations know what has been the impact of their actions over the decades? They have fostered enmity among communities and propagated racial discrimination. They have stopped investments into the state which was earlier known to be cosmopolitan in nature. They have made thousands of locals flee Meghalaya and seek greener pastures elsewhere. Imagine how a Khasi living in Kolkata or Bangalore would feel if he shot in the same manner like Dharamvir.

The Indian government has been lenient enough so far to let go such acts of crime which can be classified as racism by far yardsticks and for which there is severe penalty prescribed in the Constitution. But why blame the Central

because this is something that the kids should learn from Kindergarten. These are lessons that should be inculcated in young minds at the same time as they learn their ABC and 123.

The Khasi and the Pnar are known for being able to maintain their houses and surrounding clean but it ends there. The lesson that needs to be instilled in the young minds is to learn to clean not only one's house and backyard, but as much as we try to keep our houses clean, we also need to keep the roads and public spaces clean. More often than not it is found that people in their effort to clean their own houses and backyards, end up littering other people's yards or the public places. The lesson number one post COVID-19 lockdown is to, "Say No Littering." Keeping the environment clean is a lesson for the young people as much as it is for the elders, and it has to start with oneself and now.

The corona virus which spreads through droplets has also made spitting an offence, therefore, the new normal for people particularly those who are in the habit of spitting at random, is to stop the bad habit immediately. Spitting is now a punishable offence and it invites penalty. People are also in the habit of throwing rubbish from the comfort of their vehicles, as if the road is their waste bin. The new normal is also to enforce the relevant laws which deal with littering and also smoking in public places.

The theme for this year's WED is it is "Time for Nature." It is therefore time for the people to spare a thought for nature. Last week after the incessant rains which flooded river Myntdu, the receding waters left plastics hanging like colour paper garlands hanging on shrubs on the banks of the river. The sight is ugly and not a feast for the eyes. This can change by simply not littering everywhere. Simple acts like not littering, not spitting and not smoking in public places may be small, but they can go a long way to help heal the earth heal itself. The point is if we cannot do anything to help protect and conserve the environment, the least we can do is to leave nature alone and see magic happening.

Government only when law and order is a state subject after all? Questions must be raised as to what the State Government has done to prevent such atrocities from recurring time and again? How many HNLCL and KSU radical activists have been arrested since 1979 when the first communal riots broke out? Questions also need to be asked to the Meghalaya police, known to be one of the lesser corrupt police forces of our country, as to what sort of protection they are providing to the business community in the state?

The world functions on a give and take basis and we are all interconnected. We are not in the stone age where we hunt and kill. I pray that the misguided youths learn a thing or two about business management before making ludicrous public comments. It's behavioural economics that rules our everyday lives, not sermons and Taliban type dictates in the 21st century. Time we introspect and broaden our thinking.

Yours etc.,
Ajay Gautam
Via mail

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

Right time to introduce the real "Taxi" in Shillong

By Ngahiwoth Khonglah

Many will be surprised with the title of this article but if one pauses a while one will realise that we don't and never had a taxi service except for those plying outside the State. We only have passenger vehicles such as big buses, medium sized ones, smaller ones and three wheelers. Even the two wheelers like Rapido are under trial or still being conceptualized. Now what is a taxi? It is a car with a driver that takes us to our destination of choice on a price agreed upon or as per the rate regulated by the authority depending on the mileage travelled. Going by the above definition all those means of transport in our State called "taxis" don't fit the criteria. They are more like small buses. A bus travels on a pre-determined route and ferries many passengers at a time and charges a comparatively lesser fare. I strongly believe that this is the right time to introduce taxis since social distancing will be part of our lives which everyone has to maintain even when the lockdown is relaxed or lifted. Till a vaccine is found and is ready to be used on humans (which is not going to be anytime soon) social

but it is the Government who with a sincere motive should lead the way. To those drivers/owners who oppose the idea, I like to narrate my experience while travelling from Motphran to Mawlai on a shared taxi charging Rs 10 each from 5 persons with a total income of Rs 50. I had boarded the cab and told the driver that I was willing to pay Rs 50 for the journey since I was in a hurry so he need not wait any longer. The gentleman refused and preferred instead to wait for 4 more passengers which ended him earning the same amount of Rs 50 carrying 5 persons than just one! Amazing right? Now the authorities have instructed that only one passenger could sit in the front seat with the driver while two other passengers could sit in the rear seat. This would further reduce the taxi driver's income to Rs 30. How can the cabbies survive? The truth is, the Government's red cab (or small bus I may say) under JNNURM are the most overloaded compared to all other transport. I once asked the driver why he carried so many passengers? His reply was that there are many owners of these



distancing will be a part of our lives.

Many times and for many years we grumbled about the so-called 'taxis' not taking passengers to their destination of choice but to wherever the driver wishes to. This way, waiting to get a ride to our destination is a painful wait and we have to stand for hours on the road trying our luck on every yellow cab passing. In my first hand experience, after a frustrating one hour struggle telling one taxi after another where I wanted to go and then getting a negative reply from several cabbies, I turned the tables on them by asking...Where are you going? The guy was caught by surprise! (Trusted, I waited home that evening). The argument given is whether anyone can ride in a taxi for Rs 10? None! And with the price index of everything rising I wonder how these guys survive? And the service provided compared to the fare charged is reasonable! So no complaints!

Taxis are meant for people who can pay and who value time as money. As the saying goes, "There is always an opportunity in any situation; it only needs to be found." This lockdown is the right time to bring reforms which cannot be brought about in normal days. The Government should take this opportunity of introducing taxis in our state and Shillong in particular. This will not only help the people to commute faster and more comfortably but it will definitely ease traffic congestion since many cabs will not move without a passenger. I would presume as usual that any change into something new will have some opposition,

vehicles; they include the Government, the contractors, the sub-contractors and us. That's pretty mind-boggling right?

So let's come back to the government side of the story. All permits issued to this so-called 'taxi' is not that it should ply on a shared basis but that it should run on full capacity and charge accordingly. With the Covid-19 pandemic and social distancing being mandatory, it is in public interest that the Government and the Transport Department in particular to (1) put a small colour code for taxis which can be hired and (2) mandatorily fit a meter for the charges to be applied. This will not only be profitable for the driver and owner but with smart phones and GPS in our hands this will stop passengers, especially tourists from paying more than they should be paying. If the Government is really serious on promoting tourism, this should be the first step forward. I am optimistic that this is a win-win change for everyone. The passengers get a cab to the destination of choice, pays for the service and the car will not move unless it is hired and gets paid (which is more profitable). This in turn helps in limiting the number of vehicles plying on the road at the same time and same destinations.

There are many who love the idea but it requires that the Government should take the lead. There's no need to force those who don't want to change but it's important to provide an opportunity to those who want to change to a better world. Perhaps with some encouraging schemes for cabbies that are ready to start, the way I see it, there's nothing to lose.

“In the public realm, secularism should not concede a single inch to religious intrusions. ”

— Gad Saad

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 9, 2020

Tighten law and order

THAT an engineer of the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) was first assaulted by some group in South West Khasi Hills and later even had to take shelter in a forest to save his life is a crime requiring immediate attention. This cannot be pushed under the carpet like other heinous crimes committed in this State time and again. Government of India and the Ministry of Road Transport should take this matter seriously as the engineer is an employee of the NHIDCL which is a fully owned Company of the Ministry of Roads and Surface Transport. The culprits that assaulted the engineer must be arrested post haste. Police have to deliver.

The abysmal law and order situation is borne out by the fact that the militant outfit HNLC not only fired at and injured a businessman Dharambir Bansal in Shillang, West Khasi Hills but also audaciously claimed responsibility for the crime and even reminded everyone that they had earlier carried out an IED blast at Bansal's coal and coke factory in February. To justify its crime HNLC accused Bansal of being involved in several illegal businesses and benami trade. They also used that old ruse about Bansal not providing jobs to local unemployed people. What the HNLC failed to mention is their own role in the extortion racket and that the threat to Bansal is to ensure compliance to extortion demands.

Interference in business transactions by people engaged in protection rackets is not new in Meghalaya. From fruit and vegetable vendors to fish vendors, all pay their share of protection money to groups that are erroneously termed NGOs. The case of an e-commerce company Amazon.in having to shut down two of its outlets under duress from the Hynniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) is another case in point. Can groups meddling with business enterprises in a competitive environment be called NGOs? And should the law not take its course in such a situation? Is this not a violation of rules governing business administration? Can any outsider dictate terms to an entrepreneurship/business to employ people of their choice? Don't businesses flourish in an environment where the best, most competent and hard working people are employed? These are the basic rules of doing business. If the environment in Meghalaya and the state cannot provide basic security to entrepreneurs then it might as well kiss goodbye to employment generation. Businesses don't operate like governments, which continue to pay employees despite their non-performance.

What's even more surprising is that the police have summoned the HYC for discussions. Is this how the Government is going to deal with all disruptive forces? By negotiating with them? Law and order is a pre-requisite to ease of doing business. If the MDA Government does not improve on this front then Meghalaya will become ungovernable.

TO THE EDITOR

Lewduh needs to reopen

Editor,
The State Government indecision on re-opening of Asia's largest open market has really affected all and sundry. But the worst affected are those so called “unorganized hawkers” . The other day as I was watching a local news channel highlighting the plights being faced by these small wage earners at Motphran area, I was greatly saddened.

These hawkers are not allowed to stand in one particular place to sell their small items and are being chased away by some police personnel. They are not even allowed to sit in a particular place to have their own lunch. Many of them braved the risk of contacting COVID-19 just to sustain their livelihoods.

It is understandable that the government does not want to take any risk by re-opening lewduh at the earliest as this market place has more than a dozen entry and exit points and around 5000 commercial establishments.

But Standard Operating Procedures(SOPs) should have been placed and planned much earlier by the concerned authorities.

When large commercial areas like Police Bazaar and other markets in the city have been open long ago with specified protocols and SOPs, it's high time that the Government reconsider opening of lewduh too as this marketplace is the source of income to many small income families and other daily wage earners.

Yours etc.,
Mangkara Hynniewta
Shillong-10

NEHU Affairs

Editor,
Apropos the news report “Thappa to approach CAT” dated June 5th, 2020, in your esteemed daily, as well as other related news items in previous issues, it appears that the former Director of NEIGRIHMS was transferred by the concerned authorities in their wisdom and in the best interests of the Institute, although it remains open for

If wishes were horses “one India one farm market” would have flown under then Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee 20 years ago. This time around, Narendra Modi government's move is good but it's not going to be easy. The changes in the Essential Commodities Act (ECA) and attempt to bypass the APMC under State governments through The Farming Produce Trade and Commerce (promotion of and facilitation) Ordinance 2020 does have pros and cons.

Agriculture Minister Narendra Singh Tomar's assertion that it will attract investments in the farm sec-



tor needs to be carefully watched to see who it benefits - the farmers or the large corporate and MNCs. The changes may well shackle the intended beneficiaries more with wholesale or retail chains. The new Ordinance has rightly assumed that there could be predatory takeovers and has banned any kind of sale, mortgage or leasing of land. Any recovery against land is also not possible.

The decriminalisation of the ECA is right to the extent that the businesses would now be difficult to harass by the policing and administrative agencies. It would help them stock required food grains or pulses and they cannot be questioned. It is a trust reposed in the business and they would have to come up to it. The danger is that if they falter, resort to hoarding and manipulate prices, the concession given would have to be withdrawn under public pressure. That is the catch. But foreign chains are exempt from the emergency clauses of calamity-like situation.

The Ordinance is explicit. It says that installed capacity of value chain participant and the export demand of an exporter will remain exempted from such stock

sumers may have to pay high prices during calamitous situations.

The Vajpayee government fully de-licensed dairy production (2002) and sugar industry (1998), made changes to allow BT cotton, introduced Kisan Credit Cards (KCC), an idea espoused by Sompal Shastri and was duly supported by then Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha despite opposition from sister organisations.

It changed cotton production dynamics. Despite large number of farmer suicides today more than 95 per cent cotton cultivation is for Bt. India is estimated to have earned \$67 billion from 2004 to 2017 from cotton exports, a mere \$13 billion a year. Overall it is said that cotton farmers are having larger incomes. However, the euphoria of farmers didn't last long due to crop failures, mounting debt, resistance against chemical and leading to suicides consuming the pesticides that could not kill the worms, in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Karnataka, Punjab and Haryana. The Green to Gene Revolution has not been that much of a success though it has made Monsanto like firms richer.

shall be in the best interests of all concerned, particularly the student community, if the authorities were to also cause the present incumbent Vice Chancellor to be replaced at the earliest.

Yours etc;
Mewan Pariat,
Shillong

Reopening of religious places disappointing

Editor,
While we congratulate the Government and church leaders who had an important meeting on Friday June 5, 2020 to discuss the re-opening of places of worship from June 14, the same is very confusing. Is it not too early? While for other faiths it may work, but for me as a member of the Presbyterian Church it does not. Moreover, worshipping God is without condition.

Worshipping Community: worshipping in the church is for all ages from 3 year olds to the elderly. But the SOP says only those below 65 years are allowed

One farm market

Fantasy or eventual reality?

By Shivaji Sarkar

limit imposition so as to ensure that investments in agriculture are not hampered. The government expects foreign chains would enter the market in a big way and help its dream of inviting FDI into food items.

Various multinationals have been there for quite some time. The new law would help them have pan-India unfettered presence. Since they are financially well-off, it is feared that this atma-nirbharta may displace traditional Khari Baoli-type markets and may cause disturbances. The Indian con-

The ECA amendments would ensure that cereals, pulses, oilseeds, edible oils, onion and potatoes be removed from list of essential commodities. This will remove fears of private investors of excessive regulatory interference in their business operations. The government expects that the freedom to produce, hold, move, distribute and supply will lead to harnessing of economies of scale and attract private sector/FDI into agriculture sector. It will help drive up investment in cold storages and modernisation of food

given them that freedom.

Another government-imposed restriction on cash transaction needs to be eased. When a farmer takes his produce to market, he faces problem in getting his payment. The electronic payment gateways do not work everywhere. This delays payment. The government needs to allow farm produce sale through cash without any limit. If this is allowed, selling farm produce would be easier and the Indian market and retailers can thrive. This kind of checks put the farmers at a disadvantage even with large chains.

The two law changes also say that now the farmer

supply chain.

The expectation that it would help drive up investment in cold storages and modernisation of food supply chains is a bit too high. It is likely to change the market dynamics and may not always be an easy process. The government hopes it would attract private sector investment and open up the global market to the farmer. But, it has ignored one aspect that no sooner Indian products in large volume reach global mandis, the prices would crash.

Another, though seemingly good, provision is the promise that the farmers could skirt Agricultural Produce (APMC) mandis and get better prices. In the States having APMC, farmers are prohibited from selling their produce anywhere except mandis. This may be a double whammy or simply would make the new Ordinance infructuous. It needs to be seen how change, brought during corona lockdown, fares in the ensuing session of Parliament.

It is also difficult to understand how the farmer would break the inter-State barriers if the State has APMC and can have the benefit of pan-India market or get better prices. Even now the e-NAM has not

would not have to bother about the minimum support price (MSP) and he can sell at prices higher than the MSP. This implies that a farmer can get more than the price sought for. The reality is during the past few seasons, most farmers have been selling their produce at less than the MSP. Even during this rabi season, getting the MSP for wheat is a dream almost in all States. In Uttar Pradesh mandis, a farmer gets between Rs 1600 to 1750 a quintal against the MSP of Rs 1925.

The MSPs of many items have been raised but farmers simply don't get it. The government's intentions may be pious, but its mechanism does not ensure that the farmer would get the promised price. If the market crumbles and the FCI isn't there, the market could become volatile.

Besides, farmers may be having dreams but default in payments could rise or be delayed as in the case of sugarcane farmers. UP owes them Rs 14,201 crore and Maharashtra Rs 4,866 crore as on April 30.

To sum it up, the changes may be well-intended but they will take some time for the nation to have the cherished one farm market.—INFA

Many perspectives of secularism and tolerance

By R Rynjah

I have been an ardent fan of Mr Mohrmen for a while now. His articles are very informative and have been a topic of animated discussion between me and my late father bringing back memories. I, however, was amused when I read his article, ‘Of God and Caesar (ST June 1, 2020). ‘ My father cautioned me to never make decisions based on feelings but on rational thoughts because feelings betray many of man's basic instincts and some of them can even lead to people committing crimes. Not all criminal acts are premeditated.

There is no doubt to a majority of us who have studied the essence of a democracy that what Adelbert Nongrum the North Shillong MLA did (praying inside the Legislative Assembly) should not be encouraged. But then again there are many people who support him openly and still many who will not voice their support because it is not what a modern, secular and an open-minded society expects from them. Politicians have always been suspected of having ulterior motives and who can blame anyone for this? They have given us enough cause. It is very hard to believe, however, that Mr Nongrum's action is foolhardy. Some say he misses the limelight and this cer-

lowing ‘ The first Corona case was reported in the state a day after the Conrad Sangma led Easter Service and now after Adelbert's action in the August House more cases are being reported in Meghalaya’. This is similar to my Aunt telling me (with the confidence that people of her age have of certain things), that the Corona Virus came to Meghalaya as soon as the order was given for wine shops to re-open. Both statements were made by irrational minds that let their feelings control their thoughts; where is science here? So if these statements hold water then the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Mr Nongrum and wine shops are responsible for the spike in Covid-19 cases in our state. Even the best of us have something or some idea or belief that we will try to protect once they are threatened. However, as long as it does not touch that raw nerve we remain unprejudiced and put on a façade to show to the world how liberal we are. Trump, for all his faults, has difficulty in hiding his bigotry but because of this the whole world now is witnessing what America has been hiding for so long behind smiles and talk of equality for all. They now claim to fight against systemic racism but a majority of the white ac-



tainly is the most talked about topic for now so we can tick that box. Others say KHNAME as a party has nothing going for it at the moment and with this pandemic

tors who are in the forefront of this protest will show their true colours if they have to take second place to a black actor. Has anyone seen a black James Bond?

There is no doubt to a majority of us who have studied the essence of a democracy that what Adelbert Nongrum the North Shillong MLA did (praying inside the Legislative Assembly) should not be encouraged.

causing people to turn to God and religion, this is the perfect opportunity for him to make an impression on his constituents, which I am sure he did; although to what extent we will have to wait and see.

Exploiting religious sentiments in our country is still the best bet to win an election even with all this talk of secularism. Still there are few who believe that he is following Jesus's instructions in Mathew 10:32. If so, the follow up question to any man of the cloth is whether this is the right place or should I say the perfect place to do what Mr Nongrum did? Or am I taking this verse out of context because that would be a big mistake. I also have to agree with Mr Mohrmen when he raises the other issue of Mr Nongrum saying that this pandemic is a punishment from God. Every individual interprets their beliefs in different ways. I, for one, do not believe in a God who punishes. It is best for Mr Nongrum to keep this opinion to himself.

Mr Mohrmen, however, disappoints in the last paragraph when he wrote the fol-

The Oscars 2020 was controversial because they say it was, ‘All White’. Is this not systemic racism? We heard protests after the Oscars but because it was done by opportunists and it quickly fizzled out. Any industry (more so the music and movie industry) that is fuelled by money and power will have opportunists lurking around every corner. We will have to wait a long time to see another Obama in America. We also see reports of a Korean band donating to the ‘Black Lives Matter’ campaign and there is no doubt that the whole world was appalled by what was done to George Floyd. However, this donation will certainly expand their market base and that consideration was definitely the push they needed. No act of violence should be condoned; the guilty should be punished but to solve this problem of intolerance we need to understand basic human nature and admit that even the best succumb when pushed to a corner. A solution to any problem is when we introspect and not put ourselves above others.

Yours etc.
Y .Dkhar & others
Shillong-2

“The whole secret of a successful life is to find out what is one’s destiny to do, and then do it.”

--- Henry Ford

The Shillong Times

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Pragmatism over Religion

A few days ago the Government had announced that religious places (churches, temples, mosques, gurudwara etc) would reopen on June 14. The announcement elicited mixed reactions, more so because the Chief Minister had himself announced that the next two weeks after Unlock 1.0 which started on Monday June 8, would be critical for Meghalaya. On Tuesday, after consulting religious leaders the Government announced that the earlier order of opening up religious places on June 14 stands rescinded until further orders. This is a pragmatic decision. Till date there are 26 active cases in the State. They are mainly returnees, studying or working in other states of India and one elderly person who tested positive on Tuesday albeit without travel history. Quite a number of returnees have returned from the Covid hotspots like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Delhi, Chennai, Ahmedabad etc. Many are still returning in batches. In Meghalaya, the Government has not started random testing. With Covid, the more people are tested the more is the likelihood of finding out positive cases, since many are asymptomatic carriers.

At this vulnerable period when there is a swirl of returnees, some of whom have completed their institutional quarantine and are now under 14 days of home quarantine, it is possible that while the test results are negative the person may be a carrier. It is also not a well established fact that if Covid does not show up within 28 days then the person tested is Covid free. There are too many unknown variables with this bug. Hence precaution, especially social distancing, wearing of masks, hand hygiene et al are imperative. It may so happen that an asymptomatic carrier attends a place of worship and despite the social distancing the virus is transmitted. What happens then in a state where the public health infrastructure is abysmal? Many have also questioned how religious places can allow some people to come for worship services while others are not allowed due to space constraints. And also those above 65 years of age are told not to leave their homes. What if they too assert that they have a right to worship with their religious community? Can anyone stop them from entering a church or any other place of worship? If educational institutions are kept closed for the same reason that Covid is a highly infectious bug then why did Government decide to open up religious places which are veritable spaces for community fellowship – the anti-thesis to social distancing? Covid demands that we do things differently and cannot go back to our ‘normal’ habits. The ‘new normal’ demands that henceforth prayer and worship has to be a private affair!

TO THE EDITOR

Why the bias against commercial vehicles?

Editor,
The recent government orders appear to be illogical when seen in the context of what good government policy should be. The order allowing odd and even numbered vehicles to ply on alternate days while permitting only private vehicles to ply on Sundays is a case in point. If the government had been sensitive to the misery of several thousand voiceless commercial vehicle drivers and helpers who had to face loss of their meager incomes

these past months, it would have allowed only commercial vehicles to ply on Sundays. This step would help the stakeholders recoup whatever little they can. It would also encourage more people to adopt public transport as a means of travel which is a stated aim of the government in light of limited road space in Shillong and other towns.
Another point that government needs to take into account is that most working class people who constitute the majority of the population do not own vehicles and hence travel to their work places by public transport. They are facing problems as only 50% commercial passenger vehicles can ply on a given

day. Hence, to ease the problems of the silent majority, and not just cater to the demands of a vociferous and influential minority, the government should allow all commercial passenger vehicles to ply on all days while further reducing the percentage of private vehicles that can ply on any given day.
This may seem like a fond hope considering that government decisions are taken by those living in a comfort zone and alienated from the majority. However, we hope that those vocal members in the opposition will take up the matter.
Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request

Blessed are the merciful !

Editor,
Much water has flowed under the bridge and human memory has slowly and steadily faded into nothingness since the demise of Dr J Sailo on April 15 last, after unfortunately falling victim to the dreaded Corona virus pandemic. Indeed, it was lamentable that following this physician’s expiry, two particular localities situated apart, viz, Nongpoh and Jhalupara had vehemently opposed the deceased’s burial and cremation rites respectively on the premise of fear of virus dispersion in their environs. These two incidents must have been a

nightmarish ordeal for the near and dear ones of the late doctor, but, out of the blue, lo and behold, by underlining the eight beatitudes of Jesus Christ on the Mount, in the Gospel of Matthew who said "Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy," the Riatsamthiah Presbyterian church had compassionately offered a decent burial space in its burial grounds at Lawmali, Shillong. The concerned family ought to be profoundly indebted to the Riatsamthiah Presbyterian church over such a warm-hearted reciprocation. May, therefore, all the good deeds of late Dr Sailo be interred with his bones as this was precisely what Mark Antony expressed soulfully

over the public beneficent deeds of murdered Julius Ceaser, in one of Shakespeare's famous dramas.
On the flip side, I learnt rather belatedly that the late doctor was from the Khasi tribe. After all he bears the surname of Ryntathiang. Hitherto, I thought he was a Mizo as the deceased was widely and popularly called Dr Sailo. In this context, I'm reminded of Mr HS Shylla the Ex- Cem of KHADC and the Khasi Lineage Bill, he attempted to enact into a law but regrettably failed and which ended up being a none starter to date. It could have been a great game changer.
Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong

Lost in Translation: The Education Meltdown

By TFL Mawlong

discussed factors. On careful analysis, we can identify three chief factors that render the students disinterested and disillussioned and hence significantly brings down their engagement in e-learning systems offered by their schools or colleges. One is the uncertainty of examinations. While it may sound sensible to not study if the examination is not going to be held, the attitude highlights the fact that the majority of our students study only for the sake of examination, not for the sake of learning, and it defeats the purpose for which schools and colleges were established in the first place. Our schools and colleges have evolved into more like the 'Degree Mills' and less like the 'Centers of Learning'. Two, is the rote learning education system which gives the students an illusion of mastery when they can reproduce the notes verbatim. Hence, class discussion and active-learning appear to be of secondary importance to the students. Three, is the lack of a formal and uniform structure of remote teaching.
While it is well within our capability to set up a formal and well-equipped e-learning system having the capability of seamless and highly interactive live classes (without using Zoom of course) we are choosing to either sit idle (by giving lame excuses) or remain content with sharing sub-standard and incomprehensible PDF notes via WhatsApp or web portals. Besides, in many cases, the School and College authorities have failed to formally and emphatically push the community to actively engage in e-learning classes. E-learning wins very little attention of most School and College Principals (many of whom are not only intellectually bankrupt but also spineless), who might otherwise be critical of unconventional digital methods to enhance quality education, but have no problem in accepting the unessential and fancy Smart ID card and Biometric attendance system.
So how can we manage this chaotic episode of education? Firstly, as hinted above, the reason why students are unenthusiastic about e-learning is that there's nothing great about our curriculum that will gravitate them to the ‘actual learning effort’. The majority of the students are attending classes only for socializing, to maintain the compulsory attendance, and because they are chronically trapped under a culture of dictated notes (no matter how bookish and substandard the notes are). As aforementioned, they study just for the final examination. So tell me one good reason why a ‘habitual crammer’ should attend the

'informal' live classes or watch those passive video lessons when the exam-oriented-rote-learning notes have been shared? I hope you can see the problem here.
Hence if we want to see changes, we should creatively re-imagine our curriculum, and formally and enthusiastically adopt blended learning. For education's sake, we should not wait for the HRD or UGC to give their guidelines/directives. I believe we can find our own decentralized and tailored solutions within the existing framework and adjust it with the HRD or UGC guidelines when needed later.
In the recently held National Virtual Seminar on ‘Quality Online Education’ organized by VIT (Vellore Institute of Technology) which I attended, Dr. Srikanta Swamy of NAAC (National Assessment and Accreditation Council) emphasized the importance of engaging, interactive, and illustrative teaching in online classes to make them appealing and effective. Unfortunately, the PowerPoint presentation which many teachers are using can hardly make teaching illustrative let alone interactive. I would like to emphasize that, teachers can be trained to design and deliver excellent illustrative and interactive online pedagogies. However, even if such pedagogies could be planned and designed, the illustrative and interactive lessons unfortunately cannot be effectively delivered with just a Zoom, Google Meet, Google Classroom, or YouTube live class. There's need to set up an ‘engaging’ and ‘well equipped’ e-learning system which none of the academic institutions in Shillong at present have. And mind you the pre-recorded videos can never be interactive unless the interactive elements are integrated into them (which would require the right software) or they are smartly coupled with interactive elements on the specially designed portals.
Though education institutions have responded responsibly to the COVID-19 crisis by exploring different methods of learning outside of the institution, there have been no 'orientation programs' to orient the students. So basically what students are seeing is just a disorganized and desperate attempt of the institutions to ensure instructional continuity. The students are neither formally enlightened as to why they need to adapt and on how to effectively use e-learning nor to emphatically encourage them to adapt to a new learning method. They are just told that because of COVID-19 there will be e-learning (whatever that may mean to students) which all students should participate in. Moreover, with the sheer neglect that

accompanies our illustration-less and incomprehensible materials, we are seriously downgrading the efficacy of e-learning as an important component of regular education.
So over and above a non-existent academic leadership, the teachers' negligence is making matters worse. In the end, we are effectively shifting the entire burden of education and its cost (for the printing of substandard notes, internet charges, etc) onto a student.
I would, therefore, like to suggest that our academic institutions stop taking students for granted. Our students need proper orientation and the institutions must arrange for that. I would also suggest the academic institutions 'formally' adopt a blended learning system that is thoroughly engaging for students and to ‘emphatically’ discuss with the students about it. Besides, we also need to develop a solution to hand-hold marginalized students who can't afford access to e-learning. And I implore the teaching fraternity to root out their negligence.
The message won't be lost in translation if authorities themselves lead the way. Perhaps the school and college Principals should start delivering periodical short video messages to the student community. The heads of institutions have powerful, invisible hands to push the students to do the right thing in a situation like this. Their simple one-minute video message (not the lifeless bulk text messages!) can potentially dissipate despair, and motivate and inspire one and all.
To conclude, with online learning becoming paradigmatic, there's need for a sensible and balanced approach to education. Regaining control over our education very much rests on dismantling our failed curriculum and approach. In this regard, as a first step, I implore upon teachers to stop behaving as 'controllers' (which they do for gaining the so-called fear and respect of students). Rather they should openly and sincerely try to be co-learners'. In 'modern education' teachers must learn to 'co-learn with students' because that is exactly what we need to do to inspire the students; to build real trust, and to encourage them to adapt and study beyond the curriculum.
(The author believes that the vision and innovation of the youth is the only thing that can revolutionize basic education and academic skills in Meghalaya. The author calls upon the learned and passionate individuals to come out of their comfort zones and do what the established institutions have failed to do.)

Is India losing the Covid fight?

By Poonam I Kaushish

In Covid 19 season, I dare to pick two truisms. One, tomorrow never comes. Two, as economist John Keynes said: In the long run, we are all dead. Today, India seems to be in a dark place as things are rapidly going from bad to worse in Unlock 1:0. The moot question is: Are we losing the Covid 19 fight? Stories abound of people dying due to unavailability of beds in hospitals, three patients to a mattress, crowded corridors reeking of infection, corpses lying on beds waiting to be shifted to the mortuary, all underscored, by the heart-wrenching tale of an 80-year old running from one hospital to another for admission until he dies in a car waiting for a hospital bed.
More, doctors and nurses are being forced to wear discarded, defected or rejected PPE. No one cares if they get infected and die. There is shortage of masks, gloves and medical equipments with 70% machines out of order, including oxygen. A study by the Global Antibiotic Resistance Partnership-India Working Group found infections rate of hospital wards and intensive care units being five times more than the global index.
Alas, two-and-a-half months since lockdown nothing seems to have changed. Already, the surge of cases has crossed 10,000 per day and counting. We cannot cope with the flood. Worse, it looks like we have no clue or strategy on how to go forward.
So what was the purpose of the lockdown? Was it successful? What is the measure of its success? Sure, it slowed the Covid-19 spread and bought us time to ramp up our ill-equipped and ramshackle health facilities along-with a sensitizing people about the pandemic and how personal hygiene and social distancing alone could help stop the contagion. However, as Unlock 1.0 unfolds it is evident that we haven't been able to flatten the rising pandemic curve of infected people despite low testing and fudging figures. Appallingly, India's testing remains one of the lowest in the world at 4.5% - 2,198 tests per million people. In fact, the country is now among the top 10 worldwide vis-a-vis total reported infections, and among the top five in the number of new cases.
Sadly, the only curvature that is pulverized is the GDP. This is accompanied by a lot of pain experienced by migrant workers, daily wage earners, businesses, police and health personnel, salaried people and housewives! The Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy estimates that unemployment has spiked to 36%, with 26 crore people having lost their jobs.
True, Modi is no magician to wish away the ills that have plagued us for over 70 years and beyond. That he is trying his best cannot be doubted. Certainly all his decisions might not be correct on hindsight, but whether good, bad or impulsive time alone will tell. At least, he acted decisively.

The bungled lockdown triggered an exodus of millions of informal workers who lost their jobs in the cities and began returning home in droves, resulting in spread of infection from the cities to the villages. And with the messy easing of the lockdown there are growing fears of infections spreading further in the cities.
Our health infrastructure, plagued by a heartless attitude, lethargy, corruption and bereft of cure and consolation and accounting for less than 1% of the GDP, is crippled by a shortage of over 600,000 doctors and two million nurses. Only 58% of those who call themselves 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, nurses and doctors in district hospitals do not have the required skill sets to deal with the crisis. They do not even know how to operate ventilators. When lack of required skill sets and unsophisticated ventilators come together, it is a lethal combination.
So what next now? As the WHO has repeatedly stated there is no alternative to “testing, testing, testing.” The Government would do well to take this advice on a war footing and scale-up testing rapidly. For, a country of 1.3 billion, we should have already been testing at least 3 lakh people per day. Consequently, in absence of a comprehensive strategy of extensive testing the virus seems to be winning.
Certainly, India will not be able to pull off a Chinese miracle and build a hospital in 10 days. But it can prioritise hospital readiness by reducing red tape, speed up expenditure and upgrade facilities. What is needed is a national task force and clear targets regarding testing kits, hospital beds, and lead funding the biotech industry to work collectively for a vaccine and not inconsistent messaging.
Clearly, this is just the start of the war with the situation threatening to get worse over the next few weeks. India needs to be well prepared. Asserted a senior doctor, “If the infection rate continues to grow, things are going to get pretty grim in a few weeks time. A critical-care bed needs an oxygen line, a ventilator, doctors, nursing staff. It's a tactical nightmare”
“The infection is not spreading uniformly. India will see staggered waves,” added a leading virologist. Stating, a one-size-fits-all strategy to contain the pandemic by unlocking the country will not work as different States will see infection peaks at different times. For example in Maharashtra the reported infection rate, the number of infections for every 100 tests, is three times the national average.
One way, some experts suggest, is to plan 'multiple, small, controlled, explosions' rather than allowing the disease to have a single massive explosion. Another thought is by allowing activity based on age so that more and more young people get infected and build immunity. The virus would just go into hiding (herd immunity). Towards that end open schools and colleges sooner than later. We would have thus reduced the overall mortality.
Granting the inevitability of people having to return to near-normal even under ‘new normal’ conditions, the Government needs to have a Plan-B, Plan-C and whatever more it might take to contain and reverse the trend from now on. It needs to build a functional Government health infrastructure large enough to meet the needs of 1.3 billion people and plans to effectively control the virus, else we risk losing what we have gained.
Even as our leaders exhort people to exercise Sainyam and Sankalp, this alone is not enough. The Government needs to remain focused and turn this crisis into an opportunity. It cannot afford to waste the valuable lead time it gained during lockdown which has prepared us for a new tomorrow with a new normal! All India needs to do is play it right. ----- INFA

“I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become a reality... I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word.”

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 2020

Worsening Covid scene

IN terms of the Covid spread, India is back to the season of fresh scare. Initial hopes that a lockdown will save the nation of the pandemic’s sway have evaporated. While India woke up to fight the disease on March 25 through a nationwide lockdown, the Covid infection toll in the country was in the range of 650. Today, the tally crossed the 2,50,000 mark and refuses to be tamed in principal metros like Mumbai and Delhi. The Delhi government, worried over the way things shaped up for it, stated on Tuesday that the infection figure could cross 5.5 lakh in a matter of another month. Mumbai too is failing to stem the Covid race ahead and remained in a shutdown mode for two months. So too with Ahmedabad, Pune, Chennai etc.

With activities mostly resuming from June 8, the social distancing norm is bound to be flouted across the board. Mass transport systems other than flights have been resumed to substantial levels. Flights too could have started but for fear on the part of state governments that this would further aggravate matters in their states, as most flights touch Delhi or Mumbai. So too with international flights which emanate from the US, Europe, Hong Kong, or the Gulf regions.

Yet, it is clear now that India is set to take the world’s number one position in Covid infections. Mumbai itself surpassed China’s stated tally of 85,000, while the US, Europe et al will sooner or later fall behind India in infection tally. The deaths, however, are not very high here; it’s still in the range of over 7,000 whereas the US death toll crossed the one-lakh mark.

Much about the Covid virus are still unknown. Scientists are tackling the matter at many levels. It now turns out that China was having Covid cases from mid-2019, though it announced the matter to the world by December only. A vaccine to check the pandemic’s spread will be weeks away. However, perceptions are also gaining ground that Covid-19 too might go away on its own, as SARS did after killing over 800 people in a span of a few months. The scenario today is unpredictable.

But lockdown is no longer the answer to tackle Covid-19, lest the nation faces unprecedented economic disaster which will affect one and all. The poor living on daily wages have been the worst-affected, and they could not even get out of their homes with a begging bowl due to curbs on people’s movement. How things will pan out in the next few weeks is something to wait and watch even as state governments try their utmost to tackle the crises. It’s a catch 22 situation!

Pandemic and some of its telling lessons

By Bhagirathi Panda

The world is struggling to overcome Covid 19 and minimise its impact on people, society and the economy. However, this pandemic has turned out to be a great laboratory for each one of us to draw important lessons about life, livelihood, society and the economy. We as common citizens and as social scientists have our lessons ready too. As I write this piece, total confirmed cases in the world happens to be 6799713 and total deaths 397388. For the country as a whole, the corresponding figures stand at 256611 and 7200. For the North Eastern Region(NER), the figures are 3783 and 5 respectively. If we calculate the death to confirmed infection rate(also called death rate), it stands at 5.84%, 2.8% and 0.13% respectively at the world, country and NER levels. In plain words, what this simple statistic says is that out of every 100 confirmed infected people, only 5.84(say 6), 2.8(say 3) and 0.13(say less than 1) persons die at the world, country and NER levels. Thus at the moment, the NER is in a better situation when it comes to the death rate from Covid19.

There may be various reasons for this low mortality rate in the NER. First of all, the absolute number of total infected cases is much less, compared to the total population of the region. The confirmed infection rate for the total population at the national level is 0.02 % and at the NER level it is 0.008 % (if we forget the issue of low testing for a while). However, we in NER should not become complacent because of this very low mortality rate. Statistics too hide a lot. As the lockdown measures are progressively relaxed and more and more people come from other parts of the country (whether stranded or because of job loss, or because of temporary closure of educational institutions etc.), the absolute number of case are bound to increase. This would definitely upset the low rate of infection and possibly the low death rate.

Secondly, compared to the country, people in the NER are more tuned to community life and living. Hence, chances of community infection too increase with increase in absolute number of infections. However, if the community leaders can prevail upon the returnees(through the degree of community hold they have) to effectively follow Covid 19 guidelines, this can prove to be an advantage and may not allow the infection rate to go up. Another, reason for the low death rate in NER may be because the region happens to be the Youngistan of the country. More young people in relative terms live in the NER compared to the country as a whole. They have immunity and therefore either do not get infected so easily or even if infected get cured fast without difficulty.

One more statistics i.e. the recovery rate has to be read with a caveat for the NER. The current recovery rate as calculated from the official Government of India data shows it to be 49 % for the country. For the NER it is 23 % only. This low recovery rate for the NER read with the low death rate reflects on the high time lag between testing and getting the final results. This may also mirror the deficiency in testing infrastructure in the NER compared to other parts of our country.

Covid 19 and its unfolding facts, tales and narra-

the time when countries and citizens look forward to Government as a saviour and good governance as lubricating force for creating a conducive environment for revival of the economies in terms of growth and employment.

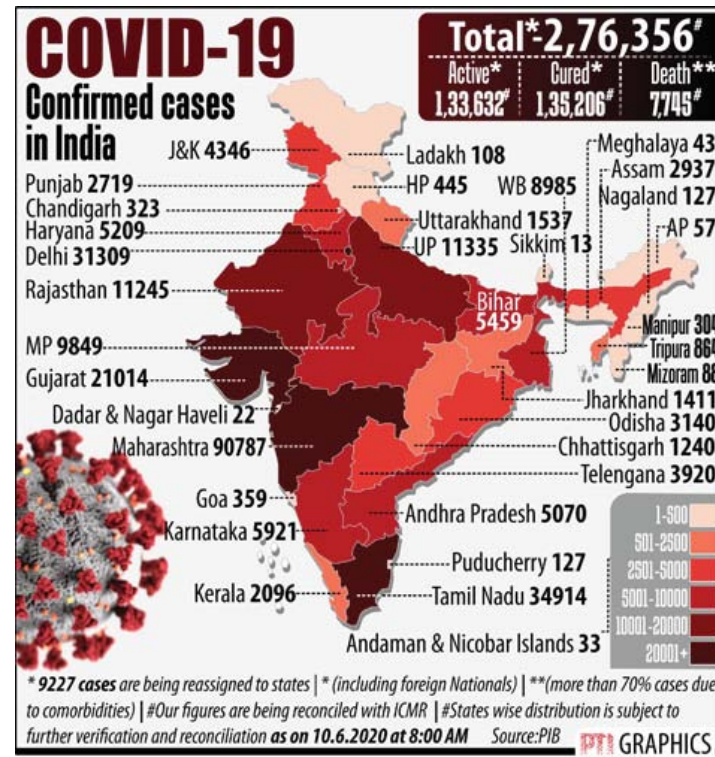
An important lesson learnt from the Covid 19 narrative, when it comes to containing and providing the required healthcare to the infected during a pandemic, is the imperative of having a robust public health care system. However, the containment of Covid 19, amelioration of the plight of the

market, go for infusion of liquidity and play the role of a good regulator to revive the economy. There is no doubt that a large number of sectors of the economy have been hit hard by this pandemic. However, what matters most to us would be the plight of the rural economy, informal sector and the MSMEs. Rural economy is critical because it is going to bear the brunt of the reverse migration. With a fragile agriculture and distress driven rural non-farm economy (particularly in the NER), providing livelihood opportunities for the masses will be a big challenge. Till we create a predominantly pull based non-farm economy in the rural sector, programmes like MGNREGA can continue to work as a sponge to absorb the migrants and returnees. What is needed immediately here is better calibration of MGNREGA in terms of convergence and asset creation with agriculture and other identified high end non-farm activities specific to the regions/areas. Increased activities through MGNREGA can also revive the economy in terms of creating ready demand that is so critical now. A number of studies have established the multiplier impact of MGNREGA on income generation in the rural economy.

The urban informal sector and MSMEs also need a lot of patronage from the Government and the private sector. Government intervention can come in terms of easy credit flow, provision of infrastructure and policy modifications with respect to marketing, taxes, labour and land. The high end private sector should consider the informal and MSMEs as an integral supplementing and complementing part of the economy and should therefore endeavour to have a productive (not exploitative) arrangement with them. Post 1990s, the Chinese economy could accelerate its economic growth by establishing such an arrangement with its informal sector and the rural economy.

Finally, a pandemic requires enough of patience and commitment from the Government of the day at every level so as not to fall into the trap of becoming a dictatorial regime. It is more crucial for democratic arrangements like ours so that our space for genuine negotiations, aspirations, choices, freedoms are not lost or compromised. At the same time, the citizens of the country should also adopt and be adept themselves with the changing times to contribute their might for expanding the production and wealth basket of the economy without unduly being obsessive of their entitlements and rights.

(The author teaches at the Department of Economics, NEHU, Shillong)



tives are also rich learning experiences for each of us. Never, in our known recent history have our minds been so awakened and soul unlocked to realise the inadequacy and helplessness of the institution of ‘market’ in caring for the poor and

migrants and returnees and revival of the economy cannot be done by the Government alone during the different phases of the unlocking. There is a need for huge information collection with regard to the migrants and returnees particularly the

As I write this piece, total confirmed cases in the world happens to be 6799713 and total deaths 397388. For the country as a whole, the corresponding figures stand at 256611 and 7200. For the North Eastern Region(NER), the figures are 3783 and 5 respectively.

the middle class. And for that matter, never, in our known recent history have our minds been so awakened and soul unlocked to understand the economics and relevance of a partnership between the Government, Community and Market for managing a pandemic and its consequential impacts.

The heartrending story of the migrants leaving their workplaces and walking thousands and thousands kilometres in the scorching heat to return to their native places, speaks of the ruthlessness and inadequacy of the market (private sector). The impending recession and the trade war between China and USA may again bring a number of failures of the Market all around the world in matters of employment, income generation and production, further adding to the woes. This is

ones who hail from rural areas. There is also the immediate urgency of sensitising the masses (including the migrants and returnees) at the local level about the disease, its spread, its effects and quarantine procedures. There is also the need to identify appropriate places for quarantining them. Mental and societal health problems too are expected to surface. Collection of all these information and arrangement of required infrastructure requires time, manpower and resources. Information asymmetry has enormous cost. At a time when the Government is flat and under severe stress with its resources, it is prudent to build a partnership with community and enlightened civil society to breathe easy and better manage the pandemic and its different impacts.

Similarly, the Government also needs to partner with the

Anti-racism protests

No echo in India!

By Dr D K Giri

Anti-racism protests erupted across the world since 25 May. These were solidarity actions against the brutal murder of 46-year-old black man, George Floyd in Minnesota, Minneapolis, USA. Thousands of people stepped on to streets in all continents shouting slogans and carrying placards. Surprisingly, there was no noise here, faint or loud, against such a barbaric act. The deafening silence of political class as well as civil society in India merits some scrutiny.

Why did people march on the streets in thousands with their masks on, defying physical distancing during this deadly pandemic? The incident of 25th May was too heart-wrenching for people to remain unmoved. The blood-chilling words that shook the conscience of people across the world and stirred them to protest are worth-recalling here to comprehend the depravity, insanity and barbarity involved in the crime.

As the white police officer pinned down George Floyd to the pavement with his knee on Floyd’s neck for nine minutes, Floyd said, ‘please, please, I cannot breathe’. The officer, in the height of cruelty, tells Floyd to ‘relax’. Floyd pleads, ‘I can’t breathe, please, the knee on my neck’. The officer continued to hold him down with his knee for 8 minutes and 46 seconds to be precise; as Floyd begged for water. Floyd cried, ‘My stomach hurts, my neck hurts, please, please, I can’t breathe’. After a while, Floyd lay motionless under the officer’s knee. The passers-by watching the incident were heard pleading with the policemen to move off Floyd.

The dying, crying and pleading words of Floyd moved people out of their isolation and social distancing on to the streets in protest against this gruesome incident. The placards and festsheets read ‘Black Lives Matter’, ‘I can’t breathe’, ‘Justice for Floyd’. The crowds surged spontaneously as they had experienced similar cruelties on black people, and minorities in their countries. The people could relate those incidents in their respective countries to that of Floyd.

For instance, in Australia, the protesters compared the murder of Floyd with the death Dunghutti man David Dungay in 2015. He died in the Long Bay prison in the hands of prison guards restraining him. Dungay’s final words, ‘I can’t breathe’ echoed in the demonstration and blended with Floyd’s last words. In Palestine, an autistic unarmed person was gunned down. Protestors conflated the local crime with Floyd’s death. ‘Enough is Enough’ was another slogan that drew people en masse to the streets.

There are two issues to be examined and addressed by peace-loving, justice and equality- oriented people across the world. One, the extreme prejudice, hatred and violence against ‘the other’ in any country; second is co-creating mechanisms for proscribing misperception of legitimacy of majoritarianism, and undermining of minorities. This social misperception is exacerbated by the opportunistic populist politics pandering to majorities in the democratic game of number. Such political leadership and trends may fetch electoral dividends in the short term but will have deleterious effects on a society in the long run.

The white majority in America will do well to remember the profound statement made by a pastor and author in their country, Richard Warner, ‘a lie does not become truth, wrong does not become right, and evil does not become good, just because it is accepted by the majority’. Majority is one of several mechanisms of taking a decision in a democracy including in elections.

It does not legitimise or sanctify any action or reaction. If this basic principle is lost on people, it will lead to denial of rights and justice to many, the so-called minority.

This is precisely what is happening in the world. Blacks in the West are in minority and they are ‘the other’. They were brought to the United States as slaves. So, they are supposed to be inferior to the white majority. Not only at home, in their colonial exploits abroad, the German Kultur or America’s Whiteman’s burden, urged by the poet Rudyard Kipling lent a civilising-mission for colonial invasions and post-colonial interventions.

The process of otherising certain segments of society takes various forms from country to country. Blacks in America, Algerians in France, Turks in Germany, indigenous people in Australia, religious minorities in Asian countries, Rohingya Muslims in Myanmar, are victims of ‘otherisation’. Their conditions become far worse when the political elite, mainly the right-wing populists wheedle the so-called majority for electoral gains. The majority then feels legitimised in unleashing injustices and violence against the minorities.

If electoral majority is not turned into social domination over the minorities, we will have greater social harmony. The electoral majority should be constructed in each election on political issues, not on sameness of ascriptive identities like race, religion, caste and ethnicity. Society should be constructed on the principle of pluralism, which comprises and compliments diversities, and encourages the spirit of accommodation.

Why was there no noise from India as a part of solidarity to the protests in USA and elsewhere? There is more than one reason for such silence. India is facing multiple challenges at present. First, the corona pandemic that is causing social and economic disruptions and terrible health consequences. Second, the cyclones affecting states like Odisha, West Bengal and Maharashtra. Third, the Chinese incursions into Indian territories. Fourth, the unabated terrorist acts in Kashmir continue to engage India’s military and para-military force, and occupy the political leadership. Fifth, which is the ruling party’s grand electoral strategy, is the consolidation of majority through a couple of Acts recently passed. This is holding back the support for minorities elsewhere.

Just before the pandemic, the anti-CAA protests were snowballing across the country. The protesters were seen to be supporters of Muslim minorities and supported by the Opposition parties, most of them. Any protest that could be organised had to be done by the Opposition. With the economy crippled at both micro and national level, opposition fragmented, the lock-down gradually lifting, the virus prowling and attacking all over in the densest country of the world, a solidarity protest becomes an untenable proposition.

On the other hand, the ruling-BJP in India is supportive of the present US Administration led by Donald Trump. So, any protest by the ruling party here, even in the name of justice is unlikely.

It is, however, a sad commentary on an India, that not only philosophically prides in upholding dignity, social justice and equality, but has demonstrated in 70-odd years of its existence that it can stand by these principles. Why then is this silence when the entire world is raging against this cruelty in USA? It is time to introspect as a Nation! –INFA

(The writer is Prof. International Politics JMI)

TO THE EDITOR

Let’s protect our forest belts

Editor

In a paragraph of her recent article, “World Environment Day amidst Covid-19: Time For Nature,” (ST June 4, 2020) Patricia Mukhim drew attention to the forest belt stretching from Lawjynriew, through Lumpynngad, Risa Colony, Cleve Colony, Malki, Lumparing etc., up to Laikor. In the same paragraph she stated that it is learnt that some MLAs have been pressurizing the Forest Department to grant them permission for commercial projects which therefore could be within the forest belt mentioned

and which is under government protection

What is stated in the article is startling since such commercial projects are the last thing expected to be brought in within a well established protected forest very close to Shillong. The city will always need much of greenery within and around it for a soothing effect in congested surroundings with possible rise of temperature and air pollution looming ahead. It would be imprudent therefore to remove even a small patch of trees from this forest for such projects. It is also upsetting if some of our very own elected representatives have such designs in mind which if carried

through could have unfavourable consequences on their very own people both of the present and the future generation.

Apart from the aesthetics and ameliorative value this protected forest provides to Shillong city, its vital contribution however is that of protecting the sources of water within the forest which is feeding fresh water to the localities below it for decades now. These sources could provide water for perpetuity if there is proper upkeep and maintenance of the forest belt and if it is ensured that it remains under protection. On the other hand any commercial projects within the forest belt will involve clearing some vegetation and ex-

cavations for constructions. Such activities even if carried out at a distance from the water sources will adversely affect downwards and outwards movement of capillary water within the sub-surface resulting in reduced water movement to these sources thereby reducing their quantity of water.

It would, of course, not be expected that the stringent Indian Environmental Acts and the Forest Acts as framed would be modified or made flexible to contravene the basic principles of such Acts such that construction projects are allowed within a protected forest. However, there have been instances where large projects are pushed into protected ar-

eas in other parts of the country by tweaking certain portions of the Acts. Controversies that arise out of such decisions usually end up with justifications that these are in the interests of the public at large though at times, the justifications seem to lack credibility.

Justifications would come in if there is a push for these commercial projects within the Shillong forest belt mentioned. Whatever be the justifications it is inconceivable, however, that the benefits from these projects can ever override the greater and vital benefits which the population below the forest belt derives presently and perhaps for generations to come if this forest belt is constantly

protected. Therefore Patricia Mukhim rightly stated in her mentioned article that people should remain vigilant about avaricious ambitions since these could be at the cost of the public at large. The Dorbar Shnongs of the localities below this forest belt should perhaps be more vigilant and may even jointly take pre-emptive steps to prevent such ambitious plans, if any, from taking shape.

Yours etc.,
KL Tariang
Via email

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

“The whole secret of a successful life is to find out what is one’s destiny to do, and then do it.”

--- Henry Ford

The Shillong Times

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Of billionaire fugitives

ALL said and done there is little reason for India to cheer over reports that valuables worth Rs 1350 crore have been brought back to India in an ongoing drive by the Enforcement Directorate against two fugitive businessmen, Nirav Modi and his maternal uncle Mehul Choksi. Both facing serious charges such as defrauding of Punjab National Bank (PNB), have been giving India’s law-enforcing agencies the slip since 2018. This, after charges like fraudulent bank transactions and money laundering were registered against them. What is brought back is fine. But, fact is also that this is just a fraction of the loot that has disabled India’s public sector banks since the time of the UPA, a process that was carried forward through the NDA term too until the lid was off the shady deals involving even senior bank officials.

Notably, valuables worth over Rs 130 crore which were in the possession of the two had been brought back from abroad a while ago, and this is the second arrival – these including polished diamonds, pearls and jewellery, which were sent by the accused from here to Dubai and which later ended up in Hong Kong. Both men are fighting their cases from their bases abroad – Nirav Modi in the UK and uncle Choksi in Antigua and Barbuda, as last heard. Both are also stalling attempts by the ED to have them deported back to India. The King of Good Times, Vijay Mallya, too is fighting similar cases in the UK courts, lost them at the last stage too, and is now exploring other options to outwit the Indian systems.

Public sector banks here have been virtually robbed of lakhs of crores by high-flying businessmen with near impunity for years and the governments looked the other way. PM Modi promised the people during his campaign for LS polls in 2014 that he would get back the looted funds deposited abroad by such men. Nothing of the sort happened in his first term, and nothing much is likely to happen during this term too. When it comes to fighting such cases in court, things can only revolve in circles without reaching anywhere. Laws are one too many under the shade of which such men can take shelter for years. PM Modi owes an explanation to the nation as to why things are not progressing, other than small seizures like this from Hong Kong.

TO THE EDITOR

Glitch in online payment of electricity bills

Editor,

The electricity Bill in our locality Mawlai Mawky-nroh was given to us by the Meter Reader on the June 5, 2020 and the due date for payment of the said Bill is June 19, 2020. The electricity bill can be paid at the MePDCL counters or online as we all know.

Since the June 5, 2020, I had been trying to pay the bill online through the MePDCL website but in the box where the amount is to be entered, no amount is shown. Instead an advance amount is shown. I had also tried to pay my electricity bill online through other websites but it is shown that no amount is due against my Consumer ID number.

This shows the abysmal working condition of MePDCL. As we know, online payment is meant to be fast and helpful to the customers as is the case with other online payment platforms but it’s the opposite when it comes to MEPDCL. It seems like online payment of electricity bills which should be of great help especially during this

Corona Pandemic is not taken seriously by MePDCL. Through this letter, I request those involved in the online payment section and also the bosses of MePDCL to take this matter seriously.

Yours etc.,
Banriker Lyngdoh,
Via email

Reflections on NEHU ranking

Editor,

Apropos the report ‘NEHU ranks 40th in Nature Index 2020’ (ST June6, 2020), I would like to give some important details on this ranking which is based on Nature Index data from January 1st 2019 to December 31, 2019. I feel that the basis of ranking adopted by the Nature Index is ambiguous and illogical. For example, their ranking is based on the publications in a few (10-12) selected journals only. Further, it is not sensible to keep an institution with less research article counts (AC) above the institution which has comparatively many more publications but less fractional count (FC) because of the number of authors. Under the Sector “Academic” North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) achieved this 40th rank. On the other hand under the Sector “All” NEHU’s rank is 51. These two facts were not

disclosed in the referred news item. For the higher ranking of NEHU, based on academic performance, the credit goes to the academicians i.e. teachers and research students for their hard labour and dedication for the University. Hence the teachers with their research team truthfully deserve to be complimented. However, the mind-blowing question arises as to why the NEHU ranking is down to 51 for the same period under the Sector “All”? Does the sliding down of NEHU rank from 40 under Sector “Academic” to 51 under Sector “All” involve and reflect on the poor performance/ interest of its non-academicians i.e. officers of NEHU or something else? Readers may click on the following link to see the list of institutions under both the categories: <https://www.natureindex.com/annual-tables/2020/institution/all/all/countries-India>

Further, the NEHU ranking at 39 last year by National Institutional Rankings Framework (NIRF) of the Ministry of Human Resource Development (MHRD), for Indian educational institutions in the university category has come down to 49 this year. It is an indication to all the stakeholders of NEHU to seriously think and take

corrective measures to restore the past glory of this University.

Yours etc.,
Prof. S.B. Prasad
Member, Executive Committee,
NEHUTA (2019-20)

Wanted a fair deal

Editor,

As per the instruction of Directorate of Education Research and Training, Shillong a call was given by the Principals of DIET to receive MTET qualified certificate. Despite the papers of the MTET exam being leaked prior to the exam time in one of the centres in Tura and which must have had spread across the state, and repeated demands to re-conduct fresh exam made by the candidates it is strange that after almost one year the result has been declared without re-conducting the exam. Government should have conducted a re-examination before declaring the result. As a candidate I would like to urge the Government to conduct a re-examination in the fairness of things and there should not be any back entrance.

Yours etc.
Nivedita Saha
Phulbari,
West Garo Hills

NEIGRIHMS: The Way Forward

By Patricia Mukhim

any malfeasance to the public domain. People who use the Institution, more so a health care and research facility cannot be handcuffed to a slavish deference to the Director or the administration or any single Department of the Institute. Hence those with grievances about being pilfered by a certain doctor in the Cardiology Department should have gone to the District or State Consumer Protection Council with the necessary complaints. At least the matter would have been investigated. But no one would do that! Yet everyone would gossip about the goings-on in the Cardiology Department.

DS Thappa was one who could not tolerate media scrutiny because he believed he was above it all. The day any news report on NEIGRIHMS appeared, he would scurry to write a rejoinder through the public relations officer. One day the Director stooped so low as to use the mobile number of his colleague to call this writer. He used intimidating language, not expected of the head of an Institution. Later he collated all the news reports and articles that had appeared in The Shillong Times during his tenure and wrote to the Press Council of India (PCI). The Council did not find merit in his complaints and set aside the case. Such is the pettiness to which the Director had stooped.

Funnily, even after being told to vacate his Directorship, Thappa did not relent. He again approached the Meghalaya High Court to stall his departure. No director is above any institution. Directors come and go and are usually transferred in, “public interest.” He should just have left. But not Thappa! He has now approached the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT). That is of course his right as a public servant but transfer orders are hardly ever revoked by the Union Ministry.

This brings me to the point of leadership in a health care institution. The Director of a Health and Medical Research Institution must also have adequate administrative capabilities apart from his professional proficiency.

An Institute like NEIGRIHMS suffers from internal pressures where there is increased demand for transparency and accountability and also in managing different departments headed by specific health professionals who are experts in their respective fields. The Director is just the first among equals and therefore must treat every head of department with deference and have regular conversations with them on how to improve services in those departments. A director who is vengeful, has an unpleasant demeanour and indulges in witch-hunting cannot survive for too long in a society that does not believe in hierarchy. That’s the first problem that directors who do not know the meaning of leadership would face in any institution. A leader serves and does not expect to be served. A leader does not create cliques that dance to his tune and will desist from any whistle blowing. That has been NEIGRIHMS problem. There is apparent lack of unity among the medical fraternity and that’s how Directors divide and rule. Too much time is wasted in conflict management rather than in planning for the future. The director of a health institute must know management because that entails planning, organising, control, budgeting, implementation and evaluation. Above all, a director should ensure efficient utilisation of resources to achieve the short term and long term goals of the Institution.

There are many schools of thought in management. One is the traditional or bureaucratic approach to management with a well-structured chain of command adopting a top-down approach and where the head of the organisation believes in tight control and usually does not believe in learning from others. A competing school of management is the human relations approach which focuses on participatory decision-making and self governance. This, many experts believe works better because workers are motivated and involved and they have the space to air their grievances without getting into a conflict

situation. A leader/director that does not know how to manage conflict in the Institution and allows all grievances to spill over to the public domain is a failure. And that is where leadership counts!

Management experts Bennis and Nanus have famously said, “Managers are people who do things right and leaders are people who do the right thing.” The authors believe that although management and leadership represent two distinct disciplinary and practice areas very often they overlap. Leaders have to do both (a) manage institutions but not get stuck in the status quo (b) lead the institution to higher levels of achievement. It is the leader who envisions the future and lays the path to reach future goals by engaging his team in the effort. After all institution building is a team effort – never the work of one individual.

I am amused therefore to read a letter from the outgoing director which circulated over social media on Wednesday and also appeared in the media on Thursday, where he portrays himself as a victim. Many directors have served NEIGRIHMS and quietly left when their time had arrived, not necessarily after the five –year tenure. The ministry has every right to review the performance of every director and to allow the person to continue only if he/she has succeeded in achieving certain objectives. A director during whose tenure the best minds of the Institute have migrated should have the humility to ask himself some hard questions instead of playing victim. Above all, a director that is vengeful and seeks to destroy the careers of younger colleagues is neither a leader nor a manager. NEIGRIHMS is well rid of such a person.

Now the Union Health Ministry has to find a Director with the dignity, grace, competence, leadership and managerial skills and above all life skills in managing human relations to head NEIGRIHMS. Let’s not forget that this Institution was created to promote excellence in health care and medical research in a region with poor public health infrastructure.

Christian worldview

Editor,

It has been witnessed that when life-shaking events occur, whether at the personal or collective level as it is now with the Corona Virus pandemic, it has often led to a deeper questioning and re-examination of life, of meaning and purpose, and of one's spiritual faith and grounding. A study by the University of Copenhagen reveals that the number of people Google-searching for the word 'Prayer' skyrocketed last month, doubling with every 80,000 new reports of the virus. It is a human reality that when confronted with challenges and uncertainties in life, we tend to look beyond ourselves to a greater/ higher reality for answers and help. Recently, the news of a public represe-ntative praying in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly has sparked off a public debate as to whether faith belongs in the private or public space. Yes, in one sense, faith is very much a personal experience, a matter of one's personal belief and spiritual journey. At the same time , however, in the Christian worldview, faith is not, and cannot be something that is exclusively lived out in the realm of the private. If it is to be truly meaningful it has to impact community and strive to bring positive and desirable

changes that benefit everyone around.

Our personal experience of God should bring healing and transformation not only to our individual selves but also to the people out there. What we believe in our hearts should find expression in the way we live out in our relationship with others, and in our moral and social values. So, in this sense, there is an intersection of the private and the public. How wonderful it would be if our private faith would nudge us into working more zealously for the cause of justice, equality, integrity, love and service to mankind. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. In our desire to be politically correct, we religiously try to divorce the two, so bent on keeping our personal beliefs personal and private that we do not allow it to make an impact on the wider community even if it is for the good. Jesus, in one of His sermons, tells his disciples, “You are the salt of the earth; you are the light of the world. . . A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ” In other words, if faith is to be a lived reality, it must not be hidden but publicly voiced out and lived out, without however, forcing it on those who may hold different worldviews.

Yours etc.,
Tejedor Tiewsoh
Via email

Justice for George Floyd petition gets 17 million signatures

Trump regime stunned at intensity of protest movement

By Mark Gruenberg

There are petitions, and there are petitions...and then there's the petition started by a 15-year-old Portland, Ore., girl, identified on Facebook as Kellen S., on change.org, demanding justice for George Floyd. Talk about a tsunami, and her petition is it.

Following Floyd's burial June 9 in his hometown of Houston, the demand for justice for the 46-year-old African-American man, murdered by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, has hit 17,223,456 names as of the morning of June 10, and counting.

That's more than double the population of New York City and equivalent to one of every 19 people in the U.S., based on the latest Census Bureau estimates.

Kellen's petition is in line with the millions of people who have hit the streets nationwide and abroad, demanding justice for Floyd, an end to routine police killings and repression of unarmed African-Americans, and an uprooting of systemic U.S. racism. More than two weeks after Floyd's May 25

names before its organizers—and the website—declared “Victory!” after Ellison acted.

Needless to say, the response absolutely flooded and delighted Dorozenski.

“After video surfaced of George Floyd’s murder surfaced, your signature joined with millions of others, and people taking action on the ground, to let Minneapolis know that the world was watching,” she wrote, recapping developments – including the tougher indictments and the demonstrations – since Kellen started her petition. “While Kellen, who started the petition, sees a long road ahead, these are significant steps forward on the journey to justice.”

Dorozenski reported Kellen told a National Geographic interviewer that she thought the idea of “people her age” becoming leaders in times of upheaval was “a daunting challenge.”

“Her age was actually the asset,” Dorozenski commented. “She recognized that social media would be the most effective tool to reach teens and



murder, the peaceful protests show no signs of stopping, only expanding.

“George was handcuffed and restrained and being completely cooperative when this all went down,” Kellen wrote in her petition on change.org, addressed to Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey and city DA Mike Freeman. “The officer put his knee on George’s neck choking him for minutes on minutes while George screamed that he could not breathe. Bystanders beg for the police officer to take his knee off George’s neck, but the officer didn’t listen and continued to choke him.”

“Not that it would matter at all, but George was not even wanted for a violent crime. A grocery store (said) that he was signing a bad check.” The story cops gave was that George used a counterfeit \$20 bill.

Kellen’s initial petition demanded Frey fire the four officers and Freeman file charges. Frey did, while state Attorney General Keith Ellison took over the investigation and filed an upgraded charge of second-degree murder against Chauvin and initial charges of aiding and abetting that felony against the others.

And a separate petition demanding justice for Floyd on colorofchange.org reported some four million signatures, change.org leader Mary Dorozenski wrote, though Color of Change provided no petition figures on its website. But the Floyd petitioners weren’t done.

A second “Raise the degree” petition on change.org, from Allie M., demanding an upgrading of the initial third-degree murder charge against Chauvin, drew 3.028 million

spread awareness about police brutality and racism. Now, she has become a sterling example of how young leadership can foment and foster change.”

Kellen’s petition is still gathering names. The goal is now to garner 18 million. Meanwhile, there’s another one making the rounds, by Lorelei Holaj, a worker at a non-profit group in Fort Lee, N.J., that campaigns for justice for victims of police discrimination and brutality.

HoJay demands Kentucky officials investigate and prosecute the Louisville police officers who murdered African-American EMT Leonna Taylor, 26, shooting eight bullets into her as she slept, in a no-knock drug raid on the wrong address, her house. HoJay’s petition has 5,936,750 names as of 11 am Eastern Time on June 9.

There are other petitions concerning other police killings of unarmed African-Americans posted on change.org’s site, including one where police shot a Kansas City, Mo., man in the back—in his own back yard.

There was one more petition concerning Floyd though, and the required response will be interesting: Straight to Trump on the White House’s petition website.

That petition, with no author because none is required, demands the Oval Office occupant act for justice for Floyd, something Trump refuses to do. It’s drawn 424,610 signatures. Any petition to the White House that gets at least 100,000 signatures within three weeks of filing requires some sort of response. What that response will be—or if there is one—after June 28, will be interesting. (IPA Service)

“Don’t settle for what life gives you; make life better and build something.”

--- Ashton Kutcher

The Shillong Times

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Fake news & COVID-19

THE coronavirus continues to create alarm in Meghalaya resulting in spread of fake news. The news that a Covid+ive patient from a particular locality with travel history who first tested negative and later tested positive for Covid, might have also infected his pregnant wife was on social media on Wednesday. The other fake news was that someone from the CM’s office and the NIC has tested positive. Rumours were afloat that another lockdown was imminent. Such fake news can create panic reactions and has to be strictly dealt with. The rule about whether or not the names of Covid infected persons should be revealed is very clear. Medical ethics demands that names of those testing Covid+ive should be withheld, unless like the famous actor Tom Hanks or Britain’s Prince Charles, they decide to make it public, possibly to lessen the stigmatisation aspect. In fact the very reason for keeping the names of the infected confidential is to prevent stigmatisation. Meghalaya had gone through the trauma of a Covid death and the subsequent unpleasant episodes. A repeat of that incident is unwarranted.

Hence those that blame the Government about lack of clarity in the manner in which information on Covid+ive persons are given by withholding names and places of residence seem to have forgotten that ugly episode. True there is fear and paranoia about the unknown and unpredictable virus. But it is also a fact that stigmatisation of the infected continues despite the Dorbar Shnongs as community institutions appealing to their constituents not to stigmatise those testing positive, because Covid-19 after all, is an infectious disease and anyone could get it. Health experts worldwide are of the view that in times of a pandemic, privacy concerns must be balanced with efforts to protect others. However, that equation is affected by infinite individual variables. Of greater concern is the fate of health care workers not knowing if a person coming for treatment of some other disease might also be Covid+ive. Hence in most countries today, nurses and doctors will be operating under the assumption that everyone has COVID-19 at this point. But knowing it for certain can help them decide how to deploy limited resources like face masks, PPEs etc. It will take a long time before citizens take on the social responsibility of publicly informing others that they are Covid+ive. That’s what people want from others but would they like it if their own names were made public? That’s the question that needs an honest answer.

TO THE EDITOR

Let experts do the talking

Editor,

Apropos the news item "Blame on CM for incomplete COVID info" (ST June 12), I am more worried than surprised by the reaction of the twitterati at the way the State Government has handling the explosive situation created by the Coronavirus pandemic. The issues raised by the netizens cannot be pushed under the carpet. They need to be addressed in an honest and transparent manner. Governments in this country, including the central government are coming under the scanner for various acts of omission and commission. Firstly, if there has been error of judgment, it is better to own up rather than hedge. Clarify beyond any doubt that there is no hide and seek and demolish the impression that the government is under-reporting the figures. As I see it, there is a bigger danger of creating an institutional distrust among the public, if the various arms of the government are seen to be bungling with the Covid challenge. Before the perception becomes

ingrained in the public psyche that they are in the hands of some untrustworthy people, there is an urgent need for a few corrective steps.

First and foremost our energetic Chief Minister should reconsider the strategy of being seen as a one-man army. It is understandable that politicians can hardly resist the temptation of being in the limelight. But if the CM, who is the highest decision maker in our prevailing dispensation, makes an error of judgment, which is the next higher authority that the people can turn to? It is therefore advisable for the CM to discontinue the daily press briefing and entrust it to a senior medical officer who is articulate and knowledgeable on all aspects of Covid-19. Meghalaya should take a cue from other states, including the Central Government, and follow what a Sonowal or a Narendra Modi has been doing which is to take hard decisions behind the scenes for a dedicated team to implement.

Talking of team, the need of the hour is team work. Has our State succeeded in this regard? Well, a rag-tag team has been cobbled up but

Is there a George Floyd among us?

By Albert Thyrniang

The US is reeling under nation-wide protests sparked off by the killing of George Floyd by a Minneapolis police officer who pinned the already handcuffed 46-year-old black man for 8 Minutes and 46 seconds on his neck. Viral videos of the ‘murder’ are heart-rending. Protests in the largest city of Minnesota state soon spread to more than 150 cities in all 50 states even as the main accused, Derek Chauvin has been charged with second degree murder and manslaughter and his three comrades with abetting the crime. The protests were accompanied by vandalism, uncontrolled looting and the ensuing police crackdowns, brutality and excesses led by Donald Trump himself who postures himself as a ‘law and order’ president and ‘ordered’ governors to dominate the street and even tweeted ‘when the looting starts, the shooting starts’. Now the protests have gone international with ‘I can’t breathe’ and ‘Black lives matter’ slogans echoing everywhere.

The history of the United States of America is unavoidably marked by the shameful legacy of slavery of Africans in all thirteen colonies. School history books glorify the line "All men are created equal" articulated in the US Declaration of Independence in 1776 but they don’t tell us that even in the Constitution of the great nation the word slavery was never mentioned. How could you declare equality while continuing with the worst practice in history? Slavery in the US continued well into the 19th century as it was only in 1885 that it was abolished by the Thirteenth Amendment.

The long disgraceful institutional slavery in the US might have been abolished but its side effects continue. Unofficially slavery has been replaced by racism. Racism and prejudices against the Black (African-American) community are deep-rooted. The George Floyd killing is just the latest in a series of similar incidents in the US in recent years involving the police. A study in 2017 revealed that officers speak with consistently less respect towards Black people than to the white community. Overt racism in the ‘world leader’ nation led to the killing of the man accused of presenting a counterfeit 20 dollar bill, in broad daylight and on camera.

Racism permeates all walks of life across the globe. Sports fans are

familiar with humiliating and traumatic ‘monkey’ and ‘anti-Semitic’ chants that Black sportsmen and women face in stadia. Racism in sports is even more ‘epidemic’ than COVID-19 and have brought popular sports like football into disrepute. In spite of world sports associations like IOC and FIFA’s “No-to-Racism,” initiative disturbing trends of racism continues in US and Europe unabatedly. As sports only ‘mirror the society at large’ racism pervades all spheres of human interactions.

India has no reason to feel morally superior as far as racism is concerned. North eastern students and migrants face ugly racism, discrimination, and bullying in mainland India on a regular basis. In cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Pune, Chennai north easterners are called ‘Chinkis’, ‘Chinese’, ‘coronavirus’ because they look different. During the lockdown there was a case of students from Nagaland being denied entry in a Mysuru supermarket. Another incident took place in Bengaluru where a man barged into an apartment of women from Northeast branding them ‘Corona Carriers’.

Exclusion and discrimination seems to have acquired DNA status in India. It is in our psyche. If the US has racism, India has casteism. And casteism is much older than racism. Originating in ancient India, it was exploited by the ruling elites, priests and ascetics in medieval and modern India, particularly during the Mogul Empire and the British Raj. The British even segregated Indians by caste and granted certain administrative jobs only to people belonging to certain castes till as late as the 1920s. However, we need not blame the British because, though banned in 1948 and negative discrimination was replaced by affirmative action, the evil is far from waning. To this day Dalits are still the most sufferers of this ingrained system.

Minorities in India are in a suffocating situation. Hindu extremists have a hatred for Muslims. Vile rants, abuses, physical violence and lynching are a norm. It is not just the loose cannons that are anti-Muslims; the government of the day has demonstrated the same attitude. The abolition of Article 370 in J&K, its demotion into union territories and the subverting of civil rights

raises serious questions of negative treatment by the present regime towards Muslims. The passage of Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) is a brazen anti-Muslim legislation.

Christians too no longer live in an enviable environment in India. With regular attacks on their institutions and personnel, threats of physical violence, sexual assaults, killing of Christian priests etc., Christians face increasing discrimination. For the record in August 2017, the US Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), ranked India’s persecution severity at “Tier 2” along with Iraq and Afghanistan. Last year India rose from No. 31 to No. 10 on ‘Open Doors’ Watch List, only one place better than Iran, in global persecution severity. In 2020 USCIRF placed India as ‘Tier-1’ in minority persecution with North Korea and Pakistan for company.

India has extended support to the George Floyd movement but many have termed the move hypocritical as the situation back home is no better. The alleged police excesses in J&K, mob lynchings, police brutality against anti-CAA protesters and the ruthless and inhuman police treatment of the poor during the lockdowns are examples from recent memory without reminding ourselves of the past and digging into history. Ironically, the graphic and chilling videos of Chauvin’s kneeling on Floyd are freely circulated here in the country but we conveniently forget that we too are guilty of worse cases.

Here in Meghalaya do we have records of police brutality? What has happened to the Fullmoon Dhar case? Was the jail-breaker killed in a fake or genuine encounter? Will we ever know the truth? Another sensational case is that of Sohan D Shira. Till date little light has been shed on the gunning down of the GNLA chief. Should anyone be branded as criminal and then be ‘executed’ in an ‘encounter’? Does this not mean police excess?

What about racism? Are we free from the curse? In Khasi Hills we have the word ‘dkhar’ and in Garo Hills ‘bangal’ to describe ‘outsiders’. Are they not racist terms? The words are deprecating and scornful. Should we continue to use them? Non-tribal would also narrate instances of violence against the community at

different points in time.

Recently Adelbert Nongrum stirred a controversy of sorts. His actions in the Legislative Assembly might have pleased a few enthusiasts. In the light the American scenario let us test ourselves. Besides racism, the US has issues with ‘White and Christian supremacy.’ There are many out there who still think that the whites are superior to others. There are Americans who say Christianity is superior to other religions. Many of us too have somehow, consciously or unconsciously, been trapped into this belief.

Historically, we know very well that our ‘lands’ have been evangelised by European and American whites. We admire and appreciate them. But did we accept them because of the colour of their skin? If they were Blacks from Africa would we have accepted them readily? If they were Browns from Japan or Korean or bearded Arabs would we open our doors to them? Hypothetical questions do reveal a lot about ourselves. If George Floyd were white would he have been killed? We the non-whites are still holding on to the idea that whites are superior.

In 2014 a world renowned personality was appointed administrator of a Church’s administrative unit. Shockingly clergymen rejected him. If he was a white from Europe or America would have he been humiliated the same way? Would attempts been made to instigate a boycott of the official? Would that unkind letter have been passed around for signatures? In what way is this not racism?

With reference to Nongrum’s controversial act, a person reached out to me saying ‘Meghalaya being a Christian majority state we should have the privilege of reading the Bible and praying the Christian way in the Assembly’. This is called majoritarianism. This is exactly what Hindu nationalist groups say, ‘we being the majority can chant ‘Jai Shri Ram’ in parliament; minorities can’t; we can declare India a Hindu state, other religions are subservient’, ‘we can perform puja in parliament, minorities can’t’. It is presumed that we in Meghalaya resist this majoritarian attitude. If we reject majoritarianism at the national level, is it not hypocritical to expound the same in Meghalaya or Nagaland or Mizoram? We are treading a dangerous path.

India needs to avoid pitfalls in targeted COVID-19 response strategy

Failure in containment now will worsen make humanitarian crises

By Gyan Pathak

India has been implementing targeted lockdown in place of general lockdown since June 1, 2020. More stringent measures are being put in place in the containment zones. However, about half of the three lakh cases of infections were added during the targeted lockdown period. It necessitates rethinking even about the present targeted COVID-19 response and rectify the mistakes in its implementation, otherwise our medical facilities will soon be overwhelmed and the situation will go out of our control.

The implementation of the new targeted strategy of lockdown and unlocking is a proof in itself that the earlier strategy of general lockdown between March 24 and May 31 was a grave mistake. There is no doubt that targeted response is a better strategy, in terms of resource mobilization, targeted handling of cases, and avoidance of other humanitarian crises caused by the disease and the economic crises brought out by the general lockdown or all human activities, except the ‘essentials’ as defined by the government. Despite this better strategy, if the number of cases is increasing day by day, it’s a matter of serious concern. We must therefore find out where we have gone wrong. This exercise is unavoidable because India has already become the fourth worst hit country in the world, and the trend of infection indicates that the country may become the second worst hit nation by the first week of July, only after the United States, if we fail to contain the outbreak now.

In this situation, the latest OECD economic outlook report is worth attention of the government of India and all the stakeholders. It said that there are two possible scenarios for India, the first one-hit scenario, and the second is second-hit scenario. The report has emphasized that both the scenarios are possible. In the first scenario, it is presumed that country will be able to avoid acute crisis after 10 weeks of general lockdown and targeted lockdown thereafter. The report then goes on presuming the second-hit scenario with a second wave of outbreak of the disease during autumn (October to December) this year. Since the second wave of outbreak is being reported even from the countries that have been by and large successful in containing the first wave of the outbreak, the threat of the second wave of outbreak in India seems to be real, even if we succeed in containing the outbreak now. Therefore, we need to plan our strategy keeping the risk of second-hit scenario in view.

Thus, India needs a two-pronged strategy, one for the current one-hit scenario, and the second for second-hit scenario. Mishandling of the situation now, as we have seen during the general lockdown period, will be too costly to bear, both in terms of medical consequences and the economic crises arising out of it. For example, if the present trend of infection continues, there will be around eight lakh cases of infection with 24,000 deaths. The Government of NCT Delhi has said that by the end of the next month Delhi will have 5.50 lakh cases, and the state will require 80,000 hospital beds.

It may be mentioned here that Delhi had only 6000 beds by the last week of May, which the state wants to increase to 20,000 by June 20. The huge gap between the available medical facilities and the requirement is accentuated by the severe shortfall of doctors and nurses. Shortage of testing kits, ventilators, medicines, and so on are among additional challenges meet. The examples of economic consequences include the worst case of overthrowing millions of people in abject poverty, ie, living at less than \$1.90 per day. According to World Poverty Clock total number of people living in extreme poverty is over 41 million. According to the World Bank’s latest global poverty estimates, COVID-19 could push 71 million people in into extreme poverty in under baseline scenario, and 100 million under downside scenario in 2020. Almost half of the projected new poor will be in South Asia, and India’s share will be around 70 per cent. Under the baseline scenario, COVID-19 could generate 176 million additional poor at \$3.20 and 177 million additional poor at \$5.50 globally. It is an humble reminder that Prime Minister Modi had promised eradication of poverty by 2022, as part of his ‘New India’ agenda among others.

Indian economy and finance had been worsening even in the pre-COVID-19 period, and at the time of announcement of lockdown it was performing worst in the decade, and unemployment was 45 years high. Lockdown was hurriedly conceived idea without any preparation even as the first case in India was detected in January end. Providing medical facilities was the only answer, but government was too slow on this account. Finally, general lockdown was announced, which created irreparable harm to well-being. Economic activities were completely stopped. About 300 migrant labours died of hunger or in accidents while returning to their homes without any transport facilities. Even after the hardship, corona outbreak could not be contained. The whole strategy was a mistake and above all the situation was mishandled.

The economic package of Rs 20 lakh crore to revive the economy was announced on May 12. One month has since past. The total economic package was turned out to be at Rs 20.97 lakh crore, but it is proving not so effective. Only about Rs 2 lakh crore is being channelized as support in cash and kind to the distressed common people. The rest of the amount are intended for business, industries, and tax payers, as loans, rebates, or other support. It is not likely to improve consumption and demand, and therefore work only as avoidance of bankruptcy, nothing more. Many of them will be permanently closed, and many will at best take the loans to pay rent, taxes, and other liabilities. Even after unlocking the economy, business, industries, and banks will find themselves in great difficulty in financing their day to day needs. The Union and the state governments also are facing the acute problems arising out of revenue deficit.

Under the new scenario of COVID-19 infection, targeted response to the disease and the economic crises needs to be intensified, first to avoid further worsening the situation, and secondly to keep the risk of second wave of infection anytime after September at abeyance. India has always suffered the mistakes committed by its rulers, but cannot afford now without its ruin. (IPA Service)

DESIGNING BETTER HYGIENE

Saral Designs, which promotes menstrual hygiene in under-served areas, makes surgical masks

By Deepanjali Kakati

Suhani Mohan, a metallurgy and materials science engineer from IIT Bombay, started her career as an investment banker. When she met Anshu Gupta, founder of NGO Goonj, she learnt how women in rural India use newspapers, rags and other unhygienic material during menstruation, which leads to reproductive tract infections.

"It had never crossed my mind that when I spend Rs 100 a month to manage my menstruation, how would a woman, whose entire family's earning is less than Rs 1,000 a month, manage hers," says Mohan. "I felt a strong urge to do something about this, which made me quit my job in 2014."

A year later, she co-founded Saral Designs, a Mumbai-based start-up, which provides access to high-quality and affordable menstrual hygiene products through its SWACHH range of pad-making machines and innovative distribution model. Saral Designs has received training at the Nexus Incubator start-up hub at American Center, New Delhi.

In early April, as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the start-up quickly modified its pad-making machines to make surgical masks, to increase availability of personal protective equipment in India. It collaborated with the Mahindra Group to produce three-ply masks at the auto group's Kandivali factory in Mumbai. The start-up is also working with the Maharashtra State Innovation Society to ensure distribution of 100,000 sanitary pads in Mumbai's slum areas affected by COVID-19.

Excerpts from an interview:

What inspired you to change your production in response to COVID-19?

A few months back, we were already thinking of new products to add in the hygiene sector. When the COVID-19 crisis came up, we started getting calls from clients who wanted to know if the sanitary pad machines could be converted to three-ply mask machines.

So we started looking at how a regular surgical mask is manufactured. We realised that the non-woven material which is used in sanitary napkins is fairly similar to that of surgical masks. And one of our machines used a very similar process. We thought we could quickly modify this machine to start making masks.

Our design team spent almost 14 to 18 hours every day over two to three days, to complete the design. And then the lockdown came into effect.



Girls in remote areas do not have to miss school for periods; (left) Suhani Mohan (in denim shirt) with a co-worker

We were unable to procure the components we needed. I reached out to a lot of contacts; one of them was an alumnus from IIT Bombay working with the Mahindra Group.

Mahindra has a lot of in-house fabrication facilities because they make cars and this was a fairly simple modification for them.

We worked with their team to change the design of the rollers on our machine, from the cutout of a sanitary napkin to that of a surgical mask. Within a week, we were able to start mass production at their facility. From 10,000 masks a day, we have ramped up production to 30,000 now. The masks are being distributed to frontline workers through Mahindra's corporate social responsibility wing.

Could you elaborate on how Saral

distributes its menstrual hygiene products?

We aim to cater to women who do not use hygienic menstrual products by addressing the issues of awareness, access and affordability. In developing countries, due to poor infrastructure, either distribution costs make products like pads and diapers 60 per cent more expensive, or the existing brands do not cater to remote locations. There is immense potential for local production, which not only reduces distribution costs, thereby making sanitary pads affordable, but also creates local livelihood opportunities.

What innovations did you incorporate in your products and technology?

Technology is at the heart of our solution. We have developed an indigenously designed and patented automatic ultra-thin sanitary pad-making machine, at a decentralised scale. While decentralisation reduces distribution costs, the automated production ensures economies of scale and product quality. These high-quality sanitary pads are distributed online, through various retail channels and in partnerships with health care workers, schools and nonprofits to increase awareness and accessibility at the last mile.

Approximately how many people you've reached so far and how many you hope to reach in the near future?

So far, we have sold 6.5 million low-cost pads, impacting 200,000 girls and women via more than 30 production units in India and five other developing countries. These production units are run by local NGOs and entrepreneurs in Tier II and III towns, creating job opportunities in production and sales. We are working with more than 1,000 rural women, who act as our sales and outreach agents in their communities.

This year, we plan to impact 51,000 girls and women with our awareness campaigns and have 45 machines running production units in different parts of India.

How was your experience of participating in the training at the Nexus Incubator? What were your key takeaways from the training?

Nexus has been a great network. We were part of it two years ago and we still reach out to them for introductions and support. Our first machine in Bhutan was set up with another Nexus incubatee from that country, for which we are very grateful.

(SPAN/TWF)

Life before & after the pandemic

By Ranjita Biswas

As Coronavirus rages on more or less forcefully across the globe, and scientists in desperate search for a vaccine cannot yet pronounce 'this is it', people cannot be blamed for echoing the words in the Blues track recently released by the Rolling Stones 'Living in a Ghost Town': Life was so beautiful, now we got all locked down/Feel like a ghost, living in a ghost town.

Meanwhile, speculation is also on as to how life will be after this nightmare is over. Sure, a vaccine will come, maybe after 18 months or two years as scientists assure. Until then adjustments to life in a new environment will have to be accepted whether one likes it or not.

Referring to the Black Death or bubonic plague that swept across Europe and England in the Middle Ages that killed more than one-third of its population, historians say it was a watershed event. Later, everything was categorised as 'before' and 'after' the plague. Will it be true of this century as well post-COVID 19 when examined in posterity?

Social interaction

Social interaction and behaviour could change its contour as also social etiquette. For example, will the Indian way of greeting with a namaskar replace handshakes globally?

Professor W Ian Lipkin, the world's foremost virologist who was also a consultant for the 2011 Steven Soderbergh film Contagion (how uncannily prophetic it seems now with a

storyline about a virus threatening the society) in an interview on an Indian television channel recently said it could.

A firm believer in the traditional Indian system of greeting instead of touching the other with a handshake, he said it is more scientific. Perhaps it would be embraced, pun not intended, wholeheartedly in the coming days the world over.

Worklife

Working from home (WFH) has been a norm for some time now after the virus attack. Many believe even after the pandemic reduces its fury the practice will continue for various reasons; logistical, the need to keep social distance, and psychological, for fear of infection from some hidden carrier. Even in India, a work environment which trusts more 'in the office' ambience compared to many western countries, there has been a new thinking. Already HR strategists in some corporate houses are reportedly framing policies to make WFH the new normal.

However, social behaviour experts and psychologists warn that this arrangement could also lead to a feeling of isolation. Employees meeting only virtually may feel disconnected. For those who live on their own without a partner or spouse, for whom the office atmosphere offers a welcome communication platform, this new arrangement could lead to psychological trauma.

Relationships

Looking at relationships and interactions with people around, one wonders if the experience

of realising the frailty of lives post-Coronavirus people would be more compassionate. Or whether young people would be more aware of the senior members of the society. At present there are lots of help-in-hand activities going on initiated by young people to assist older people in the community lockdown time. But will it sustain? Hard to predict because human memory is notoriously short.

There are reports that after Wuhan, the epicenter of the virus, was opened up, there has been a record number of applications for divorce. Not an optimistic comment on bonding flourishing under stressful times. In India as well as elsewhere, instances of domestic violence has been increasing in number and there have been multiple calls to helplines by women.

Business as usual?

The lockdown has hit commercial activities very hard, obviously. Countries like Italy and Spain, some of the hardest hit, are tentatively opening shops and standalone establishments. Yet, post Coronavirus many experiences will not be the same again, at least for some time to come. Shopping in malls which lately became a way of life with consumers in urban areas and even in India, may not be the same experience in the near future.

Already many malls are taking the lockdown period to plan the next strategy according to reports. Like doing away with trial rooms and encouraging consumers to try apparels at home so that social distancing, and letting consumers enter the

premises at certain intervals can be maintained.

Same might be true of watching movies in multiplexes too. Popcorn and weekend outing? Wait! Who knows when it will be the norm again!

However much some in the tourism sector may try to sound optimistic, going for long-distance destinations for holidays for the average person would seem to be a 'no-no' in the near future. Globetrotter Indians perhaps will rediscover locales nearer home to spend with family and friends.

Airlines which are tentatively planning of reopening are talking about keeping the middle seat in three-seater row vacant and some rows not for sale at all. Even then the aviation sector is not sure things will be the same for a long time to come reeling under a bleeding revenue sector. Experts predict some airlines worldwide will go bust and never recover and thousands of employees left without a pay cheque. In India, will it be the end of boom-time in air travel as affordable pricing lured away a large section of the middle income people from long distance trains?

Sports

There is talk that the Olympics might not happen even in 2021, postponed from 2020, if the pandemic does not subside. Tokyo organizing committee CEO Toshiro Muto said in a news conference (conducted remotely), "I don't think anyone would be able to say if it is going to be possible to get it under control by next July or not."

The future of tennis's major events seems very fluid at the

moment. Andy Murray, Wimbledon champion (2013) said recently on resumption of the tennis season, "...right now, that is not the most important thing. First of all, we want to get our normal lives back. Then, hopefully, over time things will start to allow for travelling and sport will be able to go back to normal."

Football, basketball, in fact all other sports event organisers and practitioners are going through the same dilemma.

The other challenge is, with the social distancing norm, until a solution is found, how will the layouts of stadiums be adjusted to the new format?

Whichever way you look at it, things are bound to change after this experience. Not since Spanish Flu after the end of World War I something on this scale has hit people. Also, at that time it didn't sweep across the world being 'not connected' like today.

But there could be some plus sides too despite the health disaster. Thomas Friedman, three time Pulitzer Prize winning journalist and author of The World is Flat said in a recent interview via video conference on a Indian channel that the pandemic has exposed the weaknesses of our health system and governments are likely to invest more on the sector to be better prepared if something like this hits again.

Lipkin thinks it's likely with many virus strains lurking around to strike humankind. Governments will have to invest more on Green technology. "Mother nature rewards the adaptors. Adaption will be a challenge but humankind will have take up that challenge if



it wants to survive," Friedman says.

Friedman also observed that globalisation which has gone through phases is now at its Phase 4 stage now with virtual conferences, interacting through the cyber tools, etc. "Technology will only get better in this

field responding to the time."

One thing is for sure, the socio-economic effects of the current pandemic is going to be felt for a long time to come and not just immediately after when the virus chooses to go, or a vaccine is widely available in the world at an affordable price. (TWF)

NE's first woman criminal lawyer passes away

Minati Sarma, a resident of Shillong, passed away last month in Guwahati. She was a renowned lawyer and a social activist. She was a senior lawyer of Shillong Bar Association and practiced in Guwahati High Court as well the Shillong High Court.

Sarma, whose father Raibahadur Naranath Sarma was a freedom fighter, was a member of the Bar Council of India and a Government Assistant Pleader and Assistant Public Prosecutor for the Government of Meghalaya for 15 years. She was also a lecturer in Shillong Law College.



Not many people know that Sarma, born a year before independence, was the first woman criminal lawyer in the North East. She represented India in various World Conferences on Law and Litigation procedures and was also a representative from India for the International Women Congress in Beijing.

She was married to Mukunda Sarma, who was a professor at St Anthony's College.

Sarma was legal advisor to many government bodies in Meghalaya and also a member of state women commission. She was closely associated of senior Supreme Court lawyers such as Ram Jethmalani, Krishnamurthy and others.

She was associated with Assamese literary and socio-cultural organisations as Mukul Sangha, Shillong Sahitya Kanon. She has been an active member of the Asom Kriti Kendra and Laban Namghar. She wrote a number of books on law and 'Samaj Aru Ain' is the most popular.

We pray for her soul's journey to the Lord's Abode.

Homoeopathy for boosting immunity

By Dr Pratip Banerji

The outbreak of COVID-19 has left most of us panic-stricken as people across the globe strive to combat this pandemic. The primary issue is that this is a viral infection and we as human beings have no natural immunity to viruses. While the frontline medical community, actually facing the pandemic, is doing a very good job despite limited resources, the research community is perplexed because any useful and viable treatment will take at least 18 to 24 months from the drawing board to disbursement and application. The only real and effective way for a population to combat a viral infection is to develop 'herd immunity'.

Herd immunity can only be developed in two ways — first, by massive cross community infection, and second, by mass vaccination. Since allowing massive cross community infection is unwise as this may result in devastating consequences, we are left with the option of vaccination, which is not viable as there will be no relief in this respect before 18-24 months.

Another problem with vaccination is that they are viral strain specific, the scientific community also knows that mutation of viruses is a given fact and it has already been reported that the Corona viral strain in India has mutated from the original strain that caused the outbreak in China.

The COVID virus found originally in humans in Wuhan has been labelled Type A. Subsequently, there has also been detection of Type B and C, which seem to differ amongst different races of humans. Due to this and the fact that there will be further mutations, there is a fear that different strains of the virus may not respond to vaccines whose sphere of action will necessarily be limited to certain strains. Thus we are all caught in a difficult situation.

Adding to the difficulty is the fact that we are faced with incomplete or erroneous data on infection in the population, number of tests done and tracking of the disease.

Historically, every epidemic/pandemic faced by mankind has brought us down to our knees. The conventional system of medicine seeks to cure by killing the disease-producing agent.

Currently, conventional treatment of COVID-19 infections is being done with some anti-viral medicines and antibiotics.

While these anti-viral medicines



were found to have some effect on earlier SARS and MERS infections, which were caused by a similar virus, so far there is no definite information that they are having an effect on COVID-19 cases. Antibiotics are usually used to treat bacterial infections and have no effect on viruses and at best may help secondary bacterial infections in COVID-19 positive cases. This is where homoeopathy has its advantages. Homoeopathy is an accredited and recognised system of medicine in India and for this reason there should be no bar on its use in any disease, let alone COVID-19. This system of medicine is popular and historically homoeopathy has an excellent track record in the treatments of epidemics/pandemics. Homoeopathic medicines are safe to use and we can expect very little, if any, side-effects as can be experienced by using other systems of medicine.

In homoeopathy, an agent is used to treat the same symptoms in a diseased human being that it can produce in a healthy one. Thus the homoeopathic arsenal against any disease already ex-

ists and it is only a question of matching the symptoms of the contagion to the known symptoms of a medicine which is most similar. Taking this into consideration the symptoms and the physical systems the COVID-19 is affecting can be analysed and a protocol for treatment can be designed. Thus the reaction time between diagnosis and treatment is reduced dramatically.

As many studies have shown, our medicines have the capability to boost the immune system. Boosting immunity is exactly what is required in the battle against this disease to prevent as well as help patients recover from this contagion. Our protocol is designed keeping this in mind and medicines are also matched, in a specific manner, according to different problems faced by the patients in various stages of the infection.

We have tremendous success in treating viral diseases such as the common cold and different types of flu, dengue, measles, mumps, rubella, chicken pox, shingles, hepatitis B and C, herpes and cold sores, polio and even the odd case of rabies. We have been reaching out to

premier institutions across the world, especially in those countries which have been dealing with the outbreak before India, to gather information and case studies as to their successes and failures against the virus.

Taking into account the above information and our experience in treating viral diseases, we have formulated a specific protocol for the disease. This protocol is available in our website and within the first two days, we already have had over 13,000 hits on the page and various enquiries from all over the world.

We are getting many enquiries from COVID positive cases and are in the process of getting into place a "Covid 19 Survey", in collaboration with an American colleague, associated with a major American University.

Through this survey, we will be able to gather data and observe the effects of our medicines on prevention and treatment of cases, but it is too early to share information on these developments. Results of this will help to validate my suggestions for a successful measure for all to build an effective

immunity against COVID-19, circumventing the 18 to 24 months required to create a useful conventional vaccine.

I think what is being done right now in our country/state, which is identification of micro-hotspots, enforcing total lockdown and testing suspicious cases, is a good move by the government. When the need for lockdown ceases, it will be necessary for a phased unlocking of the situation as a sudden unlocking may trigger the second wave of infection.

There is a need to spread sanitary awareness to populations most prone to spread, such as those where it is impossible to maintain "Physical Distancing" and appeals for civic sense and social responsibility amongst populations who are in defiance/denial of their vulnerability to this infection thus posing a threat to all efforts by the aware and the Government to deliver the country "Corona Free".

(The author is a homoeopath and co-founder of Prasanta Banerji Homeopathic Research Foundation. Views expressed are his own)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 14, 2020

Venus is forming an angle of 135 degrees with Jupiter on your solar return chart thus promising a lot for you this year. Your financial condition will remain stable and strong. Additional sources of income too could be tapped. Money and wealth will keep coming. Your expenses too will rise but your budget will remain under control. You will also come in contact with lot of influential person. Your government related work will move fast. You will also settle tax disputes with authorities. You will have great imagination and ability to foresee things at your workplace. You will also conceive new ideas and get them implemented. Health of family members will remain ok.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

You participate in conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about your views this week. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and adopt new strategies in financial matters. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation business associates. You move on the path of success and betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Your work status may change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities that come your way.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

Your self-confidence gets a boost and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You would admire and adapt new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. It is good time to organize your workplace and make it more modernized and equipped with good infrastructure. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve desired goals. Also, circumstances or your own reserve may prevent you from openly declaring or expressing your feelings. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider society is possible during this week. You adopt new styles and spend on luxury items. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasure and romance during this week. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You would maintain balance of the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. You turn things around in business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Monetary transaction brings gains in property related issues. An overseas or long distance journey with includes pilgrimage is on the cards. You maintain a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

Your creativity will assist in your output at work and help you undertake new assignments. You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and ethnic styles. Your ideals are higher than usual, teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. 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 this week. Students in journalism, law, management and related fields attain success and good results. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

Your professional skills wisdom and craft is appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and

get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively from now onwards. This time takes some kind of pressure on professional and personal aspects. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

You would be emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness. Sometimes you would protest against domination by people at work. You may have to face egoistic people. Some associations would be competitive in business but you shine and work well in your field of activity. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you meet new and unusual people. Your hobbies, moments spent with family, all come into focus. Some lifestyle changes made by you begin to show results.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

New associations and beginnings in work areas as some unknown 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. 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 in this phase. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

This period brings excellent opportunities for people in show business and related fields. You would work more creatively and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You have been more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires particularly on your personal and domestic life. Your personal charm and attractiveness would have a positive effect on your relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. It would be better to go for long term investments and speculations for financial gains.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous and you cannot tolerate delay that prevents you from behaving exactly you want. How willing you're prepared to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success this time. You play the role of the senior in the family and personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect supporters to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. You will be considerably more proactive, healthy, and focused.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

The planetary configuration brings more stability in relations and professional life. You have a tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new method to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and fond of the life of the home and family. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to display a whole lot of self-discipline. You use your best talents and co-relate all activities to boost the business and work opportunities. Make changes to your fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

This phase brings excellent work opportunities for people in teaching, hotel, finance and in communication fields. People in marketing and sales would work hard to meet professional commitments. You would express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or you write. Health remains good during this period. Excellent professional opportunities await those students who have completed their education in fine arts, drama, music and finance. Your romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence, and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings will be therapeutic.

Need the basics to survive

By Ranjan K Baruah

The recent lockdown has proved that we can live without luxury items or goods but we cannot live without basic needs, which include food items. When the lockdown started, there were apprehensions about food supply and availability of food but so far things are moving well and we did not see any shortage of food.

No shortage of food means the credit goes to all our farmers who contribute for all of us. There is no doubt that agriculture in India is the main source of livelihood for millions of individuals. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for about 58 per cent of India's population.

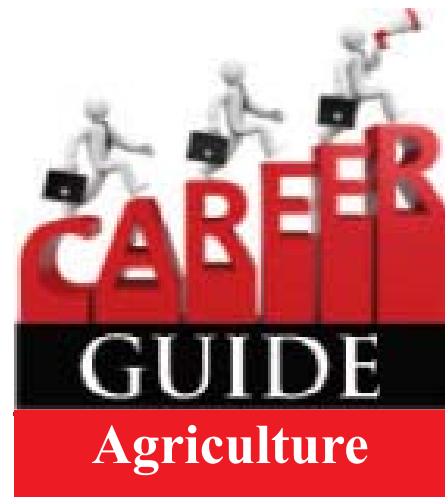
When it comes to agriculture or food industry then our farmers have been doing well though there are more scopes and opportunities in future. The Indian food and grocery market is the world's sixth largest with retail contributing 70 per cent of the sales. We have been affected by COVID-19 pandemic and now we have to look for our careers which can be sustainable.

We have seen that migrant labours or workers have gone back to their native place. This brings more challenges for young people when it comes to employment. There are more opportunities in the field of agriculture and let us explore agriculture as career options in next few editions.

When we talk about career in agriculture, then it is not limited to farming. The recent progress in technology has added many new areas where someone who is not a farmer can also make a career related to agriculture.

There are colleges and universities which offer courses related to agriculture. Animal husbandry or works related to livestock are also linked with studies of agriculture which makes it a big area to explore from career perspectives.

Anyone who wants to get engaged with agricultural careers may choose to study different courses offered by agricultural universities based in different parts of the country. In the North East, we have universities like Central Agricultural University, Imphal or Assam Agricultural Univer-



Few options are agricultural engineering, horticulturist, dairy technology, poultry farming, pisciculture, agronomists, agricultural economics, agri-business management and floriculture.

Individuals who have degrees from agricultural universities may get government jobs as there are departments of agriculture and allied services, researchers in different institutes and teaching. But there are also opportunities for individuals who are not from agricultural universities but may be part of career in agriculture which includes banking, sales and marketing.

We will publish different options related to agriculture in our forthcoming editions. As mentioned earlier, there are many scopes and opportunities related to this field. We need to explore all options and plan our career related to agriculture. One must remember that employability skills are must if we want to be successful in any field which includes agriculture. Let us be positive at the time of lock down and together we can beat COVID-19 and make our careers in the field of agriculture.

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

“Believe me! The secret of reaping the greatest fruitfulness and the greatest enjoyment from life is to live dangerously!”
--- Friedrich Nietzsche

The Shillong Times
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Nepal on the offensive

WHAT’S clear by now is that there is no love lost between Nepal and India. Adopting a tough stand, the Sharma Oli-led Communist government in Nepal has taken matters to a head by getting parliamentary clearance for its new map that includes a part of land in India’s possession in Ladakh region. While the nod for the step has come from the lower house, it will be a matter of time before a similar nod comes from the upper house as well. Significantly, there was near-unanimity for the government’s stand - on claiming right over a substantial part of the land which Nepal claims it gave to India on a temporary basis to set up a military base long ago. The erection of an 80-km road by India to facilitate easier movement of pilgrims to the Hindu pilgrim centre of Manasarovar has come as a major provocation for Nepal.

It is well-known that Nepal has begun straying from Indian orbit from the start of this century – after the palace coup and murder of long-time ruler King Birendra and a short term by his brother. Monarchy out, the fraternal ties between the two sides progressively took a downslide under the democratically elected governments. The decision by the Nepal government to change the character of the nation from being a Hindu nation also led to a worsening of ties between Nepal and the Modi government. China is clearly in the picture; it is offering to mediate between Nepal and India now. With its new-found economic clout, China is wooing nation after nation in the geopolitical region. It weaned away Sri Lanka from India in the context of the LTTE offensives, then edged closer to Pakistan through financial support to major infrastructure projects including the CPEC and Belt and Road initiative, and Nepal is being drawn into such a situation now.

It remains to be seen how India will respond to Nepal’s claim. Defence minister Rajnath Singh used strong words against Nepal’s provocative action. The firing from the Nepal side along the border region the other day has added an altogether new dimension to the frayed relations between the two countries. A progressive worsening of the relations is likely, though it seems a section of the ruling Communist party led by revolutionary leader and former PM Prachanda, is more in a mood to talk things over. India will have to play its cards with extreme care as it cannot afford to allow Nepal to go the Chinese way.

TO THE EDITOR

NGOs- a law unto themselves?

Editor,

It is alarming to see the number of cases of NGOs taking the law into their own hands. They have neither been authorised to work on behalf of the Government nor to work on behalf of the people. Yet we read in the newspapers of them unilaterally closing down establishments or turning away migrants. What is more alarming is that both the Government and the District Administration allows them to get away with it. My question is where do you draw the line? If minor acts of taking the law into their hands are allowed today, these NGOs can become the law tomorrow. This has happened in the past. Is the Government again going to abdicate its law keeping role to a ragtag outfit of vigilantes?

The NGOs themselves should also think of their own image and credibility before they take the law into their own hands. Close on the heels of these illegal acts will follow allegations of extortion, bullying and

communalism. These allegations will easily overshadow the good deeds that may have been done by the particular NGO.

Therefore, I would appeal to the NGOs to work with the authorised Departments/ Agencies rather than taking the law into their own hands. And I would also request the Government/ District Administration concerned to put in place Standard Operating Procedures that would allow a N G O - G o v e r n m e n t partnership in these sensitive sectors.

Yours etc.,
RG Lyngdoh,
Former MLA,
Shillong- 3

Church and State don’t mix

Editor,

I read with interest, Ubahunlang Dkhar Tmar’s article "A Prayer that Agitates" (ST June 3, 2020) on the recent act by our learned legislator, A Nongrum offering a prayer on the floor of the house. And while reading the article, I realized that Mr Dkhar is indulging in word soup. He has beaten around the bush and written a long article just to state that Mr

On his own he had only published one book but what is remarkable about this man is the fact that he has his hand in almost all the important publications produced during his time. It is like saying that every important publication in the Khasi and Jaintia hills region during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is incomplete without his contribution. From petitioning the government to allow the students to appear for their exams in their own mother tongue to contributing in the making of the dictionary, he was part of all these important projects. We are talking of Hajom Kissor Singh.

Any learner who wishes to understand the Khasi Pnar people cannot avoid one important book; in fact it is like a primer to understand the Khasi Pnar people. In the preface to his book ‘The Khasis’ PRT Gurdon listed many names of people who have helped and supported him in his work and the brothers u Nissor and Hajom Kissor Singh also find mention in the list (PRT Gurdon the Khasis p-vi). Gurdon in his momentous work mentioned very little about the Pnars or Synteng because he had more contact with the Khasis than the Pnars of Jaintia Hills (Namita Catherine Shadap-Sen, the Origin and early history of the Khasi-Synteng people p-7) Hence it can be safely said that most of the information about the people who live in Jaintia hills were contributed by HK Singh and u Job Solomon who earlier worked at the office of the SDO of Jowai Sub division.

The Government in the early 1900s constituted a Textbook Committee and in this connection, “U Khasi Mynta,” wrote that it was surprised that the Committee comprised only of the Director of Public Instructions (DPI) of Schools, the Deputy Commissioner and JC Evans as members. Earlier a Khasi, U Babu Jeebon Roy was made member of the Committee but after his demise the government never appointed any native to the Committee. The report in U Khasi Mynta requested the Governor to appoint a member from the local community to the Committee. Later U Khasi Mynta in its September 1903 issue reported that the DPI has made some correction and nominated

Hajom Kissor Singh as member of the Textbook Committee along with Dr. Roberts. H.K. Singh replaced Babu Jeebon Roy and become the native member of the Textbook Committee which was responsible for selecting text books for use in the schools in the region.

The first English- Khasi Dictionary was published in 1920 and it took the Committee about 11 years to complete the arduous task. In the preface to the Dictionary the then Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jaintia Hills A.W. Dentith wrote the story of how the project was started till the dictionary was completed. Dentith remarked that according to the Government letter Number 4445C Dated 30th March 1907 a Committee was constituted to work on the project of producing the first ever English-Khasi Dictionary which comprised of Messrs FE Jackson, LO Clark and BC Allen representing the Deputy Commissioner and the other three members were Rai Sahip Dohory Ropmay, HK Singh and U Nissor Singh the author of the dictionary.

In the later part of the project a Committee to revise the manuscript was constituted with Rev. Walter Firminges, Rev. C L Stephens, Rev. J C Evans and Khan Sahip Amjad Ali as members. The preface also mentioned that the author U Nissor Singh read the part of the manuscript sent to him from the Printing Press and was able to proof read only from alphabet A to O. Unfortunately Nissor Singh died on the February 20, 1918 while serving as the Inspector of School in Tura, Garo hills. A.W. Dentith in the preface concluded that proof of the remaining letters from P to Z was read by his brother HK Singh. Singh not only completed the unfinished task but he also wrote the keys to pronunciation and the list of abbreviation in the dictionary.

While still working in the SDO Civil, Jowai office; he started an Upper Primary School in Jowai called Unitarian Free School which caters to the needs of the students in Jowai. HK Singh was also a signatory to the petition sent by the school administrators in Jaintia hills which pleaded with the Government to allow Khasi Pnar students to appear for their Upper Primary School

examination in their mother tongue. Prior to the intervention, the Khasi Pnar students had to appear for their examination in English language while others wrote their exams either in Assamese or Bengali.

The application was signed by HK Singh Manager, Unitarian Free School, u Soso Tham Headmaster Shangpung U.P. School and Samuel Challam officiating Headmaster Jowai. In a letter to the Director of Public Instruction, Assam (Through the Sub Inspector of Schools, Jaintia hills) dated Jowai, February 8, 1902 the administrators of the three schools in Jaintia hills requested that the Khasi Pnar students be allowed to write their exams in Khasi.

The Director of Public Instruction, Assam W. Booth in his letter to the Sub-Inspector of Schools, Jaintia hills, Jowai number 7327 dated Shillong October 21, wrote: ‘In reference to your Memo. No. M7, dated the 8th February, 1902, from the manager, Unitarian Free School, Jowai, and the Headmaster of Jowai Middle English School and the Shangpung Upper Primary School, I have the honour to say that I agree with the applicants on all points stated in their application, the children must be taught in the vernacular to the end of the Upper Primary standard.

Another important publication that he was involved in was a book on Khasi etiquette and along with Babu Jeebon Roy he wrote the introduction to the book ki Jingsneng Tymmen. The relationship between HK Singh and RS Berry grew deeper and stronger and the later ultimately became a Unitarian. Any study of RS Berry’s work will remain incomplete if his contribution to Unitarian Church is not taken into consideration. He composed 35 hymns in the Unitarian hymnal and has also written the chapter ki Kpieng Ksiar ban deng which was part of the Unitarian hymnbook.

HK Singh also composed 72 hymns for the Unitarian Church hymnal and he has also translated many hymns published in the hymn book. When HK Singh sent the first Khasi Unitarian hymnal to u Khasi Mynta, the journal reported that it has nothing

to say about the book, because it is already known that it is a book of worship but added that it appreciated the beauty of the Khasi language used in the book. His translation of English hymns both by foreign and native composers also needs to be properly studied.

The only prose he wrote was a piece about his journey from Jowai to Jaintiapur and the journey was part of his assignment to address the grievances of the people in Jaintiapur. This piece was included in the Mawpun Jingtip which was one of the prescribed textbooks of the Meghalaya Board of School Education.

HK Singh was also an able administrator, observed U Khasi Mynta in its November 1905 issue and said that it was important to have a native appointed as the Head Clerk in the Deputy Commissioner’s office and the Courts in Jowai and Shillong because local people know the culture, tradition and religion of the Khasis. Moreover they can understand, read and write better in Khasi than the non-native head clerk. Having a native officer in the office will also help the government communicate better with the Syiem, the Wahadadar, the Sordar, the Dalloi etc. Perhaps it was also due to the lack of qualified Khasi candidate to take the job that no Khasi was appointed to the post till then. The Newspaper appreciated Major Gurdon for appointing HK Singh to replace Babu Radhanath who was transferred and posted in the plain areas.

The government also appointed HK Singh as the Dewan of Khyrim state for some time to help the Syiem of Hima Khyrim. S.E. Rita in his order dated September 23, 1902, stated that HK Singh is appointed temporarily as Dewan of Khyrim State by Chief Commissioner of Assam in a letter No. 156 confd dated 15-9-1902, 4219 on condition that the Khyrim State bears the cost of his pay at Rs. 150 P.M. and pensionary contribution as calculated under the rules in force.

HK Singh Nongbri was born to Bor Singh Malngiang and ka Bida Nongbri on the June 15, 1865 at Saitsohpen, Sohra and was only known as the founder of Unitarian Church in the Khasi Jaintia and Karbi Anglong district of Assam. It is high time that his contributions to the nascent Khasi literature is given due recognition.

How Shall the Pandemic End?

By Prasenjit Biswas

As larger numbers of people are living in quarantine centres and containment zones in India than the number of infected by the Covid, there is a cry for ending this. Being locked down, the space of living has squeezed into smaller and smaller holes for a larger number of people. The cry for ending arises from there. There is a serious discrepancy between the transmission eco-system of Covid and closing our internally open and expandable private spaces.

To understand this, let’s look at the idea of spread of Covid through physical contact that has given rise to the idea of ‘safe distancing’. One basic issue is, if the COVID virus can remain airborne up to 30 metres, is our idea of six metres distance correct enough? The impossibility of maintaining the required distance is both relevant and exceptional. It brings back memories of a weird but widespread practice of dissecting rats during the Bubonic plague, or the infamous memory of Spanish Flu of 1918 leading to imposition of infamous Rowlatt Act of 1919 by the colonizers. It looks like the administrative measures like the idea of containment, incarceration and isolation that arose in early modern colonial period could not have been replaced by modern medicine, vaccination and other such means even today. In-spite of such measures, isn’t it true that Spanish Flu never disappeared and it rather reappeared as H1N1 virus? So measures of containment of people physically as self or administrative measures couldn’t stop re-emergence of a more virulent strain as in the Spanish Flu. The same is the case with Covid with D614G mutation in the virus in some places.

As far as internally open nature of our social space is concerned, any constraint put on such a space is going to create its own negative impact. Let’s read two opinions. ‘The invention of the racial “Other” as a reality will increasingly be done via algorithms, statistics, modelling and mathematics’, says Achille Mbembe, the lead thinker of decolonization. Apart from this impact of an increased amount of racial othering, artificially shrunk private and public spaces in Covid times result in what historian Yuval Noah Harari termed as ‘under the skin surveillance’, ‘the emergency pudding’ and ‘soap policing’. Put together, it marks a mechanism of making us smaller and smaller and that is supposed to win the war against the virus, while battle in all other front such as human dignity and human rights will bear its chilling effect. An emergent surveillance state mixed up with disaster capitalism will have the possibility of shrinking democracy and human rights.

The conflict between medical measures and social control measures mark the new reality of stigmatization of the vulnerable and an increased aggression against those whose human rights are shrunk by the smaller social space. This will mark a spurt in all kinds of violence and violation. Police violence across the globe, stigmatization and prohibitions on even the dead, man-made slow famines and many other such systemic violations have erupted. The worst is when distress and human miseries are being pushed back in the name of Covid emergency and the basic accountability of governments across the world is on the wane. What returns in everyday life is again a

systemic failure to mitigate citizens from economic suffering combined with unprecedented migrant labourer crisis, loss of income, job and growth. In this sense, the global crisis of ‘disaster capitalism’ prolongs through the Covid crisis.

At another level, bellicose demonstration of military dominance over land, sea and outer space endangers the whole of mankind after Covid. Interestingly, Spanish Flu simulator used by students of Oxford University shows how the Flu prolonged the military expansion even after the end of World War- 1. Here without fighting a war today, simulations of war are happening as a means to dominate the physical space. If I say, that our social and private spaces have shrunk and the possibility of state to state warfare rises, I would be in good company of military thinkers like Stephen Peter Rosen and also probably with a war optimist like historian Geoffrey Blainey. Blainey argued that war promotes an optimism of ending, while peace promotes a pessimist vision of the world. Playing devil’s advocate, Blainey called for ending war to end war as a means of achieving power. Increased propensity by China to augment its global firepower and an attempt to militarize the war on Covid looks like an authoritarian state’s way of gaining global power. Indeed, Francis Fukuyama called for democratic resilience against Covid induced shock effects such as Chinese aggression in response to China’s isolation in the world!

On a happier note, the pandemic can end belligerence, which could also be an end of the pandemic. Against a possible ‘medical holocaust’, a term used by Catharine Arnold, one can think of a solution of drawing antibodies from recovered patients and use it to cure more people. The humbling effect of donating antibodies by an ex-Covid patient is more than the blood donation movement that now needs to spread across continents so that a planetary end of Covid is in sight. Donating antibodies can really build up an atmanirvar bharat as well. In the Indian philosophical traditions, the notion of sambhava (probability) in Puranas and in Khasi tradition the notion of Ka Rynghiew can help us imagine SARS-COVID-2 neutralizing antibodies rich blood donation to the needy patients. Such a giving will certainly strengthen the Ka Rynghiew in the human self. Such a probability will also help end the pandemic.

The psychological boredom inflicted by the pandemic could be ended by initiating new tie ups with the neighbours such as developing a lawn that meets neighbours’ lawn. In the context of North-East, looking at Baghjan fire and Dibru-Saikhowa man-made earthquake from condensate well in the middle of a Pandemic, there is a need to realize the ecology of sacred landscapes and stop unwanted land use. As epidemiologist Sonia Shah warned, destruction of animal, plant and virus habitats for having pipelines, roads and other such infra projects will expose us to more and more zoo-ontic viruses like Corona, as they can easily enter our bodies from the landscapes now captured by us by removing other species. We need to end such practices to end future pandemics.

(The author teaches Philosophy at NEHU, Shillong).

“There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.”
-- Albert Camus

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Rajya Sabha seat crucial

IT is unfortunate that a state with virtually no voices both in the Lok Sabha or Rajya Sabha because of the politics of numbers in this country, should further compromise its position by nominating to the Rajya Sabha a person purely on political considerations. Dr WS Kharlukhi is the National Peoples' Party (NPP) president in Meghalaya. To be fair, Meghalaya has no dearth of leaders with the political acumen to raise crucial issues in the Rajya Sabha which is the Upper House of Parliament that decides on whether or not a particular Bill can become an Act. It is just that such people are not privileged to belong to a political party. Perhaps it is fond idealism to expect political leaders to rise above partisan politics and send to the Rajya Sabha a person who can draw attention to the problems not just of Meghalaya but of the region as a whole. When the Citizenship Amendment Bill (CAA) was put to vote in the Rajya Sabha last year we did not hear too many voices from the region opposing the Bill on the floor of the House and bringing out its pernicious intent. True, the Rajya Sabha MP from the Congress then did not vote for the Bill but we never got to hear her arguments on why she thinks CAA is a disruptive piece of legislation. Articulation is important and sending a Rajya Sabha member without the political capital to represent a state of over three million people is simply a waste of a rare political opportunity.

In the past the Rajya Sabha, has seen many stalwarts from various walks of life. They were people who have excelled in their respective fields. Going through the political history of India we will find that the Rajya Sabha has been playing a pivotal role in India's parliamentary democracy. Article 249 allows Parliament to legislate on matters enumerated in the State List if the Rajya Sabha passes a resolution by two-thirds majority. This happened in 1952 and 1986. Under Article 312, Parliament is allowed to create an All India Services common to the Union and the States, if the Rajya Sabha passes a requisite resolution. The Rajya Sabha passed resolutions in 1961 and 1965, to create Indian Engineering Service, Indian Forest Service, Indian Medical and Health Service, Indian Agricultural Service and the Indian Educational Service.

Considering the importance of the Upper House, logic should dictate that the best person/s be sent to represent the state in the hallowed portals of India's democracy. But no, political loyalty weighs over all other considerations. Over the years the quality of Rajya Sabha MPs has left much to be desired, again because politics trumps every other yardstick.

Has community transmission happened?

By Glenn C Kharkongor

There have been denials, assertions and side-stepping about community transmission from various spokespersons and experts. The Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has been consistently claiming that community transmission has not occurred. A few days ago, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma assured us that the state was taking steps to forestall community transmission. On June 13, Andhra had 222 new cases of which 186 were reported to be from “community transmission”, the media carefully using quotation marks.

ICMR Director General Balram Bhargava was asked at a media briefing on June 10, if India is in the community transmission phase, Bhargava skirted the question and said, “There is a heightened debate around this term community transmission. Having said that I think even WHO has not given a definition for it.” This was on the day that India registered its highest number, 9996 cases.

But Delhi Health Minister Satyendar Jain said last week that in half of the Covid cases, the source of infection was not known. The assessment of the Delhi administration points towards the “third stage of spread. If the transmission has reached a stage where the source can't be identified, it is community spread, according to epidemiology,” Jain said. The health minister carefully added, however, that it was up to the Centre to declare whether the community transmission stage had been reached.

What is community transmission?

In leading up to an epidemic, WHO describes the stepwise scenarios of: no cases, sporadic cases, clusters of cases, community transmission, and country-wide transmission.

According to the ICMR, community transmission has occurred when the source of the infection cannot be located because multiple areas now have been affected. A person tests positive despite no known exposure to an infected person, nor any history of travelling to an infected area. The WHO says that community transmission “is evidenced by the inability to relate confirmed cases through chains of transmission for a large number of cases, or by increase in positive tests through sentinel sampling”.

A state of community spread implies that the virus is now circulating in the community, and can infect anyone. At this stage, it is theoretically possible for everyone to catch the infection.

tion.

What are the experts saying?

The denials of the Indian government mean that the country is still at Stage 2, which is local transmission. This occurs when family members, friends, neighbours or other close contacts, contract the virus from an infected person. The source of the transmission is known, contacts can be located, and appropriate measures such as testing, treatment and isolation, are taken.

Some leading physicians have disagreed with this assertion for months. Jayaprakash Muliyl, former professor of epidemiology at CMC Vellore and Member, Research Committee, National Taskforce for Covid, declared that spread by community transmission



started in March itself. In the first week of April, India Today quoted the Director of AIIMS, Dr Randeep Guleria as saying that Stage 3 had begun in some parts of the country.

In the last week of May, a joint statement by the Indian Public Health Association, Indian Association of Preventive and Social Medicine, and the Indian Association of Epidemiologists included this sentence: “It is unrealistic to expect that COVID-19 pandemic can be eliminated at this stage given that community transmission is already well-established across large sections or sub-populations in the country.”

A paper published in the Indian Journal of Medical Research (IJMR) on more than 40,000 positive cases recorded between January and April, conceded that the exposure (travel or contact) history of a large number of confirmed cases was missing. The IJMR is the official journal of the ICMR.

Why doesn't the government say so?

In March itself, community transmission had been established in at least 12 countries in Africa, said the World Health Organization (WHO). These include Algeria, Senegal, South Africa, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ivory Coast, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Gabon, Liberia, Nigeria and Rwanda.

Since then we haven't heard much about community transmission. The National Health Service (NHS) of the UK has been unable to trace contacts of 33% of people with coronavirus in spite of a vigorous ‘Test and Trace’ strategy, but they don't use the term ‘community transmission’. Other than India, few countries seem to stress the concept of community transmission.

It's difficult to overhear what goes on behind the closed doors of the central Secretariat, so we can only speculate. Perhaps the government feels that to concede the fact of community transmission would be tantamount to saying the lockdown didn't work. Or they may be criticised for not doing enough testing. Already there has been a misstep by Dr VK Paul, NITI

Aayog member, who predicted in the last week of April that cases would decline to zero by May 16.

Once community transmission has occurred the public health strategy changes. Only minimal mitigation measures would be required, mostly dependent on responsible citizen behaviour. Like for the flu, those who get moderately or severely sick will be treated. The doctors will do Covid testing just to confirm the diagnosis. Public health strategies will be confined to surveillance, outbreak monitoring, and vaccination programs when the vaccine is ready. In the long term, tracking of seasonal surges and regional variations and their concomitant factors will round out the knowledge of the behaviour of the virus.

Is community transmission an important concept

While acknowledging the threat of community transmission, the president of the Public Health Foundation of India (PHFI), Dr K Srinath Reddy maintained we must first be clear about the definition. He advises applying it to local situations rather than to the country as a whole. Two categories of localised outbreaks are of concern.

The first are cases concentrated around entry points of foreign travellers, usually large cities. The second are clusters in overcrowded areas, especially slums. The priorities now are

to contain the disease in these areas and to protect rural regions, because two-thirds of the population resides in the rural hinterlands. Reddy's nuanced view takes a disaggregated view, rather than viewing the country as a whole.

What about Meghalaya?

The small number of cases indicate that community transmission has not occurred in the state. All the positive cases are seemingly traceable to their antecedents. Most of these in any case are asymptomatic or have mild disease and are containable at home.

Registering and monitoring incoming travellers needs to be continued. But testing at entry point needs to be done only for those with symptoms or those coming from the 13 cities with high case load as Himachal Pradesh has done. These cities as per the ICMR list are: Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Ahmedabad, Thane, Pune, Hyderabad, Gurugram, Chengalpattu, Jaipur, Jodhpur, Kolkata, and Indore. Others do not need entry point testing and should go straight to home quarantine.

As only asymptomatic travellers are allowed to travel, it is unlikely that many newly infected persons will test positive, because the virus load is small in the early stages. Already we have seen such instances in Meghalaya. Institutional quarantine should be reserved only for those with moderate symptoms and for individuals whose home situations are not optimal. In other countries individuals with mild-moderate symptoms are being managed at home. Meghalaya could adopt this approach.

The decisions of headmen in Meghalaya are inconsistent, with some localities mandating that returnees must go to institutional quarantine, even though home conditions are adequate. This is against the current guidelines. Forced institutional quarantine of negative and asymptomatic cases has its own problems of logistics, proper care and supervision, and possible spread of other diseases.

In Karnataka, persons who are in home quarantine are required to provide the names of two neighbours who will assist the tracking system to ensure compliance. In this way, citizen responsibility is combined with systemic monitoring. Public identification of positive cases is not required. This violates the principle of patient confidentiality and may encourage vigilante actions.

our society. We also live in a virtual world where many friends connect with us through social media. If any person goes into depression, anxiety and fear, the family member's and friends' responses are not supported. They are unable to understand the problems faced by that person. Counselling and mental health facilities in the country are not adequate. Suicide is an extreme step and affects the family and society. It is a sign that we are living in a world where we are incapable of sharing our problems freely with a close friend or confidante. It's important for family members too to understand and detect signs of depression among their family members and to seek professional help. Friends and family can talk to the person and try and give mental support and encouragement. This might save the lives of many people.

Yours etc.,
Amit Singh Kushwaha,
Satna (M.P.)

Agri-business potential in the state of Meghalaya : Policy Paper

By Prof. Ram Singh

Agriculture in Meghalaya is undergoing rapid transformation and in that process agri-business is now emerging as a specialized sub-sector. Demand for modern farm inputs and value added services are also increasing rapidly and therefore development of viable strategies and approaches for ensuring adequate and efficient supply of modern inputs and services for accelerated growth are going to be challenging in general but becomes more specific due to COVID-19. Generally, the magnitude of change is lagging behind that of the country mainly due to poor infrastructure, lack of policy support and lack of proper institutional supports. Marketing of agricultural products of small and marginal farmers in the state of Meghalaya is adversely hampered.

Already the markets are fragmented, not regulated, and APMC Act is not in vogue. The share of middle men in the consumer rupee remains very high. Again the COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged more hobnobbing of middlemen with producers. Supply chain of output as well as input has disrupted business on both sides. The COVID-19 Pandemic happened at a crucial time for producers and middlemen where many crops of the state were either on the verge of harvesting or for sale in markets on one hand and input supply need for new crop plantation/sowing on the other hand. Consecutive four lockdown has devastated the planning of farmers as well as other stakeholders in the state. It has not impacted the economy of households but it has impacted the macro economy of the state. Hence, the development of rural infrastructure and improvement in the existing rural marketing system are the key areas which deserve special attention of planners to promote agri-business in Meghalaya and the region to bring back the economy on track on which the major chunk of population is surviving.

Existing infrastructure facilities are mostly concentrated around the state capital only; far away from the areas producing agricultural commodities which are highly perishable in nature in the remotely located villages of the state. Better infrastructure and deregulation of domestic market will encourage private investment in agri-business sector which will open up several opportunities for employment in the non-farm sectors for those who have lost their jobs. Contract farming can overcome the problem of raw material supply and reduce post harvest loss, particularly in case of perishable products like fruits, vegetables, milk, mushrooms, etc. However, to safeguard the interest of small and marginal farmers from possible unfair trade practices and breach of contracts by the firms, the contracts can be regulated by enforcing transparency in contracts and strengthening farmers' cooperatives or self help groups.

In case of contract farming, crop insurance should be made mandatory with premiums to be paid by the firms/company. There is a growing market for organic foods and processed food items with international quality standards. But lack of premium prices, poor certification systems and inadequate quality control facilities are the constraints. It is now accepted that the future scope in agri-business lies in the areas of agro-processing; development of rural infrastructure like cold chain, warehouse, packaging, etc; micro-finance and crop insurance; organic farming and health foods;

establishment of agri-clinics and service centres; and in the area of information communication technology, forward trading and supply chain management.

Development of agro-industries is critically important for the expansion and diversification of the agricultural sector in the state of Meghalaya. In addition, such activities would reduce seasonality of consumption of a range of processed foods, minimize post-harvest losses, and increase profitability and sustainability of production systems besides their impact on increasing farm incomes, rural employment and foreign exchange earnings and reduction in marketing risks.

Policy Options: Only few markets regulated in the state with limited number of commodities for transaction in the state of Meghalaya. Hence, at least 50% of the markets should be regulated in the state. APMC Acts should be amended to allow Contract Farming in high value enterprises like Fruits and Vegetables; Poultry; Spices; Medicinal crops, Dairying, etc where the post harvest loss and price fluctuations are too high. At the same time sufficient safeguards to protect the small and marginal farmers from any legal disputes arising from the breach of contracts should be provided. Involvement of local governments (Village council/Municipalities) and crop insurance should be a must in the contract agreements.

Strengthening market intelligence in the State: Policy makers need time to time data on agri-products comprising of arrivals and prices for constructive policy initiation in the state. Hence, estimates of monthly supply-demand gaps and prices of important agricultural commodities and publish it in market bulletin or leading news papers/radio/television/etc. Strengthening/developing database for horticultural crops/enterprises: The availability of reliable data base on horticultural crops and enterprises, which is very poor at present, will be of immense help in policy making.

Strengthen Agri-business Education and Management in the state: Include commercial agriculture as a subject in school curriculum (since agriculture is the main source of livelihood for majorities in this region) and example may be taken from the other state of Rajasthan, M.P. and U.P. Participation of technocrats (Graduate/PostGraduate/Doctors in Agriculture) in committee/boards for better policy formulation: As the state has three leading college in the subject of Agriculture (Tura, Kyrndemkui and Barapani) preparing human resources at UG and PG/PhD level, hence, provision of participation of these human resources must be ensured for better implementation of policy interventions in the sector of Agriculture.

Establish the State Agricultural Council to regulate all the sister department in proper shape with proper liaisoning with central Agricultural University and ICAR Strengthening Agri-business Infrastructure in the State: The Government should invest more on developing hardcore infrastructure like road, market, transport and cold chain system for vegetables, fruits, fish, meat and eggs etc.

(The writer is Professor & Head School of Social Sciences College of Post Graduate Studies Central Agricultural University, Umiam (Barapani)-793 103 Meghalaya-India E mail: ramsingh.cau@gmail.com)

TO THE EDITOR

Unjustified opposition

Editor,
Appropos the news, “KSU opposes move to rename Zig Zag Road”, (ST, June 15, 2020), there cannot be any opposition when the Zig Zag Road has already been renamed after Late Ardhendu Chaudhuri, who was the local MLA and a resident of the same road, by an authorized state committee. Late Ardhendu Chaudhuri's selfless contribution to society is unparalleled since he did not serve people on the basis of their constituencies but irrespective of their residence. Many KSU Laban Circle members who were agitating against the move to rename the Zig Zag Road and oppose it should sit down and ponder since many of their own family members and relatives were served without looking at which community they belonged to by Late Ardhendu Chaudhuri. I stand witness to the fact that on several occasions he met local tribal people from interior

villages of the state and other urban constituencies of Shillong town since such was his persona and extended a helping hand towards all without prejudice when he was the local MLA. Thousands were benefited by his kind gestures. He never differentiated between tribal and non-tribal. Hence, such an opposition to rename a road after him when the renaming of the Zig Zag Road has already been cleared by the Meghalaya State Names Authorities Committee, in February last year, is not only unjustified but also shows lack of gratitude and grace. The local MLA of 19 – South Shillong Constituency, Sanbor Shullai has on several occasions acknowledged that he owes his political career to Late Ardhendu Chaudhuri whom he revered and that he would surely live up to the expectations of the people of this constituency. Meanwhile, why is the former MLA, Manas Chaudhuri, younger brother of Late Ardhendu Chaudhuri silent on the matter? A politician cannot

remain mute to issues and should voice his opinion in order to remain relevant.

Yours etc.
BC Paul,
Shillong-4

Thoughts on wearing masks in public places

Editor,
We hear ad-nauseam our political masters telling us that wearing a mask is mandatory. Our Deputy Chief Minister was reported saying in your daily last week that it is a mandatory provision in Meghalaya. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no notification from the State Government proclaiming that it has become a legal requirement for every citizen to cover their mouth and nose by wearing a mask while in public places. Without any official notification, how can it be a mandatory provision? Therefore, as it stands today, mask wearing is an essential health advisory, and not legally binding on the citizens.

True, a large number of self-preserving people have accepted it as an inescapable part of life today. But the opposite is also true. A good number of people are seen on the streets without a mask. And strangely, nobody questions them. Be it during the morning time when a fair number of people are out on the streets, or at market places, there are some who either have no mask or have no respect for the advisory. And then, there are some who hang a mask around their neck, but without caring to cover both mouth and the nostrils. This serves nobody's purpose.

Therefore, the question is, whose specific responsibility is it to pull up those who defy this critically essential public behaviour? Maybe, it would be a good idea to entrust this task to the policemen, including the traffic cops who in any case have a hawk's eye on the traffic movement. Talking of masks, we read in the newspapers about mask, sanitisers etc being distributed on a daily basis to various health workers and re-

lated institutions. Without minimising the import of such thoughtful actions, I feel attention needs also to be given to the poor families who either have no access to masks or use an unclean one day after day. They can't afford to buy sanitisers and soaps either. Maintaining health hygiene is certainly not their priority in life. This exposes them to vulnerability of contacting Covid infection. My appeal therefore is to identify these poorest of the poor and extend this bare essential support for the safety of all concerned. The bottom line is: water the roots rather than the leaves!

Yours etc.,
One who feels,
Name withheld on request

Suicide an extreme step

Editor,
The suicide of a famous Bollywood actor Sushant Singh Rajput is a big loss for our country. This suicide case raises an important issue which is neglected by

"Before your dreams can come true, you have to have those dreams."
--- John Barrymore

China the bully
A grave provocation has come from China, and how India will handle this is worth watching. The killing of three Indian soldiers by Chinese troops in Ladakh on Monday night came at the height of weeks of face-off in the region. This also saw direct engagements on May 6-7 there, followed by another confrontation in Sikkim on the eastern side of the 4,000 km border/LoC three days later. A bigger confrontation was in the offing and how far this will go is anybody’s guess. The central provocation for China is India’s energetic implementation of some road projects to facilitate easy reach of military manpower and material to the LoC and regions skirting it. That the Chinese threat comes at a time of the pandemic is worrying. The red dragon has been flexing its muscles and attempting to nibble away Indian land through consistent informal aggression along the border. China is laying claim to Arunachal Pradesh, calling it southern Tibet and its territory, even as Tibet itself is China’s usurped land.

China’s aim is to deter India from its pursuit of road development etc., but it may have other motives too. China is nobody’s friend, and it single-mindedly pursues its goals. It keeps Pakistan on its side to needle India. Sri Lanka too is beholden to China now hence its ally. At the same time, China is now on the defensive over the way it spread the Covid virus and imperiled the entire world, impacting both health and the economy and causing millions of deaths. But China’s economy also is bound to take a hit from the pandemic’s internal impact although it has enough ways and means to overcome such crises as it has amassed adequate wealth to buy up global support where needed. China’s military’s strength is five times that of India, and any military fight will not be on equal terms. However, India too cannot be bullied and China cannot expect to get away with a military confrontation because its markets in India will take a hit. Hence, China cannot afford to burn all its bridges.

The security scenario around India is grim. Pakistan is the enemy of all enemies. Added to this is Nepal, which has strayed into the Chinese orbit and moved away from India. Afghanistan is slowly changing colour. Sri Lanka is friendlier towards China than with India. Maldives too is no longer a trustworthy friend. Only the Islamic nation of Bangladesh is by far the closest ally of India apart from Bhutan. All these imply that India has to mend its diplomatic relations with its immediate neighbours even as it builds its military strength.

TO THE EDITOR

On the Contrary

Editor,
I have read the observations of Glenn C Kharkongor's "Christianity and Covid" (ST June 4, 2020) and Mr John R, "Church and State don't mix" (ST June 15, 2020) on my article "A Prayer that Agitates" ST June 3, 2020). I gladly welcome their observations. In the article I had stated that I welcome any corrections/constructive criticisms, considering my inadequacies of opinion, thoughts and knowledge. The objective (which I haven't stated) of the article was to try and provide a balanced, coherent and holistic aspect of the issue (both deductive and inductive), while at the same time not supporting, maligning any persons or institutions. Hailing from the disciplines of Anthropology and Geography encourages us learners to be objective and holistic in outlook and reasoning. As a college teacher too I tried to inculcate in my students the importance of cultivating an objective point of view.

Maybe I have failed in providing that picture when I wrote the article, which I humbly accept. In the spirit of public discourse and exchange of ideas and thoughts, I am obliged to clarify and elucidate on the observations.
Referring to my article, Glenn C Kharkongor wrote, "The latter is heavy with Biblical verses and doctrinal injunctions", "simplistic explanations of the overlap of religion and politics". In my article I referred to only two verses from the Bible, I will not consider it "heavy" considering the heaviness of the issue 'at hand'. Kharkongor also pointed out that "there are 93 verses in the Bible that advocates praying in private." I haven't included even one of them in my article. On the "simplistic explanations of overlap between religion and politics", I have to say I haven't explained anything, I just provided few examples. Considering the readers and the limitations of space, I tried to be simplistic in my writing for the sake of communication. If I have failed in that too I am obliged to correct my articulations. While writing my article, I also had in mind

the concept of structure and agency from anthropology and therefore I also used the terms "environment of influence" and "bounded rationality" (primarily a concept in behavioural economics). I considered the conditions (prayers, crisis etc) that influence the outcome or the settings that might have an influence on any actions. Since I considered this issue under the spectrum of religion and politics, I tried to provide a brief general description through limited examples, about the relationship of religion and politics being a historical affair.
The nexus between politics (State) and religion brought mixed results both good and bad. I also mentioned that religion is a form of politics (considering the frictions of ideas, thoughts, and interpretations of holy books happening in the field of religion) There are power- structures in religion that operate on the basis of power relations and hierarchical functions. I agree with Kharkongor that it is pointless to speculate on the MLA's

motives and in my article I stated the same. I can say, this issue, has relevance (if not directly) with the existence or absence of God. There will be no 'prayer' if one does not believe in the existence of God. But to prove it from a scientific, theological or philosophical point of view will not give a complete answer; even 'a complete library will not give us an answer'.
Regarding John R's, observations on my article as 'word soup' all I can say is that a soup is an appetizer. An article or essay is always a soup of words. I accept his observation of me indulging in 'word soup' instead of 'word salad' (mixture of confused unintelligible random words). I considered my article intelligible enough to John R, but when I read his observations that I 'beat around the bush' just to accept Nongrum's act as harmless, I was amazed at his deductions. Nowhere in my article have I mentioned Nongrum's act as harmless or even supported his acts. Mr John must have guzzled my 'word soup' in a hurry, despite it being bushy. However John is entitled to his opinion. Maybe he has formulated an opinion on my

article even before reading it. John assumed correctly, of me being a Christian, but my views on being a Christian are different. John's curiosity on my stand that if a non-Christian legislator did the same thing, then would I defends his or her acts? I don't know why he would boil down my article to a hypothetical question, despite it being a 'word soup'. But I had considered this point while writing my article.
All I can say is that my stand on any issue will be objective, even if it is a shaky and flimsy ground. I accept to be considered wrong in judgement or opinion but never to be accused of what I haven't said or written. To quote Voltaire, "I disapprove of what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it".
Yours etc.,
Ubahunlang Dkhar Tmar
Shillong-6

Iewduh needs urgent makeover
Editor,
Referring to the news about Iewduh reopening, it is high time that the Myliem

ministers anymore." Intelligent inference seems to lead to this motive for regional parties to cling on to MDA and for them to vote for the NPP nominee in spite of CAA. This is purely safeguarding their own selfish interests rather than interest of the 1. 9 million Scheduled Tribes of the state.
Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma weathered the CAA storm and kept MDA intact pleading that the original CAB is different from CAA. He has taken pains to explain repeatedly that under CAB Meghalaya and the whole of North East was to come under its purview. But the present CAA excludes the Scheduled areas of the state and the states in the region covered by Inner Line Permit (ILP) regime and 6th Schedule. He has reminded more than once that he had championed to oppose CAB leading to its non-tabling in the Rajya Sabha in May 2019 and its subsequent lapse following the dissolution of the 16th Lok Sabha and the end of Modi's NDA 1. The 'much changed' CAA led to the change of heart of NPP. However, the non-Scheduled areas of Shillong city are not exempted from CAA. UDP and other regional parties wanted the whole of Shillong to be away from CAA. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amit Shah did not accede to this demand. Yet NPP, through its MP, voted for CAA ignoring Shillong. The only consideration for NPP was that the whole of Garo Hills was out of CAA's bound. NPP should have instructed its MP that unless the whole of Meghalaya and North East is excluded from CAA she would vote against the Bill then. She pleaded for the provisions but voted for the Bill even when it was not granted. The regional parties did not take much offence of this serious and stunning action and kept MDA afloat. They will also make sure that Agatha is joined by another NPP member in the other House. So much for the saviours of this 'land and its people'!
NPP's nexus with BJP is as clear as sunlight. Conrad, whose father, PA Sangma was supported by BJP as Presidential candidate in 2012, has left no more room for any doubt. He included the two BJP MLAs (one is cabinet minister) in his government though he could afford to refuse support. But the same charge is accused of UDP and other parties. They could have stood their ground against inclusion of the communal party in the 'secular' coalition. They did not! Therefore, by extension they are ideologically linked to the BJP.
Conrad's cosy relationship with BJP was on full show when he accompanied Modi and Rajnath Singh to file nomination papers in Varanasi and to visit the bishop of Lucknow before the parliamentary election 2019, respectively. Why should the public object to his closeness with the top two BJP leaders? They are only the face of the fanatical and fascist RSS and other saffron outfits. The Hindutva forces that are historically linked to Germany's fascism have sinister motives. To a great extent, they have succeeded in saffronising and infiltrating into the whole government machinery. The only agenda left is to convert India into a "Hindu Rashtra". CAA-NRC is a part of this grand project.
RSS has partially succeeded in saffronising North East too. The so called social organisation has presence in the 'Abode of Clouds' and is working hard to exert more influence in the state. Forces are certainly there who are aggrieved by the fact that non-tribals cannot buy and own land here. They might be strategically at work to see that the state and the whole of North East 6th Schedule areas become 'free for all property'.
These forces also share a common divisive and hate ideology. The Delhi riots or pogrom happened because of this hate, exclusive and intolerant ideology. CAA-NRC is a result of a certain agenda. In Meghalaya we have witnessed the fall out of CAA. Two incidents - Ichamati violence and the Shillong stabbing case - are related to CAA. No one justifies violence but would the twin incidents occur sans CAA? Could the temperature against CAA in the state be of milder degree had NPP voted against CAA? It looks like we are going to make sure the party has one member each in both houses of the Indian parliament. We might threaten to fight against CAA tooth and nail but we don't mind empowering the party that welcomed CAA.

“I can’t breathe”
a tribal cry
for justice

By Barnes Mawrie

Today the whole world is gripped by the events that are currently taking place in the US. The anti-racism protests which is set in motion by the murder of George Floyd, an Afro-American by the racist policemen, has given rise to arson and violence and massive protests in major cities of the US and in other countries as well. The pleading words of the dying man, "I can't breathe," have become the loud slogan of the protesters. The murder of George Floyd actually became the trigger for a long-lying ticking bomb of anti-racism sentiments. The one-sided impact of the Corona pandemic clearly proves that it is the poorer class especially the Afro-American community that suffers most from the pandemic. This is due to the poor health infrastructure and poorer lifestyle that this community can afford. The slogan signifies the suffocation that this particular community suffers due to racist policies and attitudes of the white people. We are familiar with well known movies like Mississippi Burning or



Nagaland, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Tripura) is merely 10. In a parliament of 543 members, what impact can 10 MPs make on government policies? Their faint voices are drowned by the vast majority. It is alarming that Assam which has 14 MPs has not even one Adivasi MP considering that the Tea Garden community constitutes a big percentage of the state population. This is the reason why issues related to the tribal people of Northeast India are rarely in the limelight. As long as this system of representation continues, the tribal people of Northeast India have a bleak future. The list of 14 MPs of Jharkhand which is the home state of Adivasis, shockingly shows only 3 tribal MPs. It is evident that national policies are not benevolent towards the tribal people. The step-motherly attitude towards the tribal states. The tribal states are far behind others when it comes to development. Infrastructure is minimal in most tribal states and this does not attract investors and consequently, no industrialization takes place which leads to absence of employment opportunities. This in turn causes brain drain from the region which further worsens the socio-economic condition of tribal people.
The tribal communities especially those of Northeast India, also face a discrimination by the national media. It is a fact that the national media rarely gives news coverage of the Northeast states perhaps except that of Assam. National news coverage is mainly concentrated on other states of India. A road accident that happens in UP or in Delhi is reported but a massive protest in Northeast India does not attract the national media. It is apparent that most national news channels do not even have in loco journalists in many Northeast cities.
The tribal communities be it in Northeast or in mainland India, continue to suffer discrimination, isolation and racist treatment. Governments have come and gone, be it the Congress or the present BJP, but the plight of the tribal people has not improved much. It is true that with the establishment of a separate ministry - DONER, there is much more needed attention given to Northeast India, yet the functionality of it is still wanting. It is strange that the BJP Government has appointed Dr. Jitendra Singh from Kashmir and not a person from Northeast as the DONER minister. How can a person who is not from the region know anything much about the aspirations and problems of the Northeast people? This does not speak well of the government's policy on Northeast India.
The tribal peoples of Northeast India, who have voluntarily sacrificed their independence to accede to the Republic of India since 1948 onwards, feel betrayed and let down. The racist attitude towards them by the rest of the country and the policy of discrimination has extinguished their hopes for a better future in this country. Perhaps a national movement of tribal people is the need of the hour to compel the government to address itself to their grievances.

“Racism is a grown-up disease, and we should stop using our kids to spread it.”

— Ruby Bridges

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Meghalaya's Covid record

IT is not often that the World Health Organisation (WHO) commends a State Government on its efficient handling of an epidemic, or in the present case, a pandemic. Normally it is the country that is lauded. Since Meghalaya today has the least number of Covid infections due to strict handling of incoming returnees from different states and overall vigilance in observance of standard protocols for keeping Covid at bay, the State certainly merits commendation. When compared to other cities in the region, particularly Guwahati, where people are least bothered about social distancing and wearing masks, people of Shillong, the districts headquarters, the suburbs and the villages as well have been most compliant, especially about wearing masks. At this juncture it is important to remember that there are several people and institutions that are responsible for keeping the Covid numbers low and at a manageable level. Firstly, the State Government and its excellent team down the line must be acknowledged for their vigilance. The check gate at the Byrnihat entry point has been very well spoken of by visitors entering the state. The checking and testing is meticulous yet the officials manning the entry point and dealing with visitors are courteous.

In tackling Covid in the state, the traditional institutions have played a stellar role. In fact they have been the talking point on national television. What also caught the attention of national news channels is that those students and workers from Meghalaya living and working or studying outside the state but who returned recently were not called migrants but “returnees.” This they felt was a unique and respectable term. The Deputy Commissioners (DC) of all districts and their team who spend considerable time scanning their computers for applicants of curfew passes and other permissions have executed their tasks highly professionally. Officials of the district administration have worked under great pressure especially in the early days of the pandemic when protocols had to be worked out and executed.

In dealing with a new, unpredictable virus like Covid19, some errors are inevitable but they need to be quickly corrected without creating chaos for the Institution. The case of the pregnant woman who later delivered a baby boy at NEIGRIHMS is a case in point. The woman tested Covid positive but not after she had been in the Labour room and other testing facilities and was handled by unsuspecting health-care givers. The woman and her husband returned from Delhi and both tested negative but her husband later tested positive. With Covid, any slip-up can prove costly. Meghalaya has done well so far but eternal vigilance by all—citizens, health-care providers, Government etc., is necessary to contain the virus.

TO THE EDITOR

Genesis of ethnic racism

Editor,

The thought-provoking write-up by Albert Thynriang “Is there a George Floyd among us?” (ST June 13, 2020) was timely. Reading the article, I am aroused to share my own thoughts, some in agreement; others not so. As a person born and bred in cosmopolitan Shillong around the Khasi milieu, now settled outside, I thank the writer for touching upon the endemic racism in the world, especially in this part. For obvious reasons, I shall restrict myself to the various forms of racism that exist in the country, including Meghalaya.

Thynriang is right about the religious racism that is being fanned in the country. The Hindu assertion is a new phenomenon, part political and part as a flagrant response to rise in terrorism in the name of religion. Historically, the Hindus have been a soft target of the jingoistic Muslim marauders. In recent years, Hindus have helplessly borne the brunt of Jihad as repeated terror attacks have left the “weak” and “unorganized” Hindus at the receiving end. Today, after the ascent of Modi, Hindus have begun to assert them-

selves, quite unlike their known docility. Not just that; the fanatic Hindus seem to be in a mood to catch the bull by the horns. In the process, there are transgressions of the “Lakshman rekha” of secularism and religious tolerance. This uncharacteristic agro of the Hindus has led to the chagrin of the small ethnic and religious minorities which the writer wants to call “religious racism”.

Let me remind Thynriang that racism always existed in these hills. It was a British policy that led to religious hegemony and division of community on religious line. Can we forget that the British described every non-Christian as “pagan” and “heathen”—words which are highly derogatory. I recall in Shillong when the Pnars of Wathapbru area would take out processions for participating in Behdeinkhlam festival, all decked up in the traditional attires, the British masters would forbid the neo-convert Christians from witnessing such heathen culture!

The writer rightly deplored racism in sports arena in the world. In this regard, Shillong is no exception. Ever since Shillong was built by the British and the Bengali babus, football was the most popular local sport. Players from different

communities would form the Shillong District XI. There used to be only merit and no ethnic considerations. After Meghalaya came into being, suddenly it became impossible for non-Khasi players and teams to participate. The ugly scenes in Shillong football league of crowd baying for blood of the non-Khasi players tacitly abetted by the organisers created a hostile, racist atmosphere. Gradually, all the non-tribal players and teams have disappeared from the scene. And, I suspect, with that football itself has been killed in Shillong.

Thynriang refers to some derogatory terms like “dkhar” and “bongal” the tribes use for the non-tribal plains people. He goes on to add: “Non-tribals would also narrate instances of violence against the community at different points in time”. I am happy that he stoked the ticklish issue of systemic persecution of the non-tribals. I grew up hearing more derogatory expressions like “khar-jap”, “khar-rinjain”, “khun ka pohjait” and what have you. But there was nothing serious about these abuses. I reckon, these were mere banter. Everything began to change with the tribes becoming their own masters. The waves of one-sided pogroms led to ethnic cleansing. How locality af-

In Safoora Zargar's case, basic rule was ignored

Courts have to adopt humanitarian principles in granting bail

By Mohd Kumail Haider

that if a prima facie case has been made out by the prosecution and if there appear reasonable grounds for believing that the accused has been guilty of an offence punishable with death or imprisonment for life, he shall not be released on bail pending disposal of the case; unless extraordinary circumstances intervene favouring the accused.

Delhi's Patiala house court on 4th June, 2020 denied bail to 27-year-old Safoora Zargar. The research scholar from Jamia

facie UAPA case. This prima facie case was then used to justify keeping a pregnant woman in an overcrowded prison in the middle of a nationwide pandemic.

The Sessions Court order argues that due to the embargo created under Section 43-D (5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 the Court cannot grant bail. It is a clear matter of legal precinct that while Section 43-D (5), UAPA does create a restriction in attainment of bail, but it does not put an absolute bar. Firstly,



Millia Islamia is currently in judicial custody in connection with her alleged role in the Delhi riots conspiracy case. Safoora has been booked under Sections of IPC and UAPA. Advocate Gautam Bhatia points out that the lynchpin of the Order is a prima facie finding of a “conspiracy” to “block a road.” This conspiracy rose to an “unprecedented level” although we are not told how. But the fact that the accused is also prima facie one of the conspirators, meant that ipso facto the “acts and inflammatory speeches” (we are not told which) were attributable to her. It should be immediately clear that such an approach casts the net of criminality so wide, that just about anyone can be brought within its ambit. A reading of the Order, therefore, makes it clear that insofar as both the law and the facts stood in favour of bail, the Court got around the first barrier by replacing legal doctrine with a metaphor of its own invention. It then vaulted the second barrier by replacing facts with a set of adjectives—such as “unprecedented scale” and “inflammatory speeches”—that spared it the necessity of an explanation. In this way, the law was stretched from one side, and the facts from the other, and they met in the middle to make out a prima

UAPA concerns itself with unlawful activity and “Unlawful activity” in itself is very vague. Secondly, Section 43-D (5), UAPA states—“Notwithstanding anything contained in the Code, no person accused of an offence punishable under Chapters IV and VI of this Act shall, if in custody, be released on bail or on his own bond unless the Public Prosecutor has been given an opportunity of being heard on the application for such release.....”

The aim of arresting a person accused of having committed a crime is to ensure that he/she does not escape the rigours of law, when proved guilty or that the accused person does not tamper with the prosecution evidence. Safoora Zargar's lawyers appealed for bail on humanitarian grounds, given that she is 21 weeks pregnant and reportedly suffering from Polycystic Ovarian Disorder. They told the court that her condition had become all the more vulnerable because of the COVID-19 crisis and pointed out that inmates in all three of Delhi's jails had contracted the coronavirus infection.

While dealing with the issue of grant of bail in non-bailable offences, it has been held that a person is entitled to his liberty even in case he/she is accused of a Non-Bailable offence and the right of

an accused person should not be dealt with by a court in a superficial manner. There have been cases where the person accused of having committed a grave offence under Section 307 of IPC is enlarged on Bail owing to ill-health. In Ratan Singh Nihal Singh & Ors v. The State, it has also been the opinion of courts that since right to liberty is an imperative right of a person, an application seeking Bail should not be decided in a mechanical and perfunctory manner.

While dismissing her bail plea, the judge asked the concerned jail superintendent to provide adequate medical aid and assistance to the accused. But the reality of the jail conditions is miserable and is not hidden from anyone. It has been held by various courts that releasing a woman accused of having committed a Non-Bailable offence on special grounds is not discriminatory. In the matter of Mst. Chokhi v. State, a woman accused of committing murder of her one child was released on bail as there was no one to look after her other child at home. Further, it has been the opinion of courts at large that where the prosecution is unable to persuade the court that there is any reasonable ground for believing that the accused person is guilty of commission of a Non-Bailable offence, in such case the accused person should be released on Bail.

Article 21 of the Constitution has been liberally interpreted to mean something more than merely human existence and includes the right to live with dignity and decency. In India, the judiciary has played a major role in recognizing the right to health as a part of Article 21 of Chapter III which deals with the fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution of India. State has been directed to provide the highest attainable health standards to its citizens towards the fulfilment of international standards. Thus, the denial of bail to Safoora Zargar was not just legally and factually miscalculated, but also abnegates the humanitarian spirit that every person is presupposed to carry in terms of his/her dignified and healthy right to life. (IPA Service)

joins three other ladies in the same vehicle she would have to pay only Rs 5 per head and not Rs 6, thereby gaining Re 1. Each of the four ladies then paid Rs 5 per head and the driver collected Rs 20 for the trip. This way he collected Rs 14 more by throwing government notification to the winds. Soon it became a new system in Shillong—the so called share-taxi. Now everybody knows that drivers do not carry only four passengers plus driver making it five in all.

Here is an example of a legally shared taxi. Four office assistants, say from Nongthymmai proceeding to DC's office or Police Bazar start from one point at around 10:00 AM. They pay for the reserved taxi for the given distance. The money they pay is shared among the four of them. They gain but the driver does not lose. He gains in the sense that he got a daily regular trip without undue harassment by police.

Except in the case of proper, legally shared taxis, all journeys by taxis are generally reserved. The above are examples of proper running of taxis. It is up to the department to check and enforce the provisions.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Centre-state coordination

The ‘COVID-19 effect’

By Dr S Saraswathi

Prime Minister Modi's meetings with Chief Ministers of States and UTs on June 16 and 17 regarding the state of COVID-19 is the sixth such PM-CMs meeting on the pandemic and will be extremely significant in view of rising cases of coronavirus across the country despite four lockdown periods with the fifth running. Measures taken for containing the disease and results of easing the lockdown are being discussed continuously between Union and State governments, among ministers, officials, medical and other experts. Never before had we gone through this much of strain to bring about Centre-State coordinated decision and action. It can be termed “COVID-19 Effect”.

Meanwhile, after a review by Modi with ministers, concern over spiraling cases in some States particularly Delhi has grown and anxiety to act immediately is on everybody's mind. It is reported that the PM observed it was important to have the capital back on track and devise a plan to control the spike.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah and Health Minister Harsh Vardhan held an emergency meeting on 14 June with Delhi Lt-Governor Anil Bajjal and Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal in the presence of senior officials of Delhi government and municipal corporations to draw up a plan for coordinated and comprehensive response to handle the challenges posed by the pandemic.

In the background is Supreme Court's sharp criticism of deteriorating conditions in Delhi. Indeed, the worsening of the situation in Delhi has been allowed too long to deserve any excuse. Coordinated as well as joint action of the Union and Delhi Government which should have been the starting point is receiving attention as the last resort to save the Capital.

The Union Government has been initiating multiple interventions to help States manage the situation efficiently and promptly. Both have their role and responsibilities in public health matters particularly in dealing with epidemics and pandemics. That does not mean independent policy and plan.

The Union Government has set up an expert group at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences - a Central institute - to provide clinical advice to States to manage cases. States are also asked to set up similar expert groups for clinical management at State level. The need for expert groups to assess the situation and provide advice is acknowledged by the Centre and States which enlarges scope for participation and coordination between political and non-political leaders.

Needless to mention that the fight against COVID-19 pandemic is not a political matter, but a national health crisis affecting all States, and the entire population without distinction as to race, religion, language, caste or political persuasions. For the first time in the history of Indian democracy, we witness continuous deliberations between Union and State Governments, frequent consultations with experts on technical issues, and reviews and assessment of developments on almost daily basis. All State Governments must be pleased with this, whatever they may say to stick to their political stand.

The first PM-CMs meeting was held on 20 March 2020, a week after WHO declared the disease a pandemic and before announcing Lockdown-1 to “ensure coordinated approach to fight COVID-19”; the second on 2 April to exchange views on extension of the

Lockdown; the third on 27 April discussed further lockdown plans after several CMs announced relaxations of restrictions; at the fourth such interaction, the PM highlighted the importance of following the guidelines of lockdown and stressed that everyone's aim must be rapid response.

In the fifth video-conference held on 11 May, Modi called for “balanced strategy” and sought inputs from the States. As the toll had crossed 70,000 at that time, the importance of co-ordinated action received wide support. But West Bengal resented Central instructions, supervision and survey. The question of State autonomy came up when the situation was practically out of control of individual States.

Delhi Government's decision at one point to restrict COVID-19 treatment in Delhi hospitals to bonafide Delhi residents seems unreasonable for the simple fact that every Indian citizen can move into and reside in any State and there is no special status as “state citizens” to claim special rights in a State. The LG overruled the decision on the basis that Right to Health is an integral part of Right to Life. Delhi particularly is a cosmopolitan city having a large proportion of floating population.

With the return of “migrant labour” to their home-States and many to their villages, we are now facing the risk of epidemic escalation into rural areas and absolutely need Centre-State coordinated planning and action. Modi had to remind the States that our biggest challenge would be to ensure that COVID-19 is prevented from spreading to rural areas. To harp on the theme of State autonomy and State subject when the pandemic has affected over three lakh people in the country seems to be a political compulsion.

Pandemics, like war, have to be fought under one leadership with pooling of resources, expertise, and manpower from all parts of the country with a single over-all policy and coordinated planning and action strategies with due consideration for differential local conditions. The pandemic is expected to peak at different times in different places. It should be possible to share equipment like ventilators between States by proper coordination and timely cooperation. Central teams have to be deployed in States for assessment of the situation and provision of required medical assistance. All these are possible provided we consciously cultivate mutual trust and cooperation between Centre and States and between States.

Union Home Ministry has asked State Governments not to dilute the restrictions given in lockdown guidelines. Since the powers of the States under the Epidemic Diseases Act 1897 are not adequate to fight the pandemic, Union Government has to use the Disaster Management Act in the case of COVID-19.

States do have an important national role and cannot afford to remain self-centred. They have to enlarge their horizon to think of India and people of India even though their power is limited to their respective States. The attitudes manifested by some States in dealing with the crisis created by loss of employment of migrant labour and in making arrangements for their return to home-States are typical specimens of lowest level of the spirit of cooperation and inability and unwillingness for coordination in our federal democracy. --- INFA

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

*“The way I see it, if you want the rainbow,
you gotta put up with the rain.”*
--- Dolly Parton

War with China, not an option
WAR mongering is good for television news channels to garner TRPs. In the real world, war is a long drawn affair that exacts a huge cost from both the warring sides. True, there is anger and disgust in India over the death of 20 soldiers including an army Colonel but to avenge those deaths by declaring war at a time when both countries are burdened by the pandemic would mean that all diplomatic channels are closed and talks have collapsed. This is not the case. Although China is a slippery customer and has never stood by any bilateral agreement with India, there are other ways of dealing with this bellicosity. China’s claim to Galwan Valley is also not tenable. The name of the place itself suggests it is not Chinese. In fact the Valley is named after Ghulam Rasool Galwan of Ladakh.

It is intuitive that the grandson of late Galwan, Amin Galwan has also stated that war is not a solution as it causes loss to everyone hence the issue should be resolved through talks. When the British were ruling India, the area was named Galwan Rasool or Galwan Nala. This is where the fight is going on between India and China. In 1962, the Chinese entered that area but were pushed back by Indian soldiers. In recent times India is beefing up infrastructure around that area in the same manner that it is trying to complete the border roads in Arunachal Pradesh. Amin Galwan says the area indisputably belongs to India and had been for over 200 years and should remain so. Meanwhile India has asked China to confine its activities to its side of the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and not to take any unilateral action to alter the status quo.

India and China do not have demarcated borders. Successive Indian governments slept over the matter after China waged a war and annexed large swathes of Indian land in the early 1960s. India was unprepared for a war, and the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru is known to have dismissed such annexations by reasoning that what China took was barren land, where no grass grew. This exposed the weakness of the Indian leadership. With the huge economic clout that China has built in recent years, it’s military strength is several times that of India’s. China is bound to repeat similar offensives if it is not stopped in its tracks. The undemarcated border spread over nearly 4,000 km is a sitting duck for future Chinese aggressions. It is imperative therefore, that China is made to account for its actions in Galwan.

TO THE EDITOR

Plight of non-tribal traders

Editor,
The whole world, including India is fighting the deadly pandemic COVID-19. After the country had undergone series of Lockdowns the Central and the State government of respective states are working for the welfare of the people. In this global economic crisis, people are gripped by financial instability and many are unable to support their family. Various NGO’S, religious bodies, public representatives etc., are joining hands with the Government to support people in need either by providing essential commodities, mask or PPEs. People are finding it hard to meet their daily needs. In such a scenario where survival itself becomes a big question, the Khasi Hills District Council in Meghalaya is keeping a check on the non-tribals for carrying out trade activities which are not permitted in their licence and also their area of trade.

The business sector is the one which is most hit by this global pandemic. Many non-tribals in Shillong are born and brought up here and have been carrying on with the businesses started by their forefathers since ages with proper trading licence. Due to the Lockdown their trades have been hard hit especially those trading in lewduh area which has remained closed for the last three months. So the genuine non-tribals who have to support their family to meet their basic needs and also their staff members, will have to look for other trades at least to meet their daily needs.

In such a scenario, many have opted to sell vegetables which most of the traders are doing now. KHADC should at least have allowed them to carry on with this trade till the situation improves. Moreover, it was also mentioned in one of the daily newspapers that trades which are carried out by tribals cannot be done by non-tribals. If this is the case then our tribal brothers and sisters are now competent, qualified and are

Life post the pandemic: What’s the ‘new normal’

The word ‘new normal’ which is today a cliché first originated in 2008 after the economic crisis that threw the entire world out of gear and those in businesses had to rethink new ways of doing business. For most of us the new normal is scary and daunting yet in some ways transformative and enlightening too. This lockdown has given new meaning to friendship and family and made us reconnect with our inner selves instead of externalizing our thoughts all the time and seeking happiness from things external. The post Covid world presents new opportunities for us to imagine new ways of doing things and to push the boundaries of thinking, imagining and creating.

New normal however is dichotomous in nature. Hand washing is not a new thing; it has only been reinforced to the point of becoming second nature. Wearing a mask is a new part of our make-up and I must admit it is suffocating. For women, it takes away the pleasure of donning lipstick. I suspect that the cosmetic industry, particularly the lipstick producing industry will take a hit. But I hope we develop masks that are tailored to allow us to go around with some colour at least. I have noticed that my friends and family are not so gung-ho about wearing make-up these days. The world has suddenly turned bleak and colourless!

Now about the other new normal, working from home has become quite the in thing. This will soon reduce the need for physical infrastructure and save on rent payments and all the cascading liabilities that come with renting office buildings, especially the swanky variety. The more people work from home the lesser demand there will be for menial jobs like sweeping, dusting and swabbing floors and for security guards. So new jobs will have to be created for these categories of people!

Some groups like the Shillong Chamber Choir have reinvented themselves and taken on an entirely new profession besides engaging in their regular singing gigs. They are now into a second profession - that of home delivering groceries and other sanitary items – a new business. Now that’s called

capable of carrying on any kind of trade. They have enough potential to look after the academic, administrative and other fields of administration in the State of Meghalaya. Does this mean then that the genuine non-tribals who are born and bought up here should stop doing any kind of trade since the tribals are now capable of conducting all those trades? Where are the fundamental rights here? Hope the administration in KHADC comes up with a proper solution to address this thorny issue.

Yours etc.,
Homnath Gautam
Shillong -2

Covid resurfaces

Editor,
All is not well with China that was earlier praised for its meticulous and strenuous war on Covid-19 and touted to have successfully contained the pandemic. But with the report of 31 new Covid-19 positive cases on Wednesday, China moved on a war-footing canceling

innovation. It’s making an opportunity out of disruption.

The other thing we are now getting used to is virtual meetings and web-based seminars – or webinars. Having seen the utility of skype or zoom meetings why would organizations spend money for physical travel of participants and their stay at plush hotels when they can have people participate in meetings sitting in their own homes? So will webinars be the new thing in academia, business et al?

And then the much debated topic – online education, or home study has to be given a new thrust. Much has been spoken about how online education has an urban bias because those beyond city limits have no networks or don’t own smartphones. So what is Digital India’s claim to fame if it only provides education to urban yuppies? Now this is an opportunity for the county to scale up digital connectivity in a big way. No one should be left behind.

For those who are not in the Government sector Covid has dealt the cruelest, unkind cut. It is a not just a flesh wound but a cut to the bone especially for those that have lost their jobs. This is easier discussed but extremely difficult for people to fit in again even as jobs change profiles. For journalists Covid-19 has been brutal. While many have lost their jobs due to a rapid decline in advertisement revenue others have been harassed with FIRs being filed against them for reporting on Covid. The Epidemic Act 1897 and the Disaster Management Act has been used on journalists for being critical of governments ostensibly because governments are trying their best to handle the pandemic. The media was blamed for scare-mongering leading to the unprecedented migration of workers from one state to another following the lockdown. But the media was simply reporting what it saw.

The post Covid world demands new thinking and reimagining of businesses. In our own state we see the emergence of new markets that mimic lewduh but with adequate space for physical distancing. There are hundreds of domestic flights, testing 3.56 lakh residents, suspending sports events and closing certain gyms. Though Beijing does not operate international flights, it cancelled 1,255 domestic flights. The national railway operator also closed its services. The fresh Covid outbreak indicates that China cannot be complacent with the containment measures taken as the pandemic virus undergoes mutation and resurfaces as and when it wills.

An epidemic control official in Beijing said on Wednesday that the capital had tested about 3.56 lakh residents since Saturday, after more than 100 locally-transmitted Covid-19 cases were spotted in the city. Beijing on Tuesday urged its residents not to leave the city, and closed schools again as authorities scrambled to contain a severe new coronavirus outbreak in the city of 22 million people. Moreover, it is learnt that the cases are not confined just to Beijing but have been recorded in provinces across China too.

What is alarming and

vegetable and fruit markets en-route to Pynursla from Upper Shillong right up to Laitlyngkot. There are similar markets on the Shillong-Jowai road.

The new normal is that you are not allowed entry into gated communities. If you want to enter institutions like NEHU you will have to go through a thermal scanner. Here the security guard will be taking the temperature of doctors and professors. So be it. That too is the new normal.

Our attitudes behaviours, preferences as consumers have changed radically. Consumerism has dipped. Many stay-at-home husbands have developed culinary skills in these three months of lockdown and some relationships have blossomed.

Now coming to public transport in the ‘new normal’ every time we take a taxi/bus we will be apprehensive about the person sitting next to us. Who knows who’s a Covid carrier! If we continue to crowd there are chances we will transmit the disease. Police are now trained to apprehend people without masks and drivers that allow their taxis to carry more than the stated number of passengers, than in catching criminals.

Shopping malls and super-markets now are extra careful that there is no crowding lest they are reported by some vigilantes and are told to shut down as happened to a store in Police Bazar.

The other day I visited a shoe shop. I was told by a doorman to sanitise my hands and to write my name, mobile no and address in a register. That’s for contact tracing in case any of the customers develop Covid symptoms at some later stage. The shoes that customers tried for their sizes were sprayed with disinfectants too.

If my grandmother was alive she would think we are all suffering from obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) about excessive cleanliness (which in Khasi is called leh subani palat kumba ioh puri).

Oh yes! And for a while now no movie watching inside a movie hall. Why would anyone want to be in an enclosed space where one person coughing or sneezing can spread the droplets in the entire hall?

defying the imagination of the authorities is that the people of China went through the strictest restrictions imposed in life against the possible contraction of Covid-19 pandemic and yet how this new coronavirus outbreak happened again in China is unfathomable. The good part of the story is that the country had been getting back to normal, with people going back to work and restaurants reopening. Even now there are strict measures being followed and foreigners are banned from entering the country though with some limited exceptions. Likewise, entry to apartment blocks and shops requires a QR code on one’s phone to harvest the location history. Masks and temperature checks are ubiquitous.

It is reported that the new coronavirus outbreak in China is linked to a food market. The vast Xinfadi wholesale market is believed to be the epicenter of the country’s latest battle against Covid-19. The Xinfadi market is the size of more than 250 football fields and claims to be the biggest

Normally lovers go for movies so they can sit close to each other and whisper sweet nothings. But what’s the point if two people have to sit two seats away from each other? Sorry but for now we will have to be happy with Netflix/Amazon Prime.

Now about the hospitality industry, which has been the most hit on account of Covid, business will now have to change gears. Locals should now become tourists who want to take a break from cooking, washing and cleaning. Hotels have had to cut their manpower by about 50% because without any revenue generation since March 2020, how could they continue to pay their staff? And then what about the maintenance of the hotels and the power bills which have now just shot up like the thermometer does when recording the temperature of a severely infected Covid patient?

Some countries have opened up their gyms and spas although the number of members gymming at a single time are drastically reduced and shower curtains are fixed between one treadmill and another. I guess this will happen here too (new normal).

Our travels are now largely restricted and will be so at least till the end of the year, hopefully. But airport protocols too have changed beyond recognition. Those who travelled to Guwahati recently said the normal pushing and shoving at the carousel for retrieving luggage was missing. There are people posted at the airport who are extremely courteous and ask passengers if they need any help. I hope this continues to be the new normal.

Oh yes, and how can I forget virtual weddings, birthday celebrations and what have you!

How do we emerge after Covid? Are we still going to be the same self-seeking, egotistic individuals always looking at our convenience over others’ or have we changed our re-adjusted our inner compasses? Do we want to be the same person when we come out of this Covid world? Do we get out of the consumerist lifestyle or do we go back to the same routine? The choice is entirely ours. Covid, however, is a grim reminder that we need to change and for the better!

wholesale food market in Asia supplying up to 80% of the meat and vegetables to the capital’s 22 million people. But, the new coronavirus’ resurgence remains a mystery, despite China’s claims that this outbreak of new Covid is a European strain of the virus. However, China has sequenced the genome. But the million-dollar question is how this European strain of the virus arrived in China. What is worrying the people is that beyond Beijing, a new surge is not Asia’s only flare-up; Japan’s capital city Tokyo has also reported more than 20 new cases over the past six days. These surges in two countries serve as a clear warning to all other countries in the world that governments and people must be wary of its new outbreak.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandan
Viaemail

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Social distancing and lockdown amid social divide

By Naba Bhattacharjee

We were attending a COVID-19 relief operation of our organization recently in collaboration with another socially active trust. At the end of the programme, members of both groups decided to take a photograph. When the photo was put up on our social media site, one of the members rightly pointed out that all in the frame had forgotten the social distancing protocol when the picture was taken. A feeling of remorse provoked serious self analysis on this lapse. In the course of the relief distribution, we insisted on the recipients to confine themselves within the “circle” drawn on the ground at intervals of specified distance. Yet when it came to ourselves social distancing was conveniently given a go by. In what way were “we” better insulated than “them”?

This incident activated serious introspection with a question on whether social distancing is just that “six feet divide”, which although fully justified as a safety net against COVID 19, may also be widening the existing social divides. In India, “social distancing” brings into focus social histories of

“own”, even in extending relief, has shown the ugly face of inequity. The sudden announcement of the lockdown and the suspension of all public transport, left thousands of migrant informal sector workers in mainland cities without any means of basic survival. The long and arduous homeward journey was the only alternative for survival as in a matter of days they became unwanted and almost as contagious as the virus itself. It became “we” against “them.” With the lockdown, the more privileged groups in Indian society have quickly established greater social distance between themselves and others around them. It simply required a widening of existing pecking order in society, which is often based on class and caste, affluence and influence. Lockdown also saw Indian elites maintain distance from the general populace. The tribal society has been by and large free from such divide till now. A majority of workers in India are engaged in unorganized sectors as daily wage earners, wherein affluent employers have no long-term legal obligations for their welfare. With the coronavirus crisis, many of



ST file photo

safeguarding respective social strata to which one belongs. Social distancing in a deeply fragmented society like India is both vertical – along class, caste, religious, insider, outsider and many more such profile, while there also exists the horizontal which entail the separation of people within the same vertical group. Vertical social distancing was easier to achieve with the onset of the pandemic in India while the horizontal divide posed a much bigger problem.

Even in a non-crisis situation, the underprivileged sections in India have limited access to the basic means of survival and are at a much higher health risk, often living in densely populated slums in urban India or areas in rural India which are segregated by caste, religion, ethnicity et al. This makes social distancing, a luxury to adopt for millions of poor in India, although a compulsory civic duty to counter the pandemic. Compliance level in the hill states and regions of NE including other Himalayan states are much higher due to better self discipline and innate homogeneity. Rising cases of non-compliance with government advice and protocols clearly reflect how our basic inequalities, including women engaging more in social distancing compared to men, influence effectiveness of different COVID 19 protocols. Underprivileged population, who bear the heaviest burden of the pandemic, are found more compliant as a matter of protection.

In the lockdown concept too, there is an inherent classism. Both caste and class are hierarchy systems, based on the exploitation of marginalised groups in most Indian societies. Lockdown has essentially followed these established divisions. The practice of untouchability has been a fundamental aspect of the caste system. The lockdown has served to worsen the already gaping inequalities. Intolerance and lack of minimum support and empathy for migrant workers, bias towards the

them lost their jobs. The situation is particularly difficult for migrant workers who live in congested slum areas or roadsides often with no access to clean drinking water or toilets. The fault lines of social divide stands fully exposed.

So, while social distancing, in theory and practice, operates equally applicable to the entire population rather than groups, it also operates within deep inequalities and ways that are intensely unequal. Moreover, many people forced to take shelter in a place are vulnerable or historically disadvantaged, including the elderly, those with chronic conditions, undocumented immigrants, and communities not domicile to the place. In other words, burdens of all COVID-19 protocols and orders are far from being fairly distributed. The workers suffering financially are more willing to sacrifice for the health of the nation as they may be more worried about the economic effects of getting sick in absence of social security and health care benefits. Hence these people are found to be more supportive of steps that would limit the disease’s spread.

Historically, racism, stigma, and discrimination resulted in grossly inequitable application of disease containment measures in our country. COVID-19 situation is no different The current crisis has shown the needs for more investment in public sector institutions, especially in public health, for the most marginalised people to survive during and post lockdown. Further, there are fears that with burden of quarantine measures many workers will be forced to choose between destitution and defying restrictions. It is indeed a tight rope walk even with quarantine and isolation, albeit to a lesser degree. All these measures need to be justified and made morally mandatory; highlighting the expected benefits to society, beyond social division, that offset costs of legal compulsion in the form of COVID-19 protocols, SOPs et al.

“Live in the sunshine, swim the sea,
drink the wild air.”
--- Ralph Waldo Emerson

The Shillong Times

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Unlock 2.0 from July

INDIA was under lockdown for over two months sending the economy into a tailspin even as the exodus of migrant workers, some walking hundreds of kilometers back to their homes in what is an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. On Friday, India recorded a daily jump in the number of Covid19 cases at 13,500 cases with over 300 deaths. Overall, Covid related deaths have crossed the 12,000 mark taking the toll to over 3.5 lakh cases. Meanwhile Chennai has been forced to go for a second lockdown up to June 30, after fresh outbreaks surfaced there. India’s biggest challenge is its population density and the movement caused by people returning to their home states from designated red zones and also from abroad. Health experts have been worried that a sustained Covid19 outbreak would burden its already over-stretched healthcare system.

Meanwhile Prime Minister Modi who was in consultations with state chief ministers clearly stated that there would not be fresh lockdowns anywhere in the country, and that the Unlock process has already begun. Unlock 2.0 will start from July 1, with more economic activities and fewer restrictions. Instead of limiting activities, testing will be beefed up. This was the Prime Minister’s sixth round of consultations with chief ministers on fighting Covid19. Modi reiterated that saving lives should be the top priority and urged states to expand the health infrastructure. He however cautioned that the rise in number of infections meant that there is need to fortify testing facilities, contact tracing, tracking and isolating Covid19 patients.

This brings us to the State of Meghalaya which had recently been commended by World Health Organisation (WHO) for the low infection rates which has been kept that way through strict quarantining of returnees from across the country. However, there is no place for complacency. Any let up in vigilance is bound to have adverse effects. After Unlock 1.0 and easing of restrictions in the State, public movement has increased and social distancing continues to remain a challenge. Also the wearing of masks in public spaces such as shops and streets are still being violated. This indiscipline is cause for concern and should attract punitive action since those who violate these important health protocols would put the entire community at risk. The propensity of those under home quarantine to break rules also poses a potential risk. Here the community institutions have been vigilant but humans being what they are, slip-ups are inevitable. Covid is highly unpredictable and comes in waves. Meghalaya has to be prepared for this and power up its health care system during this grace period. Meghalaya also has to increase testing facilities so that machines at any single institution do not crash through over-heating.

TO THE EDITOR

Reopening
Iewduh fraught
with health
consequences

Editor,
Apropos the news item, " Trading circles divided over market reopening" (ST-June 17, 2020), I think the concerns raised by some shopkeepers belonging to the Greater Iewduh Welfare Association and Hynniewtrep Nongiew Association with regard to the reopening of Iewduh are valid. It sounds rational that if Iewduh is opened even partially, there will be a huge rush leaving no scope for health protocols. Even if only one asymptomatic Covid infected person mingles with the thousands of people that are surely going to through Iewduh, we can imagine what the consequences are going to be.

Under the present circumstances, most people understand the anxiety of our Government which is

trying to balance the needs of livelihood and general health safety as well as the frustrations and even desperation of those who make their living from Iewduh. However, I think that we should err on the side of caution rather than regret later on. Without minimising the commendable efforts of the Government in preventing the spread of Covid-19, I also believe that luck or unknown factors also played a significant part in that the pandemic has not affected our state to the extent that other neighbouring states are experiencing. Having said this, many are rightly apprehensive that the premature reopening of Iewduh could turn out to be that proverbial "One False Step," which could potentially render to naught all the good work of these past months and plunge our state into an unprecedented health tragedy. But will the government reconsider its decision? Personally I feel there is no shame in reversing our

Mid Crisis Report Card

By Glenn C Kharkongor

Who knows if this is the mid-point of the Covid crisis? But we’re at the junction between lockdown and unlock, so a good time to do some stock-taking. Are there any lessons to be learned, that will help us on the onward journey? Almost every agency, institution and citizen is a stakeholder, and one way of working in tandem is to keep watch over each other. There is no escape from a systems approach, and any organization or person that strikes out on its own will rock the boat.

Government
The central and state governments have managed the health crisis quite well, given India’s high population and disparate regions. Declaring a disaster situation early and the follow-up lockdown were decisive actions.

Where the government failed was in the anticipation and management of the social and economic fallout. Declaring a lockdown with only four hours notice was a dangerously precipitous move. Once the volcano erupted, it could not be contained. The government looked, helpless, confused, inept, even heartless, as millions of migrant labourers took to the roads. The financial schemes and full-page ads were unconvincing. The vast exodus led to a spike in Covid cases over the entire country. Worst of all, the collateral deaths are incalculable. This illustrates very vividly how rules and guidelines can unravel when they collide with real life.

The main spokesperson for the government is the Indian Council of Medical Research, an astute move. Even the Ministry of Health stayed in the background and Niti Aayog made a few missteps. The ICMR has been on top of the situation, most of the time. But the management of administrative communication has been poor. India’s bureaucrats issued well over 4,000 different rules during the first two months of lockdown, a morass of orders that added to the confusion. One journalist has described it as management by red tape.

There was no option but to release the lockdown. India is one of the few countries in which restrictions have been unlocked, even in the face of Covid cases rising daily. In most parts of the country, workplaces and commercial establishments are open. On June 15, the local trains in Mumbai, one of the worst hit cities by Covid, started moving, even as India recorded a

daily high of 11,929 cases. The graph will spike again and again, but these are correct decisions in the balance of options.

Judiciary
The courts, especially the Supreme Court have been exemplary. Numerous statements and judgements exemplify their grasp of reality. They have supported the government’s strategy, by and large, in dealing with the pandemic. The Madhya Pradesh High Court upheld the government’s order prohibiting disclosure of identity of Covid-19 positive patients. The Delhi High Court slapped a fine of Rs 20,000 on a on a petitioner who had challenged the Centre’s decision to relax the nationwide lockdown.



The Supreme Courts genuine concern for migrant labourers and other victims shone through in several orders. It ordered a time-bound schedule to help workers reach home. It ordered the government to take up the full refund of cancelled tickets with the airlines. It refused to take action against private companies who could not pay full salary to employees, and asked the finance ministry to take up the waiver on loans with the Reserve Bank of India.

Media and social media
The TV channels are a mixed bag. It is pointless to comment on shrieking anchors who thrive on sensation, zooming into controversial waters. Bland and balanced analysis is a rarity. But TV succeeded in highlighting the plight of migrant labourers, bringing their distress into living rooms, drawing the attention of the world and prodding a sluggish government.

The print media, has by and large, walked a straight line, balancing their critique with recognition of the difficulties that governments face. Coverage of the plight of victims has been fused with empathy. The headlines have been supported by infographics, which bring focus and immediacy. Rarely have there been lapses into hyperbole.

Many in the social media have taken off, running on tangential forays into

conspiracy theories. The one that seems to have gained the most traction is the 5G radiofrequency (RF) waves, which is a non-ionizing radiation and harmless compared to ionizing radiation, such as x-rays. In some right wing circles, there is denial that there is Covid at all, or that it was created by Anthony Fauci.

A proponent of the 5G conspiracy is Dr Rashid Ali Buttari, a Pakistani born osteopath and anti-vaccine crusader in the US. He has twice been reprimanded by the medical licensing board for improper treatment of patients, and use of adulterated drugs. Buttari claims several qualifications which are listed as "questionable " by Quackwatch, a professional

monitoring organization. There are enough delirious followers to post his frequent and dangerous rants.

Citizen response
Citizen responsibility has been a mixed bag. There have been regions where citizen compliance and cooperation have been exemplary like Kerala. In cities like Mumbai and Bangalore, the residential areas have seen self-imposed restrictions by apartment complexes and citizen groups. But crowding invariably happens in slums, market areas and bus and railway stations. And everywhere, there are the unheeding devil-may-care types who make good citizens despair. The behaviour of the poor, however, deserves empathy, not condemnation.

In this age of internet, open access journals and public discussion, everyone has become an expert. While we must be well-informed citizens, an assumption of expertise is hazardous. The authors of some letters and articles in the media even put their degrees and brief biodata, indicating that they are well-educated and highly intelligent. It’s not the same thing as being an expert. It’s harmless if everyone has an opinion about the cricket team, but matters of health are different. Because Covid knowledge is incomplete and evolving, anyone can latch on to something that supports his/her pet

opinion, and trumpet it as scientific.

There are two kinds of specialists whose expertise is paramount in viral outbreaks: epidemiologists who know about patterns of disease and virologists who track virus behaviour. While not perfectly predictive, their generic knowledge comes in handy when dealing with a new viral disease. Even medical specialists discuss differential diagnosis and seek second opinions. But if I wanted to invest my money I would go to a broker, rather than to an architect, never mind how smart he is.

By and large, India has depended on the advice of ICMR and other epidemiologists and they have got it mostly right. It’s the political and administrative decisions that have sometimes faltered.

Church
As usual, whenever there is a crisis, the church is conspicuously absent from the scene. A few donations come in and a few individual churches or Good Samaritans proffer some community aid, but a systemic response has never been forthcoming, whether from a single denomination or from the collective church community. Some years ago, in Kenya, the church used its reach in every village to distribute mosquito nets, logistics that even the government could not muster. There are many silent epidemics such as single mothers, stunted children, and teenager dropouts, in which the church could contribute immensely.

Meghalaya
Our state government has done a good job, given the inherent difficulties of dealing with a disaster situation. But the decision-making has not been free of political expediency. Certain businesses like coal and liquor appear to have been favored. In the face of pressure groups, non-tribals have not been adequately protected.

Communication with the citizenry gets low marks. Public pronouncements have been monopolized by the chief minister and his deputy, and there have been mis-statements, back-tracking, and amateurish explanations. Hardly have we heard from a health expert. Even Trump, with his muddled press conferences has a health expert standing by. The recent interview, featured on the front page of the Shillong Times, with the health secretary, Sampath Kumar, was refreshing. His detailed answers gave us a clear update of the Covid situation in the state.

chemicals, ores, natural pearls, precious stones and fabrics etc. Chinese imports into India electric machinery, electronic equipment, nuclear reactors, boilers, solar energy components etc.

It is to be borne in mind that in 2017-18, China met almost 60 per cent of India’s import requirements for electrical and electronic equipment. In the smart phone industry, four of the five bestselling mobile phone brands are from China. Together, they account for 60 per cent of India’s smart phone market. Analysts believe that both nations have invested heavily in each other. Under these circumstances, it may be good for both the countries not to engage in nefarious activities that may lead to irreparable loss. What should India and China do in this hour of strained relations? Surely, both the countries must resume what they have left undone. What will both countries gain in case they engage in war? Through war, nothing is going to be

won by these two countries except destruction. Moreover, these two countries are the most populous countries in the world and if war breaks out, millions of people would be killed on both sides.

Conversely, if the two countries decide to cooperate and ignore the petty issues based on the ‘enough is enough’ policy; greater things are in store for these two mighty nations in future. Being peaceful means being able to achieve economic and social progress, both of which are necessary to promote life and well-being. War means death and destruction of everything we have laboriously constructed over years. So, let us opt for peace so that we do not lose everything through war.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanani,
Via email

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Manipur Politics

By Insaf

ROUND THE STATES

Cong turns table on BJP?

Manipur is again riding on a political merry-go-round. There’s hope and despair among warring sides. The BJP-led coalition government is on a shaky wicket, as 3 of its MLAs have quit, ally National People’s Party (NPP) has withdrawn support of its 4 MLAs, despite their holding ministerial berths, as also one TMC and independent MLA each. Despondency in Chief Minister Biren Singh’s camp is growing. His former counterpart and Opposition leader Ibobi Singh is upbeat, as those who quit have either extended support or got into the Congress fold forming the Secular Progressive Front. The number game, very much familiar in North East, is being played to the hilt in the 60-member Assembly. With its strength reduced to 56, the BJP is down to 23 and Congress, with a tally of 26, will go for the kill. It has asked Governor Najma Heptulla to convene a special Assembly session for a no-confidence motion against Biren. The previous disqualification of 7 of its MLAs by the Speaker after they crossed over to BJP, will not impact the end-result insists Congress. Messy alright, but it may be BJP’s own making: putting up titular king Leishamba Sanajaoba as its Rajya Sabha candidate, against people and insurgent groups’ wishes and stripping NPP Dy CM of his portfolios. Looks the government would need to pack up, unless Governor decides not to go by the rule book again, as she did in 2017—inviting the BJP when the Congress was the single largest party. There’s no certainty in politics, especially when its dirty.

Ladakh Top Priority

Ladakh needs to be top priority for the Centre in the midst of COVID-19. With Opposition leaders wanting to know the ground situation, Prime Minister had called a meeting. However, it is critical that the locals get a bigger role to play for border protection. In fact the BJP’s Lok Sabha MP Jamyang Tsering Namgyal insists it’s time to take our territory back from the Chinese. “Not just Aksai Chin, but even areas like Gilgit and Baltistan are all part of Ladakh. India of 2020 is not the India of 1962.” He regretted that the Chinese have been allowed to bully for far too long and that “our shepherds should go to their traditional pasturelands, to which China has denied them access, and reclaim Indian territory”. The sentiments against the Chinese are growing rather getting more shrill after 20 Indian Army soldiers, including a colonel-rank officer, were killed in a violent face-off with Chinese troops in the Galwan Valley. The government cannot be a mute spectator, the Opposition insists. There is a clamour that Chinese goods be boycotted. More needs to be done, sooner the better.

SC or Govt Task?

Supreme Court has had to step in, rather take over government’s role once again. After providing succour to migrant workers, this time round it’s to ensure justice for the ‘corona warriors’ -- doctors and nurses. Following its orders, the Centre has written to all States/UTs asking salaries of doctors and health workers doing corona-related duties be released on time, or else any violation by hospitals will be treated as a punishable offence under the DMA. The apex court was hearing a petition questioning the Centre’s decision that 14-day quarantine was not

mandatory for doctors, whereas quarantine facilities were critical not just for them but their families too. Plus, it was alleged that these healthcare workers were either not being paid salaries or their wages were being cut or delayed. While the Centre needs to file a compliance report within four weeks, it must mull over this advice: ‘In war, you do not make soldiers unhappy. Travel extra mile and channel some extra money to address their grievances,’ and settling issue of non-payment of salary to health care workers is not the court but government’s job. Hope it learns its lesson, so no more knocks on SC door.

Rajasthan HC Shuns Social Media

Rajasthan High Court’s order raises many an eyebrow. Watch out what you post on social media, is a warning to its judicial officers and staff. On Monday last, the court’s Registrar General issued a standing order asking them “to desist from forwarding, liking, disliking and commenting upon any posts which are against the policies of Government/ High Court Administration”. Clearly, it’s uncomfortable with them expressing opinions on social media on “matters to which they have no concern whatsoever.” Specifically it noted they were indulging in: “forwarding, liking, disliking and commenting upon the posts which are not only scandalous and derogatory but sensational also; government and court’s policies were being commented upon; official communications were being forwarded “unauthorizedly” on these platforms which amount to “a breach of official confidentiality”; and accessing of social media during office hours is not only affecting the working but diminishing dignity and reputation of entire system”. These practices, it warns amount to misconduct under Rajasthan Civil Services (Conduct) Rules, 1971 and would attract ‘suitable disciplinary action’. Would it be a deterrent, is a big question.

No Rath Yatra!

There is great disappointment in Odisha and among devotees of Lord Jagannath. For the first time in 235 years, the annual Rath Yatra, scheduled on June 23, will not be held, due to the pandemic. The Orissa High Court had last week advised the Naveen Patnaik government to consider holding it with elephants or machines, instead of humans, pulling the chariots. Somehow this wasn’t shared by the government counsel before the Supreme Court, which had been petitioned by an NGO ‘Odisha Vikas Parishad’. It restrained the yatra ‘in interest of public health and safety of citizens, given that 10-12 lakhs would gather for it.’ The State Cabinet has agreed, drawing flak from priests and Opposition leaders who complain: government’s approach is ‘half-hearted’; offering no alternative to pull chariots, or PIL was State-sponsored to hoodwink devotees and preparations so far have gone waste. Some even opine, the 9-day Yatra, an intrinsic part of Lord Jagannath’s life could instead have ‘re-instilled faith of billions of people praying to the lord for well-being during the pandemic.’ Why couldn’t it be allowed on a limited basis like other commercial activities or why not impose curfew in Puri city two days before the yatra and only cops pull the chariots? No point waiting for answers—people need to get used to this new normal. ---INFA

SAVE THE WAVES

By Priyanka Saurabh

Understanding the importance of oceans in life, we earthlings must turn our attention to keeping the existence of the oceans intact. At present, the effect of human activities is also visible on the seas.

Oxygen level in oceans is steadily declining and life is in danger due to the presence of huge amounts of pollutants in the seawater in coastal areas. When seawater is muddy due to oil spills from oil tankers, sunlight does not reach the depths in it, making it difficult for life to flourish there and also affecting biodiversity in those places. The increasing level of pollution in the coastal areas of the oceans is also worrisome.

World Ocean Day was celebrated on June 8 all over the world. The ocean is not only a symbol of life on Earth but also plays an important role in environmental balance. Its main purpose is to make people aware of the increasing pollution in the sea and the dangers posed by it. It is difficult to imagine life on Earth without the oceans, as the oceans are considered extremely useful socially, economically and culturally, despite the rapidly rising levels of pollution in the oceans.

Oceans are slowly becoming a dump yard of plastic waste that is also having a bad effect on the health of marine organisms as marine organisms mistakenly consider plastic as their food which causes them to lose their lives.

Every year World Oceans Day is celebrated according to different themes. This time the theme was 'Innovation for a Sustainable Ocean', the purpose behind celebrating World Oceans Day is not only to spread awareness about the oceans, the importance of oceans around the world, and the challenges they face.

Not only this, on this day many oceanic aspects like food security, biodiversity, ecological balance, indiscriminate use of marine resources, climate change, etc. are to be highlighted.

Over the past decades, global warming has caused massive damage to ice sheets and glaciers, decreased ice cover and the Arctic's maritime boundary and thickness, and increased temperatures. As global mean sea levels rise, these changes have affected terrestrial and freshwater species and ecosystems, coastal ecosystems are affected by ocean warming, including intense ocean temperature, acidification, oxygen loss, salinity, and Includes sea

level rise. Adverse effects from human activities on the sea and land are already being seen on habitat, biodiversity, as well as the functioning and services of ecosystems.

Oceans and the cryosphere (icy Arctic regions) play an important role in the earth's system. Powered by solar energy, large amounts of energy, water, and biochemical elements are mainly exchanged between carbon, nitrogen, oxygen, and hydrogen among all the components of the earth.

From the sun the energy of the earth's surface is converted into various forms, which fundamentally change the weather system

Due to future global warming, four cities — Kolkata, Mumbai, Surat and Chennai — are among the 45 coastal cities globally where a 50 cm rise in sea level will cause floods

in the atmosphere and the currents in the sea, the fuel photosynthesis in the land and sea, and so on.

The ocean has a large capacity to store and release heat and this is responsible for climate change compared to the atmosphere. Evaporation from the surface ocean is the main source of water in the atmosphere, which is carried back to Earth's surface in the form of precipitation.

The sea and the cryosphere are interconnected in many ways. Evaporation from the sea provides snowfall which forms ice sheets and glaciers and accumulates large amounts of frozen water on land. Ocean tempera-

ture and sea level affect ice sheet, glacier, and ice-shelf stability in places where the ice water base is in direct contact with seawater. The melting reaction of ice to changes in ocean temperature means that a slight increase in sea temperature has the potential to rapidly melt and destabilise an ice sheet or a large portion of an ice shelf.

Due to future global warming, four Indian coastal cities — Kolkata, Mumbai, Surat and Chennai — are among the 45 coastal cities globally where a 50 cm rise in sea level will cause floods.

Extreme sea-level events that used to occur once in a century in the past will occur in many areas every year until the middle century. Asia will face the strongest influence in the 10 major river valleys in the Hindu Kush Himalayan region. These include TN Shan, Kun Loon, Pamir, Hindu Kush, Karakoram, Himalayas, and Hengduan and high altitude Tibetan plateau areas. There will be massive uncertainty in rainfall patterns. The floods will become more frequent and severe due to the increase in the incidence of excessive rainfall in the hilly and low lying areas of the Indus, Ganga and Brahmaputra river valleys.

Climate change is weighing heavily on the ocean's ecosystems and depicts a disastrous future for most people's lives at sea, so today we have a long way to go to address concerns about the effects on the ocean's environment and ecosystems.

Renewable energy for policy development by reducing anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions; Shipping and transportation; Protection and restoration of coastal and marine ecosystems; Fisheries, aquaculture, and shifting diets; And there is a need to focus on carbon storage in Seabed.

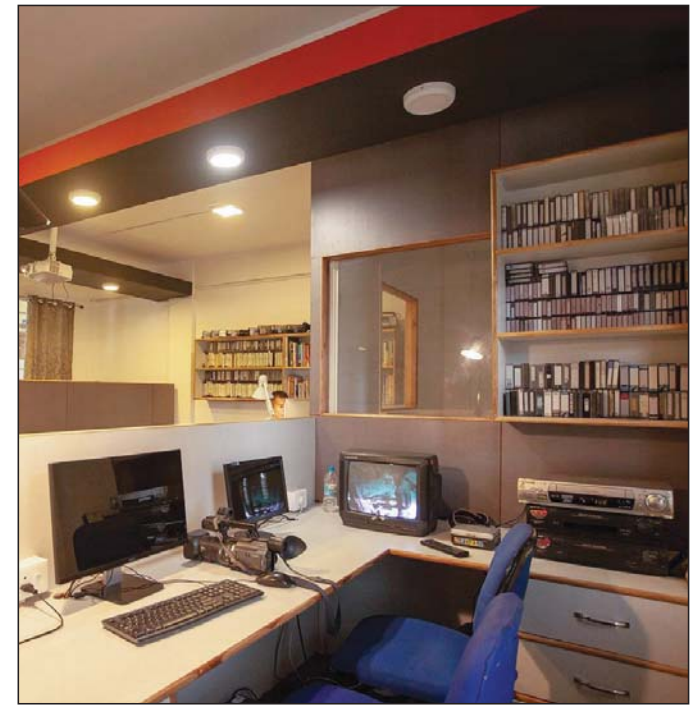
According to current forecasts, depending on the warming scenario, regional temperatures are likely to rise between 3.5°C and 6°C by 2100, causing significant losses of 36-64 per cent in glacier volume. This will affect the flow of water and its availability.

Global warming will directly "affect" domestic use of water resources, agriculture, and hydropower, and all countries will make new efforts to study and develop renewable energy resources and energy-efficient coastal and offshore infrastructure in time should start. And to live, we must save the oceans.

(The author is a poet, columnist & an independent journalist)

Photo courtesy: Pexels

Archiving the pandemic



The Archive office

The Northeast India AV Archive, an audiovisual public archive at the Department of Mass Media at St Anthony's College, is capturing stories of the pandemic so that the future generations can know about the life and time of those who survived or perished in this global phenomenon.

Formed last October, the Archive's latest initiative is Khlam (plague): Archiving the COVID-19 Pandemic in Meghalaya (meghalayacv19archive.in).

"COVID-19 Pandemic cannot be an occasion for uncertain silence. The Northeast India AV Archive is creating Khlam by collecting experiences and impressions of how COVID-19 has affected everyday lives in Meghalaya. It will attempt to be a witness to the changes which are being wrought, policies which are being actualised, and even those moments which continue to remain the same," said Tarun Bhartiya, who has been associated with the Archive since its inception as a research consultant as well as member of the working committee.

The Northeast India AV Archive and The Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Japan (SPF) as part of its response to the disruptive arrival of CoViD19 pandemic is engaging with the creative community of Meghalaya through offering short-term collaborations to practicing artists, musicians, writers and image-makers to help them imagine living the present as well as the future with the world this pandemic has wrought.

The Archive is offering 28 short-term collaborations of two months each to help create artwork, short films, short photo essays, reflective essays, music pieces and performances.

The Archive and the Sasakawa foundation are also providing financial support to artist collaborators not only in Shillong but will strive to include people from various parts of the state. Also, rather than focusing on anglophone urban world, we would encourage creative responses in vernacular, especially Pnar, A'chik and Khasi languages.

"We need not wait for the future to look at the past but start collecting experiences and impressions of how COVID-19 has affected everyday lives in Meghalaya, changes which are being wrought, policies which are being actualised, and maybe even those moments which remain the same. With no end in sight, where social distancing, lockdowns, spatial containment continue to be order of the day, we need to figure out ways and modes of both practices as well as uses of the archive," said Nathaniel DN Majaw, project director at the Archive.

The last date for applications is June 24.

"NE AV Archive right from the beginning puts common citizens and their relationship with history as its reason to be. That's why when the pandemic disrupted our lives we imagined Khlam as an archive of the pandemic which shall become repository not only of the state and its actions but also people's experiences and engagement with this. This collaboration is imagined both as a support to the artist community as well as expanding the meaning of the archive itself," Bhartiya said.

Photo courtesy: Nathaniel Majaw

Online tools for better & focused studies

By Kaustov Kashyap

The internet is one of the biggest inventions in today's world. It is fast and brings us information in seconds. On one hand, the internet provides us thousands of apps to make our lives simpler and on the other, it distracts us throughout the day with endless notifications and sometimes unnecessary information.

Though the internet helps students with free online courses and study materials, it also keeps them distracted from studying most of the time. How many times we have tried to read an article on the internet, but ended up reading five more along with it? The online media is an interesting space and it can easily keep you hooked on for hours and so proper time management is necessary.

Too much distraction is not good for anyone, especially for students who are studying to grow their career. With exams around the corner, students need to focus on studies and score well. But this can only happen when students can avoid checking their mobiles or laptops every 10-15 minutes. Thanks to the internet again as there are a few tools that can easily help students stop wasting time on the internet and rather focus on their lessons. A list of best online tools has been mentioned below for students to focus better in their studies:

SelfControl

If you find yourself checking your Facebook and Instagram feeds every now and then, you can use SelfControl to block these social networking sites for any period of time, say 2 hours or 4 hours, as per your preference. Even you restart your computer within that time period, the app won't stop working. You can specify the names of the websites you want to block so that your access to other websites remains uninterrupted. SelfControl app is available on the Mac App Store.

Time Out

While it is important to focus on studies, it is equally important to take breaks at regular interval to avoid putting too much pressure on the eyes and the brain. Time Out lets you set intervals after specific duration, for example say 2 hours or 4 hours. Time Out will automatically fade your screen and remind you to take a break. You can set the break time from 1 minute to any duration of your choice. It can be downloaded from the Mac App Store.

Think

If you feel clumsy using multiple apps at a time, install Think app. It will let you use a single app in the



foreground while the rest of the apps will be in the background. The background will appear almost opaque, making it easier for you to focus on a single task. You can download Think from the Mac App Store.

FocusWriter

If you need to complete an as-

ignment or do your homework, FocusWriter is the best tool for you. It hides absolutely everything from your screen like other applications, the task bar and menu leaving only a grey background and a blank screen to write.

This screen feels similar to a word document. FocusWrite is available for Mac and PCs.

Concentrate

Concentrate is another useful tool that lets you customise a set of tool for a specific task. For example, if you want to write something, the tool will let you focus on the task completely by automatically blocking social media sites, changing your instant messenger status from active to away and closing all email inboxes. Similarly, if you choose to do some other tasks like social media marketing, the app will customise another set of tools suitable for that specific task. Concentrate is available for Mac only.

RescueTime

If you genuinely want to improve yourself and spend less time on the internet watching videos or playing games, then use RescueTime. The tool helps you track your activity throughout the day and assess your progress. Additionally, the app will also help you block social media sites when you want it to and send alerts about the amount of time you have been on the internet.

Flowstate

Flowstate can be your best friend when you are having a writer's block or when your creativity goes out of the

window. The Flowstate tool is simple to use; first you need to name your writing session and allot time duration (maximum 120 minutes). As soon as your session starts, you need to keep writing until it ends. In case you stop for more than 5 seconds or exit before the session time is over, the whole progress will be lost and you have to start writing again from the beginning. This app is available in the Mac App Store.

Forest

Forest improves your power to focus on a single task. With this tool, you can set the time when you want to focus. At the scheduled time, you have to plant a tree which will grow over the next 30 minutes. If you leave the app and switch to another in these 30 minutes, your tree will die. When you try this everyday, by the end of the week, you will have a virtual forest. You can try this out while having dinner with family or studying. Forest is available on Apple iTunes and Google Play. Balancing studies and leisure time is very important for students to score well in exams. With the help of these apps, you can easily save 2-3 hours and utilise it for doing something worthwhile. Improve your concentration and boost your productivity by downloading these apps at the earliest.

(The author is a career counsellor)

Genetics study helps tiger conservation

Uma Ramakrishnan, one of India's leading scientists, conserves tiger population using genetics reports

By Natasa Milas

Preserving the tiger population in the Indian sub-continent is a passion with Uma Ramakrishnan, an assistant professor at the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Bengaluru, and one of India's leading scientists. Her work focuses on population genetics and the evolutionary history of mammals.

Data from Ramakrishnan's work has been used for creating and improving plans for conservation of tigers in a rapidly urbanising India. In 2013, Ramakrishnan and her team's data was used as evidence in the Supreme Court to petition for an underpass for the widened National Highway 7 to enable tiger connectivity between Kanha and Pench tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh.

Ramakrishnan was a 2015-16 Fulbright-Nehru Academic and Professional Excellence Fellow at Stanford University, California. She is the first Indian to win the Parker/Gentry Award, administered by The Field Museum in Chicago in recognition of her work on conservation efforts. Excerpts from an interview:

How did you become interested in population genetics?

I was always interested in the natural world and in understanding animal behaviour. I was lucky to grow up on the Indian Institute of Science campus in Bengaluru. My curiosity as a child always extended beyond simply observing the natural world. I asked myself: 'Why do animals behave the way they do? What is actually transpiring in these animal populations?' Early on, I realised that there was a hidden layer of information that we were not considering — DNA and genetic variation.

After high school, I accompanied my family to Princeton University, USA, where my father was on a sabbatical. There I spent time in a molecular ecol-



ogy lab and could gain deep insights into biology by understanding this hidden information layer. I knew then that I wanted to use a genetics lens to study wildlife populations.

After my studies, I was lucky to get a job at the National Centre for Biological Sciences, part of the Tata Institute of Fundamental Research, Bengaluru. I was their first hire in the ecology and evolution area. Soon after, I got a call from conservation zoologist and tiger expert Ullas Karanth, asking if I was interested in working on tigers and their genetics. My journey over the last 15 years or so at NCBS, understanding tigers and other Indian biodiversity, has been in-

credibly exciting.

How is your work helping to preserve the tiger population in India?

The future of tigers is really in our hands. Thanks to the efforts of the Government of India, several tiger populations have recovered. The viability and future survival of these populations will be contingent on our ability to maintain connectivity between them.

I hope our research has and will continue to fill the gap between science, management and policy. We are currently working on an isolated population of tigers in Rajasthan and I hope our research insights will help

plan what may be the best way to ensure long-term survival of this population.

How has your experience at the Stanford University as a Fulbright Fellow helped your current work in India?

This was a really great opportunity. After nine years at NCBS a sabbatical sounded great. I was outside my comfort zone at Stanford University, the academic mecca for population genetics. Additionally, Stanford is nestled in the San Francisco Bay Area, where many conservation NGOs and start-up companies at the forefront of new genomic technologies are based.

The amazing thing about being

outside your comfort zone is that it's empowering. With colleagues at Stanford, we turned what has typically been a challenge for conservation genetics — non-invasive or poor-quality DNA samples — into a strength. We asked whether we could develop cheap, reliable and fast methods that used novel genomic technologies to work on poor-quality samples. While there, my colleagues and I set up the Program for Conservation Genomics. Our goal was to provide simple-to-use genetic approaches to on-ground conservationists. We are still working together to make this a reality.

What are some of the biggest challenges in your work?

Permissions to work in protected areas are always very challenging. Then, there are the things you really have no influence over. It rains and, well, your samples collected over the next few days are unlikely to have DNA or yield results. Sometimes, we work with large teams or in areas which are very difficult (for example, high elevation), inaccessible or not very politically stable.

What are your future research plans?

I would really like to build partnerships with other tiger researchers across Asia. The methods we developed while at Stanford are going to be generalizable across tiger range countries. One of the

goals is that everyone across the world can use a common platform for analyses, so that the data is comparable. Critical to this effort, however, is that each country builds an ecosystem to generate and analyze their genetic data on tigers locally.

We are working hard to understand the impacts of inbreeding or mating between relatives on small and isolated tiger populations. This is a big ask for a species like tiger, but I am hoping the detailed work we are doing could shed some light on this problem, which is sure to become more common with time.

I hope that our research can contribute in whatever small way to reverse biodiversity loss. (SPAN-TWF)



Uma Ramakrishnan with a team member. In 2013, her team's data was used as evidence in the SC to petition for an underpass for the widened NH7 to enable tiger connectivity between Kanha and Pench tiger reserves in Madhya Pradesh

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JUNE 21, 2020

New Moon and annular solar eclipse on your solar return chart will bring mixed results for you. Financial position will remain normal. Your business profits too will be down. You would plan change of business but it would be wise to take expert advice. You may face some business setbacks too. New job offers will come but it will not match your expectations. But your long pending disputes with family members may get resolved through arbitration or mediation. You will face competition at your workplace. But enemies will not be able to harm you. Your colleagues will keep on supporting you. Your relationship with your family members will be wonderful. There will be laughter and joy in family ties. Loved ones will come closer to each other. Friends will also keep supporting you. You will develop religious inclinations and also take to spiritualism in a big way. Health will remain perfect.

Aries: (March 21 - April 20)

This phase brings glory, gains and success in professional and personal relations. You would express yourself with charm and grace as you are exceptionally articulate and your writing takes on a poetic quality about it. You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You manage to communicate with moody and angry people with a sensitive approach and gentle manner. Looking within at your values and beliefs gives you insight and direction. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well being and confidence. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining a balance in all areas of life.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)

Commercial transactions and business deals could be conducted successfully. You are unlikely to be display a whole lot of self-discipline. It's a great time to exert your personal influence, as you come across as especially cooperative. There is perfection and beauty in emotional relationships as you come from a deep and spiritual space within to relate in a new way with your loved one. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. Avoid being lazy and laid back as temporary gain or success in business needs to be followed up with hard work and dedication

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)

You would improve your professional and personal relations, as you express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner. There could be alterations in ideas or plans, increase and decrease in finances and fluctuation in business. You can be lead away by enthusiasm unless careful inner balance is maintained. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. You are just, fair and generous in family and professional situations. Your sense of humor helps you out of difficult situations. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)

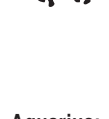
A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation with overseas contacts. You are likely to get business and work opportunities from overseas and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you. At this time your heart is where the home is. You may be tempted to spend lavishly on things that make your life more comfortable and pleasant. Beware of over indulgence of any kind by maintaining balance in all areas of life.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23)

You are frank, outspoken and can be undiplomatic on occasions. Political correctness and diplomacy are the call of the hour. You are more willing to adapt to new circumstances, ideas, and unfamiliar situations this week. You put in a lot of efforts and then find that this has established a strong professional base and this brings in desired and even unexpected gains. It is good time to organize your workplace. This would help you to get a better perspective to achieve goals. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Romantic notions start to take on a realistic shape.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)

It's a great time to exert your personal influence where it can prove to be beneficial with the larger picture in view. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business



ventures and collaborations. This helps you build your self-confidence and strengthen your financial position. You may take up assignments and projects and this would end on a winning note for you during the week. Your efforts to reach out to new people will be accepted and welcomed as you get success in foreign matters too. You extend your hospitality to family and expenses rise this week on purchase of luxurious household items.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23)

This phase brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relations. You wield power and authority most effectively as you bring perspective and order in chaotic situations at work and home. You gain money and influence through business ventures. Success brings rank and respect as you dominate the professional scene. You win appreciation of people in senior position and this open the doors of new opportunities. You carry yourself with confidence and style that attracts much attention and draw attention of interesting people around you. You would express yourself with charm and grace in professional life and this brings financial gains and new contacts. You feel full of energy and indulge in sports, physical activities and a structured exercise routine.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)

This brings success, glory and cordial relations with family and loved ones. Cooperation and focus on harmony and understanding benefits you professionally and enhances your reputation and public relations. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity this week. You are more rational when it comes to financial matters. You need to drop comparisons and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling in inadequacy and stress. You would regroup your energy and thoughts and focus on the basics.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)

You extend hospitality to family and friends as you entertain and organize meetings and get-togethers. You would perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation and favor from seniors. Financial benefits also may come your way through investments and insurance. You would have a positive feel towards spiritualism. You are passionate in what you do, although you display self-discipline with people around you. It's also a good time to break bad habits.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)

Confidence, pleasure, and a deeper involvement in personal and professional relations comes to the fore. This enhances work opportunities for people in the creative line, marketing, arts, show business and related fields. A romantic affair would give a big boost of confidence and personal magnetism runs high to be appreciated and admired. This is a time where you bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships in family and loved ones. Socializing and making new contacts could help to boost your career. A healthy lifestyle and fitness remain on your agenda.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)

You would face new circumstances, changes and unfamiliar situations. A positive approach and well chosen words would benefit. You may take up new assignments and projects that would incorporate and utilize your ideas. Your inner hopes and desires come to the fore even as you tackle your job with a realistic and practical purpose of mind. You incorporate and utilize your ideas. You would be loving and appreciative of the love you receive especially from children. Romance heightens your personal magnetism.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)

You feel the fragile bond of friendship, romance and love in personal relations. You curb your natural reaction to situation and focus and gather information and take care not to hurt any relationship. You will be needed to provide inputs and your presence may also be required at home and work and you will have to divide your attention according to priorities. It is time to heal friendships with tender, love and care. You may also display more responsibility towards your family and take them for outings. Your thoughts turn to philosophy and worship during this time. The fine arts are inviting and involving as you channel your creative energy into it. This is a good time to organize yourself and your thoughts and attend your health and well-being.

'My vision towards life changed after Money Heist'

Indian-origin actor Ajay Jethi, who is based in Spain, had no clue about Netflix's one of the most successful series *Money Heist* (*La casa de papel* in Spanish). Playing Shakir's character, Jethi rose to prominence not only in Spain but in India and Pakistan as well. IBNS-TWF correspondent Souvik Ghosh catches up with the actor who played a hacker.

What was your first reaction when you had received the offer to be a part of *Money Heist*?

I was happy to get to work as an actor in another project. It was a new project to me. Getting an offer is always a happy thing for me as an actor. I was not aware then about the popularity of the project which was famous in the name of *Money Heist*. I had no clue that the project was so popular.

When did you realise the popularity of the series?

My manager first told me about the popularity of the project. Then I watched the two seasons of *Money Heist* within three days and realised the popularity of the show. Initially, I had thought it was popular in Spain. But when on the first day of my shoot shared an Instagram story about my participation in the show, friends from India and Pakistan had started texting me. Then I realised that the show is watched by the Indian and Pakistani community. But the worldwide popularity of *Money Heist* was felt by me only after the release of the series' fourth season as I was getting hashtags on social media.

Was the brand Netflix enough for you to choose the character of Shakir or the content was the last word?

No, that was suggested by my manager who had asked me not to skip the series... Since I had earlier worked with Alex Pina (Spanish television producer), I was sure the show would be of a great concept. I never say no to any project owing to remuneration.

How much your life has changed after *Money Heist*?

Definitely my life and my vision towards life have changed after *Money Heist*. I am feeling more responsible after getting such overwhelming re-



sponse from all corners. Also I am thinking how to balance all my works. Apart from all these, my hard work will continue.

You have worked in full-length films earlier. Is there any difference between full-length film and OTT platforms?

It depends on the project whether it is a full-length film or a web series or short film. I never distinguished between them. I have always felt why all countries do not watch Spanish films. Now due to OTT platform, the reach has become wider. According to me, OTT platform is more than films because it has given a wider reach... I think OTT and Netflix have led to the breakage of language barriers.

People in India are very much keen to see an adaptation of *Money Heist* in Hindi. While some on social media feel Shah Rukh Khan can play the Professor's role, others feel Ayushmann Khurrana can do justice to the character. Whom would you choose as the lead actor if you were given an opportunity to adapt *Money Heist* in Hindi?

See if *Money Heist* comes to mainstream Hindi film, it would be great to have Shah Rukh Khan playing the role. But personally I would love Ir-

rfan Khan (the interview was taken before Irrfan Khan passed away) sahab to do the Professor's role which is very deep.

Do you think it is high time the Indian directors and producers follow *Money Heist*-type projects?

See Indian films have changed in last one or two decades. With time, the independent films which are content-based have been adapted into mainstream cinema slowly over the last few years. It would be great to bring films of *Money Heist*-level to the Indian audience which is very intelligent. People now love the style of acting which is globalised. The films, which were used to be made by Naseeruddin Shah, Om Puri, Shabana Azmi, were earlier known as art films. But now those art films are the mainstays in India. So this change is great. One should think with a wider sense.

Have you watched any film during the lockdown period?

I have been watching a lot. The latest film which I have seen is Morgan Freeman's *Hard Rain*. I used to watch YouTube more. I used to watch films of Morgan Freeman, Leonardo DiCaprio and Al Pacino. I love their films.

What is your next plan after *Money Heist*? Are you going to venture into Bollywood or stay in Spain?

I will never leave Spain. But my next plan is in Bollywood. I seriously want to do content-based Hindi films. I have also received a couple of offers in Hindi films. I have liked both the projects. I have decided to work on those films. It is a different feeling to work in one's own language. The happiness to get recognition from my own country is unparalleled.

Did you get the offers after *Money Heist* season four success?

Yes after the release of *Money Heist*'s season four.

Any director in India you would like to work with?

There are plenty of them. I would like to work with Sanjay Leela Bhansali, Anurag Kashyap, Tigmanshu Dhulia, Anubhav Sinha and Imtiaz Ali.

"At last now you can be what the old cannot recall and the young long for in dreams, yet still include them all."
--- William B. Yeats

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BJP’s RS challenge

WITH over 60 seats having gone for the Rajya Sabha polls, in filling vacancies declared since March, the BJP is nowhere near a majority in the Upper House of Parliament. In the present round of polling the BJP gained the upper hand, its strength going up to 86 against a diminishing strength for the Congress, at 41 in the 242-member Rajya Sabha. The NDA strength rose to nearly 100. Still, there is little likelihood of the BJP-NDA gaining the upper hand in the House in the near future, belying expectations till recently, that the BJP-NDA will achieve its aim on this soon after the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. With the Shiv Sena and the Telugu Desam out of the NDA, the ruling alliance’s assembly-level support for the RS polls reduced. Besides, the Congress managed to outwit the BJP in quite a few states. This made the BJP aspiration to win a majority in the RS a tough call; and this will reflect on the government’s performance. The NDA managed to see through legislations in the Upper House via support from some regional parties, while the Congress and the Trinamool Congress put up stiff resistance. That resistance saw key legislations like the GST bill kept on the back burner for years after the Modi government took power in 2014. This Bill was ultimately passed towards the end of Modi’s first term by turning the legislation into a finance bill, not requiring RS nod.

Smooth functioning for a government is not possible unless it has majority support in both Houses of Parliament. This will be unlikely, given the present state of affairs, and even in the future too. The equations in state assemblies would not allow the BJP-NDA to outwit the Opposition in the upper house. This scenario is only likely to turn worse as the BJP as a political entity is failing to muster support in state assembly polls, one after another, and the Congress or the regional parties are gaining ground in some states. This will further affect the RS strength for the NDA as a whole in the next four years of the Modi government. After Amit Shah left as BJP chief, the organisational-level functioning of the BJP has suffered; it has lost the cutting edge mobilizing skills that Shah was adept at. Chances are also that the present lockdown, the migrant labour crisis, the Chinese aggression etc., might further work against the BJP in future polls. This might also hurt the BJP and its allies in future RS polls.

TO THE EDITOR

God’s own ambassador for change
Editor,
Our ancestors had the good fortune – though they might not have realised it at the time – to have humane missionaries like Rev. Thomas Jones I of revered memory who introduced the Roman script and deservedly earned the title of “Father of the Khasi Alphabet.” The pragmatism of the British administrators of the time should also be given due credit for spreading literacy among the Khasis in spite of their initial reservation.
Let me take the liberty to quote from the foreword by Stewart L. Udall in the book, “The Navajo People...”(published 2006) which reads, “To fully understand...of the Navajo People...how the Navajos lived a half-century ago...that generation of Navajos did not have access to rudimentary education...”
By 1945 we had post-graduates among us while at that period the Navajos “did not have access to rudimentary education.” Concerning all this we should show our gratitude by recalling Rev. Thomas

Jones’s role in our educational development every International Literacy Day.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Shillong – 2

NEIGRIHMS nurses’ grievances & clarification

Editor,
We the NEIGRIHMS Nurses are very disappointed by the inaction and discrimination of our administration towards the nurses at this time of turmoil and war against COVID-19. With the report of the first case of a COVID-19 patient in our hospital on the June 9, 2020, we, the Nursing fraternity of NEIGRIHMS, have expressed our concern in the form of a letter addressed to the director of NEIGRIHMS regarding the breach in the quarantine protocols of the said patient and the attending staffs. The case was also a test that proved that our administration was unorganized, unprepared and unsystematic in handling COVID positive cases. The pandemonium caused by a single COVID positive patient exposed

The country is in a very difficult situation. It is literarily up against the Himalayas. On the one hand the country is fighting the pandemic which continues to bother both the central and the state governments. On the other hand China attacked the country in the Ladakh region during a very crucial period when the country is in the process of opening up the lockdown. The country’s economy is already in a bad shape due to the lockdown which was imposed to prevent the spread of COVID-19. The government was hoping to push the wheels of the country’s economy forward. But the Chinese attack coming as it does at this juncture is like a blow below the belt to the country’s financial health. It is also a body blow to the Prime minister personally.
In the skirmish which happened on Monday night of June 15, soldiers of the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) attacked and killed more than 20 brave Indian soldiers. It was also alleged that the Chinese military not only attacked our soldiers but they altered the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and captured some areas which belong to India. This is according to the statement of the Ministry of External Affairs.
I, for one do not support war because it only creates more hatred and bad blood and which only makes the two opposite parties bay for each other’s blood. In this short span of time many wars were fought and the only outcome is the death of young soldiers which brings sorrow to their families. It also brings only death and untold miseries to those who were directly affected by the fight. In fact war can only bring two things death and destruction.
However, in times of a crisis like this it is the duty of every citizen of the country to express solidarity with the army and give them the moral support that they most need. The country needs to stand solidly behind its armed forces, but at the same time we wish that good sense will prevail at the political and diplomatic levels of the two governments to

prevent such incidents from happening again and also to avoid unnecessary loss of lives in the future. While supporting the soldiers’ families, one also wishes that there are no more wars and that no family has to lose their loved ones to untimely deaths.
After the attack in the Ladakh border there is an increasing demand for banning of Chinese goods in the country which one can of course understand and relate to. But the moot question is, if this even practical at this juncture? Can we really do away with all Chinese goods? For example this article is typed on a Lenovo laptop. Chinese cheap products have inundated Indian markets and Chinese investment is everywhere. In fact it looks like almost every successful start-up is being funded by China. Of course there is no harm in getting carried away but the country needs to look at long term approaches of dealing with China. It is not easy to slay the dragon, but there are ways that it can be rid off from one of the largest markets in the world.
Perhaps we need to look at the border dispute more carefully and the recent developments in the neighbouring countries should help us realise that it does not augur well for India. Perhaps it will also help us understand better if one cares to look at what had happened just before this attack in Galwan valley in the Eastern Ladakh.
The other Himalayan Challenge in the region is the tension between India and Nepal which has further deteriorated with time. The question therefore is if there is any link between the PLA ambush on the Indian army in Galwan with the new Indo-Nepal relationship which is worsening. The tensions between the two neighbours deteriorated further when India inaugurated a road linking Dharchula in Uttarakhand state to Lipulekh, as part of the Kailash-Mansarovar pilgrimage route. Nepal protested and the relationship between the

By HH Mohrmen

two countries started going downhill. Nepal then retaliated by releasing a new political map showing the areas of Lipulekh, Kalapani, and Limpiyadhura as part of its territory.
The Nepal-India border was delineated in 1816, by Treaty of Sugauli which was signed between the British East India Company and the King of Nepal following the Anglo-Nepalese war. The other cause which triggered the Galwan attack could very well be China protecting its new found friendship with Nepal. In China’s gain India loses not only its neighbour and its ally but a country with which it has many things in common, but fundamentally religion. Nepal is a Hindu country as much as India is.
Sumit Ganguly, Professor at Indiana, University, Bloomington in his opinion piece which appeared in the South China Morning Post suggested that the abrogation of article 370, the redrawing of Jammu and Kashmir map and the circulation of new map of Ladakh could be the cause of tension not only with Pakistan but China too. India unilaterally redrew its map with the understanding that this is its internal affairs, but Ladakh also shares its border with China.
China has invested heavily in Pakistan and is getting closer with Nepal and if this relationship is further strengthened India will find itself being isolated by its next door neighbours. If the China-Nepal-Pakistan axis really happens then that will be a great threat to India. India will be squeezed by China both politically and economically. Pakistan will no doubt be a willing partner in the arrangement as it would love to see the Asian tiger bleeding.
Almost six decades ago, the two countries have fought a fierce battle against each other. The Indo-China war of 1962 which lasted for a month was considered to be a mistake and was called the Himalaya blunder. The same mistake of trusting China was made more than fifty

years after the 1962 war. India need to realise that there cannot be ‘India and Chini bhai bhai relationship’, it has never been and it will never happen.
China is India’s neighbours and like they say, you don’t get to choose your neighbour but you can choose how to live and engage with them. China like the Himalayas is something that we cannot avoid; in fact we depend on it. Like the Himalayas the country need to make use of the mountains and use it to its own advantage.
During six long decades since the war, the relationship on the Indian border with China has never improved and the June 2020 Galwan attack will further aggravate the already delicate relationship between the two countries. India shares a border of more than three thousand (3488 to be precise) kilometres with that country from Arunachal to Nathula and Ladakh and the relationship in the border is far from being harmonious. In the past there was confrontation in the Nathula and Cho La regions in Sikkim and in 2017 there was the Doklam attack again in the Sikkim border. India is therefore facing a Himalayan challenge vis-à-vis its relationship with China.
It does not need an expert to see that China is exerting pressure across the globe and right now India is seen as a soft target. On one hand it has to fight the pandemic and on the other hand it is trying to revive its economy and China uncannily attacked India when it is at its weakest. India is in a tight spot, similar to the situation where it had its back against the wall while in front is the great expanse of the rugged and high precipitous terrain of the Himalayas. The point is the country cannot do away with its neighbour just like one cannot simply remove the Himalayas, but it needs to tread carefully in its relationship with China. Six decades ago Nehru had failed, so did his grandson Rajiv Gandhi and now Narendra Modi is also falling in the same trap and is yet again betrayed by the Chinese.
The moment.
However, since all our issues were not addressed by the administration we would like to put forward to you that the nursing personnel of NEIGRIHMS had decided to wear the BLACK BADGE since June 16, 2020, as a gesture of displeasure and would continue to put it on until all our matters are addressed.
Here, we would like to acknowledge that the TNAI, State branch and Nursing Superintendent of North Eastern Institution of Ayurveda and Homeopathy has also come forward in support of our issues.
Yours etc.,
JAC (NNA & TNAI, NEIGRIHMS Unit)
Names withheld on request

Citizen returnees

Editor,
I am a resident of Meghalaya and have just returned to Shillong after a hiatus of three months. I had left Shillong for a week’s vacation but got locked out due to the pandemic. My homecoming was especially painful for me for the reason that I lost my nearest and dearest one during my absence from home. Under the changed circumstances

The Successors
To Thomas Jones
Rev. Lyndan Syiem

Today is Thomas Jones Day, in honour of the pioneer Welsh Presbyterian missionary among the Khasi-Jaintia people who arrived at Sohra on 22 June, 1841. In 2018, the Government of Meghalaya had notified 22 June as Thomas Jones Day in the six districts of East Khasi, West Khasi, South-West Khasi, Ri Bhoi, West Jaintia and East Jaintia. There has been plenty of discussion and debate in this newspaper and elsewhere over Thomas Jones. ... But what happened to the fledgling Welsh Mission after Jones resigned in 1847? Who succeeded him at Sohra so that the mission grew and became this church of almost eight lakh members in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, and sixteen lakhs in the Presbyterian Church of India?
William Lewis was ethnically Welsh but was born in England, in the great industrial city of Manchester, in 1814. He had the privilege of school education followed by an apprenticeship in one of the city’s factories. He could have become an engineer but felt called to the ministry; so in 1839 he joined the Theological College at Bala, Wales. After ordination and marriage, the Rev. William and Mrs. Mary Lewis embarked from Liverpool and arrived at Sohra on 2nd January, 1843. They came with Rev. Dr. Owen Richards and his six year old son (his wife had passed away in 1836). Their arrival was a great relief to Thomas and Anne Jones who had been struggling on their own for eighteen months.
The subsequent division of work saw William and Mary Lewis running the schools, Dr. Owen Richards treating the sick and wounded, and Thomas Jones preaching, translating books and touring mission stations. The missionaries also shifted base from the crowded soldiers’ camp at Saitsohpen to the present extensive property at Nongsawlia, gifted to the Mission by the Syiem of Hima Sohra, Suba Syiem.
The Lewises faced many initial problems; it was difficult to confine the free-spirited boys from Sohra and the nearby Ri War villages to the classroom. Many dropped out and the three schools at Mawsmai, Mawmluh and Sohra were in danger of closing. So the Lewises had to moderate their Puritan discipline and motivate their students with small rewards and lavish praise. Girls’ education was especially difficult because many families believed that girls who handled quills and books would become barren. Mary Lewis had to alternate between sewing/knitting classes and book teaching for the girls. Their fears were allayed when some of her students managed to become mothers. Mary Lewis invested her time and resources into teaching and training girls. Unfortunately she is yet to receive credit as the pioneer of Women’s Education among the Khasis.
Baptisms were initially very slow, not due to Khasi reluctance but because the missionaries expected strict standards of faith and conduct from their converts. Some missiologists have criticized the Welsh for delaying baptisms and testing applicants for weeks and months. In the long run though, perhaps it was good that the early missionaries set such high standards for church membership. Hence the first baptism classes were held five years after Thomas Jones’ arrival in 1841. Two Khasis who requested baptism were Jungkha and his wife. Jungkha taught at Mawsmai while his wife helped at the missionaries’ home. They had a shop which they obediently closed on Sundays and faithfully adhered to a Puritan lifestyle, yet were not accepted in the first batch. The first fruits of the mission were Amor and Rujon, who were baptized on 8 March, 1846. This event marks the formal establishment of the Nongsawlia Presbyterian Church, the ‘mother church’ of all subsequent Presbyterian churches in North East India. The honour of conducting these first baptisms belonged to the slow and steady William Lewis, rather than the brilliant but temperamental Thomas Jones.
The years 1845-47 were the hardest for William and Mary Lewis. Daniel Jones, a missionary who had just arrived, and Captain Lewin, a strong supporter of the mission, contracted malaria on a preaching tour to the Jaintia Hills and both passed away. Daniel Jones’ wife went into premature labour and the child died. Father and stillborn daughter were buried on the same day; Mrs. Jones returned shortly afterwards to Wales, an inconsolable, broken woman. With Dr. Owen Richards’ premature return in 1844, Thomas Jones’ wife and child’s death in 1845, and Jones’ own painful resignation from the Mission in 1847, the Lewises could have succumbed to despair and given up their work.
That the little mission survived despite such heavy losses is tribute to their commitment and tenacity. Two previous attempts by the Baptist Mission had already failed: Krishna Chandra Pal who had come to Pandua in the foothills in 1813 and Alexander B. Lish who had worked at Sohra in the 1830s. (On a side note, the first missionary to the Khasis was not a Westerner but a Bengali scholar from Serampore, Krishna Chandra Pal.) Clearly we would not be observing Thomas Jones Day today if it were not for William and Mary Lewis.
1848 was encouraging as Nabon Sawian became the first Khasi Christian woman. Her dramatic life story, as well as Mary Lewis’ character, was portrayed in the movie produced by the Jingiaseng Samla, KJP Synod Sepngi. She was also the first Khasi woman teacher and served several years at the mission school at Shella. Nabon Sawian is an honoured name in the Presbyterian Church; our Women’s Sunday falls on the third Sunday of July, coinciding with the Sunday on which Nabon was baptized: 16 July, 1848.
William Lewis conducted the first wedding in the community, that of U Luh and Ka Phuh in 1849. He established schools at Shella, Jowai, Lamin and in many War villages near Sohra; he drew up the first rules of order of the nascent Presbyterian Church and appointed Amor as the first Secretary of the Church. After Thomas Jones’s translation of the Gospel of Matthew, William Lewis, assisted by Mary, translated the gospels of Mark, Luke, John and the Acts of the Apostles.
The researcher is struck by the unity of spirit and the close working relationship between William and Mary Lewis, uncommon in that hierarchical, patriarchal age. They mentored Ma Tirasing, who became the first elder of the Nongsawlia Church and the brilliant Larsing Khongwir, who excelled as a teacher, evangelist and who accompanied them to Wales in 1860. Larsing became a sensation, speaking in chapels across Wales. Sadly he took ill and died in 1863, far away from home. He was buried at Chester.
In 1860, after eighteen years of service, the Lewises returned for what they thought was a furlough to Wales but the doctors advised them against returning to India. They spent their later years writing books in Khasi, revising the translation of the New Testament and translating ‘Pilgrim’s Progress’ into Khasi. William Lewis passed away in 1891 and Mary followed him to eternity in 1896. Admittedly, Thomas Jones deserves credit as the pioneer of the Welsh Mission, but it was the Lewises who consolidated and made it the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Church.

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

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world.”

-- Mahatma Gandhi

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Meghalaya's lone Aspirational District

ON Sunday, the Minister for the Department of North Eastern Region (DoNER) stated that a sum of Rs 190 crore would be provided to all the eight North Eastern states to augment healthcare facilities in the states and to deal especially with infectious diseases like Covid. However, this amount would be made available to the 14 aspirational districts that fulfilled 49 key indicators of which healthcare was an important component. This was arrived at by DoNER through a scientifically designed mechanism. Each aspiration district was to focus on improving key indicators.

In Meghalaya only Ri Bhoi district has qualified to be the Aspirational District. One of the key indicators for qualifying to be on this merit list is the proper implementation of Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PMJAY) popularly known as Ayushman Bharat Yojana Scheme. This is the flagship scheme by the Government of India which is essentially a health insurance scheme to cater to the poorest section of society and the vulnerable population. The scheme offers financial protection in case of hospitalization due to medical emergencies.

Rs 190 crore if divided into 14 districts amounts to Rs 13.57 crore each. DoNER Ministry has also given the North Eastern states the option of availing funds for health projects from the Rs 500 crore North East Special Infrastructure Development Scheme (NEISDS). All North Eastern states barring Tripura have applied for these funds. The Aspirational District scheme is meant to help backward districts catch up with their counterparts. It is ironic that just one district from the many backward districts of Meghalaya such as East Jaintia Hills, South and East Garo Hills, has qualified as the Aspirational District. Perhaps the district officials should work harder at meeting the 49 markers so that they can come all come up to level of their more progressive peers. And if Ayushman Bharat is a key indicator then its execution should have been more meticulous.

The Aspiration Districts programme was launched by the Prime Minister in 2018 to quickly and effectively transform these districts. The broad parameters of the programme administered under NITI Aayog are Convergence (of Central & State Schemes), Collaboration (of Central, State level officers & Deputy Commissioners) and Competition among districts driven by a mass movement. The areas of focus are Health & Nutrition, Education, Agriculture & Water Resources, Financial Inclusion & Skill Development, and Basic Infrastructure. NITI Aayog in partnership with the Government of Andhra Pradesh has created a dashboard for monitoring the real-time progress of the districts. Assam has 7 aspirational districts out of a total of 33 districts while all other states have only one each.

Where will Covid take us?

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

meaning.

What about testing?

Unreasoned demands for more testing are a simplistic approach. Even if it was logistically and financially possible to test everyone in India, the yield would not be very useful. Millions would be found to be negative. An unknown but probably large number would be asymptomatic positives. This may be a feel-good thing, because it would tell us that most people with the virus don't get sick and it would also provide a denominator that would indicate a very low fatality rate, i.e., not that much to worry about, compared to compared to TB, malnutrition, suicides etc.

It would be impossible to trace the source of infection of every asymptomatic positive case and would confirm by default, that there is community spread. A better strategy would be to test more in hotspot areas, and

cine for dengue or chikungunya.

Even if a good vaccine is developed, anti-vaxxers will pose a considerable threat. In 2019, the World Health Organization named vaccine hesitancy as one of the top 10 threats to global health. Deaths among unvaccinated persons are steadily rising, worrisome especially for innocent children. Their parents subscribe to fringe theories such as links with 5G and claims that Bill Gates is using vaccine microchips to track humans. The anti-vaccination movement uses social media to amplify its message. Facebook told the British Medical Journal that it has removed hundreds of thousands of posts containing harmful misinformation relating to Covid-19 and a potential vaccine.

Meghalaya may fall victim. The vaccination rate among rural children in the state is 58.5%, lower than the

oids have been given a magical glow, but they are natural hormones occurring in the body and have general immune benefits that cover a wide range of illnesses in a non-specific manner. Steroid drugs can have harmful side effects, both in the short and long term.

The first anti-viral drug manufactured in India for Covid is favipiravir, announced on June 20. It will help those with mild and moderate disease, but not those with severe disease. Each tablet is Rs 103.

For the prescribed 14 day course, the expense will be Rs 11,866. Not many will be able to afford this, and no scheme for poor patients has been announced.

What should Meghalaya do?

A phased unlock is the right strategy, but not to be unduly dragged out. Border checking should be continued for registration and home isolation. Testing at state border areas won't tell us much, because people from containment zones cannot move, and those who are allowed to travel are expected to be asymptomatic anyway. Testing at the entry points can be restricted to those from high case cities and persons with symptoms. Institutional quarantine should be only for those with positive tests and symptoms.

Educational institutions must open, albeit in a phased manner. For schools, first the higher classes, for colleges and universities, only the final year batches. Other batches can join a month later, when precautionary systems are in place. Assembly, convocations and other large campus gatherings must wait. Teaching in shifts is logistically difficult, and will entail double faculty time. Students from the other Northeast states will come to Shillong, but are unlikely to cause a spike in cases.

Tourism can re-open for the post-monsoon season. Because of a general fear, the numbers will be small to begin with, and so crowding at popular spots is unlikely. One USP that can be marketed is the low Covid prevalence. Maybe this is the idea of 'resilient tourism'.

The unlock will be covered by the Rapid Response System. Chief Minister Conrad's idea sparked briefly, but seems to have been shelved. A vigilant and agile system of testing and contact tracing for every positive case can now be put in place.

We will have to live with Covid like we live with TB, malaria and the flu.

India's circle of friends dwindling under Modi

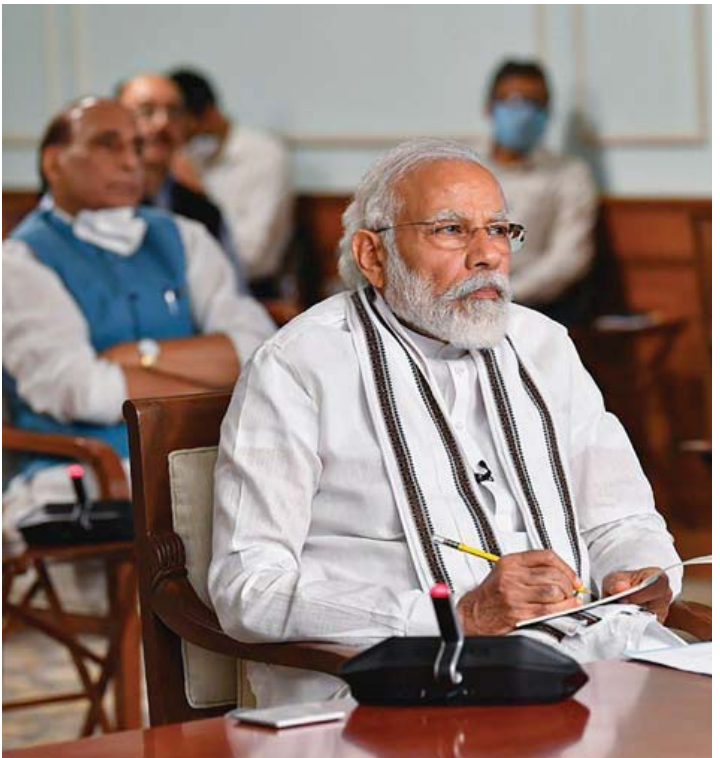
International bodies worried over decline of press freedom

By Amulya Ganguli

About a year ago, external affairs minister S. Jaishankar said that "we are getting to know who our friends really are". He was speaking in the context of the criticism which the government was facing because of the crackdown in Kashmir, agitations against the enacted and proposed citizenship initiatives and the Delhi riots. Since then, the number of India's friends has dwindled. China and Pakistan were never known as pals, but Nepal and Bangladesh were. But, now, Nepal and Bangladesh have joined China and Pakistan in their dislike of India. Nepal has undertaken what has been called cartographic assertion by India by claiming parts of Uttarakhand as its own territory with the Chinese embassy in Kathmandu reportedly playing an "inspiring" role in persuading Prime Minister Khagda Prasad Sharma Oli to sever his country's so-called "roti-beti" (bread and daughter) ties with India, to quote the Indian defence minister Rajnath Singh.

Bangladesh, on its part, has been unhappy over the identification of illegal Muslim immigrants in India as Bangladeshis. They have the press, including violence, threats of violence, or unjustified arrests or prosecutions against journalists, use of criminal libel laws to prosecute social media speech, censorship or site blocking". These are not the words of a friend. Neither is the downgrading of India's status by the International Commission for Religious Freedom which has placed India on a par with Pakistan, China and North Korea while taking note of the Indian home minister's "termite" remark. According to the commission, India has become a country of "particular concern" ever since the BJP's assumption of power at the centre. India, of course, has rejected the accusations as "biased" but its denial is unlikely to be widely accepted.

It isn't only the neighbouring countries, government departments or international commissions which are either ill-disposed towards India or have serious reservations about its functioning. There are also others who harbour



been called "termites" by none other than India's redoubtable home minister, Amit Shah, while a BJP leader wants them to be quashed like kida-makaura (insects). Under the proposed National Register of Citizens (NRC), they are sought to be ferreted out from among the Indian Muslims and deported – if Bangladesh accepts them, which it has refused to do – or interned in what has been dubbed concentration camps by the BJP's critics. Because of these charges, several Bangladeshi dignitaries called off their trips to India. They included both the foreign minister, A.K. Abdul Momin, and home minister, Asaduzzaman Khan. More recently, Bangladesh has edged closer to China with 97 per cent of its exports securing tariff exemptions in China. Both Nepal and Bangladesh have maintained a deafening silence on the latest border row between India and China. Little wonder that the maverick BJP M.P., Subramanian Swamy, favours a "reset" of India's foreign policy.

India is now surrounded on its north, west and east by unfriendly neighbours – Pakistan, China, Nepal and Bangladesh – some of whom are openly inimical. Unlike these countries, the US is a friend. But the American state department has spoken of violence and discrimination against minorities in India. It has referred to "significant human rights issues including unlawful and arbitrary killings; torture by prison officials ... and harsh and life-threatening prison conditions". It has also expressed concern over "political prisoners in certain states; restrictions of freedom of expression and



definitely all contacts.

Up to this point we are talking about RT-PCR, finding out if a person has the virus and can be a spreader. Antibody testing has a different purpose. Antibodies to Covid appear 6-12 days after infection and merely show that a person was exposed. It has little role in treatment.

Antibody testing is a public health surveillance tool that tells us about prevalence in the community and will influence later policies and decisions about control programs, such as vaccination, drug requirements, treatment protocols and public awareness.

Vaccines

Hope and hype do not help the cause. It takes at least a decade to develop a vaccine. Even though Nipah vaccine efforts got an early start, the vaccine is still years away. Compressing the time frame is fraught with complications. The fastest vaccine was developed in 4 years, for mumps in 1967. MERS appeared in 2012, but intense work on a vaccine is still in progress. Whether a vaccine will come at all is not a given. In spite of 30 years work, there is no effective vaccine for HIV. Best efforts have yielded no vac-

all-India average. A published survey on vaccine-hesitation, by the Indian Institute of Public Health, Shillong in 2018, reported a multi-factorial situation. While many parents were worried about efficacy and side effects, there were cultural and religious reasons also. Like with Aadhar, there is some distrust of government schemes. Biometrics is considered by some to be anti-Christ.

Medical officers have reported refusals based on religious grounds, and one government doctor said that he had invited religious leaders for a discussion, but nobody showed up. In the course of a nutrition project conducted by MLCU, it was found that in one village, not a single child had been immunized because of warnings from a pastor.

Drugs

Hydroxychloroquine has been virtually abandoned, studies on ivermectin have been discredited. Plasma transfusions from infected patients do help but will never be available on a large scale. Plasma is the golden yellow sticky fluid that oozes from healing wounds, the liquid residue when the red blood cells are removed. It contains antibodies. Ster-

TO THE EDITOR

No crowding at Iewduh please!

Editor,

Keeping in view the economic and financial hardship that the three months lockdown has inflicted on the shopkeepers in Iewduh, the decision of the State Government to partially reopen the market may not be irrational thinking. After all Iewduh is "ka piang ja" (the rice plate) of thousands of people of Meghalaya who are dependent on it for their livelihoods. The decision of the Government to allow only 30-33% of shops to reopen on a rotational basis every day may perhaps be on trial basis to observe if shopkeepers as well as customers strictly abide by health protocols and standard operating procedures.

What needs emphasis here is the matter concerning hawkers. There is no denying that Iewduh wears a highly congested look in normal times. Besides the shops, hawkers are seen occupying every nook and corner, lanes and by-lanes they can possibly find. They would simply spread their wares at any place they find, making it difficult for shoppers to walk and to find their feet. Today, we cannot

afford such a congestion. Thus, while the State Government has agreed to reopen the market partially by numbering shops that would be allowed to open on specified days, it becomes even more important to check that no hawkers should spread their wares. Iewduh is known for its congestion and is likely to get back to that status quo if unchecked. At the risk of facing the wrath of the hawkers, I wish to clarify that I have no personal grudge against them. In fact I had always advocated for a designated space to be provided for the hawkers so that they can trade and do business without being interrupted and also without causing inconvenience to the general public. Today, keeping health in consideration the hawkers will have to be stopped from doing business at Iewduh and only shops with proper doors/shutters should be allowed to operate.

Thus, as much as the reopening of the market is desired it is expected of the people to treat this reopening as a way to discipline themselves into citizens that care about others and most importantly about

themselves. Therefore the state government and the Syiem of Myliem must not only be vigilant but must be very strict and stern with violators, be it the shopkeepers or the customers themselves.

It is commendable that the DC, East Khasi Hills has issued an order that any shopkeeper flouting the odd-even number system would result in their shops being closed down for good as well as strict action would be taken against them. With the same severity shoppers who fail to follow the COVID-19 protocols should equally be punished. The state that we are in today does not permit us to be callous and casual about our health. After all, we are responsible for our health as well as the health of our fellow beings.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Boycotting Chinese Products

Editor,

Chinese aggression at the LAC in which 20 Indian army personnel were killed has aroused fierce anger in Indians. People's anger was clearly evident in a survey that shows

that a majority of Indians are in favour of boycotting Chinese products. The boycott Chinese products movement gained strength at a time when the government is promoting a campaign to make the country self-reliant under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat Mission. 87% of the respondents in the survey said that they were ready to boycott all Chinese products. "Boycott China" is a recurring theme in India. If China has to be dealt with, then India needs to attack its economy. While the Chinese attempts of incursion in Ladakh can be handled by the army, the Chinese invasion in India can be dealt with only with the cooperation of the general public. This sentiment was aroused in India due to the attitude of the Chinese administration. During the 2017 Doklam standoff too, an antagonistic atmosphere towards China had been created. However, it is not easy to overcome India's addiction to Chinese goods.

There is no denying that China has farsightedness and the Chinese people are hardworking. The efficiency of China's administrative system must

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Via email

"A lot of people do not muster the courage to live their dreams because they are afraid to die."

--- Barbara Sher

The Shillong Times

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CM-cum-party chief predicament

MEGHALAYA Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, had to rush to fire-fight in Manipur after four NPP MLAs led by former DGP of Manipur, Y Joykumar Singh raised the banner of revolt against the BJP-led Biren Singh Government. The chairperson, North East Democratic Alliance (NEDA) Dr Himanta Biswa Sarma too had to rush to Manipur at the directive of Home Minister Amit Shah to calm tempers there even as three BJP MLAs also decided to quit the coalition government and the Party. Dr Biswa Sarma has been on the frontline fighting Covid 19 in his state – Assam but that duty had to be shelved, because, evidently party matters are more pressing than the pandemic. Similar is the case with Conrad Sangma.

That a senior politician like Y Joykumar Singh the NPP MLA and Deputy Chief Minister of Manipur broke away from the NDA coalition shows that the Biren Singh Government was sidelining him and his colleagues and they felt politically sterile. That Party Chief Conrad Sangma endorsed the stand of the 4 NPP MLAs to leave the Biren Singh led Government, “in the interest of the people,” and that he does not see their intent of joining the Congress Party as problematic shows that the NPP is a Party bereft of ideology and is guided purely by opportunistic goals to be in power with whichever party can make it to the power grid. Considering that the NPP and Congress are arch rivals in Meghalaya, a modicum of political decency would have made it untenable for the NPP MLAs in Manipur to even consider aligning with the Congress Party there. But that’s politics at its basest.

Currently the NPP has 5 MLAs in Arunachal Pradesh, 4 in Manipur, 20 in Meghalaya and 2 in Nagaland. Governments in the North Eastern states are congenitally shaky because of the coalition arrangements and the pressures and pulls for favours, businesses and power. Also, governments in the region mimic one another. In Arunachal Pradesh the NPP had offered unconditional support to the BJP-led Government from the outside while in Nagaland the NPP has merged with the Nagaland Democratic Peoples’ Party (NDPP). NPP’s stand is therefore fluid. It is everything to everyone. So what happens if the NPP encounters problems in Arunachal Pradesh or Nagaland? Will Conrad Sangma leave his work as CM and go fire-fighting in these states? The much maligned Congress Party had in the very least followed the protocol of one man, one post so that people holding ministerial positions are not burdened with running the Party. But the NPP is yet to emerge from its dynastic format. Why blame only the Congress?

Dr Jekyll or Mr Hyde?

Both. Indeed, India-China relations are like a kaleidoscope of good and evil. The duplicity of human nature or in geo-strategic terms of nations who poker-face show no emotions even as one plans strategy, defiantly standing one’s ground and gambling on a winning hand. Both New Delhi and Beijing are doing just that, betting, with the underwritten message: Don’t mess with me.

The brutal assault in Galwan Valley 15-16 June leaving 20 dead, the biggest confrontation between the two militaries after their 1967 clashes in Nathu La has brought India and China to the brink of a shooting war. Worse, it happened post rapprochement of Chinese incursions in Eastern Ladakh since 5 May and was “pre-meditated and planned” with the connivance of China’s senior leadership, thereby marking a decisive change in India’s long standing border management policy to maintain “peace and tranquility” along the 3,488-km long Line of Actual Control (LAC).

Predictably, even as India and China accuse each other of violations, till date the LAC remains disputed and undemarcated, yet is not considered a ‘hot border’ like between India and Pakistan. Moreover, both countries have so far avoided situations that could lead to an armed confrontation. Yet, the Galwan skirmish has increased unease as India has recorded ‘transgressions’ also in Pangong Tso Lake, Trig Heights, Burtse and Doletango area.

Questionably, does India have the diplomacy to counter China’s drive for supremacy in the region? Can it defuse this? What options does it have on the table?

And do the present assertive trends of Indian foreign policy portend the likelihood of an aggressive outcome?

Interestingly, barring 1962, when the neighbours went to war over their disputed boundary, not a single bullet has been fired across the Sino-Indian border since 1975. In the intervening period, there have been skirmishes and face-offs. But they were all peacefully resolved including the 2017, 73-days Doklam stand-off which had sparked disquieting speculation about the propinquity of a conflict between the two Asian giants and the possibility of destabilizing the sub-

Chinese checkers in Ladakh

Salami slicing tactics fail

By Poonam I Kaushish

continent and region.

Strategists say the stand-off is connected to India’s construction activities, including building a road from Dharchuk via Shyok to Daulat Beg Oldie, which allows C-130J aircraft to land, boosting strategic airlift capabilities. Other projects ensure India has tactical movement between battlefields like DBO and Pangong Tso. Rohtang Tunnel gives strategic mobility to move troops between Punjab to Ladakh. India is enhancing access for its forces to Karakoram highway, strategically important for Pakistan and China which is being opposed by Beijing.

India needs to navigate these turbulent waters with measured and calibrated response. Galwan underscores Beijing’s seriousness about demarcating the Indo-Chinese border but wants to keep the situation ambiguous to enable its salami slicing tactics to incrementally grab territory. As a first step, New Delhi has ‘attacked’ economically. It has changed the approval route for Chinese investments to prevent its predatory policies. With social media screaming ‘Say-no-to-Chinese-goods’.

Sceptics wonder whether future India-China ties will be smooth as border tensions have risen over the past decades, yet economic relations are unbalanced with a massive trade deficit against India. On one hand, New Delhi wants to position itself as an alternative destination for global value chains. On the other, there is awareness of the need for continued Chinese investment flows and the importance of not getting into a hostile fracas with a stronger neighbour. Hence, tensions between these competing and contradictory imperatives would need to be managed as the stakes for the neighbours are higher and more complex now.

Undeniably, one has no illusions about Sino-Indian complex ties. Certainly, China’s hegemonic ambitions will remain a serious problem, requiring engagement and hedging. There will be pressure to not go back to business as usual after this. New Delhi may also not be able to afford to continue its ambivalent and uncommitted foreign policy. There is an even a bigger question about the rationale behind China’s provocative actions.

Therefore, one needs to keep its relation on track while furthering its national interest. For this one needs a new template as the underlying realities have changed. Beijing is using the same language it used against India while justifying its 1962 incursions into India. The 1962 attack was to insult Nehru while the 2020 attack is to discredit Modi.

Given the Chinese habit of exacerbating border tensions, a shadow of uncertainty hangs as neither knows where the LAC is, as both countries have differing perception about the border. But, as Galwan shows New Delhi can no longer be arm-twisted, as in 1962.

Undoubtedly, China is using Article 370 abrogation as a Trojan horse to forward its own stakes in Ladakh as it would impact its China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project. Two, it sees ‘red’ on India’s new map depicting Gilgit-Baltistan and Aksai China within the Ladakh boundary. Now Ladakh like Arunachal could fully integrate into India and stymie its negotiations on the boundary issue. Four, Beijing is activating its proxy regime in Nepal to further needle India.

True, even as South Block dubs Galwan as temporary duration face-offs, China’s move appears clandestine smacking of it unfolding a devious game-plan against India. Consequently, it remains to be seen if this attack will be unlike Depsang in 2013, Chumur in 2014 and Doklam in 2017 that momentarily impacted India-China ties.

What next? A shadow of uncertainty hangs. New Delhi needs diplomatic, economic and military deterrents in place to counter Beijing’s moves. It immediately needs to deal with a boundary that remains un-demarcated, undelineated and disputed over seven decades with a neighbour who periodically flexes muscle. Hence, New Delhi needs to reset its China policy by attuning to the changed ground reality and arriving at an agreed definition of the LAC.

At this critical juncture India does not have many options. One way is to settle the boundary, which presently seems unlikely. The Chinese Army wanted to put India on the backfoot, to maintain psychological dominance in the region and break away on a comparatively higher note. India needs to balance the scales and defeat the

Chinese bully at its own game by creating appropriate defence. It needs to stay aggressive. It's only when there is fear of retaliation that China will stop taking India for granted. ‘Enough’.

On its part, New Delhi has clarified the LAC as a possible way to stabilise its frontiers with China on a number of occasions. Initially, the two sides agreed to it, but after exchanging maps for the middle sector, the least contentious of the three sectors in the LAC, the Chinese showed no interest.

Thus, unless there is a comprehensive breakthrough, Indian and Chinese soldiers are destined, for now, to try to stare each other out at the LAC. Having been used to browbeating the Indian army in the past, the PLA is perhaps surprised that India 2020 is a far cry from India 1962 in terms of its swift counter build-up and firmness. We need to expand these capabilities further.

Today, a chill has set in Indo-China ties. Deep mistrust and lack of confidence is apparent. Yet the two have not rejected dialogue, even when it is no more than a repetition of known positions. New Delhi cannot afford to take any chances with what constitutes India’s national security and strategic interests and must pursue them doggedly.

Modi realizes only too well that in today’s geo-strategic political reality, pragmatism dictates real politics. There are no shortcuts. New Delhi needs an all-encompassing and multi-pronged strategy to deal with Beijing even as it wants durable peace though this alone cannot guarantee non-escalation.

New Delhi’s new assertiveness would need all the wisdom, maturity and restraint to ensure that it remains in control of the Indo-China script. Certainly, in this zero sum game the muscle-flexing and one-upmanship will continue till trust is built. In the long-term India-China relations will be determined by India’s strategic goals and objectives vis-à-vis the evolving regional and global security environment.

Clearly, even as China wants to create a ‘new normal’, tough responses to provocations and clear red zones are the best guarantee of peace in the sub-Continent. An intoxicating mix of muscular diplomacy and ruthlessness masked in velvet gloves. By changing the rules of the game, India has spelt out: It takes two to tango! ---- INFA

It takes darkness to see the stars again

By Munmun Majumdar

The similarities in facts and fiction aren’t generally as obvious as in the case of 2011 Hollywood film Contagion — almost like a chronicle of a pandemic foretold. What is different, though, is the availability and use of sophisticated technologies that in many ways are proving to be critical in combating the Novel Coronavirus. The COVID-19 has led to reliance on communication technology promoting an exponential rise in pervasive computing like never before. At the same time the pandemic is a grim reminder that the world continues to face existential threats that knows no borders causing loss of lives, social disruptions, economy and exposed the vulnerability of countries’ healthcare systems and social infrastructure.

When the WHO declared COVID -19 a global pandemic, the response of the governments all over the world was to prevent the spread of the disease by imposing restrictions on travel and movement of people. Most countries went into lock down. Governments and societies all over the world became desperate in seeking ways to work on strengthening their health infrastructure, business continuity plans etc. The nature of COVID-19 reinforced the need to rely on new technologies to build flexible and dynamic models to respond. This is the first pandemic in human history where technology and social media are being used on a massive scale to keep people safe, productive and connected while being physically apart. This paradigm shift will affect not simply the way business, production, distribution or consumption are conducted but every aspect of life.

The onset of the Fourth industrial revolution had already heralded drastic technological changes profoundly transforming economics, societies, national security and other areas. According to the frequently quoted Davos report, 65% of primary school children entering school today will end up working in entirely new jobs which do not exist now. It also foresaw that most of these jobs will be highly complex and interrelated. Hence, the implications extended much beyond better computers linked to expansive networks to encompass genetic engineering, 3D printing, renewable energy, and other path breaking technologies. The COVID-19 pandemic has served as a catalyst, and speeded up this all-encompassing revolution that was already moving at an exponential speed.

The accelerated digitalization of many business and service, including teleworking and video conferencing systems in and out of workplace, access to health care, education, access to essential goods and services etc. are pointers to this new development.

Communication technology has facilitated the ability to work from home, have homebased learning, maintain social bonds and even hold a virtual Royal Hospital Chelsea flower show etc. At a time of severe crunch of healthcare professionals and the risk of people-to-people contact, autonomous vehicles are proving to be of great utility in delivering essential goods like medicines and food items. Robots are being deployed as vending machines, dispensing hand sanitizers, performing thermal imaging and so on. In some of the severely affected areas, where humans were at a risk of catching the virus, drones came to the rescue transporting both medical equipment and patient samples, saving time and enhancing the speed of deliveries. Similarly, tools that use Artificial Intelligence are being employed to detect traces of the virus. And the Mobile epidemic map enables more people to view epidemic information conveniently and in real-time on portable devices. A good instance of leveraging technology is the AarogyaSetu, a mobile app which uses GPS and Blue

Tooth to help citizens identify their risk of contracting the novel coronavirus and provides information to effectively track patients and those they come in contact with.

Similarly, educational institutions opted for online teaching and learning as a mode of pedagogy. Conducting Conferences, Webinar workshops, seminars were made possible from the safety of one’s own home. Flexible arrangements and teleworking are already mandated by the ongoing pandemic and global access to online learning as a medium made it possible to keep learning as an emergency measure.

Online learning, which is a version of distance education, is based on the premise that education should be all-inclusive and lifelong. It believes in the values of equity, access and quality. However, according to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) 53.6% of world population have access to the Internet. This implies that many are being left behind from the virtual lectures, sharing of research and study material over virtual conferencing tools. As a matter of fact, these technology tools whether used for commerce, education or to make digital payments etc., relies on internet availability and access to these tools will depend on whether the people have the required facilities to do so.

The outbreak has also hastened the transition to e-commerce and accelerated the use of artificial intelligence and robotics and people are showing more interest in food safety and health. Similarly, social media and messaging platforms has helped societies stay resilient. Simultaneously, the dissemination of hate speech, conspiracies, and dangerous medical misinformation that undermine societies from within is on the rise. There has been a huge spike in phishing worldwide and Governments are having to face various challenges in communicating public health guidelines to citizens, including information dissemination and combatting the COVID-19 infodemic.

Certainly, the use of technology whether it be the use of Trace Together for contact tracing, technology for home-based learning, video calls for work from home, using e-commerce apps to keep their businesses alive, in creating new ways to connect citizens to healthcare, has been positive as we see it happening already. Even though the COVID-19 has exposed human fragility, along with the downside of an interconnected world, being equipped with technological advancements has enabled mankind to respond to the crisis better than any past pandemic. However, what cannot be undermined is that the measures to curb the spread of the virus based on technology often infringe upon personal choice and privacy. For example, to mitigate the epidemic and accurately scan people diagnosed with the virus, countries across the globe are tracking smartphone data and technology such as the rings and bracelets that are connected to the Cloud Minds AI platform can monitor all changes in the body. Utilizing sophisticated technologies and expansive surveillance network such as the use of facial and iris recognition solutions integrated with infra-red thermometers for screening for public good marks a big leap in the technology sector at the same time it is essential to recognize that these measures also pervade the private domain. What is of utmost concern is that once the States establish complete control of the user data, will it use it for intrusive surveillance or Bio-surveillance? Much will depend on how government policies are shaped, as well as, on how people respond. While there are a couple of promising trials going on which the world hopes for the recovery, an added challenge is to address how technology will be deployed in future that will define a new tomorrow.

The writer is Professor, Dept of Political Science, North-Eastern Hill University Shillong

TO THE EDITOR

Plight of hawkers

Editor,
The State Govt. under the leadership of Mr P. Tynsong has demonstrated that it is a Government of the rich. Recently in his briefing to the media, Mr Tynsong said only the people who have shops (rich traders) can open. Mr. Deputy CM are hawkers not hungry? Do hawkers don’t have children and family to feed? Under your leadership, basic rights given by the Constitution of India are denied. Mr. CM doesn’t want to take the blame and is disguising himself. As of now he is busy with the politics of horse-trading with the BJP his affiliated friend in Manipur. Our CM unlike other CMs, doesn’t take Covid-19 seriously. If he is serious, why should he busy himself with the political games in Manipur? For our CM politics is more important than the rise of covid patients. The Deputy

CM becomes the mouthpiece of our CM, as if our CM is abroad. This Govt. plays the blame game tactic to gain the trust and confidence of the public. But Sirs the citizens of Meghalaya are mostly poor and live from hand to mouth. Please don’t consider Meghalaya to comprise of only the rich and well to do. When the Government lacks leadership, chaos and mayhem follow. Mr Tynsong you need to think a million times and provide answers to the poor and the downtrodden of our society.
Yours, etc.
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong - 2

NEIGRIHMS should not fall from grace

Editor,
A letter of grievance captioned, “NEIGRIHMS nurses’ grievance & clarification” (ST, June 22, 2020) by the nurses of the hospital is uncalled for. It

clearly shows the desperation of the nurses who have to attend to Covid patients risking their lives. What is unfortunate is that the Hospital management is seemingly apathetic so far as the safety and welfare measures of the health workers are concerned. The letter squarely blames the administration for being unorganized, unprepared and unsystematic in handling Covid cases.

Well, all segments of the hospital should function as a family. Any shortcomings and misunderstanding in the departments should be sorted out internally by the administrative authorities without much delay. Therefore, it always calls for the management to be “extra alert”. No situation would arise that might compel any section/department to come out in public with grievances. This is a totally disgraceful and unhealthy development. The citizens of the Northeast sincerely wish NEIGRIHMS good

health. The hospital should not fall from grace at any cost.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Spiralling Covid cases

Editor,
The other day the World Health Organization’s Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus became philosophical while addressing the Dubai virtual health forum. He said, “We cannot defeat the pandemic with a divided world.” Yes, it is true that we cannot achieve anything if we are disorganized. With the Covid-19 pandemic outbreak in China, there also broke out strong anti-China feelings for the obvious reason that China had not shared the precious information on the Covid-19 pandemic. Ghebreyesus said, “the greatest threat facing the world is not the virus itself, which has now killed over 471,000 people and infected

nearly nine million worldwide, but the lack of global solidarity and global leadership.”

Ghebreyesus was serious and also spoke about the crisis the world economy is facing. He said, “We know that the pandemic is much more than a health crisis, it is an economic crisis, a social crisis and in many countries a political crisis. Its effects will be felt for decades to come.” Right now the world economy is in dire straits, and people are facing acute shortage of food. India is going to be hit most by the pandemic.

Now the WHO has sent out a fresh warning on Monday over the dangers of the new Covid-19 in the light of numerous European countries further easing their lockdown restrictions. It may be pertinent to note that coronavirus positive cases around the world are rising especially in Latin America with Brazil now registering over 50,000 deaths. Discomforting news

is that Australia is again in the grip of second wave of Covid-19 attack.

Unfortunately, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro has started downplaying the coronavirus pandemic virulence. He compared the virus to ‘a little flu’ and argued that the economic impact of shutdowns is often worse than the virus itself. It may be remembered that Brazil is the second worst-affected country by the Covid-19 pandemic after the US. It is a country that has been hit hard by political infighting, and therefore it lacked a unified policy to handle the virus.

As Ghebreyesus pointed out, we cannot defeat this pandemic with a divided world. So, there should be a consensus among countries of the world to help each other by sharing everything especially exclusive information on the pandemic. Such a unified and cooperating world can easily beat the pandemic.

Yours etc.,
TK Nandanam,
Vanail

“Preemptive war is what Israel did in ‘67 with Arab armies on its borders.”

— Molly Ivins

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 25, 2020

Tense subcontinent

THREE fronts have surfaced simultaneously to embarrass India in a worsening security environment in the subcontinent. After China killed several Indian soldiers in a brutal nocturnal hit in sub-zero temperatures in Ladakh, top military level discussions are going on to defuse the situation. Nepal changed its map and came from behind to stop India from carrying out an embankment work in Bihar. Pakistan is waiting in the wings to hurt India at every turn. Terrorist offensives have seen a new phase in Kashmir and a CRPF camp has been targeted in Pulwama, in an attempted repeat of Uri.

Defence minister Rajnath Singh is in Russia, among other engagements, to expedite defence purchases and deliveries like Sukhoi, MiG29s, S-400 missile systems etc. Alongside, external affairs minister S Jaishankar addressed a Russia-India-China trilateral via video mode, stressing on the need for nations to follow the ethos of global relations. Words mean little in these critical times. This is time for firm stands.

Admittedly, there is a need for a serious rethink on India's present close ties with China and action could follow at multiple levels spanning diplomacy and trade. At the same time, a different approach towards Nepal might be in order. If Nepal has genuine grievances, they must be addressed and a confrontation avoided. There is reason to invest more in India's relations with Nepal as bilateral engagements remain strong and fraternal feelings are age-old; unlike China. The present government in Nepal, headed by Sharma Oli, might even be a passing phase. His closeness to the Chinese leadership is well-known. Reports are also that China is using him to grab parts of Nepalese territory; something that China keeps doing with all its neighbours all the time.

Pakistan is not in a fighting mood with India now, thanks also to the apparent interest for peace on the part of prime minister Imran Khan. Pakistan's military is not comfortable with this scenario, and is watching the unfolding situation in the subcontinent in the context of the confrontations by China and Nepal with India. Notably, Afghanistan too is not as close to India now as it had been for ages.

Even Bangladesh is being wooed by China. Since 2015, Bangladesh is China's top trading partner, a position that India has lost. Billions in Chinese funds are being invested in Bangladesh in bridges and power projects. Sri Lanka was wooed in a similar manner by China and it alienated Colombo from India in the backdrop of the LTTE menace there. Time for India to play its cards with great care, alert, and more of decisiveness.

Foreign policy was the moot rhetoric of Modi's campaign in the 2019 Lok Sabha polls. He grandiloquently emphasised on it and went hammer and tongs to ostensibly pursue it. Domestic issues were upstaged. He banked on the Pulwama terror attack and subsequent retaliation towards Pakistan through the Balakot airstrikes. In the long run, he was crowned as the victor. And now, this rhetoric has failed India as some of its hostile neighbours are asserting their supremacy over us.

Apart from the Ladakh standoff, India's relations with Nepal have hit a low ebb. It has also consciously or subconsciously unfriended a friend in need like Bangladesh.

There are serious loopholes in our foreign policy and they should be culled out.

The Indian road in the Himalayas, connecting to the border with China, at the Lipulekh pass was not built overnight and definitely being monitored by the Nepal government. The Lipulekh pass link road also cuts across Kalapani, an area which lies on the easternmost corner of Uttarakhand's Pithoragarh district. Both India and Nepal lay claim to Kalapani. But Kathmandu raised the issue officially and publicly in November last year when India announced its new political map after the abrogation of Article 370. The new Indian map depicted Kalapani as part of Pithoragarh district. The issue made common cause with Nepal's pent-up anger against India and the hashtag #BackOffIndia trended on social media.

Precisely, India touched Nepal's raw nerve in 2015 when it extended implicit support for the blockade on the landlocked country. The country, with one of the world's youngest populations, treated it as sheer betrayal and indulged in India bashing. India took a very wrong step in supporting the blockade and was seen as 'playing the big brother'.

Nepal might not be a very strong country to challenge India's might. But exploiting its weakness is not the way because we are already surrounded by neighbours inimical to our well-being. And expecting overnight assistance from a superpower like US is unrealistic.

India should not unfriend its old allies

By Shilajit Kar Bhowmik

US always stood by Pakistan during wars and it is substantiated by history.

China is now fishing in Nepal's waters. It wants to exploit our problem by expanding its suzerainty over the country which we have snubbed as a 'puny little brother'. To be precise, it occupied and annexed Tibet in 1950. It was squeezed between India and China, thus, forming a barrier. But this barrier was removed after China annexed Tibet. Hence, India's frontiers were endangered as China came closer to it. This was the beginning of India-China hostilities which was ignored by Nehru in all his impracticalities.

China is using the same old idea. As soon as we assert our hegemony over a neighbour perceived to be weak, it takes advantage. It exploits our neighbour's frustration and isolates us.

The ruling parties of China and Nepal also held a virtual meeting in mid-June during which they discussed the current political situation and shared experiences mutually on running the party and government. The meeting synchronised with the Indo-Chinese border standoff and increasing tension between India and Nepal. Thus, the meeting was well-timed and aimed at dealing India a blow.

PM Modi is always publicised as a strong, decisive and formidable leader who is always tough against his foes. Indeed, he is so. But that toughness is demonstrated against his political rivals who pose a threat towards his party and power. And it was a pill-sweetening act. Nevertheless, the masses of Bangladesh are foaming at the mouth. In February this year, protest marches were staged in the country against CAA, NRC and Modi. The Bangladesh Foreign Minister A K Abdul Momen had to say, "We are a political government. We were elected by people's votes. India should not do anything so that we have to answer people for their actions." A wound was inflicted on Bangladesh's psyche when Abrar Fahad, a student of Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) was tortured and killed allegedly by members of Awami League's student's wing last year. The reason? Fahad had posted on Facebook criticizing

Bangladesh's agreement with India allowing us to withdraw water from Feni river for Sabroom in South Tripura. The brutal murder sent shock waves across the country with several students of different universities holding demonstrations on their respective campuses and demanding exemplary punishment for the killers. Thus, we can easily gauge how sensitive our relations with Bangladesh have become in the past few years.

A leading businessman of Tripura shared his experiences in Bangladeshi trains with this writer. According to him, when a Bangladeshi used to bump into an individual from Tripura, he used to leave his seat for the person considered to be a special guest. The Bangladeshi would say to the person from Tripura, "You are not only our guest. You are a beloved friend. Please, have a seat." But such cordialities have slipped into the past. Presently, they are quite indifferent when they learn about our nationality. This is what the businessman, who is a regular visitor to the neighbouring country for professional matters has stated.

China is now wooing Bangladesh as well. It has provided a huge boost to the country by announcing tariff exemption for 97 per cent of Bangladeshi products with effect from July 1. The announcement was made in June, a month after Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina and Chinese President Xi Jinping had a discussion to upgrade their bilateral relations during Covid-19. Naturally, our neighbours need an alternative if India continues to bully them unnecessarily.

In our personal lives too we must take old friends into confidence in the first place whenever we face problems. Because the attitude of old friends is time-tested and this compels our reliance. This is not to suggest closing ourselves to the possibility of making new friends. But we should not trust the new ones overnight because we are unfamiliar with their principles and policies.

Therefore, India should renew its old ties with friends like Bangladesh and Nepal along with continuance with the US. That would keep us safe and secure.

Rule of law index

Rank under pandemic

By Dr S. Saraswathi

The Supreme Court has asked the government to treat a writ petition filed in the court seeking setting up of expert panels to find ways of enhancing India's rank in the Rule of Law Index as a "representation" and respond within six months. For, it is not a judicial issue, but a matter for government consideration.

In the Rule of Law Index 2020 prepared by the World Justice Project (WJP), India is given 69th rank among 128 countries and jurisdictions – not even among first half in the list. WJP is an independent, multi-disciplinary organisation working for promoting the Rule of Law (ROL) worldwide. It is a quantitative assessment tool designed to provide a detailed and comprehensive picture of the extent to which those who govern various countries are bound to act according to laws and regulations and prescribed procedures and adhere to the rule of law in practice. An independent judiciary, individual freedoms, and free press are considered essential ingredients of ROL. Such an index with inputs from several countries regarding their practices can be a valuable guide to advance in the Rule of Law.

Effective Rule of Law prevents arbitrary decisions, and can reduce corruption and protect people from injustices. Whether it can combat poverty as claimed by its advocates may be disputed by welfare theorists. But, it is to be accepted as the foundation for justice, equal opportunity and peace underpinning development, and fundamental rights for all citizens. It guarantees an accountable government that holds law as supreme.

Rule of Law is being discussed from the days of Plato and Aristotle. As a political concept, it can be traced to 16th century Britain as a right of subjects against the divine right of kings. Its originator was Sir Edward Coke, Chief Justice in the reign of James I. To John Locke, freedom in society means being subject only to laws made by a legislature that apply to everyone equally. British jurist AV Dicey popularised the concept of Rule of Law as the corner-stone of parliamentary democracy. No man is punishable or can be lawfully made to suffer in body or goods except for distinct breach of law, and no man is above law.

In 2006, eight sub-rules comprising ROL were added by Lord Bingham in the House of Lords. Besides holding law as supreme, equal and accessible, he included protection of essential and basic human rights, and compliance with the obligations of international law. He mentions that the executive must use powers given to them reasonably in good faith or proper purpose, and must not exceed the limits.

WJP defines the Rule of Law as a system in which following four universal principles are ingrained – accountability of government and its officials and agents under the law; clear, publicised, stable and fair laws that protect fundamental rights including security of persons and property; accessible, efficient and fair process by which laws are enacted, administered, and enforced; and delivery of justice by competent, ethical, and independent representatives and neutrals in sufficient number and having adequate resources and reflecting the make-up of the communities they serve.

Present day rulers may not be claiming any divine right, but may have the power to misuse, bend and misinterpret laws. The powerful in the government and opposition may tend to take law in their hands for personal/group advantage, and

apply them selectively.

Human rights, equality, transparency, participation and cooperation may suffer due to the exigencies of situations. There are myriad ways in which well meaning laws may be violated in practice. Individual cases of violations can be rectified, but deliberate bending of rules, manipulations in procedures, constant use of loopholes and abuse of discretionary powers make a mockery of the ROL.

Our country is governed by laws, legally established institutions, lawfully framed procedures, and well laid administrative regulations that are definite, publicised and common to all. Rulers are also subject to law and not above. Rule of Law is one of the basic features of the Constitution and an integral part of the principles of governance. Independent judiciary is the hallmark of the ROL.

Under Rule of Law, all members of a society, including the governing group, are considered equally subject to existing law of the land the contents and processes of which are publicly disclosed. Equality and openness are two essential characteristics of the Rule of Law. The term is closely associated with "constitutionalism" – a political situation and not any specific law.

ROL is not just a weapon against unquestionable State domination or against the whims and fancies of the ruling groups; it is also a shield protecting the civil society. It has grown in various forms apart from legal and procedural codes like permitting judicial activism, public interest litigation, suo moto judicial intervention on press reports and so on thus making justice more easily available and accessible to the citizens.

WJP index is based on the results of a survey of over 130,000 households and 4,000 legal practitioners and experts to measure how the Rule of Law is perceived and experienced worldwide. Countries covered have different political and juridical systems, economic standing, ethnic-social characteristics, historical background, population complexion, and domestic and international problems. But, these are not taken into account in the preparation of the index as in any such global index which goes by scores given on the specific indicators used in the project.

Denmark, Norway, Finland, Sweden, Netherlands, Germany, New Zealand, Austria, Canada, and Estonia are the top 10 and Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Bolivia, Afghanistan, Mauritania, Cameroon, Egypt, Democratic Republic of Congo, Cambodia, and Venezuela are the bottom 10 countries in the index reporting 2019 record. Noteworthy is the removal of the US from top 20 and Spain getting elevation. France declined from 17 to 20 in rank. The UK stands at rank 13.

On the whole, the global trend is found to be declining in the past three years. Last year, the fall was in fundamental rights, absence of corruption, and particularly on constraints on governmental power. Civil justice shows most positive movement over previous year. Regulatory enforcement has improved.

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, nations undergo crisis after crisis not only in health sphere, but in many human activities, necessitating quick decisions and prompt actions. Emergency situations do not wait for normal decision-making processes. The government may have to have powers to deal with extraordinary difficulties with extraordinary powers. –INFA(The writer is Former Director, ICSSR, New Delhi)

TO THE EDITOR

Anti-poor stance of Govt

Editor,

It is a preposterous measure that the government is taking by increasing fuel prices arbitrarily. In the last few weeks we have seen fuel prices keep rising endlessly. When the international crude oil price is tumbling down, our fuel prices in India keep rising on a daily basis. This is purely for the benefit of the government both central and state. It is true that the government needs more money during these days of the epidemic, but this singular measure is an indirect attack on the poor. We all know that when fuel prices increase, the poor citizens have to pay more for their journey fares. The lockdown measure put out by the government has already limited the number of passengers which results in doubling of fares. Above this, the rise in fuel price will aggravate the situation further. The prices of commodities will keep surging and how will a daily wage cope with this. To make things worse, many poor people today are without jobs or means of income. The rise in the prices of food articles will definitely lead to deprivation and hunger for the poor people. We will not be surprised to know that more and more poor people

will die of starvation. Why does the government not increase taxes on luxury goods which the rich classes can afford to buy? This is evidently an anti-poor government which does not care for the plight of the have-nots. It appears that its policy is to appease the rich and the middle class than care for the survival of the poor. God save our country!

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb,
Via email

No Covid protocol in Govt establishments

Editor,

The strict Covid-19 protocols enforced by the State Government in various private and commercial organizations, and at various entry and exit points of our state are highly commendable. Even the WHO has praised the efforts of our Government in combating and controlling the spread of this pandemic. Some shops in Police Bazar really adhere to the said norms. After a thermal screening and the regular use of a hand sanitizer before entering the shop, every customer has to also fill up details in a register like names, phone number and residential address. This procedure can easily help in contact tracing. But recently when I vis-

ited one or two government offices in Shillong, I was surprised to see the laxity in these offices. There was no thermal screening at the entrance, no register was maintained either at the time of entry or exit. Most of the staff members are also not adhering to the protocols. God forbid, if there is any person with Covid 19 symptoms entering these offices, then it would be impossible to trace them.

When the Government can impose strict action against private organizations, commercial establishments and citizens who violate these protocols, then they should also be vigilant and strict in their own departments. I don't want to point fingers at any Government offices or officials, but I just want them to practice what they preach.

Yours etc.,
Mangkara Hynniewta
Via email

Has India been a good neighbour?

Editor,

The tragic events at the Galwan Valley involving India and China have been met with a muted response not only from the international community (barring USA) but also from India's immediate neighbours. It would be fair to assume that China's growing economic influence in these countries

may have resulted in an unofficial silencing of criticism against it. However, we can also examine past relations between India and its neighbours to examine if India has been at a cordial relationship with all. Nepal for example suffered a humanitarian and economic crisis in 2015-16 when Indian traders imposed an unofficial embargo on it as part of the Madhesi protest. Nepal was hit by a devastating earthquake April 25, 2015 and relief operations were still going on. Nepal suffered another blow at the hands of India when the Modi government suddenly imposed demonetization in 2016. Relief efforts, medical and health care systems, farmers, traders, daily labourers and small business owners in Nepal were the worst hit. In both cases, the Indian government never stepped forward to address these issues. It denied that there was an embargo and till date the Indian government has done nothing to address the issue of crores of Indian rupees lying useless in the coffers of the Nepal government.

The Bangladesh government faced the ire of its citizens when fears were aroused regarding the implementation of the NRC and CAA in India. The NRC and CAA were seen as controversial in Bangladesh as

they policies both national and international. Bhutan has been heavily dependent on India for trade and commerce. However, over the years Bhutan has evolved both politically and economically and has started to establish its own place in the international community, un-influenced by India. Discussions between India and Bhutan have been limited to economic and environmental issues but it must be noted that the first military operation carried out by the Royal Bhutan Army in 2003 was against militants from North East India such as ULFA and NDFB who had infiltrated Bhutan and made its forests their camps.

India shares a complex and difficult relationship with its immediate neighbours. At times, it seems that the other countries are the ones at a disadvantage. This may make a relationship with China even more appealing, especially if they do not share or have a minimal border with China and are thus able to avoid the various political, social and economic complexities that come with border sharing. India would be wise to remember that every decision it takes, whether economic, political or military, will be closely watched by its neighbours.

Yours etc.,
Joshua Rynjah
Shillong -14

“Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content.”

-- Helen Keller

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Perils of the pandemic

THE Covid19 pandemic is taking a harsher toll on specific sectors. One of the major hits is on the education sector. The future of students is in jeopardy, more so at school levels where direct spoon-feeding and personal attention by teachers is important, as also for science studies at higher levels too, where labs and other adjuncts to various courses are laid out. The bigger challenge is to hold exams!

With the Centre and the CBSE board informing the Supreme Court on Thursday that the remaining summer exams of Class X and XII will not be held, the grim future can only be visualized. Online classes are being conducted but both the students and teachers will take time to get used to such a system. This has its limitations too for school-going kids.

Two options are left for students – either to wait and see how the scenario shapes up and write exams at a later stage; or go by an assessment process based on their earlier grading/marks or performance. The pity of it all is that there is no clear idea as to how long these uncertainties will persist. The Covid19 spread is seeing no chance of a let up at least in the near future. India has edged up to the level of the fourth worst-hit nation on the Covid graph.

The deadly pandemic that has hit over 4,70,000 people and caused deaths of nearly 15,000 so far despite the nationwide lockdown having played mayhem with our lives in terms of loss of jobs for millions. The hotel and restaurant industry across the country and elsewhere too are mostly non-functional as people are not ready to take the risk of eating out. Those who make a living out of this industry are hard-pressed for cash and many hands in this sector must now be in dire poverty.

Most other sectors are functional and getting back to life, except for the aviation industry. Parking aircraft in an airport area per day costs more by rental than the plane put in flying mode. Flying or not, the planes require constant maintenance which cost huge sums. Job cuts and salary cuts are heavy in this sector due to the present pandemic-linked distress.

The health sector across countries is put through a major strain and quite a number of health workers have contracted the disease and died. This is a painful situation for one and all; more so for those engaged in specific fields. In fact, no sector remains unaffected. This is a disaster that has taken both lives and livelihoods. And the way forward is yet to emerge!

Tourism: From disruption to innovation

By Patricia Mukhim

Covid 19 has hit the tourism sector like a tsunami. For a state like Meghalaya that earns its rupees from the tourism sector, the prospects look rather bleak for the near future. Indeed, even in January this year, no one was prepared for this ‘Future Shock.’ And we are still battling Covid three months after the lockdown. No one can really do a crystal ball gazing and tell us when this sly virus will leave us. However, tourism like any other business has to reinvent itself. Covid19 may slow the pace but that pace will pick up. Long term demand will build up. In the meantime Meghalaya tour operators in collaboration with Government need to chart out a different course for the future of tourism. In fact this temporary slump is an opportunity to step back and see if we have been pursuing the right course and if what we have been doing is actually tourism or some kind of destructive roller coaster ride.

For Meghalaya there two key words that should prefix the word tourism. They are ‘sustainable’ and ‘eco-tourism.’ What we have been pursuing so far has been neither eco-tourism nor has anyone given a thought to sustainability. Everyone has been in a mad rush to sell destinations as if there’s no tomorrow. Government has been a passive on-looker, sleepwalking with no tourism policy in its pocket. It was a free for all as if nature is owned by a few people who run tourist destinations and the rest of us are mere temporary passers-by. Sorry, but that idea of tourism is no longer sustainable and if the post Covid tourism model does not change then just forget tourism because there will be nothing to sell.

Yesterday, I was in conversation with a leading tour operator, DD Laloo who has, along with Dr Vijay Kumar, Commissioner and Secretary, Tourism Department been trying to think out innovative ways of reviving tourism in Meghalaya. This thinking is imperative because that’s where Meghalaya’s economy is. Tourism in Meghalaya has suffered from want of a long term vision. As a result we have the example of Mawlynnong, previously a stellar model of rural tourism which has now gone awry. The reason? Short-selling the sights and sounds of the area and not having a holistic action plan of how to deal with the consequences of a sudden rise in footfalls and the accompanying carbon footprints.

No one even worked out the carrying capacity of Mawlynnong. Should it be 50 or 500 or 1000 tourists a day? What are the environmental costs of having 500 or 1000 people stepping with their shoes and boots on the “LIVING ROOT BRIDGE.” Khasis love to talk about heritage and heroes of the past but have respect for neither. If people had any respect for their ancestors who diligently wove the roots of the rubber tree (ficus elastica) to make a bridge that spans the river so they could travel from one village to another, they would not charge a mere Rs 30 per person to walk on that marvelous sacred bridge. Those days no one wore shoes. Hence the

good day, a place like El-ephant Falls (despite the discharge of grey water coming from the sewerage of the Air Force Headquarters which no power on earth seems able to stop) still manages to get about 1000 visitors a day. While the place is being run very professionally by the San Shnong Welfare Youth Organisation (SSWYO), there is much scope for improvement on tourism products that can be sold to nature lovers from the city of Shillong itself. The place is located next to the Reserved Forest. In the evening and early morning, this is an ideal place for bird watchers (ornithologists). You can hear the cuckoo and all kinds of birds inside the forest. So a forest walk



root bridges looked nice and fresh and well cared for. Now in Mawlynnong a lot of repair work has taken place and marred the very idea of the root bridge. What is Rs 30 to a tourist that pays hundreds of dollars for air fare? It’s just 40 cents for goodness sake! How can the villagers not have even a modicum of respect for what their ancestors have left behind? It’s nothing short of criminal!

The carrying capacity must be fixed depending on the ability of the place to reverse the carbon footprints every single day and this being a technical thing, we would need experts to tell us how to measure that. Once the price of a destination is hiked up there will be lesser day visitors including the types that sleep on buses parked at Polo Ground and who don’t even spend on hotels and food. Tourists that only leave behind excreta and plastic waste should be discouraged from coming to Meghalaya!

Proper pricing of tourist destinations is the key to sustainable tourism. On a

for a price is a good recreation for city folks, more so in the post Covid period when people long for fresh air. The SSWYO can have a robust tie-up with the Forest Department so that the forest is protected even while a walk through it is allowed.

Meghalaya is a hill state with meandering streams and brooks gushing out of every nook and corner. Unfortunately, in Shillong city these have become cess-pools and septic tanks. But look at the Wah Umngot in Shnongpdeng, Dawki. It is a spectacularly clean and pristine river and is widely admired for its beauty. You can literally see through the water even as you take a boat ride. Yet it is another product that is not yielding appropriate revenue for the local people there because it is not astutely priced. Another case of short-selling a tourism destination! And there are many such destinations!

Tourism is a huge waste generator, yet no one has really thought through what to do with the garbage left behind by tourists. Should they not be paying for the

clearance? Is the cost added to their hotel bills or their entry tickets into a tourist spot? Like Sikkim, Meghalaya too should strictly check to see if tourists are bringing in plastic wastes like food packets and water bottles. Water dispensers have to be put up at destinations and tourists should pay for the water they drink there. Alternatively, they should be encouraged to bring their own water flasks, not single use plastic water bottles. These are the biggest pollutants and we don’t have a plastic recycling plant in Meghalaya! Also what we don’t know is that beyond Shillong there is no garbage treatment plant. Just a few kilometers away from Shillong is Smit Village with the once beautiful Umiev River now turned into a garbage dump. And mind you the Umiev River feeds the Greater Shillong Water Supply System. People informed that there is no waste collection or waste management system. So we can guess where all the garbage goes. Straight into the river! This has got to stop because this is the reason for Covid!

Hence reopening tourism also means that Government has to have a comprehensive action plan based on a quick survey of the present situation after which it has to come out with a CLEAR CUT TOURISM POLICY. We don’t want a slipshod job not based on ground realities. It’s good to know that Dr Vijay Kumar has been travelling and feeling the tourism pulse of the state.

And the word tourist today should include anyone who leaves their home in any part of Meghalaya to travel to another part. They too must pay the same cost that national and international tourists pay, for they leave the same carbon footprints wherever they travel. Hotels and guest houses too must start thinking of eco-friendly environments. They should try solar lighting and adhere strictly to sewage treatment protocols. And last but not least, hotels, guest houses, B&Bs have to stop using single-use water bottles and disposables. These hotels etc., should be evaluated and awarded for being eco-friendly.

There’s much work to do in Tourism before Meghalaya opens up. When to open up is the million dollar question. For now let’s get things in order first. Can we have a Post Covid Tourism Policy at the earliest?

India has options to meet China challenge

By Anjan Roy

Nothing could compensate the loss of twenty young lives of the Indian Army, but the episode and China’s premeditated actions on India’s Himalayan borders willy nilly has changed for good the global geo-political narrative.

Much to its chagrin, India is now hyphenated — as they say in strategic talks— with China. China, the pretending global power, now considers India its biggest stumbling block in Asia in its bids towards attaining its pre-eminent position.

Until recently, as many would recall, India used to be hyphenated with Pakistan and US strategy calculation weighed India versus Pakistan. Now the United States is obliged to consider India as the most important bulwark again China’s projections of power in Asia. This is no small gain.

Years back, a Japanese friend of mine had told me “You Indians always fight with Pakistan. This is small-time. If you have to fight, fight with the Americans as we did. And then, rise again to beat them in their own game.” Japan dominated the entire economic discourse of the United States for over a decade when the US car companies were being driven out in their home ground by the Japanese producers.

Thereafter, in electronics to high technology, the Japanese were scoring over the US to shore up their trade surplus. It was then difficult to remember that twenty five years back Japan was hit by atom bombs by the US.

It was then Japan that made its place secure in the high table of the world’s largest economies. It surged past the UK, France, Italy and Germany.

Indeed, China’s implacable hostility towards India is the reflection of the weight of India in the global discourse. Today, China is fighting with India for small slices of land in the inhospitable Ladakh region and northern Sikkim. China knows for certain that in tactical terms, it will be no cakewalk to gain substantial ground in the Himalayan terrain. This is possibly just the first round.

Its next moves will come in the Indian Ocean. China is building up its flotilla of ships for projecting its power far away from the mainland. The sheer objective of China’s Belt and Road initiatives in Pakistan is to gain access to the Arabian Sea from its crucial road facility across the Karakoram.

China is building the port at Gwadar in Pakistan from scratch for this purpose. Once Gwadar is functional China will be in a position to station its critical naval resources in that area and then command the access and movements across the Arabian Sea. India’s trade routes and vital sea links run through these waters and hence it will be of immense importance to start building up capacity to meet this imminent threat.

Gwadar is of critical importance because it will eventually link up by road with Chinese hinterlands in that country’s western parts. It already has military bases in these parts and these could then be easily linked up to its outlets on the Arabian Sea and eventually in the Indian Ocean.

This is like Crimea in the Black Sea region for the Russian Empire. Right from the nineteenth century, Crimea was of critical importance for Russia and Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine was driven by the calculation for gaining strategic access into the open waters through Crimea.

As of now, India can expect only lip service from Russia in its strategic movements to meet the Chinese threat. With the Western

world’s generally negative attitude towards Russia, and its disposition towards a dictatorial system, Russia is fused together with China.

This week, Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, had participated in Russia’s Victory Parade, thereby assuaging Russian pride. He has also secured promises for supply of a good number of aircraft immediately and substantial military spares for the hardware stocks that are already with the Indian defence services.

Selling such items would be of critical interest for Russia as these orders shall work towards propping up sick or lame defence production industries of that country. India has been used to Russian defence items and their operations. Hence, to obtain such supplementary material at this point would be essential value.

However, India should start putting its eggs in several boxes. Fortunately, such alternative safe keeping of our interests look possible now more than ever before.

Because of China’s gross hostility towards a number of other countries, many others are now ready to join forces with India. Japan, for one, is feeling increasingly vulnerable to the Chinese threat. It has given open demonstration of its uneasiness with China when it announced a corpus of \$200 billion for its companies for shifting base from China.

Currently, Japan’s longstanding dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands is simmering. Experts feel it can be the next flashpoint for armed confrontation between China and Japan. Senkaku is even more sensitive for China than Himalayan borders.

During an earlier round of dispute over the Senkaku, the Chinese had boycotted Japan and anything associated with Japan. China’s national hostility towards Japan was so acute that a Chinese citizen was beaten to a state of coma on a Beijing road just for the crime of driving in a Toyota.

The catch for China however is that Japan has a defence treaty with the United States that provides an attack on Japan would be tantamount to an attack on the USA — just the same reason why China after all cannot dare take military option for integration of Taiwan. China would be keen to demonstrate its might over the Senkaku Islands to establish its claim to being the big power.

Japan is also threatened over the South China Sea, along with a host of others from Vietnam to tiny Brunei. And these are all under the protection of the USA.

As China is claiming whole of South China sea as its sovereign territory, USA has made it a point to patrol these waters if only to establish its right of navigation in international waters. USA has also flown over some of the Islands which in these waters which have been militarised by China. While previously the USA never made any concession to the idea of a defence tie with India, being as it was, hyphenated with Pakistan, now India is noted as a counter-balance to China in American strategic talks. If anything, casting aside all past reservations about defence ties with USA, efforts should begin for a comprehensive agreement with the United States. Maybe, these could include inviting strategic US resources in India as well. These may hold enough intimidation for China to be more civilised in any approach towards India till we nurture our own capabilities to a level to pose adequate threat.

Faced with power and intimidation, it is the threat potential that alone matters. (IPA Service)

TO THE EDITOR

Covid protocols for ordinary citizens only

Editor,

It appears that the Covid protocols in Meghalaya are meant only for ordinary citizens of the state. As is seen from the recent visit of the CM to Manipur the Covid protocols were not binding on him and is also not applicable to Government officials specifically the CM and the Deputy CM. Recently the CM on account of political expediency related to his party affairs travelled to Manipur and Delhi thereby violating the Covid protocols laid down by the State govt. Is this the example he is setting for the people of Meghalaya? Is the visit rational and valid? The CM ignores the fact that the virus is contagious, and that it might affect those who need to meet with him. It is also funny that the Deputy CM is forcefully justifying and vindicating what the CM does by terming his visit to Manipur as ‘official.’ Are people of Meghalaya fools? Do the CM and

Deputy CM require to be taught the difference between politics and government? During this pandemic, even the PM respects and honours Covid protocols. At this catastrophic moment PM Modi has set aside politics. He is concerned with ways and means to prevent the spread of the virus in the country.

What about the CM and the Deputy CM of Meghalaya? Do they not have any responsibility and accountability to the people? It is shameful that the duo in their desperate attempt to save the Government in Manipur have temporarily forgotten the Covid-19 pandemic. They are both opportunists and care more about politics than the people.

Yours etc.,
Batskhem Mawlein
Shillong - 2

Whither GSWSS Phase III

Editor,

As a concerned citizen, I am pained to see that Phase-III of the Greater

Shillong Water Supply Scheme is yet to be completed even after 12 years of laying the foundation stone of the project on October 22, 2008 by the then President of India, Pratibha Patil. The main objective of Phase-III of GSWSS is for generation, treatment and distribution of additional water from Mawphlang to augment the shortfall of water supply to Greater Shillong areas already covered under Phase-I and Phase-II like Shillong Municipality areas, Cantonment areas, Mawlai, Nongthymmai etc., and to supply water to 2001 census towns of Pynthorukhrakh, Nongmynsong and Madanring. The Covid lockdown has affected to a great extent the progress of the work executed by Tantia Construction Company.

Now, I came to know that prior to the Covid lockdown, work components of the phase like intake water pump house, gravity pump house, filter house, installation electro mechanical components at the filter house, laying of main pipelines and other items of work were progressing well but laying of pipelines in many areas to be covered under the

phase are still incomplete. Moreover, a number of works still remain to be completed in major components at the Mawphlang site. It is also reliably learnt that an approximate amount of Rs 88 crore is required to complete the remaining works of Phase-III before its final commissioning.

Now, it is difficult to predict when the project will be completed since that would depend on availability of additional funds to carry out the remaining works besides the cost escalation of civil and technical works.

In this connection, I appeal to the MDA government to immediately arrange the required funds and to place the amount with the PHE department so that it can do the needful. I also urge Mr Samlin Malngiang, the Minister in charge PHE and the engineers in charge of the project to take full responsibility to ensure speedy and early completion of the project. We cannot afford to further delay it because the people of Shillong have suffered enough these past several years owing to water scarcity and three months from now we will again see the

plight of the people here who have to walk miles to get their supply of water.

Yours etc.,
Philip Marwein
Shillong

Shillong-Dawki road project

Editor,

The recent news about Defence authorities agreeing to part with land for expansion of Shillong-Dawki Road is heartening. The people of southern parts of Khasi Hills who have suffered for a long, long time because of increasing traffic congestion are hoping that they won’t have to wait for decades for completion of the project. I am simply intrigued by the inattention of the Meghalaya Government towards its expansion for all these 50 years. This road was built by the British and has remained that way even after Independence. For 50 long years, strangely, nobody pushed for it, while we suffered silently. I don’t remember that this critical matter was ever seriously raised in the Assembly or even in the District Council.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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

Common food additive in desserts, gum can trigger adverse health effects

Next time when you hop on desserts, candy, beverages or gum, read on. Researchers have found that a common food additive significantly alters gut microbiota in mice, causing inflammation in the colon and changes in protein expression in the liver.

The study confirmed a strong linkage between foodborne titanium dioxide nanoparticles (TiO2 NPs) and adverse health effects, said researchers from University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Human exposure to foodborne TiO2 NPs commonly used as a food additive known as E171, recently banned in France but allowed in the US and some other countries, which is made up of different-size particles of TiO2, including one-third or more that are nanoscale.

E171 makes products look whiter and more opaque. Its



exposure is two to four times higher in US children than in adults.

"I think our results have a lot of implications in the food industry and on human health and nutrition," said lead author Hang Xiao, professor and Clydesdale Scholar of Food Science.

Gut microbiota, which refers to the diverse and complex community of microorganisms in the gut, plays a vital role in human health.

An imbalance of gut microbiota has been associated with a range of health issues, including inflammatory bowel disease, obesity and cardiovascular disease.

Smaller than 100 nanometers, foodborne nanoscale particles may have unique physiological properties that cause concern.

"The bigger particles won't be absorbed easily, but the smaller ones could get into the tissues and ac-

cumulate somewhere," Xiao said in Small, a weekly, peer-reviewed journal that covers nanotechnology.

In their study, Xiao and his team fed either E171 or TiO2 NPs to two populations of mice as part of their daily diet.

The mice fed a high-fat diet eventually became obese, while the mice on the low-fat diet did not.

"In both the non-obese mice and obese mice, the gut

microbiota was disturbed by both E171 and TiO2 NPs," Xiao said.

"The nanosized particles caused more negative changes in both groups of mice."

Moreover, the obese mice were more susceptible to the adverse effects of TiO2 NPs, causing more damage in obese mice than in non-obese ones.

The researchers found TiO2 NPs decreased cecal levels of short-chain fatty acids, which are essential for colon health, and increased pro-inflammatory immune cells and cytokines in the colon, indicating an inflammatory state.

The study also measured levels of TiO2 in human stool samples, finding a wide range. Xiao said further research is needed to determine the health effects of long-term - such as life-long and multigenerational - exposure to TiO2 NPs. (IANS)

Biomedical researchers get closer to why eczema happens

A new study from researchers at Binghamton University, State University of New York may help to peel back the layers of unhealthy skin -- at least metaphorically speaking -- and get closer to a cure.

An estimated 35 million Americans suffer from eczema, a chronic skin condition also known as atopic dermatitis. Worldwide, 2 to 5 percent of adults and about 15% of children suffer from symptoms such as dry, inflamed and very itchy skin with open sores.

Although there are myriad treatments for eczema, such as medical creams and natural remedies, the exact causes of the condition remain elusive.

In a new paper, the team - Associate Professor Guy German and PhD student Zachary W. Lipsky from the Thomas J. Watson School of Engineering and Applied Science's Department of Biomedical Engineering, and Associate Professor Claudia N.H. Marques of the Harpur College of Arts and Sciences' Department of Biological Sciences -- connects two aspects of eczema research that are rarely studied together.

One result of atopic dermatitis is a decreased level of skin oils known as lipids, particularly one group called ceramides.

Lipids on the surface of the skin function to regulate hydration and also help defend the skin from foreign invaders either indirectly through immune signaling or directly through their inherent antimicrobial activity.

Another result of eczema is an increase in staph bacteria in the skin, which can cause irritation and infection.

German said that genetics can play a part in whether someone has ec-



zema, but people in certain occupations have also been shown to be more likely to get the skin condition, such as healthcare professionals, metalworkers, hairdressers, and food processing workers. The connection? An increased amount of handwashing or regular contact with detergents for your job.

"What happens if, either through a mutation or through occupational risks, there's a decreased presence of lipids on the skin?" he said.

"The essence of this study is that in normal, healthy conditions, bacteria do not penetrate the skin barrier. In atopic dermatitis conditions or lipid levels consistent with AD, it does -- and it consistently takes nine days," he added.

Because the staph bacteria are immobile, they need to multiply in number to grow through the protective outer skin layer known as the stratum corneum.

The Watson researchers believe the bacteria don't grow around the skin cells but actually through them. With lipid depletion -- either

through genetics or occupational risks -- the skin appears to become more vulnerable to bacterial invasion and infection of underlying skin tissue.

"When we usually think about the oils in our skin, we think about water retention and moisturizing -- things like that. Now we're looking at how these lipids are important for protection against these microorganisms that can come in and cause diseases," Lipsky said.

While this study has not unlocked all the secrets of atopic dermatitis, showing that the bacteria could be the cause rather than the result of the disease is a major step forward. Further research is required, and that's where the Watson team will investigate next.

"Now that we know that bacteria can permeate through lipid depleted skin, how does it affect the skin mechanically? Does it make the skin weaker and more likely to crack? Can we figure out how bacteria are moving through different skin layers?" Lipsky said. (ANI)

Online workout sessions for children gains traction

The fear of an infection coupled with a countrywide closure of most institutions for kids, has children sheltering at home with little outdoor play or activity.

A team from the University at Buffalo studied overweight children from Italy throughout March and April when the country was forced to go into lockdown in a bid to stop the spread of coronavirus.

They found that children ate an additional meal per day, slept an extra half hour per day, added nearly five hours per day in front of screens and dramatically increased their consumption of red meat, sugary drinks and junk foods.

With no clear timeline of when the schools will open, Indian parents are doing all they can to ensure their children stay fit. One of

the steps that many parents have taken is to have a joint family workout session which includes the kids as well.

"The regular pre-lockdown routine was useful when it comes to fitness as my child would go out and play every day. The situation is different now, as schools have moved online, restricting every kid to their homes," says Rupali, a Pune-based mother of a 12-year-old kid, who has enrolled her child for daily workout sessions on HealthifyStudio.

HealthifyMe, a leading health and fitness app, saw parents getting their kids to join the online home workout sessions. This was common across batches with both fathers and mothers getting their younger ones to exercise along with them.

Now the company has launched personalized sessions for the kids themselves owing to the massive demand they were witnessing for such a session from parents.

In a month since the launch, over 1000 kids have already worked out via HealthifyStudio, with bookings for kids constituting 5 percent of the total bookings.

Also, the demand for the children's batch is rising rapidly with the number of sessions getting doubled from 45 to 90 in just 30 days, the brand told IANSLife.

Another parent, Priya Narayan from Pune said, "The prolonged lockdown has started taking a toll on the health of my child. My 7-year old who was very energetic is now just confined within the house with restricted movements and physical activities. As she was al-

ready overweight, it has now become even more important to indulge her in some form of physical activity. HealthifyMe's online home workout session is one way to ensure that she stays healthy without compromising fun."

"Over the past month, we have witnessed an increased interest from parents getting their kids to join the online home workout sessions. In one month of launch, over 1000 kids have already worked out via HealthifyStudio. The demand for the children's batch is rising rapidly. Most of the surge is coming from cities Bengaluru, New Delhi, Mumbai, Pune, and Vadodara. Kids are really enjoying workout sessions in routines like Dance Fitness and Aerobics on the platform," Tushar Vashisht, Co-founder ad CEO, HealthifyMe told IANSLife. (IANS)

Improved treatment for children with sickle cell anemia found

A team of international researchers has found that dose escalation of hydroxyurea treatment for children in Uganda with sickle cell anemia is more effective and has similar side effects than a lower fixed dose of the same drug.

The study, known as NOHARM MTD (Novel use Of Hydroxyurea in an African Region with Malaria - Maximum Tolerated Dose), focused on children in Uganda, but the results could impact use of hydroxyurea worldwide, including the United States and Europe.

This clinical research milestone removes a major barrier to broadly expand the use of hydroxyurea in low-resource regions like sub-Saharan Africa, according to the physicians who led the study at Makerere Univer-

sity in Kampala, Uganda, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, and the Indiana University (IU) School of Medicine.

Sickle cell anemia is a life-threatening blood disorder that distorts red blood cells into a sickle or crescent shape and leads to anemia, recurrent pain, organ damage, and early death.

According to lead study co-investigator Chandy John, MD, a physician scientist at the Ryan White Center for Pediatric Infectious Diseases and Global Health at the IU School of Medicine, the optimal dosing and monitoring plan for hydroxyurea was unknown when the study started.

Particularly for low-resource countries like Uganda, determining the hydroxyurea optimal dosing and monitoring plan was crucial. John said the new study

confirms that the dose escalation regimen is better than fixed dose, but expanding hydroxyurea treatment will require affordable drug costs, education of healthcare providers, and an increased drug supply. In addition, newborn screening for sickle cell anemia is needed to help identify those who will benefit from treatment as early as possible.

"Our data make it clear that children on a higher daily dose had substantially better clinical outcomes, with fewer adverse events," John said.

"The study shows clearly that the optimized dosing strategy for hydroxyurea, though it requires more effort than a fixed-dose treatment regimen, results in far better outcomes for children with sickle cell anemia," Ware said. (ANI)

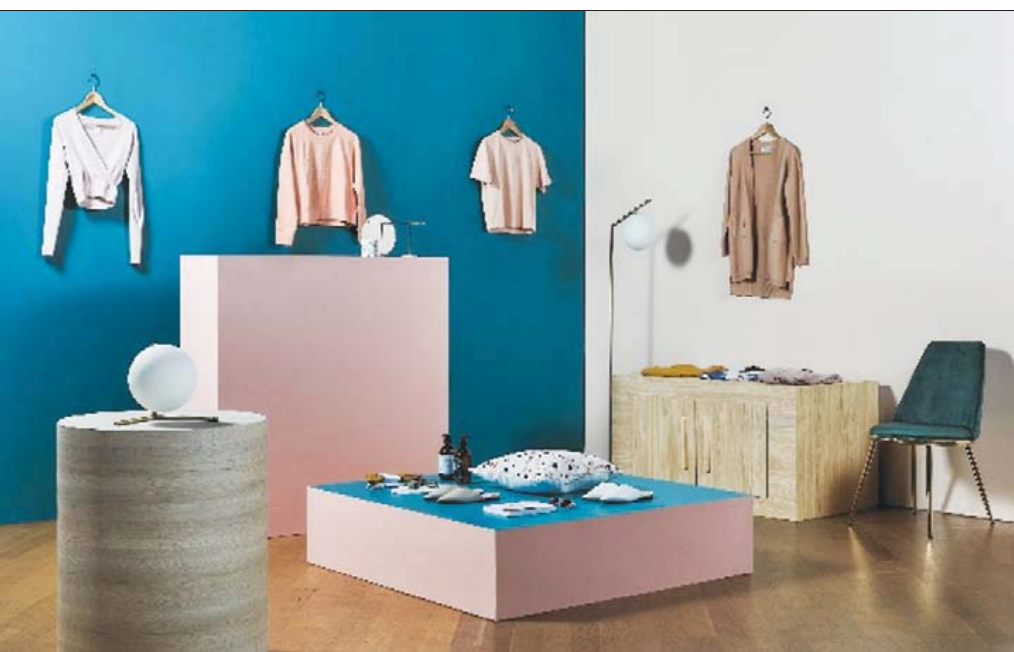
Home is where the heart is and after a long tiring day, we all want to be at home, which is neat and clean. Therefore, your go to spot must be looked after and maintained so that you can peacefully respire and rejuvenate.

Here are few easy ideas from for you to get hands on designing a tidy yet whimsical abode, by Greenlam Industries Ltd.

Anegre Matt

Wood is a versatile material which can complement almost every kind of decor theme. It's presence naturally uplifts your interiors and provides a unique aura to the room. A perfect choice for every season, pre-polished veneers have become popular as they are ready-to-use with a very long shelf-life. For instance, Anegre Matt by Decowood is a pre-polished veneer that comes with seven layers of protection against damage along with a superior factory finish which provides a neat look. It's rich brown

For your whimsical abode



red color tone, whether paired with contemporary or antique accents will always give a timeless finesse to the decor.

Oak Stockholm

Amidst a hectic lifestyle, we don't exactly look forward to tidying up the

house. It's usually when we have visitors over makes us organize our interiors and give an extra cleansing to the floors. To ease your maintenance blues, opting for Oak Stockholm by Mikasa can be a good option. With this engineered real

wood floor's easy maintenance and durability, one doesn't have to worry about deep cleaning. Pair its light brown shade with neutrals to infuse a refreshing vibe and a comfortable feel.

One can also go curtainless allowing some natural

day light to illuminate your interiors. Complete this look antiques to add a visual aesthetic to the decor!

Electric Blue

We all have our own ways of relishing the hottest season of the year. Some like to sun bathe outside and others like to cool themselves by staying indoors. While we all are social distancing, it is also important to maintain sterility and cleanliness at home.

To achieve a serene yet vibrant space, mix and match shades of your walls and furniture. For instance, this Electric Blue decors by Greenlam Laminates from the house of Greenlam Industries Ltd. beautifully blends with the other contrasting colours like pink or yellow.

Moreover, with its antibacterial feature which retards the growth of common bacteria up to 99.99%, you can bid farewell to your hygiene woes. Re-arrange and remove extra accents for a minimal look! (IANS)

It's time to have the 'money' talk with your family

We are not usually comfortable talking about money with friends, family, or even with our spouses. But it's time we changed that. These discussions need to be had, now more than ever.

As a family, you work towards goals that further not just yourself but the family as a whole and how you manage household finances is an important aspect of that.

Therefore, it is imperative to talk about money and align financial goals to ensure each family member is on the same page.

The impact of Covid-19 on all our lives has certainly made us realise that.

It invariably has a medium-to-long-term impact on everything - right from familial dynamics to how we

save, manage and spend money.

Thus, overcoming the reluctance to discuss money matters is a step in the right direction for creating a positive perception about it and space for everyone to share their thoughts, fears and ease the burden.

Here's a practical step-by-step approach shared by Prateek Mehta, co-founder, Scripbox, to follow to have these discussions with family.

Step 1: Prepare for the meeting

Ensure you have most of the financial data in black and white. If you don't already have a structured budget and expense sheet in place, make an estimate of your monthly expenses vis-a-vis your income and savings / investments.

Step 2: The approach

It is crucial to have regular and transparent discussions about money with your spouse because it impacts making decisions about budgeting, saving, investing, cutting the right corners especially in times like these.

For example, having discussions about how you can defer home renovations, buying a car or purchasing jewellery until your savings rate is in line with what is required for your goals can help take the right financial decisions now and in the future.

If you have young children or teens, it is a great way to initiate a healthy outlook towards finance, understand its value, and how to prioritise spending and budgeting.

Having discussions about putting off non-essential expenses such as upgrading smartphones to ensure that their education and other basic needs are not compromised can help them negotiate needs vs. wants. It will help them become financially adept individuals.

Step 3: Assess

a) Budget & Expenses
b) Goals
c) How am I doing

Understandably so, due to the pandemic, all big or small purchases that you intended to make require a second thought.

Equally importantly, your savings and how you make the most of your savings also needs a second thought if you are starting out your wealth creation journey.

If you have been invest-

ing, a re-look at goals is needed. Lastly, the first two will give you a good picture of your financial health and guide towards appropriate next steps.

A: Assess your budget and expenses: How much are you saving? As a thumb rule, it is recommended to have at least 30 per cent of your income put aside for savings and investments.

If you are not, the lockdown and the resulting restriction on leisure expenses have presented an opportune moment to relook at expenses and what can be trimmed.

Discussing this with your spouse and family and doing this exercise as a household is key. It will help you make a practical list as well as postpone all non-essential expenditure until your

savings goals are met.

B: Assess impact on goals: How does the situation affect the family's immediate and long-term financial goals?

The economic slowdown has a massive impact on employment and salary cuts. This will impact your ability to save and thus, goals such as your child's education, retirement will take a hit.

Which are the other near term and longer-term goals that would be most impacted? How bad is the hit and what can be done to fill the gaps?

Discuss these and work towards coming up with solutions together. You may have to make some tough choices, but it helps set the expectations and how to power through.

C: Finally - how are we

really doing? Is there an emergency fund in place that can cover at least 6 months of expenses in case there is no income? How much of your income goes towards servicing debt and EMIs?

Having debt along with income uncertainty can have serious implications. This along with A) and B) will give you a good understanding of your financial health and help kickstart the discussion on making appropriate changes.

Ask family members to pitch in and take responsibility, share ideas to cut costs and expenses they can let go.

Conclusion

A good way to close the discussion is to agree on when to revisit the conversation. Periodic reviews are

crucial to establishing mutual commitment, assessing how one is doing and maintaining open lines of communication.

The more frequently the family has these money-related conversations, the easier and more comfortable it gets.

Recurrent conversations will allow you to take discussions further and touch upon other topics such as estate planning.

These meetings will also allow you to celebrate financial milestones you achieve together, where money matters are not avoided, rather discussed, encouraged, and collectively addressed.

A positive from this pandemic could be the start of this good habit together as a family! (IANS)



By Brinda Das

The transgender rights movement in India has had a rather rocky trajectory. The 2014 Indian Supreme Court judgment, the NALSA judgment, that recognised transgender as a third gender for the first time, was a major impetus to the creation of codified rights for the transgender community.

The government in 2019 introduced its own bill to protect transgender rights but soon became the object of criticism. The bill was later revised on December 5, 2018, but lapsed with the dissolution of the Lok Sabha for general elections.

Finally, the much-awaited Transgender Person's (protection of rights) Bill passed by the Rajya Sabha on November 25, 2019, arrived. Transgender rights activist Grace Banu declared it a "murder of gender justice".

Why did this highly anticipated Act spark a considerable level of resentment and rejection? With the aim of uncovering this very question and to gain a deeper insight into the community and its perception of the Act, I met Anjali, a transgender woman and advocate for transgender rights working with The Humsafar Trust, a community-based organisation addressing the various concerns of the LGBTQ community in India.

The Hijra community

The law states that "every transgender person shall have a right to reside and be included in their household. If the immediate family is unable to care for the transgender person, the person may be placed in a rehabilitation centre, on the orders of a competent court."

First, owing to the recurrent ambiguous nature of the Transgender Rights Act, there is no elaboration as to the facilities provided at these centres, what they will entail etc. This is just the kind of comforting reassurance a minor needs after being rejected by or running away from their homes.

Second, this legislation totally ignores the alternative structure already in place as a viable option for these individuals — the Hijra community. The Hijra community is a part of India's rich cultural history. Hijra, the term used for transgender individuals in these communities, are considered demi-gods and to wield great power in traditional Indian mythology.

"The Hijra community formed as an alternative to biological families, young transgender women were run out of their homes, and had no other recourse, these communities were and are the need of the hour," says Anjali.

Transgender rights: A regressive policy

These communities have a hierarchical social structure and culture of their own, like the community in Babusapallya where eight transgenders live under the protection of their guru, Zeenath Pasha. They find safety in their community and the freedom to express their identities.

I came across instances of violence and exploitation in these communities, acts of assault from the guru to their chelas (disciples). Anjali believes that these communities will, with time, transform into more flexible and less hierarchical structures. "In the recent years, many Hijras are speaking up against the ills committed inside these communities, whereas previously things were very confidential and rigid. But nothing can beat the support provided in these communities," she said.

I wondered about the transgender individuals who do not resonate with the Hijra community and would, therefore, be hesitant to join. To this, Anjali suggests that a choice be provided to minors, to either enter the Hijra community or opt for the alternative in the law.

I felt quite neutral in my stance in response to this legislation. But I do believe that the Act and its legislations should be designed and modified from the perspective of the transgender community. The stance of the community in response to this legislation is unanimous and pretty clear — they want the law to acknowledge these alternatives as a resort. This is, of course, is not to say that an act should operate on the whims and fancies of its target population.

The purpose of a legislature designed for a minority group is to be the force of balance. To do this, there needs to be empathy to balance the needs of its target population with the rest of its population and legislations in place. Unfortunately, the needs of the transgender community have so clearly not been taken into consideration.

The government claims they had transgender representatives during the drafting of the Act, and voting in the two parliaments. There is no evidence to support this claim and the community representatives have conveniently not been named, nor has any representative stepped forward to validate this claim. The problem with this act is that it was impersonal and therefore plays out inadequately and negligently.

Mangti, or begging, is a traditional form of income in the Hijra community. A Bill in 2016 criminalised this practice. This Act decriminalised Mangti. At first, I was apprehensive as to whether this was a good move. On one hand, it was a sign of respect towards the Hijra community by not disrupting its longstanding tradition, and on the other hand, it could encourage complacency among the community.

Anjali, however, stressed that it was

a good move but only in the context of this poorly designed Act. Since the Act makes no formal reservations for the community in employment, it would not be fair or sustainable for them to take away their primary source of income.

Get up, stand up

Should a trans-woman or man be able to avail the same legislations available to their cisgender counterparts? Well, this can be a tricky one. Anjali's stance was relatively straightforward — while the needs of a transgender individual and their cisgender counterpart may not be the same, they do coincide on certain fronts. She believes these coinciding needs should be applicable to a trans-people as well.

In practice, the transference of these legislations may bring up its own complexities. "Regardless, these can be worked through," maintained Anjali.

The legislation ignores the alternative structure already in place as a viable option for these individuals — the Hijra community. Hijra, a term used for transgender individuals in mainland India, are considered demi-gods

For instance, special reservations made for cisgender women as well as social and religious minority groups in education and employment can and should be transferred to their transgender counterparts.

You're probably pondering the fate of Chhattisgarh in the light of this new Act? Unfortunately, they can no longer sustain their self-identification provision, which is in direct violation of the Act. The bright side, however, is that they can continue to address the ambiguities and concerns the act has so conveniently left outside the periphery of the law through their state welfare boards.

As I wanted to know the favourable conditions in Chhattisgarh that allowed for such progressive treatment of transgender individuals, hoping these parameters could serve as an exemplar for other states to follow, to my inquiry Anjali simply replied, "A progressive government."

The NALSA judgment was a precedent for states to follow in their treatment and legislation regarding the transgender community while the Chhattisgarh government took it upon themselves to implement the judgment. I believe it is crucial that all states put pressure on their governments to create state-welfare boards which can devise schemes and policies more suitable and specific to a niche and diverse community like the transgender.

Above and beyond legislative action, there needs to be sensitisation towards the community. Let me simulate a hypothetical situation where reservations are made for transgender individuals in employment. Will the individuals' co-workers respect their preferred pronoun? Consider the plight of a transwoman, which washroom will she use, the male or female? Imagine the discomfort such situations can create.

These intricacies cannot be tackled solely through legislation. People need to be sensitised towards and made aware of the needs of transgender individuals so they can be better integrated into society.

Change of this kind starts early. Children should be exposed to non-binary gender identities from a young age, not only will this prevent intolerance but it will also hinder confusion.

Anjali tells of how she struggled to find her gender identity because of lack of awareness and benchmarks or role models in society. "I was a man who felt and expressed himself like a woman. I thought I was gay for the longest time, it didn't feel right, but that was the only other alternate identity benchmark available to me. It was in college that I first heard of the concept of transgender, and it clicked, this is who I am!"

To sum it up

While the Act seems like a convenient appeasement strategy and very impersonal towards the community, it was designed for, hope is not lost. The very ambiguity of the Act can be used against it and concerns which have merely and ambiguously been glossed over can be redressed and reconstructed.

For example, the design and execution of these rehabilitation centres can be structured by transgender representatives and activists for the betterment of the community, since there are no pre-existing guidelines or elaborations on the above in the Act. Second, all the concerns, like reservations, which have been left outside the periphery of the act can be addressed.

All hope is not lost and there is still plenty of scope for improvement and progress for the transgender community.

(The author is senior copy editor, The New Indian Express, Bangalore)

By Siba K Gogoi

The way of life can change like never before, for better or worse. But we need to accept life the way it presents itself. We can do this with the belief that we have it in us to get the best out of the worst. The journey of life never stops, come what may. Even when time seems to stop, life moves on leisurely in a world that is so familiar, yet so difficult at times. If we live and learn, we know life takes on different meanings for different individuals depending on the situations they encounter.

Here is the moment of truth for us — the time that tells us why we have to make a choice between life and living. It would be absurd to say we enjoy being locked down, but that's the truth of life now. No sane person will ever imagine being an Alexander Selkirk, but there comes a time when we wittingly or unwittingly live the life the Royal Navy officer was made to go through after being marooned on a solitary island. It takes a human to understand why Selkirk was left pining for the warmth of the company of his nearest and dearest.

In a world that has been made to look smaller by the proliferation of the Internet or the mobile phone, we have invented newer ways of communicating with the people we know or even those we don't know. Then, why do we have to bother to meet someone with whom we can talk about anything on the mobile phone?

Now that social restrictions have been enforced to curb the spread of coronavirus, even state-of-the-art gadgetry, while being still useful, seems to have lost much of its apparent allurements.

The situation that we have found ourselves in makes many of us feel electronic devices may not be enough to keep human relationships going. Probably times like these offer us an opportunity to reflect on the workings of human behaviour and bonding. Tough times can also be a reality check on how we handle situations and to see if we can come out mellowed and better equipped for the future.

When self-isolation or social distancing is the order of the day we have no option but to go with the flow. The lockdown has given us time to measure ourselves up in a seemingly unearthly environment. The outbreak of COVID-19 that has threatened to ravage the world reminds us that human life is more precious now. It's the fear of death that makes us hold life dear.

If we do not lose hope in times of crisis, we may well have our moments when doing crystal-gazing. Here it would not be out of place to quote noted TV personality Oprah Winfrey: "Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire. This is your moment. Own it." It is human nature to ap-

We live & learn



preciate certain things in their absence or when they are lost. What have we missed or lost

during this period of aching lockdown? Literally, we have everything we had before; still

we miss some of the things which supplement our life because we cannot have them

the way we would have liked. It may not be long before we run out of resources. It is all about making the most of the situation on hand, regardless of how bad it is.

In a normal situation we would have occasionally liked to eat healthy chicken stew or fish curry as family dinner. Now, with social restrictions in place, we can learn to live without meals that otherwise could be as delicious or sumptuous as those served in a five-star hotel.

Even potato curry might get tastier for those in the average income group, if not the moneyed class. Isn't it, then, time we got tuned to a life of austerity or living without wasting money and resources? This, of course, does not mean being mean. Rather, it's living within our means.

What are the things which make life worth living in the circumstances? A tricky question indeed.

There are so many shades of the meaning of life; in most cases it's we who give meaning to life rather than cogitate on the purpose of life. Our likes and dislikes are naturally different and so are the ways in which we lead our life.

However, there are certain things that contribute to the universality of our existence. Boredom creeps into our life when we feel bound to stay indoors for an agonisingly longer period of time, away from even the quotidian societies outside the bounds of our homes. For some it may be like withdrawing into themselves, while for

some it may be like fighting mental trauma. Still, there are some who are ready to take the bad with the good.

Reading a good book or watching a good movie can be balm for disturbed minds. If you are a music lover, you can take it easy listening to the songs you like the most. Gardening can be as good as a catharsis for those wishing to have a way with self-isolation. Maybe, the lockdown has taught us a thing or two about how to spend quality time with our children or families.

We are not sure how we will manage our finances in the days ahead because self-isolation or regulated social life also means job losses and limited economic activities that can easily affect a family's budget. Not all can pick and choose as far as getting a job is concerned. In such a situation, it would not be a bad idea to start doing things that we did not like to do when there was no coronavirus in our midst.

Probably Indian cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar recently led the way by giving his son Arjun a haircut, the video of which circulated on the social media, drawing warm responses from his fans.

Will life, after COVID-19, be the same as it was in the not-too-distant past? Maybe, we will have to learn to live with it; maybe not. There is no time like the present. It's we who have to decide if we need to turn back the clock for the sake of the future.

Time for green options

By Ranjan K Baruah

We have published information related to career in agriculture and today's edition we will publish information related to horticulture. As we have seen the pandemic situation and people coming back to their native states, horticulture can be a good option for many young people to choose for livelihood. This is an option for young people who want to pursue courses related to horticulture. At the same time, there are opportunities for others to chose and become an entrepreneur.

It is a science as well as an art of production, utilisation and improvement of horticultural crops, such as fruits and vegetables, spices and condiments, ornamental, plantation, medicinal and aromatic plants. Horticultural crops require severe care in planting, carrying out intercultural operations, management of growth, harvesting, packaging, marketing, storage and processing.

The term horticulture is derived from two Latin words hortus, meaning 'garden', and cultura meaning 'cultivation'. It refers to crops cultivated in an enclosure. This subject is being taught in agricultural universities around the country though there are few special institutes.

India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world after China. In India, about 55-60 per cent of the total population depends on agriculture and allied activities.

Horticultural crops constitute a significant portion of the total agricultural produce in India. They cover a wide cultivation area and contribute about 28 per cent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). These crops account for 37 per cent of the total exports of agricultural commodities from India.

When we look at the north eastern region then the main products from horticulture perspectives includes turmeric, ginger, banana, papaya, pomegranate, coconut, areca nut, etc. There are academic courses and also opportunities for entrepreneurs to start business where they get support from government and other agencies.

Students after passing senior secondary may join agricultural universities where the subject is being taught. All those who

do not have related academic degree but wants to be an entrepreneur then they may communicate with different agencies and government departments focussing on horticulture. There are many training programmes being conducted in different parts of the North East.

NHB: National Horticulture Board (NHB) was set up by Government of India in April 1984 on the basis of recommendations of the 'Group on Perishable Agricultural Commodities', headed by Dr MS Swaminathan, the then Member (Agriculture), Planning Commission. The NHB is registered as a society under the Societies Registration Act 1860, with its headquarters at Gurugram.

The main objectives of the NHB are to improve integrated development of Horticulture industry and to help in co-ordinating, sustaining the production and processing of fruits and vegetables.

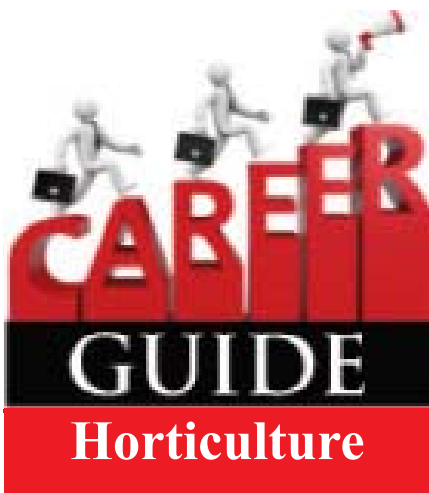
MIDH: Mission for Integrated Development of Horticulture (MIDH) is a Centrally Sponsored Scheme for the holistic growth of the horticulture sector covering fruits, vegetables, root & tuber crops, mushrooms, spices, flowers, aromatic plants, coconut, cashew, cocoa and bamboo. Under MIDH, Government of India contributes 60 per cent of the total outlay for developmental programmes in all the states except states in North East and Himalayas, 40 per

cent share is contributed by state governments.

In the case of northeastern and Himalayan states, GoI contributes 90 per cent. In case of National Horticulture Board (NHB), Coconut Development Board (CDB), Central Institute for Horticulture (CIH), Nagaland and the National Level Agencies (NLA), GoI contributes 100 per cent.

MIDH also provides technical advice and administrative support to state governments/State Horticulture Missions (SHMs) for the Saffron Mission and other horticulture related activities Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY)/NMSA.

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



Health PR needs resurrection

By Ranjan Das Gupta

Elvis Presley in his immortal song, In The Ghetto, spoke of a Negro Mother who cried pathetically after her son was born. The child was forced to become a criminal with a gun in hand by cruel circumstances. He died a tragic death. The tragedy struck the mother who cried even more when her second son was born.

This song has a universal essence. Countless mothers are crying as their sons, daughters, husbands and themselves are getting affected by the deadly COVID-19 virus. In India, the scenario is better than the more developed West.

Public relation in our national health area is in its infancy. It has not matured in the true sense. In big corporate hospitals, it is limited to developing image through flow of media news. Many times facts are suppressed. Business development by hook or crook is the motto of healthcare public relation.

Doctors, paramedical staff and medical technicians work round the clock. Sick and ill people look up to doctors who can cure them. Social analyst Purna Krishna Bajpai mentions only 19 per cent of our doctors appointed in hospitals work with the right approach. The remaining 81 per cent are involved in developing medical care as a corporate business.

Doctors are not always to be blamed. The common public and its lack of patience are also responsible for the deterioration of the situation. Doctors have at large decreased proper medical attention to patients and are more interested in filling their pockets. Besides, their behaviour with patient parties is not at all healthy. Thus their public relation efforts in developing confidence of patients are taking a back seat.

This is a painful scenario and it is getting worse. Patients losing all hope in the medical fraternity are thus resorting to meaningless violence of assaulting doctors. There are of course exceptions. Dr B Pratap Reddy of IMA, Telangana, is suffering from acute colon cancer. Yet he possesses all energy and enthusiasm to put forward the fact that costs, import duties and taxes on all essential medical equipment should be removed. He also advocates



the cause of the best treatment to be made available for the poorest.

Fortunately, many of his ideas are proving to be true. Ironically, such examples are few in India. The concept of classless society with medical insurance for all is hypothetical in India. The cold war between government and corporate hospitals has gone up alarmingly. The corona scare has certainly compelled all healthcare sectors to come on a common platform. That is with the motto to save affected souls. The Supreme Court has issued instructions that those who are within poverty levels and the Ayushman Bharat Scheme should be tested at private laboratories free of cost.

Dr KK Aggarwal, president of Confederation of Asiatic Medical Societies who is issuing daily research oriented bulletins on corona, feels, "Public relations in healthcare needs a resurrection in the sense that the five Ws and H of communications i.e. who, when, what, why, where and how should

be translated straight forward in every action so that no patient is left uncared."

The key to healthcare public relations in India is a uniform code of unwritten ethics which include a two way communication between medical practitioners and patients. The overall understanding of a need to deliver the right treatment is many times either misunderstood or overdone. In this aspect, a clear demarcation of activities for healthcare is very essential.

The common sense application states the majority of ill health persons are unaware of medical procedures and basic ways of maintaining good health. To arouse health consciousness among patients special methods should be adapted, feels Dr Satendra Katoch, Additional Medical Director, Gangaram Hospitals, New Delhi.

Italy gave a hero's farewell to the delegation of 47 doctors from Cuba who visited the country and helped to cure corona in a big way. In Cuba, Vietnam and Cambodia healthcare is available at minimal

cost to every person. It is at times even free. Barak Obama regretted that he could not make healthcare free for Americans. In India, the tragedy is even worse.

When eminent media personality Soma D'Beavoir, who is also a specialist in healthcare, took up the case of the deprived Rohingya community in New Delhi in the dead of winter earlier this year and spoke for them in a commanding voice, she transcended barriers of communications created by sick human mentality.

But the efforts of Sangita Reddy, health icon and president of FICCI, are commendable. She speaks vociferously for the private healthcare sector in India but does not lag in blaming those who are the black sheep in this arena. She boldly condemns any efforts to make healthcare a distant vision for any individual and carries on undauntedly her crusade for best healthcare like a white rose.

(The author is a Kolkata-based senior journalist)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, June 28, 2020

'Birthday Forecast'
Moon trine Venus on your solar return chart and it will bring good results for you. It is going to be an exceedingly exciting time period for you. These are the wonderful times you always wanted to have. Your creative side will emerge in front of people. There will be spring in your steps. You will have great imagination and ability to foresee things at your work place. You will be able to conceive new ideas and get things done. Your colleagues and officials will be very much impressed by you. Someone whom you have known for long will be drawn to you leading to a passionate affair. Marriage could materialize. You would be mixing more with the persons of opposite sex freely and also now talking more. You would appear to be more fashionable and smart. And would give proper attention to your wardrobe. Your financial position will be good. Family will provide able support.

'This week for you'
Aries: (March 21 - April 20) People and friends look to you with more respect, tolerance, and acceptance. You don't feel the need to prove yourself. You have the chance to shine because you project yourself with self efforts and modesty. Some of your most natural talents and hobbies would meet with reward and acceptance. Work done behind the scenes may be revealed or incorporated into your career or public life. Past efforts pay off now. Some of you may find that your career is moving towards a more service-oriented direction. You have more faith in general regarding your career and the direction in which you are working.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You would move towards a more positive and objective approach to your professional and personal life. You would have a great desire to expand your work and knowledge. Your ideas are higher as teaching may be part of the picture, and your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. You might further your education and it's a fabulous time to do so, or you could broaden your knowledge in a more informal manner. Close friends and family members notice you for your more tolerant and broadminded nature. Confidence is the key of success and faith in the universe and your ability to do the right thing will get you everywhere now. This is the best time for realizing the positive potential that you have.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to be more spiritual. You are sober and serious in professional and personal relationships. You are getting serious about loved ones, family relationships and children. You are likely to take your hobbies more sincerely. In fact, this is an excellent time for monetizing any personal hobby and turning it into a profession. You would be more practical in romantic relations with a loved one. For many, a romantic relationship stabilizes and becomes more serious. Opportunities both personal and professional are likely to present themselves. You would combine your inner and outer strengths to achieve success and happiness in professional aspects. You achieve success as you are brilliant and there is good fortune attending to professional, personal and material aspects.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You may travel or make contact with people of different cultural backgrounds than your own. You are more determined to achieve your personal goals, and are more strategic in the manner that you go about doing so. Pouring your heart and soul into your efforts comes naturally 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 is indicated. You connect with well known personalities, fun loving people, artists and entertainers. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business with good energy and support. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Health needs care and old habits of excesses need to be discarded.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) You would be involved in lectures, debates, and discussions. You can convey your ideas powerfully to others, and you may be invited to speak in front of many people and this would enhance your image. You are quick to take the initiative and to put your thoughts into action. You would have a tendency to work on many projects. You are more determined and hard-working and this brings fulfillment of all desires. This is an excellent period in your life in which to get organized and to stick with projects through to the end. A new project or goal begun at this time has a good chance of being successful and long-lasting. A short vacation allows you to enjoy natural surroundings with a loved one.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) There is perfection and beauty in emotional and personal relationships. You are frank, outspoken and can be outrageous or undiplomatic on occasions. This is altogether a happy and relaxed period for you. Remember to be thankful. Mental pursuits, new learning, and all forms of intellectual activity are favored. Your ability to concentrate and focus helps you to achieve what you set out to do. You are more inclined to put your ideas into action than usual. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) A business partnership is lucrative and supportive. Good planning and management leads to be more progressive and productive professional ventures. Good luck in financial opportunities is encouraging. You are restless and move into varied activities and pay visits to friends. You are also likely to form relationships with people based on a deep level of mutual appreciation and understanding for each other. You are in touch with your more sensitive and spiritual qualities. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You are able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility. Your personal charm and attractiveness has a positive effect on your personal and professional relationships. People see you as a loving and lovable person and they would help and cooperate with your goals and ambitions. It's a very favorable time for developing your relationships with parents and other relatives. Responsibilities and commitments may take up more time than usual. So set a target and make a proper schedule so meet the desired goal. Personal relations are precious and need to be treated with tender, love and care. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) Family is supportive, children are loving and friends share hospitality and love at this time. It would be in your favor to make new beginnings and forget all old wounds and past patterns. It is best to let go negative feelings about relationships and situations gone by. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may disagree mentally with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. Your social life is expansive and a variety of people connect with you. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It is time to come back to your inner center to regain physical strength, mental balance, emotional harmony and spiritual awareness.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) Issues of sharing of power and authority with others in personal and professional relationships come to the fore. You are likely to experience events that highlight the necessity to share and trust. Events and circumstances are such that you learn about your own personal strength. You may have to deal with willfulness and issues of power and competition. You would have a tendency to control your life through some form of manipulation. You may discover a new direction in your career. You may also experience tangles in your close personal relationships. Watch for jealousies and manipulative behavior of people around.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You are in touch with dynamic, forceful and assertive energy to make new beginnings. Professional power and authority is vested in you to organize and achieve important targets and goals. You bring stability and order in business and professional projects with a dynamic and assertive approach. You come up with original and creative ideas that surprise others in the professional area. You most successfully perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. Different people from different environments may attract you. Your warrior like qualities of energy, action, swiftness, strength and pride come to the fore. You need to value and respect established relationships and business partnerships as they stand by in times of stress and trouble.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) It is time to break through restrictions, additions and emotional patterns as you are ripe and ready for major professional changes. Do not forget about long term commitments while you are dealing with short term contracts. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event is celebrated. You are appreciative and caring as you give total support to loved ones through a difficult time. It is time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills as a promotion or lucrative business opportunity is likely to present itself.

PERSONAL FINANCE

By Rajesh Choudhury

India is currently undergoing a crisis both in health as well as wealth. As per a recent survey, about 95 per cent of households prefer to park their money in bank deposits. Mutual funds came at sixth place (9.7 per cent) followed by stocks (8.1 per cent), pension schemes, company deposits, debentures, derivatives and commodity futures (1 per cent) as investment vehicles for the urban households.

We have been hearing rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) most often after the onset of COVID-19. The question is how it is going to affect most of the people who have parked their money in banks. Effective from May 27, 2020, the 1-2-year FD rates have come down to 5.1 per cent from existing 5.5 per cent.

Fixed Deposits and saving deposits rates are governed by the RBI rates, which are repo rates. Several macro-economic factors influence the repo rate to reduce and banks follow the measurements and reduce the interest rates on fixed deposits and saving accounts.

Since the onset of the pandemic in India, a lot of macro factors affected the liquidity in the market and RBI infused a lot of money — the result is the reduction of interest rates.

Repo rate is the rate at which the central bank lends money to commercial banks in the event of any shortfall of funds. Monetary authorities use this to control money supply in the economy, and hence inflation. The reverse repo rate is the rate at which RBI borrows funds from commercial banks. It is the rate at which commercial banks in India park their excess money with RBI usually for the short term.

Let me explain in lucid language citing with individual reason and the impact on the money parked in the banks in the form of FDs or saving account.

1. Liquidity: The prevailing liquidity in the market or a county plays a very vital role in deciding FDs rate



etc. If there are enough ideal cash or Government support in the form of cheap loan to banks then the interest rates get reduced as they don't want deposits from the general public.

In the current situation, a lot of liquidity is coming from the RBI in the form of package for banks and other sectors and the resultant is the huge decline in repo rate gradually the bank interest rate is also getting declined.

Last May, the FD rate was 7 per cent and now it came to 5 per cent effective from May 27, 2020.

2. Inflation rate: RBI controls the inflation of our country, if there are too much money and utilisation of such money is not in an optimum way, the resultant will be inflation in the country. RBI will intervene and reduce the rate cut further to control the inflation.

3. Weak Economy: Since 60 days or lockdown has arrested the economical activity of the whole world and India is also not spared. The requirement of the fund by the business houses in several sectors is also be-

ing reduced. The defaulter's gap is increasing. Demand for money is also reduced in the economy by those and resultant the ideal money. The effect will be to the end investor of FDs and Saving account holders.

4. Demand and Supply: If there is less demand of credit in the market, consequently the rates of fixed deposits will fall as margin falls.

Fixed deposits (FD) are ideal for investors with a low risk appetite looking for assured returns. Fixed deposits allow investors to deposit their money for a specific period of time for a rate of interest which is typically higher than what is offered for a savings bank account.

With the interest at 2.75 per cent and the annual inflation hovering at around 4 per cent, the real returns you are getting now are actually negative.

During the period of 1990s the fixed deposit holders earned a handsome return of 10 per cent to 12 per cent.

(The author is a certified wealth manager)

“Education is what survives when what has been learned has been forgotten.”

— B. F. Skinner

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SHILLONG, TUESDAY, JUNE 30, 2020

Bugbear of online education

COVID19 has pushed parents to home-school their kids. Schools do their part by conducting online classes over WhatsApp which, simply read, means that students are given brief explanations of the lessons followed by assignments that the kids have to complete and submit, also via the same mode. For the teacher to get 40 lengthy WhatsApp messages which then need to be downloaded to the teacher's iPad/laptop/desktop for correction is a tall order. This hardly serves the purpose of education since teachers are hardly able to gauge if the students have actually comprehended the lesson and imbibed its holistic meaning. Besides, if the home has become the new school then parents are actual teachers while the school and their teachers are virtual educators. The students are caught between the two. In their minds, they believe that the teacher can never be wrong. Most parents are trying to teach their children that a mathematical problem does not necessarily have just one solution. There are several ways to arrive at a solution but students will argue that their teachers have taught them a certain way and that's the only way.

Most students, especially the younger ones are fidgety and restless at home. They just want to get back to school. But it's not because they value their lessons. The most important reason is because they want to touch base with their mates. There's so much to share, so much to talk about the lockdown and the hundred and one things they have done during this period. Friendships formed during school days are known to survive the ravages of time. To be kept away from friends and soul-mates for three months is distressful. After all, it is to a trusted mate that one confides in, more than to one's parents. It is to learn social skills and life skills that parents send their kids to school. These are psychological aspects of education that are often glossed over.

The classroom is more about human connection than about book knowledge. In the age of Google and multiple learning platforms there's very little that the student does not know. But between knowing something and turning that into a lifelong skill is a huge chasm. Education is more about mentoring the student and helping him/her understand that life is not a joyride but a series of hard knocks and failures as well. Students have to develop the mental and emotional resilience to take those knocks and come out wiser. The classroom is also a place for collaborative learning; for clearing doubts on complex subjects like Mathematics and the Sciences. Teaching is both a science and an art. The student is a creature with multiple intelligences and the teacher's role is to explore these to bring out the best in each student. The online mode of education misses out on the real life classroom experiences. But Covid and other disasters demand that online education should encompass those lived experiences of the classroom too.

TO THE EDITOR

Kudos Meghalaya Govt!

Editor,

The aviation sector had resumed operations after a frustrating hiatus of 2 months. The threat of the virus was rising exponentially in Mumbai and I decided to come back home. However, a few factors made me pause and contemplate - particularly the travelling guidelines. Meghalaya had laid down some strict protocols for returnees - We could go home only after our reports were out and after serving our 14 - days Quarantine (in case home Quarantine wasn't feasible). I wondered how difficult would the situation be? What would be the quality of facilities provided? Yes, I was indeed very apprehensive as I had witnessed online the pathetic conditions of Quarantine and Observation centers across India. But I had to return and I took the leap of faith, with fingers crossed and a hopeful heart.

On arrival, a bus migrated us from Guwahati Airport to IIM Shillong where we were kept under observation for 4 days until our reports were out. Once negative, we were shifted to respective Institutions for 14 - days Quarantine.

I came back home a few days ago. I look back at how worried I was initially of the lengthy travel and Quarantine period. And now, I cherish at how comfortable the entire stay and journey has been. I would like to earnestly thank the Meghalaya Government. You've done a splendid job! Be it the bus journey, the stay at IIM Shillong or the stay at Hotel Barbareek (my Quarantine center), I didn't face discomfort at any stage. We were provided with proper amenities, hygienic food and standardized accommodation and all of this contained an icing of extreme kindness from each personnel involved.

Today as I write this, we have less than 50 confirmed cases out of which just 5 are active. I won't be wrong

In the wake of the commemoration of Thomas Jones Day, the past week has witnessed a plethora of articles and messages acknowledging and glorifying the contributions of the Welsh evangelists to Khasi literature and the social life of the Hynniewtrep tribe, in general. It is established knowledge that the Welsh evangelists in the Khasi Hills cannot be simply pigeon-holed in the same category as the political agents of the British Raj. The acrimonious relationship between the Welsh and the British has been meticulously documented, right from the murder of Welsh royalty in Edwardian times, to the ban of the Welsh language in educational, judicial and legislative institutions, the violent protests against the Investiture of Prince Charles as the Prince of Wales and most recently, the political lobby of Plaid Cymru (A nationalist party in Wales) for Welsh independence, in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum.

Be that as it may, there is also no denying the fact, that though the Welsh, may have detested the British and even suffered due to British imperialism just as the Hynniewtrep tribe, yet, they too were condescending towards the Hynniewtrep people and considered the Khasi Hills, a mere heathen land, in need of civilizing and deliverance. It is also noteworthy that the Khasi Hills had already been subdued by the overbearing sloop of British imperialism, when Thomas Jones came to these hills. Now, the major reason, which afforded him undue advantage, to exert such an influence over this land, is ascribable to a rather ulterior strategy adopted by the Welsh evangelists; that they came riding on the underbelly of British imperialism.

The influence of Thomas Jones and the Welsh mission in the Khasi Hills is so immense, to the extent that, during the commemoration of the centennial anniversary of Thomas Jones, a much bigger crowd converged and participated, than when the Pope himself visited Shillong. This must have been a proud moment for any Welsh Calvinistic evangelist who so readily, regarded the Pope, the Brahma and the Mohamedan as their evil trinity. There is also a sweeping tendency to venerate Welshmen, not just evangelists. This was most explicit, when a Welsh poet, researcher and film-maker, by the name of Nigel Jenkins, visited Shillong in the 1990's. Most peculiarly, he was asked to preach in one of the churches, despite Nigel Jenkins not being a Christian,

in saying that our Government has done the best amongst all states in India. Yes, we are a small state which makes management easier compared to other densely populated states. But then, there are similar sized states in the North-East whose numbers are surging each day!

Whilst bringing back residents, any government is expected to put in optimum efforts on two parameters - containing the spread of virus and ensuring the returnees are not affected adversely. Meghalaya Government you have superbly ensured that both are achieved. Keep up the good work. Hoping the other states take a leaf out of Meghalaya's Book!

Your etc.,
Karan Sharma,
Via eail

Vaccine nationalism

Editor,

The discovery of a vaccine for COVID-19 is central to global efforts to re-start economies. However,

let alone, a preaching evangelist. Surely enough he had to labour through his fumbling twenty minute speech of a sermon. The episode, albeit awkward and forgettable, proved the envious clout of the Welsh evangelists over the minds of the Khasis, who seem to harbour a pre-supposition that every Welshman is a virtuous Bible believing preacher.

It is imperative to understand, that it was with a Calvinistic evangelistic aim, that the Welsh Mission in the Khasi Hills was initiated. Consequently, almost everything not biblically sanctioned and inherently Khasi, was summarily dismissed as evil and belonging entirely, to a superstitious culture with a stupendous fear of the unknown. Churches were prohibited from using traditional musical instruments in their praise and worship service as they were deemed as an extension of a superstitious pagan culture. Church members were often reprimanded and ran the risk of inviting punitive actions from the mission and the Church, for merely witnessing or attending traditional festivals, dances, bluffsights, wrestling and archery. More alarmingly, there were instances when one of the most sacred bonds in Khasi culture, that of clan based kinship, was almost on the verge of desecralization. It was fortunate enough that Khasi leaders like Capt. Dr. Homiweel Lyngdoh, vehemently protested against the solemnization of intra-clan marriage, by some Welsh evangelists, who knew little about the clan and kinship system of the Khasis. The ignorant dismissal and disdainful treatment of Khasi culture and beliefs by the Welsh evangelists could have disastrously affected such practices deemed taboo by the Khasi culture. It is even more shocking to learn through historical documents that some missionaries even objected to the tendency among women to work alongside men in the fields which supposedly rendered the women unwomanly. This was regarded by some of the missionaries as simply unacceptable and unbecoming of men and women alike. Such incidences prove that what the missionaries were preaching was more than the Gospel but also an insidious attempt at evaluating and transforming cultural practices arbitrarily, through the biased lens of their subjective cultural principles.

Much has been said about the emergence of the written literature, attributed to Thomas Jones, but it must

there are serious doubts about whether countries will act in their narrow self-interest or adopt a collaborative, global approach. Several vaccines are in the testing stage and considerable effort costing billions of dollars and using complex logistics will be required to develop, manufacture and distribute the vaccine worldwide. The intense and growing rivalry between the US and China, and the subsequent rise of nationalism and failure of multilateralism is making the outbreak of COVID-19 and the need for a vaccine extremely complicated. European countries and the WHO are in favour of the multilateral option. But the US and China are against it.

China and the US are using huge resources to become the first to develop a vaccine. US President Trump has launched Operation Warp Speed, a public-private partnership that aims to make millions of doses available in the US by the end of the year. China too is trying its best.

Welsh evangelists:

Riding the underbelly of British imperialism

By Elnathan W Lyngkhoh

also not be forgotten that for more than half a century, after the emergence of the written Khasi literature; the only thing Khasi about that written Khasi literature was the name and the language of the newly derived script in which that literature was written. Until the early part of the twentieth century the subject matter of the written literature was dominated by European ideals. It was only with the emergence of the likes of Sib Charan Roy, Jeebon Roy and Radhon Sing Berry, that the Khasi Cultural Awakening was kick-started in the literary field. It was this Khasi Cultural Awakening that enabled the written Khasi literature to be discerned as distinctly Khasi in subject matter and content. By and large, European culture, and in this case Welsh culture, is far too often regarded to be synonymous with the Christian faith. In the process, they have utterly disregarded the fact, that Christ did not preach a culture but a faith and more importantly, Christ himself, was an oriental person of the east and not European. Had Christ preached and propagated a culture, the Middle Eastern cultural aspects and ethos of Palestine and Israel would have, by all means, become ubiquitous to the whole of Christendom.

It is understandable should any of the readers find in this article, an attempt to vilify the man so revered by the majority of Hynniewtrep people as the Father of Khasi Literature. However, that simply could not be farther from the truth and it is in fact impossible to not acknowledge the immense contributions of the Welsh evangelists to Khasi literature and the overall socio-economic well-being of the Khasis. In the height of the missionary efforts in the Khasi Hills, in the early part of the 20th century, records and statistics showed that among the cultural groups in the North East, the highest literacy rate was among the Khasis, largely due to the numerous schools established by the Welsh. Healthcare services provided by the missionary doctors among the tribes in the North East also benefitted mostly the Hynniewtrep people. The healthcare infrastructure and services provided by the Welsh enabled vaccination to be mandatory in the Shillong area, even in the pre-independence era. And later on, it would attract nursing students and patients from all over India to seek education and treatment in Missionary institutions, in Shillong at an affordable rate.

Most importantly, it is the work of Welshmen like Tho-

mas Jones which provided the Khasis, with a lingua franca that helped unite the Hynniewtrep people and a written literature through which they could document and express their culture and their lived experiences. Although the written literature was introduced mainly with an evangelistic motive, it was later indigenized by native authors to dislodge the colonial ideals presented in early written Khasi literature. We also cannot dismiss the contributions of Welshmen especially Thomas Jones who encouraged the people to insurrect against the British and they also fought legal battles on behalf of the Hynniewtrep people, when they were cheated and swindled by British political agents during trade and commerce. The Welsh missionaries were instrumental in the ushering in, of at least, a semblance of industry in the Khasi Hills when they shared with the Khasis, the knowledge about the multifarious industrial utility of the abundant limestone and coal here. This was particularly useful in refining of iron ore. The knowledge shared by the Welsh missionaries with the Khasi tribals extended even to carpentry. The Khasis, for instance, learnt the usage of saws and a host of other carpentry tools and implements. The Welsh, ergo, significantly helped the Khasis to elevate their standard of living and also helped in creating numerous employment avenues for the Hynniewtrep tribe.

Lastly, it must also not be forgotten that the Welsh had a hand, in inspiring a strong sense of nationalism and unity as a people, evident from the innumerable nationalistic hymns composed, specifically for the Hynniewtrep people, which are still sung with pride and fervour to this day.

It is imperative that the Hynniewtrep people not overly idealize historical figures; they are men not Gods and naturally flawed and corruptible. Winston Churchill who is considered the saviour of Western democracy is also responsible for the deaths of millions of Bengalis during the Bengal Famine and Mahatma Gandhi who is hailed as the father of the Indian Republic, is now being scrutinized for his sexual malfeasance and his attitude towards race. But all things considered, it is their good deeds which we must celebrate and cherish and it is from their flaws that we must learn and improve, as a tribe and a nation.

Social contracts in the time of Covid-19

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

Man is a social animal. What make this animal different from others are its established norms of civility and civil society. We live in a certain way and do things as per pre-defined processes all of which are accepted as being appropriate and ordered. Well, one can only imagine what would happen if these 'norms of civility and order' were to collapse. What type of animals would we become? I suppose there would be anarchy and a loss of respect for the promotion of overall well-being. In the heart of this, there begs a question. What is that underlying element/factor that defines civil society? To this end, the answer is 'social contracts'. It is what makes society and ensures its progression and development over the course of time. In its absence there would be anarchy at all levels. It would lead to the evolution of 'tinpot dictators'. This would result in a multiplicity of self-proclaimed dictatorship without pure demarcation of accountability. After all, we all love power and authority; but who wants to be accountable? Be that as it may, social contracts are the bedrock upon which modern civilizations are built and sustained. In its absence, societies would be thrown into a dangerous tailspin of socio-economic decline. This is what Meghalaya is faced with in the context of the covid-19 pandemic. Accordingly, I place the following pointers –

Firstly, J. Rousseau famously said that 'man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains'. Well, leaving aside the wide frames of social contract theories; in short, his seminal work of the mid-18th century largely forms the basis for modern social contracts. It is based on the realization that a people have to follow certain norms and ways of life which are enshrined in the form of laws and regulations. Here, the people lose a certain degree of freedom while living in a civilized society. However, in return their rights and liberties are protected and upheld by the authority. This authority is predominantly in the form of a government and its governance. This relationship thrives over time as a give and take arrangement; a trade-off and as a mutual benefit between the people and the government. This is precisely the reason why we have governments and elections and in the end call ourselves a democracy. The people have the power to decide who shall control/curtail their freedom through elections/protest (or even agitation). In addition, social contracts can be explicit or tacit. So basically, this is the crux of a social contract. In the operation of it all, the people look up to the government for provision of a reasonable and respectable socio-economic life in return for the freedom sacrificed. Thus, for a social contract to really work; the government must deliver and the people must agree!

Secondly, the covid-19 pandemic has created a situation where there is a need to have a re-visit into certain aspects of social contracts. This is because the socio-economic demands and expectations of the people have multiplied manifold over the course of the pandemic. There is a sense of anxiety and distress amongst the daily wage earners, returned back workers from other states, small traders, micro entrepreneurs, etc. On a larger scale, the entire unorganized sector of the state is in uncertain waters. So, what is to be done about it? Yes, we are not responsible for this covid-19 pandemic; but, it has not spared us from its destruction. As such, there is a need to re-visit and strategize our social contracts circling around such pandemics. This is because today it is covid-19; in the future it will be something else. At the outset, there is a need for a comprehensive database on the people/units in the unorganized sector. This will help in data mining at the click of a button and thereby assist in the formulation and implementation of relief measures (both cash and kind). This will enable the targeting of genuine people in need and prevent leakages of relief into undeserving firms/individuals. In this age, big-data and its analysis are indispensable and it would be even better if the database is maintained on a real-time basis (at least through monthly update). All of this will ensure that we act on time and that too effectively. Overall, such databases will also go a long way in assisting policy and planning even during non-turbulent times.

Thirdly, how do businesses run for two/three months without revenue flows? This is a pandemic-related question which business schools have never contemplated; but at least they are into it now! Keeping this aside, for our 'hand-to-mouth' ridden unorganized sector the difficult economic circumstances and its cascading social effects are extremely dire. Now, the talks of struggling households not being able to send their children to schools are gaining ground. In fact, schooling comes later; even daily survival has become an issue for many. As such and keeping in mind our ground realities, funding these distressed people is the only way out. But of course the government does not have money! Here, the point to be noted is that if we start looking for money as and when a problem happens; we will never have enough. Hence, we need to preempt such pandemics and other related disasters. The creation of a dedicated contingency fund in the lines of relief funds for natural disasters can be a means of meaningful help. It will ensure timely action. This intervention may be thought of within the larger financial planning framework of the state on an annual basis. Yes, the result of this is that the burden will increase; but it is a yoke worth carrying!

Fourthly, what happens when social contracts fail? Well, in such a case the government (or any authority) loses legitimacy. Then it has no right to direct and dictate a people. The people stop looking up to it for protection and provision and they start taking matters into their own hands. This becomes the first stage in the downfall of a democracy and civil society. Now, there are glaring examples to this end in our context such as – many youth are not psyched about the registration under Meghalaya economic survey 2020 and Meghalaya skill survey 2020 as they do not see anything fruitful coming out of it. The recent financial assistance provided to daily wage earners and small traders (particularly BPL families) was touted as being grossly inadequate. Some shops in Shillong have opened out of turn without care; parents are at odds with the government as far as opening of schools and payment of school fees are concerned, etc. These are all troubling developments.

Governments have to take note and respond. Have a re-visit into the social contracts. Today, the government machinery is duty-bound to mitigate the tailspin of socio-economic decline. After all, these are all related to the highly contagious pandemic.

Lastly, coming back to Rousseau's famous quote; yes, it is accepted that everywhere man is in chains. However, the chains become bearable and acceptable as long as the governance delivers; or else, such chains become a reason for protest, agitation, intimidation and maybe even violence!

(The Author teaches at NEHU)

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Via e-mail