

Of Amartya Sen and His Teacher Bhabotosh Dutta

by Salahuddin Ahmed

Professor Dutta had the great genius of addressing BA pass Economics course and Honours course quite differently making a differentiation between what must be intelligible and grasped by the average run of students and what must be instilled into superior brand of the students in the Honours classes.

THOUGH belated, Amartya Sen has got what was his due about a decade back, the Nobel Prize for economics in 1998. People in this part of the world have very appropriately felicitated him. Amongst many other illustrious persons, our Prime Minister has also not lagged behind.

The trend in economics that Prof. Amartya Sen gave a fresh momentum was to 'HUMANISE THE DISMAL SCIENCE OF ECONOMICS' which used to be characterised and quoted in various text books in our days about half a century back. Economics was primarily looked upon as a science of 'WEALTH' creation only (viz Adam Smith's 'Wealth of Nations' which even now continues to a great extent, creation or earning of pounds, dollars and Takas; hot to maximise profit by minimising cost; in the process the raw material producers and the human elements, the workforce, the labour need only satisfy themselves at wages for which the minimum could be the subsistence level, if at all the market demand conditions were favourable; if not, as a result of poor effective demand all round for slump or depression or recession as it has very frequently turned out, even if he loses his job, starves or is famished, more or less it is his exclusive concern). The welfare economic trends that started with the Fabian Socialists and the NEO-CLASSICAL THOUGHTS and trends, given a fillip by Lord Maynard Keynes, somewhat moderated the selfish motivations to inhumane aspects of traditional economic thinking.

Since the dawn of civilisation, this world has not been free from some kind of starvation, want and needs, failure of crops and harvest or other natural disasters leading to famine and semi-famine conditions.

This part of the world where we are living, South Asia, once in a while, faces this problem. Broadly Asia, Africa and Latin America are the yet growing and developing parts of the world with all the blessings of welfare and socialist minded Governments in the past who brought in some kind of command economy, nationalisation of key economic sectors, especially leading key industries, but the results achieved were of a mixed nature. One of the best experimenters in the process, India, since its liberation and independence with the help of eight or nine five-year Plans under the pioneering efforts of Dr. Mahalanabish and first Prime Minister Pandit Jawahar Lal Nehru and about a dozen of his successors, brought in tremendous economic development; but some parts of India are highly developed, such as the Punjab and Maharashtra, while some others like Assam, Orissa and eastern India in general have not been able to fare well. Even in such parts which are pretty well developed, the economic benefits, the GDP and the standard of living though may have improved a lot, but in the process left behind a huge number of the common mass with inadequate assets, landed property, skill and education, so that improvement in general has not been even and shared by all the rest.

The entitlements for each individual are different. Some or few may in fact be wallowing in riches while many others may not be languishing, but may only be starving. When a

large-segment of such left over persons are without a job, source of income or income perceptively reduced, halved, altogether cut, as in a slump or depression or recession, without the benefit of appropriate or suitable 'safety net', measures like 'cradle-to-grave social security', unemployment benefits or other State-led large scale preventive steps mainly at the initiative of government, the result to be bound to be reflected in economic hardships, strains, semi-starvation or even starvation sometimes leading to famine and famine conditions.

The genius of Amartya Sen was to make a pain-taking many years' study of all the famine situations in the Asia and Africa including those of China, undivided India including Bangladesh. He showed in his books how hunger and famine, how entitlements of nations and within the nation, how different segments of people and even within the different segments, gender differences can differentiate and affect individuals' entitlements, some getting more than required 3000 calories and a huge mass of people not even their minimum eternally.

Having spent his early days in Dhaka, Bangladesh, he had his education in St. Gregory's School and then in West Bengal. His early childhood impressions about the prevailing poverty made a lasting impact in his mind. He had his BA Honours from Presidency College, Calcutta where amongst other illustrious teachers and professors, he had the benefit of

studying under another great man and teacher Professor Dr. Bhabotosh Dutta. Professor Bhabotosh Dutta himself had his early education from Dhaka Collegiate School. His father was earlier Professor of B.L. College, Khulna and later of Jagannath College, Dhaka and they used to live in Wari.

Professor Bhabotosh Dutta had the most brilliant and distinguished career, got first class first both in BA Honours from Presidency College and M A in Calcutta University. He did not accept the lectureship offered by Ripon College, Calcutta; but joined Islamia College in early forties (founded by Sher-e-Bangla A K Fazul Haque) now renamed as Moulana Abul Kalam Azad College. This writer also had the opportunity of being the student of Professor Bhabotosh Dutta between 1944 and 1947 (along with the father of the nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, Mollah Shamsuddin, Kazi Golam Mahboob and some others). Professor Dutta had the great genius of addressing BA pass Economics course and Honours course quite differently making a differentiation between what must be intelligible and grasped by the average run of students and what must be instilled into superior brand of the students in the Honours classes.

I can recall an occasion, while teaching Indian Economics, Professor Dutta was sauntering up and down in the vacant space between the blackboard fixed on the from wall and the first couple of benches. He introduced the world TAQAVVI LOANS and suddenly

asked me (sitting on the front seat of the first bench), what was the meaning of the word 'TAQAVVI' and not being well-versed in Persian and Arabic, I fumbled. He then introduced some other words TAQAT and QUAT. These words are even now used in the whole sub-continent including Bangladesh introduced by the Mughals in land tenure and agricultural practices. This meant, he explained, that the farmer or the cultivator who was probably starving or bereft of all liquid capital because of strain as footsteps of famine was being heard at the door, the farmer needed to be strengthened and reinvigorated with the tonic or funding as TAQAVVI LOANS, to be repaid back to the government. When his QUAT or strength returned.

Another day I visited Prof. B Dutta at his Balgajon house, not far away from the tram depot in Calcutta on my return from Shilling after my five months convalescence after an attack of malignant malaria. Prof. Dutta opened the door for me as I knocked and I wished him 'ADAAB' as was the practice in those days. But as I failed to wish the same to another gentleman seated in his drawing room in Dhuti, Panjabi and Chadar (all khadi), he snubbed me for this lapse and introduced me to Mr. Promotho Nath Bishi (whom I never met till then) but I added quickly, 'Oh, the great author of Shrikanta Pantham parol (Readers may recall that the great novelist Sharat Chandra Chatterjee wrote Shrikanta in four parts, Promotho Nath Bishi added the fifth one).

Such a teacher's influence must have worked in Amartya Sen too.

The writer is a retired Secretary, Government of Bangladesh.

The Sinners Progress

by Monica Das

We are at a time when the best are lacking all convictions to wipe out the passionate intensity of the worst. Only for a handful of waspish human beings the world is turning to an uninhabitable place.

IF becoming loyal needs to be immoral then that is the shaping of human monsters. India's Vishwa Hindu Parishad's secretary D L Sharma has aired that the youths in Madhya Pradesh's Jharua did not do anything unlawful by raping four missionary nuns and it was only an outburst of some patriotic Hindus' anger on the enemies of their country. He alleged that missionary nuns are proselytizing Hindus to Christianity to increase the number of India's saboteurs. As usual this barbaric incident has been given a political excuse. Many a hundred logic has been shown in defence of Indian patriotism 'which is different from any other country's. Such Indians' love for India overwhelming any display of towering loyalty on earth is becoming the prick of other people's foolfall. Men like Mr Sharma are becoming guide and godfather of a country of teeming billions. Religion has always been a tool for fending most petty cases of political convenience in India. Commands of leaders like Sharma will be obeyed as gospel because they fulfil the carnality of men.

In a bourgeois society like India religion is forced to evolve from the ideas of spiritualism, goodness, awe, etc.) by the cunning priests and powerful men who seize hold of man's 'natural' belief in magic to impose their rule on the mass. In this case the magic is violating some particular women and thereby vanishing all 'anti-Indian' elements. In India the process of spell-binding people with religious illusions extends to coercion. If religion is consciousness which is spontaneous then such awareness of

the mind and guidance of the soul should not be regarded as a capacity to confine a man inside a particular threshold. There is always a continuous feed-back of majorities' support to a particular religion in a society. A society is not a phenomenon of crystallization but a process of continuous phasing out of several types of human-elements. In an Indian society which is a hierarchical pyramidal system the bottom-liners of the frustration feel the crushing pressure of the thumping juggernaut. Struggle for existence may swamp out a belief, and seemingly, Indian Hinduism more than does that. It seems India's Hinduism has been made a religion that is forced to divide people instead of conciliating them, instilling hatred among its own men. Sinned are its upcaste men who wronged the weak for hundreds of years by forming false religious rules. These men are first-rate sinners.

That they are show-offs of their fake devoutness need not be told. Their crippling psychology is reflected in their cinema, music-videos and other electronic-visual representations where sexual vulgarity is always prioritized. There everywhere is the expression of their sexual perversion that is pervading the moral crux of their system. For a religion which has the uniqueness of showing immense reverence to female deities glorification of feminine virtues being the nucleus of its belief, it is regrettable that men who belong to it are becoming engaged in unleashing human beasts on virginhood. What is going on in India in the name of revival of Hinduism for the sake of creat-

ing a 'Hindu-India' goes against any primary idea of becoming a Hindu and retaining it. Had Hinduism been a faith of a few or part faith of many then there might generate the thought of a crusade to establish it. No crusade ever occurred in the age old history of Hinduism, because no Hindu ever felt that it was at stake at any time. Never did it require any protector. In the political mess in India every idea has lost its own meaning. There the idea of being a patriotic Hindu carries more novelty than being an Indian Muslim or Sikh, a notion which has been not only recently ground into the minds of general people, but from its independence (it was the sole purpose of creating India).

Should it be despaired that they who are loosing upon the world the behemoth of lust will be able to keep away their fair maidens from its sight? By declaring the ceremony of lust they are taking them farther from God and nearer to dust. India being a country that outnumbers in poverty and illiteracy any other country is progressing backwards at a time when other developing nations are gearing up their development plans putting petty religious feelings behind.

We are at a time when the best are lacking all convictions to wipe out the passionate intensity of the worst. Only for a handful of waspish human beings the world is turning to an uninhabitable place. The slouching beast of anarchism and sensuality set at large, civilization is at stake and where it will pull in the pilgrimage of humanity will end bringing out in the foreground the procession of the sinners.

Lawmakers Lead Way in Loan Defaults

THE drive to bring loan defaulters in Pakistan to book is marred by politically motivated exemptions and lack of adequate legal cover. It is rapidly turning into a farce.

Promised law changes have not taken place. Threats of ruthless pursuit have proved empty. And those in power seem often to be the worst culprits.

The default by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's family businesses alone runs into billions of rupees. Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain's Phalia Sugar Mills, one of the many industrial units the Interior Minister owns, owes nearly half a billion rupees to Pakistani Banks.

Even Redco and its textile unit, belonging to the high-profile chief of the Accountability Cell, Saifur Rahman, has defaulted by more than 60 million rupees.

Some analysts claim that 70 per cent of the Prime Minister's present cabinet consists of defaulters, a situation which has persisted ever since the banks were nationalised in the 1970s.

The crackdown began with the announcement of Pakistan's nuclear tests on May 28. Expecting international sanctions to follow, Nawaz Sharif promised the nation a plan of action that would carry the country through the tough times ahead.

High on the national agenda he presented two weeks later was a pledge to recover unpaid dues from loan defaulters.

As evidence of his determination, the promised to pay back the Sharif family loans taken out by the Ittefaq Group of Companies. Other defaulters had 30 days to pay what they owned or else face dire punish-

Pakistan is still suffering the after-effects of sanctions and boycotts that followed its nuclear tests earlier this year. But part of the strategy to weather the storm, the chasing up of bad debt on a massive scale, has run into the sand. Gemini News Service reports that this is partly because some of the biggest culprits are in government. Yousaf Rafiq writes from Islamabad

ments, including immediate arrest and confiscation of property.

However, long after the deadline expired, little seems to have come of the much-touted campaign. The expected wave of arrests, and the attendant fireworks, is nowhere to be seen. And not even one per cent of the total amount in default has so far been returned to the lending authorities.

At stake is a colossal sum of Rs 140 billion borrowed from nationalised commercial banks (NCBs) and development finance institutions (DFIs) by about 13,000 individuals, businesses and government departments, according to an Election Tribunal list of defaulters released before the February 1997 elections.

Non-performing loans in the banking system are also skyrocketing. A recent presentation to the Law Minister revealed that non-performing loans are probably nearly Rs 325 billion.

If recovered, the money could go a long way to help the desperately cash-strapped government bolster its flagging banking and financial sectors.

Less draconian measures have been tried. The State Bank's incentive scheme started in June 1997, but has not contributed any substantial defaulted amounts to the banks.

"Rather, it gave more time to some defaulting borrowers to submit fresh proposals for rescheduling to the bank and development finance institutions, demanding more accommodation from the financial institutions i.e. delaying tactics," said the Board of Investment.

Outside pressure is now also building. The Pakistani government has asked the World Bank to support its structural reform programme with a Structural Adjustment Loan (SAL) focusing on improvement of financial governance.

But the World Bank has set conditions on the SAL to demand action on loan defaulters, including changes to the law and a Rs 25 billion collection target for May 31, 1999.

However, adequate legal cover is still lacking. "This seems to be the greatest hurdle in the government drive against defaulters."

"Where are the laws that allow the government to go after defaulters?" one exasperated Lahore banker asks. "The public has no sympathy for them. But this is not a jungle how can you force anyone to return money they owe without appropriate legislation."

At present, says Mohammad Mirza, a High Court lawyer dealing with default cases,

loans are a contractual obligation between the two sides of the deal.

"If anything goes wrong, a civil liability arises, not a criminal one," he says. "If a bank first files a civil suit for the recovery of struck up loans and then follows it up with a criminal case, the latter action is clearly in bad faith."

This is exactly what happened against one defaulter who owed Rs 620 million. But the courts stayed his arrest on bad faith grounds. "We get stay orders to this effect every day," added Mirza.

Instead of introducing more comprehensive legislation, the government seems to have chosen a more roundabout approach.

The State Bank has instructed NCBs and DFIs to scour their contracts with defaulting clients to uncover false information which could amount to the offence of misappropriation or deliberate misrepresentation of facts to secure monetary benefits.

But the only government agency that deals with white collar crime in the country, the Federal Investigation Agency, cannot act on its own.

"We can only act on the complaint of a lending institution," says Major Shahid Maqbool, deputy director of the FIA's Commercial Banking Circle.

"We cannot take action suo moto (on our own initiative) on default cases because a default by itself is not a criminal act."

Existing procedure says the banks must investigate defaulting companies, uncover evidence of criminal conduct, check the crime is relevant to the loan in question, and then report their findings to the FIA.

The Commercial Banking Circle has received 13 separate complaints involving a total default of some 950 million rupees. So far it has nothing to show for it.

In private, government officials readily admit that government strategies will not provide immediate results and may not be effective even in the long run.

"This has to be a continuous exercise conducted without interruption and irrespective of which party is in power," one senior government official says.

"Besides, the government also has to do something about the bankers which approve loans against inadequate collateral. If you provide a thief with a hundred walls behind which he can hide, how long can we keep looking?" said the official.

For the anti-default drive to bear fruit, the government must first create transparency at the level where loans are sanctioned. Many of the bad loans currently held by banks are the direct result of collusion between borrower and banker.

The writer is a reporter for Pakistan's Frontier Post, and writes for the magazine Politics and Business.

Treating and Rehabilitating Lepers

J Henry writes from Hyderabad



— PTI photo

SUFFERING from leprosy, with deformed hands and feet, Santosh had no choice but to beg until some paramedical workers found him in a remote village in Orissa and cured him.

Not only were his deformities corrected through surgery, Santosh today earns his own livelihood and is even learning to read and write, thanks to LEPR-India, a city-based NGO.

"Disabilities are found to be an accumulating problem in all the projects and to prevent this, prevention of disability is given prompt importance during treatment process," says Dr. Dinakar Piplande, vice chairman of LEPR-India.

"While treating leprosy patients, the risk of developing a disability is assessed and the progress then monitored," Dr. Piplande, who is also a reconstructive surgeon says.

With over 10 lakh leprosy afflicted people in India and thousands more being added every year, he says there is need to sensitise and create mass awareness among the people and involve them in doing something for the less fortunate ones.

"Working with an annual budget of Rs three crore, LEPR-India in the last ten years has cured over 1.48 lakh people besides identifying over 1.98 lakh leprosy patients," says its chief executive Tilak S Chauhan.

LEPR-India is supporting 19 projects all over the country, covering a population of over 15 million.

LEPR-India plans to take up tuberculosis and HIV awareness programmes in all existing projects at a cost of Rs one crore. It also intends to take up construction of a hi-tech leprosy/tuberculosis laboratory in Hyderabad.

Though LEPR-India receives all grant from LEPR-UK, it also organises charity programmes to collect more money to "diversify and expand its programmes."

"It needs more funds to be raised indigenously to sustain and implement its activities," says Chauhan.

"It is sad that people contribute liberally to give a facelift to ruins of Golconda Fort whereas the response is poor when it comes to doing something for reconstructing ruins of human beings (lepers)," says Chauhan, adding "not many people come forward to fund leprosy control programmes as much as they do for, say, cancer."

There is lot of social stigma attached to leprosy which needs to be removed, he says.

Quoting an example of how an old couple in London after their retirement raised 20,000 pounds (Rs 14 lakh) for Lepra-UK, he says zeal and commitment need to be imbued for doing something for leprosy victims.

"The average prevalence of Lepra-India projects has come down from 51.1 per 10,000 population in 1991 to 9.9 per 10,000 population in 1997," says Chauhan, noting "it is a very

satisfactory achievement."

Lepra-India is also supporting government district multi drug therapy programmes by providing medicines, additional vehicles, incentives to workers and expenses pertaining to patient welfare.

Bidar in Karnataka (since 1988), Karimnagar and Medak in Andhra Pradesh (since 1989) and Bolangir and Nowrangapur districts (since 1990) in Orissa have been receiving support from Lepra.

The British Leprosy Relief Association (LEPRA), a successor of British Empire Leprosy Relief Association (BELRA), started leprosy relief work in India in 1952.

In 1987 LEPR-India decided to undertake Multi Drug Therapy (MDT) work again in India. In 1988, LEPR-India was formed as a partner organisation to LEPR-UK.

A memorandum of understanding was signed with the Indian government to participate in the national leprosy eradication programme, under set guidelines for international voluntary organisations to collaborate with the MDT programme.

LEPR-India had to establish its own infrastructure in areas under LEPR's responsibility where government could not recruit staff and form leprosy units. Six such units have been started in India since 1988, Chauhan says.

LEPR is also funding eight NGOs working for leprosy control.

— PTI/APB

Starry Discovery

ASTRONOMERS in Hawaii, USA, have discovered a solar system that seems to be forming around the star Epsilon Eridani, about 10 light years away. The astronomers, who were using a British telescope, say that the star, which is similar to the Sun, has a ring of dust around it like the comet belt in our solar system, and a bright region that may be the sign of a planet.

Presenting the reports at a conference in Santa Barbara, Jane Greaves from the Joint As-

tronomy Centre in Hawaii said, it is the first time they have seen anything like this around a star similar to the sun. "We were amazed to see a bright spot in the ring, which may be dust trapped in orbit around a planet," she said.

She further added that the star system is a strong candidate for planets, but if there are planets, it is unlikely that there could be life yet.

Tough Task

IT may not be possible to eradicate polio pellets from the world by the year 2000 unless adequate resources are mobilised in time, warn World

Health Organisation (WHO) officials. Bruce Aylward, in-charge of the WHO Global Polio Eradication Initiative, says that only a few polio-endemic countries are left in the world.

Polio is still a major problem in countries such as Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Nepal, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan. Members of the Global Technical Consultative Group on Polio Eradication (TCG) have said, since the initiative has been taken there has been a 90 per cent decline in polio cases worldwide. However, the target to eradicate it by the year 2000 does not seem to be forthcoming.

While a majority of the costs

of polio eradication are covered by the polio-endemic countries themselves, about US \$150 million in additional support is still required for the year 1999.

Side Effects

THE France-based Roche Holding AG, has planned to withdraw its drug for high blood pressure, Posicor, as its interaction with other medicines is poor. Long term clinical trials have shown that Posicor is no more effective in treating congestive heart failure. Last year, company officials had warned that there were chances of Posicor causing low heart rates in some patients

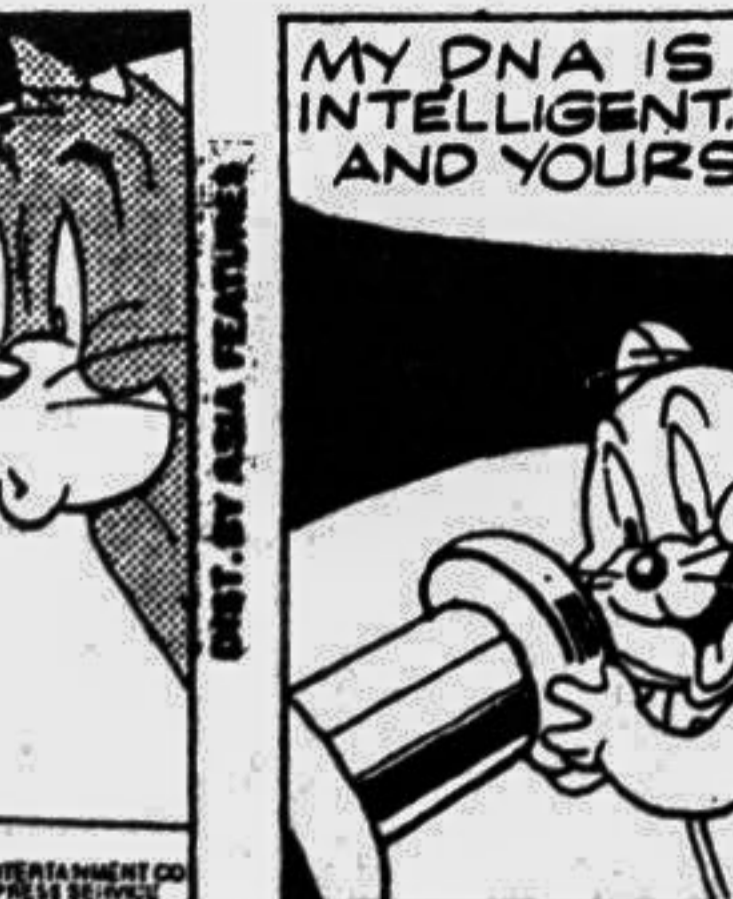
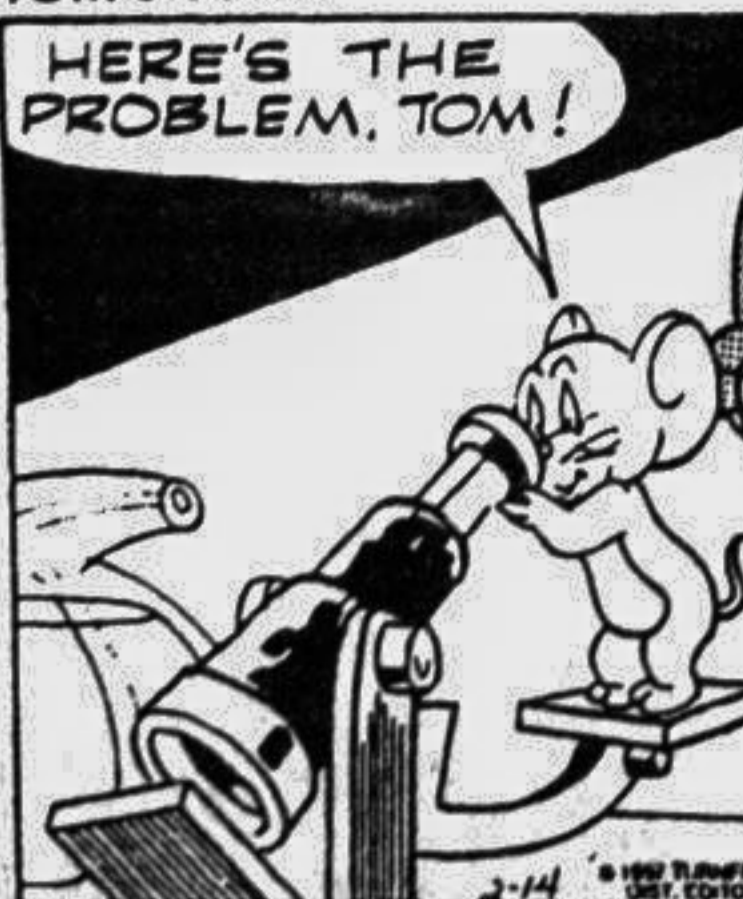
and might also increase the risk of muscle injury if taken with statin cholesterol drugs. With the withdrawal, Roche shares have fallen considerably.

Show Way

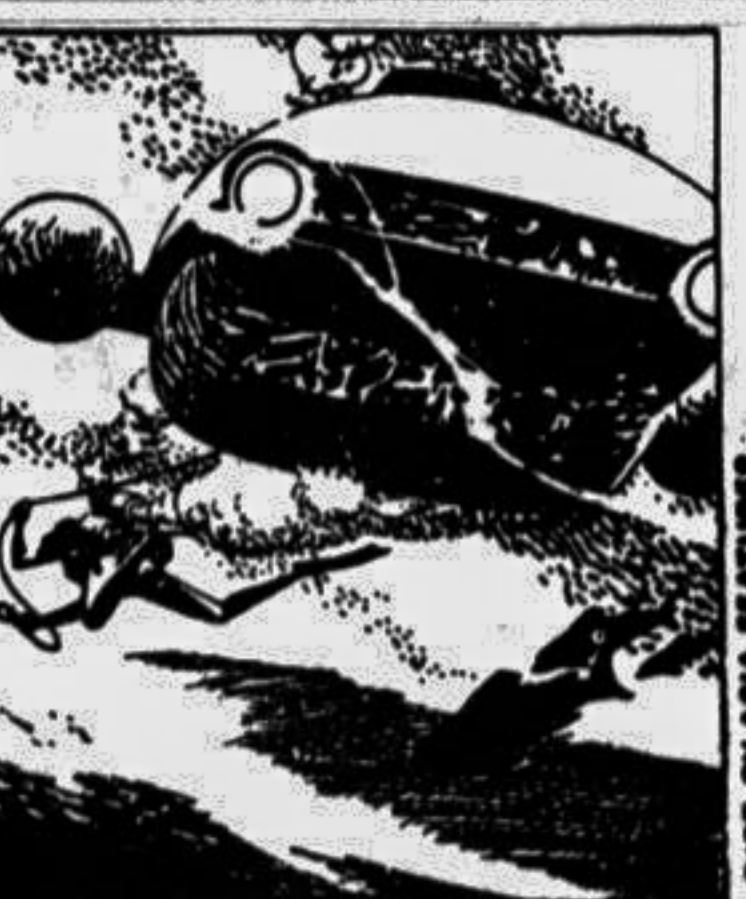
PEOPLE with poor eyesight or severe memory problems could soon be a lot more streetwise, thanks to the Auditory Location Finder (ALF) a wonderful invention being developed by a team at the Edinburgh-based Napier University's Transport Research Institute.

CSE/Down To Earth Features

TOM & JERRY



By Hanna-Barbera



Enough of Baby-sitting

Syed Zarir Hussain writes from Shillong

TRIBESMEN in the north-eastern Indian state of Meghalaya are making a fervent bid to break free from their centuries-old matrilineal system and mould it into a patrilineal one.

Their attempts have sparked off a blazing row in the female-dominated tribal society.

According to traditional tribal Khasi customary laws, women are regarded as the dominant force in the society with the youngest daughter inheriting the family's property. After marriage, a Khasi husband moves into the house of the girl's family and when a child is born they take the surname of the mother.

The demand for a change from the matrilineal to the more widespread patrilineal system is gaining momentum with a radical all-male organisation, the Syngkhong Rympeh Thymmat (SRT), lobbying hard for mobilising public opinion among the tribals.

"We are being reduced to mere breeding bulls and baby-sitters. We have virtually no role to play in the society," Teibor Khongee, an executive member of the SRT, told India Abroad News Service.

"Khasi men have no rights over family properties, and even our children have to take the surname of the mother under this prevailing matriarchal system," he complained.

Though the SRT and its supporters have so far not mounted any significant dent in the matrilineal system, their demand for a change is becoming strident.

They claim to have enlisted the support of at least 60 prominent women in their fight against the traditional system. A public debate on the issue is being organised on October 29 by the SRT.

After the SRT took the lead in raising the banner of revolt against the matriarchal system, a few more groups, including the powerful Khasi Students' Union (KSU), joined hands on the need for a change.

"The matriarchal system no longer suits the present generation. The law needs to be modified so that there can be equal share of properties among all family members. A child should take the father's surname so that the lineage is

maintained," Paul Lyngdoh, President of the KSU, told IANS.

The awakening in the Khasi men for a greater share of family properties and rights have not gone down well with the fairer sex. The system is so deeply rooted that even the tribesmen get jittery to openly advocate for alter reversal.

"I think the male members should get a fair deal as far as property rights are concerned. But the matrilineal system, as such, should not be changed as it would erode our traditional values," Patricia Mukhim, a leading women's rights activist and writer, said. "The uproar for a change is all in the mind, resulting mainly out of growing unemployment."

The demand for restructuring the Khasi society is also a fallout of the growing number of Khasi men marrying non-tribals. Outsiders allegedly marry Khasi girls for property, taking advantage of the matriarchal system which empowers the youngest daughter to inherit family properties.

"There is a deep sense of frus-

tration and anger among the Khasi men as they are being discriminated against. Khasi men are becoming paupers by virtue of this irrelevant customary law," Khongee said. "We have no line of succession. Our generation ends with us. We have no land, no business, and no generation."

Anti-matriarchal advocates say the growing number of inter-caste and inter-tribal marriages are leading to a sharp increase in the divorce rate in Meghalaya, besides heightening social tension in the state.

There are an estimated 30,000 Khasi women who have been divorced by their non-Khasi husbands in recent years, the highest divorce cases among tribals in the entire north-eastern region.

The matrilineal system is leading to all these social evils. It has degenerated Khasi society. We must reverse this system and that change must come soon," the SRT members say.

Until such time a consensus is evolved, the tug-of-war between the tribal Khasi men and women, who reign supreme over all family matters, shall continue.

— IANS