

"Making mistakes is a lot better than not doing anything."

— Billie Joe Armstrong

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RSS as centenarian

THE Vijaydashami festival this time also occasioned celebrations marking the 100th year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS)—that is obviously guiding the destiny of the nation through its loosely linked political outfit, the BJP. A century's existence for this entity that was formed in 1925 in Nagpur as a service-oriented organisation is by itself proof of its cohesion — supplemented by a sense of high discipline — both of which have helped the outfit grow from strength to strength. This growth was despite the fact that the RSS periodically faced heavy odds, having been banned repeatedly after Independence — in 1948 when its associate assassinated Mahatma Gandhi; then during the Emergency period in the 1970s; and after the Babri Masjid demolition in which its rank and file actively participated.

The RSS' growth thereafter, mainly since the 1990s when the BJP repeatedly ran governments at the Centre and in several states, is remarkable. Notably, the RSS has from the outset been projecting its ideology as pro-Hindu. An attempt by Sarsangh Chalak Mohan Bhagwat to designate all those born here as Hindus has failed to carry conviction. The Sangh Parivar of which the central edifice is the RSS has outfits like the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) that aggressively pursues Hindu communal causes. The RSS on its own projects a more accommodative face, but its intentions are suspect for a vast majority of people — including the minorities and the underlings in the Hindu society who carry the stigma of being "lower or backward castes."

As the RSS celebrates its centenary, its influence over the central and several state governments run by the BJP is seen in both positive and negative lights. On the positive side, the ministers demonstrate the fabled RSS discipline to substantial extents. On the negative side, the RSS agenda being implemented by these governments is seen to be loaded against the minorities, principally Muslims. There is hardly any representation for Muslims or other minorities in the central government despite their substantial presence. Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself carries with him the Pracharak hangover though he had claimed at the outset in 2014 that he as PM would be guided by the tenets of the Constitution, which he called his "Gita." The Modi governments' main claims vis-a-vis its performance in the last 11 years are the abrogation of the special status for Kashmir Valley, the building of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya through facilitation of a compromise between Muslims and Hindus on the Babri Masjid Issue and the offensives against Pakistan — all of which have a Muslim angle behind them. This rhymes well with the Hindutva causes. It's time the RSS and BJP reassess, reset and widen their agenda, see and treat the entire population as one, and tone down their perceived sectarian styles. There has to be life beyond Ghar Wapsi, a distorted notion of nationalism and the like. India must stand among the comity of nations as a progressive and modern entity.

Letters to the Editor

MPSC Exam Turmoil Raises Alarms Over Transparency and Quality

The recent screening test conducted by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) has plunged thousands of aspirants into a state of bewilderment and distress, following a string of concerning issues that cast a shadow over the Commission's credibility.

The primary point of contention is the sudden preponement of the examination. Originally scheduled for October 25, the test was abruptly held on the September 20. This drastic change, with minimal notice, created immense mental pressure on candidates, disrupting meticulously planned study schedules and raising serious doubts about the administrative fairness of the MPSC. The decision is seen as arbitrary and severely prejudicial to the dedicated aspirants who rely on a stable calendar.

Further compounding the woes of the candidates was the disconcerting nature of the question paper itself. Despite the exam being a technical paper requiring complex calculations, the presence of very few numerical problems—only two, by most accounts has left many candidates doubtful about the nature of the exam. This was made more egregious by notification on the official

website, permitting the use of a scientific calculator. The allowance of a sophisticated tool for only two problems in a technical paper highlights a stark disconnect between the Commission's preparation and the subject matter's requirements.

Moreover, the quality of the question paper has been severely criticised. Aspirants noted that a significant number of questions were repeated, and the overall standard was disappointingly low, leading to widespread claims of a "superstitious" paper lacking in rigour and relevance. Such shortcomings in a high-stakes competitive examination undermine the integrity of the process designed to select the state's most capable Engineers.

These cumulative irregularities—the abrupt preponement, the calculator anomaly in a technical paper with minimal numerical questions, and the compromised quality of the test—have eroded the confidence of the public and aspirants in the MPSC.

A Call for Re-examination: Given the confusion caused by the preponement and the questionable quality of the paper, a re-examination is imperative to ensure a fair and level playing field for all candidates.

The future of Meghalaya's administration rests on the foundation of a fair and transparent recruitment process. The MPSC must heed the voice of the youth and take immediate steps to restore faith in its ability to

Gen Z generated lessons from Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka

By RV Warjri

The manner in which the current Republic of India is governed today, its constitutional Head of State, our gracious lady President of India who is only occasionally heard or seen by the media, profoundly commented on the recent Gen Z upheavals in Nepal. President Murmu said that not "schemes" but "the recognition of people's rights" constitutes "real empowerment".

Hope the President's admonition is taken seriously by the decision makers be it at the Centre in Delhi or the State Capitals in India, particularly the states in the Northeast whose economy is largely scheme-centric.

It has become conventional especially among the ruling elite and the middle class to dismiss most revolutions and movements as instigated by external forces, foreign inspired, super powers, deep state conspiracy etc. While there may be merit in this perception, over-exaggerating it could lead to half-baked conclusions. Losing sight of the underlying causes that led to the bursting of such movements and worse, to cloud the approach for a rational analysis and prevents us from coming out with appropriate solutions. Moreover, media reports focused almost entirely on the destruction and the public unrest with no attempt to reach out to the people who are behind the mobilization to find out their views. One common strand which symbolized the movements in Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka was that they were largely Gen Z-led, student-led or youth-led. The age groups they belong to are under 35.

The protest in Sri Lanka in 2022 was fueled by the economic crisis and runaway inflation, daily blackouts, energy shortage, etc. In Bangladesh it began as a quota movement in early June 2024 led by the 'Students Against Discrimination'. The quota for children of freedom fighters had functioned as a form of political patronage to consolidate the power of the Sheikh Hasina regime that had grown autocratic. Lack of economic opportunities, unemployment, police repression, crackdown on dissent, etc., led to full scale violence. This is especially notable, since Nepal witnessed a youth-led move-

ment against corruption, nepotism, political instability, and oligarchy regimes run by a gerontocracy.

In Nepal the uprising was led by various Gen Z groups, spearheaded by Sudan Gurung of the Hama Nepal NGO. These groups have been raising questions about the corruption, nepotism and misgovernance of the regime. The display of arrogant and affluent lifestyles of the children of ruling elites known as 'Nepo babies' have offended the sensitivities of Gen Z who have been creating networks of dissenting groups through social media.

Ms Pandey, a 24-year-old environmental campaigner, had uploaded a video showing a mining site in Chure, one of the most fragile mountain ranges in the region. Nepal's resources should belong to the people, not to 'politicians' private limited companies", she wrote, calling on her peers to "march against corruption and the misuse of our nation's wealth." The point here is how exploitation of mining also fueled the protests.

"Nothing can stop a revolution in Nepal" - Jawaharlal Nehru wrote to Jayaprakash Narayan in November 1950. Such was the historical depth of corruption in Nepal. The supposedly progressive federal constitution passed in 2015 remained only in theory with neither progress nor implementation. Millions of investments were concentrated in a few hands. Their children would study abroad, compounded by their extravagant lifestyles.

Therefore corruption by the so called elected rulers, stood out very clearly as the number one reason for all these movements in all these neighbouring countries of India. Investigations conducted by professional and diligent journalists also exposed land grabs, cooperative scams, gold smuggling, etc. Also, South Asia is undergoing dramatic demographic and developmental changes. The pace of development is, however, slow and highly inequitable. This is fodder in the hands of tech savvy youngsters, social media networking and the mobilization of widespread popular dissent. And more visibility

of the Gen Z, also means more freedom not less.

Historically and regretfully, one common collateral damage in all these revolutions and movements is that they spiral into uncontrollable violence, anarchy, vandalism, mayhem and deaths. That has been part of most revolutions, be it the French revolution of 1789 or the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 or the Arab Springs of 2010. The late illustrious President of the United States, John F Kennedy once said that "either you have a non-violent revolution or you will have a violent revolution". It was Aldous Huxley who said, "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach."

The spillover of the developments in Nepal can have a corrosive effect in India and especially neighbouring Northeast India. Who knows? The same may or may not happen in India either nationally or in certain pockets depending on where the boiling point can reach!

Lets look at the past 50 years in India. We had non-violent movements no doubt. The first was Jayaprakash Narayan's (JP) Navnirman Andolan, beginning 1974 compounded by the George Fernandes-led railway strike that paralysed India. Yet, these failed to dislodge Mrs Gandhi till an election did it in 1977. The second was Anna Hazare's so-called anti-corruption protests in 2011 fully backed by new TV and strong elements in the Opposition till elections changed it in 2014.

And the system is also such that only groups that enjoy dominance have a chance of having their grievances addressed by the state. Agitations involving marginalized communities, or populations already demonized in the security discourse like Muslims, Christians, Dalits, Adivasis are put down with brutal force and lack of empathy from the majority. Oppression is a potential for explosion.

Coming back to the scheme-centric model of development in the Northeast, big megabucks happen only from land deals or land grabs, illegal mining by

the high level, government contracts and government procurement. In Meghalaya, even low level contractors and suppliers are crying that most of the contracts and procurements are being cornered by a few. The few who have family members as Ministers or politicians. So the few control both political capital as well as economic capital with super luxury cars like Lamborghini. Also a money machine to the ruling party they wield unbridled influence. Like Nepal, children study abroad or in elite schools in other capitals.

Regularly, letters to the editor by the youth have expressed disgust at the frivolous appointments of Chairman, Co Chairman, Advisers etc to the Government of Meghalaya at a heavy cost to the exchequer, whereas the jobs are not forthcoming. Employment is empowerment and as President Murmu says, being gainfully employed is "real empowerment!" These are the Gen Z, questioning. Not to speak of other agitations by teachers and others.

Author Ayn Rand in Atlas Shrugged had warned, "When you see that in order to produce, you need to obtain permission from men who produce nothing - When you see that money is flowing to those who deal, not in goods, but in favours - When you see that men get richer by graft and by pull than by work, and your laws don't protect you against them, but protect them against you - When you see corruption being rewarded and honesty becoming a self-sacrifice you know that your society is doomed."

A foot note. As per international media reports, the "Gen Z protests" in Nepal have captured the imagination of young people in China as well. On social media platforms such as Weibo, Zhihu, Douyin, and Bilibili, Chinese youth are debating the causes behind the unrest. This is in spite of the success of China in denting large scale poverty and extraordinary economic ascendancy.

So Gen Z is not going to sit and watch like the generations before them did. They are asking hard questions which politicians must answer or face their ire.

(The writer is a diplomat and former Ambassador)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Winners Through Non-Violence.

As Gandhi Jayanti approaches, and garlands are dusted off statues and speeches rehearsed with fervent sincerity, I cannot help but feel a sharp tug at my conscience. For while we prepare to celebrate the life of the Mahatma—we, his countrymen, are often seen marching in the opposite direction of his ideals.

And nowhere was this deviation more embarrassingly on display than with our men in blue behaving not like victors, but sulking children. The scoreboard might have declared us winners in the Asian Cup, but the antics on the ground told another tale—one of immaturity, of insecurity, of everything Gandhi would have quietly sighed over.

Where Did the Gentleman Go?

Cricket, we were once told, was a gentleman's game. Gentlemen shook hands after battle, exchanged smiles, and carried themselves with quiet grace whether they won or lost. But somewhere between the bat flips, glares, and aggressive posturing, we seem to have misplaced the gentleman.

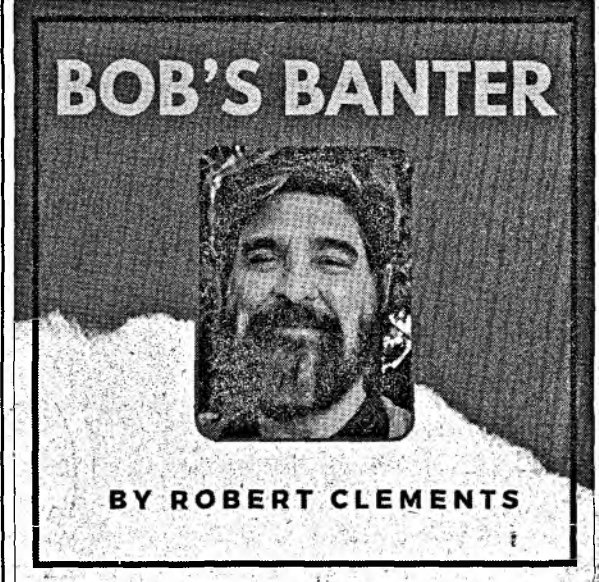
There lies the great tragedy. The world is not blind. The same antics that we excuse as "passion" are watched elsewhere as pettiness—it all chips away at our dignity.

And slowly, without our noticing, the world begins to treat us with the same disdain we think we dish out. I wonder what would Gandhiji have thought?

Violence is not merely about sticks and stones. It is also about attitude, about the spirit we carry. And non-violence is not weakness—it is strength. It is the ability to say, "I am secure enough in my victory to extend my hand even to my rival." That is dignity. That is power. That is Gandhiji.

Let me bring this down from cricket stadiums and international rivalries to something simpler—the neighbourhood playground. Watch children play. The ones who truly win are not those who snatch marbles and run, but those who, even in victory, can share, smile, and say, "Good game."

The world is fractured enough. Division, hatred, suspicion—it is everywhere. If there is one gift India can offer, it is the gift of Gandhiji's legacy: non-violence as



What a strange sight it was: men supposed to represent a civilization that gave the world the message of ahimsa, behaving like schoolboys squabbling over marbles. The crowd may have cheered, the television anchors may have roared, but the world, watching closely, would have whispered, "So these are the inheritors of Gandhiji?"

And then came the pièce de résistance—the refusal to walk up and receive the trophy because the chairman presenting it was from Pakistan. A trophy, mind you, for which the entire match had been fought.

I sat aghast. If we felt so sullied by the idea of shaking hands with a Pakistani, then why, I ask, did we play at all? For whether it is cricket, a hand of cards, or even a round of gilly-danda in the bylanes of your neighbourhood, only friends play together. The very act of agreeing to a match is an agreement of goodwill. It says, "We are willing to engage." To then recoil at the final act—the moment of dignity, of honour—was to spit on our own promise.

The world chuckled. Not because of Pakistan, not because of cricket, but because of us. "These?" they asked, "are supposed to be winners?"

Let us talk maturity. We claimed, quite loudly, that we had "won the war" against Pakistan. If so, should not that be all the more reason to behave with quiet dignity? To display the aristocratic disdain of victors?

Think back. After World War II, when the English walked their streets and Germans came visiting, did they hiss and heckle every German tourist? No. They simply raised their noses with aristocratic poise, poured another cup of Earl Grey, and let silence itself announce their triumph.

That is the mark of winners. Not noise, not tantrums, not flexing muscles at every passerby.

But we? We prance about like cartoons, mistaking bluster for strength. And in the process, we do not look strong. We look insecure.

strength, dignity as power. Our cricket field is not just a field. It is a stage on which the world watches us perform. And when we behave like spoilt children, the message sent is loud and clear: India has forgotten its soul.

But imagine instead if we behaved as Gandhiji would have us. If we received trophies with grace, shook hands even with rivals, smiled even in the face of tension. The applause would not just be for sixes and wickets. It would be for the spirit of India itself.

Winners, real winners, don't need to shout. They don't need to sulk. They walk tall, their silence more powerful than a scream, their smile sharper than a sword. They let the scoreboard, the trophy, and history itself do the talking. Losers, on the other hand, even with medals dangling from their necks, leave behind a bitter aftertaste. People shake their heads, muttering, "Grow up." So here is my plea, as Gandhi Jayanti comes knocking. Grow up, India. Play cricket like winners. Walk off the field like winners. Receive your trophy like winners.

Because if we do not behave like champions, then slowly, very slowly, the world will begin to doubt whether we are champions at all. And that, my dear reader, would be the greatest loss—not on the scoreboard, but in the soul of our nation.

So let us remember Gandhiji. Not with garlands alone, but with our behaviour. Let us wear dignity the way he wore his khadi: simple, unadorned, but stronger than steel. For only then will we be true winners—winners not just through runs and wickets, but through non-violence.

And when that happens, the world will not just clap for our cricket. It will stand in awe of our Gandhian character...

You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending him your name and phone number on bobbanter@gmail.com.

conduct unassailable and meritorious examinations. Yours etc., Name withheld on request, Via email

Money charged for no Data service

Editor, Can we rely on the service of mobile service providers? No, not at all. All entered the fray with a bang to provide "super-smart" service. But they all have literally ditched their gullible customers. Customers now have a deluge of complaints. From certain places, they cannot make calls at all. Even if the call gets through, the voice is not clear, or it is slurry. Call drops are far too frequent.

Voice calls apart, the data service is "the worst". Companies are just robbing money from the public in the name of providing data service. The other day, a 128 KB file sent through email could not be downloaded until I reached home and used broadband. Please note, even the service of JIO fiber -5G these days is not as good as it was earlier. Download streaming is noticeably slow.

One angry student who has to rely on mobile data service for his college project said that burglars and mobile service providers are no different. The difference is only that poor burglars get arrested and put in jail for the offence, while the mobile service providers, having taken money without providing service, are

not even condemned by the police, nor by the district authorities. Had Reliance Communications of Anil Ambani not run away with the booty collected under the pretext of an initial security deposit, I don't think the company had been appropriately taken to task.

Before anything is put in place, in the larger interest of the public, I urge the authorities concerned to crack the whip. Companies should immediately stop selling recharge plans like 2 GB or 1.5 GB daily until these providers can actually deliver what they advertise. Equip first, advertise later.

Yours etc., Salil Gwali, Shillong

Fabricated stories can poison minds

Editor, Apropos of the report "HM sounds alarm over fabricated crime stories" (ST Sept. 29, 2025) has shocked me. Most of the crime incidents involving minors baffle us because we consider them innocent on account of their tender age. In such cases we often direct our fingers at the state administration. Minors are never suspected of committing a crime because they get the benefit of doubt owing to their age. It is therefore surprising to note that a minor girl who fabricated the story on August 25, 2025 in Nongthymmai, Shillong as reported was just an excuse to rid herself of blame whereas

the reality was something different from the truth. The dexterity displayed at such a tender age is like a bead that germinates into a big tree in course of time. It is a signal of crime awaiting to take its ugly shape in future if it is not nipped in the bud.

Fabricated stories can have severe consequences on individuals and societies as a whole. It can fuel tensions and conflicts between different groups and communities. It can also affect the mental health of the person accused apart from stigmatisation of society.

It is not wise to blame someone as incompetent. Each one of us need to combat the dreadful disease through our collective efforts by educating individuals to critically evaluate sources and identity potential biases or misinformation. Fact checking practices before sharing information to prevent the spread of false narratives is imperative. The sooner we act on it the better.

Yours etc., Deepak chhetry, Tura.

Cautionary call to aspiring authors

Editor, Behind every book lies a dream. Yet too many aspiring authors see that dream crushed, not by rejection but by fraudulent publishing companies that prey on hope.

These firms hide behind polished promises and glowing Google reviews, but the

truth is harsh. Writers invest their savings into marketing and promotion, only to face silence: calls unanswered, emails ignored, money gone. The loss is not only financial but deeply emotional. Imagine pouring your soul into a manuscript, only to have your trust broken before your words even reach readers.

Traditional publishers today often favor celebrities or authors with ready-made followings, leaving new voices vulnerable. This vacuum has allowed fraudulent self-publishing houses to flourish. Still, genuine publishers do exist; teams that guide transparently, charge fairly, and truly support their authors. The task is learning to tell the difference.

So let this be both a caution and a call. Writers, safeguard your creativity as fiercely as you guard your words. Do not rely on reviews or glossy promises alone. Ask questions, speak to fellow authors, demand proof of real work before signing away your trust.

No author should lose their voice to deceit. Protecting writers means protecting stories, and protecting stories means protecting culture itself. If we remain alert, our dreams will not just survive but they will shine.

Your's etc, Shivani Pde, Via email

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

— Philip James Bailey

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Big talks meaningless

BIG talks do not help change the fate of a nation or its people. Solid action on the ground brings about change. A deficit in action cannot be made up with exhortations from the podium – the standard style of India's semi-literate governing class. Two top movers and shakers of the nation – Prime Minister Narendra Modi and RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat – addressed the people on the occasions marking Vijaydashami and the centenary year of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. Both zeroed in on the curses that bedevil the society and stressed the need for change. That they are mindful of these is gratifying; but their penchant to hold forth on critical issues and beating a retreat without taking any steps to reverse the wrong trends in positive ways is glaring.

Modi's take at the centenary event in Delhi was that "unity in diversity is the soul of the nation, but divisions fuelled by caste, language, regionalism and extremist thinking could weaken the social fabric if these are not confronted." The statement comes from a Prime Minister who led the nation through three consecutive terms in power at the apex of the governance system, but has done too little in confronting the ugly scenarios. Even in the handling of terrorism – in which the Modi establishment made significant progress even in the Kashmir Valley – much more deserved to be done from his side. Operation Sindoor gave India an opportunity to nail the terrorist masterminds in Pakistan, but they are still cocking a snook at India and Modi from the cool comfort of their dens. They are boasting that the gains for Pakistan from this confrontation were six against India's zero. Modi and his defence minister are yet to open their mouths on who lost and gained what. Modi cites the problems of casteism but such sentiments are getting more pronounced today due mainly to the discriminative nature of the governance system that Modi presides over. The PM cleverly did not cite the issue of corruption that plagues the government, both at the bureaucratic and political levels. This has skyrocketed under his watch even as Modi presents himself as being incorruptible. The money that the BJP pumps into election campaigns in themselves are proof of the huge cuts it manages from governmental deals. The highway development, by far the main progress India registered under Modi, too has an ugly side to it, which was exposed by none other than the CAG.

The 'unity in diversity' that Modi stresses has been the stuff that politicians hailed for long; what's new is his singular ostracizing of communities like Muslims from the main frame, evident also from their glaring lack of representation in his 70-strong ministry, and in his other governance systems. This is over and above their near-total exclusion from the bureaucracy, the preserve of an elite segment of the society. Bhagwat, who also claimed "diversity is our tradition and we must maintain it" too acts like an ostrich – shutting his eyes to the realities on the ground.

Alienation in the Government

By Avner Pariat

The following write-up began percolating in my head because of the interactions and conversations I had with a number of government workers across the hierarchical ladder. This included peons, office staff all the way to the upper echelons of the Bureaucracy. Throughout these conversations, a common thread seemed evident – just under the surface – and it might be summed up as a feeling; a feeling of "not having contributed or added something meaningful to their roles/posts". Indeed, this often has existentialist bearing on the person affected as well. This ultimately leads to bad outputs and low work productivity. I thought about this phenomenon a lot and I feel that the best explanation for this condition is probably still that of one of its greatest exponents, namely, Karl Marx.

Marx's theory of Alienation describes how the Capitalist system – in this case the machinery of the State Government – disconnects the people working within from the value and purpose of their labour. The first dimension – alienation from the product of labour – occurs when workers have no control over what they produce, making their output feel foreign and exploitative. Secondly, alienation from the labour process arises when work becomes repetitive, externally controlled, and devoid of creativity, reducing it to a mere means of survival. Thirdly, alienation from species-being refers to the suppression of human potential, as workers are denied the fulfilment of meaningful, self-directed activity. Finally, alienation from other humans emerges when competition replaces cooperation with isolation and mistrust. In capitalist production, workers sell their labour as a commodity, losing autonomy over their time, skills, and the fruits of their effort. This alienation leads to estrangement from one's own identity, as labour is no longer an expression of self but an imposed necessity. Government workers, though not producing commodities, experience similar alienation through bureaucratic rigidity, lack of agency, and disconnection from policy outcomes. The psychological toll includes burnout, apathy, and a diminished sense of purpose, mirroring Marx's critique of dehumanizing labour conditions. For example, the number of office workers who are freely opting for the Voluntary Retirement Scheme (VRS)

seems to have gone up over the past decade from what I have observed and I would argue that this is a validation of Marx's assumptions.

Many lower-rung government workers actively contribute to policies, public services, or bureaucratic processes but lack control over the final outcomes. A legal professional drafting legislation might see their work altered by political or bureaucratic agendas, rendering the final policy unrecognizable or misaligned with their intent. Similarly, healthcare workers may face pressure to meet quotas or submit daily standardized metrics, reducing their medical work with patients which then leads to cold impersonal outputs rather than meaningful societal contributions within the community. Meaningful societal contributions here describe work that has a positive effect on individuals and society as a whole. For government workers, this means seeing how their efforts – whether delivering healthcare, educating students, or shaping fair policies – directly improves lives and strengthens communities.

When these public servants recognize their role in creating systemic change – such as reducing inequality or ensuring ethical governance – they derive a deeper sense of purpose and personal fulfilment. This connection between the efforts of labour and societal impact fosters higher job satisfaction, greater efficiency, and stronger public trust. The government can even get away with lower wage compensation in such cases (though I would not lobby for such a thing). People want to feel that they have contributed to something bigger than themselves. When government employees feel their work matters, they perform better, leading to more effective services and smarter use of public resources, benefiting both citizens and the state. Conversely when they feel like just ineffectual cogs in a large machine the reverse is observed. This has been studied again and again and there is no dearth of literature on the matter.

Alienation from the Process: Bureaucratic structures in government often enforce rigid workflows, limiting autonomy. Tasks are often fragmented (e.g., processing paperwork or adhering to strict protocols), reducing work to repetitive, mechanical actions rather than

creative or intellectual engagement. Decision-making authority typically resides in upper management or elected officials, leaving workers with little influence over how their labour is organized. Marx describes this as labour becoming "external to the worker," a mere means of survival rather than self-expression. For example, a social worker constrained by red tape may feel their expertise and ethical judgment are side-lined, leading to frustration and disengagement.

Alienation from Species-Being (Human Potential): Marx posits that humans thrive through creative, purposeful work that reflects their "species-essence". However, government roles may stifle this potential. Narrow job descriptions and hierarchical structures can limit opportunities for innovation or holistic problem-solving, reducing workers to cogs in a machine. The modern emphasis on compliance and risk-aversion in public institutions prioritizes procedural correctness over meaningful impact, alienating workers from their capacity to effect change. For instance, a teacher adhering to standardized curricula might feel disconnected from their role as an educator, unable to tailor methods to students' needs. Marx highlights that capitalism replaces communal bonds with transactional relationships. In government, this might manifest as a focus on "efficiency" over collective well-being, estranging workers from their shared purpose.

Summing up we can see that there are a few unique challenges for government workers.

1. Public Service Paradox: While government roles are often mission-driven, Alienation can arise when workers perceive a disconnect between institutional actions and public good (e.g., budget cuts which undermine social services).

2. Structural Hierarchies: Even in the public sector, capitalist logic of the "market" can replicate exploitative dynamics, subjecting workers to efficiency-driven pressures.

3. Psychological Effects: Alienation in government roles correlates with stress, burnout, and feelings of powerlessness, as noted in health inequality research linking alienation to poor mental health.

How do we mitigate Alienation in the Public

Sector:

1. Participatory Decision-Making: Bureaucrats must involve lower-rung employees (especially at the grassroots level) in policy design or workflow improvements. They cannot rely on middle managers to be the "native informants". A native informant is a concept originating in social sciences, especially linguistics and anthropology, referring to a member of a community who provides cultural or linguistic information to an outside researcher. Initially a neutral term, the term has become derogatory and problematic, highlighting the power imbalances in the relationship between the outsider (who studies or administers) and the insider (who is studied or administered). I have encountered too many of these people who have not been able to deconstruct their own class privilege and connections to make good decisions for the majority who are still underserved. The outcomes become mired in vested interests. Bureaucrats must be aware of this before they assume that only a few officers know everything about the local cultures and contexts. Even if they are locals.

2. Fostering Autonomy and Creativity: This means letting government workers use their own skills and ideas to solve problems, instead of just forcing them to follow strict rules. We can show the public that this is happening by highlighting success stories. For example, when a muster-roll worker finds a faster way to fix potholes or a librarian creates a popular new reading program for teens, the government should publicly celebrate these improvements. Maybe through acknowledgement via memos, publications or even plaques. Why should ministers and dignitaries have all the credit? When people see these real-life examples of better service, they can easily understand the positive impact of giving workers more freedom. This builds solidarity and boosts worker morale.

In summary, while government work differs from industrial labour, Marx's framework points us in the right direction and shows how officious structures within public institutions can alienate workers from their labour, humanity, and peers. Addressing these issues requires reimagining work as a site of empowerment and emancipation. We need to encourage our lower rung workers and celebrate their contributions as well!

When AI Revives the Lost: The New Age of De-Extinction

By Tanveer Singh

Imagine waking up one morning to hear the cheerful sounds of bird songs; only to realize that the bird you loved is no longer there – it has vanished forever. The same could be true for the animal you are deeply connected to, that symbolizes your identity or spirit, lost to extinction and removed from the natural world. This heartbreaking decline has become more common in recent decades, as countless birds, from the passenger pigeon to the Spix's macaw, and animals, such as the Asiatic cheetah and the northern white rhino, have disappeared from the world due to habitat loss, climate change, and human activity. Even the sparrows that once filled our childhood with wonderful memories are now a rare sight because of the construction of buildings, towers, and the use of pesticides.

In response to these losses, scientists are constantly working on the new field: De-extinction or species revival that uses genetic engineering and cloning, not only to make the DNA of lost species but also to simulate their behaviors and roles within ecosystems. However, the question of deep curiosity is what if recent Artificial Intelligence technologies are applied to de-extinction? Will AI be able to make what was once impossible, and how efficiently will it be able to preserve the extinct animals?

To respond to your curiosity about how the process of the revival of species works, here is the answer. The procedure starts with the deep research of fossil fuels or fragments of ancient DNA from museum specimens or archaeological finds. They served as a blueprint, and then traditional methods like cloning and selective breeding were used to make these species. However, these methods are often hindered because of contamination or missing DNA fragments or loss of some pieces of fossil fuels, which makes it difficult to recreate a full genome (a complete set of genetic information). Take the example of the Moa Bird of New Zealand; the bird was known to be extinct in the mid-15th century, and when fossil remains of it were gathered, it was found that there were many missing and damaged DNA parts; as a result, the full genome could not be constructed through cloning. These challenges underscore the need for artificial intelligence models and techniques that can generate accurate genetic information, which can be utilized in cloning and selective breeding methods.

Out of the hundreds of thousands of species known to be extinct, only around 8-9% have a DNA fragment that allows cloning. This percentage could go up by 30% if advanced AI models are used to reconstruct the DNA fragments. AI models like Evo 2 use learning patterns from living relatives of extinct animals to guess and fill broken DNA sequences, which traditional methods cannot fully restore. For instance, Colossal – a biotech company – successfully created extinct species of dire wolf pups by reconstructing the DNA fragments and altering the genes of close relatives of them, like the grey wolf, to bring back the hybrid that resembles the extinct dire wolf pups. Furthermore, it helps scientists to put short fragments of DNA together by analyzing overlaps and patterns in data. It can quickly find the right order and correct errors in these fragments, making the assembly process quicker with high accuracy and precision. For example, hifiASM – an AI DNA assembler model – was used by scientists to assemble the DNA fragments of passenger pigeons taken from the museum that assisted in the ongoing research of de-extinction of these birds.

Additionally, AI helps in seeing what ancient species were like by making realistic pictures and 3D representations of them. AI can analyze fossil records, incomplete skeletons, and living relatives to produce visuals of animals that are no longer alive, such as the woolly mammoth, dodo bird, and saber-toothed cat. Mid-journey is one such AI tool that helps in reconstructing the visuals of extinct species by using machine learning algorithms. Besides this, AI aids in organising and storing data of extinct species by creating digital repositories which can be used by others to know about the species and background of the extinct species. For example, Macaulay Library by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology uses digital repositories to store thousands of bird species, which also includes extinct species like the ivory-billed woodpecker and Kauai O'o.

Despite these applications of AI in reviving De-extinction, some major challenges need to be resolved. First and foremost, AI relies heavily on DNA sequences to reconstruct extinct species. However, many times, DNA fragments are fully damaged or have missing pieces, which makes it difficult for AI to rebuild an accurate genome. For instance, Dinosaurs cannot be revived using AI and bioengineering methods, as they are known to have been extinct about 66 million years ago, and the survival time of DNA fragments is about a few million years. Secondly, even if AI helps in recreating extinct species, the environment in which the species survived has already changed since it went extinct.

Thus, the relationships between habitat, ecosystem, and climate change will affect the survival of species, which can lead to the failure of reviving many species. Take the example of woolly mammoths that have been known to be extinct for about 10 thousand years ago, the ecosystem in which they lived was grasslands and tundra, which has been replaced by forests and landscape. As a result, this shift in habitat will lead to a struggle in the survival of woolly mammoths, even if they are reconstructed using DNA fragments. Besides this, AI cannot address moral questions like the impact of reviving these species on the ecological system or the welfare of these engineered animals.

Despite these challenges, the future of the De-extinction field, with the integration of Artificial Intelligence, is being shaped by higher accuracy than the traditional approaches and an increase in efficiency. Now, it is no longer just a dream of seeing extinct species again, but it is becoming a reality because of technological advancement. Scientists are trying their best to revive several species, including Tasmanian Tigers – an extinct species of the Australian mainland, 1936 – by assembling DNA using AI. Furthermore, creating more advanced models of AI can increase the accuracy and efficiency of de-extinction research. Alongside, AI can be used to simulate the ecosystem of the extinct species and analyze behavioral outcomes that scientists can use to predict and mitigate risks before actual release.

It would not be an exaggeration to say that AI has transformed the De-extinction field, making the dream scenarios of viewing extinct animals possible. This collaboration not only aids in reviving the species but also restores the habitat and ecosystem of the animal in which it used to live and learning from past experiences to safeguard the current endangered species. Despite major challenges in ethical considerations and accuracy in genome prediction, the rapid advancements in the field of AI will decrease these challenges in the long run.

Furthermore, the combination of genetic insights with the analytical power of AI can assist scientists in restoring biodiversity, preserving the ecosystem, and developing innovative solutions for environmental sustainability. This collaboration of Biology (Genetics) and Computer Science (AI) will foster a deep connection between humans and nature, where technology will aid us in strengthening our bond with the flora and fauna of Earth, leading us towards a better future for society and the environment overall.

(The writer is the First B.Tech Student at Plaksha University, Mohali).

Letters to the Editor

Understanding mental illness

Editor,

I write in appreciation of Akhil Dwivedi's, Letter to the Editor, "Mental Illness is not Madness" (TST, Sep 26, 2025). Old religious civilisations, like India, can be tone-deaf to genuine mental illness. This is one extreme. But here in America, we have the other extreme – a world where the psychologist and therapist have replaced the confessor. Iniquities are interpreted as ailments of the mind (not soul) and treated with medication. A saccharine-sweet undiscerning sympathy pervades a culture of ubiquitous therapy that helps nobody – least of all the patient. Besides the medical industry, nobody really profits from this intrusion of medicine into the purview of religion. The same with the bodily appetites. An obese person once told me she was considering stomach-shrinking surgery to lessen her food intake. It never occurred to her to try self-control. A direct result of runaway materialism, this commodification of one's own body comes with a lethal loss of inwardness. On the mental front, we are witnessing a gargantuan loss of the old stoicism, dignity, and inwardness that derive from faith in a higher power.

I remember the stoicism of my parents' generation – a resilience so great that I used to think (as a child), adults did not possess tear glands. The first time I saw an adult weep was when she lost her infant son tragically, under painful, avoidable circumstances and

a cruel medical establishment. Back then, the culture of therapy was non-existent. Before the traumas and vicissitudes of life, you practiced resilience, self-surrender, and calmness – not medication or therapy.

This is not to deny the painful realities Mr Dwivedi speaks of, but to draw a line between genuine mental illness and a lethal culture of therapy that robs us of dignity and confidence. Mental illness is a stark reality of modern culture and deserves the fullest attention of the scientific community. An inappropriate luxury in this context, religion cannot help those who are in the throes of mental illness. Conversely, science cannot help those who have succumbed to a culture of therapy – relinquishing accountability, introspection, and faith. They need wisdom, ethics, and the highest aspects of religion.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar
Via email

Lack of discipline in modern parenting

Editor,

This letter is not intended to shame or judge individual parents, but rather highlight concerning trends in modern parenting. Not all parents fit these descriptions; there are many dedicated and responsible parents out there. Some of the examples mentioned may not directly imply parental fault, but rather serve as illustrations of broader

societal trends and challenges.

There's need to bring back old school parenting, old school discipline in schools. The kids are having it easy and are without respect depicting parentless behaviour. We used to live in a city where we had to keep the children safe, but now the tables have turned. Now we live in a city where minors are capable of creating chaos within the state, sending ripples only to find out that they fabricated the story. Now who should be held accountable? The government? The society? The school system? The parents?

Well, they say, "A good education begins at home." It always starts from home. If you can't discipline your child, how else do you expect society and the system to turn out? Parents nowadays turn their kids into spoiled brats and pinpoint others for the child's mistakes, always assuming their children are angels. But in reality, even Satan wouldn't want to deem them his children. They always try to cover up the mistakes instead of disciplining them.

Moreover, when schools try to handle their children, instead of examining their kids behaviour first they'd rather blame the institution for being ineffective and say they are too harsh. Are they though? Or are you just irresponsible adults who don't want to take responsibility for your own child and blame the institution for their behaviour?

Why else do you think the school system disciplines

your child? It's not about having fun or expressing anger but teaching your child responsible behaviour and self-control, which it seems you don't teach them at home and neither do you give them a reality check on how life in the real world works. This finger pointing only perpetuates the problem, rather than addressing the root cause.

Furthermore, the way school systems disciplined students back in the days was a lifetime lesson that we remember to this day. Look at the difference between back then and now. In today's generation, you discipline them now, and 10 minutes later they have forgotten it. "But writer, how can you compare that? Back then and now it's totally different?" some will quip. Discipline is discipline; it doesn't exceed or diminish just because of the time gap. Likewise the mathematical truths!

In addition to this, back then, kids were kids. Now, a 13-year-old is capable of murder; minor students can spin a yarn about being drugged and held at knife-point. Then you have teenagers engaging in physical fights and online beefs, using slangs and informal language in public without hesitation. You say kids are the "future." Future?

Future what? Pathological liars? Murderers? Drug dealers? Vandals? Rapists? You want your kids to be the future leaders, the next APJ Abdul Kalam, Kiran Bedi, yet they don't even have basic manners, decency, discipline, or self-control. You've

set them to be nothing but failures and a disgrace to the state. Yes, parents and children should have a good relationship, but not to such an extent that you condone your child's misdeeds. Spoiling children can lead to negative consequences, such as the sense of entitlement, lack of self-discipline, and poor behaviour. Hence, the phrase, "teach them while they're young." Everything starts at the initial stage. Shape and mould them to become persons with good morals and values instead of making excuses for their mistakes by saying they are still just "kids," because this is when they take advantage of you, knowing you'll always be lenient with their bad behaviour.

Finally, disciplining your children doesn't mean resorting to physical abuse, which can lead to pent-up frustration in your children and turning them into potential rebels. Effective discipline requires consistency – not too harsh, not too lenient, and certainly no knee-jerk reactions. Rather than dwelling on their mistakes, focus on teaching them the right behaviour. Punishment should be balanced with guidance and counselling, helping them to learn from their mistakes rather than repeating them.

Parents ought to know the difference between letting them enjoy their youth and destroying their future. 'Whoever spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent in disciplining him.'

Yours etc.,
Ms Nengnong,
Via email

Abuse of religious platforms

Editor,

In the wake of Zubeen Garg's passing, tributes poured in from every corner of Assam and beyond. Zubeen Garg openly identified himself as an atheist, rejecting religions. Yet, in Shillong many Durga Puja pandals exclusively built for Hindu religious worship, were adorned with images and dedications to the late singer. This act, however well-meaning, reflects a troubling thoughtlessness. It blurs the line between cultural admiration and religious observance. In doing so, it undermines the very faith it seeks to celebrate. There is no shortage of avenues to honour Zubeen Garg's legacy. By choosing a religious platform to pay homage to the departed singer, a section of the Hindu community has not only openly disrespected Garg's beliefs but also encroached upon the spiritual boundaries of Hindu worship. Such gestures, though emotionally driven, deserve critical reflection and where necessary, condemnation.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar
Shillong-3

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

Meet Irene Curie – the physicist who reshaped modern cancer treatment

The adage goes "like mother like daughter," and in the case of Irene Joliot-Curie, truer words were never spoken. She was the daughter of two Nobel Prize laureates, Marie Curie and Pierre Curie, and was herself awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry in 1935 together with her husband, Frederic Joliot.

While her parents received the prize for the discovery of natural radioactivity, Irene's prize was for the synthesis of artificial radioactivity. This discovery changed many fields of science and many aspects of our everyday lives. Artificial radioactivity is used today in medicine, agriculture, energy production, food sterilisation, industrial quality control and more.

We are two nuclear physicists who perform experiments at different accelerator facilities around the world.

Irene's discovery laid the foundation for our experimental studies, which use artificial radioactivity to understand questions related to astrophysics, energy, medicine and more.

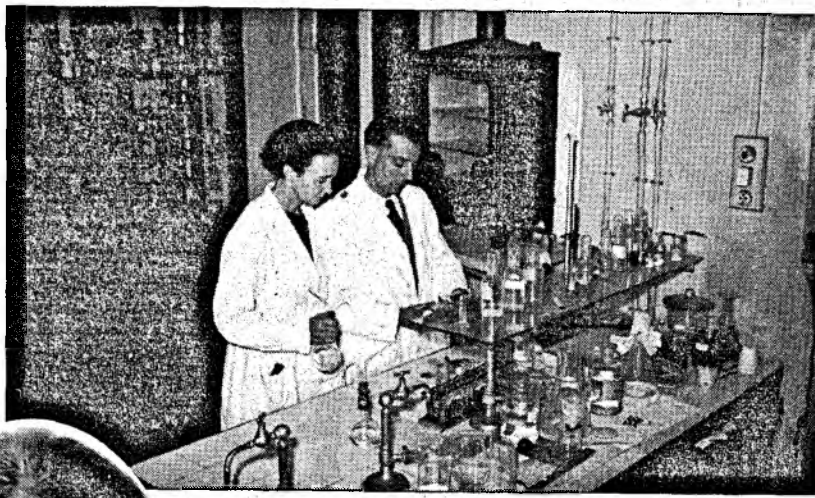
Early years & battlefield training

Irene Curie was born in Paris, France, in 1897. In an unusual schooling setup, Irene was one of a group of children taught by their academic parents, including her own, by then-famous mother, Marie Curie.

World War I started in 1914, when Irene was only 17, and she interrupted her studies to help her mother find fragments of bombs in wounded soldiers using portable X-ray machines.

She soon became an expert in these wartime radiology techniques, and on top of performing the measurements herself, she also spent time training nurses to use the X-ray machines.

After the war, Irene went back to her studies in her mother's lab at the Radium Institute. This is where she met fellow researcher Frederic Joliot, whom she later married. The two worked together on many projects, which led them to their major break-



through in 1934.

A radioactive discovery

Isotopes are variations of a particular element that have the same number of protons - positively charged particles - and different numbers of neutrons, which are particles with no charge. While some isotopes are stable, the majority are radioactive and called radioisotopes. These radioisotopes spontaneously transform into different elements and release radiation - energetic particles or light - in a process called radioactive decay.

At the time of Irene and Frederic's discovery, the only known radioactive isotopes came from natural ores, through a costly and extremely time-consuming process. Marie and Pierre Curie had spent years studying the natural radioactivity in tons of uranium ores. In Irene and Frederic's experiments, they bombarded aluminium samples with alpha particles, which consist of two protons and two neutrons bound together - they are atomic nuclei of the isotope helium-4.

In previous studies, they had observed the different types of radiation their samples emitted while being bombarded. The radiation would cease when they took away the source of alpha particles. In the aluminium experi-

ment, however, they noticed that even after they removed the alpha source, they could still detect radiation.

The amount of radiation decreased by half every three minutes, and they concluded that the radiation came from the decay of a radioisotope of the element phosphorus. Phosphorus has two additional protons compared to aluminium and was formed when the alpha particles fused with the aluminium nuclei. This was the first identification of an artificially made radioisotope, phosphorus-30. Because phosphorus-30 was created after bombarding aluminium with alpha particles - rather than occurring in its natural state - Irene and Frederic induced the radioactivity. So, it is called artificial radioactivity.

After her major discovery, Irene stayed active not only in research but in activism and politics as well. In 1936, almost a decade before women gained the right to vote in France, she was appointed undersecretary of state for scientific research. In this position, she laid the foundations for what would become the National Centre for Scientific Research, which is the French equivalent of the U.S. National Science Foundation or National Institutes of Health. She co-created the French Atomic Energy Commission in 1945 and held a six-year term, promoting nuclear research and development of the first French nuclear reactor. She later became director of the Curie Laboratory at the Radium Institute and

Is China climate good or bad – or both?

You could tell me that China still gets most of its electricity from coal and is building more new coal power plants than anywhere else in the world. And you'd be right.

You could also tell me that China (with a sixth of the world's population) is installing about half of the world's new renewable energy. And you'd be right too. In fact, you could read academic experts making all of the above points on The Conversation. It's OK to feel confused: China really is a key driver of both emissions and solutions.

The world's largest emitter is also the single most important country in determining how much the climate will breakdown and whether the world will do enough to stop it.

So what should we make of China and its role in global climate policy? Imagine a negotiating hall in Belem, Brazil, six weeks from now: it's the Cop30 climate summit. Officials are murmuring to each other, translators are whispering into their headsets, and people are crowding around one delegation in particular. It isn't the US or the EU drawing the crowd: it's China.

Until relatively recently, this would have seemed an outlandish suggestion. But over the past few years many academics from around the world have made the same point: China is increasingly becoming a world leader in climate diplomacy.

For decades, many assumed such leadership would come from the US or Europe. But as US commitment has wavered, and Europe seems preoccupied by other matters, expectations are shifting eastward.

Yixian Sun, an associate professor of international development at the University of Bath, says it's time for China to step up. He says that: "As an emerging superpower with advantages in clean technologies and a leadership that recently reaffirmed their commitment to climate action, the country is well positioned." Shannon Gibson, who researches the dynamics of UN climate negotiations at the University of Southern California, says that China already is stepping up. In her analysis, the country "seems to be happily filling the climate power vacuum created by the US exit [from the Paris

agreement]."

Beijing, she writes, is using leadership on climate change as part of a "broader strategy of gaining influence and economic power by supporting economic growth and cooperation in developing countries".

Whether China is engaging in climate diplomacy reluctantly, enthusiastically or strategically, something is clearly shifting. There was a nice illustration of this at the last UN climate summit, Cop29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, last year. At the time, Lucia Green-Weiskel of Trinity College in the US reported on a spat over whether China should provide funds to help poorer countries adapt to climate change at a level comparable to other big emitters. The dispute, she noted, "almost shut down the entire conference".

Why China's promises matter

China recently pledged to cut its greenhouse gas emissions by 79-10% by 2035, as part of its commitments under the Paris agreement.

Most analysts were underwhelmed, arguing that Beijing should be more ambitious. But Myles Allen and Kai Jiang of the University of Oxford say it's worth taking pledges like this seriously as "Beijing has form in only promising what it plans to deliver". They note that, for instance, China looks set to deliver on a promise to peak its emissions this decade "barely 50 years after it began to industrialise in earnest". For them: "China's targets aren't just slogans or aspirations - they are statements of intent, grounded in what the country believes it can deliver. And where China goes, others will follow." That's because even fairly modest revisions to China's targets can shift expectations and put pressure on other big emitters to do more.

We can't simply assert that China is a goodie or a baddie when it comes to global climate change policy. This is complex stuff with lots of moving parts, and you can easily change perceptions simply by emphasising coal power over new solar, or vice versa. (The Conversation)

(Authored by Will de Freitas, Environment and Energy Editor, The Conversation)

a professor at the Faculty of Science in Paris. Medical uses of artificial radioactivity The Joliot-Curie discovery opened the road to the extensive use of radioisotopes in medical applications. Today, radioactive iodine is used regularly to treat thyroid diseases. Radioisotopes that emit positrons - the positive equivalent of the electron - are used in medical PET scans to image and diagnose cancer, and others are used for cancer therapy.

To diagnose cancer, practitioners can inject a small amount of the radioisotope into the body, where it accumulates in specific organs. Specialised devices, such as a PET scanner, can then detect the radioactivity from the outside. This way, doctors can visualise how these organs are working without the need for surgery.

To treat cancer, practitioners use large amounts of radiation to kill the cancer cells. They try to localise the application of the radioisotope to just where the cancer is so that they're only minimally affecting healthy tissue.

An enduring legacy

In the 90 years since the Joliot-Curie discovery of the first artificial radioisotope, the field of nuclear science has expanded its reach to roughly 3,000 artificial radioisotopes, from hydrogen to the heaviest known element, oganesson. However, nuclear theories predict that up to 7,000 artificial radioisotopes are possible.

As physicists, we work with data from a new facility at Michigan State University, the Facility for Rare Isotope Beams, which is expected to discover up to 1,000 new radioisotopes.

While the Joliot-Curies were bombarding their samples with alpha particles at relatively low speeds, the Michigan State facility can accelerate stable isotopes up to half the speed of light and smash them on a target to produce new radioisotopes. Scientists using the facility have already discovered five new radioisotopes since it began operating in 2022, and the search continues. (The Conversation)

(Authored by Artemis Spyrou, Michigan State University and Andrea Richard, Ohio University)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 5, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Mercury is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn on your solar return chart. It is possible confrontation can create chaos around you. You will face opposition at your workplace. There can be some plotting and conspiracies against you. Some people might try to defame you and tarnish your reputation. Even your bosses will remain unhappy with you. And you can face some business losses too. But you will not lose patience and emerge victorious in the end. Expenses could be beyond your control. Your romantic life will be normal. There may be some tensions in the family, and it will be difficult for you to convince life partner. You will be drawn to social services, spiritualism and charitable activities. Health will be okay. You will develop lot of connections during business trips that you undertake.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Positive new relationships are formed, and you can look forward to good results. It is a friendly time, when it is easy to enjoy life and other people, as you instinctively start a new phase in your life. It's time to give your life a makeover, a time of new beginnings and fresh energy. Focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new plans, and exploration. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. Your physical activities tend to be more intense, passionate, and focused.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. You are inspired and could even inspire others. You are thinking more creatively, and express yourself with more sensitivity, compassion, and warmth. You want your objectives to reflect what you are really about, and you are likely to rid yourself of unsatisfying goals. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus helps you achieve what you set out to do. It is the time to coordinate with your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You are in a position to inspire others through what you create, highlighting communication, creativity and authority. Your attitude towards life would be changing; you are no longer willing to make compromises in the important areas of your life, particularly with regards to career and your life path. You would be able to find a way to strike a balance between self-gratification and the obligations of daily life. You are more determined, and it is an excellent time for getting rid of bad habits. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You give a new approach to communications projects, learning, or self-expression. Your most natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. A new project or goal begun now has a good chance of being successful and long lasting. This is a good time for reflection, prayer, and meditation. A higher purpose to your life is what you seek, and you rely more heavily upon your intuition in order to achieve it. Your self-confidence and positive attitude will reward you. Positive connections with others can be made fairly easily. A comfortable level of personal popularity helps to keep conflict to a minimum.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) This phase brings an exciting job offer, reward, recognition or a possible promotion. An opportunity to expand on a worldly level arrives now. A balanced approach to life, in terms of realistic expectations, is the best approach for maximizing success. People are bound to recognize your leadership skills and talents. You want your life path and your objectives to reflect what you're really about. You benefit from being more decisive than usual, and your ability to concentrate and focus help you to achieve what you set out to do in the coming weeks. You are more enthusiastic and ready for adventure. It's also a good time for expressing your creativity.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) This is a period of work and development. It's a time to deal with practical matters, and it's not a time to be lazy or especially gregarious. It can be a time that feels hard, monotonous and lonely. Try to get yourself organized, work to build your resources, keep busy. You might find that you are very often encouraged and supportive of others. Certainly, you

are more accepting and understanding of your friends and loved ones. Being content in love will figure and will attract positive circumstances into your life. It is likely to be a rather lighthearted time, when opportunities are greater than usual.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) There will be a wave good-luck in love and romance. You spend great time in long conversations, phone calls, short trips and enjoy the feeling of togetherness. You are more receptive and gentler on a romantic level and tend to be sentimental about work commitments. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. Financial success is stronger than earlier. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity to your work in an unconventional way. Positive new relationships are formed.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. There are greater monetary gains too. You probably should be aware of a tendency to create your own financial stress due to extravagant spending habits. Your main focus is on personal freedom, reaching out to others, making new friends, and exploration. You are enthusiastic and ready for adventure. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You might spend a lot of time on short frequent trips, communicating and visiting religious places.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. If you are patient and open yourself up in a gentle manner, you will attract both things and people. Be patient, be receptive and enjoy peace.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You enjoy decisions in your favour when it comes to legal affairs, education, and travel. Financial benefits may come your way. You may find that you have the right information at the right time. You could also have big ideas and plans. Work, especially in communications, goes well. Love matters, finances, and social relationships are especially pleasing and satisfying. You are generally more cooperative, although occasional willfulness could be a downfall, if you succumb to it. New friendships, or new spins on established connections, are in your forecast.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Your efforts would be rewarded and praised by people in authority as you resolve issues related to finances and budgets. You are bound to enjoy increased social opportunities as well as a boost in your personal popularity and magnetism. Others look on you favorably. You are more friendly, optimistic, and big-hearted than usual. A cheerful and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining cooperation from others. This is a sociable, and perhaps self-indulgent, time when the pursuit of pleasure is one of your high priorities. Security in love is likely to figure and to attract positive circumstances into your life.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) The planetary combination boosts your professional prospects as you communicate cleverly and interact in a more positive way with people. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of the consequences and try to please your loved one. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your truth and intuition to feel more integrated with your loved one. Married people should take care of family members as the health of a family member may suffer. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems, detach yourself from problems and view them from a different perspective. Meditation and daily prayers would help to overcome the recently generated problems.

What is cultural intelligence?

Whether at school, at work, or in our leisure time, we encounter individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. "Cultural intelligence," which allows us to understand and adapt to different cultural codes, is an essential asset for promoting coexistence.

What does it mean to be intelligent? To pass a logic test? To solve an equation? To have a good memory? Intelligence has long been reduced to an IQ score. However, as early as the 1920s and 1940s, American psychologists such as Edward Thorndike, Louis Thurstone, and Raymond Cattell were already highlighting the existence of different forms of intelligence.

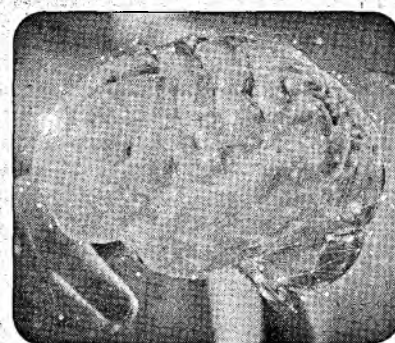
In the 1980s, another American psychologist, Robert Sternberg, proposed an approach that distinguished three complementary dimensions: analytical intelligence (reasoning, comparing, solving problems), creative intelligence (imagining, dealing with novelty) and practical intelligence (adapting to one's environment, acting effectively). According to his approach, being intelligent is, above all, knowing how to achieve one's life goals, in a given context, by mobilizing one's strengths and compensating for one's weaknesses.

Interacting in multicultural environments It was in the continuity of Sternberg's work that the notion of cultural intelligence (CQ) emerged. Proposed by Earley and Ang in 2003, it refers to the ability to understand cultural differences, adapt to them and interact effectively in multicultural environments. The initial objective was to explain why some expatriates succeed better than others during international assignments. The researchers thus identified four complementary dimensions of cultural intelligence.

The metacognitive dimension corresponds to the ability to become aware of one's own cultural biases and to adjust one's way of thinking and interacting according to the context.

For example, a French manager may be accustomed to expressing criticism very directly. When faced with interlocutors from a cultural context where this criticism is formulated more implicitly, they understand that this style may be perceived as too abrupt. They then revise their approach to facilitate cooperation.

The cognitive dimension refers



to general knowledge about other cultures, their norms and practices: knowing, for example, that in Japan exchanging a business card follows a precise ritual, that in Germany any delay is perceived as a real lack of respect or that in the United States small talk during a meeting is an essential step before getting to the heart of the matter.

The motivational dimension reflects the desire and confidence needed to interact with culturally diverse people. It is found, for example, in students who voluntarily choose to join an international team even if it will require more communication efforts.

Finally, the behavioural dimension refers to the ability to concretely adapt one's verbal and non-verbal behaviours during an intercultural interaction. This may involve slowing down one's speech rate, modulating the tone of one's voice, or adjusting the distance from one's interlocutor, depending on the cultural context.

An essential skill

Numerous studies confirm the positive effects of cultural intelligence. For example, it helps expatriates adapt better and reduce their anxiety, it improves leadership and the performance of multicultural teams, or it stimulates cooperation and innovation by facilitating knowledge sharing.

Initially designed to support executives on assignment abroad, cultural intelligence is now recognized as an essential skill in many contexts: at work, at school, but also in daily life, wherever people from different cultures meet.

Research also shows that this skill can be learned and developed. Intercultural training, whether through courses, role-playing, or simulations, helps us better understand cultural differences.

However, immersive experiences

are the most effective: projects in multicultural teams or international trips can sustainably strengthen cultural intelligence.

What a study of engineering students reveals Cultural intelligence concerns the vast majority of students, who are called upon to learn and work in multicultural environments. With this in mind, we conducted a study among engineering students on international mobility to understand how this experience could strengthen their cultural intelligence.

Specifically, we assessed their cultural intelligence using a scientifically recognised questionnaire administered twice: before their departure and upon their return from mobility. This longitudinal methodology allows us to compare initial and final levels and to measure the evolution of the different dimensions of cultural intelligence.

The results are clear: international mobility significantly improves cultural intelligence, especially among those who had travelled little before or who were not spontaneously open to other cultures. In other words, the more "novice" you are, the more you progress. This is what we call the "first-time effect": during a first prolonged contact with another culture, everyone is led to revise their benchmarks.

These findings have direct implications for the training of engineering students. International mobility is not just an asset to highlight on a CV: it is a unique opportunity to develop transversal skills that are now essential in the world of work. Employers expect their employees not only to be technically competent, but also able to adapt to multicultural environments and cooperate effectively across borders.

Our findings are consistent with other research that shows that cultural intelligence extends far beyond the scope of overseas travel. It promotes peaceful coexistence by reducing prejudices, helps foster better cooperation at work or in school, and prepares individuals to thrive in international environments. Schools and universities play a key role: by developing these skills, they contribute to training more adaptable professionals, but also to building a more inclusive society. (The Conversation)

(Authored by Marie Chédru, Mariia Ostapchuk UniLaSalle)

'Toothpick grooves' in ancient fossil human teeth may not be from toothpicks after all

For decades, small grooves on ancient human teeth were thought to be evidence of deliberate tool use - people cleaning their teeth with sticks or fibres, or easing gum pain with makeshift "toothpicks". Some researchers even called it the oldest human habit.

But our new findings, published in the American Journal of Biological Anthropology, challenge this long-held idea about human evolution.

We found these grooves also appear naturally in wild primates, with little support for tooth-picking as the cause.

Even more striking, in more than 500 wild primates, across 27 species both living and fossil, we found no trace of a common modern dental disease: deep, V-shaped gum-line notches called abfraction lesions.

Together, these findings can help reshape how we interpret the fossil record and raise fresh questions about the uniquely human ways our teeth are affected today.

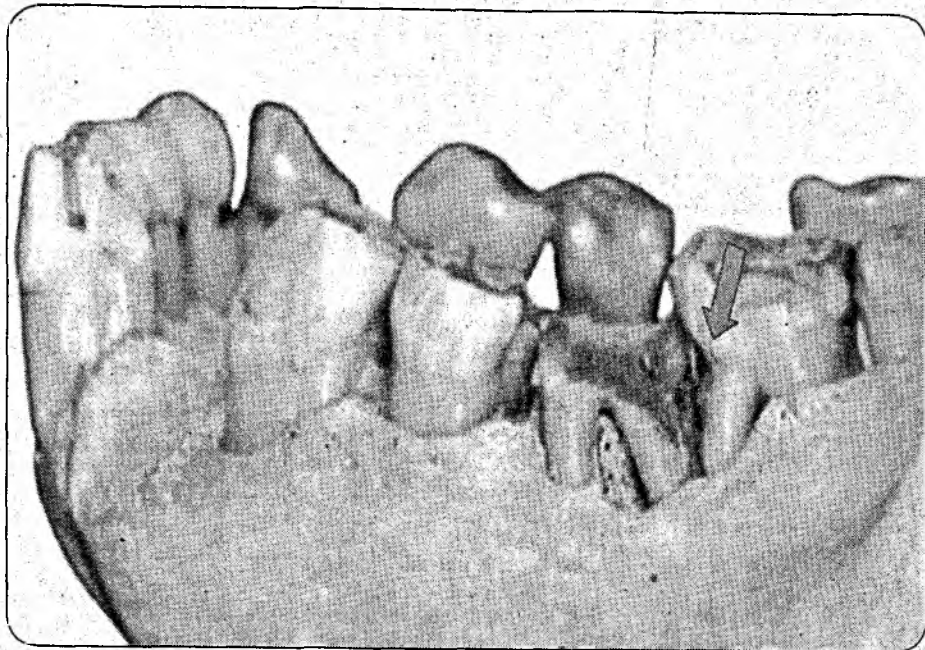
Why teeth matter in human evolution

Teeth are the most durable part of the skeleton and often survive long after the rest of the body has decayed. Anthropologists rely on them to reconstruct ancient diets, lifestyles and health.

Even tiny marks can carry important meaning. One recurring feature is the thin groove across exposed tooth roots, especially between teeth.

Since the early 20th century, these have been labelled "toothpick grooves" and interpreted as signs of tool use or dental hygiene.

They have been reported across our recent evolutionary history, from 2-million-year-old fossils through to Neanderthals. But until now,



no one had really checked whether other primates also have them.

A different condition, abfraction, looks very different - ?? deep wedge-shaped notches near the gumline. These are very common in modern dentistry and often linked to tooth grinding, forceful brushing, or acidic drinks. Their absence in the fossil record has long puzzled researchers. Do other primates really never suffer from them? What we did

To test these hypotheses, we analysed more than 500 teeth from 27 primate species, both extinct and alive. The sample included gorillas, orangutans, macaques, colobus monkeys, fossil apes and more.

Crucially, all specimens came from wild populations, meaning their tooth wear could not have been influenced by toothbrushes, soft drinks or processed foods.

We looked for non-carious cervical lesions - a name for tissue loss at the tooth neck not caused by decay. Using microscopes, 3D scans and tissue-loss measurements, we

documented even the smallest lesions.

What we found

About 4 per cent of individuals had lesions. Some looked almost identical to the classic "toothpick grooves" of fossil humans, complete with fine parallel scratches and tapering shapes.

Others were shallow and smooth, especially on front teeth, likely caused by acidic fruits that many primates consume in large amounts.

But one absence stood out. We found no abfraction lesions at all. Despite studying species with extremely tough diets and powerful chewing forces, not a single primate showed the wedge-shaped defects so commonly seen in modern dental clinics.

What does this mean?

First, grooves that resemble "toothpick" marks don't necessarily prove tool use. Natural chewing, abrasive foods, or even swallowed grit can produce similar patterns.

In some cases, specialised behaviours like stripping

vegetation with the teeth may also contribute. We therefore need to be cautious about interpreting every fossil groove as deliberate toothpicking.

Second, the complete absence of abfraction lesions in primates strongly suggests these are a uniquely human problem, tied to modern habits.

They are far more likely caused by forceful brushing, acidic drinks and processed diets than by natural chewing forces.

This places abfraction alongside other dental issues, such as impacted wisdom teeth and misaligned teeth, which are rare in wild primates but common in humans today.

Together, these insights are shaping a growing sub-field known as evolutionary dentistry, using our evolutionary past to understand the dental problems of the present.

Why it matters today

At first glance, grooves on fossil teeth may sound trivial. But they matter for both anthropology and dentistry.

For evolutionary science, they show why we must check our closest relatives before assuming a specific, or unique, cultural explanation.

For modern health, they highlight how profoundly our diets and lifestyles alter our teeth in ways that set us apart from other primates.

By comparing human teeth with those of other primates, we can tease apart what's universal (the inevitable wear and tear of chewing) and what's uniquely human - the result of modern diets, behaviours and dental care.

What's next?

Future research will expand to larger primate samples, investigate diet-wear links in the wild, and apply advanced imaging to see how lesions form.

The aim is to refine how we interpret the past while finding new ways on how to prevent dental disease today.

What may look like a fossil human tooth-picking groove could just as easily be the by-product of everyday chewing. Equally, it might reflect other cultural or dietary behaviours that leave similar marks.

To untangle these possibilities, we need much larger comparative datasets of lesions in wild primates, only then can we begin to trace broader patterns and refine our interpretations of the fossil record.

Meanwhile, the absence of abfraction lesions in primates suggests that some of our most common dental problems are uniquely human.

It's a reminder that even in something as everyday as toothache, our evolutionary history is written in our teeth, but shaped as much by modern habits as by ancient biology. (The Conversation)

Long Covid patients more likely to suffer from heart rhythm disorder

An unusual heart rhythm disorder, also known as Postural orthostatic tachycardia syndrome (POTS), is more common in people with long Covid, according to a study.

The study found that the condition, where the heart beats abnormally fast when changing position from lying down to standing up, is more common in middle-aged women than men.

For people affected with POTS, standing up is a challenge. Their hearts beat faster than normal at rest and during exertion. Patients also experience fatigue and difficulties concentrating - symptoms that are common in long Covid.

Researchers at Karolinska Institutet in Sweden found that POTS occurs in almost a third of patients with severe long Covid. "Previous,

smaller studies have shown that there is a connection, but now we can say with certainty that POTS is a very common condition in patients with long Covid.

This is valuable knowledge for both health care professionals and patients," said Mikael Björnson, doctoral student at the Department of Medicine, Solna, Karolinska Institutet.

The study, examined 467 patients with severe long Covid who had not been hospitalised for Covid-19.

91% were middle-aged women who were essentially healthy and physically active before they developed long Covid. 31% of participants received a POTS diagnosis, while 27% had symptoms but did not meet the criteria for diagnosis. The remaining 42% had no symptoms of POTS. Patients with a

diagnosis had significantly higher heart rates during walking tests and reported lower health-related quality of life.

"It is important to know that POTS can be detected with inexpensive, simple tests that are available at all levels of health care.

For those who receive a diagnosis, there are treatments that can alleviate symptoms and improve quality of life," said Judith Bruchfeld, Associate Professor at Karolinska Institutet.

The researchers now recommend that patients with long Covid who experience a significant increase in heart rate when changing position from lying down to standing, as well as during exertion, and who experience symptoms such as dizziness, brain fog, and pronounced fatigue, be investigated for POTS. (IANS)

Deadly brain cancer can alter skull, immune response, finds study

Glioblastomas - the deadliest form of brain cancer affect much more than just the brain, scientists have found.

A team from the Montefiore Einstein Comprehensive Cancer Center (MECCC) and Albert Einstein College of Medicine has found the first evidence to show that glioblastoma can erode the skull, alter the makeup of skull marrow, and interfere with the body's immune response.

Importantly, drugs intended to inhibit skull-bone loss made the cancer more aggressive, according to results published in the journal *Nature Neuroscience*.

"Our discovery that this notoriously hard-to-treat brain cancer interacts with the body's immune system may help explain why current therapies - all of them dealing with glioblastoma as a local disease - have failed, and it will hopefully lead to better treatment strategies," said corresponding author Jinan Behnam, Assistant Professor, Department of Neurological Surgery at Einstein.

The median survival of glioblastoma patients who receive standard treatment of surgery, chemotherapy, and radiation is approximately 15 months. As is true for many other bones, the skull contains marrow in

which immune cells and other blood cells form.

Using advanced imaging techniques on mice that developed two different types of glioblastomas, the team found that the tumours caused skull bones to erode, especially along the sutures where skull bones fuse.

Such erosions seem to be unique to glioblastoma and other malignant intracranial tumours, since they don't occur with strokes, other types of brain damage, or even other systemic cancers. Computerised tomography (CT) images of patients with glioblastoma revealed that decreases in skull thickness were present in the same anatomic areas as in mice.

The skull erosions in the mice increased the number and diameter of the skull-to-bone channels. Further, the team found that glioblastoma activated several genes in the skull marrow that boosted production of inflammatory immune cells, but in femur marrow, the cancer suppressed genes needed to produce several types of immune cells. Notably, they found that administering US FDA-approved anti-osteoporosis drugs (zoledronic acid and denosumab) that prevent bone loss can halt skull erosion. (IANS)

New KHADC EC will look...

(Contd from P-1) Those raising the objection include Mawkhrah-Pynthorukhrah MDC and Council Chairman Strongpillar Kharjana, Malki-Laitumkhrak MDC Deity H. Majaw, and Jaiaw MDC Denzil R. Chen, who claimed that they had originally proposed these schemes for budget allocation under the 15th Finance Commission.

However, when the tenders were issued by the SMB, the MDCs said they were not informed, indicating that the Board had bypassed them entirely.

Kharjana further pointed out that the funds earmarked for urban schemes are significantly smaller compared to those allotted for rural projects. He also questioned why the same yardstick was not applied to MLA schemes, since those funds are also released by the state government.

The KHADC Chairman clarified that the MDCs are not opposed to the development schemes themselves, but to the manner in which the tenders were floated without consulting them, despite the works falling within their respective constituencies.

It may be mentioned that the Shillong Municipal Board issued the tender on August 27, 2025, for works including the construction of motorable roads, drains, footpaths, and other infrastructure within the constituencies of Jaiaw, Mawkhrah-Pynthorukhrah, Laban-Mawprem, and Laitumkhrak-Malki.

Hawkers targeted as...

(Contd from P-1) "For us, the priority has always been to safeguard the interests of hawkers and to resolve issues through the PTVC, especially since the process was already underway for the Khyndai Lad area," Rangad explained.

Meanwhile, she noted that authorities have yet to provide any account of the expenses incurred for the construction work inside the MUDA parking lot, which was carried out to facilitate the relocation of vendors.

It may be mentioned that the association had, on September 24, lodged a complaint with the Chief Executive Officer of the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) over what it described as unjustified delays in issuing CoVs to around 70 of its members.

The association alleged that despite being genuine vendors who have been in the trade for years, many hawkers have been excluded from the process due to errors, discrepancies, and possible irregularities.

Proposal to revive, upgrade Baljek airport...

(Contd from P-1) Originally designed as a STOL (Short Take-Off and Landing) facility, Baljek Airport has a runway length of approximately 1,120 metres, which limits its operational capacity. Seventeen years after it was inaugurated by former President Pratibha Patil in 2008, the airport remains non-functional.

Sources in the state government defended the move to develop the airport for smaller 19- to 20-seater aircraft, rather than aiming for larger ATR-72 operations. Officials maintain that the plan is more practical, considering the expected passenger volume.

It is learnt that once the necessary infrastructure is ready, the government may request Alliance Air, which already operates 20-seater flights in the Northeast, to connect Tura with Shillong and other regional destinations. If required, the government may also consider offering Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to support the airline.

At present, the airport premises are being used as a venue for music festivals and other public events.

Construction of Western Bypass set to...

(Contd from P-1) The 11.99-km Package II, with a project cost of Rs 686 crore, is being undertaken by Narendra Sharma and TK Engineering Consortium Pvt. Ltd. under a joint venture. The third and final Package III, spanning 13.56 km, is being implemented by BRN Infrastructures Pvt. Ltd. at a cost of Rs 562 crore.

Conceived to ease the persistent traffic congestion in Shillong, the Western Bypass project is expected to be completed within two years from the commencement of construction.

M'laya trains its sights...

(Contd from P-1) Recently, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong had expressed confidence to achieve a cent percent literacy rate by 2028.

He had also appealed to parents not to shift their educational responsibilities onto others but to take an active role in guiding their children.



Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann with others during the inauguration of a 'Aap Ki Rasoi' at a grain market at Lehlagaga, in Sangrur district on Saturday. (PTI)

WGH's Raksamgre declared...

(Contd from P-3) president of GBC-ABDK, Joyson R. Marak, lecturer of Tikrikilla College, as well as the Nokma, school teachers and community members.

Together, they iterated their collective commitment to sustain cleanliness, promote proper waste management and work towards a greener and healthier future.

Speaking on the occasion, the District Coordinator, SBM-G, lauded the initiative of the community, and said, "Raksamgre has set a remarkable example of what united community participation can achieve. This Model Village declaration is not just recognition of their present efforts but also a call to sustain and inspire neighbouring villages towards a cleaner, greener, and more sustainable future."

Community cleaning drive...

(Contd from P-3) He praised the collective spirit shown by the villagers to ensure cleanliness and sustainability in their surroundings.

"The drive concluded with a renewed commitment from both Saindur Enviro Pvt. Ltd. and the Dorbar to continue joint efforts for promoting cleanliness, hygiene, and environmental responsibility in the village and beyond," the statement said.

3 held with drugs...

(Contd from P-3) During the operation, authorities also recovered 10.05 grams of drugs from their possession.

Following the seizure, the ANTF handed the three accused over to Lumdingjri Police Station.

Meanwhile, a case has been registered against them under the provisions of the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (NDPS) Act.

Officials have informed that the investigation into the case is currently in progress.

City man tenders...

(Contd from P-3) However, community representatives insisted that he extend his apology publicly before the Marwari community, a condition that he agreed to.

Later in the evening, members of both the Marwari and Bihari communities gathered at the Rajasthani Vishram Bhavan in Garikhana, where Sahi offered his public apology.

In front of those assembled, he admitted his mistake, pledged not to repeat such behaviour and sought forgiveness from the Marwari community.

The apology was then formally accepted by the Marwari community.

Opp creating hurdles in Punjab's progress for vested pol interests: CM

LEHRA (Punjab), Oct

4: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday accused the opposition parties of creating hurdles in the state's progress for their vested political interests, alleging that the leaders from the rival camps have a myopic mindset towards Punjab and its people.

Addressing a gathering at Lehra in Sangrur district after dedicating a slew of development projects to the people, Mann said, "The opposition leaders are eyeing a return to the CM's house in Chandigarh, but their fate is sealed because they have consistently ignored the aspirations of the people. They create hurdles in the state's progress for their vested political interests."

Targeting Leader of Opposition in Punjab Assembly, Partap Singh Bajwa, Mann accused the Congress leader of making desperate attempts to defame the government but failing miserably due to the dearth of any concrete issue.

Recalling his early days as an artiste, when he used to attend opposition rallies, the chief minister claimed he is "well aware of their misdeeds" and is now revealing the truth "by exposing their sins of the past".

Highlighting the achievements of the AAP regime in Punjab, Mann said government jobs are being provided to the youth strictly on a merit basis, "breaking the cycle of migration to other countries and instilling hope in the younger generation".

"Punjab is a blessed land and the government is resolving long-pending issues facing the people. The state government is working untiringly for the progress and development of Punjab and prosperity of its people," he said.

Underlining the importance of education, the chief minister announced the setting up of new libraries and colleges in the villages to ensure quality education for the rural youth.

"I am now repaying the debts of people's love," he said.

Mann also said the state government has embarked on a major project to repair and upgrade 19,491.56 km of rural link roads at a cost of Rs 4,150.42 crore.

Mann described the link roads as the arteries of economic growth, as they help people in rural areas commute and give impetus to trade and business at the same time.

Earlier, the chief minister laid the foundation for a new office complex of the Punjab State Power Corporation Limited (PSPCL) in Lehragaga. Mann said the complex will have a built-up area of 10,000 square feet spread over 2.34 acres of land.

"The construction work is expected to be completed within 18 months at a cost of Rs 4.69 crore. It will house two sub-divisional offices (urban and rural) and a complaint centre aimed at providing better services to the local residents," Mann said.

He said the present PSPCL office operated from a very old building, while another operated from a rented facility, causing significant difficulties in public service and administrative work.

He also said the Punjab government is providing 600 units of free electricity to every household, benefiting about 90 per cent of families in the state who now receive zero electricity bills.

The chief minister also laid the foundation for a new tehsil complex in Lehragaga to be built at an outlay of Rs 15.92 crore. (PTI)

**"Most powerful is he who has himself
in his own power."**

—Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Shillong Times

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Surviving old hats

POLITICIANS across states are demonstrating a 'never say die' attitude, seeking to retain their hold over the masses through means fair and foul. Those in power use their resources effectively to continue in their chairs as the people give politicians a hero's image, while those in the opposition bide their time. Among the major survivors in politics and power for long durations is Nitish Kumar, the Bihar chief minister who has been around for half a century. He survived by changing sides, at times fighting the likes of Narendra Modi and at other times courting him, and changing colours like a chameleon. Having served as central minister and chief minister for repeated terms, news is that pre-election opinion polls this time are giving low ratings for Kumar. His popularity, as per one opinion poll, is just half of what his new generation rival, Tejashwi Yadav, now maintains. The assembly polls in the state are just a month away and the 75-year-old Kumar is bound to make a fresh bid to retain power for himself and his political alliance.

Kumar is just one among the many politicians who have demonstrated an insatiable thirst for power. He achieved his goal by hook or by crook, 'led' the people or ruled them for two-thirds of the Independence era and would not hang up his boots. In several states, politicians who held senior posts for several decades are hanging around, refusing to give way to the new generations. In certain cases, as in the case of the Congress, families retain power or hold sway over politics for decades together through successive generations. The BJP was thought to be a shade better, with new leaderships being ushered in across several states. But, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also 75, remains as its reigning hero for the third successive term in power at the Centre. Unlike in the US, there's no limit here for politicians to hold any post. Despite a long innings, Nitish Kumar has not been able to substantially change the fate of Bihar as a backward state. His agenda is limited to ensuring 'sadaq, pani' to the people, whereas the larger cause of fast-paced economic development remains neglected. It, thus, is natural for the new generation to aspire for a change of leadership. The 'tired face' of Kumar should be a dampener to their spirits.

The system of politics in this country is a circus without a ring. While every government service has an age limit for retirement, this is not applicable to politicians and ministers, not to speak of chief ministers and prime ministers. Reforms, revitalization and rejuvenation are a must for effective performance of the systems. Ageing men hanging around the corridors of power as "movers and shakers" is a bad commentary on the state of affairs of a nation. They have a vested interest in protecting themselves and extracting the maximum for themselves from the establishment. Ideally, a new generation with new and novel ideas, and brimming with energy, must step in and lead the nation and states from the front.

Letters to the Editor

Parenting and discipline

Editor,

The letter entitled "Lack of discipline in modern parenting" by Ms Nengnong that appeared in the Shillong Times on Oct 4, 2025 makes some good points but is unnecessarily harsh.

That children need discipline at home and school is a well-accepted and time-honoured truth. Children need care and nurture and much kindness, but also need guidelines and directions for good behaviour. Childhood and adolescence are critical stages not only for cognitive development but also for social and moral development, and good parenting is important.

While every generation is alike in some respects, the environment that children grow up in has changed significantly in the last few generations. Which is why generations have been designated as Baby Boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z and Gen Alpha. These are not mere Western labels. They portray the marked evolution in every child's social, economic, academic environment from generation to generation. These changes and challenges cause enormous stress and threaten the

child's wellbeing.

There is no point in using phrases like "back in the days", "back then" and "old-school parenting". Old school parenting, by the way, included spanking, ear-pulling and caning. Of course, I don't think the author is advocating physical punishment. However, in the last line she says, "Whoever spares the rod hates his son." I presume she means this in a figurative sense, and does not actually mean beating a child. Anyway, harking back to the "old days" is not relevant.

In a balanced discussion, one would not use extreme words and phrases like "pathological liars, murderers, drug dealers, vandals, rapists, Satan". A very small percentage of children grow up to be criminals and most of these children have had deprived childhoods such as abject poverty, broken homes and lack of opportunities. Hardly any of this can be blamed on the lack of parental discipline.

In fact, there is much valid data that shows the current Gen Z has lower drug use, less crime, and less promiscuous sex than all the preceding generations. They are more socially responsible, environment-conscious, and more empathetic to mental illness.

The other evening, a 4Front Campus Talk, Esp 10 of its Panel Discussion series titled "Balei jyllei u Drugs ha Meghalaya" was aired on social media and no wonder the subject matter under discussion immediately caught everyone's attention. Illicit drug abuse, the menace it poses on our minuscule tribal society; our future and the apparent easy availability of this social evil to spread, especially among our youth, has caught the attention of all citizens. To claim that there is a general overall social alarm over the issue, is to make the understatement of the year. Society is worried sick and there is social panic over the state's apparent inability to control the menace. Vigilante groups have sprung up in almost every locality of the state; addicts have been caught and on several occasions, in an effort to teach the addicts a lesson, physical violence resorted to. Sadly such public efforts of taking the law into their own hands have not nor can they ever yield the desired result. Instead, it has only increased friction and tension between the police and the public, coincidentally, both anxious stakeholders to curb the menace. Such reactions divert attention from the drug problem to a public vs police law and order issue. It is the drug criminal who then walks home laughing while genuine concerned stakeholders are left fighting among themselves. That's the last thing we need, if we are to successfully tackle the Drug Menace in our state.

The above mentioned Panel cum Awareness discussion was held in the KJP School in Mawlai Phudmuri and it was really encouraging to see both the audience (keen, young, students and teachers of the school) and the panelists (made up of a Redd Police Officer; a Redd Indian Foreign Service member; a reformed drug addict turned anti drug activist; a Pastor; a Psychiatrist, a serving Police officer enforcing the NDPS Act; a member of a prominent Seng Kynthei plus an active youth leader from Mawlai) ably anchored by Iban Mawrie, freely exchange opinions, views, apprehensions, suggestions and concerns over the threat of illicit drug use and substance abuse. It was one of those rare moments when the generation gap was bridged and this time it was triggered by a perception of a common threat by both generations. To me, a viewer

of the programme, two things stood out prominently. The first was the focus of the panelists on mostly curative aspects of the problem (counseling, rehabilitation and the need for increase in de-addiction centers etc) and really very little, except for some repeated advice for better parental supervision, as a preventive measure. From the side of the kids, there were more questions and interest on better preventive steps and at the end of the session, to be quite candid, the students did not appear too convinced by the answers from their elders. On the whole however it was a much appreciated effort which to my mind should be expanded to involve more youngsters in other schools, simply because they appeared as anxious, if not more, for assurances that the drug threat can be controlled and their future secured.

The main focus of this write-up therefore shall be on preventive measures that need to be taken by the authorities to control the menace of drug abuse within Meghalaya. This is not to say that the State Government has been sitting idle on the issue. Far from it and the efforts of the anti drug squad of Meghalaya Police should be appreciated. Needless to say however, it shall require some out of the box creative thinking, if we really want to beat the drug criminals. Firstly, we must accept reality as it exists on the ground, by accepting the fact that we are dealing with some very smart criminals whose sole concentration is on how to outwit the Police. The Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, Act, 1985 therefore needs to be supplemented by some local act to make it more effective for Meghalaya. In Meghalaya we have The Meghalaya Narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances Rules, 1986 which will perhaps require some further tweaking to strengthen the hands of our law enforcing agencies. Secondly, we do not grow poppy nor do we manufacture drugs within the state. 100% of illicit drugs come into the state from outside and that too by road. A reality that should outline our strategic approach to the problem. Thirdly, as was admitted in the panel discussions, the entry of drugs into Meghalaya can happen only via Ratchara, EJs or via NH 40, Jorabadi, Ri Bhoi district. It is from these two

entry points that illicit drugs are smuggled into Meghalaya on a commercial scale, to be further repacked into smaller packets or 1 or 2 gms sachets for street distribution to individual addicts.

This writer strongly believes that the two drug entry points mentioned above, are the most vulnerable interception points where the drug enforcement agencies need to concentrate on. "Nip it in the bud" so to say before it spreads into our streets and localities. Chasing after peddlers once the drugs have been repacked and distributed is actually pointless. Cutting off the bulk entry of drugs at the two entry points makes more sense. Let's try and see if we can do it.

"Easier said than done" would be the initial reaction to the suggestions made above. The manpower and the resources just aren't available to check each and every vehicle; each and every passenger that enters Meghalaya through the two choke points mentioned. Touched! Well argued! But can we start thinking outside of available manpower and instead seek the help of technology? The Meghalaya drug problem after all, is a recent phenomenon which could perhaps be tackled better through the use of easily available modern technology. In 2023, J&K became the first region in India to equip accused criminals under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act (UAPA) with GPS tracking devices. Punjab is thinking of doing the same for drug related criminals.

Drug traffickers are as dangerous as terrorists, more in fact for their activities not only affect social and national security but they also rob our future generations of their moral fiber, their education, the whole life they have before them. The police must be in the know of, perhaps not all, but a majority of the suspected commercial traffickers of drugs into Meghalaya. Most must be repeated offenders out on bail. Yes we don't have the manpower to track their movements. But GPS enabled anklets will assist the police in monitoring their movements such as when they leave the state and when they try to reenter the state. A bit of AI assistance will actually reduce manpower need for monitoring and scrutinizing movements of these big fish. AI will alert the police once an at-

Tackling the Drug Menace with Appropriate Technology

By Toki Blah

tempt to leave or reenter Meghalaya is made and that is when the checking of the specific vehicle the suspect is travelling in can be made. It will be pinpoint targeting. No longer random, hit or miss checking.

This GPS enabled tracking of drug offenders, with the objective of preventing entry of illicit drugs into Meghalaya must be done on a case-by-case basis where the rights of the individual, especially the Right to privacy must be kept in mind. The prospective success rate and the relief it can bring (if this is made operational, not less than 80 to 90% of illicit drugs entering Meghalaya will be curtailed) should cause us not to deter or hesitate from examining how it can be lawfully implemented. By this I mean that the attachment of GPS enabled anklets must be done only through a court order. Police cannot do it on their own. Forcibly attaching a GPS device to track an individual can be viewed by a court as an interference with liberty and privacy rights.

To help the courts pass such necessary orders on behalf of the Police, the Meghalaya Government can be of assistance, through a small amendment of The Meghalaya Narcotic Drugs Psychotropic Substances Rules, 1986. A few lines stating something like "Notwithstanding anything in the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS) or the NDPS Act, 1985, a Special Court or Sessions Court may, when granting bail under Section 480/483 (BNSS) or Section 37 of the NDPS Act, or when releasing a convict on parole, probation, or remission, or on a specific request by the Meghalaya police, under Sec. 170, 126, BNSS, to deter a likely drug related criminal offence, order that such person shall be subject to electronic monitoring by means of a GPS-enabled device" could easily be inserted as an amendment. This would be of great help to the police in pinpointing entry of drugs into Meghalaya by habitual offenders. New suppliers can take their place but with the sort of excellent intelligence at police disposal these too will be sooner than later netted. It would literally take the drugs out of market circulation. With drug supplies cut off, small peddlers and users will be left high and dry, ready and then more than willing to be rehabilitated once again into decent society. Which is exactly what we want.

In Nepal, the proverbial 'last straw' was the blanket ban on major social media platforms in the country, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The government said the ban was invoked because of "non-compliance with Nepali law," but this was viewed as an authoritarian attempt to suppress dissent and stop digital spaces essential for communication, education and employment. With perceived entrenched government corruption, which has not eased despite two decades since the removal of the monarchy and institution of a Republic, the social media ban ignited the simmering discontent.

Uniquely, unlike past protests driven by political parties or ethnic entities, demonstrations which unseated Oli's government were spearheaded by an amorphous group of young professionals and students calling themselves Gen Z. For them, social media provided the platform to digitally coordinate their protests, challenge the political stagnation, demand that leaders be held accountable. Nepal has witnessed massive political instability, including 14 different governments since 2008, and seen widespread protests against corruption and bad governance.

Peace was restored once the Army and Gen Z representatives agreed to hold fresh elections within six months under the interim leadership of former Chief Justice Sushila Karki. It remains to be seen whether this youth-led movement will bring real change or just be symbolic gestures.

The protests indicate that Nepal's youthful populace have become more politically aware and active and

seek transparency and accountability in public life. That violence ceased when what they perceived as the corrupt establishment was removed, displays a sense of maturity within Gen Z and continued faith in the path of democratic governance, and electoral politics.

It remains unclear where the funding for the well-orchestrated movement came. The former monarch Gyanendra, foregrounded by parties seeking to restore a Hindu monarchy, seems an unlikely source. He is too discredited to be acceptable to those who head the movement for cleaner governance.

Nepal's Gen Z movement was compared, with recent youth uprisings in South Asia; Bangladesh's 2024 job quota protests and Sri Lanka's 2022 'Aragalaya' (struggle) uprising. They seem to highlight a global trend in which the digital-savvy generation is increasingly rejecting political elites who fail to deliver stability or provide accountability.

In Bangladesh, where the Awami League government was ousted last year, fundamentalist Islamic groups moved to seize space created by the uprising and ouster of the 'secular' Hasina. Various reports suggested that the movement was funded by Islamic fundamentalists, including the Jamaat-e-Islami (Jei), Pakistan's ISI, keen to regain a hold there, and even the US 'foreign hand.' In Dhaka then, as in Kathmandu now, the tipping point was the government's high-handed reaction, firing on protesters.

After Hasina fled to India, the Army and protesting youth agreed to appoint the politically neutral Nobel Laureate Mohammed Yunus as Chief Advisor of an interim caretaker arrangement, but outbreaks of lawlessness and targeting of minorities continued. He announced elections in February 2026, but barred the Awami League from participating, making the polls not fully participative.

That Hasina's regime was perceived as supported by India saw attacks on Indian targets, while the Jei, whose student wing recently swept the Dhaka University elections, for the first time ever, is seeing a resurgence. It is expected to do well, after the Khaleda Zia-led Bangladesh Nationalist Party, in the scheduled 2026 elections.

Nepal has no similar fundamentalist party to make major electoral gains. There is also no strong anti-India sentiment to become a rallying factor ahead of elections, but the Indian government is not popular with Gen Z. Beyond memories of the 2015 informal 'blockade,' the fact that the RSS seeks the Hindu monarchy restored does not make them popular with protest leaders.

There has been recent unrest in India's border areas, particularly in Ladakh where people seeking constitutional safeguards and their statehood restored saw an eruption of violence and widespread arrests. The government, after an initial crackdown, released some protesters, but Sonam Wangchuk, leading environmentalist, inventor and advocate for greater autonomy for Ladakh, remains jailed, charged under provisions of the strict NSA. There have also been tribal protests on the Assam-Meghalaya border against a proposed dam. How the government deals with these simmering protests will determine whether the outcome stays contained.

As the Indian government closely monitors neighbourhood events, warily watching its Neighbourhood First policy unravel, it is maintaining a strict wait and watch strategy while it strategizes about how to contain the turbulence beyond its borders.

Neighbourhood upheavals trigger concern in India

By Nilova Roy Chaudhury

Countries across South Asia have been riven by apparently spontaneous, popular upheavals which have forced members of the ruling polity to flee their countries. Aspects of what happened recently on the streets of neighbouring Kathmandu were reminiscent of the 'Arab spring' that began in Tunisia in the early 2010s and engulfed entrenched sections of the West Asian polity. It remains unclear how India's neighbourhood turmoil will get resolved and what the impact on India will be.

While it remains unlikely that India will get seriously affected by the popular upheavals that have swept over elected governments in the neighbourhood, there is certainly some unease within the establishment. The central government will be closely looking at and examining why people turned against their elected governments and ousted them.

The immediate provocation may have been different in each country, but the underlying theme; from the economic collapse and removal of the Rajapaksa in Sri Lanka in 2022, the ouster of Sheikh Hasina in Bangladesh in August 2024 and the overthrow of the KP Oli government in Nepal; has been corruption and the governments' failure to meet and manage the aspirations of the youth. A series of government missteps ignited the discontent, which erupted in mass protests, abating only when the leaders fled.

A significant portion of South Asia's population is 35 years or less. The demographic dividend was meant to work to the advantage of these countries. However, the Covid 19 pandemic sent economies into a tailspin, leaving vast numbers of unemployed youth who found themselves with limited opportunities, unable to fulfil their aspirations. Their governments, led by aging leaders, appeared out of sync with their requirements and unable to channel their energies into gainful opportunities, leading to increasing frustration. The perceived corruption and ineptitude of ruling parties acted as the trigger.

In Nepal, the proverbial 'last straw' was the blanket ban on major social media platforms in the country, including Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp. The government said the ban was invoked because of "non-compliance with Nepali law," but this was viewed as an authoritarian attempt to suppress dissent and stop digital spaces essential for communication, education and employment. With perceived entrenched government corruption, which has not eased despite two decades since the removal of the monarchy and institution of a Republic, the social media ban ignited the simmering discontent.

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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.

“Nobody ever forgets where he buried the hatchet.”

— Kin Hubbard

The Shillong Times

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Meaningless Symbolism

GOVERNMENTS and the United Nations have set aside certain days in a year to remind humans that the environment needs to recover – hence World Environment Day, or World Bio-diversity Day or World Habitat Day. In India, October 2, Gandhi Jayanti, is observed as a day dedicated to cleaning up public spaces. Hence VIPs and other important dignitaries are seen wielding a broom they hardly know how to use, on this one day. The purpose behind such symbolisms is to ignite a spark among conscious citizens so that the issue becomes a daily concern and instils in them the endeavour to embrace the meaning behind the symbolism. However, that has failed to garner results on the ground.

World Environment Day has been observed for several decades but in the real world trees are being mercilessly slaughtered to make way for roads and quarries and other so-called projects aimed at creating employment. Once trees are brought down there are no attempts to replace them by growing equal number of trees or more in wastelands that are increasing by the day on account of abandoned coal mines and barren hillocks which are clearly visible enroute to the rural hamlets of Meghalaya. Charcoal production is banned but in Meghalaya there's a huge gap between making a law and implementing it. There are no dearth of laws but those wielding money and political power ride roughshod over those laws and are never punished. Similarly, since Narendra Modi took over as prime minister of this country in 2014 there has been a huge push for the Swachh Bharat Campaign and now the Swachhta Hi Sewa (Cleanliness is a Service) crusade the mounds of garbage at Marten and across Meghalaya has just accumulated without it being processed. Talks of bringing in companies from outside to deal with the legacy waste has proved infructuous. And the issue is all but forgotten! October 2, observed as a day for cleaning localities has become just a one-day symbolic gesture as if people don't litter for the rest of the year. A one-day symbolic event is just not working. International organisations like the United Nations which have kick-started many positive movements and national governments need to take stock of such movements and think beyond slogans and symbolism.

The key to making any movement a successful one is community involvement which governments don't do very well because most movements are implemented in a top-down approach without consulting the communities; learning from their errors and successes and making the community feel it is their idea that is being implemented. This is the only way to ensure that afforestation happens and that rivers regain their clean and pristine nature. In this respect it must be said about Meghalaya that the District Councils have never worked in tandem with the State Government in its community development projects. The least common denominator – the Dorbar Shnong should actually be the implementing agencies for all conservation projects. Words like Climate Change and Climate Adaptation should be translated into the local languages and become part of our vocabulary if we are to see a cleaner, greener environment.

Why can't Maths and Science be cool and interesting?

By Dominick Dauri Roising Rymbai

The basic necessities for human beings are - air, water, and food. Air and Water Purification processes constitute Science. Food is agricultural sciences. Mining and environment regeneration is all about engineering and technology. And Good Health? That's Medical Science. Mathematics has applicability across the Natural, Life, Physical and Social Sciences. STEMs – Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics, are important. Of course, the Liberal Arts and Humanities are no less important. Imagine, how a coder or scientist can serenade a doctor or an engineer, without words, poems and songs? And for the next level of social contract called marriage, Economics, Sociology, Anthropology, Geography, History and Political Science will certainly be important in life.

What defines human civilisation? Culture, music, the fine and performing arts, parks and museums, architecture and engineering marvels, science and technology, or just being there for one another, the common-good ecosystem! What is Nature but poetry in motion (Newton's three laws of motion). The films' range of the acclaimed James Cameron is interesting; from the Terminator series (early warning signs of AI's sentient and decision-making capabilities) to Titanic (a non-scientific love story) and the two Avatar films on the latest "Scramble for Africa" (colonisation of the last frontier space), with sub-themes of indigenous people's rights and environment.

In the 1990s and 2000s, after parents, teachers were (hopefully, still are) highly respected. Their words were literally the gospel truth.

At Khliehriat (Don Bosco) High School, the Maths teacher (Late) Babu Louis Swer (fondly called Bu-Lo), would simplify the mathematical equations in the students' common language, Pnar. He would also make it a point that the weaker students were always helped by the better students, during breaks and after-school hours; actually a form of peer-to-peer learning. The classes of the Science teacher saar Shakti would always be filled to the brim; major explanations were in Pnar too. Dr. Star Pala MD, the present HoD of Community Medicine at NEIGRIHMS, was the star (ok, benchmark) student in school back then - in academics, football and, also regular attendance at Catholic Mass.

In Kiddies' Corner High School then, the classes of (Late) Miss (Mrs. Urmila) Basu, a post-graduate from IIT-Kharagpur, were always interesting. Not to forget the extra classes with (Late) Bah Rahman sir.

There are still educationists like the former long-time Principal of St. Anthony's College Shillong, Reverend Fr. Stephen Mavelly SDB (the founding Vice Chancellor of Assam Don Bosco University). To be summoned for a talk, by such individuals like the soft-spoken and well-mannered Fr. Mavelly, was always dreadful. From experience, being whacked is way better; the physical pain will go away in a day or two. The short talk ended. Now, it is one thing to assert with coal-truckloads of confidence and, another to prove it right. So, how does one score 80%, then the high-level percentage, in the upcoming HSSLC (Science) Board exams?

In Physics classes, there was the affable but 'don't-talk-much' professor, (Late) Bah James Blah sir. He could

male ancestress for divine assistance - in hard work, focus and discipline. The previous five years' exams' question papers were minutely examined and analysed. There was this Biblically-thick aquamarine-covered book called Maths Tutor to manoeuvre; well- challenge accepted. The Chemistry books by the Assamese professor MD Purkayastha of St. Edmunds' College were very helpful. Using the English professors' classes' running notes as reference. Notes were made for the English and Additional English papers. With anxiety levels running high, the burning of midnight-oil took place with music in the background - from Khasi-Pnar songs (expected), Hindi classics of Latajee & Ashajee, Kishoreda and the inimitable RD Burman, Jagjit Singh to Irish popular acts, Brit-rock/

West Asia to Afghanistan, Balochistan and, the tropical rain-forests of South-East Asia. Something about Japanese technology, yes. The automotive symbols of luxury: under colonial rule, it was the British-manufactured Rolls-Royce cars; today, in a free sovereign country, they are German-made sedans and Italian supercars. Growing up in Jaintia Hills, one was always filled with a sense of wonder at the automotive beast called ShaktiMan (fondly called StiMan), a symbol of German engineering matched to topography of India's North-East.

Why can't Nobel Prize and Fields Medal winners be also treated like rockstars and pop icons? Why can't we make Maths and Science cool and interesting? Why should they only be the bastion of high school toppers? Or like the non-democratic practices of the alchemists and Brahmins of old times, is it the present aammi made to feel, force-fed with false narratives of insurmountable obstacles, that the STEMs are not meant for them? When the barriers are soaring and access points are few and far between, and career guidance almost nil, even the best of driven curious minds can be frightened off the STEMs. Like the Nordic countries, and also sounding utopian, but can one imagine a highly technological-advanced society with liberal social democratic roots, for our children?

And here's a beautiful story, not a sob one of two cousins from some back-of-beyond village in our Meghalaya hills. One in Class-XI (Science) and the other B.Sc. (Physics Honours), studying in a prominent college in Shillong. With Practicals' classes, part-time jobs are difficult to attend to. Every Saturday and holiday, they work in a car-wash centre. Augmented by government scholarships, the paid-up commissions from each washed-car plus generous tips from interested and big-hearted customers, is enough to push through the week and eventually the month – food, rent and an ASPIRATION.

PS: From being the college topper in HSSLC (Science) Examination 2000, the writer struggled and somehow managed to graduate in Economics from the same college (Morning section) in 2006. There was help from Beiheh New Rymbai and family, the (Late) Miss Sheila Wallang and Brian sir, Reverend Fr. Ioannis Wapakma SDB, Interested College Professors, Good Friends and Ka Bei; along with a Ford Foundation sponsored scholarship and part-time jobs.

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Illegal Mining in Lum Bangla A Reflection on Power, Inequality, and Neglect

By Evangeline Dkhar

Even after years of bans and promises, illegal coal mining continues in Lum Bangla. But behind the dust and darkness lies a deeper story – of poverty, power, and a system that keeps failing its people.

Lum Bangla, a small village in the Elaka Nongkhlieh Dolloiship of East Jaintia Hills, has once again drawn attention. Despite the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ban on coal mining, reports indicate that illegal extraction continues, often hidden deep within the forests. For outsiders, this may seem like another case of law being broken. But for those who live there, it is a story of survival, inequality, and government neglect.

When Survival Turns Illegal

For many families in Lum Bangla, mining is not driven by greed but by necessity. Farming has become difficult, and alternative jobs are scarce. With few options, people risk their lives in abandoned mines to earn a living. In this unequal system, those who dig the coal gain the least, while traders, transporters, and powerful middlemen earn the most. The profits flow upward; the dangers stay below. Illegal mining here is not just an environmental issue – it is a social symptom of poverty and lack of opportunity.

Law and Accountability

If mining is banned, how does it still go on?

The answer lies in weak enforcement and the failure of accountability. Despite official warnings, trucks continue to move, and new pits quietly appear. Locals often whisper about arrangements that allow the trade to continue – a system where influence and money often speak louder than law. When people see that rules apply only to some, public trust erodes. The state's silence becomes complicity, and the law itself begins to lose meaning.

The Changing Face of the Hills

The environmental damage is visible everywhere. Hills once covered in forest are now scarred and hollowed. Rivers that once ran clear have turned black. Farmlands are barren, and streams that sustained life now carry waste.

This is not just ecological loss – it is cultural erosion. For the Jaintia people, land and nature are part of identity and spirituality. As mining takes over, that connection weakens. Older villagers recall when the land "fed us and gave us life." Now, it gives little back but danger and destruction.

A Shadow Economy

Illegal coal mining has also created a parallel economy – one that operates outside any system of accountability. It provides quick cash and temporary jobs but also fuels corruption, conflict, and social division. This "shadow economy" deepens inequality between those with access to networks and those without. It traps communities in a cycle where illegal work becomes the only work available. In the long run, it weakens the community more than it sustains it.

What Needs to Change

While crackdowns and bans may serve to delay mining on a temporary basis, they do nothing to address the root of the issue. Lum Bangla needs consequences as well as alternatives. That means creating local livelihoods through small industries, eco-tourism, and cooperative farmer associations; providing job skills for youth; and investment in education. The development programs need to be implemented for the communities of most concern, they cannot remain theoretical. Enforcement must be transparent as well. Unless accountability to the same degree is provided to officials, transporters, and local leaders, the process is simply going to repeat itself.

A Mirror of Society

The story of Lum Bangla reflects a larger truth about Meghalaya. When governance is weak and inequality deepens, the poor are pushed into illegality while the powerful thrive. Environmental degradation and social injustice go hand in hand. Illegal mining, in this sense, is a mirror of our society – showing how economic desperation and administrative failure combine to destroy both land and lives. It is not enough to blame the miners; we must question the system that leaves them with no other choice.

Conclusion

Lum Bangla's tragedy is not just about coal – it is about how easily laws can be bent, and how quickly communities can be forgotten. The mining pits of East Jaintia are reminders that progress built on exploitation is never real progress. If Meghalaya wishes to move forward, it must choose fairness over favour, livelihoods over short-term profits, and sustainability over silence. The future of Lum Bangla – and many villages like it – depends on those humanitarian principles.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Sociology, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

Rail or Road: Meghalaya's transport predicament

Editor,

The news, "Minister junks influx fear linked to railway" (ST October 4, 2025) made interesting reading. The Minister citing the affordability to transport Jackfruit was shocking. Meghalaya's unique topography, symbolic

capital density and civic trust gradients make the rail vs. road transport debate deeply layered not just logistical but narrative and institutional. Here is a brief glimpse at the comparative advantage and constraint of Rail vs. Road

transport in Meghalaya.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Why Ampareen was dropped from the cabinet

Editor,
On September 4, 2025 the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya acquitted Ampareen Lyngdoh, the cabinet minister who was recently divested of her post under the MDA 2.0 government, plus two other retired government officials for being allegedly involved in that infamous "Educational Scam", or widely known as the "white ink case." This specific case dates back to the year 2008 and pertains to tampering/manipulating the score sheets of candidates for selection as Assistant teachers in lower primary schools. In this selection process out of 521 candidates,

246 of them were outrightly canceled! In the course of hearing of this case, the Meghalaya High Court transferred the same to the CBI in 2017, and the latter duly registered the case against the accused on January 3, 2018. However, as aforementioned, the Meghalaya High Court has acquitted the accused in the "white ink case." No wonder then, post these prolonged seventeen years of physical and psychological dilemma on Ampareen and others it must have been an intangible sense of ineffable joy to the latter.

Markedly, there are some discerning friends of mine who queried me, thus, 'If Ampareen Lyngdoh and others are exonerated from what is an alleged scam, then why is the case of those 246 candidates who had been dispossessed of appointments not reconsidered too?' Against such a question having legal angles it is wise for me to stay noncommittal, I thought.

That aside, my memory was drawn to a parallel episode which occurred in the

state of Haryana in the year 2000. This case known as Teacher Recruitment Scam in which an ex-Chief Minister Om Prakash Chautala, his son Ajay Chautala an 53 others plus an IAS officer Sanjiv Kumar were convicted by the Supreme Court and sentenced in a case of illegal recruitment of 3206 junior basic teachers (JBT). Some of the offenders were given a ten year jail term and others less than that. Mind-blowingly, the said former Chief Minister was sentenced to ten year terms, notwithstanding the fact of being an octogenarian.

If the CBI approaches the apex court on this "white ink case" of Meghalaya it may be inferred that Ampareen Lyngdoh and others may certainly not be out of the woods as yet! Hence, the Teacher Recruitment Scam of Haryana and the subsequent punishments of the offenders despite their respective enviable status must have haunted the inner circle of the MDA 2.0 government thereby prompting the ruling dispensation to send Ampareen packing from the

cabinet in case the Supreme Court delivers an unfavorable judgment against her while still holding a cabinet berth and thereby becoming a liability for the ruling party in the fullness of time.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Appeal for transparent investigation into the death of Zubeen Garg

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to express the concern shared by countless admirers of late Zubeen Garg regarding the circumstances of his sudden demise. While his passing has left the entire region in grief, it has also raised several doubts that cannot be ignored.

Zubeen Garg was not only a celebrated artist but

also a cultural icon whose influence transcended music. The unexpected nature of his death calls for a thorough, impartial, and transparent investigation. It is important that every aspect—medical, forensic, and circumstantial—be examined carefully and without bias so that no question is left unanswered.

The people have a right to know the truth, and only a fair inquiry conducted by competent authorities can uphold public trust. Any delay or negligence in this regard will only deepen the doubts and pain of his admirers.

Through your platform, I appeal to the concerned authorities to expedite the probe and keep the findings transparent so that justice is ensured, both for Zubeen Garg and for the millions who held him dear.

Yours etc.,
Pinaki Nandy
Shillong

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

Advantages and Constraints of Rail and Road transport in Meghalaya

	Mode of Transport	
	Rail	Road
Advantage	Rail is cost effective for long-haul, high-volume freight (₹1.5–₹2.0 per ton-km). Lower emission and fuel consumption per ton/km. Economic catalyses - Potential to reduce logistics cost and boost trade corridors.	Last mile reach- Navigates hilly terrain and remote villages. Supports tourism, perishables and time sensitive cargo. It is embedded in local trade, rituals and civic routines.
Constraint	Only one operational station. Mendipathar; Shillong remains unconnected. Civic resistance- Khasi and Jaintia groups fear demographic influx and erosion of indigenous identity. Rail is seen as an external imposition without epistemic integration.	High operating cost ₹2.5–₹3.5 per ton-km; fuel and maintenance intensive. Congestion and strain - NH 6 and NH 44 are saturated and monsoon disruption is common. Then there is ecological stress where road expansion often clashes with sacred geographies and biodiversity zones.

Strategic overlay: What is optimal?

Dimension	Advantage	Road
Cost efficiency	Bulk freight, long haul.	Short haul, flexible routing
Civic Trust	Low (Due to migration fears).	Moderate to high (familiar mode)
Symbolic capital	Weak (Seen as external).	Strong (Rituals, tourism, trade.
Environmental impact	Lower emissions.	Higher strain.
Infrastructure status	Sparse, contested.	Dense, strained.

The two most powerful warriors
are patience and time."
—Leo Tolstoy

The Shillong Times

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Insult to Judiciary

THE rise of Hindutva sentiments in recent decades is seen by many with a sense of foreboding. Quietly, a fundamentalist streak is being nurtured and promoted in social life mainly, but not exclusively, in the Hindi belt with tacit backing from the BJP and its ideological grandmaster, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The latest manifestation of this streak was noticed in the manner that a shoe was hurled at the Chief Justice of India, Justice BR Gavai, who has just a few months' tenure in this exalted office. The CJI was humiliated in the most heinous manner by a lawyer at the Supreme Court on Monday, in a protest against an observation Gavai made in a temple-related row in Madhya Pradesh — that the petitioner should rather go and refer the complaint to the deity, Lord Vishnu, for a divine response and settlement.

It is normal for judges to go overboard and pass unwarranted comments, some of which are not palatable to people with a strong sense of right and wrong. The general tendency is to let such observations pass, also considering the exalted seats from which such "indulgences" occur. A patently harmless comment from CJI Gavai however came as a provocation to the lawyer, who now claims he couldn't sleep since September 16, when the "objectionable" observation was made in court. Gavai had recently taken courage in his hands to effect some reforms in the Supreme Court, to where he extended the widely prevalent job reservation system for Scheduled Castes and other underprivileged segments. Since he hailed from one such community, he thought it fit to act when the time was ripe and he had the authority in his hand to "set a wrong right." Significantly, despite his abrasive act, the accused lawyer would go scot-free. No case has been charged against him though he has been suspended from the bar, which could be a temporary step. In other words, the Modi establishment opted to give a kid-glove treatment to the lawyer, whose notorious action shocked large segments of the society. The Prime Minister, however, had the gumption to hold forth on this huge insult to the chief justice. The blah-blah from Modi — that "there is no place for such condemnable acts in our society," must be taken with a pinch of salt. He lacked the nerve to act against the lawyer who was upset over the alleged "insult to Sanatana Dharma" from the CJI.

Indian society is a melting pot — deeply divided as we are on the basis of race, religion, caste, language and much else. The dominant Hindu society itself is a divided house, with one segment set against the other, and the influential entities exploiting the weaker ones. RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat only earns ridicule every time he speaks up for one-India. His organisation is allegedly in the forefront of undercutting national unity through its sectarian agenda. Insulting a CJI in the name of a distorted version of "dharma" is the height of religious fanaticism supplemented by sectarian prejudices. A civilized society has no place for such criminal indulgences.

Speak Your Roots: A Digital Hearth for Khasi Language Preservation

By Daiarisa Rumong (PhD)

What is language? Language is alive because it is spoken by living persons. Language evolves because we are evolving. Like everything that is part of human existence, it needs to be nurtured, protected and preserved. Language is beautifully concrete and abstract. We say and mean something literally and also symbolically. This is why there is power in words; in how they are placed and spoken; given impetus by tone, pause and pitch. At its purest, language exists in the spoken realm. The flight from tongue to page is fraught with gaps of meaning. At its most mysterious, language is not fixed. It moves in breath, it is forgotten, it is remembered, it receives love, it endures apathy. Language evolves yet it also stays the same. It is a constant process of regeneration yet staying true to essence.

As babies, before we learn to speak, we first learn to hone in our listening skills when people talk to us. Earlier it may only have been the mother tongue that babies listened to but now babies have to grapple with at least two languages, namely the mother tongue and the English language. Now we can expect a toddler's first word to be in English. Does this undermine the importance of the mother tongue? Do we impose a hierarchy of language in our homes? Do adults unconsciously (or consciously) slip into using English when they speak, text or think? And if there is conversation in dreams, which language do we dream in?

The International Mother Language Day was first announced by UNESCO on November 17, 1999. It was formally recognised by the United Nations General Assembly in 2002. The International Day of the World's Indigenous Peoples is observed on August 9, and was first pronounced by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1994. In addition to this, 2022-2032 has been declared as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages. UNESCO has highlighted a ten-year action plan to draw the world's attention to the critical loss of indigenous languages and the urgent need to preserve, revitalise and celebrate them.

"The situation of indigenous languages is alarming: at least 40% of the more than 6,700 languages spoken around the world are threatened with extinction in the long term, due to a lack of speakers. This would have severe consequences for cultural diversity and would jeopardize the centuries-old knowledge and know-how that could be decisive in humanity's efforts to solve the challenges of this century, including climate change and biodiversity loss."

Furthermore, less than 2% of languages have any real presence online, including localised software and websites, translation and text-to-speech services and content moderation algorithms. This prevents millions of indigenous language speakers and signers from fully engaging in society and shows the need for the active development of a truly multilingual digital world." ([https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-celebrates-](https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/unesco-celebrates)

international-decade-indigenous-languages?hub=416)

Thus, there is a growing awareness about the conservation and revitalisation of indigenous languages, which in turn preserves culture, history and identity. This also becomes extremely relevant for communities like the Khasi who follow the oral tradition. Most of us only study Khasi language and literature in school and that is where it ends. But as one reflects on all that has been stated above, a deeper insight is needed to speak, write and read a language with purpose. This lack of knowledge of a language and its literature affects its readership and relevance in day to day life. We cannot allow this to be the case for the Khasi language as it is the crux of our culture, identity and history in an increasingly globalised world.

Globalisation is inevitable and when understand this, we can begin to balance the use of the English language with our mother tongue. Both languages should be given equal importance in our homes, so that our children learn to value their mother tongue rather than dismiss it as a second language. Further, the use of the mother tongue will imbibe a wider and deeper understanding of the dynamics between culture, identity and history. The cultural nuances of a mother tongue while speaking or writing it should not be lost on our children and if they speak both their mother tongue and English, they are enriched and can further juxtapose the two languages and see them with a critical eye.

In Meghalaya most of us are multilingual, we speak standard Khasi, our dialects, English and Hindi. We can all agree that this works to our advantage. As globalisation takes hold of our lives, digital platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube have gained ground like never before. This is where we get our news and other forms of entertainment also contribute to art, read and write poetry or articles, engage in debates about politics or religion. So quite conveniently, the world and our selves are literally in our hands. Then, do we pay attention to which language we use to do all this in?

Speak Your Roots emerged out of a conversation which demanded there be meaningful experiences on social media. An Instagram page was created which would focus on the Khasi language as an effort to revive the interest not only in speaking the language but also in reading and writing in the Khasi language. On August 3, 2020, the page was launched and it is a work of passion and love for community and culture. *Speak Your Roots* has grown into a compendium/archive of word meanings, phrases, precepts, customs, interviews, poetry, research articles and so on. Now at five years old, with a following of 10,900+ *Speak Your Roots* is a testament that language appeals to the heart and mind because it is something innate, stemming from a yearning for self-knowledge. The enthusiastic response to the content of *Speak Your Roots* also shows that there

is awareness of a loss or disconnect between us and our oral tradition, especially in the urban areas. This may be due to the fact that we do not speak, read or write in the Khasi language as often as we should. So our knowledge of Khasi folklore or folklife is at best superficial. Again, this is inevitable perhaps because of modernisation and globalisation.

For the Khasi community, language came before literature. The oral tradition or the spoken word was already established before the written word or literature. Therefore, one needs to understand the power of the spoken word. For instance, how precepts like Tip Brieu, Tip Blei were exclusively handed down and understood by word of mouth. As a consequence, the efficacy of *Speak Your Roots* depends on the clarity and impact of the spoken word in our day to day lives. Custom, phrases, precepts and others draw their authority from the oral tradition. Thus, we may not learn everything from books. What we refer to is collective knowledge and wisdom and the collective memory that pervades our society. This is ultimately what is posted on the page.

To create content based on folklore and oral tradition is tedious because the content has to be confirmed and verified. To verify phrases, stories or practices (culture, agriculture, architecture, food) we need experts and individuals who are well-versed in Khasi philosophy and who have a grasp of the language. Most importantly, they should have an insight of the Khasi worldview. The support and interaction of such experts and individuals is important for *Speak Your Roots* because folk-life is indeed carried by the ever-flowing current of language. This is why it is critical that this is maintained on social media.

The communitarian effort behind *Speak Your Roots* reinforces the circle of the oral tradition. This "circle" is evocative of the *lyngwiar dpei* or the hearth of a Khasi family where teachings are dispensed and stories narrated. Thus, collecting contributions from followers or others with the same interest is a way of documentation and creating an archive. These contributions create a positive feeling of having a part in the sharing of knowledge with others. Consequently, *Speak Your Roots* creates a sense of responsibility towards the conservation of language, literature and culture. *Speak Your Roots* is therefore, culture-centered, community-centered and conservation-centered.

Further, the presentation of content should be attractive and appealing to social media users as they are consumers of indigenous knowledge. The visual element is important because the combination of image and text is seen as the product that is given to the reader to learn from. This "learning" is a process which includes reading, understanding, internalising and usage. This is part and parcel of the task of documenting literature, language, culture and history on *Speak Your Roots*.

Translation of content into

English is seen as a key factor for *Speak Your Roots* to grow because translation helps to promote and exhibit Khasi culture to the world. Translation facilitates the bilingual nature of the page, making it accessible to the non-native speaker because there are many who are also researchers.

Interpretation and context for translation become significant as what is being explained is based on oral tradition. Translated content is always appreciated by the non-native speaker because it gives them the opportunity to understand, learn and research. This in turn, enhances the aim of preservation and conservation. This leads to the topic of representation.

In terms of representation, digital space such as a social media page, serves the purpose. Representation is a serious task because sometimes literature, history and culture are misrepresented leading to misconception. In *Speak Your Roots*, the spoken word is represented by the written word. That is, the oral tradition is represented by text, enabling a literary representation of the oral tradition. Thus, as a literary archive, *Speak Your Roots* captures the multi-layered nature of the spoken word which is itself fluid. Ultimately, the content of *Speak Your Roots* aims to reconcile the spirit of the spoken word and the ink of the written word.

The digital-age approach to cultural preservation is part of a broader global movement. Social media platforms like Instagram, Twitter, and YouTube are increasingly being utilised as powerful tools for the revitalisation of indigenous languages. They offer a space for grassroots activism, allowing communities to create and share their narratives, thereby increasing the visibility and prestige of their languages. The success of *Speak Your Roots* lies in its ability to bridge the gap between generations. It offers the youth a way to engage with their heritage in a medium that is familiar and appealing to them, while also honouring the wisdom of their elders. The page acts as a "symbolic hearth", a place where the community can gather to kindle the fire of indigenous heritage in the digital realm.

Speak Your Roots encourages discussion and debate on various topics that are posted so that a fruitful discourse follows. Collaborations have been forthcoming with the annual International Mother Language Day Campaign undertaken with Big FM 98.3 Shillong and valuable support was received for the creation of the *Speak Your Roots* website (<https://www.speakyourroots.com/>) from The North East India Audio Visual Archive, St. Anthony's College, Shillong.

Speak Your Roots offers a compelling model for indigenous language preservation in the 21st century. It combines a passion for one's heritage with the strategic use of modern technology to create a vibrant and engaging space for the celebration and revitalisation of a language. The initiative not only serves as a digital repository but also as a living, breathing community forum that is helping to ensure that the Khasi language continues to be spoken, read and written by future generations.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

I Take the Blame...

Today, the Prime Minister lands in Navi-Mumbai to inaugurate a gleaming new international airport. Cameras click, drones hum, and television anchors shout themselves hoarse describing how "under his leadership," a dream has taken flight. Later in the day, he descends into the city to inaugurate the new underground metro line—another "visionary" achievement, they say.

The television channels are in overdrive, anchors glowing like LED bulbs, repeating words such as historic, landmark, transformative, as if a dictionary of adjectives had been emptied into their teleprompters. What they forget to mention is that these projects were started long before the leader's convoy first rolled down their dusty sites.

Engineers, planners, and workers who actually toiled for years to make it happen, of course, are too sweaty and anonymous to be part of the frame. After all, who needs masons when you've got a good photo op?

But here's what I wonder—since our leaders love standing before airports and metros and saying, "I take the credit," shouldn't they also stand before a few other places and say, "I take the blame?"

Picture this: a political leader, sleeves rolled up, standing in Manipur, before the smouldering remains of burnt houses and shattered lives. "Ladies and gentlemen," he says, flashing his best smile, "I take the blame!"

For the women who ran in fear, for the families torn apart, for the silence that stretched for months—I take the blame.

Or imagine him before a family who's just lost their daughter to a brutal crime, saying, "Yes, I take the blame."

Or maybe outside a jobless youth's home, holding a press conference to declare, "I take the blame for your unemployment!"

Or in front of a burnt church or a lynched man's house, whispering, "I take the blame!"

Wouldn't that be leadership worth applauding?

But sadly, that scene remains as fictional as a politician refusing a garland. When bridges fall, when women cry for justice, or prices rise faster than a hot-air balloon, our leaders are suddenly missing in action—probably on a foreign tour, hugging someone or waving from the steps of an aircraft.

And what about us, the public? We clap till our palms hurt. We wave flags, we chant names, we post selfies with the background of whatever they've just cut a ribbon for. "Wow, what a leader!" we say, not realizing that the person taking credit for the airport, never lifted a hammer, never turned a bolt, never sweated a drop, nor even planned the airport. The real heroes are the nameless engineers, the labourers who worked through rain and heat, and the planners who fought red tape thicker than concrete.

But when disaster strikes, the spotlight swivels away. Suddenly, there's no "vision-

ary leadership." There's only a "technical glitch," an "unfortunate incident," or "circumstances beyond control." The blame passes faster than a political promise before elections—from minister to bureaucrat, bureaucrat to engineer, engineer to contractor, and finally to that ever-reliable scapegoat: "act of God."

Nobody says, "I take the blame." And maybe that's the real tragedy—not just that mistakes happen, but that no one owns them.

True leadership, dear reader, isn't about basking in the glory of completed projects, but about standing firm when things fall apart. Leadership isn't a photostudio; it's a mirror. A mirror that reflects both triumph and failure. But in our country, mirrors are carefully angled to show only the flattering side.

I sometimes think, what would happen if our leaders had to inaugurate every event that happened under their watch. Would they stand in front of crumbling schools and whisper, "I take the blame"? Or before empty hospital beds during a pandemic and murmur, "I should have done more"? Or at a farmers' protest and say, "I failed to listen"?

Now that would be an inauguration worth remembering.

But we, the citizens, are partly to blame too. We've become so used to worshipping power that we've forgotten to question it. We're dazzled by lights, impressed by long motorcades, and hypnotized by speeches that begin with "My fellow citizens" and end with "I, I, I." The "we" of democracy has been replaced by the "me" of politics.

So maybe the next time you see a ribbon being cut, pause before clapping. Ask yourself: who deserves the applause—the one holding the scissors or the thousands who held the shovels? The one waving from the stage or the ones who built the stage?

And perhaps, when another tragedy strikes and the cameras point elsewhere, ask again: where are those who said, "I take the credit"? Why can't they now say, "I take the blame"?

Because, my dear reader, a nation doesn't rise on credit—it rises on accountability. And until those who seek power also seek responsibility, we will continue to be a land where airports soar but ethics crash-land.

So today, as flashbulbs pop and another ribbon is cut, maybe we should clap a little less and ask a little more. Because the true test of leadership isn't how many airports you inaugurate—it's how many broken bridges, broken systems, and broken hearts you stand beside and say, with humility and courage, "I take the blame."

Until that day, the only thing flying higher than our airports... is political hypocrisy...

(You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending him your name and phone number on bobsbanter@gmail.com.)

Letters to the Editor

When Governance Becomes a Reward System

Editor,
The recent cabinet reshuffle by Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, which saw as many as eight ministers being dropped and later appointed as Chairmen and Advisers, has sparked wide public discussion across Meghalaya. While the political reshuffles are part of democratic governance, the appointments that followed have raised serious questions about intent, priorities, and accountability.

Many of these newly appointed Chairpersons and Advisers reportedly hold qualifications as modest as matriculation or higher secondary pass some even class five. This naturally invites the question: what kind of "advice" can they offer to a Chief Minister whose own educational background and administrative experience

far exceed theirs? If these positions were truly meant to strengthen governance, one would expect merit, expertise, and competence to be the guiding principles not political compensation.

In reality, this move appears to be a way of restoring ministerial status under different titles. These appointments often come with salaries, allowances, vehicles, and other benefits all drawn from the public exchequer. For a small and resource constrained state like Meghalaya, every rupee counts. Creating such posts for political convenience sends a wrong signal, especially at a time when unemployment among youth is at an all time high.

Across the state, thousands of qualified young people wait anxiously for job opportunities. Many are postgraduates, trained professionals, and civil service aspirants who continue to dream of serving their own State. To them, these appointments appear

as a painful reminder that in our system, connections often outweigh competence.

Public office should not be a reward for loyalty, but a responsibility earned through merit and service.

Meghalaya needs visionaries and reformers, not ceremonial advisers. As citizens, especially as young people, we have every right to ask, "why must public funds be spent to maintain political comfort, when the same resources could be used to create employment, improve schools, or support entrepreneurship?"

Governance must never lose its moral compass. It must inspire hope, not helplessness. It must create opportunities, not just titles. Meghalaya deserves a leadership that listens to the youth not one that drains their future to preserve its own past.

Yours etc.,
Marbianglang Lyngdoh
Rymbai,
Via email

All religions deserve equal respect

Editor,

The recent anti-Sanatani remark made by Chief Justice of India B.R. Gavai during a hearing concerning the restoration of a decapitated idol of Lord Vishnu at Khajuraho has stirred deep concern among followers of Sanatana Dharma. This episode is not isolated. Over the years, several public figures and politicians have made disrespectful statements and comments against their traditions, deities, and scriptures while other instances—such as Nupur Sharma's mere quoting of Islamic texts—have drawn stern observations from the judiciary. This asymmetry in response has led to growing disillusionment among Sanatanis.

Sanatana Dharma values tolerance, restraint, and pluralism. However, continued

disregard of its sentiments by politicians and judiciary risks eroding this patience. If such trends persist, it is not inconceivable that Sanatanis may feel compelled to express their discontent more visibly through large street protests, civic mobilization, and public advocacy. Public figures and especially the judiciary, must uphold equal respect for all faiths, not only in principle but in tone and conduct. Let this serve as a reminder that reverence, restraint, and responsibility must guide our public discourse and not irresponsible comments.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

My Love for Shillong and Celebrating Durga Puja Here

Editor,
Some places never leave

your heart, no matter where life takes you—and for me, that place is Shillong. Nestled in the beautiful hills of Meghalaya, it isn't just a destination; it's an emotion, a canvas painted with misty mornings, pine-scented breeze, and soulful melodies that drift through its winding lanes. Every time I return, it feels like a homecoming.

But what makes Shillong even more special to me is experiencing Durga Puja here. The festival of Durga Puja, with all its grandeur and devotion, takes on a unique charm in this hill town. Unlike the overwhelming crowds of big metros, Shillong's celebrations are warm, intimate, and deeply cultural. The community pandals, lit up with soft glows, the rhythmic beats of the dhak resonating through the chilly autumn air, and the fragrance of incense mingling with the aroma of food stalls—it's a festival that feels both famil-

iar and new.

Durga Puja in Shillong is a melting pot of traditions. You see Bengali households upholding age-old rituals, while locals from different communities join in wholeheartedly, adding their own colours to the celebration. That inclusiveness is what I love most. It isn't just a festival for Bengalis—it's for everyone who believes in joy, togetherness, and the triumph of good over evil.

And then there's the city itself—Shillong dresses differently during Puja. The markets are bustling with shoppers, kids in new clothes beam with excitement, and friends gather to hop from pandal to pandal, often ending the night with steaming momos or jadoh at roadside stalls. The crisp October air makes the evenings magical, turning every outing into a memory.

For me, Durga Puja in Shillong is not just about rituals or celebrations—it's

about belonging. It's about being part of a city that embraces diversity yet feels like one big family. It's about standing under the starlit sky after Pushpanjali, with the hills silently watching over, and realizing how blessed I am to call this place a part of my life - my birth place!

Shillong will always be my sanctuary, and celebrating Durga Puja here makes the experience all the more soulful. It reminds me that festivals are not just about traditions, but also about love, togetherness, and finding joy in the simplest of moments.

Until next time...
Yours etc.,
Shibashish Rudra,
Shillong/Gurgaon

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

The Environment at Stake

WATCHING the earth-cutting along the Pynursla-Dawki four-lane road makes scientists and seismologists wonder if Meghalaya really needs this road which cuts through fragile hills with deep gorges on the side. Already this unfinished road project has claimed five lives and injured a few people. The hills look unstable as if they are pulled out from under their roots. It is unclear as to what is intended to achieve through this four-laning work when the coal export from East Jaintia Hills to Bangladesh (if and when the scientific mining begins) does not need to pass through this highway. What exactly are the formal exports and imports passing through this highway other than boulders and sand? And up to what point will boulders be exported to Bangladesh? Are those custodians of forests waiting until every forest in this state turns barren?

In December last year the India State of Forest Report (ISFR) stated that Meghalaya lost 84.07 sq km of forest cover between 2021 and 2023. Despite the shocking statistics the Government has remained a silent observer. What is debilitating about Meghalaya's governance is that the Autonomous District Councils which are mandated to be the custodians of forests, rivers and minerals in the entire state barring the reserved forests and the areas under the Municipalities appear to be floundering and seem to have given up on their supervisory roles as the prime conservators of forests which are the prime catchments. The District Councils appear helpless to stop rampant quarrying because their claim is that they have no control over forests owned by individual clans and communities. So, have the Councils then forgone their control over forests which are our lifeline? Is this not a major failure? The Autonomous Councils are envisaged as instruments of self-governance so that tribals who are a minority in this country do not lose their land and resources to the exploitative forces and corporations from the rest of India. But this vision appears to have been short-circuited since the exploiters today are not forces from outside Meghalaya but the tribals themselves. In the name of livelihoods rampant quarrying and mining without any checks and balances are threatening to turn Meghalaya into a desert.

Quarrying in different parts of Ri Bhoi district especially places adjacent to Assam at Jorabat where the once green and forested hills have now been gouged out so that boulders and sand can be sold onwards to Assam and other states for construction purposes without any concern, are a present danger. The highway at Jorabat is regularly flooded and causes interminable delays for commuters but the Meghalaya Government seems oblivious of this new threat. Neither are the District Councils bothered. A petitioner from Assam has approached the Supreme Court on this issue with maps that show the entire hill on which the University of Science and Technology is constructed and other areas adjoining it are certified to be forests at one time. The Government of Meghalaya ought to take stock of the situation before this state experiences environmental shocks such as massive landslides as are happening in Darjeeling and Himachal Pradesh. The environment is an unforgiving foe.

Power and Politics: The Fallout of Meghalaya's Cabinet Reshuffle

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

The recent cabinet reshuffle, which saw the induction of eight ministers, including seven fresh faces, came as a shock not just to the common public but also to the incumbent ministers in the MDA government, who did not know that it was taking place. In the past, there had been discussions that the BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) would rotate its ministers, with AL Hek stepping down to make way for Sanbor Shullai, the legislator from South Shillong. Earlier in the year, Hek was asked about the agreement for sharing the cabinet berth. He declined to comment, but declared that he would abide by the party's decision if the reshuffle happened. True to his word, he did not protest. However, the other outgoing ministers were surprised because they did not know about such an arrangement. One in particular expressed strong discontent at the decision: Ampareen Lyngdoh.

The removal of Ampareen Lyngdoh happened in the most bizarre fashion. She was attending a two-day national conference on agriculture for Rabi Campaign-2025 in New Delhi as the state's agriculture minister. When informed about the move to drop her, she decided not to attend the second day, with only senior officials from her department being present. The chair reserved for her remained vacant. From an outsider's perspective, it would have appeared someone humiliated her on purpose on the national stage. She admitted she did not know of her impending removal and questioned the lack of consultation, calling the process "casual" and "insulting" to her constituents.

Ampareen's mistreatment is ironic considering that in 2021 she was one of the five Congress MLAs who supported the NPP-led government while she was still in the opposition. She explained that by claiming that they "decided to offer... support to the government on the aspect of governance in the greater interest of the people of Meghalaya." This weird situation invited ridicule from opposition party leaders, with the Delhi chief minister, Arvind Kejriwal, taking a dig at the Congress and tweeting: "Congress and BJP part of same government in Meghalaya?" This was a big embarrassment for the Congress, which also saw

12 of its 17 MLAs, led by former chief minister Mukul Sangma, defect to the Trinamool Congress. The party promptly suspended Ampareen for anti-party activities. A year later, she and Mohindro Rapsang resigned from Congress and officially joined the National People's Party (NPP) in the presence of Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma. She might still get a political appointment to assuage her disappointment. But it cannot be denied that her ouster from the cabinet without consultation has left her humiliated.

Ampareen's decision to support the NPP when she was still in Congress was all about realpolitik. Ampareen began her career with the Indian Youth Congress but joined UDP (United Democratic Party) after they refused her a ticket to contest the 2008 Assembly Elections. After she won the election and rejoined the Congress in 2009, the government rewarded her with the position of the state's minister for education. Ampareen, hence, is no stranger to migrating to greener pastures when it suits her interests. In this she is not alone.

During the last election, the PDF (People's Democratic Front) President Bantedor Lyngdoh accused the NPP of trying to bribe his party's MLAs, claiming they were offering 5 crores to make the switch. However, after the elections, the party promptly merged with the NPP. People wondered if the accusation was indeed true, and finally, someone offered PDF a higher price, causing it to fold. Recently, Congress' last remaining MLA, Ronnie Lyngdoh, also joined the NPP. Not long before that, his colleagues in the Congress party, Charles Marngar, Gabriel Wahlang, and Dr Celestine Lyngdoh had also left the party to join the government. Paul Lyngdoh himself was the founder of KHNAM (Khun Hyniewtrep National Awakening Movement), which he left to join the UDP in 2014.

Returning to Ampareen — although she joined the NPP in the hope of easing her path to the Assembly and a cabinet position, the 2023 election turned out to be a fiercely contested battle. There were indications earlier on that she was under tremendous

pressure. If the BJP and the newly formed VPP hadn't split the vote, Manuel Badwar could very well have won the seat for Congress. But the challenges are not yet over. With the rise of the VPP and their victory in the MDC election, her future prospects are not looking very promising. For a demographically mixed constituency like East Shillong, her non-communal credentials are a very important part of political strategy. To give her credit, she has not deviated from that despite the temptations of playing the communal card. This was even more apparent during the MP election when she was the NPP candidate for the Shillong seat (she lost the election). While the VPP was riding high, banking on the resurgence of jaidbynriew politics, she firmly held on to her secular credentials. In Amit Mahanti's 2025 documentary Inside Out, which focused on the 2024 MP election, she was shown questioning the sustainability of such an approach. But come the next election, which is still 2.5 years away, this may not be enough.

Ampareen was one of the most vocal and identifiable voices in the present MDA government. She, along with Paul Lyngdoh and Rakkam Sangma, was regularly in the spotlight. It is ironic that it is the most recognizable names that have been given the boot. Perhaps this is exactly why they lost their cabinet positions.

When the cabinet reshuffle was announced, Hyniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organisation (HITO) requested the Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, to extend the principle of balance and inclusivity and appoint a Khasi minister to replace him as head of government. The demand has many problems, and it could lead to a reciprocal demand in the future, which could cause serious problems if ignored. The reshuffle also removed Ampareen Lyngdoh and Paul Lyngdoh, who were the only identifiable Khasi names that could have been candidates for the CM post. Is it possible that, because of their public visibility, some senior members of the NPP felt uneasy about the limelight shifting away from them?

Ampareen has had a chequered career. She is a consecutive five-term MLA and

has been part of both the Mukul Sangma and the Conrad Sangma-led cabinets. However, in 2010, she was accused of manipulating the MPSC teachers' selection process, which took place during 2008 and 2009 when she was the Education Minister. A CBI inquiry was ordered, and the allegation became known as the 'white ink scam'. Just a few weeks ago, after 17 years, the High Court exonerated her of all charges. The CBI, on its part, has expressed disappointment with the judgment and stated that it is considering challenging the verdict in the Supreme Court. So, her legal troubles may not be over yet. She was also part of the Mukul Sangma government, which passed the illegal state Street Vendors Act in 2014, which set the street vendors on the warpath against the government. Finally, the Conrad Sangma led-government withdrew the illegal act, but the issue of street vendors is not completely solved, and more legal challenges are expected in the days to come. Ironically, one of her portfolio in the current government — from which she was removed — was that of the Law Minister.

Where do Ampareen and Paul go from here? If news reports are to be believed, it was the UDP, Paul's own party, which was the principal force behind his exit. If that is true, his days in the party are numbered unless he wants to play second-fiddle to others. News reports also suggested that Ampareen was removed for practicing nepotism. The irony is that three cabinet seats now belong to a single family — the Dhar dynasty. Ampareen left the Congress to join the NPP, so a return is highly unlikely. VPP will not admit either of the two, considering their track record. Both are forceful personalities, something which the party cannot accommodate. Adelbert Nongrum learned that lesson the hard way. BJP is the only viable option. But joining it could mean political suicide. So, the next 2.5 years are going to be very crucial for both Ampareen and Paul. It is going to determine whether they continue to remain relevant in the political sphere of the state or disappear like many of their predecessors. Interesting times lie ahead for politics in Meghalaya.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution.)

What the Bamboo Remembers

By Ellerine Diengdoh

Have you ever really listened to the silence in our hills.....it is not empty. It is the deep groan of bamboo, the calming hush of the pines, the soft whisper of a footfall on moss and the insistent whirr of the cicada. This silence is a feeling, that settles deep in your soul, and asks you to just....be still.

We come from that silence.

Here, in our Hills, life was never meant to be a race. Our pace was something gentler, it was the rhythm of walking, always walking, for running was considered a kind of madness. We were taught to wait, for it was understood that all things required their own time to ripen. We had a name for this pact with time, a sacred incantation, "suki suki" or "slowly, slowly." It was not an excuse, it is how we once lived.

A long time ago, everything we made was born from this rhythm. We didn't just weave a basket, we grew with it, chose the right stalk and gently coaxed a shape from its being. We didn't just fabricate a pot, we spoke to the clay, until it finally learnt to trust our hands. We didn't just weave a fabric, we braided our stories into its threads. These were not "objects" or "products", they were pieces of our family

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and our community, carrying the history of everyone who came before.

Then, just as the birds' sorrowful omens had predicted, the rhythm broke. The old, living silence of our ancestors was smothered, and in its place, a new silence began to fester, carrying with it the stench of pestilence. It is a deafening silence that comes after the bulldozers had devoured the light and gone to sleep for the night. It is the silence of a people watching their world being dismantled and finding no words big enough to describe their grief.

Progress, cloaked in dust and rage, screaming in tongues we don't understand, has arrived. Some call it "development", to move us "forward", but no one is asking, forward to where, whose future are we rushing towards?

What good is a luxury resort, built on the bones of a forest that taught us how to breathe. What good is a tourist attraction, that clawed its way out of sacred groves. What good is a shiny facade, where the foundation is mortared by the blood of our people.

This isn't a new story, we know this plot by heart, it has been repeated over and over, that we are numb to it now. When they carve up our land for projects that feel alien to this soil. When the rivers we once swam, now run sick with poison from our greed, when our people are pushed from their homes, in the name of a future they never asked for, we know whose vision is being built!

This same bewildered rush has broken into our schools and our places of learning. Our education mirrors the bulldozer....fast, brutally efficient and soulless. It trains our children to pass exams, but never to ponder about life. It rewards compliance, never curiosity. We see our teachers, the ones who still have the fire in their soul, breaking under a mountain of useless paperwork, forced to justify their value on paper, instead of proving it in

the minds of their students. There is no time to wander the difficult path to wisdom. There is only a blind race to a finish line, that isn't even there!

Our ancestors, who could read the future in the entrails of a rooster, knew that understanding takes a lifetime. They knew that speed without purpose is just another word for ignorance. This new world however, does not care about wisdom, it wants profit, and it wants it NOW. In this mad rush, we have woken something up. The Thlen!

Yes, the Thlen. The devouring serpent from lore. It is no longer a story whispered to scare children. It is here. I see it in the insatiable hunger that eats our forests, that swallows our rivers. I see its reflection in the glossy brochures that sell our waterfalls, our hills, our caves, our root bridges, as a weekend getaway.

Here is the part that hurts the most, the serpent did not just crawl in from the outside, Toki Blah asked the question we are all afraid to ask: "Who is the thief?"

The thief like the Thlen is our own, and feeds on its own. It is kept alive by those who speak our language but have forgotten our truth, those who trade our collec-

tive soul for a car, a contract and a moment of borrowed power.

So, this is where we find ourselves now..... helplessly watching our children grow up and seeing in their eyes a confusion, that is hardening into a deep, unfamiliar emptiness.

But maybe... maybe it's not too late to reverse this, to remember what it means to be slow. To remember the patience it takes to find the right wood for a Duitara, to feel its spirit, before you even begin to carve.

To remember to sit with the earth long enough to know where a seed wants to grow. To remember what it is like to learn something not for a test, but just for the joy of knowing.

To remember to look into the eyes of our elders and ask, not what we can get, but what kind of people we want to become.

This slowness, this inconvenient, unprofitable slowness, is not weakness or a romantic nostalgia, it is the last thing we have that is truly ours. It is not about looking backwards, it's about seeing clearly. It might be the only real defence we have left, the only thing standing between who we are, and what this frantic world is trying to make of us.

Let us reclaim that slowness, because we were never meant to be fast.

We were meant to be whole.

Inspired by:
"Tread softly because you tread on our dreams" by Janet Hujon (ST August 11, 2025)

"To Catch a Thief" by Toki Blah (ST July 24, 2025)

"Is Myntdu Doomed to Become the Next Wah Umkhrah?" by Bhogtaram Mawroh (ST July 23, 2025)

"Stunning Silence on the Mawpat Forest Plunder" by Patricia Mukhim (ST July 19, 2025)

"Why Academics Need to Slow Down" by Uddipana Goswami (IHE May 02, 2025)

Letters to the Editor

Ecological Disaster in Waiting?

Editor,
Anyone who takes a bird's-eye view of the areas around Jorabat cannot help but feel a deep sense of hopelessness. The lush green hills that once stood like proud forts of Meghalaya's natural charm are now gasping for breath. Not just that, they are scarred, shrinking, and also weeping!

It seems that all these years, there has been no administrative authority willing to take a firm stand to protect our forests, safeguard our flora and fauna, and preserve our precious water bodies. The slow disappearance of these hills due to rampant earth-cutting, quarrying, and the construction of buildings in the name of development has begun to spell disaster.

This Sunday, on the 5th of October, a brief downpour lasting less than thirty minutes was enough to expose the fragility of our battered ecology. Like thousands of other commuters, my friends and I, while returning from Guwahati, were stranded for over two hours due to a partial flash flood. It was a short spell of rain, yet the consequences were

severe. I shudder to think what would have happened if it had rained continuously for five hours that day. On May 30-31, 2025, these areas received about 110 mm of rainfall within 24 hours, the highest May rainfall ever recorded, turning NH-27 near Jorabat into a flowing river and causing seven-hour traffic jams. Have we not heard of countless people missing their flights and trains to Delhi, Mumbai, and Bengaluru because of these recurring flash floods? Is this highway not our only lifeline to the rest of the country? I dare say, this stretch of GS Road is the central vein of Meghalaya; when it clogs, the entire body gasps.

What struck me most was the nature of the floodwater. It was "thick with mud". That is a clear sign that the soil is eroding with a vengeance. This is not just runoff; it is the land itself being washed away. If this continues unchecked for another five years, half of the hills we see today might be flattened. Sadly, our indifference and our silence are now deafeningly obvious. I wonder when we will finally wake up to this reality.

An aged school teacher from Jaintia Hills rues: "when will each of us truly realize that Meghalaya's green hills were not at all

meant only for visual delight which we can just do away with? They are ecological fortresses." Yes, the teacher is absolutely right that these hills unmistakably act as "natural sponges", absorbing rainwater, slowing its flow, and helping to rejuvenate underground aquifers. Hills with greeneries effectively prevent landslides, filter the air, and regulate the climate. Can any of our advanced technologies do that for us?

What is very frustrating is the fact, as reported, that between 2001 and 2024, Meghalaya lost close to 243,000 hectares of tree cover — an whopping 14% erosion of its forested landscape since 2000. Why has it still not dawned on us that the vitality of our urban spaces is sustained by the greenery that surrounds them? Without the hills, rivers, and green vegetation, the energy of our towns will be drained away.

Now we are left wondering on how to restore what we have lost? How do we bring back the hills we have cut down? I believe we are now merely waiting to see the ecology throw its "ominous tantrum". We are only waiting to watch the houses and high-rises of Jorabat and Khanapara tumble down? If we do not act now, I am pretty sure, Mother Nature herself might stand up with

a hacksaw, ready to cut our ambitions to size.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Language embodies identity and culture

Editor,
Dr. Daiarisa Rumnong's article, "Speak Your Roots: A Digital Hearth for Khasi Language Preservation" (The Shillong Times, October 8, 2025), is very inspiring and important. It is not only for the Khasi people but for all communities who wish to keep their mother tongue alive. Her message is not just about language — it is about our cultural identity and who we are.

Today, globalisation and digital communication have brought the world closer. But at the same time, many native languages and traditions are slowly disappearing. This problem is not only in Meghalaya; it is everywhere — in India and across the world. From the tribal languages of North-East India to the old languages of Native Americans and Aboriginal Australians, everyone faces the same question — how can we stay connected to our roots in a world ruled by English?

Dr. Rumnong's idea of

a "Digital Hearth" is both beautiful and useful. She shows that we can use social media to share our proverbs, folk tales, and traditions. Her project, Speak Your Roots, teaches us that technology can help us save our culture instead of destroying it. This is a smart and positive way to solve a global problem — by using modern tools to build a link between old and young generations.

She is very right in saying that language is our identity. When a community forgets its language, it loses its history, pride, and way of thinking. But when young people start learning and speaking their mother tongue again — whether it is Khasi, Bodo, Mizo, Garo, or any other — they find back their roots and self-respect. This pride in one's own culture helps build unity and strengthens India's diversity.

Though native language teaching facilities exist in schools, especially in the lower primary stage, many students later choose Alternative English instead of their mother tongue when they reach higher classes. This is a worrying trend. It is high time we help children understand why their mother tongue matters — not only for communication, but for keeping their culture alive. Those who study Alternative English can still be encouraged to learn and use their native language

at home, in daily conversation with elders.

Schools too can play a creative role. Organising debates, storytelling, and literary competitions in local languages — alongside English — can make learning both joyful and meaningful. Such small efforts can go a long way in reviving pride and interest in one's mother tongue.

Dr Rumnong also warns that translation must be done carefully, so that the real meaning and beauty of native expressions are not lost. Her ideas show a perfect balance — she respects tradition but also accepts modern methods. Speak Your Roots is a wonderful example for every community that wants to protect its language.

In today's world, where people scroll more than they speak, Dr Rumnong's message reminds us to stop and listen to the voices of our ancestors. Her initiative truly deserves admiration and support from everyone who values culture, memory, and human connection.

Yours etc.
Jairaj
Tura, Brahmapara

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

Asia's growth story

THOSE looking for reassurance that the Indian economy is faring well might now heave a sigh of relief. The reference is to a statement from managing director of International Monetary Fund, Kristalina Georgieva, that the “Chinese economy is decelerating steadily while India develops into a key growth engine.” Her statement came in the run-up to a meeting of finance ministers and central bank governors at the World Bank and the IMF in Washington. India is already being projected as the world's fastest-growing economy in the post-Covid19 phase, the growth rate being seen to have gone above 7 per cent. This is short of the 9 plus rate of growth in the Manmohan Singh era, but 11 years of the Modi government have been a period of continued economic stability for the nation.

Set against the season of economic downturn in neighbouring nations like Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, India looks like it's comfortably placed. Yet, a glaring growth in economic disparity between the rich, the middle class and the poor is all too pronounced under the Modi dispensation – a scenario evident also during the Manmohan era punctuated by globalization and 'economic liberalization'. Singh's “trickle down” theory – that the benefits of the rich becoming richer, or the national economy growing stronger, would percolate down to every individual down below, and more importantly the poor – may not have many takers now. The plight of India's poor has not improved in any substantial manner in the recent decades, other than that they are fed with subsidized grains and other sops. Emancipation of the poor in significant ways remains a mirage. Narendra Modi's lip-service to the poor in abundant measure too has helped little in this respect.

China, as the world's second largest economic power after the United States, attained this exalted status by hard work and visionary leadership in recent decades. It started economic liberalization and even adopted a market economy – the hallmark of Capitalism—as part of reforms since the 1980s under the guidance of Deng Xiaoping. India took lessons from China from the 1990s under Narasimha Rao and Manmohan Singh. Notably, the economies of China and India were at the same level at the turn of the century—and so were their military strengths. Now, perceptions are that China commands a strength five times that of India's in both these sectors. India grew majorly in the past three decades too. It is set to emerge as the world's fourth largest economy; and is likely to outwit Germany in the near future.

The rise of two giants in the continent, alongside Japan, gives Asia a major economic heft. It must be noted here that former US secretary of state Henry Kissinger had visualized decades ago that the 21 Century would belong to Asia – while the 20th Century was America's and the 19th Century Europe's. The Covid19 eruption in 2020 had hugely upset China's growth trajectory, but it has the wherewithal to reinvigorate itself. To India's advantage is the large army of its young people, whereas China is ageing.

Letters to the Editor

The Typing Speed Mystery at Nongstoin District Judge and Sessions Court

Editor,
If you are reading this letter, I hope you have already read the one published on September 29, 2025 in The Shillong Times, titled “A Message to the Meghalaya Public Service Commission”. The author of that article expressed deep concern and frustration with the functioning of the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC), even going so far as to question whether the Commission is indirectly looting job aspirants. The author raised serious doubts about the qualifications or attentiveness of those responsible for setting question papers and releasing answer keys, and also questioned whether this might be a deliberate tactic to generate revenue through the representation process. As a job seeker myself, I fully relate to the author's sentiments. I too feel that many departments may be using this similar tactic to loot job seekers.

I'm sure many of you are curious to know what happened to me at the District Judge and Sessions Court, Nongstoin. Let me explain

what happened:-

On September 3, 2025, the office of the District Legal Services Authority, West Khasi Hills District, Nongstoin, issued an advertisement inviting interested candidates who are citizens of India to attend a walk-in interview for the position of Office Assistant/Clerk, scheduled for October 7, 2025 (Note: The post is purely contractual in nature and may be terminated without any prior notice).

As part of the application process, candidates were instructed to submit a Demand Draft of Rs 150/- in favour of the District Legal Services Authority, Nongstoin, as an application fee. The advertisement also stated that applicants would undergo a computer typing speed test (practical), and only the qualifying candidates would be shortlisted for the interview. However, nowhere in the advertisement was the required typing speed mentioned. Personally, I assumed—based on MPSC standards that the qualifying speed would be 30 words per minute (wpm). When I arrived for the interview on 7th October, I was informed that the required typing speed was above 40 wpm. I was taken aback, as this crucial detail was never mentioned in the original advertisement. I knew at that point that I wouldn't meet the threshold. Had I been informed of this requirement in advance, I and likely many others

It is commonplace for someone like me who is fathered by a non-tribal or someone who marries a non-tribal to be called by polite Khasi society as ‘Men Die Ri’ meaning a traitor whose loyalties lie with the ‘scheming’ non-tribal who they have over the years managed to caricature as the evil incarnate. Since the early days of statehood, the lack of vision by those who were mandated to craft out a vision for Meghalaya's people but failed to do so and hence the state's non-development and its economic and educational backwardness, are all attributed to the ‘dkhar’ who is seen as exploitative, calculating and Machiavellian to boot. The fact that most of us received our education from non-tribal teachers and made it in life is all but forgotten. Why is it so hard to accept the basic fact that we are all humans and have the same frailties and strengths in equal measure. Just because a person is a tribal does not make that person infallible.

The reason for this article is a conversation I had with a gentleman from Kerala who has lived and worked here for over 30 years. This person said to me, “Your Meghalaya will never develop because your people live in constant fear of the ‘outsider’ as if you will never have to encounter that outsider once you cross Byrniehat. Your people are so afraid of selling land to non-tribals including those who have lived here for generations, yet you have no compunctions about selling acres and acres to a fellow tribal who then sells the land back to the government at a profit. The poor among you are getting poorer and no one is bothered about them, least of all the state.” He went on to say that if land were to be adequately surveyed and alienated for creation of livelihoods, it would make much better sense for Meghalaya since the unemployment figure here is staggering.

What one realises over the decades is that people like me who are termed ‘Men Die Ri’ actually have nothing to sell to the ‘outsider’ and nor do we do benami businesses. On the contrary it's those so-called pressure groups (erroneously termed NGOs) that create a fear psychosis among the gullible tribals. They are actually controlling the semi-literate and illiterate through regular mind games. Fear and hatred

would not have wasted our time, energy, and money applying for the post.

While I accept that I did not meet the qualifying speed and thus wasn't eligible for the interview, my question is: Why didn't the District Judge and Sessions Court, Nongstoin, specify the required typing speed in the advertisement? Even though this is a Contractual post and some may say it's just 150/- for the application fee, I personally feel that this lack of transparency raises serious concerns and from my perspective, it appears to be a deliberate attempt to extract money from applicants; knowing that most would not qualify and still pay the application fee. If this was indeed done intentionally, it is deeply unethical, and those responsible should be ashamed of themselves for such actions and the application fees be refunded immediately. Job seekers deserve clarity, honesty, and respect not vague criteria and hidden requirements that result in wasted resources.

Yours etc.,
(Name withheld on request)
Via email

Of Killer Highways

Editor,
The recent accident cases along the NH6, particularly the Guwahati-Shillong stretch is a matter of great concern especially for fre-

Who is the real Men Die Ri? (Traitor)

By Patricia Mukhim

are two potent tools to push an entire population to even take up arms against a group they are told is exploiting them; has taken away their share of jobs and are controlling all the businesses in the state. They forget that we are all part of the country called India and that if we can work and live outside Meghalaya others too have the right to do likewise in their areas of expertise here. In Meghalaya there are already specific laws and institutions that favour the indigene over the so-called non-tribals. We are not living in a separate country and therefore we need connectivity whether that be by road, rail or air.

One fails to understand why a fear psychosis is being created over the coming of a railway line into Khasi

are dreams crafted by some with ingenious minds who hardly understand the capacity of our people to own and implement the idea beyond the initial baby steps because there is no hand-holding after the inaugural session is over and done with.

In a liberal democracy people live with a certain level of optimism, faith and a sense of security but that's far from happening in Meghalaya. Some people are constantly telling us we are not safe; that we need more protection and therefore we need the Inner Line Permit when the world itself is shrinking and people travel places with ease. But as a society even the educated have learnt to acquiesce rather than fight the forces of pessimism that actually

“The poor among you are getting poorer and no one is bothered about them, least of all the state.”

and Jaintia Hills and why we have had repeated spineless governments that could not take decisions that are in the public good for the long run and why governments are invariably held to ransom by these pressure groups. What's the point in having a government that cannot assure the public of the basic development premise – such as the railways which will make all goods coming from outside the state, especially essential commodities such as rice, sugar, dal, vegetables and fish which all cost a bomb here because of the road transport cost and the extortion by sundry groups. What's the point in having a top-heavy police force if they cannot even control extortion with a firm hand and put the kingpins in jail. If small offenders can be arrested why are the big fish escaping and living like kings with all the facilities available with one phone call? This extortion culture is what is retarding the progress of Meghalaya.

Sadly we have become a state with inaugurations galore on events with fancy names. Each inaugural function is followed by a speech that makes us feel we are closer to becoming lakh-patis but such dreams are short-lived because they

are taking us on a retrograde step rather than on the path of progress. We are a society trapped in our own fears but we cannot even name those fears. Many people in closed doors speak of the so-called seng bhalang (organisations for the greater good) with disdain but don't have the courage to call them out and point to the retrograde steps they have forced the society into.

Khasi society is today trapped in a cultural prison to which they have to conform or be termed traitors to the cause. But what is the cause? No one has really spelt out what the cause is but we are all enlisted into that ‘noble’ cause. Philosophers like Nietzsche tell us that society is not a zero sum war but a conversation of negotiations. Does Khasi society ever get together to discuss issues that affect us all? Why do we believe that everything that the pressure groups do is in our larger interest? What is the point of that Khasi National Dorbar Hall if it does not meet to discuss the socio-political and economic issues confronting us? What one sees today is a fractured community with the traditional support systems crumbling.

For decades together we

tribes of Meghalaya have lived like we are a culture under siege and spent precious hours discussing culture. But does this culture bring food to our homes? We spend considerable time and resources reliving the past through dances and songs and are overly concerned about identity but hardly invest in discussing the future of our youth. Reality is a lot messier than for us to waste our time and resources enacting the idea of a culture under siege.

In Meghalaya what we have lacked for the longest time are leaders of courage who can motivate us to have hope, aspirations and who can inspire us to have a vision of a better life. What we have instead are leaders who arouse our dark passions and fill us with hatred and fear – two negative emotions that are intended to keep us constantly under threat. Evolution has wired us to be extremely sensitive to threats which psychologists call the ‘negativity bias.’ The wrong kind of leaders and politicians have used resentment and fear and stirred up all the negative emotions to win votes. They make us believe they will protect us from these so-called threats but once they are elected, they forget their constituents and give them only the crumbs. That's the political stratagem used by Meghalaya's politicians and their collaborators the pressure groups to win elections.

And in 53 years we have managed to create a society sharply divided into the ‘high class’ and the poorest of the poor who scramble to make a living setting up a shop that earns them just under three hundred rupees a day with so many mouths to feed, forget about sending their kids to school. This is the real Meghalaya which no one is keen to talk about because everything is Shillong-centric. We have realised by now that none of the elected representatives really care about addressing our most pressing problems. They are there to continue to remain in power because that power is an intoxicant they can't live with.

So before we label people as ‘Men Die Ri’ first do a deep dive into the meaning and metaphor of the words and do a reality check about who the real traitors of the ‘jaidbynriew’ really are.

distorted impressions that are neither educational nor appropriate for their age. Sexual health is indeed an important subject, but it must be conveyed with dignity, sensitivity, and educational purpose, not by sensationalizing it.

I sincerely urge your esteemed authority to kindly review such advertisements and ensure that public awareness campaigns are framed in a manner that informs, educates, and safeguards public health without compromising cultural values or the innocence of young viewers. One constructive solution would be to adopt the internationally recognised practice of watershed hours, as followed in countries such as Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, when children are less likely to be watching. Alternatively, advertisers may be encouraged to frame their messaging in a more educational and respectful manner rather than relying on suggestive visuals.

I trust that ASCI, being a guardian of advertising ethics in India, will take appropriate steps to address this matter.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang Lyngdoh
Rymbai,
Via email

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Breathing Danger

How Smart Technology Can Save Indians from Air Pollution

By Rameswari Sahoo

Aarav, an eight-year-old boy wakes up with a persistent cough every morning. The air quality index for Delhi when checked for that day by his mother Priya shows an hazardous indicator with the value reading 450. This means another day of video games rather than playing cricket. Its not just the pollution that is harming him, but also the eye strain. Millions of Indian families like this, live under an invisible and deadly toxic cloud wondering, when they would be able to breathe clearer air.

But what if technology as simple as a smartphone could help families like Aarav's take control of the quality of air in their community?

India faces one of the world's most severe air pollution crises. Seven million Indians die from air pollution-related diseases every year. That's like an entire population of Bangalore and a little more dying annually by just doing something as normal as breathing. To put this into perspective, air pollution kills more Indians each year than combined deaths in road accidents, terrorism, and natural disasters.

Delhi, Mumbai, and Kolkata rank among the world's most polluted cities, with air quality readings exceeding safe limits by 5 to 10 times. Breathing Delhi's air is equivalent to smoking 50 cigarettes a day. Now imagine your children breathing that kind of air every day.

It is not just a problem in urban areas, rural areas are affected too. 70% of India's surface water is polluted and contributes to air contamination from evaporation and dust. This literally creates a toxic web for all the population in India.

Among all those trapped in this toxic web, one group suffers disproportionately. Children are the worst affected due to their developing lungs absorbing more toxins easily than adults. Its actually quite heartbreaking. The respiratory problems they have to suffer will be lifelong, reduced lung capacity, cognitive development issues are just the start of the list.

Understanding where this deadly pollution originates reveals just how complex and widespread the problem has become. Sources of pollution are everywhere: emissions from vehicles from traffic jams, construction dust from urbanization and infrastructure boom, industries, power plants, crop-burning.

But the crisis is not being ignored. Air quality monitoring stations have been installed in various cities by our government; they provide real time data through websites and applications. The stations offer precise measurements of microscopic dust and smoke particles among other pollutants, but they are expensive costing lakhs of rupees. Stricter emission standards for factories and power plants and for vehicles to reach the European standards and electric vehicles are promoted.

But these solutions have critical limitations. Government monitoring stations are less in number. Only 40 monitoring stations are covering the city of Delhi with 20 million people. Its one station for 500,000 people in vast areas. Each government-grade station costs Rs 10-15 lakhs, making micro-level local monitoring economically impossible. Rural areas and smaller cities have practically no coverage, leaving the Indians staying in those areas completely unaware.

Current solutions are top down and reactive. Communities have no instruments to monitor their own air quality, no way to identify pollution sources and finally no data to take action at the right time. People living near a brick kiln or a heavy traffic intersection would never know the quality of air they breathe.

But what if there was a way to change this entirely? What if communities could take control of their own air quality monitoring? Imagine if every community in India had its own air quality monitoring station network, not that expensive station, but dozens of affordable smart sensors providing localized, real-time data. With today's technology its entirely possible and not just a dream.

The solution lies in low-cost community driven connected air monitoring devices at the edge combined with Artificial intelligence algorithms deployed at the community level. There are affordable, sensory station costing under Rs 5,000 each compared to the Rs 15 lakh government stations. With such affordable devices, communities can create dense monitoring networks that provide real time air quality insights.

Here's how this pivotal system will work: pocket-sized air quality meters equipped with PM2.5, PM10, solar panels, batteries, and gas sensors would be installed every few hundred meters across different streets. These sensor stations are small enough to mount on streetlights, building walls, or school compounds and can continuously monitor air quality and transmit data through wireless to a central community database.

Intelligent software that analyze this localized data in conjunction with traffic patterns, weather patterns, and industrial activity are where the true magic happens. Communities can take preventive measures since these algorithms can forecast pollution spikes two to four hours in advance. Schools might restrict outdoor activities and redirect traffic in congested regions.

Visualization of data through charts, mobile apps would make air quality information understandable to everyone. Families would see simple color-coded maps showing exactly which streets, parks, or markets have safe air quality.

When data from pollution sensors show pollution surges being recorded from a particular factory, communities will have compelling evidence to force action. The affordability of this approach makes it viable and scalable. Between 100 and 300 community sensors can be funded compared to the price of a single government monitoring station, offering 300 times greater coverage.

Most significantly, air quality is transformed from a theoretical policy concern into real community action by this networked system. People stop being passive victims of pollution and start taking an active role in finding solutions when they see real-time data demonstrating how the air quality in their area gets better on days when cars are not allowed and gets worse during construction.

However, this technological transformation, requires more than just smart sensors and algorithms – it needs active community participation. Here's how we can contribute to cleaner air. We should support local air quality initiative, advocates for community-driven sensor networks in our areas. We can contact the resident welfare association, schools, and councillors for information and deployment on localized air quality stations and make important personal decisions. When feasible we should choose electric automobiles, bicycles, or public transportation over petrol and diesel vehicles.

Its time to vote for politicians who place a high priority on environmental protection and take inputs from public consultations regarding air quality laws to support policy reforms. Every little thing we do will add up to a large contribution in reducing pollution. The cumulative effect of millions of Indians making wise decisions on energy use, transportation, and environmental advocacy can improve air quality. This collective action, combined with technological innovation, offers a path toward the cleaner air that every Indian deserves.

We can alter how communities view, predict, and respond to air pollution by normalizing air quality monitoring through reasonably priced IoT networks and machine intelligence. The health advantages are instantaneous, the technology is available, and the fees are reasonable. Every human has a right to clean air, and every breath counts.

We may either continue to tolerate toxic air as an part of our Indian life or use technology to create a future where children like Aarav can play outside safely, breathe freely, and grow up healthy. The devices are ready, the algorithms are waiting, and the communities are willing. Let's clear the air together.

(The writer is pursuing Ph.D. at Plaksha University)

Chronicles of Despair

It's barely a month since a four year old girl from Nongrah disappeared and was later found dead in the same locality. This time a 7-year old boy from the same locality also disappears and his dead body is located at Mawpat forest. This is a new phenomenon and a worrying one since there are hardly any leads and motives for the murders. To lay the blame solely on the Police Department for failing to prevent these mysterious murders is to shelve community and societal responsibility. Deputy Chief Minister in charge of Home, Prestone Tynsong has rightly called on parents and families to take better care of their children to prevent such sad occurrences. Meghalaya like other tribal states has a robust local governance system – the Dorbar Shnong which is a body selected by the residents of the village/locality to ensure that basic facilities are in place and that there is safety and security within the locality. Within a Dorbar Shnong nearly everyone knows everyone else and usually there is a sense of common trust among the residents that problems can be resolved internally through discussions and collaboration.

Whenever there are murmurs of suspicious movements of individuals or groups the entire locality is alerted and adults and youth volunteer to police the locality late into the night. This solidarity is what keeps the residents united in their goal of securing their respective localities. While the Police assist in such circumstances the locality does not rely entirely on them but works in tandem with them. The Seng Samla and Seng Longkmie are usually alert when untoward incidents threaten to derail the peace in any locality/shnong. It may be just a coincidence that Nongrah is facing these mysterious incidents twice in a row but other shnongs need to remain alert against such dangers awaiting innocent children whose lives are cut short leaving behind a trail of sorrows and unresolved fears that prevent closure for grieving parents and relatives.

Undoubtedly the Police Department have a duty to get to the root of these mysterious killings and lay their hands on the murderers at the earliest in order to restore public confidence. While public outrage against the serial murders will die down, public pressure on the Police to get to the root of these murders should remain constant so that such occurrences are nipped in the bud and the murderers found. The motives for such murders can then be ascertained instead of assuming the worst – that tales of the ancestral Thlen (a blood-feeding python nurtured by its keepers because it brings prosperity to them) begin to take over and the entire society reverts to its fears and suspicions and begins to live on the edge instead of moving ahead towards progress and development. The Khasi society has lived on these horrors and fears for a long time and also turned some of its own people into outcasts for ostensibly fearing the Thlen. These unfounded fears need to be addressed by the State Police by finding the killers of the two children who disappeared and died within a month of each other.

The Madhatter's Circus: Descent to Dystopia

By Mac J Dkhar

I have been to many strange places, but when I returned here, I got caught in a story that everyone was telling. A very strange situation where the people on stage are not running a state, but a show. And the audience? They take out their kwait, open the tympanum leaves, slide in the shun, and spit red arcs into the air. Between chews and gossip, they murmur a story of pure entertainment. So, here is a tale – The Madhatter's Circus.

The stage was set and the lights went dim, the drums went POWWW! and the Madhatter walked onstage, cane in one hand and hat tipped at a naughty angle. He paused, let the silence grow, and then swept into a bow.

"Ladies and gentlemen, behold the grand design!", he exclaimed. "Every two and a half years, we shuffle, your clowns like tards in a magician's deck. And tonight is the appointed hour, the moment of midterm course correction!"

The crowd clapped politely, but one voice broke through: "Correction? Sounds more like midterm course confusion."

The Madhatter smiled, unfazed. The bell sounded, the spotlight flickered. The Madhatter's Circus began.

Act I: The Vanishing Lady

"Watch closely!" cried the Madhatter. "For my first trick, I shall make someone disappear!"

With a flick of his cane, poof! The lone woman minister vanished. In a matrimonial land, no less. The villagers gasped, and the audience hissed. "Why her? An insult!" The Madhatter knew it too. He had figured it all out. He picked a woman because her absence would shock and prick; a great way to distract, hold the crowd's attention, and drown out deeper criticism, while the cracks in his reign quietly faded. After all, women were never partners in his circus, only props.

The Madhatter tipped his hat like he had pulled off the impossible.

Act II: Tourism on a Walking Stick

"Now, ladies and gentlemen," the Madhatter shouted, "Behold the second Act – Swapping, it is! I will trade youth for wisdom!"

The tourism rooster, full of ideas, moved away, and an old, weary tortoise waddled onto the stage, suddenly tasked of luring tourists. "Dynamism on a walking stick!" the monkeys in the rafters yelled.

But the Madhatter's trick was not an accident. He knew that tourism, the most exciting and lively acts of the circus, needed a puppet not a

leader. And what better puppet than a tottering tortoise? Too polite to complain, too slow to catch the bus, and too tired to chase after backpackers. The Madhatter laughed and said, "Why take a chance on a rooster that can do tricks when you have a tortoise that mistakes festivals for nap schedules?" After all, it is easier to pull strings when someone moves slower than the cherry blossoms bloom.

Act III: Health, the Gamble

"New blood!" the Madhatter said, twirling his cane theatrically. "Our circus loves it!" A lamb with big eyes stepped out and was handed the keys to Health. A clueless novice in nice suits. The fragile hens clucked nervously for they knew their well-being was at stake.

The villagers whispered, "What healing could a lamb perform when he had never touched a thermometer?"

But the Madhatter was rewarding loyalty. They whispered that this lamb was chosen not for his skills in medicine, but because it followed and was led by a cunning hyena's staff dangling with gold coins.

The trick was simple: pick someone who would never bite the hand that fed them. The Madhatter smiled. Health was all about keeping the pockets in his circus "healthy."

Act IV: Turn Off the Lights

The Madhatter yelled, "And now, an electrical and shocking act!"

The beaver-engineer, who had built homes and dammed the rivers of loadshedding, was pushed aside. A class-ten ostrich, dim but always busy hawking vehicles, lolloped along. The crowd jeered at its puny mind and bulky body, for they knew it would bury its head in the sand at the first sign of trouble.

Simultaneously, the lights flickered on cue, heightening the act's tension, while the Madhatter yelled, "Electrifying change!" The villagers were unimpressed and quietly stocked up on candles, wondering if the next blackout would be called a "midterm stability correction."

Act V: The Eagle Waits

The Madhatter looked up as the room grew restless, expecting a wave of sneers. The opposition eagles who were sharp-eyed, fierce, and forever screeching at every stumble, would have usually filled the air with shrill protests.

But this time, there was silence. The eagles circled high above, wings wide and their

eyes fixed on the tent. They knew better than to waste their voices. Why swoop now? When the canvas was crumpled, the poles bent and the circus would soon collapse?

The villagers whispered, half in awe and fear, "When the eagles fall silent, it means they are waiting for the right time to dive."

Act VI: The Hyena Behind the Curtain

"Now," the Madhatter whispered, "A secret everyone knows but we will pretend it's new!"

The hyena, master of moneybags, crept from behind the velvet curtain. He did not roar or command; he did not need to. With every clink of coins, the chairs danced along to its jingle, typical of a musical chair act. His sharp mocking laugh made it clear who held the leash. He needed no spotlight, for everyone knew the circus was his.

Yes, the Madhatter was the Ringmaster, but the true ring of power lay in the hyena's golden teeth.

Act VII: Monkey Business as 'Your Choice' of Life

The Madhatter yelled, "For your delight, I present the dancing monkey!"

Arts and Culture was his stage. He twirled, hands high, chanting "It is your choice!" Heritage shrank to hashtags and Instagram's fleeting trends. The parrots sighed, "so, this is culture now!"

Act VIII: Perform and Perish

"And now, a cruel twist!" the Madhatter yelled. "Here, performers must perish!"

The hardworking horse galloped in, with its muscles gleaming with the sweat of real work. He had even won races that made the circus proud. People praised him, kids cheered for him and slowly his fame began to outshine the Madhatter himself. And of course, that could not happen. Suddenly, his shiny mane faced the harsh end of the Madhatter's whip and he whimpered in pain.

In trotted a donkey, jingling proudly in a garland of silver coins, while the horse, betrayed and broken, gasped: "Et tu, Brutus?" The villagers, disgusted, spat out their kwait juice. They grumbled, "That is the reward for hard work. Performers punished and lackeys rewarded!"

The Madhatter clapped the loudest because he was happy that no beast in the circus would ever take the spotlight. Better a braying donkey than a noble horse who steals the show.

Act IX: Thrones for Dynasties

"Finally," the Madhatter proudly declared, "A royal touch!"

The grandest thrones rolled out, placed neatly in the laps of a business family. People were ignored for their merits and performance. From the shadows, the hyena laughed. They knew that when the thrones were chosen and handed, it always ended up in the lap of the "Dhar lings" of the show.

Act X: Education Déjà Vu

The same old owl, who had once turned Education into its own circus, wobbled back onto the stage. There he was again, feathers ruffled but perched proudly, as if age alone made him wise.

The pigeons cooed, "The second time will surely be different!" as they pecked on bread-crumbs.

The teachers, less amused, tightened their tapmoh shawls and sighed. They had seen this play before and knew they would be the ones weaving thread from their tears, stitching the same old tent holes in the streets again.

Act XI: The Bureau Cats

The Madhatter declared, "And now, my grand finale!"

The main cats of the circus, the bureau-Cats, came into view. They lay across the fattest portfolios like they were pillows just for them, looking sleek and smug.

The crowd laughed bitterly. They knew who feasts, when the cream was poured. One particularly bloated Tomcat licked his whiskers after his share, while his small cat-sultans fought over the dregs, purring "Kum-Arrgh," in feigned delight.

But the cats didn't just stop there. They toyed with the mice-nisters, tossing them back and forth and watching them squeak and scatter with no way out. The villagers spat their kwait and laughed darkly, saying, "This is not a reshuffle!" It is a cat playing with its food.

The Madhatter smiled for he knew that behind every weak mice-nisters in front, pretending to govern, hides a fat cat.

Epilogue: Curtain Falls

The drums rolled, the Madhatter bowed. The monkey danced, the donkey brayed, the tortoise dozed, the hyena cackled, and the bureauCats licked their whiskers. The villagers spat their last kwait, muttering: "New costumes, same animals."

The curtain fell, but everyone knew the circus would return. The tickets were sold once every five years and the audience had no choice but to watch. One old man laughed bitterly and said, "In this circus, the clowns change masks, but the joke is always on us."

The Profound Pledge: Sushila Chetry's Call to Immediate Action

By Jairaj Chhetry

The streets of Fancy Valley, Tura, speak not through monuments or plaques, but through their quiet cleanliness. The absence of litter, the sense of care stitched into every pathway, tells the story of a woman whose labour is as humble as it is extraordinary. She sweeps not only dust from the lanes but apathy from the human spirit. Her name is Smt. Sushila Chetry, and at an age when many naturally seek rest, she has chosen a broom as both her companion and her calling. She stands as a beacon of selfless community service, a reminder that dignity resides in dedication.

Smt. Chetry cannot endure the sight of filth in or around her neighbourhood. It unsettles her deeply, not simply because untidiness offends the eye, but because it betrays carelessness toward the community one inhabits. With quiet persistence, she urges all who cross her path to do their part—never to litter, always to keep their surroundings as clean as possible. For her, cleanliness is not a private virtue but a collective responsibility.

A Life of Choice, A Quarter-Century of Service: What renders her work remarkable is that it is not driven by financial necessity. It springs instead from an inner conviction—an ethic of care woven into her very being. A mother of two accomplished sons—one, a postgraduate in agriculture now working in a school, the other a restaurateur—she has no cause to worry about survival or security. She could, with justification, have stepped back into the comforts her family provides. Yet she has not.

For twenty-five years—a full quarter of a century—she has been the silent sentinel of her locality, broom in hand. Her labour is neither perfunctory nor mechanical; it is devotional, a form of prayer enacted daily for the well-being of her neighbours. Hers is the rarest of commitments: service as a choice rather than an obligation, a discipline born not of want but of love.

The Profound Promise of a Single Day: The defining episode of her life came when she was already eighty years old. One morning, as she bent to her task, a passing professor halted, struck by the quiet determination of her effort. Watching her, bent with age yet unwavering in spirit, he felt compelled to ask:

"Auntie, with all due respect, your sons have given you comfort and security. At this age, why do you continue with such demanding work?"

Her reply was not laced with complaint, nor was it

a plea for recognition. Instead, it was a line destined to endure—a crystallisation of wisdom formed over a lifetime of honest labour. With dust clinging to her clothes and resolve shining in her eyes, she answered: "I do not know whether I will live to see tomorrow. And so, I do not want to leave my work of cleaning the road of my locality until my last breath."

In that one statement lies a philosophy far deeper than textbooks or lectures can convey. It is not the language of resignation but of fierce immediacy, an unflinching refusal to postpone responsibility.

An Urgent Call to the Youth: "I do not know whether I will live to see tomorrow."

Allow those words to settle. They are not uttered in fear but in courage. They reject the culture of delay, the casual promise of "later," which so often undermines meaningful action.

Her message resounds as a challenge to the young: do not wait for perfect conditions, for governments to intervene, or for others to take the lead. Begin now. The time to act is not tomorrow but today.

If every young person, with energy and passion untarnished by hesitation, were to embrace her creed, the transformation would be profound. Cleanliness, she reminds us, is not cosmetic but communal. It is not about what lies outside one's door alone but about the respect we owe to shared spaces. For years she has urged all who meet her to treat the streets as their own—to refuse littering, to embody care.

A Legacy Beyond Applause: What Sushila Chetry of Fancy Valley, Tura, offers us is more than an example to be admired; it is a model to be imitated. Appreciation, though deserved, is not enough. Her life invites us to recalibrate our own—to live as if today were our last chance to make a difference.

In a world too often paralysed by hesitation, her voice breaks through like a bell: act now, serve now, clean now, live now. Hers is the highest form of leadership—the leadership of action without obligation.

Her work, modest in gesture yet monumental in meaning, is a quiet whisper to us all: make your corner of the world beautiful today. And in that whisper lies a call to build a cleaner, kinder, more compassionate tomorrow—one dedicated day at a time.

(The writer is retired Headmaster, Gorkha School, Tura and a state awardee in 2022)

Letters to the Editor

How Safe Are Our Children?

Editor,
With the ongoing crimes against children in Shillong, it is deeply disheartening to witness how our children are forced to face such atrocities. Their innocence and childhood have been robbed by a few who believe they can exploit them without consequence. A growing sense of fear has taken root in the minds of parents, making it difficult to trust anyone, while children themselves live with heightened anxiety and insecurity. Is this the kind of environment we wish to create for our children? How can they learn the art of trust when they are constantly taught to distrust others? Are we raising a generation in which trust will become a rarity? Surely, no child deserves to be raised in a world so deeply afflicted by such circumstances.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data of 2023, the number of crimes against children in Meghalaya has been steadily increasing. In 2021, the state recorded 481 cases of crimes against children, which rose to 512

in 2023 (NCRB, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to this rise, as children became more vulnerable amidst social and economic challenges during the health crisis. Although there was a brief decline in 2022, with 416 cases reported (Meghalaya Police, 2022), the number again increased to 512 in 2023 (Meghalaya Police, 2023). These figures are alarming and call for urgent, sustained, and collective action to address this critical issue.

Year-wise Cases Reported by Police and Courts of Crime Against Children Cases in Meghalaya during the year 2022

Sl. No.	Crime Category	Police Reported				Court Reported			
		Cases	Final Disposal	Final Disposal (%)	Final Disposal (%)	Cases	Final Disposal	Final Disposal (%)	Final Disposal (%)
1	Abuse of Children	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
2	Child Labour	5	5	100	100	5	5	100	100
3	Child Marriage	15	15	100	100	15	15	100	100
4	Child Sex Abuse	20	20	100	100	20	20	100	100
5	Child Trafficking	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
6	Child Prostitution	5	5	100	100	5	5	100	100
7	Child Begging	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
8	Child Exploitation	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
9	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
10	Child Neglect	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
11	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
12	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
13	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
14	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
15	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
16	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
17	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
18	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
19	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100
20	Child Abuse	10	10	100	100	10	10	100	100

The chart above illustrates the case disposal of crimes against children in Meghalaya for the year 2022 (Meghalaya Police Website). The statistics highlight an urgent need for a comprehensive

and coordinated response to safeguard children's rights and well-being.

As the saying goes, "Put out the fire before it burns." To effectively address the multifaceted challenges faced by children in Meghalaya, a multi-pronged strategy is essential:

1. Community Empowerment: The Dorbar Shnong and its affiliated organizations must be empowered to play a proactive role in creating awareness among parents, women, and children about

key locations — including near schools, colleges, and within localities — can serve as a deterrent to potential offenders and assist in quick response and investigation.

3. Capacity Building in Schools: Schools should organize regular sessions conducted by trained professionals to educate children about personal safety, consent, and protection. The aim should be to empower, not instill fear.

4. Strengthening Crèche Facilities: Parents, especially working parents, need to be made aware of the importance of crèches as safe spaces for children. Existing facilities should be upgraded to ensure safety, supervision, and accessibility for all families.

While these are only a few suggestions, tackling crimes against children requires collaborative efforts among the government, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), community-based groups, and local institutions. Together, they can play a pivotal role in realizing the vision of a safer, equitable, and brighter future for the children of our state.

Yours etc.,
Natasha Dkhar,
Via email

Time to wake up and do our bit for the environment

Editor,
I read with deep appreciation the editorial, "The Environment at Stake," published in The Shillong Times on October 9, 2025. It is both timely and thought-provoking — a much-needed reminder that the world around us is under growing pressure and deserves our care and attention. The tone of the piece truly captures the seriousness of what we are facing and invites every reader to stop and think about the direction we are heading towards.

The concerns raised about rapid development, road expansion, and increasing quarrying are very real. These may look like signs of progress, but they also disturb the fragile balance of nature. We see it around us — hillsides giving way, forests are thinning out, and streams running muddy where they once ran clear. The recent figures showing the loss of forest cover between 2021 and 2023 are especially worrying. They remind us that even small human actions, repeated over time, can change the future of our hills and rivers.

As the old saying goes, "We

do not inherit the Earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children." That truth carries deep meaning today.

Instead of pointing fingers or assigning blame, I feel this is a time to come together. Every section of society — local communities, traditional bodies, institutions, and citizens — can play a role. Even simple acts like community-based monitoring, tree planting, and introducing nature clubs in schools can make a big difference over time.

Your editorial has done exactly what a good one should — it has stirred reflection. I sincerely hope that the conversation it has started will continue, and that all of us — policymakers, community leaders, and ordinary citizens — will take it as a shared call to protect what we have inherited, so that our children too can grow up surrounded by the same beauty and abundance we once knew.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Tura

Our mother tongue, a precious legacy

Editor,
It always irks me when somebody says that he/she

can no longer speak their mother tongue. I have come across such people right from the time when I was in college. As a young adult I was amused. How can somebody not know to speak in the language they are born into? As I grew into an adult, the numbers have just increased. By then I was disgusted. Sadly some of those who can no longer or perhaps who choose not to speak in their mother tongue are full fledged adults. This is not only embarrassing but shameful. What a pity! While some say they cannot speak the mother tongue because they have stayed away from home from a very young age and had nobody to communicate with, there are others who simply shrug and do not seem to have any qualms about their inability to speak their mother tongue. This nonchalant attitude is despairingly sad.

Today as a mother, I fear that if we don't do anything concrete about this we are surely contributing towards the extinction of our mother tongue. Do we want that? I for one do not at any cost. Therefore, it is our duty and responsibility as adults to see to it that alongside educating our children in the English language, it is equally important that we speak to our children

in our mother tongue so that they carry on the legacy and our language does not die out. All that is required is for us to make an effort. It is no struggle to speak in one's mother tongue nor is it an embarrassment to communicate in it. English is a language that connects us across region, race, community and nations but should we be giving it so great an honour that we feel embarrassed if we cannot speak the Queen's language? Certainly not.

Step into our neighbouring state of Assam and there people will respond to us in Assamese. It may be a communication barrier but certainly one that showcases the fact that they take pride in their own language. Just as it seems easy for us to simply and conveniently let go of our own language, it is equally easy to allow our mother tongue to slip off our hands and be buried into the depths of oblivion. Do we really want that? I am certain we do not. Can we then start all over again and speak our mother tongue with pride? Yes we must and we sure can!

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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

Our quest to find a truly Earth-like planet in deep space

On October 6 1995, at a scientific meeting in Florence, Italy, two Swiss astronomers made an announcement that would transform our understanding of the universe beyond our solar system. Michel Mayor and his PhD student Didier Queloz, working at the University of Geneva, announced they had detected a planet orbiting a star other than the Sun.

The star in question, 51 Pegasi, lies about 50 light years away in the constellation Pegasus. Its companion – christened 51 Pegasi b – was unlike anything written in textbooks about how we thought planets might look. This was a gas giant with a mass of at least half that of Jupiter, circling its star in just over four days. It was so close to the star (1/20th of Earth's distance from the Sun, well inside Mercury's orbit) that the planet's atmosphere would be like a furnace, with temperatures topping 1,000°C.

The instrument behind the discovery was Elodie, a spectrograph that had been installed two years earlier at the Haute-Provence observatory in southern France. Designed by a Franco-Swiss team, Elodie split starlight into a spectrum of different colours, revealing a rainbow etched with fine dark lines. These lines can be thought of as a "stellar barcode", providing details on the chemistry of other stars.

What Mayor and Queloz spotted was 51 Pegasi's barcode sliding rhythmically back-and-forth in this spectrum every 4.23 days – a telltale signal that the star was being wobbled back and forth by the gravitational tug of an otherwise unseen companion amid the glare of the star.

After painstakingly ruling out other explanations, the astronomers finally decided that the variations were due to a gas giant in a close-in orbit around this Sun-like star. The front page of the *Nature* journal in which their paper was published carried the headline: "A planet in Pegasus?"

The discovery baffled scientists, and the question-mark on *Nature*'s front cover reflected initial scepticism. Here was a purported giant planet next to its star, with no known mechanism for forming a world like this in such a fiery environment.

While the signal was confirmed by other teams within weeks, reservations about the cause of the signal remained for almost three years before being finally ruled out. Not only did 51 Pegasi b become the first planet discovered orbiting a Sun-like star outside our Solar System, but it

also represented an entirely new type of planet. The term "hot Jupiter" was later coined to describe such planets.

This discovery opened the floodgates. In the 30 years since, more than 6,000 exoplanets (the term for planets outside our Solar System) and exoplanet candidates have been catalogued.

Their variety is staggering. Not only hot but ultra-hot Jupiters with a dayside temperature exceeding 2,000°C and orbits of less than a day. Worlds that orbit not one but two stars, like Tatooine from *Star Wars*. Strange "super-puff" gas giants larger than Jupiter but with a fraction of the mass. Chains of small rocky planets all piled up in tight orbits.

The discovery of 51 Pegasi b triggered a revolution and, in 2019, landed Mayor and Queloz a Nobel prize. We can now infer that most stars have planetary systems. And yet, of the thousands of exoplanets found, we have yet to find a planetary system that resembles our own.

The quest to find an Earth twin – a planet that truly resembles Earth in size, mass and temperature – continues to drive modern-day explorers like us to search for more undiscovered exoplanets. Our expeditions may not take us on death-defying voyages and treks like the past legendary explorers of Earth, but we do get to visit beautiful, mountain-top observatories often located in remote areas around the world.

We are members of an international consortium of planet hunters that built, operate and maintain the Harps-N spectrograph, mounted on the Telescopio Nazionale de Galileo on the beautiful Canary island of La Palma.

This sophisticated instrument allows us to rudely interrupt the journey of starlight which may have been travelling unimpeded at speeds of 670 million miles per hour for decades or even millennia.

Each new signal has the potential to bring us closer to understanding how com-

mon planetary systems like our own may (or may not) be. In the background lies the possibility that one day, we may finally detect another planet like Earth.

THE ORIGINS OF EXOPLANET STUDY

Up until the mid-1990s, our Solar System was the only set of planets humanity ever knew. Every theory about how planets formed and evolved stemmed from these

trying to understand human nature by studying students living together in one house. But that didn't stop some of the greatest minds in history speculating on what lay beyond.

The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270BC) wrote: "There is an infinite number of worlds – some like this world, others unlike it." This view was not based on astronomical observation but his atomist theory of philosophy.

If the universe was made up of an infinite number of atoms then, he concluded, it was impossible not to have other planets.

Epicurus clearly understood what this meant in terms of the potential for life developing elsewhere:

We must not suppose that the worlds have necessarily one and the same shape. Nobody can prove that in one sort of world there might not be contained – whereas in another sort of world there could not possibly be – the seeds out of which animals and plants arise and all the rest of the things we see.

In contrast, at roughly the same time, fellow Greek philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) was proposing his geocentric model of the universe, which had the Earth immobile at its centre with the Moon, Sun and known planets orbiting around us. In essence, the Solar System as Aristotle conceived it was the entire universe. In *On the Heavens* (350BC), he argued: "It follows that there cannot be more worlds than one."

Such thinking that planets were rare in the universe persisted for 2,000 years. Sir James Jeans, one of the world's top mathematicians and an influential physicist and astronomer at the time, advanced his tidal hypothesis of planet formation in 1916. According to this theory, planets were formed when two stars pass so closely that the encounter pulls streams of gas off the stars into space, which later condense into planets. The rareness of such close cosmic encounters in the vast emptiness of space led Jeans to believe that planets must be rare,

or – as was reported in his obituary – "that the solar system might even be unique in the universe".

THE HOLY GRAIL FOR EXOPLANET EXPLORERS

After three decades of observing, a wealth of different planets have emerged. We started with the hot Jupiters, large gas giants close to their star that are among the easiest planets to find due to both deeper transits and larger radial velocity signals. But while the first tens of discovered exoplanets were all hot Jupiters, we now know these planets are actually very rare.

With instrumentation getting better and observations piling up, we have since found a whole new class of planets with sizes and masses between those of Earth and Neptune. But despite our knowledge of thousands of exoplanets, we still have not found systems truly resembling our solar system, nor planets truly resembling Earth.

It is tempting to conclude this means we are a unique planet in a unique system. While this still could be true, it is unlikely. The more reasonable explanation is that, for all our stellar technology, our capabilities of detecting such Earth-like planets are still fairly limited in a universe so mind-bogglingly vast.

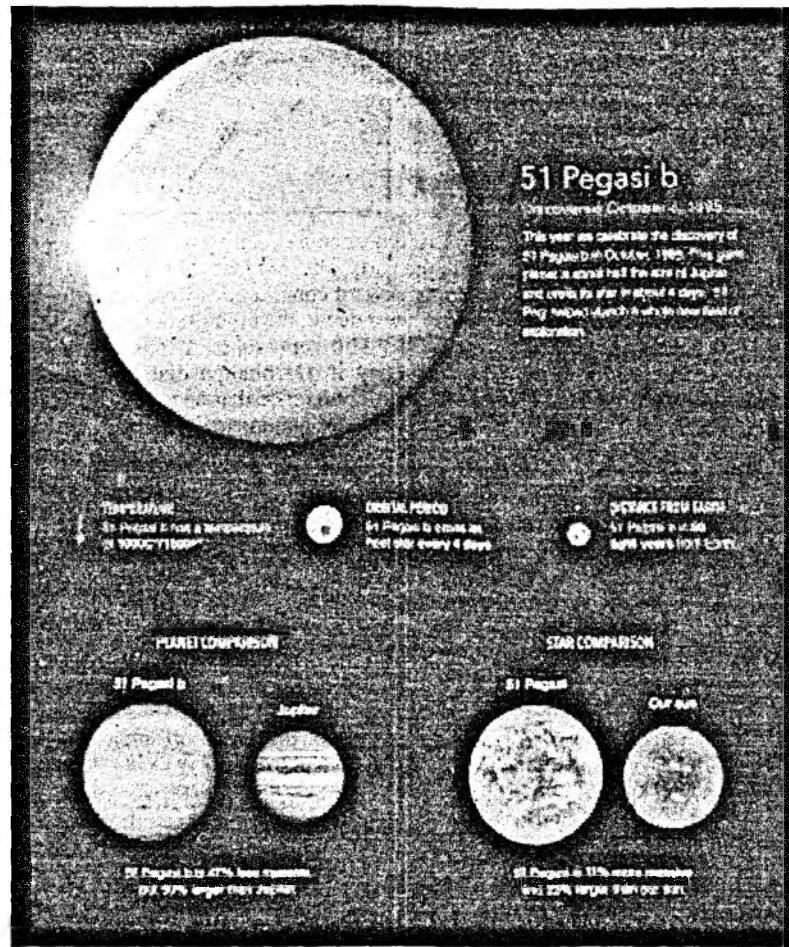
The holy grail for many exoplanet explorers, including us, remains to find this true Earth twin – a planet with a similar mass and radius as Earth's, orbiting a star similar to the Sun at a distance similar to how far we are from the Sun.

While the universe is rich in diversity and holds many planets unlike our own, discovering a true Earth twin would be the best place to start looking for life as we know it. Currently, the radial velocity method – as used to find the very first exoplanet – remains by far the best-placed method to find it.

Thirty years on from that Nobel-winning discovery, pioneering planetary explorer Didier Queloz is taking charge of the very first dedicated radial velocity campaign to go in search of an Earth-like planet.

A major international collaboration is building a dedicated instrument, Harps3, to be installed later this year at the Isaac Newton Telescope on La Palma. Given its capabilities, we believe a decade of data should be enough to finally discover our first Earth twin.

Unless we are unique after all. (*The Conversation*)



nine, incredibly closely spaced data-points (which went down to eight when Pluto was demoted in 2006, after the International Astronomical Union agreed a new definition of a planet).

All of these planets revolve around just one star out of the estimated 10¹¹ (roughly 100 billion) in our galaxy, the Milky Way – which is in turn one of some 10¹¹ galaxies throughout the universe. So, trying to draw conclusions from the planets in our Solar System alone was a bit like aliens

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 12, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Venus on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results this year. You will have vision to excel at your workplace. But competitors will make life tough for you. But you will not give up. Your peers will support you fully. Even your bosses will encourage you. Ultimately you will be able to execute all your plans. Financial position will be good. But mounting expenses will be a cause of worry. Health of elders in the family will also worry you. You will enjoy perfect bonding with your mate. He/she will be accommodative, caring and understanding. You will also make plans to buy some property. Auspicious functions will take place in family. Your social stature will rise, and you will be honoured in some major function. You would like to go on a fun-filled vacation with your family. Faith in God will increase.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities through an intellectual appreciation of art, cultural pursuits, and literature. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to writing letters, emails, making phone calls, and with communications in general. It would also be wise to double-check your work before finalizing it. You are slightly more defensive and certainly more protective than usual during this period. You might engage in arguments with someone close to you. Your attention to the logical world of reason will be a focus.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) This phase brings love, harmony and entertainment into family and personal relations. You have the chance to shine, largely because you are projecting yourself with confidence and poise. You might explore various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue of monetary gain. Your mind is always active with new ideas for an increase in income. Communication and marketing may be a source of financial or material gain. It's a good time for rethinking and revising your personal goals and plans.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Your mind is especially inquisitive when learning or studying. Short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly. You enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. It's a good time for rethinking and revising educational plans, paperwork, pending projects, and communications. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused. You might be considering furthering your education and hobbies; it is a fabulous time to do so or to simply broaden your knowledge.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) Romance and pleasure are highlighted right now. The flowing, expressive, and spontaneous energy surrounding you attracts like-minded people. You will have many ideas and plans, and you might be inclined to scatter your energies as a result. Channelled well, this is a good time to sell your ideas to others, or to present your case. You may be especially busy running errands and communicating. More articulate than usual, you may also have a more assertive, self-centered, or provocative communication style at this time. As such, discussions may become heated, or they may escalate into arguments.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) The current planetary configuration helps to increase funds and bring monetary gains. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Your partnerships and relationships are also highlighted right now, and it's time to compromise. Concentrate on truly listening to those close to you, and on playing a supportive role. Perhaps it's not the time to make a presentation or to come on strong to the world.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) An excellent week for money, career, and romance awaits you. Insecurity in your partnerships are brought to light now, and the best way to handle this is to understand that you need others instead of competing for the floor. You may be in a position wherein you are forced

to make a financial settlement or large outlay of cash, and you may find that people lean on you for support, financial or otherwise. What makes you feel comfortable and secure needs to be balanced with attention to other people's needs and comfort levels.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) This phase brings sincerity, cooperation and harmony in relationships. It's a great period for doing something entirely new and pioneering—to go solo in some area of your life. You are in a position to make an impression on others. You have presence and you project confidence. Your personal identity, appearance, outward behaviour, and self-expression come to the fore. Spontaneity of expression is what this transit is about. Increased energy and a renewed feeling of confidence is with you now, so take advantage.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations are the focus. There may be the need to revisit old, nagging issues regarding personal finances. Take this time to re-budget instead of making premature purchases. Hold off on decision-making regarding money. Instead, take the time to re-think your sources of income and how you spend. Put off finalizing anything important for the time being. In fact, some ideas or ventures may be put on hold due to circumstances beyond your control. You are most likely to express your social, romantic, and artistic qualities through an intellectual appreciation of art, cultural pursuits, and literature.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) There will be financial gains and profits from business. This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Your focus is on material affairs and comfort issues. Security is a driving force for you right now, and you might find that you are especially interested in accumulating possessions. What you have and what you don't have come into focus—what makes you feel comfortable, your sense of security, and what you value. This is a time of the year when personal finances and possessions receive maximum attention. Friends are there for you and have your best interests at heart.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You have an increased interest in your own possessions. You are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort, status and luxury. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to writing letters, emails, making phone calls, and with all communications in general. Your mind is especially inquisitive when learning. Short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly. Romance is in the air, and a joyous romantic affair is in the offing.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive pleasure from these activities. More professional freedom is likely to be experienced. This is a time of profitable productivity. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life. Your mind is especially inquisitive. Short trips and other forms of communication appeal strongly. You enjoy the challenge of tackling a variety of subjects. Talking, writing, and studying can be good ways to handle stress. It's a good time for rethinking and revising educational plans, paperwork, and ongoing projects.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) More loving and appreciative relationships with your children may also be figured now. Your powers of attraction skyrocket. Yet, you are not aggressive in your approach to love. Instead, you are attracted more if you allow yourself to be pursued. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored at this time. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Any love affair begun now will be characterized by good cheer, having fun, and a fair share of emotions. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success.

Trump on a coin? When Caesar tried that, the Roman republic crumbled

A proposed one dollar coin featuring US President Donald Trump is causing ructions across the political divide. It's also provoking discussion in the world of ancient Roman numismatics (coin studies).

The proposed coin depicts Trump in profile on one side (the obverse). On the other side (the reverse) the president raises his fist in defiance accompanied by the words "fight, fight, fight".

While only a draft proposal, the coin could be minted in 2026 to mark 250 years since the US declaration of independence. But an old law prohibits the "likeness of any living person" from being "placed upon any of the bonds, securities, notes, fractional or postal currency of the United States." More than 2,000 years ago, the depiction of living figures on Roman coins caused similar ructions.

It came at a time when the Roman republic was in trouble. The republic would crumble altogether soon after, ushering in the long period of Rome being led by emperor-kings who saw themselves as almost akin to gods.

Perhaps the American republic is at a similar stage.

Sulla's image on a coin

Rome was said to be founded by the mythical king Romulus, who killed his own twin (Remus). The fledgling state was led by seven kings before it became a republic in about 509 BCE.

By the late second century BCE it was led by Roman general and politician Gaius Marius. Marius and his later rival, Lucius Cornelius Sulla Felix, broke many of the republic's long-held conventions. They also fought Rome's first major civil war.

In 88 BCE, while consul, Sulla marched an army on Rome to defend the city from "tyrants" (by which he meant the faction of Marius, who had ousted him). After Sulla won the civil war that followed, he held the dictatorship from 82-79 BCE. Dictatorships were only to be held for six months in times of emergency. Sulla claimed the emergency was ongoing.

As part of this he ordered a list (known as proscriptions) of enemies drawn up. Hundreds or even thousands were killed and had property confiscated.

In the same year a silver coin (called a denarius) was minted in Sulla's name. One side featured Sulla himself riding in a four-horse chariot.

This was the first time a living person was depicted on a Roman coin. Up to this point only gods and mythological figures had that honour.

It was highly unusual.

Caesar's challenge to the old republic
Sulla was the first but he wouldn't be the last leader

of the Roman republic to have his image on a coin.

In 44 BCE Julius Caesar went a step further. Only months before his assassination, coins appeared with Caesar's bust dominating their obverses. Some included the words *dicto perpetuo* meaning "dictator for life".

By this time, Caesar and many before him, including Marius and Sulla, had broken the mould of the old republic.

Early in 44 BCE, Caesar took the dictatorship for life.

From 46-44 BCE he held the consulship, which was only meant to be held for a one-year term at a time. (Sulla held the dictatorship three years running, which partly set the scene for Caesar's later emergence and the final breakdown of the republic.)

For many at the time, it seemed Caesar was moving the republic in the direction of monarchy. In January 44 BCE, when a throng hailed him as "rex" (king) Caesar responded, "I am Caesar and no king". His very name was by now more powerful.

The coins of 44 BCE containing a profile bust of Caesar were an important part of his public programme, and part of his challenge to republican convention.

Sulla paved the way 40 years before.

The parallels with Trump are hard to miss. Some emphasise that Caesar did not directly

order his image to be placed on coins. Those wanting to curry favour read the room and Caesar did not object.

A similar scenario appears to be playing out with the coin design bearing Trump's image.

The parallels with Trump are hard to miss. Trump has signed more than 200 executive orders in less than nine months. His predecessor Joe Biden issued 162 in his entire presidency.

Trump's deployment of federal troops to US cities under emergency decrees provokes cries of tyranny. Sulla's march on Rome and the proscriptions that followed drew a similar response.

The possibility of a one dollar coin depicting Donald Trump on both sides echoes the coins of Sulla and Caesar.

They might not technically break the law but they would break convention. In the process they also symbolise a notable shift in the US from democracy to autocracy.

When the "no kings!" demonstrations took place in the US earlier this year, they reminded us of a key motivation for the declaration of independence.

A coin celebrating its 250-year anniversary may well symbolise its journey to demise. (*The Conversation*)



Should you be really concerned about 'overspending' your daily heart beats?

Imagine if your smartwatch didn't just tell you how many steps you've walked or calories you've burned, but how many heartbeats you've "spent" each day. According to a recent study, that number might one day become another marker of health — a "heartbeat budget" that could, in theory, tell you if you're overspending your most vital resource.

The idea of a lifetime heartbeat limit has floated around for decades. It's based on an old myth that the heart comes with a fixed number of beats, often said to be about 2.5 billion, so every extra one you use brings you closer to running out. Thankfully, that's pretty roundly accepted now to be untrue.

Exercise doesn't shorten your life by making your heart beat faster. If anything, people who exercise tend to have lower resting heart rates and live longer. But the new research, published in JACC: Advances, borrows that same metaphor in a modern, data-driven way.

The scientists behind the study analysed fitness-app data from elite athletes, comparing resting heart rates with total daily beats. They estimated that endurance-trained athletes "save" around 11,500 heartbeats per day compared with untrained adults, thanks to lower resting rates.

But those savings don't last. A single Tour de France stage can cost riders about 35,000 extra beats — according to the researchers' estimates — reflecting just how hard the heart works during a competition.

This push and pull, saving beats at rest, spending them during exertion, is what researchers call heartbeat consumption. The concept is simple: your total beats per day reflect how your heart responds to everything you do, from sleep to stress to sport. Fitness trackers already

measure heart rate continuously, so it wouldn't take much to start summing those beats and turning them into a new health metric.

But does it actually mean anything? That's where things get

ing between beats, known as heart rate variability, is a well-established indicator of stress and emotional wellbeing. Thinking in terms of "beat consumption" could help people visualise that connection be-

There are also implications for people living with chronic conditions. Some health apps already use heart rate thresholds to help users avoid overexertion, especially when fatigue or heart strain can make recovery costly. In that

sense, tracking heartbeat consumption could serve as a safety signal rather than a competition, a way of knowing when the body needs to slow down.

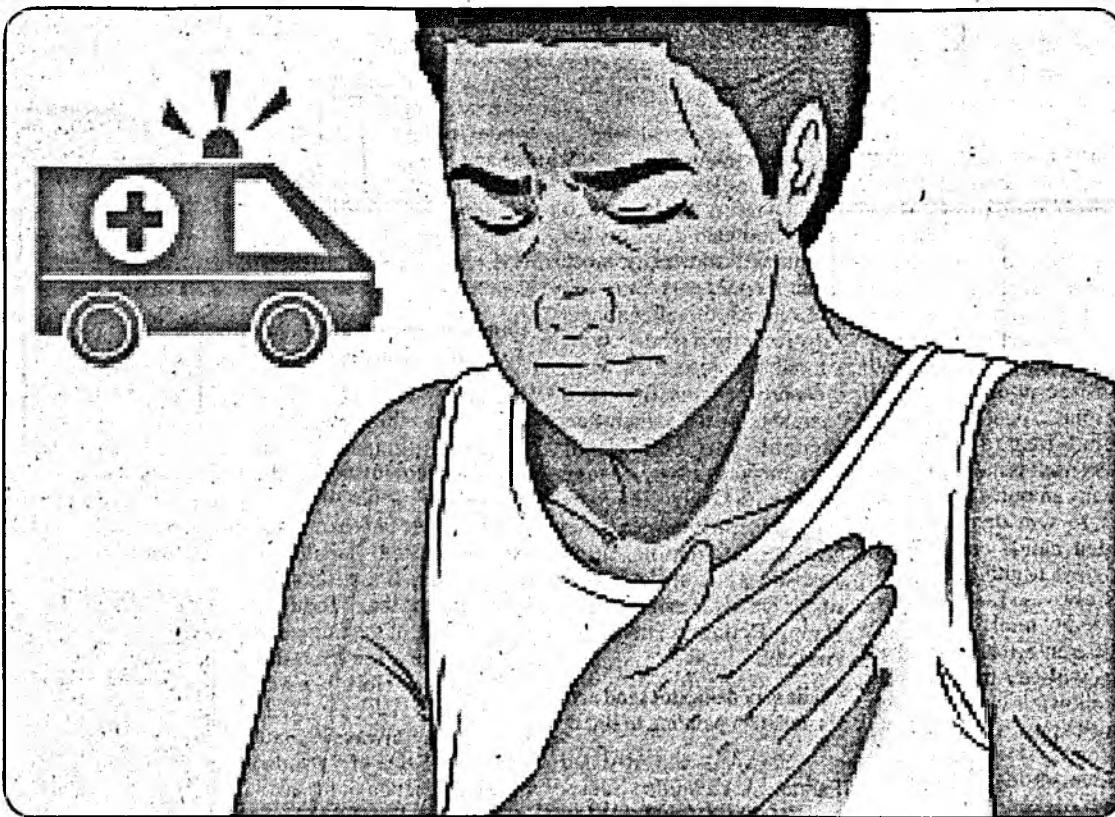
But as with most bright new ideas in fitness science, a note of caution is needed. The JACC authors acknowledge that they used fitness tracker data from a small sample of highly trained cyclists and runners. That's a narrow slice of the population.

They didn't measure blood pressure, oxygen levels or recovery biomarkers — all of which matter for heart health. Translating those findings into advice for ordinary smartwatch users will take larger, long-term studies.

Then there's the philosophical question: should we really treat heartbeats as a finite commodity? Exercise "spends" heartbeats in the short term but often "earns" more life in the long run.

A long-distance runner's heart might beat more times in a single day, but fewer times across a lifetime, because endurance training lowers resting rate and improves cardiac efficiency. In that sense, using your heart isn't the problem, but not using it might be.

Heartbeat consumption, at least for now, remains a metaphor in search of meaning. Still, it's a poetic one. Whether or not your fitness tracker or smartwatch ever starts counting total beats, the message behind it is simple: pay attention to how your heart behaves across the day. It's not about saving beats — it's about spending them wisely. (The Conversation)



murkier. The study's authors admit their analysis was small and observational. They didn't track participants' health outcomes, only patterns in their heart rate data. A high daily heartbeat count could mean someone is active, or it could reflect anxiety, poor fitness, caffeine or heat. Without context, the number itself tells us little.

Still, the idea has intuitive appeal. Heart rate is one of the clearest windows into how our body is coping with life's demands. A persistently high resting heart rate has been linked to an increased risk of heart disease, stroke and early death.

Meanwhile, variability in the tim-

between physical and mental load.

Athletes already know the power of that balance. Training too hard, too often, can elevate resting heart rate, reduce heart rate variability and blunt performance — a classic sign of overtraining.

Lighter, so-called active recovery sessions, where the heart rate stays low, are known to speed recovery, improve overall performance and stabilise mood. If a "heartbeat budget" helps people notice when their ticker is working overtime, it might encourage gentler activity days before burnout hits.

What the data doesn't tell us

Guv urges technical courses...

(Contd from P-3) Gorkha Pathshala continues to uphold its founding ideals.

He lauded the visionaries who, in 1876, donated land and resources to start a one-teacher school that now stands as a landmark in Shillong's educational history.

The governor said the founders had fulfilled one of the four essential needs of human life — education — alongside food, shelter, and health. He also described Meghalaya as one of the most peaceful and self-respecting states in the country, noting that it is virtually 'beggarless' and blessed with a strong sense of dignity among its people.

Vijayashankar added that while tourism is a natural gift, education could become Meghalaya's greatest contribution to the nation, urging that Shillong be recognised as the educational hub of the Northeast.

He quoted the late Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, saying that learning inspires creativity, creativity leads to thinking, thinking yields knowledge, and knowledge makes one great. Recalling a former dropout student who found a second chance at Gorkha Pathshala and went on to excel, the governor said the institution's compassion and human touch remain its greatest strength.

Earlier, Secretary of the school, Santa Ram Joshi, presented a detailed history of Gorkha Pathshala, tracing its humble beginnings on October 1, 1876, as a 'library school' for army personnel and attendants of British officers. He recounted its steady evolution — from a Middle English Unit in 1928 to an Upper Primary School, then a High School in 1969, a Higher Secondary Science section in 1997, and the Commerce stream in 2009. Joshi paid tribute to the founders for their selfless contribution and urged the government to grant the school linguistic minority status to preserve its distinct identity.

Adviser to the Government and MLA Paul Lyngdoh, reminded the audience that Gorkha Pathshala was established just two years after Shillong became the capital of undivided Assam. He said this remarkable fact should fill students and alumni with pride. He reflected that institutions like Gorkha Pathshala carry the wisdom of generations and continue to shape the city's identity as a cradle of learning.

Lyngdoh observed that the school represents the meeting point of four generations — a continuity that embodies the relay of education through time. He urged students to view education not merely as information but as illumination, saying that the purpose of learning is to light lamps in young minds. He commended the organisers for beginning the celebration by lighting a ceremonial lamp, saying it symbolised hope and action at a time when people often choose to curse the darkness instead.

The MLA announced a contribution of ₹15 lakh towards the celebration, saying that though he could not match the milestone number in rupees, his gesture reflected the government's support and admiration. He urged that Shillong must reclaim its pride as the educational heart of the region and restore its legacy as a "temple of learning."

In his remarks, D.B. Gurung, a member of the school community, recalled that Gorkha Pathshala was once known as the 'library school,' a place where education was first made accessible to army personnel and attendants serving under British officers. He highlighted how the institution, founded by visionary forefathers, continues to uphold their ideals and serve as a beacon of education in the city.

As the 150th anniversary celebration drew to a close, students, alumni, and dignitaries joined hands in honouring the founders who had kindled a light that still burns bright. From a one-teacher classroom to a full-fledged higher secondary institution, Gorkha Pathshala's story stood as a testament to resilience, community, and the enduring spirit of education in Shillong.

Speaker attends CPA...

(Contd from P-3) The conference underscores the Commonwealth's shared commitment to strengthening democratic institutions, promoting sustainable development, and enhancing parliamentary diplomacy to tackle common global challenges.

Booklets to enhance RTI...

(Contd from P-3) She maintained that a better understanding of the roles of PIOs and FAAs would contribute significantly to transparency, accountability, and good governance.

On the other hand, Lyngdoh noted that the publications simplify the procedural and statutory aspects of the RTI process, making them accessible to officials at all levels of government as well as to citizens seeking information.

It may be mentioned that the booklets will be made available to all government departments, public authorities and other stakeholders, and will also be accessible through the official website of the Meghalaya State Information Commission.

TMC leader threatens to agitate if 'legal' voter names in WB deleted

KOLKATA, Oct 11: Trinamool Congress General Secretary Kunal Ghosh on Saturday threatened to launch a protest with 1 lakh people in Delhi if the name of a single legal voter is deleted from West Bengal voter list through Special Intensive Revision (SIR) by Election Commission of India (ECI).

Addressing Vijaya Samilani (post Durga Puja get together) function at Ketugram in East Burdwan district, Ghosh said, "Stay united against SIR. There is Mamata Banerjee and Abhishek Banerjee by our side. The Trinamool Congress family is by your side. If name of one single legal voter is deleted, then we will organise a protest outside Election Commission's office in Delhi with 1 lakh people."

The Trinamool spokesperson further lashed out at the BJP for advocating the need to conduct SIR of West Bengal's electoral rolls to remove illegal voters.

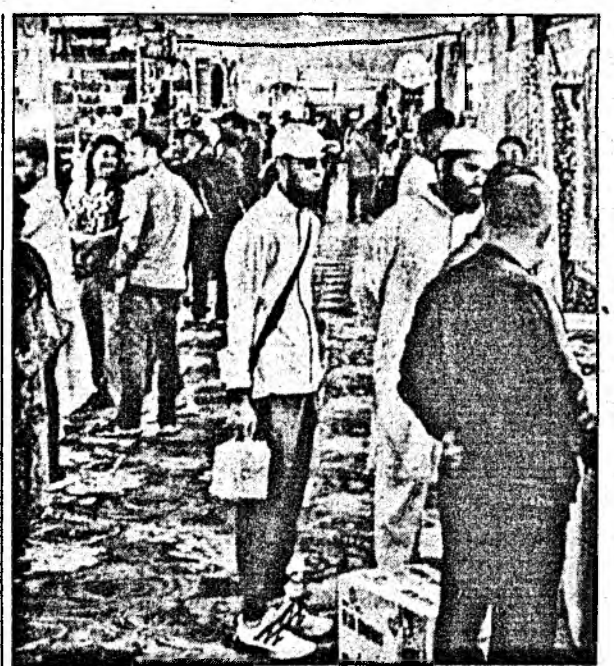
"Earlier, they said that the central forces should be deployed to conduct the elections. Despite that they lost (West Bengal Assembly polls). Now, they want to tamper with the voter list. They have used the Election Commission for this. They have included the names of voters from other states in the list. The way they won in Maharashtra and Delhi, they want to do it here as well. But Mamata Banerjee has understood their trick," said Ghosh.

He also asserted confidence that the Trinamool will retain power in West

Bengal after winning about 250 seats.

"After 2026 Assembly polls, Trinamool is coming to power again with 250 seats. There will be no change in the post of Chief Minister. There will be a change in the post of Leader of the Opposition. Because BJP will not have the right number of MLAs to hold that post," said Ghosh.

Amid indications that the Election Commission of India's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in West Bengal will start after October 15, the Commission had made it clear that under no circumstances, its criteria regarding selection of electoral officers in the state, especially the booth-level officers (BLOs) and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) should be compromised. (IANS)



Visitors attend the 13th International Leo Expo 2025 organised by Leo Advertising from October 3 to October 22, at Polo Ground on Saturday.

Raebareli lynching victim's kin meet CM Adityanath

LUCKNOW, Oct 11: The family members of Hariom Valmiki, who was beaten to death by a mob in the Rae Bareilly district of Uttar Pradesh after being mistaken for a thief, met Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath on Saturday, according to an official statement.

Valmiki, a Dalit and native of the Fatehpur district, was beaten to death by a mob in the Unchahar area of Rae Bareilly on October 2 after being mistaken for a thief. Police have so far arrested 12 accused in the case.

An official statement said Hariom Valmiki's wife, Sangeeta Valmiki, along with her father Chhote Lal and daughter Ananya, met CM Adityanath, accompanied by Manoj Pandey, the MLA from Unchahar. The chief minister expressed his condolences to the bereaved family.

According to the statement, after meeting the chief minister, Sangeeta Balmiki said, "Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has supported us at every level. I am grateful to him. Baba is the only one who can protect Dalits. We are completely satisfied with the government's action and are confident that justice will be served." The chief minister said that the family will be provided housing under the Chief Minister's Housing Scheme. Sangeeta Balmiki will also be given a permanent job at her workplace, and the family will be covered by all government welfare schemes.

Adityanath said that the accused were arrested within 24 hours of the incident. The safety and respect of Dalits, the deprived, and the exploited is the state government's top priority. (PTI)



Headman of Riatsamthiah M Kharkrang inaugurates a fashion and lifestyle exhibition organised by Manikchand Jewellers at Hotel Courtyard by Marriott in the city on Saturday.

Cadets join NCC...

(Contd from P-3) As part of the celebration, the office conducted a series of activities including a drawing and painting competition for Classes VI-VIII on the theme 'Living in Harmony with Wildlife', an essay writing competition for Classes IX-X on 'Human-Animal Co-existence' and an extempore speech competition for Classes XI-XII.

"Any mind that is capable of real sorrow is capable of good."

—Harriet Beecher Stowe

The Shillong Times

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Battle for Bihar

WITH the issue of notifications for the first phase of the assembly polls in Bihar, the die is cast for next month's high-stakes electoral war. A regime change is widely expected in a state where veteran Nitish Kumar reigned supreme for nearly two decades. Edging close to 75, he is set to lead his JD(U) in alliance with the BJP for another electoral battle, the results of which would be known by November 14. That the two-phase polls involve the will of 7.50 crore people is important also as the results could significantly help reshape the political fortunes of two contenders — the BJP and the Congress — at the national level. This would be a scenario in which one out of every 20 Indians is expressing his/her political will. The Mahagathbandhan consisting of the RJD, the Congress and the Left is running almost neck and neck with the NDA alliance of JD(U) and the BJP as per some opinion polls.

Notably, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav claimed a 36 per cent acceptance level for the CM post, while incumbent Nitish Kumar fared low with a 15 per cent support, much less than the popularity of the third electoral force in the form of Prashant Kishor. The ageing, tired face of Nitish Kumar is set against the energetic youthfulness of his rival contenders. Adding an extra punch to the electoral sweepstakes is the offer from Tejashwi Yadav — that one member from every family would be made a government employee; an order for which "would be promulgated in 20 days after formation of the government." The public mood would get reflected in the campaign that's just about unfolding. If the opinion poll results are any indication, a one percent shift in voter mood would suffice for a win for the Opposition. This might be guaranteed by the build-up of the mass sentiments during the over three-week campaign. Notably, the last assembly poll in the state five years ago had not been a smooth sail for Kumar, though he managed to retain power. In the emerging circumstances, if the RJD-Congress combine could script success, that would signal the revival of hopes for the INDIA bloc at the national level.

Every emerging signal from Bihar points to such a possibility though the seat-sharing talks between the RJD and Congress still continue. The Congress is likely to contest around 50 seats this time against its last polls' target of 70. The number of seats the parties gain in the assembly is what matters. A Mahagathbandhan win could boost the spirits of the Congress as the principal national opposition party, though in Bihar, it can only play second fiddle to the RJD. What gain Kishor's Jan Suraj can make in the present state polls in his home turf is also keenly watched. It could even be that the next government cannot be formed there by either side without his party's support — making him the king-maker, if not the king himself. The Chirag Paswan factor too cannot be ignored in the final analysis.

Law, Livelihood, and Humanity: The Dilemma of Meghalaya's In-Service Teachers

By Jairaj Chhetry

When Education Minister Lakhmen Rymbui recently voiced his concern over the fate of nearly 35,000 in-service teachers in Meghalaya following the Supreme Court's mandate on the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), he did more than highlight an administrative challenge — he echoed a profound moral question: "Can the rule of law, however well-intentioned, override the dignity and survival of thousands who have already given their lives to the cause of education?"

At face value, the Supreme Court's directive seems justified. It upholds the principle that every teacher must be duly qualified through TET — a standard meant to ensure quality education. Yet, when applied retroactively to teachers who have long been in government service, the order raises complex ethical and humanitarian dilemmas that demand careful reflection and compassionate implementation.

A Lawful Rule, but an Unjust Application: No one disputes the importance of having qualified teachers. However, to make TET mandatory for those who were appointed, trained, and confirmed by the government under valid service rules many years — even decades — ago raises questions of fairness.

These are not temporary employees. They are confirmed government servants whose appointments were verified through the District School Officer (DSO). Many have rendered twenty to thirty years of unblemished service. Some are nearing retirement; others have grown old nurturing generations of students in remote villages and towns.

To suddenly declare their appointments invalid unless they pass a test introduced long after their recruitment seems excessively harsh. "Law must ensure justice, not merely compliance."

Justice Must Be Tempered with Humanity: The Constitution of India guarantees not only equality before law but also the right to livelihood under Article 21. In the landmark *Olga Tellis vs. Bombay Municipal Corporation* (1985) case, the Supreme Court itself affirmed that livelihood is part of life — and cannot be taken away except through a just, fair, and humane process.

When a teacher's service is confirmed, it creates a

legitimate expectation of continuity. That expectation cannot be abruptly destroyed by applying new criteria retrospectively. The principle of proportionality in justice also demands that any measure should not cause greater harm than the problem it seeks to address. The objective of improving education standards is noble, but the method must be compassionate. We cannot uplift education by uprooting educators.

The Human Face of a Legal Order: Behind the statistics of 30,000 to 35,000 teachers lie thousands of stories — of men and women who have stood by blackboards in remote corners of Meghalaya, often without electricity, teaching under flickering lamps and nurturing countless young minds while enduring personal hardships.

For such teachers, the sudden threat of dismissal for not clearing TET — a test introduced much later in their service life — comes as a severe emotional and professional blow. For those in their fifties, the prospect of sitting for a competitive exam is both impractical and humiliating.

As Education Minister Rymbui rightly noted, even the Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT) may not have the capacity to conduct TET for all teachers and new aspirants within two years. Beyond logistics, this is fundamentally a question of conscience.

Can decades of classroom wisdom be erased by one test? Can a certificate truly measure patience, empathy, and dedication — the very qualities that define a good teacher?

Reconciling Rule of Law with Human Justice: The Supreme Court's recent pronouncement — that clearing TET is mandatory for continuation and promotion in teaching service — rests on sound legal and policy foundations. The Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) was introduced by the Government of India in 2011 after the enforcement of the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education Act, 2009, to ensure quality education. Meghalaya implemented the Meghalaya Teacher Eligibility Test (MTET) a few years later. The goal — ensuring competent teaching — is beyond dispute. Yet, imple-

mentation must respect both law and life. Law is not a mechanical instrument; it is a moral compass that should align with human dignity. Indian jurisprudence recognizes that the right to livelihood is integral to the right to life, and that any deprivation must follow a just, fair, and proportionate process.

Two principles can help harmonize legal obligation with humanitarian concern:

1. Prospective and Humane Enforcement: The Court's direction does not demand harsh or retroactive application. In fact, legal norms are often applied prospectively to prevent undue hardship. The two-year compliance window in the present ruling itself reflects the Court's recognition of this principle.

2. Recognition of Provisional Service: Teachers who were lawfully appointed and confirmed under valid government rules — some honoured with District, State Awards, or even National Awards by the Hon'ble President of India — represent a distinct moral and professional category. Their long years of service and proven dedication should be recognized as partial fulfilment of the qualification requirement or assessed through performance evaluation rather than through blanket disqualification.

Thus, while the Supreme Court's verdict must be honoured, its implementation should be guided by compassion and reason.

A Pathway to Justice and Reform: The government, in consultation with legal and academic bodies, could adopt a middle path that ensures quality without injustice:

1. **Phased and Prospective Application:** Apply the TET rule strictly to new recruits while allowing in-service teachers sufficient time and institutional support.

2. **Recognition of Experience:** Count long years of teaching experience as partial fulfilment of TET standards.

3. **Bridge Courses and Coaching:** Conduct free preparatory classes and mentoring sessions through DERT and State institutions.

4. **Exemption for Senior Teachers:** Those nearing retirement by at least 10 years may be evaluated through performance-based assessments rather than formal

exams.

5. **Redeployment with Dignity:** Teachers unable to qualify may be assigned academic or administrative support roles without loss of pension or status. Such balanced measures would uphold the spirit of the Supreme Court's ruling — enhancing quality education while preserving the dignity and livelihood of devoted educators.

A Separate Stream for Teacher Education: Just as India maintains dedicated professional pathways for engineering and medicine, there could be a distinct, structured stream for teaching aspirants, with specialized training, internship, and certification built over a few years. This would attract capable students who view teaching not as an option but as a calling. Creating such a system would ensure that future entrants meet all eligibility norms, thereby preventing the recurrence of such dilemmas.

This approach aligns with the Supreme Court's vision for professionalized teaching, while simultaneously protecting the dignity of those who have already dedicated their lives to the classroom.

Beyond Rules — The Test of Humanity: Thousands of teachers across Meghalaya now face an uncertain tomorrow. For most, teaching is not merely a job; it is their life's identity. To strip them of that after decades of faithful service is to wound the very spirit of education. Does law prevail above humanity, or does humanity give meaning to law?

Rules are essential, but their enforcement must reflect empathy. Teachers are not wrongdoers — they are the torchbearers of society. A state that cannot protect its teachers cannot claim to nurture its children.

Education stands on three pillars — teachers, curriculum, and compassion. Remove one, and the entire structure weakens.

The Supreme Court's goal of standardising teacher quality is laudable. Yet, its implementation must be thoughtful and humane. Let the law be firm but not heartless; let reform be real but compassionate.

As we move forward, may we remember this truth — "A nation that tests its teachers without trusting them first, fails its own test of humanity."

(The writer is a Retired Headmaster)

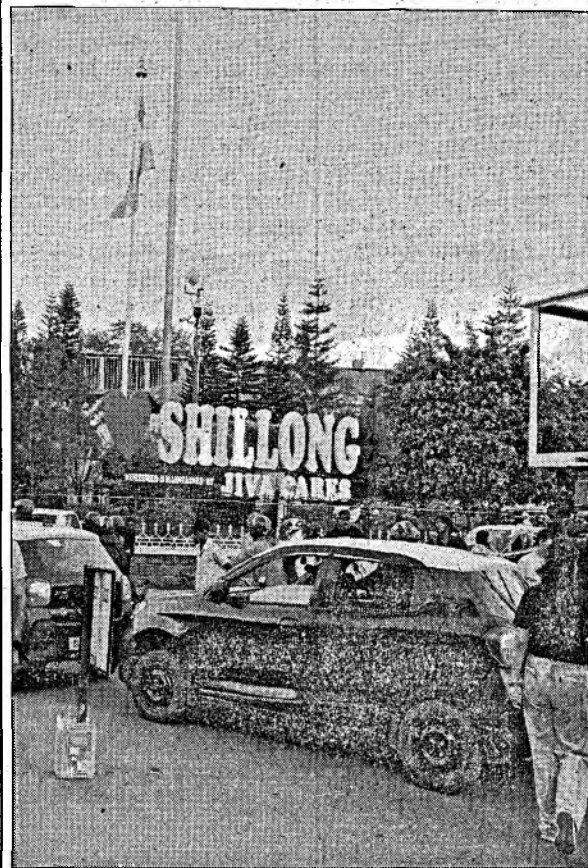
When Tradition Meets Justice: Rethinking Khasi Matriliney

By Mebanrihlang Nongrem

Meghalaya, the "abode of clouds," is one of the last regions in India where matriliney continues to thrive. Among its people, the Khasi tribe follows a distinctive system in which lineage and inheritance pass through women. Yet, this beautiful tradition carries its own challenges. As one Khasi saying goes: "A Khasi man, when he leaves his home, leaves empty-handed... if he is fortunate, he may get a government job, but if misfortune strikes, he must toil

or self-acquired property, earned individually during one's lifetime. The ancestral property is inherited by the youngest daughter, Ka Khadduh. If she dies, remains childless, or has only sons, the inheritance passes to the next younger daughter or the elder sister's youngest daughter. This ensures that ancestral wealth remains firmly within the female clan line.

Such a system highlights women as custodians of family heritage while shap-



daily just to earn rice and salt for his meals." This contrast between cultural pride and personal struggle reflects the paradox of inheritance in Khasi society.

Matriliney safeguards women, ensuring their security and social identity. But it also raises a deeper question: is inheritance truly just if it favours only one gender? Philosophers have long

ing the roles and responsibilities of men within the community. Yet Khasi matriliney, often misunderstood as "matriarchy," is not about female domination. Rather, it is a sophisticated network of family structures, inheritance rules, and social responsibilities that gives women a central place in lineage while men contribute to governance, the economy,

"The Khasi principle of ka jingbha paidbah — the welfare of the community — resonates with this vision. Inheritance, ideally, should not only preserve family continuity but also foster shared responsibility within households. Myliemngap (2024) observes in Inheritance, Identity, and Power: The Role of Women and Maternal Uncle in Khasi Matrilineal Lineage Systems, property among the Khasi is divided into two types: Ka Nongtymmen or ancestral property, consisting of land, houses, fields, ornaments, and cash passed down through generations; and Ka Nongkhynraw or self-acquired property, earned individually during one's lifetime."

wrestled with this dilemma. John Rawls, in *A Theory of Justice*, argued for a balance between liberty and equality as the foundation of a well-ordered society. Centuries earlier, Aristotle described justice as proportional equality rooted in virtue and merit, aimed at creating conditions for the "good life." From this ethical lens, privileging sons in patriarchal societies — or daughters in matrilineal ones — creates imbalance. True harmony arises only when every individual, male or female, is recognized as an equal heir.

The Khasi principle of ka jingbha paidbah — the welfare of the community — resonates with this vision. Inheritance, ideally, should not only preserve family continuity but also foster shared responsibility within households. Myliemngap (2024) observes in *Inheritance, Identity, and Power: The Role of Women and Maternal Uncle in Khasi Matrilineal Lineage Systems*, property among the Khasi is divided into two types: Ka Nongtymmen or ancestral property, consisting of land, houses, fields, ornaments, and cash passed down through generations; and Ka Nongkhynraw

and rituals. As one Khasi elder reflects: "If you want a strong community, you must also strengthen the role of the male child."

The future of Khasi society lies in balancing its matrilineal heritage with universal principles of justice and equality. A society that honours all its members — sons and daughters alike — will stand resilient for generations to come. As Meghalaya's clouds drift over valleys where matriliney still breathes, one is left to wonder: if culture safeguards women but leaves men striving, can society ever be truly just? If equity means giving each person their due, what would a balanced system of inheritance look like for the Khasi? Should tradition adapt when it collides with universal principles of justice and fairness?

True justice lies in equality. By giving each child an equal share, we honour their dignity and potential. Growth, wisdom, and opportunity should not be dictated by custom or circumstance, but by fairness. When inheritance becomes a shared gift rather than a privilege reserved for one gender, individuals flourish — and so does society.

Letters to the Editor

When will we ever learn?

Editor,
Ellerine Diengdoh's piece, in The ST dated 9th October, charmed me. After a long time, I got a chance to read a piece so beautifully written. Before I could pen a response, Patricia Mukhim's fiery write-up came the next day. The first is a sweet dreamy reverie about the Shillong and its society of yesteryears and the second a seething realistic comment on what it has descended to today. In a way the two pieces complement each other like the yin and the yang.

I have witnessed the fast-paced changes which have taken place in Meghalaya, more so in Shillong. From the slow laid-back town it was, during my college days, the city has become chaotic and unrecognisable.

The first wave of change happened sometime in the seventies when the trees were cut down for wood and rich timber traders moved to live in Shillong. But the worst started in the mid-eighties with the advent of large-scale coal mining in Jaintia Hills. This is when small beautiful cottages gave way to ugly cemented multi storied monstrosities. With it came trucks snarling through the city and traffic jams. From an idyllic town, we became an urban jungle where one had to scramble for a living. From this point onwards there was no looking back and we took a one-way road leaving any chance

of a U turn behind. The trouble with technology, the only worthwhile fruit of western science, is that it gets adopted as soon as it is developed before any social impact study can be done. Technology also changes the character of communities. Capitalism has come to us riding bareback on the tiger of technology which nobody dares to approach. One of the side effects of capitalism is that it brings about an unequal distribution of wealth and causes many families to be marginalised as it mercilessly ruins a way of life that has been practised for centuries. Peace, leisure and social cooperation are replaced by frenzy, efficiency and competition turning us from feeling humans into productive machines.

Of course climate change, addiction to alcohol and drugs, increased crime also follow in its wake as we can see in our surroundings and about which much has been written.

In essence this is what the Ellerine laments. Yet in balance it must be said that her vision though appealing and nostalgic is romantic and even impractical. We remember only the good from the past and many yearn for a return to a way of life that has disappeared. I was told by a lecturer friend to write about preserving the Khasi way of life. But that subject requires a more detailed approach than the letter to the editor format can bear.

The point being that can we even dream of living now

without electricity, or cars and airplanes? Not to forget the very essential internet. Of course we can't.

Meghalaya with its serene climate had a natural advantage as far as three sectors were concerned: healthcare, education and tourism. The first two we squandered and Guwahati has benefited from our lack of foresightedness. The last one, we are now milking injudiciously. There was never any need to get into large scale mining or into timber.

I jokingly tell people that the Land Transfer Act does little good in preserving the land. While local non tribals get the blame and the boot the in absentia non tribal is the one who gets the best part of it, in the form of timber, coal, limestone and boulders delivered to him in truck loads while he sits comfortably at home at Guwahati or in Bangladesh and what is left behind is of little use. At least if some businesses, tribal and non-tribal were allowed to operate with regulation but without interference or extortion we would have had good hospitals, hotels and educational institutions and the young would have had jobs.

For some years I taught at an institute which trains people to work in the hospitality sector. I saw firsthand how many Meghalayans are forced to seek work outside the state. We also know multitudes who go out seeking education and treatment. While in public, a never-ending diatribe carries on against dkharis the real is-

ssues are confined to the back burner. We have lost out as a state because we have an abundance of hate but no vision.

It is said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. The fight for the Jaidbyrniew has turned in reality into a fight against our own people in spite of all the song and dance about preserving a way of life. The NGO hammer sees everything as a nail, whether it is intermarriage or the rail.

One can go on and on but one needn't because Patricia Mukhim has said all that needs to be said. One needs to admire her courage in speaking out in a place where most people live wearing the warm cloak of hypocrisy.

In conclusion I would recommend a reading of two books: 1. "Small is Beautiful" by E.F.S. Schumacher and "Technopoly", by Neil Postman. They show the dangers of a mindless adaptation of tech and point to the middle path of a judicious use of technology without harming either the social or natural environment.

I hope we can still learn.
Yours etc.,
Paramjit Singh Bakhshi,
Via email

Deep Concern Over Rising Crime and Insensitive Official Remarks

Editor,
I am writing to express my

profound distress and alarm regarding the recent surge in criminal activities across Meghalaya, particularly in Shillong. The past months have witnessed a disturbing spate of crimes, ranging from petty offences to heinous acts, including the tragic murders of innocent children as young as four and seven years old. These incidents have cast a dark shadow of fear and insecurity over our community, leaving citizens questioning the safety and well-being of their loved ones.

In the wake of such heart-breaking events, the public naturally looks to its leaders for reassurance, decisive action, and a commitment to justice. However, the recent statements attributed to the Deputy Chief Minister and Minister in charge of Home, Mr Prestone Tynsong, have been deeply disappointing and, frankly, insensitive. When questioned by journalists about these grave concerns, Mr. Tynsong reportedly admonished the people to care and provide safety for their young children, rather than assuring a speedy investigation or outlining concrete safety measures.

This response is not only inadequate but also deeply insensitive. At a time when families are grieving and the community is grappling with fear, shifting the onus entirely onto parents and citizens is an abdication of governmental responsibility. It suggests a disconnect between the leadership and the harsh realities faced by the populace. While parental vigilance is

undoubtedly crucial, it cannot be a substitute for robust law enforcement, effective crime prevention strategies, and a responsive justice system.

Mr Tynsong's remarks, such as "For everything, the state government should not be blamed" and, "We need to also have proper education for the parents who need to take care of their kids," convey a dismissive attitude towards the legitimate concerns of the public. It is the government's primary duty to ensure the safety and security of its citizens, especially the most vulnerable among us. Instead of offering platitudes or deflecting blame, the people of Meghalaya expect their leaders to demonstrate empathy, initiate thorough investigations, strengthen police presence, and implement proactive measures to prevent such tragedies from recurring.

I urge The Shillong Times to highlight these critical issues and call upon the state government, particularly the Home Department, to re-evaluate its approach. We need assurances of swift justice for the victims and tangible steps towards creating a safer environment for all, rather than being lectured on responsibilities that are inherently shared.

Yours etc.,
Dr D F Marbaniang,
Via email

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"Science is the great antidote to the poison of enthusiasm and superstition."
— Adam Smith

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXVIII No. 59 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2025

Society in a Tailspin

THE number of murder cases targeting defenceless young women in Meghalaya demands that the community takes time to sit and ponder on the reasons for such a degeneration in a society once known for its values particularly, "Ka Tip Briew, Tip Blei," (Knowing fellow humans to know God). In short, the Khasi value system actually embodies a belief that sees in the human person an image of God. Unless people learn to respect and value one another they cannot claim to know God. And if the society is still guided by these intrinsic values which are also the moral compass that guided the ancestors at one time, then why are so many murders taking place with repeated frequency. In recent memory is the brutal, daylight murder of a young lady by her fiancé in the presence of her father who was caught completely by surprise. This murder happened in Eastern West Khasi Hills. The man who murdered this young lady actually slit her throat – an act that is not just brutal but exposes the depth of human passions gone horrible wrong – of uncontrolled rage and the desire for revenge. The murderer is someone's son and brother so what went wrong in his upbringing? Is the Khasi society facing an unprecedented moral crisis? Is the society too caught up to even spend time analysing itself and its failing moral compass?

Each time a murder happens, there is an uproar but with time the incident is forgotten until the next one shakes us out of our reverie. As social media addicts such murders have only become causes for gossip and passing sordid comments. In fact, salacious comments on social media are the new normal. Here the media too is complicit with their shrieking headlines aimed at getting as many eyeballs as they can garner for each view translates to money. Is this what has hardened the human soul and denuded it of empathy which is what sustains the 'humanity' project. To empathise is to feel the pain of another person and not just to feel a temporary pity and offer condolences only to move on until another disaster strikes.

To blame the law enforcing authorities for social vices that are also triggered by modern technological advances which have captured the mind-space of the youth is asking for too much. Most young people are addicted to pornography and sexual innuendoes push the young to experiment with sex. When thwarted in that ambition they tend to get violent. The fact that sex is seen as taboo and parents shy away from discussing it freely and allow their young ones to share their thoughts is what drives them to visit pornographic sites. Also, it cannot be denied that many young ones grow up in families where they see violence first hand. Drunkenness among male members is common. Most of them become violent and vent their frustrations on the woman (wife). When such scenes are witnessed by young male members, it makes them think that wreaking violence on a woman is normal. And these are best kept secrets in many families. Unless society begins to admit its fatal flaws, violence will continue. Attempts to brush under the carpet incidences of violence at home will spill out into the public domain.

Letters to the Editor

The Shoe Flinging Incident - Casteist prejudices still dominate

Editor,
This has reference to the letter written by D. Bhattacharjee dated October 8, 2025 on the incident of a lawyer flinging his shoes at the CJI B.R. Gavai in the Supreme Court. A PIL was sought by a lawyer to restore a dilapidated statue of the Hindu god Vishnu in one of the UNESCO World Heritage sites in Khajuraho, Madhya Pradesh. While dismissing it as a stunt, Justice Gavai had said in an open court: "Go and ask the deity himself to do something. If you are saying that you are a strong devotee of Lord Vishnu, then you pray and do some meditation." "This statement apparently angered the lawyer and according to the Delhi police, he had carried a chit with him on Monday, (October 6) that said "sanatan dharma ka apmaan, nahi sahega Hindustan" ("India will not tolerate insults to sanatan dharma") – a slogan that he reportedly also raised in the CJI's court.

The attack was not on an individual but on the representative of the highest court of the country and on a constitutional position. No mention of this was made by Mr. Bhattacharjee in his letter. Disturbingly there has been no response from the government. The attack was an attempt to insult the

Constitution of India. It is by far the most condemnable act targeting the judiciary and one has to register protests against such a repugnant act. After the attack, Justice Gavai continued with his daily court proceedings and said he wouldn't be fazed by such disruptions. He also decided to not press any charges. Today the issue of religion has become predominant in all discourses of social life: The lawyer has the mendacity to claim – bizarrely – that he had acted to honour "divine instructions". What is instructive, indeed revealing, is that his shameful act has not been condemned universally: the right-wing ecosystem has made approving noises.

"Sanatan Dharma values tolerance, restraint and pluralism" says Mr. Bhattacharjee. Nothing could be more of a travesty. Hatred is a key term in today's political environment in India specially against minorities.

Sanatan means timeless or eternal and Dharma in colloquial parlance is religion or even culture and civilisation. So Sanatan Dharma is "timeless civilisation". Hindutva – a word invented in the 19th century by Chandranath Basu insists it is Sanatan Dharma and therefore does not need reform. In other words, Sanatan Dharma believers believe their customs and practices are timeless, perfect and in no need of reformation. This view denies Hinduism a history, and insists that Vedas existed always, and

Does Road Expansion Always Translate To Development?

For a cyclist, Shillong and its surrounding environs provide many opportunities for exploration. There are numerous routes one can take that provide a challenge and a glimpse into the beauty of the rural landscape close to the city. One of my favourite routes is the Shillong-Nongstoin-Rongjeng-Tura highway. There's very little traffic on this road, so it's safer, and there's a lot to see. Then there's the road to Nongjirong, which diverts from the Mawkyntew road and takes one to the Umngot valley, which has some of the most beautiful rice terraces in the state. When I descend from Khrang village, I feel like I am looking at the Ifugao rice terraces of the Philippines, which UNESCO has identified as a World Heritage Site—something Meghalaya has been striving for with its living root bridges. The rapidly improving road network makes all this exploration possible. This is something missing in other states of the region.

A few weeks ago, I made two trips to Nagaland, one to Peren district and another to Phek district, to attend workshops. The first was to Peren. I was told that the road had improved and we would arrive at our destination early. However, the reality was quite the opposite. There were innumerable potholes on the road, and mud covered a large portion, making travel hazardous. Since the Kohima highway had experienced a landslide, trucks going to Manipur were using the same road, creating an additional problem since it was quite narrow. We reached the town of Peren completely exhausted. While returning to Dimapur after the workshop, the driver took a different route, which was equally bad, and I was almost late for my train.

The following week, I left again for Nagaland, this time for Phek district for another workshop. There is a perception that Assam has very good roads, but this does not seem to apply to Karbi Anglong, through which we had to pass on the way to Dimapur. Just before and after Dokmoka town, the road was in terrible condition. Our driver, a young Bodo fellow, drove through the potholes, with the underside of the vehicle often getting hit by rocks laid down for road building. The road in Dimapur was very good and had improved from the last time I was in Nagaland. Around that time, the Kohima highway was being built. It was now complete, but travelling through it was dangerous. Last year, a video was circulating on social media that showed large boulders falling onto vehicles stranded on the road, killing a few people. I wanted to know if they had taken precautions to avoid such an incident again.

On the side of the hills, stakes had been driven into the rock face and fixed with nets to stop any boulders from falling onto the road. In many sections, the landslide prevented people from using two lanes of the four-lane highway. Sometimes, the mud even covered the lanes in use. Just before Kohima, a landslide blocked the main highway, so we had to take the Jotsoma village road to reach the town. Finally, after taking so much punishment, the tyres gave way and got punctured. I was happy that the puncture didn't happen on the highway because that would have been a disaster. I had to take another vehicle to Phek, and I was already running late. Fortunately, the organisers had arranged a vehicle for me with another participant.

I had been to Phek twice, and the road, though not of high quality, was still motorable. But this time around, it seemed the road had gotten worse, and it did not let up until we reached Pfuetero, the highest town in Nagaland, situated at 1,133 metres. We reached Chizami village (the site of the workshop) late, and I was completely exhausted. The next day, I fell sick and did not recover until the last day of the workshop. The return journey was equally strenuous. We had to take an alternative route to return to Dimapur because the one we took while coming had experienced a landslide. Before we could reach Kohima, there was another landslide, and we had to take the Kisama heritage village road, which was equally bad. Finally, we somehow reached

Dimapur, and I took the train to Guwahati, where the car I had booked was already waiting for me. I got home late at night, completely exhausted and grateful to see good roads without potholes and mud.

People cannot deny that the road network in Meghalaya has improved a lot, but too much of a good thing can also be bad. One route I often take while cycling is from Tynring village, which connects to the bypass. Initially, I would take the Diengpasoh village road when it was still under construction. Later, while cycling, I found out that they had laid a new road through Ummir village, which also connected to the bypass. Recently, I went for a ride with my friend on a scooter along the newly laid Diengpasoh road. We wondered why the government had spent so much money on expanding two roads that ultimately led to the bypass and were located so close to each other. There's another road being built through Umsaw village, where the eco-park is located, which is supposed to connect to the bypass. I went trekking to find out if the road is good for cycling. Maybe I took the wrong turn, but the new road, still incomplete, ultimately joined Umrynjah, through which the VIP road passes, which connects to the Shillong Airport. This road is currently under repair, and I have ridden through it as well on the way to Bhoirymbong. I didn't understand why they were building a different road to connect to the same destination. Maybe I took the wrong turn. But it seemed that new roads were being built and old ones expanded even when there was no need.

The best example of profligacy in road building is the bypass, which starts from the District and Sessions Court in Tyuchi village and joins the road that leads to Dawki out of Jowai. Considering the traffic and the distance, the need for the project seemed totally unnecessary. In fact, there is an ongoing case in the NGT regarding the environmental impact of the project on the Myntdu River, which supplies water to the town of Jowai and holds deep spiritual significance

for the Pnars. On the 27th of September, 2025, Philippe Cullet (Senior Lecturer in Law at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK), Angela Rangan (social activist), and I were invited by the Khooid Ya Ka Wah Myntdu association—led by Khroo Lamsalanki Pariat and some senior citizens of Jowai—to join the consultation meeting on 'Myntdu River Restoration, Rejuvenation, and Beautification'. Present at the meeting were Advocate Srishri Agnihotri and Advocate Tara E. Kurien, both from the Supreme Court, who are representing the association in the NGT. The next hearing is on October 17, 2025.

While I was returning from Chizami, the passengers in the car (all experienced development practitioners) were discussing the infrastructure projects being implemented in the Himalayas. These projects were wreaking havoc on the fragile local ecology. This year has been particularly devastating for the communities living in these regions, with huge losses of life and property reported. We also talked about the expansion of road networks in Arunachal Pradesh, where there is minimal traffic.

There is no doubt that the Northeast and Meghalaya have suffered from poor infrastructure for a very long time. However, the pace at which the projects are being implemented or chosen leaves much to be desired. I had travelled to Kohima before the four-lane highway was conceived, and the road, though smaller, was safer. The state's capital needs a bigger road, but the project also creates risks that cannot be denied. People have actually died. We need good infrastructure, but we also need to discuss how those projects are conceived and implemented. Infrastructure projects cost a lot of money, and for a small state like Meghalaya, it is important to avoid wasteful expenditure and ensure that every rupee spent is justified while not creating additional problems.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

appears to take action only after tragedies occur. It is primarily due to such incidents that the Ri Bhoi police have initiated their own checking routine.

When a local DGP was appointed, the community had high hopes that the situation would improve. Unfortunately, the reality seems quite the opposite—conditions have worsened further. I sincerely urge the concerned authorities to take immediate and effective measures before more lives are lost due to this growing lawlessness and administrative neglect.

Your etc.,
Kelsang Trinlay,
Shillong - 14

Lawlessness after 8 pm
Editor,
I would like to draw attention to the alarming deterioration of law and order in our city. After 8 p.m., the entire town seems to descend into chaos. Once the traffic police complete their shift, the chances of safely commuting through the city are reduced by half—largely due to reckless overtaking by four-wheelers and the movement of overloaded trucks through urban areas.

Adding to this concern is the increasing presence of drug users in public spaces, particularly around Polo and Police Bazar. While many states have established night-time checkpoints to curb drunk driving, our state

has increased casteist. Violence and physical attacks on Dalits have grown, allegedly most in states ruled by the Bharatiya Janata Party. The intersection of majoritarian and casteist prejudice cannot be ignored in the case of the assault on the CJI, who has a Dalit and a Buddhist background. Taken together, this chain of disgraceful incidents is suggestive of the strain on civil co-existence; the shoe thrown at the CJI is symbolic of this breakdown.

It is this shenanigan of the letter written by Mr. Bhattacharjee that condones the incident.

Your etc.,
Percy Singh,
Via email

Before another child is lost
Editor,
The horrific rape and murder of a little girl in Ri-Bhoi have once again shaken us deeply. Each time such an incident occurs, we cry out for justice—and rightly so—but soon our outrage fades into silence. It is time we reflect gently, not in blame, but in concern: How can we, together, make our world safer for every child?

While the police have acted promptly and the culprit must face the harshest punishment, justice after death is never true justice. The deeper challenge lies in nurturing the moral and emotional soil from which compassion grows. A com-

My Address, an Epitaph

By Ellerrine Diengdoh

Nongrah. I live here. That's a strange sentence to write. It used to be a simple statement of fact, a word on a form. Now it feels like a confession. My address is a headline. The air in my own lane feels like it has guilt in it, like I'm breathing in powdered bone.

We have a Khasi word for a depraved demon who commits unspeakable acts on behalf of the Thlen. "Menshohnoh". A sterile

human, a person, where do you run from that? He buys bread at the same shop I do. We probably share the same taxi. He walks on the same broken pavement, and he breathes this same air!

I keep thinking about the rock placed on the little girl's back. It was not an act of rage. It was an act of... composition, of arrangement, like a gardener placing a stone in a rockery.....a final, aesthetic touch. That

We have a Khasi word for a depraved demon who commits unspeakable acts on behalf of the Thlen. "Menshohnoh".

A sterile word for an ugly horror, a shape-shifter, a child-stealer, a bind-torture-killer, a creature from Hell's deepest pit. There, we were told, inside the belly of the dark, dark woods, it waits... patient, obscene, hungry.

word for an ugly horror, a shape-shifter, a child-stealer, a bind-torture-killer, a creature from Hell's deepest pit. There, we were told, inside the belly of the dark, dark woods, it waits... patient, obscene, hungry.

I now recall the gruesome stories my father would tell me. They were his way of explaining the unexplainable. He spoke of the creature not as a legend, but as a warning. His words crawled into our dreams, for it was meant to scare us into obedience. "Don't wander after dusk", "Don't speak to strangers",

is the horror that keeps me awake. The clinical, meticulous artistry of it all. This isn't about rage or hate or violence; it is about an appetite, about a perverted need being quietly, calmly, and completely fulfilled.

I had almost convinced myself this sickness belonged only to us, a curse laid upon Nongrah. Then, the news reported another death: a thirteen-year-old girl, far away in a place I don't remember. In that moment, I understood the forest was never the point. The Thlen was never the

The thing that snatched the seven-year-old boy and painstakingly tortured and killed him had no supernatural powers. They were just people like you and me! But underneath the skin, behind the innocent smile, they were something else entirely. Sick, savage, soulless, predatory, vile, murderous perverts and sadistic paedophiles!

"Don't eat food from people you don't know"....

But that was a lie, wasn't it...a comforting horror story to distract from the real one, because the thing that took the four-year-old girl to a construction site and drowned her is not a shape-shifter. It did not have bat wings or glowing red eyes. The thing that snatched the seven-year-old boy and painstakingly tortured and killed him had no supernatural powers.

They were just people like you and me! But underneath

point. Nongrah was never the point.

So what is wrong with us as a society? Did we prefer the myth because it was easier? The "menshohnoh" was convenient. It let us off the hook. It meant the evil was an outsider, a supernatural 'other'. It meant we didn't have to look at the man or woman or even a child sitting next to us on the bus. We didn't have to ask what was going on behind our neighbours' closed doors. We outsourced the horror to a myth.

Now the myth is dead. It has been replaced by the nauseating, putrid reality of human potential. I look at the faces of the people I pass on the street and I feel a cold dread seep into me. Which one is the murderer? Which relative of mine has the sickness inside? This paranoia is a poison....it makes you feel like you're the mad one.

the skin, behind the innocent smile, they were something else entirely. Sick, savage, soulless, predatory, vile, murderous perverts and sadistic paedophiles! This truth is infinitely more terrifying than any myth because it is so boringly real. There is no dark magic to blame, only a profound brokenness hiding inside someone who otherwise looks, and lives, just like us.

That's the real dread, you see. That's the thing that gets to you. A folklore monster is a thing you can run from. It lives in the forest, so you stay out of the forest. Simple. But another

Now the myth is dead. It has been replaced by the nauseating, putrid reality of human potential. I look at the faces of the people I pass on the street and I feel a cold dread seep into me. Which one is the murderer? Which relative of mine has the sickness inside? This paranoia is a poison....it makes you feel like you're the mad one.

So I sit in my house, I lock my door, but it feels like a useless gesture. The monster isn't in the forest anymore. He's got a house key.

He is here. And so am I. And he is everywhere else, too...

Chance for peace

PEACE is given a chance in the world's most troubled region through a treaty between Israel and Hamas -- the Palestinian militants -- while a similar attempt is in the works for a pact between Israel and Iran. In what high-profile mediator President Donald Trump hailed as a "historic new dawn in the Middle East," a lasting halt to the prolonged war in the region is in sight. His 20-point peace plan that formed the basis for negotiations between rival sides principally saw the hostages taken by Hamas in its attack on Israel two years ago returning to their homes--other than the scores who "might have died" during their incarceration in Gaza. Notably, the retaliatory strike by Israel in Gaza in 2023 had killed tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians. The signing of the peace deal that also drew in Egypt, Qatar and Turkey, in the presence of Trump at the Sharm el-Sheikh summit in Egypt, involved several regional heavyweights -- a guarantee to lasting peace in the Middle East. Significantly, Prime Minister Modi, who had been invited for the ceremony, has instead sent an emissary to represent India while his Pakistan counterpart was present. The first phase of the ceasefire agreement has been coured through successfully, while details of further phases are not fully explained. There would be "disarming and pull-backs," among the other concessions that both sides would have to agree on. Significantly, the rebuilding of the devastated Gaza is part of the agenda in which other Arab states flush with funds are expected to take part.

The timing of this peace deal is important. Expectations from Trump and the wider world are that the President would walk away with the Nobel Prize for Peace this year, which is scheduled to be announced on Friday. Trump has claimed that he has made the impossible possible on eight fronts of hostilities, vis-à-vis facilitating peace in areas of war and conflict, in a matter of nine months of his present presidency. This, as claims go, also included the subcontinent where he "halted" a war and restored peace vis-à-vis the Operation Sindoor involving India and Pakistan. Trump himself had made the claim repeatedly, which was supported by circumstantial evidence and is now reinforced by Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif while India has rejected this claim. Trump, overall, deserves a peace prize. Notably, an effort for lasting peace in the Middle East, made by Barack Obama as president, had failed to materialize. Trump is set to head for Kuala Lumpur later this month for an Asean Summit, where he's expected to oversee the signing of a peace deal between Cambodia and Thailand--the neighbours that fought twice there recently and cooled down following intervention by the US president. Trump is more serious about ending the war between Russia and Ukraine than his predecessor Joe Biden. Good efforts deserve wholesome praise. Trump's negotiating skills and his tough posturings certainly helped. However, not many are convinced yet that the peace in West Asia would be lasting.

Letters to the Editor

AL Hek's Irresponsible Remarks on Law & Order Accountability

Editor,
Apropos the news item "BJP demands removal of DC..." and letter to editor, "Lawlessness after 8pm," particularly in the wake of the horrifying murder of children and the alarming rise in criminal incidents across East Khasi Hills in which this writer has on earlier occasions expressed her views. The deteriorating law and order situation especially in Shillong city be it the safety and security of citizens or illegal collection of money, the people of Meghalaya once again are demanding clarity, accountability, and decisive action. It is therefore deeply disappointing to witness Mr AL Hek, a senior MLA and former minister, publicly display ignorance on a matter as fundamental as law and order administration--specifically, the roles of the Deputy Commissioner (DC) and Superintendent of Police (SP) in his response to his party's demand for removal of present DC of East Khasi Hills district.

At a time when he must speak in one voice to uphold justice and restore public confidence, Mr Hek's off-hand remarks and refusal to align with his party's position betrays not only a lack of discipline but a troubling disregard for institutional re-

sponsibility. His statements have muddled the waters in an already sensitive debate that his party's general secretary has brought to light on who is accountable for law and order failures, and worse, they risk shielding those who have failed in their duty to protect our citizens.

Let it be stated unequivocally that the SP is the primary authority responsible for day to day policing in the district. But the ultimate authority to ensure peace and public order lies with the DC. To feign confusion on this point, especially as a former minister, is either wilful negligence or political posturing at the cost of truth.

The people of Meghalaya deserve better than evasive rhetoric. They deserve leaders who stand firm, speak clearly, and act decisively. Mr Hek's failure to do so is not just a lapse of judgment--it is a disservice to the victims, their families, and every citizen who looks to elected representatives for justice and leadership.

Yours etc.,
Iba K. Naier,
Shillong -1

Leaking water pipes and water shortage in Shillong

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to highlight a matter of growing concern for the residents of Shillong -- the frequent water short-

age caused largely by leaking water pipes, particularly those laid along the internal roads criss-crossing the city. It is disheartening to note that despite Shillong receiving generous rainfall and having natural water sources, many neighbourhoods continue to face erratic and insufficient water supply. A major reason behind this is the outdated and poorly maintained water distribution system. The worst-affected areas are those where water pipelines run parallel to narrow internal roads and lanes. These pipes are often exposed or laid just beneath the surface, making them highly vulnerable to damage from vehicular traffic, erosion, road repairs, and construction work.

Every day, one can witness treated water flowing down roads or collecting in puddles due to burst or leaking pipes. This not only leads to the wastage of precious water but also damages roads, causes traffic obstructions, and raises health concerns due to stagnant water accumulation. Several localities witness frequent pipe bursts that go unattended for days. Ironically, while water continues to leak unabated, residents are forced to depend on tankers or purchase water for daily use -- a burden that is both inconvenient and costly.

To address this issue more effectively, it is vital that the government establish easy and accessible platforms for citizens to report such leakages in real time. A dedicated WhatsApp helpline number, of contempt of court. His cheerleaders, especially on social media, have lauded him instead of ostracizing him. Nor should any of this come as a surprise. The law minister Arjun Meghwal, for example, was conspicuously silent when the attack took place. And it took eight hours after the incident for Prime Minister Modi to tweet that the shoe-throwing was a 'reprehensible act which has angered every Indian.' While the PM's strong words are welcome, recall that in 2019 Mr Modi expressed similar anguish over remarks made by BJP MP Pragya Singh Thakur glorifying Nathuram Godse, saying he would never be able to forgive her fully. Yet, no concrete action was taken against the saffron-robed MP who completed her full term in parliament without too much fuss. Pragya Thakur is, after all, cut from the same Hindutva cloth of the sangh parivar that has never fully distanced

itself from the Godse cult. Advocate Kishore is part of a similar belief system, someone who claims to be a staunch 'defender' of Sanatan Dharma. The difference is where Godse pulled the trigger to assassinate the Mahatma, Kishore chose a relatively milder weapon, a shoe, to convey his anger. In both instances, the intolerant mindset is undeniable: any perceived offence to 'hurt Hindu sentiments' is enough for a violent streak to instantly surface.

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sun. How different are these rabid Hindutvavaadis from the Islamists who screech 'San Tan Se Juda' when they claim to be similarly offended? In a Republic of 'hurt sentiments' across communities, the 'normalisation' of violence is what is reprehensible, not just the shoe-throwing act per se. There is another troubling angle to this case. Justice Gavai is the second Dalit to hold the high constitutional post of Chief Justice. He comes from a political family rooted in neo-Buddhist thought and Ambedkarite values and whose father RS Gavai was a prominent figure in the Republican Party of India movement. Visit the Chief Justice of India's house and Ambedkar portraits and memorabilia are omnipresent. In a sense, his ascent to the CJI's post marks the symbolic fulfillment of an Ambedkarite dream of a more equal opportunity society for traditionally op-

pressed castes. Paradoxically, his family origins in the Dalit movement make Justice Gavai even more vulnerable to targeted attacks. When, for example, Justice Gavai passed a stern order on 'bulldozer justice' a year ago, while affirming that bulldozer demolitions were fundamentally anti-constitutional, he was once again the object of a vicious online campaign from right wing groups. Not surprising again since it is Yogi Adityanath's muscular unapologetic Hindutva government in Uttar Pradesh that has been at the vanguard of the demolition brigade.

Which is why the shoe attack must be seen for what it is: an attempt to establish 'Sanatan Dharma' supremacy within an avowedly secular constitutional framework. The shoe thrown by Advocate Kishore was not just aimed at Justice Gavai, it was meant to consciously intimidate and undermine a judicial system that is meant to be rational, just and non-discriminatory. Advocate Kishore's act was not that of an unstable mind but a calculated move designed to make a political statement in full public gaze. He does not represent a lunatic fringe as might have been the case a few years ago but is now emblematic of a majoritarian worldview that seeks to replace a constitutional system based on equal citizenship with a Hindu Rashttra where the rule of the numerically largest community will prevail over the rule of law. Which is also why it is so dangerous and indefensible. In a multi-religious society, law must be kept above faith. And any act of violence and coercion must be condemned by one and all.

Post-script: Since the column started with an intriguing question, let me end it with another one directed at those who seek to rationalize the violent shoe-throwing act as one of 'courage': would Indian Muslims be justified tomorrow to display similar anger towards the judges who delivered the contentious Ayodhya judgment? Surely not.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. His latest book is 2024: The Election That Surprised India. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

A Shoe-Strike at the Constitution: Who is Accountable?

By Rajdeep Sardesai

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Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Trump, Peace and Us... There are many who have misgivings about Donald Trump -- his hair, his handshakes, his habit of speaking louder than the microphone, and his tweets that could give missile launches a run for their speed. But today, as I watched scenes of hostages returning to their homes, families breaking down in joy, and long-divided nations daring to embrace again, I found myself doing something I never thought I would -- admiring Trump.

Because say what you want about him, the man brokered peace where others just posed for photographs and issued statements filled with more adjectives than action. The sight of those reunions reminded me that leadership is not about liking someone's style -- it's about acknowledging when something good happens through them, even if you don't like the person himself.

And as I watched the handshakes and hugs, I asked myself one uncomfortable question: why wasn't our Prime Minister there? He was invited, yes. But he didn't attend. And in that absence, I sensed a silence -- one that said more than a thousand speeches could.

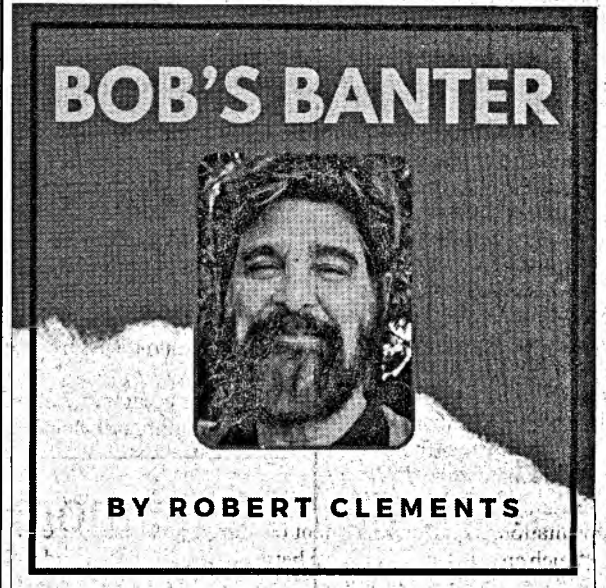
Because we, in this country of Gandhi and Buddha, seem to have forgotten that peace is not a diplomat-

home. Two years ago, I wrote a play titled The Blessed and the Chosen, which, I am humbled to say, has been bought in Australia. It's about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, told through the story of a Jewish girl who grows up in India and later becomes the President of the United States. Her leadership is not forged in political theory or military strategy, but in the compassion she absorbs as a child in India -- a compassion she carries into the White House.

But as I look around my own country now, I ask myself with sadness -- are we still that people? Are we still the India that inspired Martin Luther King Jr. to speak of love? The India that moved Mandela to dream of reconciliation? Or have we become a land where shouting wins over listening, and might is mistaken for right?

Our absence at that peace gathering was symbolic. It said, "Peace is someone else's job." And yet, peace can never be outsourced.

I hope I'm wrong. I hope there were logistical reasons, scheduling conflicts, or diplomatic nuances I'm unaware of. But deep down, I worry that our absence mirrors a growing emptiness within -- a discomfort with compassion.



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

ic posture; it's a national identity we once proudly owned. We talk of Clean India, Corruption-Free India, Digital India, and even Developed India, but when it comes to Peaceful India, our voices trail off into awkward quiet.

We clean our streets before Diwali, but not our hearts before the next hateful post we forward. We polish our brass nameplates till they shine, but allow our consciences to rust. We build smart cities, but not kind citizens.

Today, compassion has become a casualty -- dismissed as weakness, mocked as naivety, and buried under slogans that sound good on podiums but die in practice.

A few days ago, I experienced this first-hand. In my housing society group, I wrote about a blind man whose flat had been flooded and ruined because of negligence by a neighbour upstairs. I took photos, I shared the story, I appealed for help. Everyone saw the message. Blue ticks lit up like Diwali lamps. But only one man -- just one -- visited the poor fellow's flat, saw his misery, and promised to act.

That, my dear reader, is what peace looks like. Not in televised treaties or historic signings, but in ordinary acts of empathy.

Peace begins not at summits in Washington or Jerusalem, but in small rooms where we decide to care.

It's easy to applaud peace when CNN or BBC beams it into our living rooms. It's far harder to practise it when it means standing beside someone who cannot fight for himself. We've become spectators of compassion, not participants. We watch suffering as entertainment, then scroll to the next episode in our endless feed of indifference.

And that's why Trump's peace moment -- loud, brash, imperfect -- struck me so deeply. Because it showed that even the most unlikely person can choose reconciliation over retaliation. The world cheered. But we, the land that once preached Ahimsa, stayed

We celebrate when our missiles rise into the sky but stay silent when our humanity sinks.

And here's the irony: the same nation that gifted the world the word Ahimsa now measures strength in decibels of anger. The same land that once bowed before God in prayer for peace now bows before power.

Peace, my friend, is not Trump's achievement alone, nor is it America's moment. It's a reminder of what we all are capable of if we set aside ego for empathy. It's the quiet triumph of the human spirit over the noise of hatred.

Let's face it -- the world doesn't need more speeches. It needs examples.

And examples don't begin with governments or treaties. They begin with you and me. With a neighbour who helps another. With a society that protects its weakest. With a nation that believes kindness is not weakness but wisdom.

As those hostages walked free, I saw more than political victory. I saw families reunited, tears wiped, and hope rekindled. That, I thought, is what the world should look like -- not divided by borders or beliefs, but united by compassion.

If Trump, for all his flaws, could broker a fragile peace, surely we -- heirs to the greatest apostles of peace -- can rediscover the compassion that once defined us.

Because peace is not a photograph, it's a posture of the heart.

And if we, the land of Gandhi, Buddha, and Christ-followers, cannot stand for peace, then we have forgotten the one message our history shouted to the world: that love is stronger than hate, and gentleness mightier than war.

Maybe, just maybe, it's time to stop polishing our slogans and start cleaning our hearts...

You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending him your name and phone number on bobsbanter@gmail.com.

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

Yours etc.,
D Pakyntein,
Via email

"The only journey is the journey within."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

The Shillong Times

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Social Audit on PWD Crucial

ROADS in every part of Shillong are littered with craters not potholes. The same roads have been repaired just a year ago. Judging by the short lifespan of the roads it would seem that the engineers of the State Public Works Department have no idea at all about roadmaking. And going by the shabby manner of the recent interviews to recruit skilled personnel for this department, it appears that the Government is not keen to recruit the best but to weed them out instead and appoint lesser competent engineers in their place. The Government of Meghalaya is fortunate that the state does not have a culture of protests for public issues. Groups protest for their own interests and agenda but not for public interest. Elsewhere, people would have made their grievances heard through public gatherings at vantage points or would have approached the court of law since many of these roads inside the capital city are a threat to those with back problems and pregnant women. In Shillong heavily loaded, trucks all of them carrying above the nine tonnes permissible limit are allowed to pass through localities at great risk to the lives of pedestrians since large sections of the roads here have no footpaths.

Police have a problem of impounding trucks that violate the permissible load limit within Shillong city because there are no weighbridges and they cannot enforce the law without the basic infrastructure in place. Take the road from Demthring through Lapalung to Umpling and on to Itshyrwat and beyond to the New Shillong Township. The number of dumpers carrying boulders and plying through this tiny stretch of road has turned the entire road length to develop craters that are posing dangers to smaller vehicles, particularly two-wheeler drivers. These are issues of great concern but does anyone care? Everything is normalised and the Deputy Chief Minister in Charge of PWD is retained after the reshuffle despite the sordid condition of roads across Greater Shillong. In any other state a non-performing PWD Minister would have found himself divested of the portfolio but here a reshuffle in the cabinet which should be based purely on performance is instead executed for political purposes only — to keep the political scales from tilting. How can the people of Meghalaya ever expect good governance when poor and decadent governance is rewarded while those who perform are divested of their ministerial berths?

Citizens have the right to good roads because they are a basic necessity as much as water supply and power supply are. Yet these basic rights continue to be deprived even within the capital city, not to speak of the back of beyond in Meghalaya where water pipes have been laid two years ago but water is yet to reach the citizenry. But people continue to remain long-suffering and wallow in helplessness. This is where public platforms are important for people to voice their angst and where every voice is respected irrespective of community. A divided citizenry is fair game for politicians and governments. It is when people come together for a cause that governments begin to take citizens seriously and not play around with their patience. Time for a public audit of Shillong roads and ask why they don't last beyond one season. That should follow action such as blacklisting the defaulting contractors and penalising the engineers certifying the completion of the road project.

The Murders of Children in Nongrah and Public Discourse

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

These incidents or murder along with others that have occurred in recent weeks, reflect that Shillong is no longer a safe place. The two murders in Nongrah and the killing of a young girl in Ri Bhoi have sent shockwaves through the community, making our hair stand on end and sending shivers down our spines. Insecurity is mounting and parents of toddlers and young children are becoming increasingly wary of the safety and security of their wards.

The Merciless Killing of Two Children: The sorrow felt by Insaphira's family in Nongrah remains fresh, yet tragedy struck again in Lum Marboh, with the brutal murder of a 7-year-old boy named Kyrshabor, an orphan living with his "meihel" (elder aunt).

The question has arisen, and the public has every reason to seek answers regarding the sequence of events that led to the merciless killings of these two innocent children. Are there similarities between the two murders? Did the perpetrators act on someone's behalf, or are they "Nongbehong" or hired killers? Did these killers conduct a reconnaissance of the locality before committing the crimes? Or are there other motives at play?

Although these crimes occurred several weeks apart, they happened swiftly and within a split second both children disappeared from their homes only to be found dead the next morning outside their homes. These two incidents have caused widespread shock and disbelief across the city. The people of Shillong are enraged by these despicable acts and any news of kidnapping or missing children causes them to burst into anger. However, the police have stated that in Insaphira's case, a 13-year-old boy who was in juvenile custody is the sole perpetrator. On the other hand, Kyrshabor's relatives have expressed concern about the manner of his death, believing he may have suffered a painful death and they feel it is beyond the scope of a homicide. They have called on the authorities to investigate the case thoroughly.

Are these Murders Committed by "Menshohnoh"?

This is one of the most challenging questions to answer, as there is no concrete evidence to substantiate the existence of individuals known as "Nongbehong." Both "Menshohnoh" and "Nongbehong" are terms used interchangeably within Khasi folklore. These entities are loosely translated as "hired killers" and folklore describes them as performing heinous acts such as kidnapping or capturing people to be handed over

to "nongri thlen," or keeper of a blood thirsty serpent.

According to these stories, before committing such acts, "Nongbehong" would consume an intoxicant made from a traditional brew called "ka kyiat tang snem," which has been stored for ages. Once under its influence, these individuals are said to be fearless, fixating their gaze on their target, completing their task swiftly and leaving no trace of the crime, making it impossible to prove any wrongdoing.

The concept of "U Thlen" is as old as civilization itself, deeply embedded in the community's folklore and oral traditions. "U Thlen" is described as a malevolent, blood thirsty serpent spirit that demands human sacrifices for wealth and power. Perhaps, those who rear it are believed to feed it with human blood or sacrifices until it is satiated. These stories are seemingly inexplicable, but they occupy a central place in Khasi indigenous belief systems.

The recent tragic murders of two innocent children have renewed discussions around the notions of "U Thlen", "Menshohnoh", and "Nongbehong". It is important to note that there is currently no scientific evidence to prove the existence of "U Thlen" or these figures. Nonetheless, the fears and apprehensions of the general public cannot be dismissed outright. These issues warrant in-depth study, analysis and informed dialogue among elders, youth, women, thinkers and community leaders.

Historically, there have been instances where suspicion of "Menshohnoh" led to mob actions, such as burning houses or assaulting individuals based solely on suspicion. These acts were morally wrong and illegal. No house should be destroyed, nor should anyone be harmed based on mere suspicion. Legal procedures must be followed and proof must be established.

Recently, during a press briefing, the Superintendent of Police, East Khasi Hills clarified that the murders of children, including that of Insaphira, cannot be attributed to "Menshohnoh", as initial investigations suggest the motive was a dispute over a biscuit between the killer and the victim. The police are still investigating the case involving Kyrshabor and have yet to arrest the perpetrator.

Despite the lack of scientific proof, it is an undeniable fact that some individuals believe they can gain wealth through the suffering or death of others.

Today's world still witnesses individuals who profit from conflict, such as arms dealers, those who exploit communal tensions and profiteers during natural disasters like floods and earthquakes. Exploitation of the poor and labourers for personal gain persist, thereby highlighting the ongoing reality of greed and moral corruption.

The Home Minister and His Dark Humour

Humour brings laughter and is believed to be beneficial for health. However, there is another aspect to humour known as dark humour. Dark humour involves making light of taboo or sensitive topics such as death, illness or tragedy. While dark humour can foster catharsis and challenge societal norms, it also risks offending and alienating others.

With due respect, the current Home Minister of the State is popular for cracking jokes in public gatherings. However, many of his jokes are found to be offensive and insensitive, despite people bursting into laughter while hearing them. If we trace his statements from the time of COVID-19 through the electioneering period, we find that the Home Minister shared jokes that were offensive and showed insensitivity to the suffering of the people.

When COVID-19 first hit the state, many of us were extremely worried and apprehensive about poverty, unemployment and the possibility of severe economic hardships. Instead of offering reassurance, the Minister derided the people with irresponsible statements, such as claiming that the poor could eat only rice and vegetables.

His latest statement was regarding the death of Kyrshabor, which he blamed on the public for merely criticizing the government. He suggested that it is the responsibility of parents to take care of their children and implied that if a child is hurt, kidnapped or even killed, it is the parents' fault or irresponsibility. Such a statement is utterly disrespectful to the family of the victim. It indicates that he seemingly does not care to address the gruesome murder of a 7-year-old boy and is implying that the state is shirking its core duty of providing security to its citizens.

Let us assume that every parent takes his advice to heart. However, a significant problem exists in an unequal society. Wealthier parents, officers and those with societal status have all the time and resources to ensure their children's security by providing personal guards etc, to escort them to school or

piano lessons. But what about those who are poor and cannot afford help? They often have to leave their children inside the house throughout the day with no one to tend to them. These children live in favela-like surroundings and are vulnerable to many types of crimes and dangers. In fact, no one blames the government or the state. However, in a democracy, it is the primary duty of the state to ensure that citizens live in a secure and peaceful environment.

Has the Law been Ineffectively Implemented?

Laws are already in place to prevent crime and to punish wrongdoers. There is an established judicial system with the authority to arbitrate and pronounce penalties on the guilty. However, the rise in crime and murders suggests that the implementation of these laws may be ineffective. It is reported that Meghalaya has one of the highest recidivism rates in the country, with around 10 percent of those convicted or arrested without a conviction being re-arrested in the future. Perhaps many criminals are not afraid of the law or law enforcement because they believe they have protection or are riding high on the concept of "Ha Ri Lajong leh katba mon", doing what one feels like in one's own place.

The Dorbar Shnong and the Battle Ahead: While I commend the efforts of the Dorbar Shnong, the residents of Nongrah, Umpling and the police team for their diligent work, every Dorbar Shnong is now battling several pressing issues. These include the menace of drug addiction, crimes such as assault and offences against women, as well as the ongoing fight against the unknown, cruel murderers who are creating fear among the masses. But what remains is for the police to immediately arrest those responsible for Kyrshabor's murder and ensure justice is served to the departed souls.

Case of Missing Girls: In the age of social media, rumours and unfounded stories spread rapidly. This is dangerous and must be addressed carefully. The reported cases of two teenage girls missing from Umpling and Mawlai, respectively, should be treated as separate incidents and not necessarily linked to other crimes. These young girls may be going through personal struggles and experimentation in life, but they can be given professional counselling and societal support, in addition to the support of their parents. Society must learn to respect and protect children and women at all costs.

"A Bradykinin light-switch: A flash of light could reveal your body's hidden health secrets"

By Rameswari Sahoo

Imagine Martha, a mother of two, waking up with a gripping, unexplained pain in her chest and a sudden swelling in her face. Rushed to the emergency room, doctors immediately suspect a severe, perhaps life-threatening, inflammation. They need answers, and they need them now. But the clock starts ticking. To confirm her condition, a blood sample must be drawn, carefully packaged, and shipped to a specialized central laboratory an hour away. There, it must wait in line for analysis on a massive, million-dollar machine operated by highly trained technicians. Martha and her family are left suspended in a terrifying limbo, often for days, sometimes even a week, before a definitive diagnosis returns.

This agonizing delay isn't unique to Martha's situation. It is a harsh reality woven into the fabric of modern medicine. Whether it's the slow confirmation of a serious infection, the identification of a rare hereditary disease, or the real-time monitoring of a heart patient in critical care, the gap between a symptom appearing and a reliable diagnosis, being confirmed remains a massive, life-threatening hurdle.

What if those days of waiting could be condensed into mere minutes? What if a simple, fast-track test, right there in the doctor's office, could instantly illuminate the invisible crisis unfolding inside a patient's body? This dream is driving a quiet revolution in medical diagnostics, centered on tracking one tiny, powerful, and utterly elusive molecule: Bradykinin.

To understand the revolution, we must first understand the target. Bradykinin may sound like a complex bit of medical jargon, but it is, in effect, your body's most crucial fire alarm system. It's a tiny protein-like messenger that, when released, immediately signals that something is gravely wrong.

Think of an unexpected bee sting. The moment the venom hits, bradykinin levels surge, triggering the hallmarks of inflammation: the localized pain, the redness, and the swelling. But its role extends far beyond minor injuries. Scientists now recognize that abnormal or uncontrolled bradykinin levels are tightly linked to some of the most critical and varied health crises we face. Persistent high levels, for instance, can signal dangerous, chronic inflammation that silently damages the cardiovascular system. A sudden spike can trigger the swelling and constrictions that cause a severe, life-threatening asthma attack. It is also a key biomarker for rare, hereditary conditions, which are often delayed or misdiagnosed for years, causing untold suffering. Crucially, during the darkest days of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers discovered that excessive bradykinin signalling contributed to the severe respiratory distress and multi-organ failure seen in critically ill patients. This invisible messenger holds enormous clues about the state of our health. So why aren't doctors routinely measuring it?

Because bradykinin is notoriously fleeting, appearing only in trace amounts and vanishing within seconds. It only appears in tiny, trace amounts, and critically, it breaks down rapidly, often before a blood sample can even leave the clinic. By the time it reaches the expensive laboratory equipment capable of detecting it, the crucial, real-time levels have changed, rendering the test less reliable.

For decades, tracking molecules like bradykinin has relied on a handful of sophisticated, but cumbersome, laboratory techniques. They are effective for research, but utterly impractical for emergency care. These tools are not just slow

and expensive; they are fundamentally geographically limited. They are powerful microscopes locked away in high-security labs. For a patient in a rural hospital, the delay isn't just a few hours; it's the time it takes to fly a sample across the country. In the world of acute illness, this is the time we simply cannot afford to lose.

This is where innovation steps in, seeking to move the power of a million-dollar lab into a portable, instant device. The goal is simple: to create a system that is fast, cheap, portable, and utterly precise.

The technology relies on the elegant dance between light and programmed DNA, leading to what researchers call Optical sensors. That's why researchers are now building clever new sensors that can shine a literal light on bradykinin instantly. Here's how it works: imagine a "molecular light switch." Scientists design tiny strands of DNA that act like keys, perfectly shaped to lock onto bradykinin. They attach a glowing fluorescent tag to each DNA key. When Bradykinin arrives and clicks into place, the DNA key bends and flips the switch, suddenly lighting up. The result? A simple, glowing signal that says, "Yes, bradykinin is here." Think of it like this: the short DNA strand is a delicate molecular switch. Bradykinin walks into the room, flips the switch, and a visible, measurable light turns on.

This simple principle has the potential to fundamentally redefine medical urgency. The implications of moving from slow, complex laboratory analysis to a rapid, bedside test are immense and transformative for real people. Imagine the scenario in the emergency room again. Doctors treating a patient with severe, unexplained inflammation could get a definitive, quantitative answer on their bradykinin levels within minutes. This would allow them to start the correct, targeted therapy immediately, rather than waiting for external lab confirmation that might arrive too late.

Consider the young person with severe asthma. Instead of relying on a nebulous set of symptoms, they might one day use a small, handheld sensor at home to check their inflammation markers before an attack fully manifests, allowing them to take preventative medication and potentially avoid a hospital visit altogether. This technology offers the potential to democratize high-level diagnostics. Cheap, portable sensors don't need air-conditioned labs or million-dollar budgets. They can be deployed in remote areas, field clinics, and even in developing nations, providing world-class diagnostic capability where previously none existed. This is the shift from bulky, expensive desktop computers to the accessible, user-friendly smartphone, making high-tech diagnosis universally available.

Science can often feel distant, filled with jargon and instruments behind locked lab doors. But at its heart, science is about solving everyday human problems. What fascinates me most is the idea that something as tiny and invisible as a peptide molecule could announce its presence through a simple glow of light. And even more exciting is how this glow, once understood, could give doctors and patients real-time answers when they need them most.

If you remember just one thing from this article, let it be this: molecules speak a language we cannot hear, but with the right tools, we can make them glow, and in that glow lies the power to save lives.

The writer is a PhD Student, Plaksha University, Mohali

Letters to the Editor

Exams lose their meaning when malpractices go unchecked

Editor,

The recent DSC West Jaintia Hills examination for the post of Lower Division Assistant-cum-Typist (January 2025), Vide Advertisement No. DSC.3/ADVT/2012/254, dated: January, 25, 2025, held on September 27, 2025, has exposed serious lapses that demand immediate attention and accountability.

During the examination, several candidates were reportedly caught using mobile phones inside the examination halls. This blatant malpractice has shaken the faith of honest aspirants and sparked widespread outrage against the system. The failure of security personnel to properly check candidates before entry is deeply concerning, as many managed to smuggle phones inside. Likewise, invigilators failed to carry out their duties. They were seen sitting idle, leaving the halls unattended, or even using their own phones instead of maintaining vigilance.

To make matters worse, the DSC has yet to release any official information about the candidates caught cheating. This silence only deepens the frustration among genuine candidates who worked hard for months. Those found guilty should face punishment under the Public Examination (Prevention of Unfair Means) Act, 2024. It is also likely that some of these individuals have engaged in similar misconduct in earlier DSC or MPSC examinations, particularly in the Jaintia Hills region.

Therefore, even if such candidates clear upcoming MPSC or DSC exams, their results should be nullified. Their candidature must be cancelled, and their registrations permanently blocked from both DSC and MPSC portals to prevent re-entry. Furthermore, the DSC should publicly release the names of all offenders and take strict disciplinary and legal action, as these candidates have committed a grave offense that undermines the integrity of public service recruitment.

Malpractice in public examinations is not a mere act of cheating—it is a crime against every honest aspirant and against society itself. The DSC and MPSC must act decisively: publish the names of offenders, enforce strict penalties, cancel their candidature, and block them from future exams. Only through firm and transparent action can we restore faith in the system, uphold the sanctity of examinations, and protect the credibility of public service.

Yours etc.,
Meban Aibor Nengnong,
Via email
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Where are we heading into?

Editor,

What if we momentarily step away from political matters, expressing our frustrations about socio-economic decline and the state's welfare? As a society, we seem to have lost the true meaning of family. Family is not merely a mother, father, and their children; it encompasses a tightly-knit group of cousins, aunts, and uncles from both sides. To be frank, we often only gather with our relatives during unfortunate events, such as the passing of a family member or a mutual friend.

Crimes are committed with increasing audacity—rape, murder, theft, you name it—because we, as a society, have faltered. We have failed because family members no longer share meals together, discuss their days, or engage in spontaneous conversations. Today's teenagers are bombarded with vivid social media content, and they often buckle under the pressure, particularly regarding relationships. However, social media provides them with an escape from their troubles.

A child may feel alone; do we even notice? Unfortunately, we do not. I am uncertain about the point I am trying to convey, but I observe a society in utter chaos, devoid of tradition and customs. Where have the days gone when we dined together as a family? They are lost! English has become the standard, while Khasi tradition is fading into obscurity.

Yours etc.,
Meban Aibor Nengnong,
Via email

Contradictions in Badwar's response to DC removal demand

Editor,

I write this letter in response to the statement made by Congress leader Manuel Badwar regarding the demand for the removal of the Deputy Commissioner of East Khasi Hills, a demand publicly raised by Wankitbok Pohshna of BJP and ironically both leaders are

from East Shillong. Badwar's remarks dismissing the call as "politically motivated" and "unproductive" in the face of administrative challenges deserve deeper scrutiny, not just for their tone but for what they reveal about the broader crisis of accountability in our district.

The demand for the DC's removal must have not emerged in a vacuum. It is rooted in a series of alarming developments: rising cases of child abuse, unchecked encroachments, and a visible breakdown in law enforcement coordination. When citizens and leaders alike raise concerns backed by data and community testimony, it is not mere "politics"; it is democracy in action.

Badwar's response, unfortunately, reflects a pattern we've seen too often: deflecting legitimate criticism by painting it as partisan and pushing the entire onus on the society at large. But accountability is not partisan. It is foundational. The DC, as the administrative head, bears direct responsibility for ensuring law and order, coordinating with police, and responding to public grievances. When these functions falter, the public has every right to demand change.

Moreover, the deteriorating law and order in East Khasi Hills is not just a matter of statistics; it is a lived reality. From encroachment issues to various anti-social activities, the district has witnessed repeated failures in timely intervention and transparent resolution. The absence of proactive communication with stakeholders from the DC's office has only deepened public mistrust. No doubt the current DC may have good rapport with members of the public due to her welcoming nature,

but when there are administrative flaws there should be no compromise whatsoever.

In contrast, Pohshna's call for removal is not a rush to judgment but a call for administrative introspection. It is a reminder that public service is not a privilege but a responsibility. If the current leadership cannot uphold that responsibility, then change is not only justified but necessary and the state government has to take keen note.

Through this column, I urge fellow citizens, media voices, and political representatives to move beyond party lines and focus on what truly matters in restoring accountability, protecting our communities, and ensuring that East Khasi Hills and Meghalaya as a whole does not become a case study in administrative apathy.

Yours etc.,
Firstly Lyngkhohi
Shillong -3

Sex work for basic survival

Editor,

I write as a deeply concerned resident of Shillong. In recent weeks, I have grown increasingly troubled by the visible presence of sex work along the road behind the old Meghalaya Legislative Assembly building, an area that should embody civic order and public trust.

During recent visits to the locality, I engaged in respectful, discreet conversations not as a client, but as a fellow citizen seeking to understand the realities behind what is often judged at face value. I spoke with several individuals engaged in this work, and their stories were marked not by choice, but by compulsion. Among them were single parent mothers who

shared that they entered this line of work out of sheer necessity, to feed their children and keep a roof over their families' heads. One mentioned, having no other means of income after being abandoned; another spoke of debts and medical emergencies that left her with no alternatives.

The openness of these solicitations underscores a deeper crisis. The lack of social safety nets, economic vulnerability, and inadequate support for marginalized individuals, especially women.

We must respond not with judgment or punitive measures alone, but with empathy and a commitment to justice. Many involved are not offenders but survivors, victims of poverty, abandonment, trafficking, or coercion. A truly effective response must combine vigilant action against exploitation and trafficking with compassionate, long-term solutions: access to shelter, counselling, vocational training, and pathways to dignified livelihoods.

I urge local authorities, civil society organizations, and community leaders to come together to address this issue with urgency, transparency, and humanity. Let us uphold not only the integrity of our public spaces but also the dignity, safety, and rights of every person in Shillong especially those pushed to the margins through no fault of their own.

Yours etc.,
Thomas Jones Wahlang,
Via email

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

"To be prepared is half the victory."

— Miguel de Cervantes

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Politics of growth

A southern state has won praise from many quarters for the big deal it struck by way of an investment. Andhra Pradesh signed the multi-billion dollar agreement with Google, which plans to set up a 1 gigawatt global data centre and an Artificial Intelligence hub in the port city of Visakhapatnam. Several factors helped the state clinch this deal, which should be an eye-opener or of special interest to those who care for national interest. The proposed investment is of the order of \$15 billion, cited as being the largest-ever such investment especially in India's technology sector. The offer also has a provision to provide around 1.50 lakh job opportunities, mainly for qualified techies in the next five years.

Notably, some southern states had a head-start in the IT sector since the 1990s. This was principally because Karnataka's forward-looking chief minister in the person of SM Krishna — who later became India's external affairs minister — was among the first to see the emerging sector's huge potential. With good encouragement given to those like Narayana Murthy who fashioned Infosys, Bengaluru eventually emerged as the Silicon Valley of India with direct linkages to the United States' IT hub. Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister, whose famous use of laptops was a novelty in the early 80s, pushed the IT sector's growth in India with the likes of TCS, Wipro, HCL etc., also making waves. Chandrababu Naidu who was chief minister of undivided Andhra Pradesh took lessons from Bengaluru and promoted the IT sector in Hyderabad. Millions of engineers are working in these states as also in Mumbai and elsewhere now and drawing handsome salaries. Taxes from this sector are the main feeder line for these states' exchequers. Naidu pursued his interest in IT growth when he returned as CM of the present Andhra Pradesh. He tames his image of being a corrupt politician with his imaginative and dynamic developmental pushes.

What has come to AP's advantage, in multiple sectors today, is also the alliance Naidu forged with the BJP in the last assembly and parliament polls, a year ago, which helped him grab power again. To his and AP's luck, the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi could form the present central government only with parliamentary support from Naidu's Telugu Desam. Modi is said to be "beriding like Beckham" to keep Naidu in good humour, though another important NDA constituent, the JDU of Bihar, is also extracting goodies for the state from the Centre. Notably, the present Google investment was made possible by special help that the Modi government extended to Naidu by way of amending the FDI rules. Naidu famously describes his establishment as a "double engine sarkar" — a phrase he borrowed from Modi, to mean that it is powered largely by liberal central funds and support. In a scenario when those at the helm in Delhi rubbish the systems and do governance in a personalised style, states that are not on the right side of the BJP and Modi are at a disadvantage.

Blame Game Is Easy - Social Repair The Need of The Hour

By Patricia Mukhim

When things go awry as they are wont to in a world that's gone somewhat crazy, it's easy to blame everyone else — the police, the district administration, the entire government system, the law and every other institution but ourselves. But the root of the problem is with our families and families make up a society. When families are torn apart by divorce and abandonment the worst sufferers are the children. Yet we don't stop to think of this serious social malaise.

We don't even care to think what happens to the souls of the young ones who in their schools and colleges can never bring their parents because there is only one parent and, in the Khasi matrilineal system — it's the mother. This mother too carries the weight of her own predicament of having to work to provide for her children since in 99% of divorces and abandonment the woman gets no maintenance in Meghalaya. Once a man has left his wife and children he no longer cares to look back. He looks forward to a new life with a new wife and the children from that second or third marriage/affair.

But even if children grow up in a family that has both parents, in Khasi society we don't have a culture of easy conversations that are non-judgmental where children are given a space for free expression because it is in such conversations that the child's state of mind often reveals itself. Silence is indicative of the child hiding her/his feelings deep inside where they feel no one can reach. Those feelings could be anything from a broken love affair, a scolding from a teacher which the child felt was insulting in front of her/his peers and in the age of social media it could be body shaming or simply being trolled by someone with a sick mind.

I have said this many times but it merits repeating. The impact of the mobile phone and social media in particular has not yet been studied. But even without research we know that social media has led to the creation of a class that can afford to flaunt fashion on Instagram and call themselves "influencers" while others whose parents don't have the wherewithal to wear similar dresses and parade them equally bravely would feel they are the deprived dregs of society;

the underprivileged; the lot that can never be where some of their peers are. Imagine the feeling of such young people and there are many who go through this tortuous route but cannot share their deep-seated grievances with their friends and much less with their parents. In such situations can we blame the boys who seek out pleasure in drugs?

Today what our disparate and ruptured society is crying out for is the need for 'Social Repair'. Let's also accept the reality of today that children get very little from their schools where teachers have no time to give personal attention to students; much less to listen with empathy. Social Repair would amount to mending the tears in our shared fabric, those unseen connections that bind individuals into a community, into a society. When we talk about this idea, we are really looking at the health of our human relationships, the vibrancy of local ties, and the sense of belonging that nourishes our spirits. How many community events do we participate in these days? A cleaning up drive in the locality I live in saw only the elderly attending because the young these days find it hard to wake up early; sleeping as they do in the wee hours of morning because they are wedded to their mobile phones.

Community events such as games and sports are tiny threads that are woven back into the larger cloth. Social Repair begins with recognizing that our well-being is intrinsically linked to the well-being of those around us. It's an understanding that isolation and disconnection weaken not only individuals but the collective soul of a place. On a human scale, Social Repair manifests in actions that bridge divides, large or small. How many of us really care to visit a home nearby when we know someone is ill, just to see if we can extend help. That used to be the Khasi way of life. Deaths were a time when the community would help the family cope with hospitality. These days we have caterers doing that because we are all rushing somewhere and time seems to fly on angel wings. Perhaps it's not pragmatic to suggest that we go back into the distant past but we

need to find the threads that connected us.

The reality is that a community where people know and support one another is better equipped to handle challenges, whether they be economic challenges or social tensions. It all boils down to cultivating a culture of care and mutual respect, where every individual feels valued and has a voice and that voice is heard loud and clear — not muted.

So, what does Social Repair really involve? It involves active listening, meaning that we truly hear another person's perspective without immediate judgment. Social Repair means sharing skills and resources within our neighbourhoods or community groups. It means we have enough confidence to participate in local decision-making processes and make our voices heard in collective matters.

Recently a young girl went missing from her home and was later found with a young man. What was that girl looking for? What was she missing in her life? Do her parents know or do they care to know? If they listened enough not just to what she says but what she leaves unsaid would they not have been able to help her better? The biggest scourge in our society is this inability to allow our children to just speak their minds; share what agitates them; what is hurting them and where they need healing. If each family were to be able to mend this tear in the family fabric we would not have desperate children making desperate moves. There is psychology at play here. We humans possess an innate need for connection and belonging. When these needs go unmet, it impacts mental health, contributes to feelings of alienation which then leads to societal fragmentation.

The reality with our society is the great economic shift where some have too much and others too little and nothing is shared. This alienates us and ruptures society. How then can we call ourselves a community — a society with shared cultural and social values? When the affluent are unwilling to share but are obsessed with greed then society is beyond repair. We have a political system to help challenge

these inequities and the faith groups to help us deal with the systemic pressures that strain the social bonds. But both these institutions — politics and religion too seem to have failed us.

For the young, coping with life in the age of social media is a trauma. Yet they all want to be on Instagram and Facebook. In Khasi society when a young lady vocalist sings a Hindi song she is trolled most unscrupulously. Even if she sings in English she will be asked, "Why not sing in Khasi?" These societal norms decided by new ultra-right wing Khasi groups need to be challenged upfront. Anyone has the right to sing in any language they choose to! It's their life and their choice! Why should an unknown freak decide what young women should and should not do?

It's time for Khasi society to navigate through this 'Social Friction', but this also demands that we begin to have difficult conversations; a willingness to listen to perspectives that differ vastly from our own, and a commitment to finding common ground without erasing legitimate grievances. This work isn't always comfortable; it asks us to confront uncomfortable truths about societal flaws and our own potential complicity. Psychologically, this phase involves developing greater empathy and perspective-taking abilities. It requires understanding the emotional landscapes of others, particularly those who have experienced marginalization or harm. We truly need to learn empathy; to be less critical and more accepting of differences. This is how we build the much-needed social capital which undergirds every society.

At the end of the day relationships are not just personal comforts but essential infrastructure for a healthy society. In our society, politics is one reason for social divides. Its time we educate ourselves not to allow politics to divide us and to keep at a distance any political party that relies on social division to garner votes. The value of social capital — of communities sharing concerns and working through them is what we need. Is this not what the Dorbar Shnong should be doing? They have the capacity to unite us in a common endeavour!

When Leadership Outruns Legitimacy

The Case of Dr. Mukul Sangma & the Opposition Chair

By Nidahun Marbaniang

In parliamentary democracies, the position of Leader of Opposition (LoP) is not a ceremonial designation — it is a constitutional institution meant to embody the voice of dissent, the conscience of the legislature, and a counterbalance to executive authority. Yet, in Meghalaya today, this institution stands compromised by political convenience and personal assertion.

Dr Mukul Sangma, a seven-time MLA and one of Meghalaya's most experienced politicians, continues to occupy the chair of Leader of Opposition despite the Trinamool Congress (TMC) no longer meeting the minimum numerical requirement to justify such recognition. The Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in the

deeper disconnect between leadership and grassroots mobilisation.

Leadership, however, demands introspection, not self-preservation. To continue clinging to the LoP chair, despite lacking the mandate, is to mistake personal visibility for public responsibility. It signals to the electorate that positions matter more than principles — a dangerous precedent in a democracy already burdened by cynicism.

The Larger Democratic Risk

At stake here is not merely a procedural quibble but the credibility of Meghalaya's democratic institutions. The LoP's office, like that of the Chief Minister, derives legitimacy from representation. When that legitimacy



Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, consistent with national norms, stipulate that a party must hold at least one-tenth of the total strength of the House — six members in a 60-member Assembly — to be formally recognised as the Opposition.

The 2023 elections, however, delivered a clear verdict. The people of Meghalaya withdrew their mandate from the TMC, reducing it to five MLAs from the 12 it held earlier. Despite this, Dr. Sangma continues to position himself as the state's Opposition leader — a move that raises both constitutional and moral concerns.

A Question of Democratic Decorum

Dr Mukul Sangma is no stranger to governance or legislative nuance. Having served as Chief Minister (2010-2018) and Leader of Opposition (2018-2023), he understands the mechanics of power and the moral weight that accompanies it. That a leader of his experience persists in holding a post that his party no longer qualifies for is not a mere oversight — it is a conscious defiance of democratic decorum. The logic is simple: if the TMC lacks the numbers, it cannot claim the institutional privilege of leading the Opposition. The Speaker's office, too, must exercise its discretion with integrity, ensuring that rules are not bent to accommodate political symbolism at the cost of parliamentary fairness.

From People's Verdict to Political Vanity

The 2023 electoral outcome was not just a statistical reduction for the TMC — it was a popular repudiation of its leadership strategy. Despite initial momentum after its formation in 2021, the party failed to sustain the public's confidence across regions. In particular, its organisational weakness in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills — which Dr. Sangma himself recently admitted — underscores a

erodes, persistence becomes pretension.

Young people observing politics in Meghalaya — many of whom are disillusioned by patronage and personality-driven leadership — deserve a better example. They must see that leadership is about ethics before entitlement.

If procedural integrity is allowed to slide today, future assemblies may inherit a culture where rules are negotiable, and institutions become extensions of individual ambition. That is not the democracy Meghalaya's founders envisioned.

A Call for Institutional Integrity

There are moments in political life when withdrawal, not assertion, strengthens one's legacy. Dr. Mukul Sangma has the stature and experience to turn this moment into an act of democratic grace — by voluntarily stepping down and allowing the Assembly to uphold its own rules. Such a gesture would reaffirm that public office is a trust, not a trophy, and that leadership lies as much in letting go as in holding power.

The Speaker, too, bears a responsibility. Upholding the one-tenth rule is not a matter of partisanship but of institutional integrity. If the opposition strength falls below the threshold, the LoP position should remain vacant or be redefined through a collective opposition forum, ensuring plural representation without violating procedural norms.

Conclusion

Dr Mukul Sangma's contributions to Meghalaya's political journey are well documented. Yet, every legacy is ultimately tested not by the offices held, but by the principles upheld.

For Meghalaya's democracy to mature, leaders must show that rule of law overrides rule of self. In stepping aside from a position no longer backed by mandate, Dr. Sangma could once again lead — not as the Leader of Opposition, but as a leader of principle.

Letters to the Editor

Real challenges of teachers in elementary schools

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily I wish to draw attention to the growing difficulties faced by teachers in our elementary schools.

Some years ago, I attended a training programme on the Continuous and Comprehensive Evaluation (CCE) system. The idea behind it was good — to look at every child's overall growth, not just marks. But in practice, it has become very hard to manage.

Teachers are asked to observe each student carefully, keep daily records, and prepare many reports. All this work comes on top of regular classes, homework correction, lesson planning, and test checking. Most schools in Upper Primary Section have no clerk to help, so teachers have to do everything themselves.

In upper primary schools, many teachers have to take five or six classes a day. Some are also given extra official work like Booth Level Officer (BLO) duty or other government assignments. People often come to school for various verifications and documents, disturbing the teaching time. By the end of the day, teachers are exhausted.

Nowadays, another problem has appeared — online training. Teachers are told

to attend one-hour sessions during school hours, which usually clash with class timings. If they join the training, the class remains untended; if they take the class, they are marked absent from the training. This situation puts teachers in a difficult position.

It would be better if such trainings were held during their free periods or vacations. Even better, if the training videos were uploaded on YouTube or an official education portal, teachers could watch them later at their own convenience. That way, learning would continue without disturbing classes.

I still remember one CCE training where the resource person, a primary school teacher, said something that I can never forget. He told us that he was the only teacher in his school, handling all five classes from Class I to Class V. When I asked who looked after his school while he attended the training, he replied quietly, "I have declared a school holiday until I finish this training."

That simple reply says everything. How can one teacher manage five classes, keep all the records, attend trainings, and still maintain quality in teaching? This is the real picture in many schools, especially in rural and remote areas of Meghalaya.

Education policies like CCE and NEP 2020 sound good on paper, but they can succeed only when teachers are given proper support.

We need more teachers in schools, clerical help for record-keeping, and fewer non-teaching duties.

Teachers are not just record keepers. They are guides and mentors who shape young minds. If they spend most of their time doing paperwork and official jobs, how will they find time to teach with heart and joy?

I hope the authorities will look into this matter seriously and make practical changes to reduce the workload of teachers so that they can do what they love most — teach children.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry
Via email

Impending housing crisis

Editor,

Way back in 1798 when Thomas Robert Malthus proposed the theory that population grows exponentially (geometric progression) while food production increases only linearly (arithmetic progression), policy makers and the academic world stood up and took notice. The theory seemed viable and the threat looked real back then. Fast forward 227 years, the doomsday scenario that Malthus proposed has not occurred and there seems to be no threat of it occurring in the near future. Improvement in crop yield through technological advancement has made sure that there is abundant food supply globally even though population has

grown rapidly and unabated post-World War II; Yield Statistics has also made sure that food production is monitored closely ensuring that food shortages that might occur due to low yield are taken care of on time.

The Malthusian theory I feel is perhaps applicable to the global housing sector. The number of households has increased rapidly over the last 20 years while the abilities of families to purchase or build new houses has declined rapidly due to wealth gap, income gap, income stagnation and inflated land and house prices driven by imbalances in supply and demand and speculative investment. Rent has gone through the roof and owning a house for many families has now become just a distant dream.

A few days ago, I saw a video of the cage homes in Hong Kong; people living in tiny little spaces that don't come cheap speaks volumes of the real crisis in the global housing sector. Coming to our own state and community, there used to be a time when "A sense of community" used to be a hallmark of our society. Most Landlord-Tenant relationship used to be defined by friendliness which sometimes border on familial ties and buying land and building a new house was still manageable even for low-income families. Now in most localities, rent has gone through the roof and owning a house is just a distant dream even for middle and

high-income families and the same factors mentioned earlier that are responsible for the global housing crisis are the same factors that are causing the housing crisis in our state. The time for affirmative action on the part of our policy makers is now, otherwise, the time is not far away when cage houses will start to appear in our own city and state.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbaniang,
Via email

Living between two realities - the real and surreal

Editor,

The editorial "Chronicles of Despair" ST October 11, 2025 made interesting reading. I doubt very much that the Police Department can ever get to the root of this mysterious murderer. Pranshon Jala, President, Ka Sengbah Nongshad Nongkhein in his interview to U Nongsain Hima on October 21, 2023 stated that "haduh mynta dang don kibari Thlen namar u hiar pateng na kiba rrah spah jubor." Translated it means, "Till date there are people who harbour and nurture U Thlen because he is a descendant of those who crave for wealth."

In Nongsain Hima of October 11, 2025, he mentions, "lada shah pnyin ha u men-shohnoh kan shem shitom ban lap ia ki saki." (If one has been murdered by a mysterious murderer, it is

difficult to find evidence). However, the Nongshohnoh does not dare to catch hold the essence of humanity or spirit that is unrelenting (Eh Rngiew) but that which is relenting (Jem Rngiew) easily falls prey to this mysterious murderer. U Thlen is a relentless creature and Mrs Rafy in her book "Folk Tales of Khasi," written way back in August 10, 1918 and digitized by the Internet Archives in 2008 with funding from Microsoft Corporation which is accessible at rarebooksocietyofindia.org beautifully put it this way about U Thlen "As his devotees increased, he reproduced himself mysteriously, so that in place of one Thlen living in a cave (Law Suidroh, Laitryngew, Hima Sohra) where everybody knew him to be, there arose many Thlens, living concealed in the houses of the Nongshohnohs who, to preserve their own safety and goodwill of U Thlen, have become men hunters and murderers, of whom the Khasis live in deadly fear to this day." Though folk tales are not real in the historical or empirical sense, they are profoundly real in how they encode cultural truths, moral frameworks and collective memory.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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State Education Commission Report

THE State Education Commission has submitted a voluminous report highlighting the problems of the Education sector in Meghalaya. The Report suggests that overall the state of education in Garo Hills leaves much to be desired with dilapidated buildings on the verge of collapse. However, the Khasi-Jaintia Hills have other problems. There are schools with single teachers manning several classes while in some schools there are teachers but no students. All this will perhaps be rationalised once the Commission's recommendations are taken on board and the implementation process begins. The Commission states that the Report will serve as a roadmap for informed decision-making and strategic interventions to strengthen the education system in Meghalaya. It points to the demographic shift in Meghalaya with a very high number of youth population, where about 49% of the State's population is under the age of 20 years. This poses a huge challenge as these young minds have to find a purpose in life which they can hopefully do through a wholesome education programme.

What is most worrying about Meghalaya's education scenario is the high drop-out rate for which there is no robust data. The Commission could not have gone on a data collection mandate on this single aspect as it would take a long time. Hence, they relied on secondary data. Their finding were that the Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) at the secondary level showed a significant drop across the state, with the average standing at only 38.6%. The question is where do the rest of the students go and why have they not taken admission? What are the problems they encounter? Unless these questions are clearly answered targeted interventions would not be possible. According to the Report the highest NER at the secondary school level is recorded in East Khasi Hills at 49.85% and South West Khasi Hills at 46.86%, while the lowest is in South Garo Hills at 28.21%, South West Garo Hills 29.56%, and Eastern West Khasi Hills at 35.41%. These figures indicate that the drop-out rate is substantial after elementary school and indicate systemic challenges in the transition to secondary education. The factors could be socio-economic in nature, the lack of schools closer home or inadequate academic support.

If enrolment at the secondary level is low it can be expected that at the higher secondary level the NER would be alarmingly low statewide with an average of only 15.51%. And at every level of enrollment girls outnumber boys and also outperform boys. So, in terms of NER Meghalaya performs relatively well only at the elementary stage but shows a steep decline at the secondary and higher secondary level. In 2023-24 the dropout rate in Meghalaya has shown a marginal increase at the Primary and Upper Primary levels. This increase may be partially attributed to the implementation of the Student Database Management System (SDMS) under UDISE+, which has improved the accuracy of tracking student data. However, there are persistent systemic and socio-economic issues that contribute to student dropouts across the State. They include limited access to Secondary and Higher Secondary education, particularly in rural and remote areas and challenging socio-economic conditions, especially in rural and economically weaker regions. There are also reasons such as non-qualified teachers plus domestic responsibilities especially for girls in homes with too many siblings. These require multi-pronged interventions that address the root of the problem.

When I walk through lewduh on a Tuesday morning, past vendors selling kwai and fermented fish, I notice something that would have shocked my grandparents— young boys, barely past their school uniforms, eyes hollow and hands trembling, whispering to strangers near the corners. Last week, my neighbor's seventeen-year-old son was found collapsed in Polo Bazaar. Heroin. The week before, a mother in Laban discovered her daughter, a promising student, stealing money for what she called "medicine." These are not isolated tragedies. They are symptoms of a legislative gangrene that has infected our state while we debate punishments instead of providing cures.

Let us speak plainly: the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act of 1985 is a relic, a juridical fossil that punishes the sick while the disease spreads unchecked. In a state where three lakh people—roughly one-tenth of our entire population— battle substance dependency, we continue deploying an antiquated law designed in a different era, for a different country's political purposes. This is not merely poor governance; it is institutional cruelty dressed in legal robes.

Consider what research published this year in the Indian Journal of Public Health reveals: drug initiation in Meghalaya begins as early as age ten—far younger than neighboring Manipur or Nagaland, where the average is twenty-two. Ten years old. That is fifth standard. That is an age when children should be worrying about mathematics homework, not navigating the treacherous world of nitro tablets and spasmoproxyvon.

The study, conducted by the Indian Institute of Public Health in Shillong alongside the Meghalaya AIDS Control Society, surveyed 128 individuals enrolled in opioid substitution therapy across East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills, and East Jaintia Hills. What it found should alarm every thinking person. Over one-third of users started as minors. A quarter were still in school when they first experimented. More than 91 percent are male, 80 percent toil in the unorganized sector, and over half never completed ten years of schooling.

Heroin—that demon we thought distant—now courses through our veins, with users spending between Rs 500 to Rs 2,500 daily to feed their addiction. Access, the study notes grimly, is "easy"

How a Reagan Era Script Governs Meghalaya?

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

through marketplaces and mobile transactions. Once peer sharing ends, many resort to borrowing or stealing. I know this pattern intimately; a young man whose family lives near mine works odd jobs that barely pay enough for survival, yet he manages to find money for drugs by pilfering from his mother's purse. This cycle transforms victims into criminals, addicts into thieves—and the NDPS Act treats them identically, hurling them all into the same punitive apparatus.

Here is where the absurdity becomes tragicomic. Between 2020 and 2025, Meghalaya's Anti-Narcotic Task Force registered 653 drug-related cases. Convictions? A paltry 25. That represents less than 4 percent success rate. Meanwhile, NDPS Act crimes in Meghalaya exploded from 69 cases in 2021 to 189 in 2023—a 174 percent increase. Last week alone, authorities seized drugs worth over Rs 4 crore. Since 2023, the state has confiscated narcotics valued at more than Rs 400 crore and arrested 100 people this year alone.

But whom are we arresting? On August 26, 2025, at Umking Police Patrol Post, officers apprehended Hajrat Umar from West Bengal and Phulchand Ali from Lum Survej, Shillong, recovering 137.86 grams of heroin worth Rs 60 lakh. The next month, on September 29, police intercepted Chuchung Serto and Thangging Touthang from Manipur near Jowai, seizing 512.63 grams of heroin valued at Rs 2.5 crore. These are small-time carriers, mules in the supply chain. Meanwhile, the true architects—those whose bank accounts swell while our children waste away—remain comfortably insulated from prosecution.

Former Social Welfare Minister Paul Lyngdoh inadvertently acknowledged the law's fundamental flaw when he stated we cannot simply "take drug users from the streets and throw them into jails" because "withdrawal symptoms may take their lives". Think about that admission. Our own government recognizes that applying the law as written would literally kill the people it claims to protect. Yet we persist with this framework, proposing specialized NDPS courts to process more cases through a fundamentally flawed system.

The NDPS Act did not emerge from Indian soil or Indian needs. It was trans-

planted wholesale during Ronald Reagan's global "war on drugs" crusade of the 1980s. Reagan's administration threatened sanctions and international marginalization against nations that refused to criminalize drug use according to American specifications. Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi, eager for Western approval and modernization credits, obliged with legislation that transformed India "overnight" from a country that had no law regarding narcotics to one sporting one of the harshest in the world."

The irony cuts deep. Our ancestors mentioned cannabis use in the Atharvaveda around 2000 B.C. The 1893 Indian Hemp Drugs Commission—after exhaustive study—concluded that "moderate use of hemp drugs was practically attended by no evil results at all". Sadhus employed certain substances in spiritual practice without societal condemnation for millennia. We possessed, in other words, a mature, nuanced understanding of intoxicants. Then we abandoned this wisdom for Victorian moralism imported from a culture grappling with its own pharmaceutical hysteria.

The Economic Times editorial board articulated this precisely: the Act reflects "a Victorian stigma towards recreational drug intake" and represents the West imposing "its own phobia on a laissez-faire India". We adopted not just their law but their delusion—the belief that harsh punishment deters addiction, that incarceration heals compulsion, that fear cures disease.

Portugal decriminalized all drug possession and consumption in 2001, treating it as an administrative rather than criminal matter. Two decades later, the results are irrefutable: serious drug use declined significantly, especially among youth; the criminal justice burden eased; treatment-seeking increased; drug-related deaths and infectious disease rates plummeted. Economists Gary Becker and Kevin Murphy examined the data and concluded: "One moderate alternative to the war on drugs is to follow Portugal's lead and decriminalize all drug use while maintaining the illegality of drug trafficking".

What Meghalaya needs is not more specialized NDPS courts to process our children through a broken system faster. We need decriminalization of personal use, treating small quantity possession

as an administrative offense requiring treatment referral, not prosecution. We need massive investment in harm reduction infrastructure—needle exchange programs, opioid substitution therapy, community-based interventions addressing addiction's social roots.

We need to eliminate the NDPS Act's reverse burden of proof, which forces accused individuals to prove their innocence—a perversion of justice that would make our constitutional framers weep. We need generic scheduling mechanisms to pre-emptively control emerging synthetic drugs like "black tiger" and "double tiger" heroin variants that are ravaging our youth.

Most fundamentally, we need to stop criminalizing illness. A young man stealing from his mother to feed his heroin addiction does not need jail; he needs medical care, psychological counseling, and a community support system. A ten-year-old experimenting with pills does not need a criminal record; she needs intervention, education, and protection from the predators who profit from her vulnerability.

We have surrendered our liberty to think clearly about drugs, our traditional wisdom about substances, and our constitutional commitment to humane justice—all for the temporary safety of appearing tough on narcotics. The result? Three lakh addicts, a 221 percent increase in HIV/AIDS cases over nineteen years, children initiated into heroin use while still in primary school, and a conviction rate so abysmal it mocks the very concept of deterrence.

The NDPS Act is obsolete not because it is old, but because it was wrong from inception—a foreign solution to a problem we did not define, a punitive framework for a medical crisis, chains forged elsewhere but locked around our wrists. Until we possess the political courage to admit this, more mothers in Laban will discover their children's addictions too late, more young men in lewduh will hollow out before they turn twenty-five, and more families across Meghalaya will bury children we could have saved.

The question facing us is not whether we can afford reform. It is whether we can afford another generation lost to laws that punish suffering instead of healing it.

The writer is an Advocate, Trade Unionist, Ethicist & The Humanist Architect

The Gaza Syndrome

By Malay Mishra

With two years of war having passed into the bloodied history of modern times, celebrations were seen on both sides of the northern frontier as the 'historic' Gaza peace plan was foisted on Palestine by an American-led international order. This plan is likely to bite the dust like previous ones including the January agreement which was violated by Israel after just two months. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will try to subvert the agreement (finalised for the first phase only) to hold on to power with the Israeli Supreme Court waiting in the wings to oust him from office. In fact, Trump while signing the first phase plan stated that he couldn't guarantee that Israel would not attack Hamas again if they tried to regroup while the Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz has given orders to the IDF to hunt down Hamas militants once the dust settles on the Peace Plan.

The first phase of the peace plan is done, and 20 living hostages were released from Hamas's captivity while Israel delivered on its agreement to free nearly 2000 Palestinian militants and civilians. A grand ceremony jointly hosted by Egypt and USA on Oct 13 at the Egyptian resort town of Sharm el-Sheikh brought a galaxy of some twenty odd world leaders from the western world as well as the region to applaud the statesmanship of the US President. For the latter it has been a godsend as the Nobel Peace Prize for this year went to the Venezuelan Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado who in turn dedicated the prize to Trump for his "untiring efforts for peace". Machado is a disturbing choice given that she has not only supported the genocidal actions of Netanyahu in Gaza but also asked the latter for support to fight President Nicolas Maduro under the guise of bringing back democracy to Venezuela.

It is important to note that neither the UN which is mandated to administer Gaza nor the Palestine Authority which is supposedly governing the West Bank were in any way consulted on the peace plan. For instance, Navi Pillay, the former Chair of the UN Commission for Human Rights, the body that had found Israel responsible for committing genocide (subsequently taken by South Africa to the International Court of Justice), claimed that Palestine was not a party to the plan.

The second phase of the plan dealing with the disarmament of Hamas and future governance of Gaza is in limbo as Hamas has not agreed to the subsequent phases of the plan. This suits the Far-Right Likud party headed by Netanyahu well as it will probably attribute all ensuing problems to the intransigence of Hamas. It is not surprising to understand the position which the resistance group has taken in the face of all obstacles and having lost sizable men and arms besides its image within the Arab bloc. With 67,000 plus innocent lives lost, women and children murdered, maimed, raped and starved to death and with hospitals, schools, community centres bombed, food and medical supplies weaponised, homes destroyed with nowhere to go, what could have been their options?

Peace is extremely fragile, the deftly crafted scheme under the Trump imprimatur so readily endorsed by Arab nations driven by their own plans have come to naught with Palestinian resistance showing no sign of dying out even after all the atrocities committed on them over the last two years. These atrocities are an unjust retribution for the Hamas attack on Israel on Oct 7, 2023.

Peace imposed by force can never withstand the increasing challenge of just demands for a homeland. This the global order needs to recognise.

(Dr. Malay Mishra is a retired diplomat and political analyst. Views are personal). (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

by which it frees itself". Hamas has thought fit not to surrender the right of the Palestinian people to speak for themselves, for their self-determination and sovereignty. The legitimacy of Hamas derives from its mandate to govern Gaza since its victory in the 2006 elections no matter whether or not the Western powers who now clamour to recognise the State of Palestine think of it as a terrorist group.

While India had given its all-out support to the peace plan-PM Modi congratulated both PM Netanyahu and President Trump several times on Oct 9 - Gaza or Hamas has been conspicuously absent in Delhi's political thinking. India, it needs to be noted, has not declared Hamas as a terrorist group, not until now. Then why does the mention of Gaza in the public space or civil society conversations ring alarm bells? India, it may be noted, had been one of the first non-Arab countries to recognise the PLO in 1974 and Palestine as a State in 1998 in line with its principled position on de-colonisation. And having been the leader of the Nonaligned group to take up the cause of self-determination and abolition of apartheid to the UN as far back as 1946.

Writing in the Harijan in November 1938, Gandhiji had said, "My sympathy for Jews does not blind me to the requirements of justice. It is wrong and inhuman to impose the Jews on the Arabs". India had opposed the UN Resolution 181 which laid the ground for the UN Partition Plan of 1947. Contrast it with the present-day pattern of India's voting in support of the "two-nation theory" on the floor of the UN along with 153 member nations when it has been an uncomfortable proposition for Delhi even after several resolutions calling out Israel's genocidal actions and proposing an immediate ceasefire in Gaza were vetoed. While 'Palestine' may have become taboo in public discourse, this position amounts to denying history and the long tradition of India's support to the Palestinian cause.

The Trump Peace Plan, a cleverly manipulated instrument of surrender for Hamas leaves little room for any kind of Palestinian autonomy now or in future nor any scope for its participation in post-conflict reconstruction. The plan has been critiqued for its vagueness, and top-down imposition by the global rights-based order clique in cahoots with global capitalism with the ideological sustenance of far-right evangelism and pro-Zionist support. Thus, soon after the Peace Summit and withdrawal of IDF from the proximate periphery of Gaza, militants released out of Israeli prison have publicly slaughtered scores of so-called infidels. With food aid having been halted, chaos has ruled the Gaza landscape again.

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Letters to the Editor

For the People, Beyond Fear

Editor, Patricia Mukhim's article, Who is the Real Men Die Ri? (Traitor) (ST October 10, 2025), hits the mark in highlighting Meghalaya's pressing challenges. It confronts the unfair labelling of individuals with non-tribal ties as "Men Die Ri", implying disloyalty to Khasi roots. In doing so, it exposes a serious oversight: the countless contributions of those who, despite such ties, have worked tirelessly for the state's growth and development.

Fear of outsiders, often amplified by pressure groups, has fostered a culture of suspicion that blocks progress. Essential projects, like the proposed railway into the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, are opposed not on reasoned grounds but on fear, depriving communities of lower costs for essential goods and new livelihoods. Meanwhile, corruption, extortion, and weak governance continue to hurt the poorest, who struggle daily to survive.

Meghalaya's real challenge is not the outsider but the absence of courageous, visionary leadership that can balance cultural preservation with meaningful development. Society deserves governments that inspire hope, take bold decisions, and ensure progress that benefits all citizens, not just a privileged few.

It is time to move beyond fear, rhetoric, and inertia. Open dialogue, accountability, and long-term planning are essential if Meghalaya is to realize its true potential. Protecting culture need not come at the cost of progress; true loyalty lies in serving

the people, not defending old fears. The world remembers results, not promises. With strong, visionary leadership, our state can rise too and we are all watching you, hope in our eyes.

Yours etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

Congress Party's Misplaced Priorities

Editor, We have all witnessed varying political swings, twists and turns in the last few months with some political parties taking to the streets in support of social and politically sensitive issues. However, a recent protest led by the Congress party, pertaining to an incident that happened in a distant place in the State of Kerala where slogans were raised calling for the banning of the RSS a right-wing politically linked organization seems more of misplaced priority. It reeks of jingoism and appears to be an attempt to stay relevant in the public domain. Had they raised or protested on the streets of Shillong in support for the victims of kidnapping and child murder it would have been appreciated and perhaps they could have increased their vote banks a bit more. We've never heard of the Kerala Congress coming out in support for issues that had affected our state such as the shooting incident at Mukroh, West Jaintia Hills. We can hardly recollect if any protests were ever organised by the Party in Kerala on an issue in Meghalaya. The Congress is the party which under Nehru and Gandhi had

lifted the ban on the RSS so why is it now calling for its ban? This seems like a desperate attempt to score brownie points against the BJP or NPP. But this is hardly helping the Congress. Perhaps the MPCC and the AICC would need to re-evaluate their political strategies better to stay alive in the long run. Period.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Via email

Unwarranted attack on Sanatan Dharma

Editor, This refers to Kelsang Trinlay's response dated October 14, 2025 to my letter of October 8, 2025. It is unfortunate that Trinlay has chosen to misrepresent the concern I raised. This approach is often seen within the so-called left liberal eco-system. My original letter simply emphasized that individuals holding high public office, such as the Chief Justice of India, should speak with balance and respect when addressing matters of faith.

Trinlay's reply did not engage with this point. Instead, it shifted focus and turned into an unwarranted diatribe against Sanatan Dharma. This reaction is familiar among certain ideological circles. However, such prejudice cannot diminish the essence of Sanatan Dharma, which is rooted in tolerance, accommodation and forgiveness.

To illustrate this diversion, I am reminded of a humorous anecdote. A student who had memorized an essay on "Dog" was asked to write about "River." He still wrote about the dog and simply placed it on the

riverbank. Trinlay's response follows a similar pattern. It reads like an ideological essay loosely connected to the original topic. It appears that he holds grievances against Sanatan Dharma and certain political parties and has used his "reply" as an opportunity to voice those grudges, even citing questionable statistics from dubious sources, while claiming to respond to points that were never raised.

This example shows us the importance of approaching public discourse with clarity and fairness. We must examine issues as they are, not through the lens of personal bias or ideological agenda. Meaningful dialogue depends on relevance and honesty, not distortion or deflection, which Trinlay has resorted to.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee,
Via email

Every Child is Ours — Let's Keep Them Safe

Editor, This refers to the article, "The Murders of Children in Nongrah and Public Discourse" by Kysriboy Pyrtuh, published in The Shillong Times (ST Oct 16, 2025). I sincerely thank the author and the newspaper for giving the highest importance to this horrifying issue — one that has been occurring too often and too fearlessly.

Each crime against a child tears at the moral heart of our society. Beyond the tragedy lies a hard truth: somewhere we have grown used to pain that should have shaken us all. It is time to move from sorrow to solidarity, from fear

to firm action.

Let this be the beginning of a people's movement — one strong enough that no one will ever dare to harm a child again. Let us treat every child in our city, our village, as our own. If we see something suspicious — a frightened cry, a stranger behaving oddly, a child in distress — let us not turn away. Let us speak, report, and act. Silence has never saved anyone.

Learning from Others: Across India and the world, simple yet firm measures have saved countless children: Kerala's "Childline 1098" network runs day and night, connecting police, hospitals, NGOs, and volunteers to rescue children in distress.

Delhi's "Operation Smile" and "Operation Muskaan" have traced thousands of missing children through community-police cooperation.

Maharashtra's "Bal Sanrakshan Samitis" (Child Protection Committees) hold monthly reviews in villages to monitor at-risk children and families.

The UK's "Amber Alert" system broadcasts emergency alerts instantly on phones, media, and highways when a child goes missing.

In Canada, Community Watch Groups coordinate closely with police to prevent crimes and respond immediately to suspicious activity.

These models work because they unite law, community, and compassion — the three pillars of any safe society. Meghalaya can build its own model based on these tested ideas, shaped by our unique community strength and neighbourly trust.

To make child protection a living reality, we can:

1. Create Local Child Protection Units in every ward, with teachers, social workers, police, and youth volunteers.

2. Integrate Child-Safety Lessons into school curricula, teaching children how to recognise danger and seek help.

3. Establish Fast-Track Investigation Cells for crimes against minors, ensuring swift justice.

4. Launch Awareness Campaigns to dispel superstitions and myths that often cloud judgment.

5. Introduce a Unified Helpline linked to community volunteers, hospitals, and social workers.

6. Hold Regular Neighbourhood Watch Meetings where people discuss safety, report concerns, and learn response protocols.

These steps are practical and people-driven — not dependent on large budgets but on goodwill and coordination.

Ultimately, no law can replace human concern. The greatest protection a child can have is the collective conscience of a caring community. Let us not wait for another tragedy to wake us up. Let Nongrah be remembered not for its horror but as the spark that united us in courage and compassion.

Let us pledge: "Every child in Meghalaya is my child. I will watch, I will care, and I will act."

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Tura

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From barracks to palace: Soldiers who led military coups to become state leaders



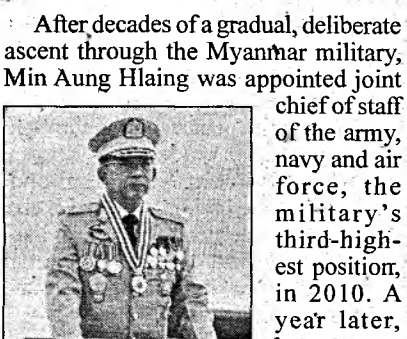
CAPSAT military unit commander Col. Michael Randrianirina and his troops make their way to the Presidency to announce that the armed forces are taking control of the country in Antananarivo, Madagascar. (PTI)

Weeks of nationwide Gen-Z protests in Madagascar sparked by power and water shortages escalated and led to a military coup that forced President Andry Rajoelina into exile. Army officer Col. Michael Randrianirina has been sworn in as the new leader of the Indian Ocean nation.

The colonel is not the first in history to rise from the barracks to the presidential palace.

Here are five other famous military leaders who followed a similar trajectory:

Myanmar - Min Aung Hlaing



After decades of a gradual, deliberate ascent through the Myanmar military, Min Aung Hlaing was appointed joint chief of staff of the army, navy and air force, the military's third-highest position, in 2010. A year later, he was appointed commander-in-chief and would spend the next decade consolidating his power and influence.

Facing mandatory retirement in July

2021, Min Aung Hlaing seized power through a military coup in February that year, declaring a state of emergency, transferring all state power to himself and establishing a military government, the State Administration Council (SAC). Since then he has ruled Myanmar under various titles. The military government has announced plans to hold a general election by year's end.

Uganda - Idi Amin

Idi Amin began his military career as a cook and served in the British colonial army. After Uganda's 1962 independence, he rose quickly through its military ranks under President Milton Obote's guidance to become commander of the army. In January 1971, Obote was in Singapore for a Commonwealth summit when Amin took control in a military coup. Obote fled to neighbouring Tanzania after the coup, which was the result of the two men's growing political and personal animosity. Ugandans initially welcomed Amin's



rise to power, as he promised to release political prisoners and restore democracy. However, his regime rapidly descended into a brutal dictatorship characterised by violence and human rights abuses.

Amin was himself overthrown in April 1979 by an invasion force composed of the Tanzanian military and Ugandan rebels.

Turkey - Kenan Evren

Kenan Evren began his military career as an officer from a military academy, rising through the ranks over several decades until he reached the highest rank of general, serving as the chief of the general staff. He led a military coup in Turkey in September 1980 after months of violence between left-wing and right-wing militants that nearly brought the country to civil war.

The leader of the coup took over the presidency and then rewrote the constitution to guarantee the military's political power. The military dissolved Parliament and ruled through a National Security Council, which Evren was the head of, effectively running the country as a dictator.

His period of sole military rule ended when he formally assumed the title of the seventh president of Turkey in November 1982, after a new constitution was approved by referendum, and he served until November 1989.

In 2012, he was put on trial for leading the coup and later sentenced to life imprisonment for crimes against the state.

Ghana - Jerry Rawlings

Jerry Rawlings rose to power through two military coups, first in June 1979 and then in December 1981, before transitioning to a democratically-elected president.

Rawlings, a pilot in the Ghanaian Air Force, became well-known for the successful first coup he led. He briefly held

the position of ruler of Ghana before ceding it.

In a second coup in 1981, he toppled the civilian government and commanded the Provisional National Defence Council military dictatorship in the early 1990s. Following the drafting of a new constitution in 1992, he was democratically elected as president and held office for two four-year terms, from January 1993 to January 2001.

His legacy is complex, with both praise for his economic reforms and criticism for human rights abuses, including arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances.

Chile - Augusto Pinochet



Augusto Pinochet was a career military officer who had risen through the ranks and was appointed commander-in-chief of the army by Chile President Salvador Allende in August 1973. The following month, Allende, the democratically-elected socialist president, was overthrown in a bloody military coup led by Pinochet. The military surrounded and bombed the presidential palace, La Moneda, where Allende remained until his death by suicide.

In the aftermath, the military imposed a junta where Pinochet emerged to establish himself as its single head before instituting a cruel, 17-year dictatorship. Until 1990, Chileans lived in a period marked by systematic human rights abuses and the implementation of radical free-market economic policies. (AP)

Estrogen could aid in therapies for progressive multiple sclerosis: Studies

About 100,000 of the estimated million persons in the United States with multiple sclerosis (MS) have a progressive form of the disease, with symptoms worsening over time or following periods of remission.

"Progressive MS is profoundly challenging because it is relentless and treatment options are limited," said Francisco P. Gomez, a neurologist who specializes in MS and neuroimmunology.

MS is believed to occur when the immune system attacks the myelin sheath - the protective coating of the nerve fibers that transmit electrical impulses throughout the body - and disrupt this communication. The disease occurs more often in women, older people and those in northern latitudes.

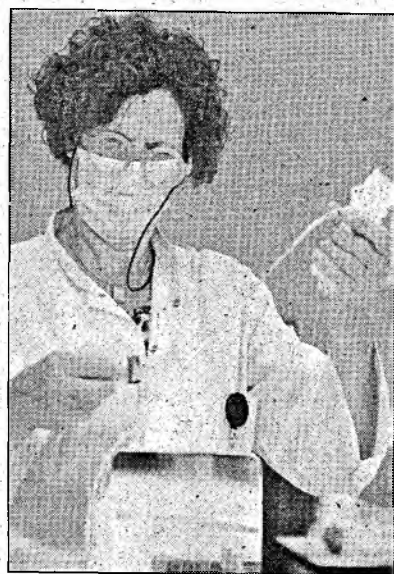
Symptoms include fatigue, numbness or tingling, bladder and bowel problems and cognitive issues, but difficulty walking and balancing are the most common symptoms - and these are more pronounced in the progressive form of the disease. In addition, the progressive form is more prevalent among Black patients.

Now, Gomez and colleagues with the Texas A&M University Health Science Center (Texas A&M Health) have identified two estrogens that show promise in reducing the symptoms of progressive MS: estradiol and estrone.

For their study, published in the *Journal of Neuroimmunology*, the team evaluated estrone and estradiol as possible treatment protocols through a study that used a virus to mimic progressive MS.

"Testing potential therapies by using virus models of the disease is important because we recently learned that the Epstein-Barr virus contributes to the formation and development of MS by triggering an autoimmune response in susceptible individuals," said study author Jane Welsh, a neuroimmunologist with the Texas A&M College of Veterinary Medicine and Biomedical Sciences (VMB) and the Texas A&M Naresh K. Vashisth College of Medicine.

She added that while women are more likely than men to develop MS, once they have the disease and become



Representative Image (Reuters)

pregnant, they tend to go into remission.

"That's because during pregnancy - and especially in the third trimester - estradiol and estrone levels are elevated," said study author Candice Brinkmeyer-Langford, a neurodegenerative disease expert with the Texas A&M School of Public Health. "Even women with MS who are on oral contraceptives experience fewer symptoms and have fewer relapses, so we evaluated how these hormones affect the myelin sheath."

Estrogen is a group of hormones that primarily affect sex drive and reproductive development, especially for women.

Estradiol is more potent than estrone and is used for hormone replacement therapy in postmenopausal women. Estrone, on the other hand, is used off-label for a variety of conditions and is FDA-approved only for treating urinary incontinence in dogs.

The researchers found that both types of estrogen decreased inflammation in the spinal cord, but only estradiol significantly decreased the damage to the myelin sheath, and believe this could aid in the development of therapeutic interventions for people with progressive MS. (ANI)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 19, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-sextile Saturn on your solar return chart and this is going to be an exciting year. You will be energetic and raring to go. And you will be ready to meet the challenges that come your way. Hurdles won't deter you. And you will meet all the challenges with confidence. New sources of income will accrue. Friends and colleagues would help you immensely. Your plans will be completed without any hitch. You would go for regular walk, do some light exercises and include yoga and meditation. Your romantic life will be wonderful. And you will also be giving time to your family. Your partner will support you and prove to be a source of strength. Your financial position will be generally good.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You are able to integrate forces, resources and professional aspects to achieve success in important business ventures. With the expertise that you possess in your field, you achieve goals and targets on time. This is an exceptionally exciting time as challenging professional, and business opportunities are offered to you. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across. You are individualistic brilliant and daring in professional aspects as new projects get under way. You could be impatient in love and relationships as you are overflowing with energy.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You would be more accommodative and compassionate in professional and personal relationships. Friendship, cooperation and synergy are available, and you enjoy the association of your loved ones. An opportunity for career advancement, a promotion or gainful business opportunity may be offered. You win debates, competitions and sports with your dynamic energy and power. Your personal charm and charisma take you through complicated situations. Even though possibilities and horizons open, you tend to think negatively and imagine the worst. You may feel oppressed by too much work. It is the best time to share and delegate work and not to carry the entire burden yourself. Guard against overindulgence in food, drink or work.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You would be most successful doing tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. Emotional attachments and relationships are rewarded with reciprocity. Some interesting people are drawn to you and invite you to work with them. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. You can draw correct conclusions from previous knowledge of people you meet again personally when making important decisions. Business projects and associations are opening and widening your horizons, so you need to think expansively from now onwards. A new cycle begins with the old order finishing as inner and outer changes are on the cards. Health problems are resolved, and your energy is restored.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) There is good luck attending to material matters, as there is increase of wealth and monetary gains. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. Practical details are to be dealt with clarity and efficiently. You may be involved in meetings with business associates as financial and business dealings would bring good results and gains. You can count on your professional and personal partners, as they stand by you through thick and thin. You will work in free and unrestricted space. Physical energy and good health allow you to tackle busy schedules.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your actions and emotions are balanced as you bring more accuracy in your work area. Economy at home and management of business and work are important issues of the week. You connect with new people and discuss important business matters. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit. Personal relations are satisfying, and you have plenty of affection and friendship around you. You could be attracted to new people and ideas as you are open and receptive. But you must conserve your financial resources for priorities that have to be met at the end of the week. You would be able to complete work assignments and personal business with good energy and support.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) The unpredictable is likely to happen that too when you least expect it. Surprises are in store for you in professional and personal matters. It would be best to be open and receptive in personal relations and family situations.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) This phase opens a world of romance and love in personal relations. You are gracious with family and children. You would express yourself in a gracious and exalted manner and influence people in authority. There could be alterations in ideas or plans, increases and decreases in finances and fluctuation in business. Marriage, business partnership and collaboration are strengthened through understanding and commitment. Money matters take priority as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. End of the phase brings fresh energy, love and romance into important relationships.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Good luck in finances and opportunities is encouraging. You are likely to spend time in different places and work closely in new associations as you combine good luck and good management. You share some memorable moments with a loved one. You are in touch with an innocence that comes from life lived fully, which also has a quality of wisdom and the acceptance of the ever-changing wonders of life. It would be good to say what you feel as you would be appreciated for your honesty. You are restless and may incorporate changes albeit small ones in your lifestyle and image.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You are bold, courageous and frank while dealing with controversial and professional matters. You are likely to meet high profile people and share ideas and spend some time in their association. A stimulating project should be taken as a challenge which would further your business prospects. Your associates and co-workers form a cohesive team with you. A wonderful professional opportunity takes you towards success. Good planning and management lead to progressive and productive ventures. You are able to achieve a lot at home and at work with your youthful energy.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The planetary configuration indicates that there is conflict within and discord outside. You may be divided about business and professional matters and finally come to terms with a compromise which might be the best thing to do at this time. You may disagree on a point of view with your partner but the love between you allows peace and acceptance. You are stronger and wiser after having gone through trouble and difficulty. It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than escape as there would be victory and success in professional ventures. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You have the ability to stand alone. You are independent, creative, original, ambitious, determined and self-assured. This period proves to be good for the people in show business and in a creative line. Your ability to express yourself and to solve problems is enhanced. Students in music, singing, fashion design and beauty culture will get success and good results. Professionally huge expenses as well as financial gains from foreign business associates are foretold. You would have good support from family members and business associates. You feel touchy and sensitive with your romantic partner.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You are generous with friends and loving in family situations. Your suave ways go down well with many. You stand at crossroads while making an important decision whether it is professional or personal. It would be better to listen to our own good judgment and do what is good for you, especially as people around you could be judgmental or manipulative. Do not forget to share your feelings with the one who loves and cares for you. You are fortunate as things turn out well in difficult situations at work and home. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. A relaxed and light attitude would help to overcome negative thoughts.

World wide web was meant to unite us, but tearing us apart instead

The hope of the world wide web, according to its creator Tim Berners-Lee, was that it would make communication easier, bring knowledge to all, and strengthen democracy and connection. Instead, it seems to be driving us apart into increasingly small and angry splinter groups.

Why? We have commonly blamed online echo chambers, digital spaces filled with people who largely share the same beliefs - or filter bubbles, the idea that algorithms tend to show us content we are likely to agree with.

However, these concepts have both been challenged by a number of studies. A 2022 study, which tracked the social media behaviours of ten respondents, found people often engage with content they disagree with - even going so far as to seek it out.

When an individual engages with a disagreeable post on social media - whether it's "rage bait" or something else that offends you - it drives income for the platform. But on a societal scale, it drives antisocial outcomes.

One of the worst of these outcomes is "affective polarisation", where we like people who think similarly to us, and dislike or resent people who hold different views. Research and global surveys both show this form of polarisation is growing across the world.

Changing the economics of social media platforms would likely reduce online polarisation. But this won't be possible without intervention from governments, and each of us.

How our views get reinforced online

Social media use has been associated with growing affective polarisation.

Online, we can be influenced by the opinions of people we agree or disagree with - even on topics we had previously been neutral towards. For instance, if there's an influencer you admire, and they express a view on a new law you hadn't thought much about, you're more likely to adopt their viewpoint on it.

When this happens on a large scale, it gradually separates us into ideological tribes that disagree on multiple issues: a phenomenon known as "partisan sorting".

Research shows our encounters on social media can lead to us developing new views on a topic. It also shows how any searches we do to get more insight can solidify these emerging views, as the results are likely to contain the same language as the original post that gave us the view in the first place.

For example, if you see a post that inaccurately claims taking paracetamol during pregnancy will give your baby autism, and you search for other posts using the key words "paracetamol pregnancy autism", you will probably get more of the same.

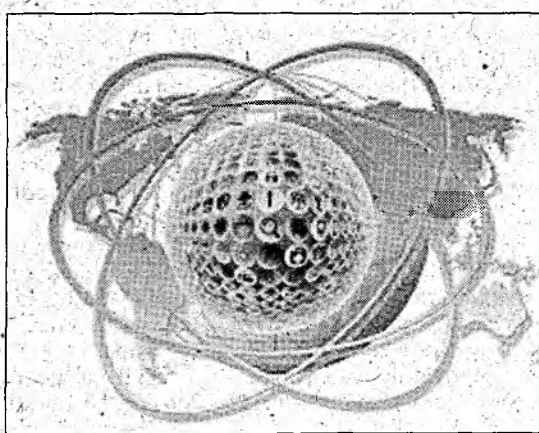
Being in a heightened emotional state has been linked to higher susceptibility to believing false or "fake" content.

Why are we fed polarising content?

This is where the economics of the internet come in.

Divisive and emotionally laden posts are more likely to get engagement (such as likes, shares and comments), especially from people who strongly agree or disagree, and from provocateurs. Platforms will then show these posts to more people, and the cycle of engagement continues.

Social media companies leverage our tendency towards divisive content to drive engagement, as this leads to more advertising money for them. According to a 2021 report from the Washington Post, Facebook's ranking algorithm once treated emoji reactions (including anger) as five times more valuable than "likes".



Simulation-based studies have also revealed how anger and division drive online engagement. One simulation (in a yet to be peer-reviewed paper) used bots to show that any platform measuring its success, and income by engagement (currently all of them) would be most successful if it boosted divisive posts.

Where are we headed?

That said, the current state of social media need not also be its future.

People are now spending less time on social media than they used to. According to a recent

report from the *Financial Times*, time spent on social media peaked in 2022 and has since been declining. By the end of 2024, users aged 16 and older spent 10% less time on social platforms than they did in 2022.

Droves of users are also leaving bigger "mainstream" platforms for ones that reflect their own political leanings, such as the left-wing BlueSky, or the right-wing Truth Social. While this may not help with polarisation, it signals many people are no longer satisfied with the social media status quo.

Internet-fuelled polarisation has also resulted in real costs to government, both in mental health and police spending. Consider recent events in Australia, where online hate and misinformation have played a role in neo-Nazi marches, and the cancellation of events run by the LGBTQIA+ community, due to threats.

For those of us who remain on social media platforms, we can individually work to change the status quo. Research shows greater tolerance for different views among online users can slow down polarisation. We can also give social media companies less signals to work from, by not re-sharing or promoting content that's likely to make others irate.

Fundamentally, though, this is a structural problem. Fixing it will mean reframing the economics of online activity to increase the potential for balanced and respectful conversations, and decrease the reward for producing and/or engaging with rage bait. And this will almost certainly require government intervention.

When other products have caused harm, governments have regulated them and taxed the companies responsible. Social media platforms can also be regulated and taxed. It may be hard, but not impossible. And it's worth doing if we want a world where we're not all one opinion away from becoming an outcast. (The Conversation)

As social media age restrictions spread, is internet entering its Victorian era?

A wave of proposed social media bans for young people has swept the globe recently, fuelled by mounting concern about the apparent harm the likes of TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat can cause to vulnerable minds.

Australia was the first to announce restrictions on people under 16 having a social media account.

New Zealand may soon follow, and Denmark's prime minister recently declared her country would ban social media for under-15s, accusing mobile phones and social networks of "stealing our children's childhood".

The moves are part of a growing international trend: the United Kingdom, France, Norway, Pakistan and the United States are now considering or implementing similar restrictions, often requiring parental consent or digital ID verification.

At first glance, these policies appear to be about protecting young people from mental health harm, explicit content and addictive design. But beneath the language of safety lies something else: a shift in cultural values.

The bans reflect a kind of moral turn, one that risks reviving conservative notions that predate the internet.

Might we be entering a new Victorian era of the internet, where the digital lives of young people are re-shaped not just by regulation but by a reassertion of moral control?

Policing moral decline

The Victorian era was marked by rigid social codes, modest dress and formal communication. Public behaviour was tightly regulated, and schools were seen as key sites for socialising children into gender and class hierarchies.

Today, we see echoes of this in the way "digital wellness" is framed. Screen-time apps, detox retreats and "dumb" phones are marketed as tools for cultivating a "healthy" digital life - often with moral undertones.

The ideal user is calm, focused and restrained. The impulsive, distracted or emotionally expressive user is pathologised.

This framing is especially evident in the work of Jonathan Haidt, psychologist and author of *The Anxious Generation*, a central text in the age-restriction movement.

Haidt argues that social media accelerates performative behaviour and emotional dysregulation in young people.

Viewed this way, youth digital life involves declining psychological resilience, rising polarisation and the erosion of shared civic values, rather than being a symptom of complex developmental or technological shifts.

This has helped popularise the idea that social media is not just harmful but also corrupting. Yet the data behind these claims is contested. Critics have pointed out that Haidt's conclusions often rely on correlational studies and selective interpretations.

For example, while some research links heavy social media use to anxiety and depression, other studies suggest the effects are modest and vary widely depending on context, platform and individual differences.

What's missing from much of the debate is a recognition of young people's agency, or their ability to navigate online spaces intelligently, creatively and socially.

Indeed, youth digital life is not just about passive consumption. It's a site of literacy, expression and connection.



Platforms such as TikTok and YouTube have fostered a renaissance of oral and visual communication.

Young people stitch together memes, remix videos, and engage in rapid-fire editing to produce new forms of storytelling. These are not signs of decline but evolving literacies. To regulate youth access without acknowledging these skills risks suppressing the new in favour of preserving the familiar.

Regulate platforms, not young people

This is where the Victorian metaphor becomes useful. Just as Victorian norms sought to maintain a particular social order, today's age restrictions risk enforcing a narrow vision of what digital life should look like.

On the surface, terms such as "brain rot" appear to convey the harm of excessive internet use.

But in practice, they're often used by teenagers to laugh about and resist the pressures of 24/7 hustle culture.

But concerns about young people's digital habits seem rooted in a fear of cognitive difference - the idea that some users are too impulsive, too irrational, too deviant.

Young people are often cast as unable to communicate properly, hiding behind screens, and avoiding phone calls. But these changing habits reflect broader shifts in how we relate to technology.

The expectation to be always available, always responsive, ties us to our devices in ways that make switching off genuinely difficult.

Age restrictions may address some symptoms, but they don't tackle the underlying design of platforms that are built to keep us scrolling, sharing and generating data.

If society and governments are serious about protecting young people, perhaps the better strategy is to regulate the digital platforms.

Legal scholar Eric Goldman calls the age-restriction approach a "segregate and

suppress" strategy - one that punishes youth rather than holding platforms accountable. We would never ban children from playgrounds, but we do expect those spaces to be safe. Where are the safety barriers for digital spaces?

Where is the duty of care from digital platforms? The popularity of social media bans suggests a resurgence of conservative values in our digital lives. But protection should not come at the cost of autonomy, creativity or expression.

For many, the internet has become a moral battleground where values around attention, communication and identity are fiercely contested.

But it is also a social infrastructure, one that young people are already shaping through new literacies and forms of expression.

Shielding them from it risks suppressing the very skills and voices that could help us build a better digital future. (*The Conversation*)

Global warming may alter El Nino, La Nina, amplify temp changes

El Nino and La Nina climate cycles could undergo fundamental changes over the next 30-40 years under continued global warming, shifting from current irregular patterns towards highly regular ones, potentially magnifying fluctuations in sea surface temperatures, according to a new study.

Findings published in the journal *Nature Communications* highlight how human-caused climate change can alter the fundamental characteristics of the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and its interactions with other climate processes, researchers said.

The world's weather and climate patterns are driven by the ENSO phenomenon, of which El Nino and La Nina form the 'warm' and 'cool' cycles, with the former related with an increase in temperatures and rainfall and the latter with opposite effects.

Researchers, including those at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, US, show that the ENSO could sync with other climate processes and the resonance could have "wide-ranging whiplash impacts on regional hydroclimates".

"In a warmer world, the

tropical Pacific can undergo a type of climate tipping point, switching from (a) stable to (an) unstable oscillatory behaviour.

This is the first time this type of transition has been identified unequivocally in a complex climate model," said lead author Malte F. Stuecker, director of the international Pacific research center at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

"(An) enhanced air-sea coupling in a warming climate, combined with more variable weather in the tropics, leads to a transition in amplitude and regularity," he added.

The researchers analysed publicly available climate models and projected that the stronger and more regular ENSO cycles could also sync with other climate drivers, such as the North Atlantic Oscillation and Indian Ocean Dipole - similar to how multiple weakly connected pendulums adjust to swinging with the same frequency.

"Our simulation results, which some other climate models support, show that ENSO's future behaviour could become more predictable, but its amplified impacts will pose significant challenges for societies worldwide," Sen Zhao, one

of the lead authors and researcher at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, said.

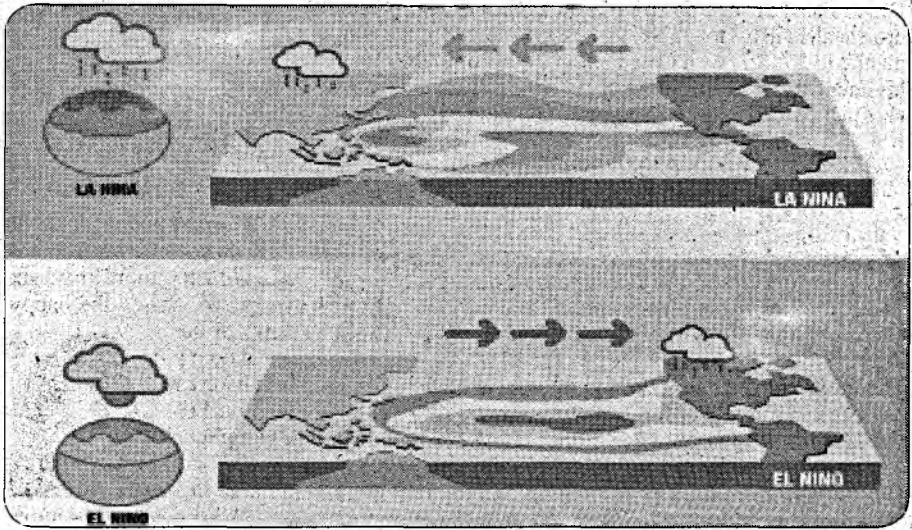
Enhanced climate planning and adaptation strategies would be required to deal with amplified effects due to an increasingly regular ENSO, the researchers said.

Further, effects of fundamental changes to the ENSO could be felt in regions far away from the equatorial Pacific and therefore, global preparedness is important, they added.

"Our findings underscore the need for global preparedness to address intensified climate variability and its cascading effects on ecosystems, agriculture, and water resources," author Axel Timmermann, director of the Institute for Basic Science's center for climate physics at Pusan National University, South Korea, said.

The study looked at the Alfred Wegener Institute Climate Model.

"Here, we demonstrate that in response to warming, a state-of-the-art high-resolution climate model simulates a rapid transition from a moderate-amplitude irregular regime, as observed in the current climate, to a highly regular oscillation with intensifying amplitude," the authors wrote. (*PTI*)



Chandrayaan-2 makes its first-ever observation of Sun's impact on Moon

CHENNAI, Oct 18: The Chandrayaan-2 mission, launched in 2019, has made the first-ever observation of the effects of the Sun's Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) on the Moon using its onboard scientific instruments, ISRO said on Saturday.

This observation would help understand the lunar exosphere, very thin atmosphere of the Moon, and the impact of space weather on its surface, the Bengaluru-headquartered space agency said.

Launched on July 22, 2019, from Sriharikota using the GSLV-MkIII-M1 rocket, Chandrayaan-2 carried eight experiment payloads. On August 20, 2019, Chandrayaan-2 was successfully inserted into the elliptical orbit around the Moon.

Although communication with the Vikram lander was lost during its September 7 landing attempt, the Orbiter remains fully operational and continues to function in a 100 km x 100 km orbit around the Moon.

According to an ISRO release, one of the payloads (on-board Chandrayaan-2), Chandra's Atmospheric Compositional

Explorer 2 (CHACE 2) has recorded the effects of the Coronal Mass Ejections from the Sun on the lunar exosphere.

The primary objective of the CHACE-2 payload is to study the composition and distribution of the lunar neutral exosphere and its variability.

Coronal Mass Ejections occur when the Sun ejects significant quantities of its building material, comprising mostly Helium and Hydrogen ions.

These effects are significant on the Moon, as Moon is an airless body that too deprived of any global magnetic field, the presence of which would have shielded the solar effects on its surface.

"Observations from CHACE-2 showed an increase in the total pressure of the dayside lunar exosphere (very thin atmosphere) when the Coronal Mass Ejection (of the Sun) impacted the Moon. The total number density (number of neutral atoms or molecules present in an environment per unit volume) derived from these observations showed an increase by more than an order of magnitude," the release said.

"This increase is consistent with ear-

lier theoretical models, which predicted such an effect, but CHACE-2 onboard Chandrayaan-2 has observed such an effect for the first time." ISRO further said the rare opportunity to directly observe the effects of a Coronal Mass Ejection (CME) impacting the Moon occurred on May 10, 2024, when a series of CMEs were hurled from the Sun toward the lunar surface.

This increased quantity of the solar coronal mass that impacted on the Moon enhanced the process of knocking off the atoms from the lunar surface, thereby liberating them to the lunar exosphere, which manifested as the enhancement of the total pressure in the sun lit lunar exosphere.

Apart from pushing the edge of scientific understanding about the Moon and the lunar space weather, this observation also indicates the challenges of building scientific bases on the Moon.

Lunar base architects need to account for such extreme events, which would temporarily alter the lunar environment, before the effects subside, the release added. (*PTI*)

Punjab DIG, arrested in bribery case, suspended

CHANDIGARH, Oct 18: Punjab Deputy Inspector General of Police (Ropar Range) Harcharan Singh Bhullar, who was arrested by the CBI in a bribery case, has been suspended, according to a state government order.

Bhullar, along with another person, was arrested on Thursday in connection with a corruption case involving bribery of Rs 8 lakh.

Bhullar was held from his Mohali office following a complaint lodged by a Fatehgarh Sahib-based scrap dealer, who accused the senior IPS officer of demanding recurring monthly payment for "settling" a 2023 FIR against him.

Bhullar was sent to judicial custody by a CBI court here on Friday.

An order of the Punjab Home Affairs department issued on Saturday said, as per Rule 3(2) of the All India Services (Discipline & Appeal) Rules, "a member of

the service who is detained in official custody whether on a criminal charge or otherwise for a period longer than forty-eight hours, shall be deemed to have been suspended by the Government concerned under this rule." "In pursuance of the said Rule, Harcharan Singh Bhullar, IPS is hereby deemed to be suspended with effect from 16.10.2025, as 48 hours have lapsed since his arrest," stated the order.

During searches at his residence, the CBI seized Rs 7.50 crore in cash and 2.50 kg of gold jewellery.

It also recovered 26 luxury watches, including brands such as Rolex and Rado, documents pertaining to more than 50 immovable properties held in the names of family members and suspected benami entities, locker keys and details of multiple bank accounts, four firearms along with 100 live cartridges. (*PTI*)

Meghalaya Nuggets

Civil Defence and Home Guards opens new district office in Jowai

SHILLONG, Oct 18: Civil Defence and Home Guards Minister Brenning A Sangma on Friday inaugurated the newly constructed district office at Hali Synna, Jowai, West Jaintia Hills, highlighting the crucial role of trained volunteers in disaster response. Speaking at the inaugural event, Sangma noted that volunteers often act as the first responders during emergencies and their timely interventions within the critical "golden window" can save lives. He added that the department has trained thousands of volunteers in areas such as search and rescue, first aid, disaster management and community awareness, strengthening the state's overall disaster resilience. Dedicating the new office to the public, the minister said the move reflects the state government's commitment to enhancing institutional capacity for citizen safety. He pointed out that until now, the department had been functioning from a rented building at Dong Mihnngi, Lalthalaboh. Sangma also highlighted recent developments, including the completion of recruitment for 445 posts and the department's first Rozgar Mela held on August 20, where appointment letters were issued to successful candidates. He mentioned that the government has approved the integration of 708 permanent posts from the Border Wing Home Guards Battalion into two SDRF battalions, a move aimed at enhancing disaster response capacity. Meanwhile, Health Minister Wailadmiki Shylla, who was the guest of honour, spoke about facilitating road construction to the new office site in his capacity as the local representative. He praised the department's volunteer training initiatives and encouraged the expansion of such programmes across Jaintia Hills and the wider state.

NHAI to repair damaged stretch of Umiam-Jorabat Expressway

SHILLONG, Oct 18: The Umiam-Jorabat Expressway is generally a top-notch road, barring a few stretches that have deteriorated in recent times. An official of the National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) informed that potholes have developed along a 2-3 km stretch between Nongpoh and Umling due to the prolonged monsoon season. The official said that the affected section has been inspected and the contractor has been directed to carry out immediate repairs. "Since the weather has improved, we will repair it as it is a bituminous work," the official said.

Marcuise flags off 9 vehicles under ADB-funded project

SHILLONG, Oct 18: Public Health Engineering (PHE) Minister Marcuise N Marak flagged off nine vehicles under the Climate Adaptive Community-Based Water Harvesting Project, an initiative funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The vehicles will be deployed across different districts to support field officers in implementing and monitoring activities under the project, which aims to promote sustainable water management and enhance community resilience to climate change. The Climate Adaptive Community-Based Water Harvesting Project focuses on improving water security in climate-sensitive regions through the development of harvesting, storage, and distribution systems. The initiative also seeks to empower local communities to adopt sustainable practices that conserve water resources and mitigate the effects of erratic weather patterns.

MP Kharlukhi inspires students with...

(Contd from P-1) The event was attended by WL Lyngdoh, president of the College Governing Body; Dr Bahunlang Tron, principal; members of the Governing Body, faculty members, student-teachers and guests.

Dr Kharlukhi unveiled the commemorative plaque and formally inaugurated the new classroom building.

CM credits Mother Prog...

(Contd from P-1) "Every woman carries within her the strength of generations, and when a woman stands tall, she carries not just herself but the good of society," he said.

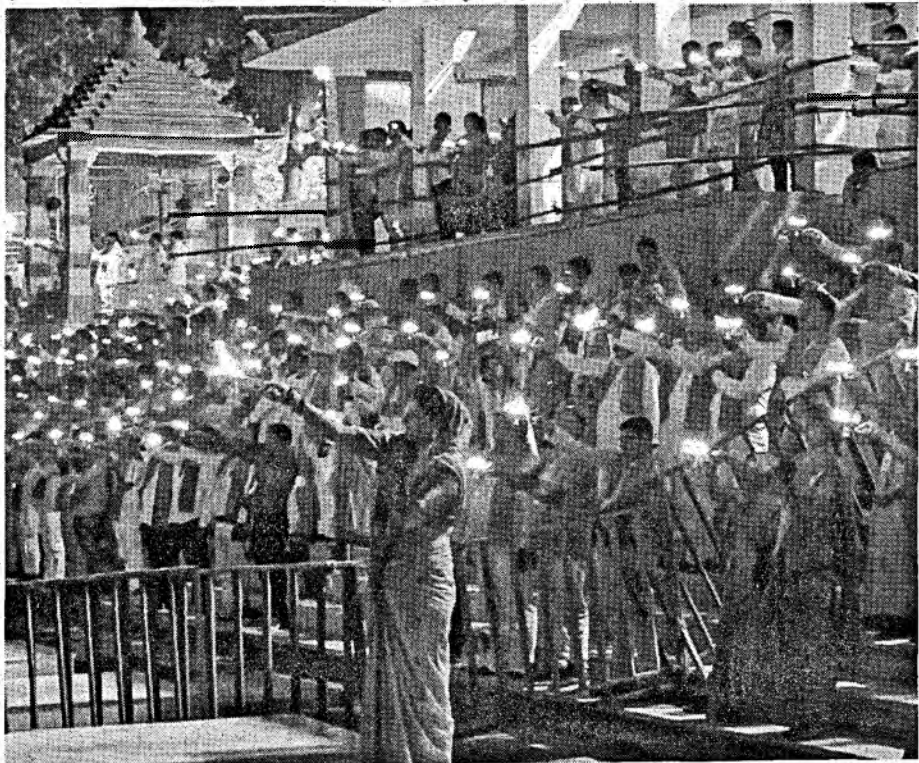
Earlier, Dr MPR Lyngdoh presented the journey of WISE, tracing its evolution since its founding in June 2000 under Sr. Judith Shadap, RNDM. Sr. Baiahlunlang Nongkhaw, Provincial of RNDM India North East Province, delivered the Words of Welcome, describing WISE's 25-year journey as "a testimony of faith and compassion in service."

The celebration featured prayers, cultural performances, and the release of a documentary chronicling WISE's 25-year journey. The event concluded with the felicitation of Governing Board Members, staff, and volunteers, followed by a Vote of Thanks by Sr. Atisha Mary Khongjee and the National Anthem sung by the St. Mary's Higher Secondary School Choir.

88 Ri-Bhoi farmers benefit...

(Contd from P-3) step-by-step guidance on host plant cultivation, maintenance, and management—vital components for successful Muga silkworm rearing.

"The Muga Farmer's Field Day Programme reaffirmed the Central Silk Board commitment to promoting sericulture in Meghalaya by fostering innovation, sustainability, and farmer welfare. Such initiatives are instrumental in strengthening the region's Muga silk industry and enhancing the livelihoods of sericulture farmers through capacity building and technology dissemination," the statement said.



People perform aarti on the banks of the Saryu river ahead of the Deepotsav at a ghat, in Ayodhya, Uttar Pradesh, on Saturday. (*PTI*)

"Mere goodness can achieve little against the power of nature."
—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

The Shillong Times

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Crude oil diplomacy

CURIOUS as it might sound, another announcement from the US by President Trump is, "India would stop purchase of Russian crude," in response to the 25 per cent additional tariff hike he imposed on goods the US imports from India. The Modi administration is yet to deny or confirm such a decision. Russian supply to India constitutes one-third of the crude processed by refineries in this country to produce diesel and petrol. Overall, the Russian supplies at discounted rates helped India majorly, helping it make huge economic gains while also stabilising the fuel prices that kept motorists happy. The stabilization of fuel prices also had its impressive impact on the markets, where inflationary trends could be checked in recent years.

This, in turn, helped the Modi government breathe easy even as it has not been able to perform well on multiple fronts and goofed up on some others. Compared to the gains India made from its unprincipled oil deal, the retaliatory action from Trump in the form of a total 50 per cent tariff imposition on Indian goods reaching the American soil did less harm in monetary terms. However, its lethal impact is on the diplomatic front. India failed to carry forward the good relations that it could build with the US in the last over three decades since the time of Narasimha Rao- Manmohan Singh combine. India is the world's third largest crude oil importer, with nearly 90 per cent of its requirements met from imports. Much of India's requirement was traditionally being met from the Gulf-Middle East. This scenario changed with Russia's war on Ukraine since 2022, which led to US sanctions on Russian sale of its fuel to other countries. However, the sanctions did not cover crude oil sales. The Modi-led Indian government saw an opportunity in this by entering into a covert deal with Russia to purchase crude oil, refine it, use and sell a part of the refined fuel to EU etc. Notably, India has over 20 refineries, the largest being at Jamnagar, run by the Ambanis.

India shipped crude oil from Russia through multiple strategies — in rupee trade; now in Chinese yuan following hurdles in rupee trade; and via payment in dirham through some business interests in the UAE, thereby circumventing the dollar-specific hurdles. Purchases from Russia, which were less than two per cent in 2020, rose to 40 per cent in 2023. The discount that Russia offered for its crude oil sale to India was initially of the order of \$20 per barrel, which later got reduced to less than 4 per barrel. Still, this has been a huge gain for India. Russia emerged as India's main fuel supplier. If India stops importing Russian crude, the annual additional burden on India, vis-à-vis purchases from other countries, could be of the order of \$3.5 billion annually. Yet, India cannot afford to keep antagonising the US; nor can it alternatively rely on China, a snake in the grass.

Rise of Private Institutions in Meghalaya: A Boon or Bane: A Sociological analysis on Education, Teacher Challenges, and Inequality in the NEP Era

By Evangeline Dkhar

In recent years, Meghalaya has witnessed a visible boom in the number of private educational institutions — from small primary schools in towns and villages to large private colleges and universities in Shillong and beyond. This rise has been further influenced by the introduction of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which envisions a new, inclusive, and flexible educational framework for India. However, behind the promise of quality education lies a complex social reality. The rapid growth of private institutions has generated new opportunities but also new inequalities, especially for teachers and students who form the backbone of the system. A sociological analysis helps us see beyond the surface — to understand the changing dynamics of education, power, and labour in Meghalaya today.

Privatisation and the Changing Purpose of Education

Sociologically, education is a powerful agent of socialisation and mobility. It shapes not only individual careers but also social values, class structure, and cultural identity. However, the growing privatisation of education in Meghalaya reflects a shift in how education is perceived — from a social right to a market commodity. The state's limited capacity to build and maintain enough government institutions has led to private actors stepping in. Private schools and colleges promise better infrastructure, English-medium education, and digital learning tools. Yet, these often come with high fees, turning education into a product accessible mainly to middle- and upper-class families. This, as Pierre-Bourdieu observed, reinforces social inequality, by giving more cultural capital to those already privileged.

The NEP and the Ground Reality

The NEP 2020 brings new expectations for both teachers and institutions — encouraging multidisciplinary learning, research orientation, and the integration of technology in education. However, the reality in many private institutions across Meghalaya is far from these ideals. Several colleges, particularly in semi-urban and rural areas, operate with a shortage of qualified teachers. One teacher may be required to handle multiple subjects, supervise students, manage administrative work, and even take part in admission and extracurricular activities. The concept of holistic education becomes difficult when teachers are already overburdened and under-supported.

Teachers are also resigning from their posts due to the combination of heavy workload and low pay, leading to frequent changes of staff and instability in departments. This affects students directly, as they face disruptions in

their learning process and loss of academic continuity. Meanwhile, institutions often demand UGC-level qualifications from teachers, but the salaries offered rarely match those qualifications. This contradiction discourages many of today's youth from applying for teaching positions in private institutions, as they seek better opportunities elsewhere.

Challenges Faced by Teachers:

Low Salaries, Heavy Workload, and Job Insecurity

Teachers in private institutions form one of the most vulnerable sections of the educated workforce. Unlike their counterparts in government institutions, they often receive low salaries, sometimes even below minimum wage standards. The salary disparity is striking — in some private colleges, teachers earn less than ₹15,000-₹20,000 per month despite holding postgraduate or doctoral degrees. Moreover, salary cuts, delayed payments, and absence of yearly increments are common. During long holidays or admission periods, some institutions even reduce pay citing financial constraints. This not only affects teachers' livelihoods but also their motivation and morale.

The workload is another major challenge. Teachers are expected to conduct classes, prepare reports, attend meetings, handle co-curricular duties, and maintain discipline, often without support staff. In many cases, they are assigned tasks outside their subject expertise, undermining both teaching quality and professional confidence. Adding to this, casual and medical leaves are restricted, and maternity benefits are often denied or unpaid. Many institutions also discourage participation in seminars or training programmes, even though such exposure is vital for academic growth. Sociologist Arlie Hochschild's concept of "emotional labour" aptly describes their situation — teachers must continue to appear calm, dedicated, and enthusiastic, even when exhausted or stressed.

Institutional Control and Lack of Voice

Another major sociological concern is the power structure within private institutions. Most are controlled by management boards, where teachers have little to no participation in decision-making. Policies regarding fees, workloads, or internal evaluations are often made without consulting the faculty. This creates a culture of fear and silence. Teachers who question unfair practices risk non-renewal of contracts or salary cuts. In Weberian terms, this reflects an over-bureaucratised system — one that values hierarchy and obedience over creativity and collaboration. Instead of being empowered profession-

als, teachers are treated as replaceable employees.

Students' Struggles in Private Institutions

Students, too, face growing challenges under this system. While private institutions advertise "quality education," many lack proper laboratories, libraries, and research facilities. Students pay high fees but receive limited academic support. In smaller towns, overcrowded classrooms and irregular class schedules affect learning outcomes. The digital divide has further deepened inequality. With the NEP promoting online and blended learning, students from rural areas or poor households struggle to keep up due to weak internet connectivity and the cost of devices. While urban students benefit from digital resources, rural students often lag behind, reproducing the same socio-economic divisions that education is meant to bridge.

Additionally, private institutions often impose strict rules and penalties, emphasizing discipline and reputation over student welfare. Mental health support, counselling, and co-curricular development remain neglected areas. Many students experience stress, financial pressure, and even feelings of alienation in an overly competitive environment.

Gender Dimensions of Inequality

The situation becomes more complex when viewed through a gender lens. Many female teachers face what sociologists call the "double burden" — managing both professional responsibilities and domestic duties. After long working hours, many continue to shoulder unpaid household work at home, which affects their rest, focus, and overall well-being. In addition, maternity leave and childcare support remain limited in several institutions. Some women return to work earlier than they should because of job insecurity or fear of salary cuts. Travelling long distances, especially in rural or semi-urban areas, can also pose safety concerns. These challenges often go unnoticed in institutional discussions about equality or teacher welfare.

While both male and female teachers face low pay and heavy workloads, women are often under greater pressure to balance family expectations with professional dedication. This highlights how gender inequalities persist even in professional spaces that promote education and empowerment. Recognising and addressing these subtle inequalities is essential for creating a truly inclusive and supportive academic environment.

Building a Fair and Inclusive Education System

Sociologically, the issues surrounding private educa-

tion in Meghalaya reflect broader structural problems — weak state funding, rising unemployment, and the commodification of knowledge. To truly benefit from the NEP, the government and educational boards must ensure:

- Fair pay and job security for teachers through standardised salary guidelines.
- Regular monitoring of private institutions to ensure compliance with labour and education norms.
- Investment in teacher training and professional development.
- Better student support systems, including counselling and affordable digital access.
- Transparent governance and inclusion of teachers in institutional decision-making.

Conclusion: The rise of private institutions in Meghalaya represents both progress and paradox. On one hand, they have expanded educational access and created new opportunities for youth. On the other, they have intensified inequality, precarity, and stress for both teachers and students. If the NEP's vision of a transformative, equitable, and quality education system is to be realised, the human side of education — the teachers who teach and the students who learn — must be placed at the centre of policy and practice.

Education cannot thrive when those who build its foundation are underpaid, overworked, and unheard. The true test of Meghalaya's educational future will not be in the number of private institutions it builds, but in how justly and humanely they function.

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Assessing the Push and Pull Factors.

By Maitiphang Syiem

We all live in a complex dynamic and continuously evolving system; the earth is itself a dynamic system with all its attributes intertwined and interconnected to function in a stable mode. Dear readers and concerned Shillongites, we need to realise that our city is a form of a living system not devoid of controllable and uncontrollable attributes, and having said, this may sound technical, but to solve issues and problems and to stabilize per se, it sometimes requires to invoke a technical route. Now a question we all need to ask: when does a system become stable and secure? To answer, let us just sneak into control system theory. It says a system is stable if its output is under control, producing a bounded output for a given bounded input. With that concept and taking that analogy to Urbanization we can say that the urban living system is considered stable even when inevitable social disturbances (like unemployment, migration, inequality,) do not result in uncontrolled spikes in violence or crime.

To inquisitively ask why can't we acquire a stable system or what makes the system stable, what can be seen is that for such stability we will need a robust and effective feedback mechanism (Community Responses). If the controlled interventions do not effectively produce controlled results, then the feedback mechanism (Community Evaluation) corrects the controlled inputs to stabilize a system. On the contrary, a system is considered unstable when there is no "Feedback Mechanism". We all need to introspect whether Shillong City has that effective "Feedback mechanism" or it's just a one-way linear approach. Why mathematically and metaphorically link a Control System Theory with the Urban landscape context, because as earlier said we all live in a system with controllable and uncontrollable attributes. In this context we are more interested in controllable attributes. We cannot deny the facts of rising crime rate both in the rural and urban scenario, however we complementarily skip and not initiate Deep Learning as to what causes them. In this perspective and confining to Urban Crimes, urbanisation is inevitable but at the same time it opens up a plethora of "Urban Paradoxes" where urbanisation though it unveils opportunities but with hard hitting challenges such as socio-economic, education, sanitation, health, recreational amenities, urban poverty dysfunctional families, psychological, juvenile and adult delinquencies, rural-urban migration, housing issues, etc. In this deliberation these variables must be understood and modeled in a living system.

A nuanced understanding of these issues requires an exploration of the push and pull factors that affect the urban landscape, the paradoxes inherent in city development, and a careful assessment of various urban crime determinants. Shillong Urban is steadily fueled by stream of migrants (rural-urban) from all walks of life seeking economic opportunities, education and better living standards, (pull factors) but yet this is rarely an easy ticket to prosperity which eventually triggers vulnerabilities. The push factors such as urban poverty, unemployment, educational limitations, social and family instabilities can be such drivers for any human misconduct.

Now diving more into the facets of an urban living landscape (social context) and concerning with existing or migrated unit of families comprising youths and adults, does it ever occur to us whether these individuals may be exposed to "pushes" (Socio-economic pressures, frustrations, unemployment, family instability, educational gaps, lack of counselling, trauma, low self-esteem) and the "pulls" which can be the temptations, peer pressure, illegal opportunities, social organizations, substance abuse, murder intentions, thefts; burglaries etc? These variables can result in juvenile and eventually adult delinquencies.

On the other hand we cannot deny that interventions (inputs) have been taken, policies rolled out, however incorporating effective "Feedback Mechanism" as add-ons may be considered to check that

such interventions oscillates the correct controlled output and not the incorrect output. For that matter the aforementioned "pushes" and "pulls" are controllable if all the intricacies of a system and the risks are well understood and all interconnected causes are analysed and correctly modelled and simulated to produce a stable and resilient system.

At this juncture we must have gathered a bit of understanding how evolving crimes in the urban landscape works as a system. Can crimes be controlled, prevented or reduced? The answer will rest within the systems (governance and society) we designed. What goes in the mind of an individual cannot be ascertained but the factors that may contribute to such misconduct can be assessed, addressed, and corrected if the interventions are effectively reached. Finally, we touched upon how we contain such aspects. Let us have a brief peek into containment theory developed by Walter Reckless. This social control theory in criminology explains why people refrain from engaging in criminal or delinquent acts even when exposed to "Pushes" and "Pulls." So, we have the "inner containment" (self-control, moral values, tolerance, positive self-concept, goal orientation, commitment) and "the outer containment" which is the external social structures (family support, belongingness, moral reinforcement, community support and cohesion). These two are imperative for us to insulate individuals from social misconduct. We already have well connected age-old grassroots systems of governance, perhaps there should be a paradigm shift in approaches where we imbibe social governance as well and ponder on "anti-social, risk reduction strategies". Incidents will evolve but incidents can be dampened, prevented and reduced by shifting from post crime handling activities to pre-crime reduction intervention activities.

How can we achieve this? The truth and hope yet again lies in the kind of system we designed considering all the "Pushes and Pulls." This will need a multi-layered approach, multi-criteria data driven-decisions through "bottom to top" strategy. We live in a fast paced and tech savvy world, where our eyes are glued to the screens and communication is only through the screen so don't be surprised or angry if the younger generations out of frustrations (Push Factors) says, "You don't have time for me." It's none of their fault. This is something we need to assess as families. We hardly communicate and listen. His Holiness the Dalai Lama quotes, "But if you listen, you may learn something new." Aren't we supposed to listen to the youth? As concerned communities it is high time that we safeguard and try to communicate with the marginalised/un-marginalised youths through counselling through social and moral reinforcement, community and religious community support activities.

Now touching on another point, community participation is commendable to fight against rising urban crimes, and it is the need of the hour. It will be really great if locality appraisal is conducted to get the nuance of impending vulnerabilities. Perhaps this can be part of a risk and vulnerabilities assessment which can help in Predictive Policing, Crime Risk Reduction, data driven and technology interventions. For a crime to be committed, factors such as time and location are intertwined so we have the time-spatial dimensions, and in this technological era we need to explore areas of predictive analysis in conjunction with the attributes of "Pushes and Pulls" to deduce and derive possible areas of crimes. We are not devoid of best practices done globally such as the CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Designs) and many more. All of us are part of the system. All we need is to collectively participate, explore, contribute and be a part of that "Feedback Mechanism" and loop till we stabilize the system we envisage.

(The writer is a Geo-spatial expert and Citizen Science Practitioner)

Letters to the Editor

"Sep ai i Por" — Waste of time

Editor,
The song "Sep ai i Por" by popular Jaintia singer U Ram Suchiang begins straight away with the pain of a young graduate's reality. In villages across the Jaintia Hills, it has struck a deep chord with youth who see their own struggles reflected in its lyrics. Sung in Pnar, the song captures the frustration of educated youth who, despite years of study and family sacrifice, return home with degrees but no jobs. The singer begins by recalling the long hours the singer spent studying while his parents with limited means sold livestock, borrowed money, and cut back on their own needs to support his education. He remembers their words, spoken like blessings "Yow soh wah thiang daw yoh kheit phi ki" ("The fruit of success will be yours to pluck.") They encouraged him with lines like, "Suffer now

in your youth so you can live comfortably later. Your hard work will bring success."

But now, back home with certificates in hand, he finds no opportunities. Instead of pride, he feels ashamed to be educated yet unemployed, unable to repay his parents' sacrifices or support himself.

The song then turns blunt and honest. "I read books till my eyes dried, but the office doors stay locked unless your pocket speaks."

These lines point directly to the widespread belief that government jobs, often seen as the only stable career path, are increasingly out of reach for those without money or connections. For many young people in Meghalaya, this is not just discouraging, it feels like a broken promise.

Yet the song does not end in despair. Midway through, the tone digresses. The singer starts to stop waiting and begin working for himself. He chooses to work whether daily waging, farming,

selling, driving, or crafting not out of desperation, but as an act of dignity. The singer further lamented that, "Better to sweat under my own sun than beg at a gate that only opens for gold."

This message of self-reliance is gaining real traction. As graduate unemployment remains a national crisis, the Jaintia song "Sep-ai i Por" speaks to a reality faced by thousands of young Indians not just in Meghalaya, but across the country who are learning that a degree alone no longer guarantees a future.

The song ends with a simple, powerful line. "If you cannot get a job, self-employment is the only way out of misery." For many young Pnar today, those words are not just lyrics, they are a lifeline.

A word of deep appreciation is due to U Ram Suchiang not only for his soulful voice but for giving courage to a generation's unspoken grief through this

song. Equally, the lyricist deserves praise for weaving truth into melody with honesty, grace, and moral clarity. Their art does more than echo pain. It lights a path forward. To our policymakers and public institutions, this song is a gentle yet urgent reminder when systems meant to uplift begin to exclude, they betray the very promise of progress. May "Sep-ai i Por" inspire not just empathy, but action so that no parent's sacrifice goes unrewarded, and no young dreamer is forced to choose between dignity and despair.

And to those in power who have always had doors opened for them while others knock and knock until their hands are sore, may this song be a gentle mirror; not to blame, but to remind that true leadership is not about how comfortable your chair is, but how many people you help rise alongside you.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah
Via email

The intrinsic human instinct is to love

Editor,
People have believed in some truly strange things over time — from flat-earth theories and alien creators to cosmic telepaths and spaghetti-shaped gods. Some modern groups await UFOs to bring salvation; others think the world is an elaborate computer simulation. Step back, and these ideas sound eccentric, even comical — yet each one springs from the same human impulse to explain the unexplainable.

Belief systems, whether scientific, spiritual, or wildly speculative, are ultimately stories we tell ourselves to make sense of existence. What one person swears is true may seem absurd to another. Every generation builds its own version of reality, mistaking conviction for evidence and comfort for clarity. And in that mix of

wonder and delusion, humanity keeps revealing the same thing: our minds are endlessly inventive in filling the gaps where certainty ends.

Animals survive reality; humans interpret it. We invent stories so we can stomach chaos. We are storytelling apes, scribbling significance on the walls of emptiness. Across these wildly diverse belief systems, one common thread stands out: humans' endless capacity to create meaning — even from the absurd. Deep down, every belief, however strange, is just another way of saying: we humans are actually all the same, inherently peaceful trying to love each other.

Yours etc.,
Shekhar Singh,
Via email

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

"Not all who wander are lost."

— J.R.R. Tolkien

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Education Not a Political Football

THE Voice of People Party (VPP) spokesperson, pleads for the continuance of the Deficit System of Grant-In Aid to schools, arguing that the arrangement as a private-public partnership model has worked over the decades. Myrboh laments that government run institutions are known to be laggards as there is no system for holding teachers accountable no matter how poor the teaching-learning outcomes. In fact, the heart of the matter as far as educational outcomes in Meghalaya is concerned is that there are no measurable yardsticks for teacher efficiency and delivery. Once a teacher is appointed, he/she hangs on for close to 25-30 years and only the students know how much they hate a particular subject because the teacher lacks specific communicate skills. This aspect has never been addressed because the era of strict school inspections has all but vanished.

When too many students fail in a particular subject should the school/college authorities not do some soul-searching to find out the root causes? How can one teacher hang on for decades without producing results simply because a system has not been developed to measure teacher efficiency and the harm caused by permanency of tenure? While the case of urban schools could be somewhat different, that of rural Meghalaya is in a pathetic state. In some universities today, student feedback is considered integral to repairing whatever deficiencies there are in teaching-learning outcomes. But what about schools, especially primary schools? When parents are not the main stakeholders in education and are diffident about expressing what their children feel about a particular teacher for fear of being victimised, the system is bound to fail.

Teacher feedback from students is a norm in the west. Students give their feedback which can be both negative and positive. This helps the teacher improve his/her teaching methods and even try out new methods which could be improving communication skills which is one of the most important skills that a teacher needs to have. When students give positive feedback the teacher is enthused to do better and improve his/her teaching skills. In the case of younger students, their parents actually need to engage with teachers frequently. Parents who believe that dropping the kids to school and picking them up after school hours is their only duty have already failed their parenting test. Parents need to take interest in their children's studies and even have conversations about how their day at school has been. It is only then that the child might open up and say things that could inform the parents that they need to engage with the teacher about their child. Our education system is faulty in that every child is treated like an automaton who is given the same teaching when what is needed for some children is a different approach. It is here that most parents end up sending their kids for private tuition where there are fewer students and the child gets special attention. The education system in Meghalaya and the country itself needs rigorous repair, nay a complete overhaul, but that requires courage to face facts. Unfortunately, governments choose to live in denial.

Is Meghalaya football ready to take the next step?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Meghalaya is fast becoming an important venue for international and national football, which is a great boost for the game in the state. The game has always been the most popular choice for many in the state, but despite the enthusiasm about it, the state has not featured prominently in the national team setup, whether it is the men's or women's team. In the last few years, we have had a lot of players from the state playing on the junior team, with Halen Nongdu captaining the national team to victory in the SAFF U-20 Championship in 2022. But it has been quite some time since there has been a player from the state playing for the senior national team. The last player to do so was Eugeneson Lyngdoh, and the only player who seems to be knocking on the door of the national team is Redeem Tlang, who finally found his feet for North East United FC (NEUFC). But with high competition for limited places, he will need to keep performing before he is called up for the national setup.

Recently, the Indian national women's team arrived in Shillong to play two international matches, with the stadium hosting an additional one between the other teams, viz., Iran and Nepal. Recently, the men's team had played against the Maldives and Sri Lanka in the same stadium. But it was unfortunate that there were no players from Meghalaya in those matches. And there will be none on the women's team as well. There are two players right now who are playing for the national U-17 women's team, viz., Alisha Lyngdoh and Bonifilia Shul-lai, and they have put in some decent performances on the field. However, the transition to the senior team is big, and many outstanding players from the youth setup don't make the jump as expected. A lot has to do with luck but also mental strength. So, we hope that both Alisha and Bonifilia can one day play for the national team and become regulars.

So, it would appear that the government has actually done a lot to improve the game in the state. Recently, they announced the signing of a three-year Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)

with NEUFC aimed at boosting football development and promoting Shillong as the 'Football Capital' of India. Under the MoU, the parties, the Meghalaya Government and NEUFC, will collaborate on football camps, coach education programmes, fan parks, and youth-focused awareness initiatives aimed at nurturing grassroots talent and enhancing fan engagement. "This long-term partnership will help Meghalayan youths unlock new opportunities in football, promote tourism, and generate jobs in the state," Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said. Although I don't have access to the complete details of the MoU, the outcomes reported are very vague. There is talk about "boosting football development," "nurturing grassroots talent," "enhancing fan engagement," etc. Such language makes it impossible to measure tangible achievements. Even Shillong becoming the 'Football Capital' of India might sound good from the perspective of tourism, which actually is a component of the deal, but it doesn't really bring about any significant change for football in the state.

Meghalaya is already a football-crazy state. In recent years, the MSL (Meghalaya State League) has created a platform for clubs from across the state to compete for the title. The first edition was won by Niam Wasa United from West Jaintia Hills, which was a very positive start for the tournament. Shillong Premier League (SPL) sides have won the last three editions, but in at least one of them, the other finalist was a team from West Khasi Hills, Khliehmawlieh YC. This was a good sign of the game getting stronger in places beyond East Khasi Hills and the state capital. In this year's SPL, we have a few Garo players playing for different teams, demonstrating that the game is improving beyond the Khasi region. Not long ago, there was a Meghalaya Baby League (for 4 to 13-year-olds), and now there's the SSA Women's Football League, which gives a platform to female players who want to take their game to the next level. One disappointment has been the

discontinuation of the U-19 SPL, which in recent times saw the emergence of players like Chesterpaul Lyngdoh and Shano Tariang. I feel the competition should make a comeback. There are already quite a few academies, and in recent times some, like Lab Bet FC, have done well for themselves.

With all this going on, I am not really sure how much more visibility it will bring to the game when the game is already quite popular in the state. Grassroots initiatives are already underway, and the Meghalaya Football Association (MFA) has been working really hard, and the results are already apparent. Even before this new agreement, Conrad Sangma had announced last year that NEUFC is going to establish a residential football academy in the state's capital city of Shillong. Have they established that? How many players from the state are in their youth set-up already? How many of them are on the verge of becoming part of the senior team? This new agreement will cost the state exchequer Rs 24 crore over the three-year period. The Department of Tourism will contribute Rs 5 crore annually to the project, while the Directorate of Sports & Youth Affairs will allocate Rs 2 crore, Rs 3 crore, and Rs 4 crore each year over the period. But if no players from the state become part of the senior team, and after three years NEUFC leaves the state, Rs 24 crore poorer, how is that benefiting football in the state? We need more players like Redeem Tlang on the team who will play regularly and hopefully one day play for the national team. Otherwise, it's money down the drain, and I'm not really sure who benefits from it.

There will be an argument made that a place in the senior team, especially for a team like NEUFC, which has achieved outstanding success in recent years, should be based on merit. Players should fight for a spot with everyone and then get to stake a claim. I have watched enough football over the years to understand that there is no dearth of talent anywhere in the world.

What players need is the opportunity to play regularly at a higher level. Consider the Eredivisie or the Bundesliga, where young players regularly play for top clubs; then contrast this with the English Premier League, where there has always been a complaint that young English players are not developing because of the influx of talent from other places who have developed by playing regularly. The best example right now is Florian Wirtz, who is just 22 years old but had already played 140 games for Bayer Leverkusen before making the switch to Liverpool for over 100 million pounds. How many English players have played a similar amount of games at the top level for their respective clubs at such a young age?

When Germany won the World Cup, two teams from the Bundesliga, Bayern Munich and Borussia Dortmund, were in the Champions League final with several German players in their lineup. No wonder the German national team is declining since Bayern Munich started dominating the Bundesliga, turning it into a 'Mickey Mouse League'. So, it's not that players from Meghalaya are not ready to play on the big stage; they just need regular game time at a higher level.

Three years down the line, with 24 crores spent, and if no players from the state are getting regular game time in the ISL, this agreement would have been a disaster. It doesn't matter if we have World Cup matches in Shillong. If there are no local players, it's not a game I am going to be thrilled to watch. In fact, it will be a humiliation if that happens. If there is no guarantee of opportunities for players from the state, it would be better to give the 24 crores and various incentives to a Shillong team so they can win the I-League and enter the ISL. Why not give the money to Shillong Lajong, Mawlai, Rangdajied or Langsning, who will make sure that local players will always get the opportunity to prove themselves? That will be a better option.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

India's Silent Crisis: The Economic and Human Toll of Neglected Mental Health

By Ajit Ranade & Sushil Walunj

Every morning, lakhs of IT workers put on their work faces—logging into video calls, answering emails, or rushing through commutes. Outwardly, everything looks fine: smiles, small talk, productivity dashboards. But behind those screens and smiles, an invisible struggle brews. Anxiety, fatigue, sleeplessness, and a creeping sense of helplessness. These are the signs of a silent epidemic that rarely gets the attention it deserves.

This is India's "hidden crisis", a public-health challenge quietly eroding our productivity, creativity, and social fabric, and the World Mental Health Day (October 10) is an urgent reminder of this crisis.

According to the World Health Organization, neglecting mental health could cost India over \$1 trillion in lost economic output over a decade. That figure isn't just about hospitals or medication; it represents absenteeism, reduced innovation, and the quiet burnout that drains motivation from classrooms, startups, and boardrooms alike.

When a young software engineer in Pune jumps from his office terrace, or a bank executive ends his life due to unbearable stress, it's not just a personal tragedy. It is also an institutional failure. These are symptoms of a deeper malaise: the neglect of mental wellbeing as a core economic and public health issue, not just a private one.

India's suicide rate was 9.9 per lakh in 2017 and rose to 12.4 in 2022, according to the NCRB. Student suicides alone have jumped 65 percent in a decade. Behind those numbers are academic pressure, job anxiety, and social isolation.

A multi-city study in 2024 found that seven out of ten college students report moderate-to-severe anxiety, and six out of ten show symptoms of depression. Yet most never seek help, either because they can't afford it or because of the stigma that still shadows mental illness. As noted by scholar Istikhhar Ali and others, mental distress is often viewed as a moral weakness or spiritual failure, not as a legitimate health condition. The advice given in families is just be strong, or pray to the Almighty. This silence and shame cuts across religion and castes, and is aided by patriarchy. A young woman facing postpartum depression is told to chant; a boy suffering from anxiety is told to "man up." Hence people suffer in silence, delaying treatment until it's too late. Families hide illnesses out of shame. Mental health is deeply tied to the economy's performance. A depressed worker is less productive; a burnt-out entrepreneur invests less creatively; a stressed student performs poorly and joins the workforce already demotivated. Research shows that every Rs 1 invested in mental-health care and counselling yields up to Rs 4 in productivity gains.

Conversely, neglect compounds inequality. Rural Indians, who already face limited access to hospitals, are the worst affected. India has only 0.75 psychiatrists per 100,000 people, far below the WHO's benchmark of 3. Over 63 percent of Indians live in rural areas, but most mental-health professionals work in metros. There is an admirable tele-counselling initiative, but poor digital connectivity and lack of trained professionals have limited its reach. Further, the Mental Healthcare Act (2017) was hailed as a landmark law, reframing mental health as a right, and not a privilege. It guaranteed access, dignity, and insurance coverage. Yet eight years later, the reality is disappointing. India's budgetary spend on mental health is woefully short of global benchmarks. Many insurers still cap mental-health claims below physical-health ones—despite legal mandates. Mental Health Review Boards are absent or inactive in many States. Community-health workers are overwhelmed and rarely trained in mental-health first aid. There is also a rural urban divide. Farmers groping with debt, women trapped in abusive households and adolescents with no outlets for expression. India's youth i.e. its demographic dividend is under immense emotional strain.

The pandemic years magnified loneliness, uncertainty, and screen addiction. College students chase impossible expectations. Youth unemployment among college graduates is more than 30 percent. Many graduates spend years preparing for government exams, their self-worth eroding with each failed attempt. The rise in educated-youth unemployment and the cultural obsession with "success" have together created a fragile generation, outwardly confident but inwardly anxious. A nation aspiring to be the next global growth engine cannot afford to have a mentally exhausted workforce.

Across corporate India many large firms now run mindfulness sessions and provide Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs). However true workplace wellness needs psychological safety, not token yoga classes. Employees must feel free to admit stress without fear of being judged. Paradoxically, we talk more about mental health today than ever before. Hashtags, wellness influencers, and celebrity confessions abound. Yet awareness hasn't translated into accessibility. Also affordability prevents most people from accessing private therapy. Government hospitals are overcrowded; counsellors in schools are few. In Kerala—considered India's health model—14 percent of adults experience mental-health disorders at some point, nearly double the national average. If that's the best-performing State, imagine the rest.

The road ahead needs several actionable items. There are also lessons from global best practices from countries such as Brazil which has a family cash transfer scheme. This scheme improved nutrition and also reduced the mortality of psychiatric patients. In Kenya the transfers improved mental wellbeing. In India, firstly the mental health component should be raised to at least 5 percent of the total public health budget. This includes counselling services. Secondly, frontline community workers should be trained for basic psychosocial support and suicide-prevention. Even the Kota policy has a suicide prevention cell. Thirdly, mandate insurance companies to cover mental illness. Fourthly, like some other countries, integrate mental health into nutrition and economic security welfare schemes. Fifth, while investing in tele-counselling and AI helps, it cannot replace human empathy. Sixth, there must be an active effort to de-stigmatise mental illness, especially through school curricula. The Supreme Court has recently issued guidelines mandating mental-health policies and counsellors in all educational institutions. These should be implemented. Our collective economic wellbeing is inseparable from mental health. India must build an unbreakable mental-health shield. That shield is made up of empathy, community, and timely intervention. It begins in schools that treat counselling as essential as mathematics, in offices that normalise mental-health leave, in families that listen without judgment.

Ignoring mental health isn't just cruel, it's costly. The loss of creativity, productivity, and hope can cripple a society faster than any fiscal deficit. As a nation investing in digital infrastructure and green energy, we must also invest in the mental energy of our people. Each suicide prevented, each therapy session made affordable, each stigma dismantled, is an act of nation-building.

India's future, growth depends not only on highways and semiconductors but on healthy, motivated, resilient citizens. The crisis is silent only because we choose not to hear it. It's time we listened—to our children, colleagues, farmers, and friends.

Building an economy that values mental wellbeing is not a luxury; it's an investment in the country's most precious resource—its people's minds. We need to harvest a mental-health dividend, with compassion, access, and awareness.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist and Sushil Walunj is a PhD Scholar.) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Pothole Promises

Editor,

The Meghalaya government loves to speak of a tourism boom with glossy ads, glowing promises, and endless talk of turning the state into a traveller's paradise. Perhaps, before selling the dream, someone should take the road to Sohra, especially near Mawpynthih village area. It is no longer a road, it is a collection of potholes auditioning for a lunar landscape. Cars sway like a game of tetris, tyres groan, and passengers hold their breath as if that alone might keep the vehicle intact.

And if that is not enough of an adventure, the road to Sohbar waits patiently, another rough patch that could humble even the best suspension systems especially if it rains. The temporary fixes with mud and stones washes away with the first rainfall just like coal. Chalta hai bro, haina? If we don't complain then chalta hai, if we complain then we will be targeted and singled out.

We mango people watch all this with weary disappointment, the grand speeches, the ribbon cuttings, the selfies beside slogans. We do not ask for much, only roads that do not resemble obstacle courses.

Someday, perhaps, some of these words will traverse the high white walls and

reach the offices of decision makers. We still hope for basic infrastructure, and that someday our roads will finally match the beauty they lead to. Are you listening?

Your's etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

Integrating entrepreneurship training with academics

Editor,

Apropos of the news "CM launches ProBites, highlights state's economic vision, youth entrepreneurship," (ST 18, October 2025) is quite ground breaking event. The Chief Minister launched a student-led brand offering healthy, probiotic based snacks, during the 'Future Founders' Felicitation and ProBites Pilot Launch. The product developed under the St. Anthony's College for Entrepreneurship, Innovation and Incubation which aims to promote wellness and integrate scientific research with entrepreneurship is timely. SACCEI has to be commended for this great work. The Chief Minister correctly emphasised the importance of embedding entrepreneurship within educational institutions to cultivate a culture of creativity and self-reliance. Embedding entrepreneurship within educational institutions isn't

just a curricular upgrade—it's a strategic shift in how we prepare future citizens to navigate uncertainty, build resilience, and co-create value.

Why it's both 'important' and 'useful' is because such activity brings about cognitive and behavioural shifts where students learn to identify gaps, prototype solutions and iterate skills essential for dynamic economies and civic innovation. Entrepreneurship education encourages experimentation, failure as feedback and adaptive thinking. Learners begin to see themselves as changemakers, not just job seekers.

The economic and institutional benefits of such an innovation and incubation stimulate local innovation ecosystems where Universities become hubs for startups, social enterprise and community-based ventures. Such activities reduce employment dependency as graduates are equipped to create jobs, not just apply for them which is especially vital in regions with youth unemployment. It also bridges academia-industry gaps as entrepreneurial programs often involve real world mentors, incubators and cross-sector collaboration. The societal and civic impact of such a program is that it promotes inclusive development because entrepreneurship can empower marginalised groups, especially when embedded with

social and ethical lenses. It strengthens civic sense and resilience as students learn to navigate ambiguity, build trust networks, and engage in participatory problem-solving.

The program also aligns with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and local governance. This entrepreneurial education can be tailored to address sustainability, health equity and symbolic capital restoration. It is heartening to learn from the statement of the Executive Director Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA) that PRIME has incubated around 300 startups and funded Rs 38 crore to entrepreneurs, in addition to Rs 146 crore sanctioned under Chief Minister-led initiatives. Equally important is the expansion of Self-Help Groups (SHG) from 5800 to 51,000, registering a growth rate of 111% per annum in 7 years. This group is very important for the economic productivity of women. Given that the economy is today, at \$6.6 billion and growing at 10% per annum and if the momentum of 10 percent growth not only continues but shoots up further it is certain that Meghalaya's economy which is presently the second fastest growing economy in the country after Tamil Nadu is capable of touching \$10 billion by 2028.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Inculcating the reading habit

Editor,

This refers to your report "Workshop Stresses Reading as Key to Social and Economic Empowerment" published on October 19, 2025. The initiative of the Directorate of Arts and Culture, Meghalaya, to organise a one-day workshop on "Habit of Reading as a Tool for Social Development and Economic Upliftment" is both timely and commendable.

In an age when young minds are more often drawn to glowing screens than to printed pages, this reminder of the quiet joy of reading feels refreshingly relevant. Reading not only informs but transforms—it refines thought, nurtures imagination, and builds character. Books and newspapers, in particular, as we know, serve as daily companions of growth, shaping students into aware, confident, and responsible citizens.

The habit of newspaper reading deserves special mention. For students, it is like attending an ever-evolving classroom—one that connects lessons from textbooks with the pulse of the real world. Regular newspaper reading sharpens awareness, strengthens language and vocabulary, and prepares students for competitive examinations and career challenges by keeping

them informed of national and global affairs. As someone once said, "Those who grow up reading the newspaper grow up ready for the world."

The points raised by Minister Sanbor Shullai, highlighting reading as a habit that broadens perspectives and sharpens intellect, were truly inspiring. Equally insightful was Prof. Shalini Lihitkar's observation that reading contributes to both social and economic growth—a truth that must be emphasized in our education system.

Libraries, too, should no longer be seen as quiet rooms lined with books, but as living classrooms of community learning—places where knowledge meets curiosity and generations meet understanding.

May this thoughtful initiative not remain a one-day event but grow into a continuous movement that reaches every school, college, and neighbourhood in our state. Encouraging both book and newspaper reading from an early age will not only enrich minds but also empower futures. For when a child learns to read meaningfully, a society learns to think wisely.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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

"Satisfaction lies in the effort, not in the attainment, full effort is full victory."

— Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times

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Vehicles, urban chaos

INDIA'S hi-tech city, Bengaluru, is also a metaphor for urban chaos. The city was once a peaceful abode for retired bureaucrats, with flower-bearing trees set along footpaths adding a special charm to its streets. The city grew by leaps and bounds in the past three decades on the back of the IT revolution that took the world by storm. Moving from one place to another in Bengaluru is now a huge ordeal because of the narrow roads and traffic snarls. The roads fail to cope with the heavy influx of vehicles. Today, everyone is blaming everyone else for the resultant chaos that marks the city. Business honchos are among the deeply distressed at the lack of proper urban planning and a failure on the part of successive governments to address the civic problems in a city inhabited by nearly 1.50 crore people. While Biocon chief Kiran Mazumdar Shaw was forthright in raising her concern over the city's crumbling infrastructure, it only led to a sharp retort from deputy chief minister DK Shivakumar. The senior leader trashed business leaders with an accusation that they were having a personal agenda to target the Congress government. It is a pity that those in government fail to fathom the people's unending struggle.

What growing cities like Bengaluru require is a mass rapid transit system like the Metro. The Namma Metro was launched in 2011 after long years of haggling and hesitation by successive state governments. After implementation of different phases, the metro system is yet to reach many parts of the sprawling city. Taking lines through the highly populated city is increasingly difficult now, though this could have been accomplished in the past with lesser effort and funds. Still, the Namma Metro is the second largest metro system, next only to that of Delhi — where too this has not been able to effectively reduce road traffic. Government policies that encourage the private vehicles market since the 1990s spelt chaos on roads in every city that mostly have old and narrow roads. Bigger cities are facing bigger problems. Bengaluru has a vehicle population of 1.25 crore; meaning one vehicle for almost every individual. Some 3000 vehicles are getting registered there every day. This could only worsen the present plight of the city as the infrastructural development for Bengaluru, or any city for that matter, never ever kept pace with the huge growth in population.

Governments sat back and blinked. However, the national highway development has been fast-paced after its good start by the Atal Behari Vajpayee government and this was continued by the UPA and NDA governments. Cities would have breathed easy had the metro rail systems been introduced in a more energetic manner. After the start of the Calcutta Metro system in the 1980s, there was a perceptible drag vis-à-vis its introduction in other cities. Delhi embraced it in the 1990s, while Mumbai initiated the project in 2014—three years after Bengaluru took to it. As of now, the total number of metro rail systems is just 18.

Our Ecological/Environmental Destiny

By Ubahunläng Dkhar Tmar

Social-Cultural Ecology: The environment, ecology and future(s) of our children(s) is not the recurring and active part of our personal and collective psyche, it pinches our nerves only if it directly affects our own children and our own kith and kin. We also fail to understand that the environment is not only the immediate natural surroundings, but it is the 'most crucial' life support system.

We exist and flourish because of this 'natural support system' (Deep Ecology). Wangari Maathai a Kenyan social, political and environmental activist and a 2004 Nobel laureate stressed on the need for eco-restoration and she alluded to and attributed this objective by also referring to the Biblical origin of mankind, where God first created the natural and environmental setting so that mankind can flourish, prosper and multiply for without it, life ceases to exist. This we know is not only a Biblical or theological underpinning but a scientific fact.

The irony is we participate collectively to flamboyantly celebrate Environment Day only once a year on the 5th of June. As a matter of fact, saving the environment is not about the environment per se but ourselves and the destiny and future of our children, because without 'nature's support system' we cease to exist.

Observing our natural and ecological settings we find that most of the lands/forests that belong to the community (ri raid, ri bamlang) which were meant to support the needs of the members of the community, (shnong, hima, raid, elaka) especially those from the economically weaker section are now under threat of usurpation. We have seen and read how these lands are being commercialized and sold to the highest bidders. The so-called tribal/native 'egalitarian principle' is totally dead.

The concept of community too (we feeling, sense of belonging) is at its death bed. Those who still think we have a community (sense of brotherhood, the 'we' feeling, well-knit, tightly-bound homogeneity of feelings and objectives), must be living in the past where hunting-gathering, agriculture is still a dominant activity. This sense of community cannot be revived under the present state of economy and trend of consumerism (conspicuous consumption) and competition. God forbid, but only when a natural disaster hits us to the bone, then, maybe this sense of belonging and dependency might revive or much worse, we are entering a dog-eat-dog war.

We identify and define (surreptitiously or explicitly) ourselves by which clan we belong to and which village (traï shnong/soh shnong), elaka, locality, political ideology, business interests, seng-bhalang, religious denominations. Community as we see now is more of a

collection of individuals who bind together for their own objectives (manifest and latent). People look at community from a beneficiary point of view (to gain something by being part of community) not from a constructive point of view (where community objectives must overwrite personal/familial objectives). We now live in a social-political world that favours individualism/groupism and adherence to competitive bargaining; In the area of trade and commerce, this means, "the buyer wants to pay as little as possible, while the seller wants to receive as much as possible." In a nutshell, this is the epitome of a 'dog eat dog world'.

Deep down under the skin, we are still mammals utilizing our primitive aspect of the brain with a 'culture' draped from above; for culture too is also a tool/stratagem. 'Being cultured' is now a rare phrase/phenomenon that cannot be attached wholeheartedly to person-hood, courtesy, or way of conduct. Culture (material & non-material) too is also a product of nature (natural world/surroundings) through the process of

tice of how we consume and dispose our resources (from water to garbage disposal). We have a narcissistic tendency that wants to look good in the eyes of the public; we love to ceremoniously celebrate environment day, water day etc., to project and fulfil our deprived psychological/emotional needs. The political dispensation only cares about cosmetics and populism. This reminds us of P.B. Shelley's poem 'Ozymandias of Egypt'. The irony is, as a State we love to imitate the Japanese, cherish and celebrate the annual ritual Cherry Blossom Festival but we totally lack the Japanese sense of community, civility, dedication, respect for nature, tradition and aesthetics values.

The neglect and abandonment of our rivers, streams, springs and catchment areas is now a frequent phenomenon, all in the name of development and livelihood issues. We are a society that glorifies our respect for nature and speak aloud with pride on the wisdom of our ancestors but yet we the present lot failed miserably. We are a society who consciously destroy our roots of existence for some

"Politics is now so deep, down and dirty, it seems that in our state there are many so-called 'development foundation stones' than our Monoliths that have been here in our landscape for hundreds of years of our cultural history."

socio-cultural evolution and revolution.

In comparison, looking at the animal world (esp., some group of mammals) who only have a society but do not have a culture, they fare better when it comes to shared bonding (inter and intra-species). A famous sociobiologist; E. O Wilson once pointed out that the main problem of humanity is that 'we have paleolithic emotions, medieval institutions and godlike technology'.

Give & Take toxic relationships or Trade-offs: In relation to how our society relates to the natural surrounding and their understanding on the value (intrinsic, potential etc.) of the ecology/environment; natural vegetation/forests, rivers, lakes, streams, landscape/topography etc. this can be viewed from a few examples (rivers, vegetation/forests, topography...) of how we deal with these aspects of nature as something to be exploited, utilised rampantly without any qualms or sense of responsibility on the ramifications and after effects.

In this context, we lack leadership to steer us and our society to be better guardians of our natural surroundings and the endowed natural heritage. With the exception of a very few, ecological and environmental issues are now only a political ploy, a pedestal for personal and party gains; it is no longer a quiet daily individual prac-

short-term greed and myopic objectives. Development and livelihood are sensitive and politically loaded words that are used cunningly to justify malpractices and claims of 'righteous' interventions and development justice. Politics is now so deep, down and dirty, it seems that in our state there are many so-called 'development foundation stones' than our Monoliths that have been here in our landscape for hundreds of years of our cultural history.

Coming back to the plight of rivers, hills and forests, wherever we go we see how nature has been ransacked and exploited. Nearly, every kilometre from Shillong we will spot the disappearance of nature, look at google earth/map and see the distribution of settlements, scar/denuded exposed landscape we will see how this landlocked State of ours is at the mercy of our own doings. This ransacking of our natural surroundings has been the factor of livelihood, pure greed, lack of implementation of environmental governance/ policy and development projects that ravage the landscape.

Livelihood is a serious issue in Meghalaya. Dig a little deeper and see how people are deprived of their basic needs and amenities. Even if these amenities are available, we will find most of the time they are not functional. We have also heard and read a survey (Assam Tribune July 20, 2025), that the average

income of households in Meghalaya is Rs 5000 per month. Just a casual visit to any village will inform us how people live. We can look at Poverty Index (Absolute and Multi-dimensional) to understand the state we are in; we are like any African Country under the King of Belgium. This environment of deprivation acts as a catalyst that pushes people to seek a livelihood even at the cost of harming the natural surroundings. It is not their fault; it is the fault of those in power. About 50 plus years of Statehood we are still in shambles fighting for daily bread and the increasing income disparity between a few and the majority.

This rat race of economic growth without ethics and concern of our natural surroundings and natural assets (Springs, Rivers, Forest...) is a dangerous trend. Who has this economic growth enriched and which section of our populace (rural and urban)? have been deprived? Has this economic growth percolated to those who are deprived and for general development? Are there cartels of development or economic hit-men to deepen someone's pockets or creating an environment of debt-ridden economy? These are questions that need to be dealt with. In a Democracy, investigative journalism, social auditing and transparency are the hallmark of true economic development and growth. I am also not totally against economic growth and development, but it should not be at the cost of Human Development. Education and Health which are a crucial aspect of a sustainable and vibrant economy.

As a society and a community, the relationship between us and nature has now been commodified. In the past, people go to fish and swim in the rivers and lakes, now in commercialized ponds/lakes/pools. We have created artificial environments; this has disconnected us from nature thereby the loss of respect for nature. I am not against private ventures to generate income and employment but we must also give equal respect to the protection and perseverance of hills, rivers, lakes and forests. We also require a nuanced and balanced approach to how we utilise these economic and life assets.

This boundary between our perception of nature and our real-life existence creates an unhealthy gap. This is a trend that our children will inherit from us and how they treat the natural surroundings. This behavioral change and attitude towards nature will cost us in the long run. Every advanced country that is at the top of the Human Development Index treats nature as part of their daily existence. Nature is not a park to be visited but a crucial part and parcel of our being and existence. We have to go back to nature and its hidden gems that heals both the soul, body and mind.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

A Real Diwali..!

In the evenings I love sitting under my peepul tree and watching the darkness weave itself through the leaves. There is something peaceful about that slow and graceful meeting of light and night, as if the day itself is taking a bow before leaving. The gentle rustling of the branches seems like applause for the sun that has completed its daily performance.

But in these last few days, that quiet darkness has been constantly interrupted by bursts of light. Sparklers hiss, rockets shoot upward, and the sky explodes in magnificent bursts of red, blue, and gold. For a moment, even the moon seems to watch in wonder. Then the lights fade, the echoes of the fireworks die away, and the night returns to reclaim its space.

That is the rhythm of Diwali; light battling darkness. But as I sit under my peepul tree, I find myself wondering whether our celebrations have stayed true to what the festival really means.

Diwali, after all, is not about the brief beauty of light that fades when the sky clears. It is about the triumph of good over evil, of right over wrong, of truth over deceit. It is not the kind of light that dazzles the eyes but the kind that clears the vision. As we decorate our balconies with strings of bulbs and our courtyards with rows of diyas, it is worth asking whether there are still corners within our hearts that remain unlit. The truth is that darkness does not live only in the night outside our windows. It lives quietly within us — in our fears, our prejudices, and our silences.

Light, in its truest sense, is truth. It reveals what lies hidden, it exposes what we prefer not to see. It can be harsh, uncomfortable, even painful. Yet without it, we stumble. It is only when light shines on corruption; or on injustice, or on cruelty that it fulfils its purpose.

The darkness that we must conquer today is not made of shadows, but of silence. It is that silence when we see wrong and do not speak, when we know the truth but stay quiet to avoid trouble, when we scroll past suffering because it disturbs our peace. That is the darkness which grows each time we look away.

Every small lamp we light this Diwali should remind us that light has meaning only when it pushes back against darkness. The lamps on our windowsills are lovely, but they must also illuminate our minds. The fireworks above my peepul tree fill the sky for a few moments, but true light is not about spectacle or sound. It is about persistence, a steady flame that burns even when no one is watching.

When a journalist risks her job to tell the truth,

when a citizen refuses to pay a bribe, when a child stands up for a friend being bullied, these too are moments of Diwali. They are not celebrated with noise or colour, but with courage. Each of these small acts of light weakens the power of darkness in our world.

The danger, however, is that once the festival ends, we often pack away our lights and also our resolve. We return to the routine of dimmed awareness and polite silence. The lamps flicker out, and so does our determination to keep the world bright.

It is in those quiet days after Diwali that the real test begins; whether the glow continues to burn within us or whether we allow the shadows to return.

I think of my grandchildren often during this time. Whenever there is a power cut, they rush to find their small torches. They hold them up, laughing and shouting, "Look, Grandpa, we can make the dark run away!" Their laughter fills the room with a joy no electricity could ever bring. And I smile, because perhaps that is what God wants from us too, not grand gestures of light that last an evening, but small, constant flames that keep darkness running away every single day.

If each of us held even one such torch, the torch of honesty, of fairness, of compassion, we could light up this nation in a way no fireworks ever could. Imagine a Diwali where every act of kindness becomes a spark, every word of truth becomes a lamp, and every heart that forgives becomes a beacon. So tonight, as you light your diya, and watch its glow, whisper a prayer. Ask that the light you see outside finds its way inside your heart. Let it stay after the crackers have quieted, after the sweets are eaten, and after the last guest has gone home. Let the light remind you that you have the power to make darkness flee, not just from your room, but from the world around you. Because the real Diwali is not about celebration. It is about conviction. It is about the decision to keep that light burning, through injustice, through fear, through indifference — until there is no corner left where darkness can hide.

And when that happens, when the glow from our diyas becomes the glow from our lives, we will not need fireworks to mark the festival. Our actions will light up the world far brighter than any sparkler ever could.

That is when Diwali will truly live up to its name — the festival of lights, not for a night, but for all time...

You can request for Bob's Banter by Robert Clements as a daily column on your whatsapp by sending him your name and phone number on bobsbanter@gmail.com.

Letters to the Editor

Correction of factual inconsistencies

Editor, I would like to submit a rejoinder to my article titled "Is Meghalaya football ready to take the next step?" (ST Oct 21, 2025). I realized that there were a few factual errors in the piece that I would like to correct for the benefit of readers.

The last player to be selected for the Indian national team was not Eugeneson Lyngdoh, but Samuel James Lyngdoh Kynshi.

The men's team played against the Maldives and Bangladesh, not the Maldives and Sri Lanka.

The correct name of the academy mentioned in my article is Lah Bet FC, not Lab Bet FC.

Yours etc.,
Bhogtoram Mawroh,
Via email

Medical clinics must stop exploiting poor patients

Editor, Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to voice a public grievance concerning the unethical exploitation of poor patients by some private medical practitioners. Recently, my neighbour from a lower middle-class family went to a dental clinic near Last Stop, Laban, Shillong, for a simple tooth extraction. At the reception, he was asked to pay Rs 500 upfront and fill out a form, which is standard practice. However, what followed was deeply distur-

ing. The entire procedure to extract a lateral incisor, including a local anesthetic injection, was completed in under 15 minutes. Since a root canal wasn't feasible in his case, extraction was the only option. To his shock, he was then asked to pay an additional Rs2,500, bringing the total to Rs3,000 for a single-tooth extraction. He was left distressed, having paid so much money, and he told me everything in detail. I also found it to be nothing short of daylight robbery.

Out of frustration, we checked with a few other dental clinics in town. Most charge between Rs700 and Rs1000 for similar procedures. It is only a handful of unscrupulous establishments that seem intent on fleecing unsuspecting patients, especially the poor and uneducated.

If Rs3,000 is demanded for a basic extraction, one

shudders to imagine the cost of more complex treatments like root canals, dentures, or crowns. Such practices not only violate ethical standards but also undermine the very spirit of medical service. Many young people in our town are without jobs, so this kind of medical exploitation only adds to their distress.

I sincerely appeal to the concerned authorities such as the District Administration, Health Department, and Social Welfare Department, to take immediate and decisive action against not just the dental clinics but also the mushrooming general nursing homes and hospitals that adopt various means to extort money from innocent, poor citizens. Random inspections and transparent pricing norms must be enforced to protect vulnerable citizens from such commercialized exploitation. I am writing this

column to raise awareness in the public interest.

Yours etc.,
V. Sharma
Via email

Are teachers scapegoats of a failed system?

Editor, This refers to your thought-provoking editorial "Education Not a Political Football" (Oct 21, 2025). It raises a painful but an inevitable question — why should teachers who consistently fail to produce learning outcomes continue in service? The question is valid, yet it needs to be answered with both honesty and heart.

Every teacher steps into a classroom with hope — not for wealth or power, but to shape young minds. However, the system often fails

the teacher long before the teacher fails the students. In overcrowded classrooms, without proper teaching aids or emotional support, even the most devoted educator can lose energy and inspiration. UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (2021) reminds us that teacher performance improves dramatically when schools provide good infrastructure, smaller classes, and timely training. A teacher's will to teach is strengthened by the system's will to support.

At the same time, we cannot ignore the need for strict standards. Recruitment must be based not just on certificates but on passion and aptitude. A person without love for children, patience for learning, or vision for growth has no place in a classroom. Regular monitoring, mentoring, and transparent appraisal must become part of the culture — not as

instruments of fear, but as mirrors for improvement. Accountability, if humane and fair, can renew the dignity of teaching.

But education is a shared journey. Parents, communities, and the government all walk alongside the teacher. A 2021 study on Teacher Accountability and Work Identities in Indian Schools found that many teachers fail not because they don't care, but because they feel unseen, unheard, and unsupported. Another study on Community-Based Accountability in Rural India (Galab et al., 2013) showed that when parents and local bodies participate actively, children's learning improves remarkably.

Teachers should not become the easy scapegoats for systemic failure. The real reform lies in ensuring adequate teaching staff, essential resources, and strong

infrastructure at the foundation level — the stage where learning habits and curiosity are first built. If the foundation is strong, we will not have to worry much about the later part of schooling; both teachers and students will grow on firmer ground.

Real reform will begin when we stop blaming and start belonging — when every parent, policymaker, and teacher feels equally responsible for every child's dream. Let accountability be not a whip, but a wake-up call; not a threat, but a shared promise to make our schools places of light, not despair.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Via email

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"The toughest thing about success is that you've got to keep on being a success."
—Irving Berlin

The Shillong Times

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Diwali: Noise versus Light

THERE was a time when Diwali was more light than sound. Irrespective of community, all children played with the phuljhari and pataka that made some noise but not with the frightening decibels that are heard these days. A day or two before Diwali the bombs begin to burst. For many perhaps there's a psychological angle to the love for loud noise that can even shake up the foundations of a house. Was the bursting of crackers a part of Hindu religion? Gunpowder used for crackers and bombs were first discovered in China and were brought to India during the Moghul period. So how is burning crackers a Hindu tradition? Burning diyas is more in sync with the theme of Diwali – the festival of lights. It is uncanny that people in this country break the law with impunity and then blame the law enforcers for not implementing the law. In Meghalaya there is a time beyond which fire crackers cannot be burnt but no one bothers to obey. Fire crackers are burnt until the wee hours of morning, rudely awakening those in slumber. People don't even respect the need for silence around hospitals and don't care that dogs and other creatures are petrified by the noise of crackers, especially those with loud booming sounds that are an assault on the ear drums.

Psychologists have shown four main themes relating to the enjoyment of loud sound: They include arousal/excitement, facilitation of socialisation, masking of both external sound and unwanted thoughts, and an emphasis and enhancement of personal identity. Some studies also found that sound levels appeared to increase gradually over the course of the evening until they plateaued at very high decibels as the night progresses. Other studies on why some individuals itch to make loud noises is that it is a public announcement of personal joy by miserable attention seekers. It's almost like the attention seeker wishes to announce his/her existence through loud noise. Others are just self-centred and care only about their own fun and couldn't care less how it affects the neighbours, particularly the elderly and the sick. For some insecure people, noise is an expression of machismo. They think that producing loud sound is an act of gallantry when all that the noise is hiding is pomposity. Crackers announce India's cricket win as if announcement on radio or television is not enough.

These days it has become the norm for the Hindutva brigade to defend to their death the right to burst crackers. These are political fanatics making a political statement that India is their country and they have every right to do what they want even if the air quality deteriorates to its most toxic point as it has in Delhi. Religious fanatics have grown in numbers in this country and secularism is being eroded. But who cares when religion has become a powerful political tool? The tragedy in India today is that even the judiciary bows to the will of the majority.

How do we make our mother tongues Lit and interesting?

By Dominick Dauni Roising Rymbai

Gen Z have a vocabulary of their own and 'Lit' means something cool, awesome or exciting. This write-up is inspired by the article Speak Your Roots: A Digital Hearth for Khasi Language Preservation by Daiarisa Rumong (ST October 8, 2025). A disclaimer: This writer claims no educational qualification in Languages or Linguistics or History.

Firstly, truckloads of respect and gratitude to Daiarisa for her effort to bring 'alive and kicking' and also make cool and interesting, our mother tongues through the Instagram page and website, Speak Your Roots. Truly, tradition meets modernity with online/digital conversations in an ancient language. Language creates personal connections. Had they been still alive, Tagore and Twain would have had an interesting purpose to hang out and talk on this twin of East and West; and the imperialists Rudyard Kipling and Winston Churchill, with their thick books, big boots and bigger guns, either being a *kabab mein haddi* (a bone ruining a wonderful solid-meat eating experience), would be slyly waiting in a corner to pounce on them. A rough calculation suggests there is a probability close to one that the Jaintia cousin of Daiarisa is named Rejoice and fondly addressed as *Kongmai* or *Kongdiah* Joy.

No one can deny the importance of English as a language. Thanks to "the sun never sets in the British Empire" and Macaulay's Minute of 1835, English (and Hindi) acts as a bridge language, a *lingua franca*, in our "common cultural threads," in Sovereign Socialist Secular Democratic Republic of India (or *Bharat ki Swatantrata*). Looking back at the challenges facing the new nation-state as of November 26, 1949 and/or January 26, 1950, perhaps Hindustani, the common ancestor to present-day Hindi and Urdu, in both Devanagari and Persian scripts, would have been a good option as a co-official language. Why? With its grammar of speech influenced by Indo-Aryan, Persian and Mughal, Dravidian school of languages (or Deccani) and India's indigenous languages, making it relatable and understandable to the citizens of our united but diverse nation-state. Of course, then, Pandit Nehru and Dr. Rajendra Prasad were the big towering figures. Sadly, the third member of the trinity (and system of check

and balances) and the official unifier of India, Sardar Patel was in declining health then. He died of a massive second heart attack on December 15, 1950. Well, let bygones be bygones!

In Meghalaya, English and Shillong-style *bara-bazaar* Hindi (like the neighbouring Haflong Hindi) act as a bridge between the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo people and other smaller communities; also between the varied ethnicities that make up Shillong city.

Today, especially with the hegemony of Pax Americana (after the Second World War), English's importance rests in it being the language of Business, Economics and Science and Technology. One just has to go through the Forbes list of billionaires and automatically understand its importance.

The use of the Khasi word *rynsan* (platform) is popularised by the online-based Khasi-language popular debate and discussion programme *Rynsan lathir* (Discussion Platform) hosted by the young but well-experienced journalist Ibankyntiew Mawrie of the news portal 4front Media; and, subsequently the Khasi-based programme *To Ngin lathir* (Let's debate) hosted by the community-elder and journalist-activist Patricia Mukhim on The Shillong Times Youtube channel. Being an elder today, is not necessarily about a moustache. Someone who crossed the average life span in India, with minimum seven decades of lived experiences, is certainly one. One grew up with the art of listening to *ki kiwa da yoo chwa ya ka sngi u bnai* (They and those, who have seen the sun and the moon before us). Guess, with rapid changes in the tools of communication, the Millennials and the Gen Z do have something to teach the Baby Boomers and Gen X, directly and indirectly. After all, grey is the sign of work-life stress and age, not necessarily wisdom. We can only wonder what the Gen Alpha will be up to, when they have the right to vote?

Debates and Discussions: The mind goes back to the 3-day *darbar of Hima Khadsawpha* (Nongkhaw Syiemship), hosted by U Pa'em Tirot Sing Syiemlieh, before the Anglo-Khasi War 1829-1833; and, the great *darbar* of Dollois and Pators (administrative functionaries in Jaintia Hills) and other

patriots held at Madan Kmai Blai at present-day Syntu Ksair, Jowai, where an aam aadmi U Woh Kiang Nangbah was unanimously chosen to be the leader of the Jaintia Rebellion 1860-1863. The word *darbar* is a fusion of Persian and Indic language traditions.

Growing up in the 1990s, the word *rynsan* (or *machaan* in Hindi) was cemented in me when the father-figures of childhood, the uncles (in a Makhian, Maruit, Maheh and Woh), would take one on hunting trips, on a Rajdoot or Yamaha-RX100 motorcycle (Yezdi was more expensive then) or a Willy's/CJ jeep, to the jungles of the present-day Narpuh Wildlife Sanctuary (officially notified a protected area in 2014). A practical lesson on patience with consistent silence and focus was the waiting game for good venison on a *rynsan* in a tree. To digress a little, one praises the conservation efforts of the local community and the Forest Department, Government of Meghalaya, initiated by a kur Kongmai Heisa Lato; MFS, Jaintia Hills Wildlife Division. And legally, hunting is a crime now!

Similarly, the Khasi word *synran* (accompany/follow) was registered in the head, through Catholic Mass and, in school, Catechism classes (Jesus Christ and His disciples, U Jisu Krist bad ki synran jong U). There were separate Moral Science classes for the non-Catholics. And in the ongoing wedding season, the honour of *shong/chong synran* (maid of honour and best man).

Our romantic artists do enjoy their creative/poetic licences; but isn't dohnd liver and heart *klongsnam*?

The Khasi *lingua franca* has its similarities and differences with the other prominent languages/dialects of the *Bri U Hymnietrep* (the indigenous lands of the Hymnietrep people). Imagine a native Pnar-speaker, raised in Jaintia Hills, trying to buy a pair of scissors (*kait/khanshi*) in Lew Sohra or Lewduh. The shopkeeper will point the tailor towards a fruit-grocer. Also, imagine, with all that Jaintia swag, another native Pnar-speaker student in Shillong, with limited lived experiences of spoken Khasi asking his/her Khasi friends for class running notes, personally or on a WhatsApp group, of Robert

Browning's poem, *The Lost Leader (U nongialam ba wiar)*. Definitely, there will be physical reactions (and emojis) of open-mouths and ghee laughs. That student, if she/he should listen, passionately and in its entirety, to the pioneering Khasi-rock fusion 2005 album *U Rangdajied (The Chosen One)* by Snow White, would certainly need to consult a Khasi-English-Pnar dictionary. Potato, a foreign (or *phareng/phoren/firang*) introduction so ubiquitous in our diet along the National Highway from Shillong to Jowai, it is *phan* in Shillong, *sohlah* in Smit and Nongkrem and becomes *salah* at the historical border of *Hima Shyllong* (Khyrim Syiemship now) and the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom.

Haters will hate; but it is a commendable act by the government under the leadership of Conrad Sangma in making mandatory the Language Proficiency Test for selection to any job at the district and block levels. It will directly encourage students to take up Khasi or Garo as a Second Language in school. Congratulations to the ownership of The Shillong Times Private Limited on the silver jubilee of its Garo-language daily, *Salantini Janera*. At the celebration in Tura, the viral images and videos of three prominent but opposing politicians of Meghalaya – the Chief Minister, the Leader of Opposition and the Member of Parliament of Tura – sharing moments of bonhomie and a few laughs thereby setting the agenda for the rest of us. The paths and the ideologies may differ, the tu-tu, main-main debates and speeches in the Assembly and elections can get heated up; but the goal remains the same. For the benefit of all Meghalaya's citizens, we can all work-hard together and unwind with a good laugh.

The writer is at a loss for words, for a direct Khasi translation of 'Thank You'. But we do have words for the more important Gratitude (Khulei Shibun, Chihajaar Ngooh). Well, algorithmic control is on and brain rot is setting in; how do we make our mother tongues lit and interesting? Now, for our Gen Z and definitely Gen Alpha, that's one tough challenge!

PS: The writer's formative years where monolithic, solid foundations were laid were in the Jaintia Hills.

(Disclaimer: Views expressed are strictly personal)
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Breathless in Diwali: Banning crackers isn't 'Anti-Hindu', polluted air is

By Rajdeep Sardesai

On Diwali night, as the clock struck midnight, sleepless and exasperated with the relentless fire-cracker noise, I rang up the local police station. "Its past midnight and crackers are still being burst. Will you take action as per the Supreme Court guidelines please?" The voice on the line sounded fatigued: "Koshish kar rahe hai sir par log sunte nahi!" (We are trying but people don't listen). I almost felt sorry for the constable on the night beat. When citizens don't seem to care, how do you enforce a court order that has mandated a 10 pm deadline for bursting firecrackers?

The next morning, while on my regular morning walk in the park, I could feel the toxicity in the air. Light autumn sunshine was replaced by a thick, black smog, the inevitable fallout of a night of festivity for some, misery for many others. So who does one hold accountable for the national capital being amongst the most polluted cities in the world where in Diwali week the air quality routinely takes a turn for the worse and only aggravates chronic respiratory illnesses?

Let's start with the Court itself. Why did a Bench headed by the Supreme Court Chief Justice B R Gavai choose to lift the blanket cracker ban? Were they genuinely trying to 'balance' conflicting interests or simply surrendering before those who insisted that banning crackers was against 'Hindu sentiment'? Was the Chief Justice, already under pressure from Hindutva foot-soldiers after his comments on a Lord Vishnu idol led to a deplorable shoe-throwing incident, keen to make peace with his critics? After all, a temporary litmus test to determine whether regulated relaxation of norms could co-exist with pollution control measures was always fraught with risk. The approval granted to 'green crackers' – an oxymoronic term – was a rhetorical fig-leaf: far from providing a middle ground between festivities and environmental protection, it only gave a licence to citizens to burst crackers with impunity. Did the apex court seriously expect any kind of regulation to be enforced by a Delhi government that has openly sided with the pro-cracker lobby?

Indeed, a brazenly partisan government has only exposed itself. The BJP government returned to power in Delhi in February this year after a 'vanvas' of 27 years. Amongst its slew of promises was a commitment to bring back the 'joy' of bursting crackers. Forget about addressing drainage, garbage collection and a slew of urgent issues, those in power were determined to revive a Diwali 'tradition' of bursting crackers. Chief minister Rekha Gupta framed it as a 'cultural celebration' with no mention of its health fallout. The BJP had accused the previous AAP government of being 'anti-Hindu' by banning firecrackers. It was a dangerous argument, aimed to inject a religious dimension to a grave public health issue. In an environment of coarsened majoritarian politics, it was just the kind of populist narrative that pushed the opposition on the defensive. A match-up between the right to breathe clean air versus religious freedom is a no-contest: clean air doesn't win you votes, religious appeasement almost always does.

Ironically, there is scant historical evidence to suggest that fire-crackers have been an intrinsic part of Diwali celebrations. Traditionally, Diwali is seen as a festival of lights and not noise, a magically lit-up diya providing a sparkling touch. It is only in more recent times that the cracker industry has become a gigantic multi-crore enterprise, driven by a consumerised religiosity that converts every religious occasion into a grand spectacle. Moreover, vote bank politics has pushed governments into pandering to the

competing sentiments of every religion: if Muslims can slaughter goats on Bakri Eid, why can't Hindus have an unhindered cracker-fest in Diwali week? This is an illogical argument when human lungs are at stake but then logic takes a backseat when emotions take over.

If the government was serious about enforcing the court directives, it could have sent out a firm message to the police force that it meant business this time, not just empty rhetoric and token fines. But to expect an over-burdened constabulary to move from mohalla to mohalla to check on cracker usage in the absence of any political will from the top leadership was ab initio an unworkable proposition. Do our judges and political leaders seriously expect the beat constable to know the difference between a 'green' cracker and a banned one? Or charge those who were violating the law as criminal offenders?

Which leaves one to ask questions of 'We, the People', those who are the heart of the firecracker nuisance. No ban or regulation on crackers will work unless the general public willingly complies with the rules. Compliance with any law is a major challenge in a sub-continental size country. In 2024, for example, approximately 8 crore traffic challans were issued across India for a variety of offences. The fact that many were repeat offenders suggests that despite heavier penalties under the amended Motor Vehicles Act, the deterrent factor isn't as strong as it should be. Only last week, a Maharashtra minister's convoy was conveniently driving on the wrong side of the road to avoid heavy traffic. No traffic policeman was going to admonish the minister, much less punish him.

The route to compliance must emerge from a mix of fear and voluntarism. If even a dozen fire-cracker violators were named, shamed and jailed, it might act as a deterrent. If citizen awareness campaigns were started across schools, offices and media outlets, it might have a long term impact. Unfortunately, millions have been brainwashed into believing that firecrackers represent an unfettered fundamental right of religious freedom that cannot be constrained through coercive state power. Concerned public-spirited citizens who raise their voice against crackers are easily branded as 'anti-Hindu' elites and even 'anti-national' for denying the masses their choice of festive celebration.

Truth is, Hindu dharma promotes environmental protection through concepts like respecting nature as divine, venerating trees and rivers while constantly striving for ecological sustainability. Demanding a cleaner environment is not an elite pre-occupation but a dharmic duty. Polluted air affects every Indian, irrespective of their income levels. There are no easy solutions but a sensitive, futuristic government ought to create a holistic round the year action plan to tackle every potential environmental hazard, then be it stubble burning farmers, polluting industries or indeed frenzied cracker crowds. A Viksit Bharat cannot be built with millions of people choking on poor air.

Post-script: When I interviewed him, Delhi's environment minister, Manjinder Singh Sirsa blamed the AAP government in Punjab for worsening air quality levels, even bizarrely accusing them of 'forcing' farmers to burn crop residue. Shirk responsibility and passing the buck remains a habitual problem with our netas. Change isn't in the air anytime soon, only suffocating pollution is.

(The writer is a senior journalist and author. His most recent book is 2024: The Election That Surprised India. Mail: rajdeep.sardesai52@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Bihar 2025: Promises, Politics, and the Pursuit of Change

Editor,
Will Bihar Ever See a Real Change - is the burning question today. As Bihar heads into yet another assembly election, one can't help but wonder, is this just another season of tall promises, or could this finally be the dawn of real change?
The political heat is already rising. On one side, RJD's Tejashwi Yadav is making headlines with a big, bold promise, a law that guarantees one government job for every family within 20 days of coming to power. Sounds impressive, right? But in a state as crowded and complex as Bihar, where would those jobs even come from? It's one of those promises that sound great on the mic but crumble under the weight of reality.
Then there's Nitish Kumar, the seasoned JD(U) leader who's been steering Bihar for nearly three decades. He's built his brand around welfare politics, pensions for widows, the elderly, and the disabled,

and new schemes like the Mukhyamantri Mahila Rojgar Yojana to support women entrepreneurs. His intentions might be genuine, but the real question is - has Bihar actually changed in all these years?

Sure, Nitish might have ended the RJD's so-called "Jungle Raj," but the truth is, Bihar still ranks among India's poorest and least developed states. Roads may be smoother and offices cleaner, but opportunities are still hard to find.

Meanwhile, Prashant Kishor the political strategist turned reformer is shaking things up in his own way. His promises sound fresh: lifting the liquor ban, giving ₹2,000 a month to senior citizens, and focusing on practical governance. But there's a twist he's not contesting the elections himself. And that leaves people wondering, how much change can a reformer bring from outside the battlefield?

And of course, there's the Congress, still caught in its own maze of indecision. From seat-sharing confusion to internal rifts, it feels like the party can't make up its mind, even as the election clock keeps ticking.

Bihar's politics has always been a game of alliances and promises. One election af-

ter another, people hear the same speeches, see the same faces, and watch the same drama unfold only the slogans change. Governments rise and fall, but the lives of the common people? They mostly stay the same.

So, as campaign slogans echo through the streets and every leader paints a vision of "a new Bihar," the question lingers - who will actually walk the talk?

Will this election bring real progress? Or will it just be another chapter in Bihar's long story of promises and disappointments?

Because at the end of the day, the biggest question remains,

Will Bihar ever see real change, or just a new face for the same old story?

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
St. Joseph's University,
Bengaluru

A red sunset on the horizon (Decline of Naxalism)

Editor,
The Naxalite-Maoist insurgency, originating in 1967, has long represented tribal and rural resistance, but today faces declining

relevance due to government crackdowns and changing socio-economic conditions. Naxalism is a form of Left Wing Extremism that aims to overthrow the state using violent means inspired by the Maoist ideology which began in Naxalbari village West Bengal in 1967 as a tribal-peasant uprising and impacted many states of the country. Now the government has vowed to end the insurgency by March 2026 and in this regard in 2025, 270 Naxals were killed, 680 arrested and 1225 surrendered and security forces have killed key leaders like Basvaraj and many Central Committee members and now Maoists face shortage of arms, ammunition and recruits.

Once India's biggest internal security challenge, spread across the "Red Corridor" from Nepal's border in the north to Andhra Pradesh in the south, covering parts of Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh Naxalism is now confined to small pockets in central India now, primarily in Chhattisgarh and with a limited presence in Jharkhand, Odisha and Maharashtra. It is also notable that in 2013, 126 districts reported Naxal violence but by March 2025 this dropped to 18 districts with only 6

classified as Most Affected. What has always been a symptom of deeper malaise, eating into the roots of the republic are embedded inequality, rural unrest, lingering feudalism, and the exploitation of tribal communities and natural resources often to maximise the profits of corporates. The success of the security operations in Abujmahar should not lead to complacency. This is because the symptoms of Maoism are ever present and they could erupt, once again. That is why the Central and state governments must work together to address local concerns.

They must remember that the tribal communities and others caught in the crossfire between security forces and Maoists have been the biggest victims of India's gravest internal security challenge. They need empathy, support and care.

Addressing their concerns about employment, security, education, health and environment must form a central plank of the government. They must be made to feel that they are an integral part of Indian democracy.

The win in Abujmahar is an opportunity to show that India is capable of embracing those who have lived on the country's political peripher-

ies for too long. This chance must not be lost.

Currently, there are only three top leaders who remain. They are Misir Bear, Thippari Tirupati, and Ganapati. On an estimate as to how many Naxalites may be remaining, officials say that the number could be in the range of 250 to 300. However, they are fighting hard for a variety of reasons. First, the leadership is very weak; second, they are falling short of arms and ammunition, and lastly, these persons have been forced to fight and have not been drawn by ideology.

However, the remaining Naxalites are more focused on protecting the three remaining top leaders. They are not trying to fight the security forces as they have realized that they may be killed. Officials also expect that out of the remaining Naxalites many will surrender and abandon their leadership. They have realized that fighting is futile, and the surrender of Venugopal has sent a strong message that the fight is over.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

"To insure peace of mind ignore the rules and regulations."

—George Ade

The Shillong Times

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Brave soldiers all

THE bestowing of Gallantry Awards for soldiers, mainly to several military personnel who took part in Operation Sindoor, is appreciable. That six such heroes were awarded Vir Chakra would also raise the morale of the military. As for Operation Sindoor, the Indian Air Force fighter jets in a jiffy tore down some of the top terrorist networks guarded closely by the Pakistani establishment for several years, and also decimated several airbases there with relative ease in the four-day engagement in May. These showed the military's technical strengths and operational prowess. That the military was also able to strongly defend the Indian territory and key establishments from Pakistani aggression in those four days is equally impressive. While Pakistan bled majorly, India did not get hit except for the loss of an unspecified number of military aircraft. Pakistan's bombast that it shot down several of India's expensive fighter jets still lacked conclusive proof.

However, the level of success of Operation Sindoor is still being debated — some five months after the war raised the temperature between India and Pakistan to a high level. Lack of clarity on the part of the military and political establishments here about the alleged "losses" on this side of the border continues. Some statements in this respect — from military chiefs and defence minister Rajnath Singh — were contradictory in nature. This added to the confusion, which still persists. Overall, Singh was right — that Operation Sindoor symbolized the Indian military's willpower and capability. Be that as it may, fact is also that several of those from within the establishment are not fully satisfied with the results of Operation Sindoor. Despite the visible successes, they hesitate to say this was another feather in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's cap. Significantly, an analytical essay, in a pro-RSS mouthpiece this week went to the extent of citing flaws in the general narrative about Operation Sindoor. It cites "structural gaps" that need to be addressed and corrected in the military's future engagements. It stresses that the obsession to purchase more Rafales in themselves would not do; and that the IAF must now lay more emphasis on aspects like networking, integration and development of indigenous defence communication technology (SDR) to ensure better coordination within its ranks.

It's easy for the military to rest on their laurels but it's better to acknowledge the flaws and take corrective steps. What caused India to lose its aircraft this time or in the aftermath of the Balakot hits requires a clear analysis within the forces. To India's embarrassment, President Trump now repeated the narrative about a loss of "several" aircraft in Operation Sindoor without however saying who lost what. While silence is golden, the political leadership here cannot afford to take the people for granted. That the RSS, which guides the government from behind, is mindful of the 'hide and seek' style of the governing establishment vis-à-vis Operation Sindoor is all too evident now. The difference in perceptions between the Modi government and the RSS on several fronts is no secret either. The likely gap might as well be widening.

Turning Reports to Results- Real Work Begins to Reform Meghalaya's Education Scenario

By Bijoy A. Sangma

On October 15, 2025, the Meghalaya Cabinet approved the Meghalaya State Education Commission (MSEC) Report 2025. The Cabinet is said to have discussed the report's recommendations in detail and directed the Education Department to examine the proposals and prepare a set of actionable steps, along with a clear road map for implementation. Subsequently, the Cabinet will take a final decision on the future course of action regarding the implementation of the Commission's recommendations.

The approval of the MSEC Report 2025 by the Meghalaya Cabinet signifies a significant milestone in Meghalaya's initiative to reform its education system. The report constitutes a comprehensive review of the sector conducted over recent years, acknowledging the advancements achieved through initiatives such as the Meghalaya Learning Enhancement Programme (M-LEP), the Meghalaya School Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (MSQAAP), and the PM-USA initiative. At the same time, it underscores long-standing issues, such as too many small schools, a shortage of qualified teachers, poor learning outcomes, and uneven standards across higher education.

Schools without teachers or single teachers

In an overview of Meghalaya's education landscape, the report says that Meghalaya has about 14,582 schools, 8.69 lakh students, and 54,646 teachers, leading to a pupil-teacher ratio of 21:1. These averages hide significant disparities that are stark and stunning. As of 2024, as many as 1,615 lower primary schools manage with just a single teacher, while 157 government primary schools have no teachers at all. This means thousands of children attend schools that lack enough teachers to provide proper instruction.

Access to secondary and higher secondary education remains limited. The report highlights that 433 villages do not have a secondary school within five kilometres, and 1,937 villages lack a higher secondary school within seven kilometres. In Meghalaya, being a hilly state, such distances pose challenges for students, making schooling difficult and unsafe for many students. As a result, the secondary drop-out rate is approximately 22 per cent, indicating that nearly one in five students drop out before finishing school.

The report talks of some encouraging developments. The Meghalaya School

Quality Assessment and Accreditation Framework (MSQAAP) was introduced in June 2025, marking a significant shift from inspection-based oversight to outcome-focused quality assurance. The Education Commission also proposes transforming the Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT) into a statutory State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT). If successfully implemented, SCERT could become the primary body for curriculum development, teacher training, and research in the state.

In higher education, the report points out the need to improve accountability. It notes that Meghalaya has two public universities, nine private universities, several government and aided colleges, and three polytechnics. Yet only one private university has NAAC accreditation. The Commission recommends stricter regulation through the Meghalaya Private Universities Regulatory Board (MPURB) and suggests upgrading prominent colleges into multidisciplinary institutions to raise academic standards.

Gaps in Data and Evidence

While the report offers valuable insights, its data presentation could have been improved. Some statistics are well-explained, while others are unclear. For instance, the drop-out rate and 'distance to school' figures are not fully defined, making it uncertain whether they stem from GIS mapping, field surveys, or projections. This ambiguity hampers accurate tracking of progress in future evaluations.

The section on learning outcomes is quite limited. It highlights weak foundational literacy and numeracy but lacks specific data from the National Achievement Survey (NAS) or State Level Achievement Survey (SLAS). Without baseline figures, the state will find it difficult to assess progress once MSQAAP is fully implemented. The same issue is seen in higher education. The report includes financial data on PM-USA grants but omits details on enrolment, Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER), student-faculty ratios, or employment outcomes. It also does not specify which universities are accredited. Without this information, policymakers and the public are unable to assess the situation fully.

The recommendation to merge small or nearby schools into larger ones is sensible and essential.

However, the report suffers from a major lacuna: it has not provided a financial plan to support this initiative. It does not estimate the costs for new infrastructure, facilities, or teacher redeployment. Additionally, there is no projection of potential savings from rationalisation. Reforms of this scale require cost estimates; otherwise, they risk encountering community resistance once implementation begins.

The report highlights that nearly 30 per cent of DIET faculty positions are vacant and that less than 20 per cent of elementary teachers received in-service training from 2019 to 2024. It rightly emphasises the importance of continuous professional development, improved deployment, and the establishment of Meghalaya Professional Standards for Teachers (MPST). However, it does not offer a concrete work-force plan projecting teacher demand, retirements, and new recruitment over the next decade. Without long-term planning, teacher shortages will continue to disrupt learning.

Gaps in addressing Inclusion Issues

The report has a limited discussion on inclusion. This represents a substantial gap, especially as far as inclusive policies and programmes are concerned. While it mentions access challenges in remote areas, the document lacks data broken down by gender, tribe, or disability. Nor does it give enough attention to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) or vocational training, both of which are essential elements of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

For Meghalaya, inclusion is essential to ensure that every child, regardless of location or background, can access quality education. The proposal to create a State Quality Management Task Force (SQMTF) to track progress is among the report's most promising ideas. When effectively organised, this task force could oversee data management, evaluate performance, and publish an annual 'Meghalaya Education at a Glance' report. However, the report lacks specifics on how this mechanism will function, who will handle the data, and whether the findings will be made publicly accessible for robust discussion. Setting clear policies on data ownership and transparency is crucial for the success of this initiative.

The Meghalaya Education Grant (MeG) financial reform proposal is another innovative idea. It aims to

streamline and unify different funding sources while linking funding to outcomes. However, this model depends on accurate, current data to function well. The Education Department might consider piloting this approach in some districts first before expanding it statewide.

The report recognises successes such as the M-LEP launch, MSQAAP establishment, and ongoing digital learning efforts. It avoids blame and concentrates on ways to strengthen institutions. Yet, the Meghalaya Cabinet's approval is only the beginning. The next phase must involve converting recommendations into concrete actions, with specific timelines, budgets, and assigned responsibilities. The government should be required to publish current data on schools, teachers, and learning outcomes at the district level.

Establishing baseline figures is essential prior to the implementation of new frameworks. Rationalisation should be conducted in accordance with detailed community consultations and financial planning. Teacher recruitment and training need to adhere to a defined schedule. Universities should be mandated to publish their accreditation and performance data. Most importantly, progress should be reviewed systematically and disclosed publicly regularly.

The MSEC Report 2025 provides guidance, but successful reforms depend on precise strategies. Policies need to rely on verified facts and transparent oversight.

If Meghalaya builds on the report by providing accurate data, realistic budgets, and robust monitoring, it can progress toward a better and equitable education system. Right now, the state education budget and system are heavily skewed in favour of major urban centres like Shillong and Tura, rather than improving education in rural areas. The state now has the opportunity to turn its vision into reality, ensuring that each school is well-staffed, that every teacher receives proper training, and that all students have the chance to complete their education with dignity and confidence. The contradictions and omissions, mismatches in data and the lack of detailed operational plans must be addressed before policies are implemented.

(Bijoy A. Sangma is a development professional, policy analyst, and commentator on public affairs, constitutional values, public leadership, social justice, and religious freedom, with extensive experience in global leadership roles and contributions to public policy and social transformation).

A king should never leave his kingdom

By Mahmood Ansari

Zubeen Garg, while already established in the music industry of Assam, did leave his home for Mumbai only to return back, and call his native soil his kingdom. Retrospectively speaking, it was a return journey not merely to rejoice over the success and wealth that had come to him but also to accomplish something credible for his fellow beings back home. Arriving on the scene in a different avatar — versatile but an iconoclast, entrenched but defiant, and philanthropist but a socialist, the returnee singer did evolve into a political persona.

Being selfless and an emotionally vulnerable one, he could have chosen to join the insurgent movement but he didn't. Reaching the apex of his musical accomplishments, he could have even joined a mainstream political party. Again, he opted out.

He did choose the alternative — often challenging the faith and habits of religion, periodically passing satirical remarks on the media and the politics of the day, and unfailingly standing for unity and fraternity amidst the ethos and pathos of a society fractured and fragmented by the memories of sectarian political agitations and turbulences of the 1990s and early twenty-first century Assam.

Rare are the occasions of a budding legend but an established music icon risking his reputation, and consciously jumping into controversies. It is always a hard choice. This icon of music, song and films in Assam did however make such a choice, once he was settled in his native land and amongst his own people.

Before meeting with the sudden tragic demise in the sea waters of Singapore in the wake of which the whole of Assam plunged into a three-day deep mourning, he was recurrently dominating the public discourse and controversies.

Deserving the recognition for the kind of accomplishments he had in the arena of playing music, singing songs and acting in movies, he began to stand as a prominent but odd-man out in the budding civil society of Assam. Excelling in a marvellous way on the landscape of the industry of songs and music for the last three decades (and also in acting and directing regional films), the budding rebel systematically divorced with his identities.

He dropped his official certificate name of Jobin Borthakur (a Brahmin title), discarded the Janae (sacred thread) from his body, got his arm tattooed with the figure of Charlie Chaplin signifying the message of fall but not fail, and began to put on a variety of headgears and caps on his head in the manner of Che Guevara.

Following his demise, an unprecedented funeral procession, along the convoy of

the mortal body in Guwahati, was a reminder of not only the decay of a cultural heart-throb but also a benefactor of the distressed and a speaker of truth to power.

Presumably meeting a premature death by drowning in the sea, he left an imprint as one of the most beloved sons of the soil, and drew hundreds of thousands of natives and tourists to walk down the streets and the roads of Assam to mourn his untimely demise. All along the saddened mourners sang the song "Mayabini Ratir Bukul" song for the middle-aged man of 52 years, whose demise opens a new chapter in Assam.

Carrying an aura of arrogance (which he called self-respecting pride), often dropping the cannons of civility rather sarcastically, and standing fearlessly on the streets and local eateries along with the members of the subaltern section of the society, he was not very popular with the upper echelons of the Assamese society.

While standing for the flood victims and dislocated people, he opted to be fearlessly notorious — without preoccupation with the standards of civility and decency. It was provocative. As an avowed social leftist, he left behind his messages of open and candid opposition to racism, parochialism and sectarianism.

While alive, he had to his credit the well-recognised and diligently achieved honour of composing almost more than thirty eight thousand songs in over three dozen languages and dialects and being proficient in playing more than a dozen musical instruments on the public stage.

In addition to the Assamese song of 2001 under the title, "Mayabini," he was awarded with a national accolade for a Hindi song "Ya Ali" in 2007. Though a drop-out from the Graduate College, he was privileged to be an awardee of an honorary D Litt degree by a private science and technology university of Meghalaya in 2024. He was not as well-read and formally educated as the late Bhupen Hazarika.

Those achievements merely created a cultural aura of the man, and that would certainly be followed and imitated by the novice and the apprentice in the arena of music and culture. The song was one genre of the message of the messenger. His anecdotes which are etched in our memories and his maverick speech-lines on the stage and in the streets were what he is remembered for. His acts of defiance and non-conformism would remain etched in public memory across Assam and the North East. His legacy will live forever.

(The writer is Professor of Economics, Assam University)

Letters to the Editor

Vincent Pala Should Quit — Congress Needs Urgent Revival in Meghalaya

Editor,
Leadership failure has brought the Congress party to its knees; the time for change is now.

When Vincent H. Pala took charge as President of the Meghalaya Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) in August 2021, there was cautious optimism that the party would regain its lost strength. He was expected to unite the organisation, rebuild the grassroots, and inspire the youth. Four years later, that promise stands broken. The Congress in Meghalaya is today a party in ruins — leaderless, directionless, and irrelevant.

A quick look at the downfall: August 2021: Vincent Pala appointed as MPCC President. 2022–2023: Several senior leaders and 12 MLAs, including former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, quit the party to join the Trinamool Congress. 2023 Assembly Elections — the Congress wins only

5 seats — it's worst performance in the last 30 years. 2024–2025: More MLAs, district and block leaders defect to other parties. 2025 KADC Elections — the Congress fails to win even one seat — its worst performance ever.

This is the reality under Vincent Pala's leadership. From a party that once governed Meghalaya and had a presence in every district, the Congress now has no MLAs, a handful of office-bearers, and just one MP from Garo Hills.

Silence instead of accountability: In any organisation, when failure becomes this visible, leadership takes responsibility. But Pala has shown no urgency to act, no acceptance of mistakes, and no vision for renewal. He continues to occupy the top post even as the party collapses under him. His leadership has alienated veterans, frustrated youth workers, and created deep distrust within the ranks.

Congress workers on the ground feel abandoned. The communication gap between the leadership and the cadre has widened. Instead of inspiring confidence, Pala's

silence and detachment have only deepened the crisis.

Why immediate replacement is essential: The Meghalaya Congress cannot afford to wait for another election cycle. The All India Congress Committee (AICC) must urgently intervene and replace Pala with a dynamic and grounded leader who can rebuild from the grassroots. Leadership change now would send a strong signal — that the Congress still values accountability and renewal.

A new leader must prioritise three things: 1. Reconnecting with people and youth through active engagement and listening. 2. Rebuilding booth-level and block-level structures with transparent coordination. 3. Launching a clean, development-based agenda that speaks of livelihoods, jobs, and local empowerment.

The road ahead: Meghalaya's young voters are restless for change. They want leaders who work on the ground, not those who cling to titles. The Congress still has loyal supporters and a legacy of governance, but it must act decisively before that goodwill disappears. If Vincent Pala truly cares

about the party he leads, he should step aside gracefully and allow a new generation to lead. If he will not, then the AICC must do what is necessary. Every day of delay takes the Congress one step closer to political extinction in Meghalaya. The time to act is now.

Yours etc.,
By Nidahun Marbaniang,
Via email

True Essence of Diwali

Editor,
Was bursting crackers a part of Hindu religion? This is a pertinent and vital question raised by the editor in the editorial "Diwali: Noise versus light" (ST October 23, 2025). Deepawali, also known as Diwali, is one of the most celebrated festivals in India and across South Asia. It is a vibrant, multi-day festival that symbolizes the victory of light over darkness, good over evil and knowledge over ignorance. The word Deepawali comes from Sanskrit: deepa (Lamp) + avari (row), which means "row of lights." It commemorates various mythological events, including Lord Rama's return

to Ayodhya after defeating Ravana, Lord Krishna's triumph over Narakasura and Goddess Lakshmi's emergence from the ocean during Samudra Manthan.

The celebration of the festival spans five days, each with its own rituals: 1. Dhanteras — Worship of wealth and health. 2. Naraka Chaturdashi (Small Diwali) which is a symbolic cleansing of evil. 3. Diwali (Main Day) where Diyas, fire-works and Lakshmi Puja are celebrated. 4. Govardhan Puja honouring Krishna's protection and 5. Bhai Dooj celebrating siblings' bonds. Homes are adorned with oil lamps (diyas), rangoli and twinkling lights. Families exchange sweets, gifts and prayers for prosperity. Beyond India it is celebrated by Hindus, Sikhs, Jains and some Buddhists globally. In Jain tradition, it marks Lord Mahavira's nirvana while the Sikhs commemorate Bandi Chhor Divas when Guru Hargobind was freed from prison.

The bursting of loud crackers during festivals like Diwali is a relatively modern cultural addition, not a core Hindu ritual. Ancient Hindu

texts like the Vedas, Puranas and Ramayana emphasize lighting diyas (oil lamps), performing Lakshmi Puja and sharing sweets to celebrate the victory of light over darkness. There is no scriptural mandate for bursting firecrackers. Firecrackers entered the scene and became popular in India during the medieval and colonial periods, influenced by Chinese pyrotechnics and later industrial production. Their use grew as a symbol of celebration but not as a religious obligation. Contemporary concerns are that high-decibel crackers raise issues around air pollution, health risks for elderly, children and animals as well as environmental degradation. Many communities now advocate for green crackers or silent celebrations to really honour the spirit of Diwali without harming public health.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

When Diwali turns raucous

Editor,
There are states like Haryana, Tamilnadu, West Bengal, Maharashtra, Punjab which

have banned the use of fire crackers to reduce air pollution during Diwali. The latest is the Bihar government which has banned the sale and use of all types of firecrackers, including green crackers, in Patna, Gaya, Muzaffarpur, and Hajipur. According to a circular issued by the Patna district administration recently, the decision follows a National Green Tribunal (NGT) directive aimed at maintaining acceptable air quality levels in these cities. It is therefore surprising that in the state of Meghalaya no such protective measures are taken. It is well known that the acrid smoke emanating from the crackers can cause sore throat, cough and difficulty in breathing for those already suffering from lung diseases. Yet fire crackers are allowed just to appease a section of society. Why? Are the rest of the citizens without a right to clean air and health?

Meghalaya is notorious for its weak implementation of every law. When the district administration has set a time limit of 10 pm to burst firecrackers why does it continue until midnight and beyond in places like

Rynjah and Police Bazar. The worst part is that people are bursting firecrackers in the middle of the road with no concern for passers-by. I would call upon the citizens of Meghalaya and Shillong in particular to unite in a call to ban fire-crackers not only during Diwali but across all other festivals. In the past we never heard firecrackers being let off on Christmas eve. Now the Christians are mimicking the Hindus. On New Year's eve too, fire-crackers from all directions light up the sky leaving a trail of smoke. All this has to stop. Just because some bad practice was started by someone it does not mean that such a thing should continue and become a culture. The Government must show more concern for the environment. We deserve to breathe clean air.

Yours etc.,
Hamarbakintiew Jyrwa,
Via email

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

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Whither Congress Revival

THE Congress Party like the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) are the only two national parties having a base in nearly all the state of the country. At one time the Congress Party had vibrant grassroots presence right down to the blocks and units. Now, after being out of the limelight for over a decade, the only time the Congress is in the news is when Rahul Gandhi leads a movement — such as the Bharat Jodo Yatra before the 2024 elections and this time the Vote Chori campaign directed at the Bihar elections.

In the 2024 Lok Sabha election, the Congress won 99 seats almost double the 2019 tally of 52 seats. Most of the seats came from states where it contested the polls in alliance with stronger regional parties. So, do the results signify a Congress revival? When the BJP came to power it started a campaign “Congress Mukta Bharat (An India freed of the Congress) and even announced that the party was dead. But such slogans don’t prove the facts on the ground. The 2024 Lok Sabha election results show that the Congress is capable of fighting back. The question remains whether the Congress can return to power in 2029 or if it can capture the elections in different states either alone or with its INDIA partners? The Bihar elections would be a litmus test for the Congress Party.

Coming to Meghalaya, the Congress Party is now reduced to zero seats in the state assembly; a situation that is alarming if not desperate. After being reduced to nil also in the Khasi Hills District Council after the 2024 elections, the Congress should have had serious introspection on the rapid downfall of the Party more so after Vincent Pala the 3-time MP took over as the State Congress President in 2021. But this is the inherent problem of the Congress Party. State Presidents are not elected but appointed by the High Command thereby depriving grassroots workers of their right to elect a person of their choice. It’s almost as if the High Command knows best. It is a well-accepted fact that Vincent Pala and Dr Mukul Sangma are arch political rivals. So, by appointing Pala as party chief the High Command showed its short-sightedness because soon after, Dr Mukul Sangma and other senior Congress leaders like Charles Pyngrope left the Party and joined the Trihamool Congress. Today, the Congress Party in Meghalaya is reduced to a shadow of itself and needs injection of leadership that can enthuse party workers. The Party also needs to introspect on what has gone wrong and what has alienated it from the people. Political parties are meant to give agency to people’s voices in the state assembly but if there is not a single Congress MLA in the Assembly, the few who still vote for the Congress are now disillusioned and feel abandoned, especially after those MLAs they elected defected to other parties. The Meghalaya Congress needs a revival now and leadership change is called for!

Who Will Pray for the Nation?

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Every religion or belief system has in its litany, prayers as a central element of worshipping God. Even those whom we consider as atheists also have at one point of time pondered about God before they questioned his/her existence.

The Land of Hynniewtrep and Sundry Groups: L. G Shullai wrote, around U Lum Sohpetbeng (navel of heaven) lies the land of Hynniewtrep and it’s inhabitants have organised themselves into diverse religious and clan groups, and Hima or Territory. These different kurs or clans together form a community called the Hynniewtrep community bounded by blood lines and intra and inter-clan relations. These Kur or clans are believed to have settled in the region for the past 5000 years and are identified by its geographical areas, like the Pnar region, Bhoi region, War region and Lyngam region. Besides, they have their own distinct dialect apart from the Sohra dialect which was later introduced as the standard Khasi language. The respective regions have their own history where Hima or Chiefdoms rise and fall while some have vanished. Further, each maintains its own cultures and beliefs, e.g. the Hima Sohar and its citizenry worshipped their own goddess called “Ka’ Lei Kharai (guardian of territory) and also pay obeisance to a male deity known as “Woh Riang” who resides in a cave outside the gate.

For the people of Hynniewtrep, religion is purely a family or clan affair and many of the rituals are confined to the family or clan and are presided over by “u kni” or maternal uncle or on whoever the clan has bestowed the power to perform such rites and ceremonies. However, women only play a secondary role in the ceremony. The Pateng Christian (Presbyterian Church Organ) published in June 1957 had written about Rai Bahadur Dhory Ropmay thus, “Due to the desire of Rai Bahadur to proceed for his further studies in Calcutta, the members of the family or clan had sought the approval from the clan deity...With regard to the continuation of studies of Rai Bahadur in Calcutta the family and the clan had assembled before its deity who subsequently approved of their plan in these words “Phah hiam haliar ma nga” which means let him go, I will look after his well-being. The Hynniewtrep land and Shillong, have had a brush with various religions that had entered into these hills via their saints, sants,

missionaries and preachers who throughout the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have propagated to the indigenous people about their new religions or God (s). Besides, the Christian majority missionary groups like the Methodist Mission and Catholic Mission, which have deeply penetrated into the entire Khasi-Jaintia Hills, others like the Brahmo, Hindu and the Ramakrishna Missions had also had their share. Many centuries earlier the indigenous Khasi people have encountered with sufi saints from Sylhet and have embraced their teachings of their brand of Islam. Today, nearly 80% of Khasi-Jaintia are Christians, around 11.50% are Hindus, the adherents of Indigenous faiths account for 8.7% and followers of Islam constitute a meagre 4.40%. Thus Meghalaya is dominated by Christians.

The Prayers: According to H.O. Mawrie, prayers are petitions made by believers or seekers to deities for specific needs, driven by human limitations and imperfections. Humans are inherently incomplete; addressing one flaw often reveals another, creating a constant state of dilemma. In such critical moments, people turn to God or deities for comfort, guidance and help in overcoming their shortcomings and failures. In many villages of Hynniewtrep, people invoke U Ryngkew U Basa, their guardian spirits or land deities, often represented as ‘Leimuluk’, ‘Leijaka’, or ‘Leishnong ki’ ‘Leithaw or gods’ of the land, village and people. Central to these prayers is the desire to stay close to their creator and seek ongoing protection and support.

Christianity encourages believers to read the Bible regularly and to pray continually. At times, believers are called to fast and pray to align their will with God’s and seek His favour. Jesus taught a simple prayer that resonates with everyday struggles, especially for ordinary people facing hardships and exploitation. He instructed His disciples: “This, then, is how you should pray: Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (Matthew 6:5-13). This honest prayer touches the hearts of many and has

drawn countless followers.

The Rally for Prayer at Khyndai Lad: To pray is neither a sin nor an illegal act. We mortals pray for hope and well-being as against despair, sickness, poverty and brokenness. However, there are religious groups who feel compelled to step out of their church buildings or temples and to gather as a collective body to pray, for reasons that matter to them or the general public. Recently, on October 19, 2025, there was a prayer rally at Khyndai Lad, Shillong, organized by a particular Christian group under the theme, “The Prayer for the Nation and Its People”. Sermons and speeches were delivered during the event along with music and songs of praises. In his speech the preacher highlighted the alarming issues and concerns which according to him are going to destroy the ethos and fabric of the “Nation and its people”. Some of the concerns are, (i) prostitution in an around the Khyndai Lad area (ii) “club culture” (iii) unabated selling, distribution and usage of drugs and other substances (iv) “walls of darkness” (v) “devils” (vi) singers and artists brought from outside the State who through their vulgarities bring disrepute and curse to people of the State.

The preachers said the city is at war against evil forces. No doubt, Shillong and the State are reeling under hard pressed issues such as the recent spate of murders which threaten the safety and security of citizens. Additionally, unemployment, poverty and health issues are crushing on the people.

Shillong For Jesus! Really?

The preacher went ahead in calling out loud that Shillong must stand for Jesus. In other words, Shillong must be under the reign of Jesus. Is it right that Shillong should belong to Jesus? How would other non-Christian citizens feel about this call? In India every citizen is entitled to profess and propagate his or her own religion, but imposing one’s religion on others is morally and constitutionally wrong. No one can claim that his or her God is greater than others or their belief is the absolute truth.

In the past one hundred and fifty years during the propagation of the Christian Gospel in these hills there arose bitter frictions between the Christian missions, especially the Methodist, and the adherents of Indigenous faith. Records inform us

that Christian missionaries were contemptuous of the indigenous belief systems and made earnest attempts to erase their culture, festivals and practices. In his book, Ka Niam Khasi (1937), Homiwell Lyngdoh Nonglath had forewarned that unless we made collective efforts to retrieve, collect and put together in writings, with the advancement of modernity, the rituals and practices, traditions and culture of indigenous people will be buried and lost.

Would the call ‘Shillong for Jesus’ reopen old wounds and cause indigenous faith like Niam Tynrai/Niam Tre etc., to doubt the actions of their Christian compatriots? What might happen to indigenous people and other minorities in India if larger groups like Hindus call for ‘India for Lord Ram’.

The Gathering of the Community: Until now the people of Hynniewtrep have not found an occasion or reason to collectively come together in an annual assembly to debate and deliberate on issues that matter to the community and Nation. The Synod meetings of Presbyterian Church or Procession of Catholic, though great in numbers, cannot be considered as meetings of Jaidynriew as no one from the other 8.7% Niam Tynrai/Niam Tre are allowed to attend. Likewise, the gatherings at Seng Kut Snem or Shad Suk Mynsiem or Behdienkhlam cannot be construed as meetings of the collective Hynniewtrep community for the reason that Khasi Christians or Khasi Muslims are not allowed to attend or participate in the event.

Nonetheless, in the past few decades we witness the activities of various Kur or clan groups who have started to organize themselves within the Kur system and some have managed so well in regularly organising annual durbars for their members who trace their descent to their respective progenitors called “Thawlang and law-bei”. While attending the Dobar Kur, it is considered inappropriate for any member to identify themselves by their religion, political affiliations or associations with any organization. Instead, they should see themselves simply as members of the Kur. Perhaps, such gatherings are the ideal platform to come together solely as members of the Kur to pray and beseech upon God for the well-being of our nation.

This article is meant for civil and informed dialogue, and to bring unity in the struggle for just and fair society.

The Silent Poetry of an Introvert’s Soul

By Daphianglin Sohkhet

There is a quiet beauty in poetry, serenity woven into words, a refuge for emotions too delicate to be spoken aloud. Poetry is the unguarded language of the heart, where happiness, sorrow, and silent dissatisfaction find a rhythm of their own. It is a sword that kills no one, yet is powerful enough to pierce the soul and bring light to the hidden corners of the mind.

Perhaps no one understands this gentle power more deeply than the introvert.

When an introvert silences their words before a crowd, an unseen assembly begins within their mind, a restless parliament of thoughts debating what is right and what is wrong, who wins and who loses. When their emotions blur into uncertainty, they retreat to solitude, sitting by the window with a diary before them

for perfection, but for honesty.

Your words do not need to rhyme; they only need to breathe.

They need to be you. Let your ink be the storm that washes away bitterness, the river that carries your hurt into peace.

And when you find darkness along your path, light your candles through the silent words of poetry. For even when unspoken, your words will shine; even when unseen, your emotions will find meaning. The act of writing becomes an act of healing, the art of turning pain into poetry, and poetry into power.

Many of us are struggling with our own thoughts, mentally exhausted and longing to cry aloud. In those moments, our tears are transcribed into the alphabet of poetry. We find escape in these letters and solitude in

And when that world begins to crumble, when our inner garden withers under the weight of life, poetry rises from the ruins. It becomes the architect of strength, rebuilding walls that have fallen, defending the heart against all odds. In verse, the weary find courage; in words, the broken find peace. There are moments when fear binds us, the fear of traveling, of stepping into something new. The fear of the unfamiliar air, of unknown faces and uncharted roads.

and a pen in hand. There, they pour their heart upon the page, words entangled with one another, imperfect yet sincere. Through poetry, they find order in chaos, beauty in hesitation, and freedom in silence.

For within every mind lies an entire landscape, a secret garden waiting to be tended. Yet what grows there depends upon what we cultivate. Some nurture a garden of flowers, while others harbor a cave of bats. Some dwell in the heavens of fantasy; others, in the hell of sorrow. Our thoughts are seeds, and the worlds they build are reflections of what we sow.

And when that world begins to crumble, when our inner garden withers under the weight of life, poetry rises from the ruins. It becomes the architect of strength, rebuilding walls that have fallen, defending the heart against all odds. In verse, the weary find courage; in words, the broken find peace.

There are moments when fear binds us, the fear of traveling, of stepping into something new. The fear of the unfamiliar air, of unknown faces and uncharted roads. Yet deep inside, the heart still longs to wander, to feel the wind of new beginnings. In those moments, poetry becomes our escape, our invisible journey.

It travels through the rattling windows of a train, whispering along the tracks; it drifts through the rhythm of a car gliding past hills, valleys, and sunlit streams. Poetry swings through heaven and dives into waterfalls; it dances in grand ballrooms under golden chandeliers, and it weeps quietly against crooked walls in forgotten rooms.

Sometimes it leads us to a war zone filled with the cries of children; sometimes, to a hall of wise men toasting to peace. It can take us into a jungle full of doubts or lift us into a clear sky bursting with dreams. Poetry moves where we cannot; it travels beyond fear, beyond boundaries, beyond the self.

When the world becomes too heavy to bear, when our hearts are caged by anger or wounded by pain, poetry offers a gentler weapon. Instead of vengeance, it gives us reflection. Instead of rage, it grants release. When you are in anger, or lost in pain, or drowning in self-doubt, do not carry a grudge as your shield. Lift a sheet of paper instead, and choose your pen over your sword.

Write your thoughts not

the unspoken words. Poetry listens when the world does not, offering refuge to the weary soul and companionship to the lonely heart.

Poetry is not a language limited by letters; it is the soul speaking in metaphors, the heart translating silence into sound. It teaches us that strength does not always roar; sometimes, it whispers. It reminds us that even in solitude, we are never truly alone; our words keep us company, our thoughts become our companions.

To the quiet soul, poetry is not merely an art; it is survival.

It is the alchemy of turning anguish into art, silence into song, and fear into freedom. Through poetry, the introvert speaks without sound, heals without noise, and lives a thousand lives within a single line.

Poetry is not just written; it is felt, lived, and breathed.

It is the calm within chaos, the journey within stillness, and the voice of every soul that once remained unheard.

Poetry is our truest mirror; it shows us who we are and who we long to be. It does not demand grandeur, only truth. It asks for no applause, only presence. It reminds us that the simplest of words can carry the deepest of meanings, and that in vulnerability lies strength.

So, when life grows unkind, when the noise of the world becomes too loud, when the mind threatens to collapse under its own thoughts, remember: you do not need to shout to be heard. You only need to write. Let your pen speak for your silence, let your thoughts bloom into verses, and let your emotions find their way home through the beauty of your own words.

And finally, I wish to say this with humility: I do not write to seek the approval of an entire crowd. My writings are personal observations and reflections of the world as I see it, and most importantly, reflections of myself. In shivering hands, in panting short breaths, in anxious or weary minds, the unspoken words that flow onto paper bring calm. They remind us that even when the world may not listen, we can still hear ourselves.

Because in the end, poetry is not an escape from reality, it is a return to yourself. It is the map of your inner world, the lighthouse in your storm, and the quiet companion that walks beside you when all else falls silent.

Letters to the Editor

Mending Meghalaya’s Education

Editor,
True reform, I believe, begins not in meetings or reports, but in classrooms where a teacher still waits for support and a child waits to learn.

I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Bijoy A. Sangma for his informative and thought-provoking article, “Turning Reports to Results – Real Work Begins to Reform Meghalaya’s Education Scenario” (ST October 24, 2025). His piece makes one pause and reflects on the urgent need to translate the Meghalaya Education Reform Report 2025 into meaningful action that truly touches schools, teachers, and students across the state. I also sincerely welcome the Cabinet’s approval of the MSEC Report 2025, which rightly acknowledges long-standing issues — shortage of teachers, limited access to secondary education, and uneven standards in higher learning — while suggesting promising measures through MSQAAP, SCERT, and MPST.

It does give hope, yet one wonders how soon these good intentions will reach the ground. There are three areas that, if addressed with care, could make the reform more effective and lasting.

First, the absence of a clear financial roadmap. Without knowing how much the proposed steps will cost or how they will be funded, the best plans may remain unfulfilled. Perhaps an initial budget outline for key

actions could be shared within the next few months.

Second, the lack of reliable data on which our children stand today. A quick NAS or SLAS-based survey to establish basic learning levels, shared openly, would help all of us — teachers, parents, and citizens — understand where improvement is needed.

Third, the continuing shortage of teachers. With over 1,600 primary schools run by a single teacher, and more than 150 without one, it may be time to look at urgent recruitment, fair incentives for rural postings, and regular in-service training so that no school remains neglected.

Alongside these reforms, I humbly appeal for timely and transparent settlement of post-retirement benefits for teachers serving in Government Aided and Deficit Grant-in-Aid institutions. It is deeply saddening to learn that many retired teachers are still waiting for their gratuity and pension — often their only means of survival after years of devoted service. No one who has spent a lifetime nurturing young minds should have to live in uncertainty and distress in their old age. Prompt and compassionate action in settling these dues will not only ease their hardship but also reflect the state’s respect for its educators.

Perhaps the government could start with a few pilot districts, publish a quarterly Education Scorecard, and invite public participation in monitoring progress. Even small, honest steps like these can help build trust and confidence in the reform process.

Meghalaya today clearly has the will to bring change. What are now needed are steady efforts, open communication, and above all, a touch of compassion — for every child eager to learn and for every teacher who gave a lifetime to teaching.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Reforms for Recruitments of Statistical & Research Assistant/Officers

Editor,
Statistical Assistant and Research Assistant are posts that require speciality in the three sisters of Physical Sciences and those are Mathematics, Statistics and Economics. Hence, there should be separate quotas of reservation for these 3 subjects respectively, namely Statistical Assistant (Mathematics), Statistical Assistant (Statistics), Statistical Assistant (Economics), Research Assistant (Mathematics), Research Assistant (Statistics), Research Assistant (Economics), Statistical Officer (Mathematics), Statistical Officer (Statistics), Statistical Officer (Economics), Research Officer (Mathematics), Research Officer (Statistics), Research Officer (Economics) and anything in between Assistant to Officer to be observed in the same manner for quota, recruitment and examination.

As such, the question papers should be for these three subjects respectively as three separate

papers for recruitment and they must be recruited separately based on the honours subject of the candidates who had applied for the job with quotas.

The most important aspect of the recruitment in these two departments is QUOTA which means that the quota reserved for Mathematics or Statistics or Economics cannot be occupied by a person from another Honours subject whether it is for Research or Statistical Assistant, under any circumstances.

The logic behind this is reform meaning that we require specialization in all these three subjects to work together as a single cohesive unit to achieve the desired empirical results to bring out the best data and analysis of these two departments because a statistician cannot do calculative mathematics work nor can a mathematician do statistical analysis work and an economist most certainly cannot do either of the two even when he takes econometrics. Further, only candidates “with Honours” in either of these 3 subjects should be recruited and not non-Honours candidates on the premise that the works carried out by these two departments in shaping state policy are too important to be allowed for such works to be undertaken by Non-honours candidates.

As of now, both the Eco-Stats and Planning Departments are dominated by Economists when one checks the staff educational background thereby creating an unbalanced analysis of the extremely important works that these two departments carry out in state planning and policy, emanating from their analysis and publications. It is also observed that in the recent MPSC exams, the question paper for economics was fairly easy when compared to mathematics and statistics with “no quota” observed whatsoever. Thus most of the recruits will be 98% economists.

In conclusion, I humbly urge for these two departments to recruit only Honours students with minimum Bachelor or Post Graduate degree specialization in these three subjects and to have QUOTAS for these three subjects during recruitment to create a balance and subsequent analysis for the best results and deductions. For this to come to fruition, the Service Rules in these two departments must be changed in terms of quota, recruitment and Honours only subject specialization.

Yours etc.,
Melabor Thabab,
Via email

Controversial liquor tax

Editor,
‘Apropos of the news “Liquor vendors oppose proposed 5% deduction.” (ST 24, October 2025), the Integrated Excise Management Systems (IEMS) being implemented in Meghalaya is a digital platform designed to streamline and monitor the state liquor trade from production and bottling to retail and taxation.

The key component and the controversy surrounding it is IEMS which aims to track permits, passes and transactions across bottling units, breweries, bonded warehouses and retail outlets and to centralise financial records and inventory flow to reduce leakage and improve compliance. The idea is to automate tax deductions and ensure accurate reporting of sales and excise duties. There is a controversy in implementing the system as it is being rolled out by C-Tel Infosystem Private Limited, a Hyderabad based firm.

There have been documented failures and disruptions linked to the Integrated Excise Management System (IEMS) in other states, notably Rajasthan. A case study of Rajasthan’s IEMS 2.0 found that there was a major software glitch in IEMS 2.0 developed by a Bengaluru based firm which led to erroneous debit and credit notifications for liquor license holders. Vendors receive alerts of large deposits that were never actually credited, causing confusion and halting liquor sales in districts like Sikar, Jhalawar, Udaipur and Bikaner. The issue disrupted stock orders and led to widespread operational paralysis with both vendors and excise officials acknowledging persistent problems. This precedent raises critical questions for Meghalaya’s rollout of the system. If glitches replicate, civic trust and compliance could suffer. External tech firms managing sensitive fiscal flows may trigger resistance. Therefore, a Rs 100 crore payout to a private firm amid vendor protests could be seen as extractive rather than reformative measures.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

What's behind anti-Trump protests and the frog costumes



Three frogs, a shark, a unicorn and a Tyrannosaurus rex dance in front of a line of heavily armoured police in riot gear.

Over the past few weeks, activists taking part in protests against Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) across the United States have donned inflatable animal costumes. The aim is to disrupt the Trump administration's claim that the protests are violent "hate America" rallies.

The result is a sight to behold, with many encounters between police and protesters going viral.

Whether they know it or not, these costumed activists are contributing to a rich history of using humour and dress to mobilise against and challenge power.

The ICE crackdowns

Since its creation in 2003, ICE has enforced immigration laws on the ground, arresting, detaining and deporting undocumented immigrants convicted of criminal activity.

During Donald Trump's first term as president (2017–2021), the agency expanded its operations to target and deport many people with no criminal record.

This expansion sparked the June

2018 Occupy ICE protests, inspired by the broader global Occupy movement challenging corporate power and economic inequality.

The first major Occupy ICE action in 2018 occurred in Portland – a city known for its creativity and dissent. It grew from a rally organised by the Direct Action Alliance into what federal officials called a "very, very peaceful" encampment with kitchen tents, kids' spaces and media hubs.

The protesters forced the temporary closure of the facility for about eight days, before federal officers cleared the site and erected a fence around its perimeter.

Following Trump's re-election this year, ICE operations have intensified again, with the repealing of policies that prevented enforcement operations in sensitive areas such as schools and hospitals. Protests have followed.

In Portland, tensions escalated again this September, when Trump described the city as "burning to the ground" and "overrun with domestic terrorists," announcing his plans to deploy the National Guard.

A federal judge has so far blocked Trump from doing so, saying the protests don't meet the requirements for rebellion. He will

likely keep trying.

Operation inflation

Protesters in Portland and across the US have long used humour and costume in their demonstrations. In October, a TikTok video showing an ICE agent spraying pepper spray into the air vent of an activist's inflatable frog costume amassed more than two million views.

The clip exposes the absurd levels of police force against peaceful demonstrators. The protester, Seth Todd, said his intention was to contradict the "violent extremists" narrative, and "make the president and the feds look dumb".

The Portland frog has quickly become emblematic of resistance, appearing on shirts, signs and street art, including parodies of artist Shepard Fairey's iconic OBEY design – the authoritarian face replaced by a cartoon amphibian surrounded by the words DON'T OBEY.

And the frog costume has spawned imitators, with creatures multiplying in protests across the country, including at the recent No Kings rallies. One group of activists launched Operation Inflation, a website that crowdfunds inflatable suits for protesters, aiming to make resistance more visible, playful



and safe.

Strategic silliness

One example that echoes Portland's blow-up menagerie is London's Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA). Members of CIRCA dressed as clowns during anti-war protests in the early 2000s. They played tag around police lines, hugged officers, and marched in absurd choreography.

As scholar Eve Kalyva notes, such actions employ "strategic frivolity": silliness or absurdity in a way that disrupts the scripts between police and protester. By appearing playful rather than menacing, costumed activists directly counter narratives that paint them

as violent threats.

The Portland frog and its friends work with the same strategies of silliness. Their dancing and cartoon-like actions make it impossible to frame them as thugs. Their soft forms bounce in contrast to the hard utility of riot gear.

From suffragette sashes to handmaids

Beyond frivolity, activists throughout history have also used dress and costume to more serious effect. In Britain in the early 20th century, suffragettes wore coordinated purple, white and green sashes to project unity in the fight for women's voting rights.

In the US, dress and costume

have played important roles in successive movements for African American liberation. During the 50s and 60s Civil Rights Movement, many marched in their best suits and dresses to assert their dignity against dehumanising racism.

The Black Panther Party had an unofficial uniform of sunglasses, berets and black leather jackets, embodying a more defiant style.

More recently, demonstrators in the US, Northern Ireland and Argentina have donned the red cloaks and white bonnets of The Handmaid's Tale to protest abortion bans.

Similarly, The Extinction Rebellion-affiliated group Red Rebel Brigade stages actions in flowing red robes to mourn environmental loss.

And the wearing of the fishnet-patterned keffiyeh has now become a global symbol of Palestinian support.

Naked solidarity

On October 12, Portland's anti-ICE demonstrators – many in their inflatable suits – were joined by thousands of naked cyclists in the Emergency World Naked Bike Ride. As costume designer and historian Camille Benda writes in *Dressing The Resistance: The Visual Language of Protest* (2021), nakedness in protest lays bare the body's vulnerability to state violence.

In Portland, the mix of bare skin and soft blow-up animals heightens both the absurdity and tenderness of the scene. These protesters offer new avenues for direct action at a time when many people's rights and freedoms are at stake.

At the time of writing, ICE was reported to have increased its weapons budget by 700% from last year.

Whether Trump will ultimately deploy the National Guard remains unclear. But across the US, the frogs (and their friends) keep multiplying. Their placards declaring "frogs together strong" remind us of the strength to be forged in unity and laughter. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, OCTOBER 26, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-sextile Mars on your solar return chart thus it is going to be a very fruitful year that promises a lot for you. You will plan to achieve big and will be a lot more ambitious and energetic. You will find yourself wonderfully uplifted to achieve things you always dreamed of. You would also have the courage to face difficulties and turn things in your favour. Your standing in job/profession will increase. And would receive appreciation from your colleagues/associates for your efforts. Your bosses will have high expectations from you and you will be given responsibilities that others are not able to handle. You can also plan to undertake renovation of your house or buy a new property. Your friends and family will support you in a big way. Your morale will be high, and you will look forward to spending some time of comfort with your family. Atmosphere will be congenial and there will be joy and cheerfulness in family. You will also come in contact with some important person who will help you immensely in your profession/business.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) Your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains, and your energy increases for projects at work and your job environment teeming with activity. You take small yet sure steps towards your financial goals. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. If you have children, they may need more discipline than they previously did. You may find your children at an age that requires more attention and or structure. There are some contentious issues that are laid to rest as you tackle them and take a bold stand. Healthy needs some attention.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You may have to make some critical decisions due to situations in your life that force you to make choices; they could even be between career and family goals. Some of you may be promoted or your career takes a new direction. The challenge is to find a healthy balance—to improve home life, while at the same time tending to your career needs. Romantic and personal relations would be more practical than fun. For some, a romantic relationship stabilizes and becomes more serious. For some you will meet a new romantic interest who is perhaps more younger and energetic as compared to you. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring of late, and you meet new and unusual people.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) New friendships are likely to emerge this time, supportive and easygoing ones. 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 are indicated. Your position of power and authority is maintained despite many changes all around. Don't allow personal feelings to influence professional decisions. An opportunity or investment to make quick gains is on the cards but analyze data at hand before you invest. Energy is high and things happen swiftly. You exude confidence and are in a positive frame of mind.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) There is good luck attending to material matters, as there is increase of wealth and monetary gains. This is the right time to share your loving and personal relationships and share thoughts and ideas and spend good time in the association of your loved one. You may be involved in meetings with business associates as financial and business dealings would bring good results and gains. You can count on your professional and personal partners, as they stand by you through thick and thin. You will work in free and unrestricted space. Physical energy and good health allow you to tackle busy schedules.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your social life will likely increase and bring you in contact with more influential, powerful people who could prove to be helpful as they extend a helping hand. Matters related to universities, higher education, organized religion, publishing, legal affairs, and foreign interests proceed smoothly. This is an excellent time to seek advanced training or further your education. Happiness and fulfillment through close friendships and relationships is indicated. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to aim for a sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) The planetary combination tends to change your outlook on life, perhaps stimulated by travel. Some changes in your social circle have been occurring, and this brings about a new awareness. You are more determined to

achieve your personal goals, and more strategic in the manner you go about doing so. New responsibilities are likely to present themselves and you would take them more seriously. New projects excite you but remember that bringing them to a completion is just as important. A little attention on fitness and health related programs would be helpful.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) During this period money matters come into focus for you. You would adopt a realistic approach to business and finance because. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional activities, during the week. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is more intense. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. You look to networking to leverage on your contacts. You may be quick to anger and can antagonize some whom you want to win over.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) This is a time which is good for money, status and for enhancing your standing. Your entire focus shifts in this direction. You take on new responsibilities but enjoy the challenges it presents. Your belief systems and personal philosophies are especially important to you, but do not often coincide with your methods. This dichotomy will inculcate new attitudes towards finances, and social relationships before you strike a balance. It's an excellent time for travel, higher education and communications. The family is supportive and helps you look at the larger picture.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You may feel the need to be appreciated by family members, and the need for togetherness with others this week. Events are such that you move towards a more objective approach to your life, and you cultivate true friendships. It is a time when we need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose and hold on to things that have a future. You would express your sympathetic and compassionate side. Others might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You would stand alone, take action and start afresh during this period.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You would be able to express a greater level of sensitivity and sensibility in personal and professional relations. You encounter people who are very considerate and understanding. 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 have to maintain a positive attitude and face life in a positive way. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill and profit.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) At this time, you feel on top in domestic issues and spend quality time with people you care about and in activities that are rejuvenating. You tend to be traditional and restrictive in family matters and may have to face opposition from younger ones. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. Your unselfishness and willingness to listen will help boost your magnetic appeal. Your professional skills, wisdom and craft are made available to you. Overseas visitors and news are positive and inspiring. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. You need to tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get your point across.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) Business projects and associations are opening and widening your horizons, so you need to think expansively. Your financial situation looks promising if you manage it well personally rather than trust upon others. You are generous with friends and loving in family situations. You come across as especially smooth and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. A business venture could be fruitful if you are willing to lend it some energy. You are involved in multiple tools of creativity you possess. A gentle and soft approach can resolve an old conflict.

What modern British monarchy might look like under William?

In a recent interview with actor Eugene Levy, Prince William stated that "change is on [the] agenda" when he becomes king. His pivotal role in the decision to remove Prince Andrew's titles has given a glimpse into what these changes might be.

Announcing that Andrew would no longer use his official titles, Buckingham Palace stated that the Prince of Wales had been "consulted" on the decision. But news reports suggest that it may have been William, rather than Andrew or the king, who was the real driving force behind the decision.

William has already made it clear he takes a dim view of his uncle, for example by banning him from walking in the Order of the Garter procession. It has been reported that as king, William will ban Andrew from public and private royal events, including his coronation.

The 19th-century commentator Walter Bagehot, whose 1867 work *The English Constitution* provides the classic account of constitutional monarchy in the UK, described the monarchy as the "dignified" part of the constitution, whose opulence and grandeur inspired "awe", "reverence" and "deference" from its people.

He suggested that the monarchy needed to maintain "mystery and theatre" in order to project this image of dignity.

Bagehot warned against the monarchy playing an "efficient" role in the constitution – seeking to solve problems that the country might be facing. But, as a poll from 2024 found, people now want the royal family to talk more about the "social issues and challenges facing the country", rather than simply looking regal on a throne.

Whereas Andrew arguably embodied Bagehot's outdated, entitled view of monarchy, William represents a more efficient one. He wants to be out in society, playing a hands-on role to help inspire policy shifts on key issues.

It is clear that William wants to change how the monarchy lives and works day-to-day. But how much change can one man – even a king – make?

Constitutional obligations

As head of state, there are certain constitutional functions and duties which, as king, William must perform. For example, he will have to deliver the king's speech each year during the extravagant state opening of parliament. This grand display of pomp and ceremony seems at odds with any pared-down vision for monarchy.

But William's future role also gives him the chance to inspire the sorts of changes he wants to see. The monarch enjoys the right to be consulted by, and the rights to encourage and warn, the government of the day. These rights are known as the tripartite

convention.

William has previously stated that he wants to "engage governments" on issues he cares about, and this constitutional convention gives him the vehicle to do so.

This is something we are already seeing William's father, King Charles, do, using his influence to encourage the government to take action on issues important to him. He encouraged the government to launch the Coalition to Tackle Knife Crime.

And Keir Starmer explicitly stated that the king's vision for sustainable, eco-friendly homes had "inspired" government policy on housing.

William has chosen to focus much of his work as Prince of Wales on issues with a social purpose, such as climate change, homelessness and mental health. This is work which he wants to continue as king, stating that what excites him most about his future role is to create "a world... that actually does impact people's lives for the better".

He has already tried to use his influence to encourage government support for these issues. In 2023, he spent weeks courting support from ministers for his anti-homelessness initiative, *Homewards*.

But in the weekly audiences with the prime minister that he will have as king, he will be able to have direct conversations at the highest level of government.

Of course, he will need to remain politically neutral, another inescapable constitutional obligation. Bagehot warned that "constitutional royalty under an active king is one of the worst of governments" and described a political king as a "meddling fool".

But Charles is already treading the political boundary as king – and so far seems to be avoiding criticism. This is likely because there is largely support in society to see progress on issues like reducing knife crime.

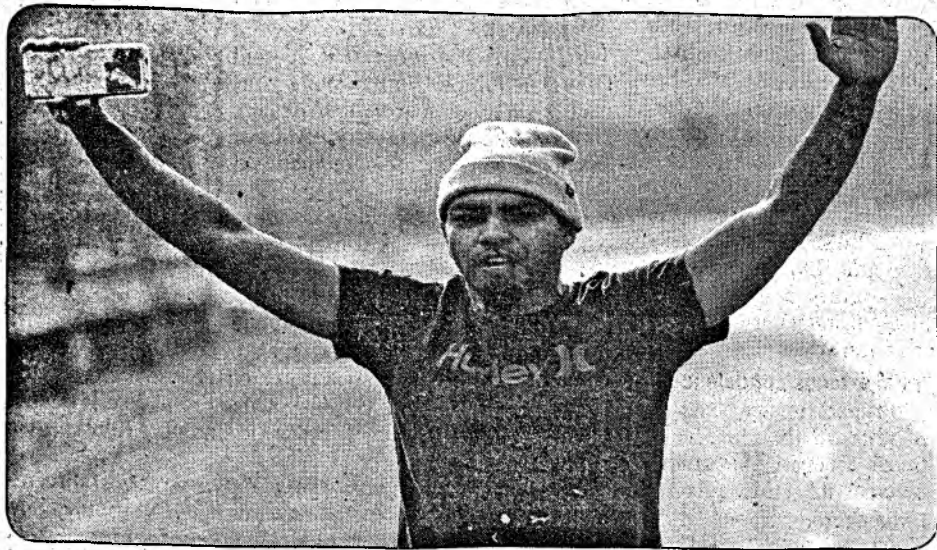
To balance his desire to initiate change with his constitutional obligations, William will have to stick to relatively uncontroversial issues on which there is broad shared consensus, like the need to end homelessness.

William can also modernise the monarchy when it comes to cost. Rather than, in his own words, having hundreds of patronages and "loads of causes that you sort of turn up and keep an eye on", he wants the monarchy to focus on a handful of core projects.

This would entail a smaller number of working royals doing fewer engagements, which should mean fewer staff and reduced costs for the taxpayer.

This informal style of monarchy with fewer working members is popular in countries where people – including the royals themselves – often bicycle. And they are just as, if not more popular, than the UK's monarchy. (*The Conversation*)

South Africans feel mixture of hope & despair as apartheid becomes a distant memory



According to data released by global market research firm Ipsos in September, 80% of South Africans say their country is on the wrong track. It is not hard to see why.

Even if they are not among the white Afrikaners who have sought refugee status in the US, courtesy of President Donald Trump's controversial policy to protect them from the discrimination he alleges they are facing, there is a great deal for ordinary men and women in South Africa to complain about.

And with nearly 60% of the population born after apartheid ended in 1994, the government's attempts to frame the hardships faced by its people as the result of past repression have decreasing relevance.

The most obvious problem is perhaps the failure for standards of living to improve.

The ruling African National Congress (ANC) party has overseen flatlining or declining GDP per capita for more than 15 years, according to a two-year study published in 2023 by Harvard University.

Worse still, the study showed that unemployment

has risen by 0.5% on average every year since the ANC came to power in 1994.

This has left the majority of young men and women in South Africa without any prospect of earning a living.

As the South African Department of Statistics reported in May 2025: "Among the 4.8 million unemployed youth in the first quarter of 2025, 58.7% reported having no previous work experience."

That means nearly six in 10 unemployed young people are still waiting for their first opportunity to enter the job market.

It continued: "Without experience, youth struggle to get hired - yet without being hired, they cannot gain experience. This cycle of exclusion continues to fuel long-term unemployment and stalls skills development at a critical stage of life."

These are just two areas of decline. Johannesburg, the country's commercial capital, has endured repeated electricity and water failures, while its streets have been so poorly maintained that some are close to being dysfunctional.

The military, once respected - and even feared

- across the continent, is in shambles. According to DefenceWeb, an African defence and security news publication, only 15% to 20% of the South African National Defence Force's aircraft are serviceable. It has one seaworthy frigate and just several inshore patrol vessels to guard nearly 3,000 km of coastline.

South Africa's police force is also severely infiltrated by criminal syndicates - so much so that Firoz Cachalia, the minister of police, has warned that the country is in danger of becoming "the next Colombia or Ecuador".

Both of these countries are plagued by criminal syndicates, with Ecuadorian crime groups particularly notorious for their links with the police.

This is all taking place against a backdrop of rampant corruption, which was exposed by the South African government's own commission of inquiry in 2022.

Hundreds of ANC politicians and officials were named or linked to corrupt activities after evidence was unearthed by the Zondo commission during its nearly four years of hearings.

Few of the accused are

behind bars. And the author of the report, former Chief Justice Raymond Zondo, has expressed his disappointment at the slow progress.

Reasons for optimism

An air of gloom has settled over South Africa. Yet there is evidence that allows for a more optimistic analysis. First, the country remains genuinely democratic, holding elections that are regarded as free and fair nationally and internationally.

This remains true, even though the ANC lost its absolute majority in the 2024 election and has had to join forces with opposition parties to govern.

This was very different from the response of many parties across Africa in recent years, which have rigged votes or refused to recognise elections they have lost.

More than 27 million citizens registered to vote for the 2024 election, and the results reflected a multiparty system with genuine voter choice.

At the same time, over 11 million South Africans did not cast a ballot, even though they were registered voters. This indicates a feeling of apathy towards politics.

Second, the official opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, has provided proof that there are alternatives to ANC governance that can work. Helen Zille was elected as mayor of Cape Town in 2006 and the party has held it ever since.

Her party has administered South Africa's Western Cape region since 2009. And their administrations have generally been effective and free from corruption, giving citizens an idea of what an alternative future might hold.

She has now decided to stand for mayor of Johannesburg in 2026, a major challenge to the ANC.

Third, most of the media

and book publishing industries in South Africa are not controlled by the government.

South Africa guarantees freedom of the press, and its media landscape is among the freest in Africa. It is ranked 27th globally on the 2025 World Press Freedom Index - the highest in Africa.

Fourth, the judiciary is independent and has a record of holding criminals to account. This includes some, such as former police commissioner Jackie Selebi, who were well connected.

However, it is capable of being disrupted by powerful figures who find loopholes to delay justice. South Africa's former president, Jacob Zuma, is a case in point.

He has faced 16 charges of corruption related to a 30 billion rand (roughly £1.3 billion) deal to 'modernise' the country's defence in the late 1990s.

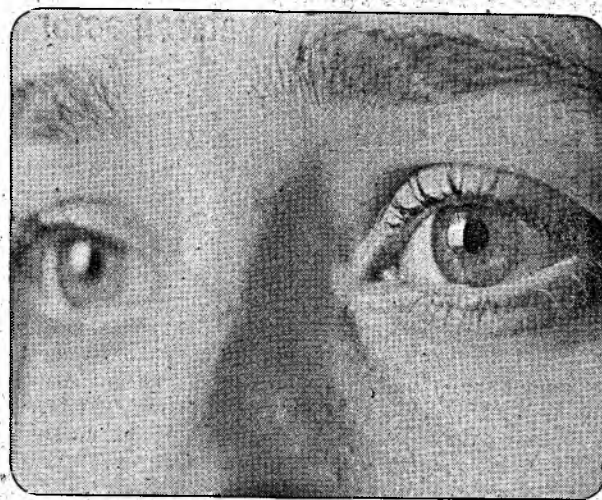
Zuma denies the charges and none have been heard in court. As his late lead counsel, Kemp J. Kemp, put it in 2007, he defended Zuma against corruption charges "like Stalingrad... burning house to burning house".

Fifth, South Africa's agricultural sector is first rate, exporting across the world, while tourism remains a major attraction and a foreign exchange earner. Mining is also still important, even though it is a declining industry.

And sixth, several of its universities are among the best in Africa and produce skilled men and women who can serve their communities. The universities of Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Witwatersrand rank first, second and third on the continent respectively.

These factors together could provide a basis for reform and renewal. (The Conversation)

Eye scans may provide clues to ageing, heart disease risk: Study



Canadian researchers have found that scanning the tiny blood vessels in the eyes may help predict a person's risk of developing heart disease and how fast they're biologically ageing.

The study, published in the journal *Science Advances*, suggests that retinal scans could one day serve as a noninvasive window into the body's overall vascular health and biological ageing status, offering new opportunities for early detection and intervention.

"By connecting retinal scans, genetics, and blood biomarkers, we have uncovered molecular pathways that help explain how aging affects the vascular system," said Marie Pigeyre, Associate Professor at McMaster University's Department of Medicine in Canada.

"The eye provides a unique, noninvasive view into the body's circulatory system. Changes in the retinal blood vessels often mirror changes occurring throughout the body's small vessels," added Pigeyre.

To conduct the study, the team combined retinal scans, genetic data, and blood sample analyses from over 74,000 participants.

People with simpler, less branched blood vessels were found to be at increased risk of cardiovascular diseases and showed signs of biological ageing, such as higher inflammation and shorter lifespan.

Currently, assessing age-related diseases like heart disease, stroke, and dementia requires multiple tests.

The hope is that retinal scans alone could eventually be used as a quick, accessible way to assess ageing and cardiovascular risk. However, more research is needed.

The team also reviewed blood biomarkers and genetic data and identified potential biological causes behind changes in the eye's blood vessels.

This helped them identify specific proteins that may drive ageing and disease - MMP12 and IgG-Fc receptor IIb.

Both proteins are linked to inflammation and vascular ageing. According to Pigeyre, these proteins could be potential targets for future drugs.

"Our findings point to potential drug targets for slowing vascular ageing, reducing the burden of cardiovascular diseases, and ultimately improving lifespan," she said. (IANS)

Tiny metal particles show potential in targeting cancer cells

Researchers have developed microscopic metal particles that can kill cancer cells while sparing healthy tissue, offering a potential new direction for more targeted and less toxic cancer treatments.

The study by the team from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) in Australia remains at the cell-culture stage and has not been tested in animals or humans, *Xinhua* news agency reported.

However, it suggests a new strategy for designing cancer treatments that exploits cancer's own weaknesses.

The international team led by RMIT researchers created tiny particles, known as nanodots, from molybdenum oxide - a compound based on a rare metal called molybdenum. It is often used in electronics and alloys. By tweaking their chemical composition, the scientists enabled the particles to release reactive oxygen molecules - unstable forms of oxygen that damage cancer cells and trigger their self-destruction.

In tests, the particles killed three times more cervical cancer cells than healthy cells within 24 hours, without the need for light, unusual for technologies that rely on oxidative stress, according to the study.

"Cancer cells already live under higher stress than healthy ones. Our particles push that stress a little further, enough to trigger self-destruction in cancer cells, while healthy cells cope just fine," said Zhang Baoyue, first author from the RMIT School of Engineering.

"The result was particles that generate oxidative stress selectively in cancer cells under lab conditions," Zhang said. These particles are made from common metal oxide instead of costly or toxic noble metals like gold or silver. (IANS)

BSF undertakes vulnerability...

(Contd from P-1) residents on the other side, but both the BSF and the Border Guard Bangladesh are working in close coordination to address any emerging challenges," the IG added.

He reiterated the commitment of both forces to maintaining cordial relations and ensuring that the border remains peaceful and secure, thus upholding the long-standing spirit of cooperation between the two countries.

Meghalaya shares a 443-km border with Bangladesh. There have been several instances of intrusion by Bangladeshi smugglers and miscreants in the past.

As several stretches of the border remain unfenced, the BSF is counting on its intelligence, technological advancement and support of border population to thwart any attempts of trans-border crime.

Meghalaya pays glowing tributes...

(Contd from P-1) Movement that sought a separate state for the hill tribes of undivided Assam, steering the campaign through dialogue and democratic means until Meghalaya was formally created on January 21, 1972.

The Garo Hills region also remembered the state's first Chief Minister through a solemn memorial service held in Tura on Saturday.

The programme honoured the visionary statesman whose leadership laid the foundation for Meghalaya's identity and its peaceful attainment of statehood.

As part of the commemoration, a book titled *Capt. Williamson A. Sangma - Architect of Meghalaya*, authored by Andrew Simons, Commissioner and Secretary of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, was released by Meghalaya Assembly Speaker Thomas A. Sangma, who attended as the chief guest.

The memorial event witnessed the presence of Cabinet Minister Brening Sangma, Assembly Secretary Malthus S. Sangma, officials of the Assembly Secretariat, members of Capt. Sangma's family, college students, and other distinguished invitees.

In his address, the Speaker reflected on his personal bond with the late leader, recounting experiences while accompanying Capt. Sangma across the state during his tenure as Chief Minister. He humorously recalled how Capt. Sangma would keep them alert during extensive travels, tapping their heads if they began to doze off.

The Speaker emphasised Capt. Sangma's unwavering commitment to democratic values and peace. He noted that Meghalaya achieved statehood without violence, guided by Capt. Sangma's belief that "violence begets violence."

The Speaker described him as one of the most revered figures in Meghalaya's political and social history, whose leadership during the Hill State Movement reflected rare courage, integrity, and principled governance.

He further praised Capt. Sangma's role in fostering unity among the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes.

"It is because of his great leadership that three tribes speaking different languages remain united," he stated, highlighting the legacy of mutual respect and collective determination that Capt. Sangma championed.

Speaking about the book, author Dr Simons expressed gratitude to the family of Capt. Sangma and to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Library for providing invaluable archival materials. He remarked that although Capt. Sangma is widely remembered, but substantial written documentation on his life and contributions remained limited, motivating him to undertake this work.

"This initiative will be informative to younger generations, helping them understand the Hill State Movement, Capt. Sangma's leadership and his principles of non-violence," Dr Simons said. He added that although he never met Capt. Sangma, he holds deep admiration for his political journey and statesmanship.

The programme concluded with a heartfelt tribute to Capt. Sangma, whose ideals of peace, unity, and good governance continue to inspire Meghalaya's present and future generations.

50 individuals benefit from...

(Contd from P-3) He encouraged participants to explore skills linked to environmental conservation, engage with local farmers and adopt eco-friendly farming practices such as Zero Budget Natural Farming and plant-based initiatives, which could further eco-tourism development in the region.

He also assured technological and financial support for the future development initiatives of DDUCC.

The event was also attended by Prof. SK Barik, Dean, School of Life Sciences, NEHU, Shillong; Dr. FR Sumer, Principal (In-Charge), DDUCC; Sanwotki Laloo, headman of Wahiajer and other dignitaries.

Bengal CM orders strict steps for safety of patients, docs & visitors in state hospitals

KOLKATA, Oct 25: West Bengal

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday directed officials to ensure the safety and security of patients, visitors and doctors in all medical establishments across the state following incidents of alleged molestation of a minor and a medic at state-run hospitals in Kolkata and Uluberia, a top official said.

Banerjee, who addressed a high-level meeting over the phone, directed officials to take all possible measures to prevent any recurrence of such incidents, he said.

"She emphasised that harassment of anyone coming for treatment will not be tolerated under any circumstances. She also directed the administration to adopt a zero-tolerance approach towards such offences," the bureaucrat told PTI.

Banerjee, who is also the state health minister, directed the department to review the existing security arrangements in the hospitals and to strengthen them wherever necessary.

"This includes measures such as the need for staff training after recruitment. She instructed that hospitals must have adequate lighting and functional CCTV cameras at all times. If any CCTV camera is found to be faulty, it must be replaced immediately," he stated.

The high-level meeting convened by Chief Secretary Manoj Pant was attended by senior officials of the state health department, including DGP Rajeev Kumar, health secretary NS Nigam and others.

Superintendents of all government hospitals, the principals of medical

colleges, and all district magistrates and superintendents of police were also present in Saturday's meeting. "The officials present at the meeting were asked to submit an action plan at the earliest to implement the directives," the official said, adding that a set of directives was issued, acting on Banerjee's advice.

"The chief minister advised that, from now on, the previous track record of any prospective employee must be carefully examined before their appointment. She also directed authorities to ensure that all staff follow a designated uniform and that duty rosters are maintained properly. The roster should clearly show who is entering and leaving the hospital at any given time, which will help in investigations if any untoward incident occurs," he said.

During the meeting, discussions were held on several measures to strengthen hospital security, the bureaucrat said.

A teenage girl was allegedly molested by a former group D staffer of a government hospital in the state-run SSKM Hospital here on Wednesday night.

The accused was arrested from Dhapa and booked under the provisions of the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act.

In Howrah district's Uluberia, a junior woman doctor at the Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay Medical College and Hospital was allegedly molested and threatened with gangrape by relatives of patients. Later, police arrested three persons for their alleged involvement in the matter. (PTI)

City college hosts...

(Contd from P-3) storyteller in society and how storytelling serves as a powerful medium to relate to others and express oneself openly through words, sounds, voice modulation, gestures, facial expressions and body movements.

The session provided students with a platform to showcase their creativity through engagement in various group and individual storytelling activities.

At the conclusion of the workshop, participating teachers and students from different colleges were awarded certificates.

BSF recruitment drive draws...

(Contd from P-3) written examinations," the IG said, adding that the declaration of results is in an advanced stage and will be announced soon.

Encouraged by the enthusiastic participation of the youths, the BSF IG said he would recommend to the central government to conduct more recruitment drives in Meghalaya, its border areas, and across the entire Northeastern region.

Talks on community-industry synergy...

(Contd from P-3) The discussion highlighted that CSR initiatives aligned with community priorities can drive inclusive innovation and strengthen responsible business practices.

The second panel, 'Vision North East - Driving Economic Competitiveness through People and Communities', moderated by Prof. Sanjeeb Kakoty, discussed how the Northeast can harness its unique strengths—human talent, natural resources, and cultural diversity—to build a sustainable, innovation-driven economy. A series of talk sessions added depth to the discussions.

The event concluded with the 'Emerging Ideas Award' ceremony, recognising outstanding entrepreneurial ideas that showcased creativity, sustainability and social impact. The top three entries were honoured with trophies and certificates.

GSU flags operation...

(Contd from P-3) Marak further stated that it was unfortunate that even Garos have to pay professional taxes while those operating from outside the state pay nothing.

In this regard, the GSU has urged the GHADC to take prompt action on the matter to prevent further violations.

Sabarimala gold theft: SIT conducts searches in multiple locations

PATHANAMTHITTA

(KERALA), Oct 25: The SIT investigating the loss of gold from the Sabarimala temple conducted searches at the apartment of prime accused Unnikrishnan Potty in Bengaluru, at a jewellery shop in Ballari, and at an office of a gold-plating firm in Chennai, officials said on Saturday.

Potty was taken to Bengaluru as part of the probe.

Sources said the SIT searched the jewellery shop

owned by Govardhan, who reportedly funded the gold-plating work of the temple's sreekovil (sanctum sanctorum) door frame, which was officially sponsored by Potty.

Officials said the SIT seized several gold bars from the shop. However, it is yet to be confirmed whether the seized gold was extracted from the gold-clad copper plates of the dwarapalaka idols that were sent for electroplating in 2019. (PTI)

Sohra college celebrates...

(Contd from P-3) Key highlights of the workshop included a lecture by Sumendra Nongkynrih, Senior Statistical Officer, NSSO Shillong, who explained how statistics can serve as a useful tool for effective decision-making and policy formulation.

He also elaborated on the evolution of statistical tools, which have made data collection and interpretation easier and provided insights into career opportunities in the field.

The second speaker, Paleshisha Nongkhaw, also a Senior Statistical Officer at NSSO Shillong, spoke in detail about the functions of the NSSO and the various surveys conducted by the office, citing several statistics from Sohra that were well received by the audience.

"Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance."
—Samuel Johnson

Neglected Railways

THE world is fast changing. It's to China's credit that it has come up with the world's fastest high-speed train that touches a speed of around 900-km per hour. The train, CR40, is currently past its trial run and awaiting clearance for commercial passenger service. The fastest-running train in India is the Vande Bharat Express – introduced during the Modi era—that runs at a speed of 160-km per hour. Its designed speed is around 180km. For ages, express trains here ran at speeds of around 80km per hour. India's high-speed Bullet train project, conceived first by the UPA government but initiated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2016, is likely to start its initial run along the Gujarat stretch by 2027. This is projected to run at a speed of 350km per hour. Notably, the entire project – between Mumbai and Ahmedabad – had been conceived as a pilot project for expansion across the main routes in due course. But, a lack of sufficient political will and red tape, coupled by a period of disassociation by the Maharashtra government, caused its delay. The Mumbai side of the project is likely to be completed by 2029.

Overall, Railways here remained a neglected sector. The Congress governments never gave railways the importance it deserved. When Modi started, he raised people's expectations. His government spoke about plans to get Japanese and Chinese technical support to overhaul the railway system and run trains at very high speeds. Nothing much materialized on the ground. Running of trains at high speed required a complete overhaul of the antiquated tracks. This requires huge expenditure. Global agencies are ready to offer funds on loan basis. This was one option. However, the government's concentration was rather on development of National Highways. Roads sector is where huge financial manipulations are possible – with bureaucrats, engineers and politicians vying with each other to have a finger in the dirty pie.

What people see are the modern, multi-lane road systems. A lack of focus on railways also created a situation of long-distance buses and trucks making a mess of traffic even on highways, not to speak of the chaos on urban roads. Lack of proper attention to the railway sector is making life miserable for the non-VIP ordinary folks who plan travel. Reservations are not easy to come by also due to the large-scale manipulations by railway officials, travel agencies and agents. This, in turn, is helping the luxury bus cartels carrying passengers from cities to cities through long hauls at night. Their charges are unbearable, but passengers are left with no option when rail reservations are not available. Successive governments showed little interest in setting things right. Modi dumped the railway budget. New trains are fewer in number. Though safety was claimed to be a major concern since 2014, several tragic accidents have taken place. There have been little improvements in passenger amenities on trains other than on some special trains and the Vande Bharat. Some 90 per cent of the rail passengers feel no improvement in their travel experiences since the turn of the century.

Letters to the Editor

Congress's survival toolkit

The editorial "Whither Congress Revival" (ST October 25, 2025) made interesting reading. The possibility of the Congress party returning to power in India in 2029 is a complex and evolving scenario, shaped by both internal recalibration and external political dynamics. After the 2024 general elections, Congress saw a surprising resurgence, nearly touching 100 – seat mark, and Rahul Gandhi assumed the role of leader of Opposition for the first time. This shift has energised the I.N.D.I.A alliance, which includes Congress and other opposition parties, positioning them as a more formidable bloc against the BJP. Analysts argue that Congress must rebuild its grassroots base, especially in states where it has faded into irrelevance. The party's current strategy appears paradoxical in shrinking to grow by focusing on weakening BJP's dominance before presenting a unified alternative. The rise of regional parties and the North-South divide are reshaping India's political landscape. Congress's ability to forge durable coalitions, especially with strong regional players, will be crucial for any 2029 comeback. Here I am in sync with the

editorial that "the Bihar elections would be a litmus test for the Congress Party."

Challenges ahead: The BJP remains dominant in many states and retains strong organizational machinery. Congress must navigate delimitation debates, leadership clarity and symbolic capital erosion in key regions. While a full return to power is uncertain, Congress is no longer seen as electorally irrelevant. If it sustains its momentum, deepens alliances and reclaims trust in key states, a coalition led return to governance in 2029 is plausible.

Congress in Meghalaya: "Today the Congress Party in Meghalaya is reduced to a shadow of itself and needs injection of leadership that can enthuse party workers," points out the editorial which is rightly so. The Congress in Meghalaya has undergone a dramatic collapse, from once governing the state to now having zero representation in the Assembly as of July 2025. Meghalaya is now the third state in the Northeast without any Congress representation in the Assembly. Nagaland and Sikkim are the two other states. The Congress's slide began in November 2021 when 12 of its 17 MLAs, led by former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, had joined the All India Trinamool Congress and over time three other MLAs joined NPP and

In Saipung, a Biate village in East Jaintia, storytelling by the ritap – the Biate hearth – remains at the centre of everyday life. Through the making of a bilingual picture book, I came to understand the warmth, difficulty and responsibility of translating stories across generations, languages and experiences.

Any Biate story starts and ends with ritap. It was in the winter of 2025, as I sat by the hearth wrapped in a thick woollen blanket and huddled together with my friends and family in Saipung, that I finally realised the profound significance of the traditional Biate kitchen. I knew from my previous stays in the village that the Biate community treasures a long-standing practice of storytelling by the fireplace called ritap. But particularly on the chilly evenings of January, a small hearth naturally felt like the place to be – a place where the stone surface retains heat, chunks of pork belly sizzle just above the fire, and loved ones nestle close to talk for a while.

With its warmth and dim light, the ritap offers an irresistible environment for sharing daily updates, harmless gossip and discussions of village matters. A small cup of chapak (Biate sugarless red tea) freshly brewed on the fire invites more chatter. The night stretches longer as we pour more chapak into our cups from the kettle. Several cats curl up nearby, upholding tranquillity. And this is how their old tales are carried over to newer generations.

Today, when people are more inclined to scroll and engage in political debates than to listen to folklore, Biate storytelling itself has become a narrative of how people live now – one that speaks of change and the futures it holds.

Divided by the Assam-Meghalaya border, the Biate community in Meghalaya, despite the shared language and cultural practices with their counterparts in Assam, continues to influence and be influenced by neighbouring groups like the Pnar. In Saipung, I often saw Biate young adults obsessed with Mizo popular music and women wearing kyrchah (jainkyrshah), a Khasi-Jaintia daily garment. Though sometimes dismissed as acculturation, I see these as important characteristics of contemporary Biate-ness in Jaintia.

"But sis, this is not what we traditionally wear," said several of my Biate friends – from both Assam and Meghalaya – when they saw an

illustration of a Biate woman wearing a kyrchah in the picture book that I was making together with the Forgotten Folklore Project (TFFP), a project by the Sauramandala Foundation. It was a comment I had anticipated, a point I had discussed many times with my team. Not only the kyrchah, but even items like a steamer for making momos that we decided to include in the book were, to some, 'not really Biate'.

Yet in practice, as I observed, these clothes and objects are very much part of daily life in Saipung – just as the stories told by the ritap no longer always begin with 'once upon a time'. These transformations make up a contemporary culture unique to the Biates of Meghalaya,

Divided by the Assam-Meghalaya border, the Biate community in Meghalaya, despite the shared language and cultural practices with their counterparts in Assam, continues to influence and be influenced by neighbouring groups like the Pnar. In Saipung, I often saw Biate young adults obsessed with Mizo popular music and women wearing kyrchah (jainkyrshah), a Khasi-Jaintia daily garment. Though sometimes dismissed as acculturation, I see these as important characteristics of contemporary Biate-ness in Jaintia.

sustaining values upheld over generations.

My picture book sought to present a story inspired by my personal encounters and observations in Saipung – one that articulates how they cross the boundary between past and future through everyday practices, imagination and curiosity. The narrative draws on a plant prevalent in Biateram, known as nathial in Biate and botanically as Phrynium capitatum, often used by the community to pack lunch and wrap snacks for jhum fields.

The story is set in the present day, where the nathial plant refuses to be plucked and instead declares to the man tasked by his wife to bring back some nathial leaves: "I will not go with you if you cannot answer this question – Is she wise?"

and local legitimacy matter deeply.

The lack of internal democracy weakens Congress's ability to regenerate from below, making it vulnerable to defections, fragmentation and narrative erosion. There is a need for leadership reboot in Meghalaya by replacing Vincent Pala who was never elected to the post of President with a locally rooted, symbolically resonant leader and map leadership credibility across districts and ethnic enclaves through democratic election of Party leadership at the Unit, Block, District and State level. The Congress may calibrate alliances by exploring tactical alliances with UDP, HSPDP or even TMC to avoid vote fragmentation. It can embed indigenous governance principles into its manifestos and co-create policy modules with local scholars and elders in bringing about its resurgence in the State.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

A Neopagan's Prayer

Editor,
As of today, I don't really know who might be a suitable patron for swimming. However, Poseidon, the Greek God of the Sea, is associated with the vast waters and swimmers often pray for

By Anna Notsu

This story was originally collected by a Biate schoolgirl in Saipung as part of my research project, which I later adapted into a Biate-English bilingual picture book to reflect the evolving nature of Biate everyday life.

This literary and visual storytelling underwent a painstaking back-and-forth process of translation between Biate and English. The original story, handwritten in Biate on an A4 sheet, was first orally translated into English by my friend in Saipung, simply to help me understand it. It was then rewritten in English by a Biate scholar from Assam. Based on that version, I produced a slightly different story – one that bridges the knowledge of older and younger gen-

beyond geographic, linguistic and cultural borders.

Sharing a story of my own is one thing, but telling someone else's story is another. The latter comes with much more liability, not just in terms of presentation and accuracy but, more fundamentally, of how to receive and interpret a story. To share means to understand, and understanding demands interpretation. This subjective process adds the care and attention that each story deserves.

On a late evening in October, although the air outside still held a trace of warm, humid summer days, my Biate sister, unprompted, lit a fire in the ritap. As my teacup was filled with chapak, my Biate brother and I sat on a mura (bamboo stool), facing the small flame quivering quietly against the dark. We went over the text line by line. He interpreted each word and phrase, paused, crossed out parts of the written Biate, translation, and scribbled new words on a piece of paper, explaining to me each choice.

Fuelling the fire with new logs, even the local cats long gone, a dull ache and stiffness in our legs reminded us of the past hours. Finally, after many hours of translating the translation, he declared, "Now, this is a Biate story."

Communities such as the Biate are often spotlighted by outsiders eager to portray 'traditional tales', 'authentic tribal life', or 'endangered heritage' in the name of cultural preservation. But what we seek to preserve is not necessarily in the past – it is in the now. How the Biate community lives today, how they interpret their own stories and how they narrate them to a newer generation form the heart of what deserves to be shared.

In this globalised era, where 'past practices' so often gain attention under the banner of culture, my experience with bookmaking became a reminder that 'culture' is not static or isolated; it evolves, overlaps and sometimes merges with otherness. And that leads to new futures – without erasing where it stemmed from.

This is a Biate story.
(The author is a PhD scholar in Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology from Leiden University, the Netherlands currently doing research in Jaintia Hills. Her PhD research is part of a five-year project, Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community, and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas, initiated by Leiden University and Ashoka University).

safe passage and calm waters which align with his domain. I am sure that Poseidon himself, is thoroughly pleased with the owners of the True North Fitness and Swimming Academy for they have acted on his behalf and answered the prayers of the swimmers. They have organised the 1st All Shillong Inter School Swimming Championship 2025 (24th-25th October 2025 – Lapalang Sawlad Road).

It was a grand event hosting a great number of students. They have left a great first impression on the students, parents, and school teachers/coaches, and all present in the event. The timing was impeccable – the inauguration, the swimming events of various categories and the regular breaks for students after a certain number of events. The centre of attraction is the huge swarm of students gathering at one place and enjoying the event (shout out to Edmundians, who painted the gallery green). It was a revolutionary initiative, a platform for students to polish their skills and, like one mother complimented – "this is the best way to keep my daughter off the screen and stay physically fit in life." By no means, am I trying to sugar coat my words as a form of sycophancy to get free Gym Membership, but rather, it is a genuine praise and appreciation for

their efforts. What I like the most is the cleanliness and well managed/structured pool area. IF.... IF a private body can provide such facilities, imagine the possibilities and potential it has in shaping future "Michael Phelps" in our very own Shillong. I pray to the Meghalayan God/s of Games and Athletics – Oh Dearest Lords! We worship and burn incense sticks in front of your gigantic posters in every nook and corner of Shillong. With your forever-young-and-handsome-faces, your exquisitely tailored suit and your saccharin-elloquent words... Your Highness!

Please intercede with the residents of our Sacred Saffron Olympus. Persuade them to shower their blessings in the form of grants and aids for the various sport and athletic institutions in and around our state so that our children may prosper in all walks of life.

As for TRUE NORTH, we collectively, would like to congratulate you for the grand success of the events. We look forward to more events in the future.

Yours etc.,
Kyntiewborlang Kharakor,
Via email

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

Indo-Bangladesh border, threats and non-lethal strategy

By Rattan Chand Sharma

The Indo-Bangladesh border is characterized by a plethora of grave threats impacting national security especially along the states of West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. Despite grave threats, the year 2011 was a watershed moment in border guarding along the highly porous and unstable Indo-Bangladesh border. It put the Border Security Force (BSF) in a precarious position affecting the hardware and software of border security. The watershed moment was the acceptance of non-lethal strategy as tactical doctrine to deal with threats thereby compromising national security. It was an unthinkable proposition adopted to improve relations between border guarding forces. The proposition was an agreement to adopt non-lethal strategy by BSF as a tactical doctrine to tackle national security threats. The agreement was signed by ignoring the violent treacherous history of Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) targeting BSF personnel, patronizing illegal immigration, cattle smuggling, infiltration, radicalization and militant groups to destabilize the North East.

In 1998, a BSF inspector was killed in a general area in Dawki, Meghalaya by Bangla miscreants, followed by surrounding of Pyrdiwh village in Meghalaya by Bangladesh Rifles and killing of 16 BSF men in 2001 in Boraibari, followed by kidnapping of two BSF officers in Tripura in 2004 and thereafter killing of BSF officer on 16 April 2005 in Tripura. Had these incidents been analyzed realistically, the non-lethal agreement may not have seen the light of day. There is no denying the fact that attacks on BSF personnel have increased following implementation of non-lethal strategy. Recently cattle smugglers attacked the BSF party with sharp edged weapons despite the BSF using pump action guns in Malda in West Bengal.

Whether threats along the Indo-Bangladesh border justify non-lethal strategy at tactical level needs analysis. Threats emanating on the Indo Bangladesh border are illegal immigration, infiltration, drugs, weapon and FICN smuggling, cattle and smuggling of perishable goods. These threats impact the economy, destabilize the demographic character of NE states especially border areas and cause societal disharmony. These threats cannot be addressed effectively through non-lethal responses. Strategy to address them through non-lethal force may be a serious miscalculation and hara-kiri, impacting both hardware and software of border guarding adversely. With a hostile regime in Bangladesh with ISI footprints, these threats have assumed structured character and can only be addressed through structured response which is the use of potent lethal means and not disorganized and unstructured non-lethal strategy.

Vulnerabilities along the Indo-Bangladesh border including Siliguri corridor need serious introspection and response. The Ministry of Home Affairs and BSF need to discard non-lethal strategies and focus on improving hardware and software of border guarding to strengthen border security. Government has been investing in improving the hardware of border guarding. It gained structured and coordinated traction after establishment of the department of border management. However, border guarding hardware needs substantive improvement through enhanced budgeting. The current increase, impressive in percentage terms, is inadequate for balanced development and upkeep of border guarding hardware. BSF needs to present its case effectively and professionally to get more funds for strengthening border guarding hardware and software. Both hardware and software of border guarding need urgent attention to make men operationally and logistically effective.

The software of border guarding is low priority or no priority area whereas it is this which needs prioritized attention. For the effectiveness of hardware, the software must be healthy and sound. Weak software may render strong hardware ineffective and vice-versa.

What is border guarding hardware and software? Border man, weapons and equipment, terrain, border outposts (BOPs) surveillance devices, border pillars, border fence, flood lights, border road, intelligence network, border population, border area development programme, integrated civic action programme form the hardware of border guarding. It requires continuous upkeep, innovation and upgradation. Old, outdated and unkempt hardware may become a liability in effective border guarding. Hardware is kept under watch by men and its effectiveness depends upon the effectiveness of strategy to thwart threats through effective use of weapons. But with non-lethal strategy in force, there is reluctance on the part of men and leadership to use lethal force even when attacked. This is well known to smugglers and anti-national elements who feel emboldened to carry out their activities. Thus, non-lethal strategy needs reconsideration and must be discarded in the interest of national security.

The software of border guarding is professionalism of leadership and men and their acumen to use professionalism at macro and micro levels, mental toughness of leaders and men to withstand extreme hardship. Also treating border security as a sacred ritual and driving force to boost morale and motivation without unduly getting affected by the external environment dictated by service conditions and societal and familial responsibilities is integral. While Governments and border guarding forces put enough focus on hardware of border guarding, there is very little done to strengthen the software of border security which must be agile and active for ensuring effectiveness of hardware. It is this weak software which drives men to commit suicides and incidents of fratricide.

The first step in strengthening software is basic training for both leaders and men. Training curriculum stands highly diluted and bereft of the mental toughness regimen which comes through putting men under harsh conditions to endure hardship and adversity. The need is to restore old methodology of training which focused on ground realities to develop mental toughness. There is a need to re-prioritize basic and in-service training curriculum to make it more practical and less theoretical. This will bring in self-actualization in men; drive their morale and motivation imbuing qualities of discipline, professionalism and integrity in them thereby making border guarding a highly professional enterprise in national security.

The first lesson is tough basic training followed by regular company and battalion training regime accompanied with long marches with full battle load as part of company and battalion collective training and renewed focus on weapon and equipment training. Border guarding software through realistic training will truly become professional and there will be rhythmic coordination between hardware and software thereby strengthening border security.

Considering the multiplicity and gravity of threats along the Indo-Bangladesh border, there is a need to strengthen border security through coordinated improvement in both hardware and software of border guarding and junk non-lethal strategy. For this to happen the Union Home Ministry should designate the Indo-Bangladesh border as highly sensitive and a highly vulnerable zone with threats carrying long term national security implications especially for the North Eastern Region. The Indo-Bangladesh border which was a problem area of yesterday and will be a problem area of tomorrow, needs structured lethal response in national security interest, not ad-hoc ad-interim response.

Hope those handling policy and conceptual level of border management realize the perils of non-lethal response and its long term impact on national security and initiate course correction.

(The writer is Commandant (Retd), Border Security Force)

"Where there is unity there is always victory."

— Publilius Syrus

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Sort out the overlaps

THAT Meghalaya has too many tiers of governance. That some of them overlap is a no brainer. At the end of the day if an analysis is done it would boil down to one thing – control over finances. That in a particular District Council constituency such as Laban, some areas should fall under the Municipality and others under the District Council is something that should have been settled right at the beginning but since there were no contracts and tendering involved earlier, the matter did not gain traction. Now that the matter pertains to road construction and that is where money is to be made and has always been made by the State PWD, and in the case of urban roads – the Urban Affairs Department, a conflict of interest has arisen. Obviously, no authority wants to hand over a lucrative part of the governance system to another entity. But this is creating too many pitfalls and overlaps which are ultimately not good for the people residing in the areas who are the end beneficiaries of a road or a water project. Besides, a road cannot be restricted by the duality of control by the Shillong Municipal Board and the Khasi Hills District Council. That goes for the other two Councils as well.

Hence it is important for the State Government, the Members of the District Council, as also the Executive Committee of the Council to sit and thrash out matters. In the first place the District Councils were never envisaged to be a development institution or to be involved in infrastructure creation since that would overlap with the authority and mandate of the state government. It also depends where the Sixth Schedule is applied. In the case of Assam where the Government is led by a non-tribal majority, the Sixth Schedule in the tribal-majority areas such as Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao and Bodoland are vested with more powers, including that of running several institutions. These Councils are almost like a state within a state and they have large budgets for infrastructural development. In the case of Meghalaya, the District Councils exist in a state with a tribal dominated government. If strict constitutional guidelines were to have been followed the District Council should have been abolished after statehood was granted to Meghalaya. A long term vision would have informed the then set of leaders that the District Councils would have been a superfluous institution. But it is a parody of the times that an institution once created cannot be done away with purely because of the political fall-outs, although pragmatically this would have been the right thing to do.

As of now there is a constant conflict of interests over the jurisdictions of the District Councils and the State Government. There is also a clash of interests between the Syiemship and Councils and the Dorbar Shnong and the Councils since the Dorbar Shnong these days work very closely with the State Government in implementing a plethora of schemes. Also, the District Councils have some primary responsibilities which they have miserably failed to carry out as the custodians of rivers, forests and land. Why are the Councils then more interested in road making?

Wah Umkhras: Where the Puri Once Lived

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Recently, Sonal Jain, a highly acclaimed artist and author based in Shillong, gifted me the book 'Puri'. The book, which was the outcome of the project supported by Heinrich Böll Stiftung and took over four years to complete, punctured by the pandemic, has as its setting the landscape around Lum Shyllong. On a splash page, there is a map of the nine mythical springs that emerge from it, revealing the beginning of their journey. As they flow downstream, they are joined by smaller streams like Umliw, transforming them into great rivers like the Umngot and the Umiam. It is along these rivers and streams that the Puri or water nymphs reside, and the focus of Sonal's work. I remember my mother telling us stories about the Puri and other mythical creatures in the past, which included the Boit, Kshuid Tynjang, and many more. In fact, the house in which I grew up was along the banks of Wah Umkhras, which also originates from Wah Demthring (one of the nine mythical springs) in Lum Shyllong.

For those who have been long residents of Shillong, Wah Umkhras has a special connection for them. It has found its mention in many literary works, which include the 2017 book by Esther Syiem (a highly accomplished scholar and retired Professor of English at North-Eastern Hill University), 'Memoir in Water: Speaks the Wah Umkhras'. In an interview with Jobet Warji (a highly respected writer and scholar), while talking about the book, she reminisces that the water body in the past "had beauty and power and the ability to make itself heard through its raging waters or clear translucence in autumn or winter." In his famous poem "Sundori" in The Yearning of Seeds (2011), Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih (the most famous modern Khasi writer) also mentions the river. Recently, at a workshop, I listened to Desmond Kharmawphlang (a well-known folklorist), talking about the river and reciting a poem. Wah Umkhras which has powerfully impacted everyone who lived around it, finding a mention in their creative works. And

the transformation of the river from its pristine state to a drain has likewise deeply affected them. Staying along its bank, I saw the entire transformation.

When I was young, going to Wah Umkhras (known as Umkhar in our section) for washing clothes and bathing was a regular affair during the weekends. There were a couple of waterfalls, including the Spread Eagle Falls, close to which were deep pools where the most adventurous of us would go diving. I would prefer shallow water where I could submerge myself without getting drowned. On the other side of the river, there was a path that would lead to Nongrim Hills, and I would use that for going to college. The river, however, became impassable during the pre-monsoon and monsoon seasons when the river became a torrent swell, carrying mud and debris while giving off a frightful roar which one could hear from far away. This was the time we avoided going to the river.

However, when the river was gentle, it was full of people washing, swimming, and picnicking. Some people would catch fish using their fishing rods, but the one that fascinated me a lot was catching fish using a khoh (conical basket). People would walk along the edge of the water and thrust the khoh into the sand. Then they would lift the basket out of the water and inspect it for dohthli. Sometimes, the catch also included crabs as well. But I never saw people catching frogs for food. Or maybe I just missed that. Along its banks, there were many fruit trees, especially those of Sohprai-am (guava). While those belonged to households staying on the other side of the river, my friends and I would throw stones at them to bring the fruit down. When some fell into the water below, we would rush to collect them and escape before the owners found out. Fruits were not the only things we would steal.

There was also a bamboo grove planted as a fence along the bank. Whenever we needed stumps for our cricket

matches, we would cut some with a wait (khasi machete). And during the winter, we would cut down long bamboo poles for making small bamboo houses to be burned down at a later stage. This was part of the Nepali festival called 'mera meri,' and once I made my own bamboo house and stayed in it for the night. Our house was one of the first in the area, and it was mostly farmland where farmers grew radishes and sweet potatoes. Just before the harvest, we would steal sweet potatoes from the field and eat them with our friends. Come to think of it, we were doing a lot of stealing back in those days.

This was a time when the river was very clean, and there was no dearth of dragonflies darting around hunting for their prey. In fact, the sight of dragonflies stayed with me for a long time, and I was really sad when they were gone. Also, in time, the fireflies we once caught in the falling light of dusk were also gone. Their disappearance began when the river started becoming dirty. It all started with the establishment of a small abattoir near the river bank. It was near where I stayed. I would see every day a cow being killed and drained of its blood, which, along with the other wastes, would flow into the nearby stream, which joined the Wah Umkhras. Initially, there was no discernible impact on the river. But slowly, changes began unraveling.

The first sign of the river becoming dirty was the appearance of red worms swimming in the water. The fish had already disappeared. Then plastic, discarded clothes and all kinds of debris started appearing, clogging the flow of the water. Slimy brown moss started growing on the rocks we previously used for crossing the stream. Downstream, the pool used for diving was now awash with floating plastic and all kinds of garbage. It had become so dirty that I was hesitant even to let my feet touch the water, which once upon a time was full of shimmering pebbles. The once beautiful Wah Umkhras

had become a nullah.

Sonal Jain expertly presents the transformation of our water bodies in her book, displaying pictures of pristine forest streams, millennia-old caves, and the pollution that has started destroying many of them. The book itself feels melancholic and gives a very earthly vibe as you turn its pages. Since the book is about the Puris, it has many stories about people being possessed by one, which turned out to be both a blessing and a curse. The story of well-known sculptor and painter Raphael Warji's great-granduncle, who was enchanted by a Puri, is especially fascinating and worthy of a feature film. In fact, the book has shots that are going to be part of a feature film in the future. The story, not to give away the suspense, brings out many revelations that I did not know about the Puris and also gives an insight into the cosmogony of the Khasis – how they looked at their place in the universe. But the one thing that the book makes very clear is the need to reconnect with nature and the value of environmental stewardship.

The Puris can only live in water bodies that are clean. So naturally, as the Wah Umkhras started losing its unspoiled character, the stories also disappeared. When I was young, near our house, there was a small shyngiar (spring) that was used for collecting water. It dried out as soon as houses started getting built in the area. I remember being told to stay away from it at night because of a spirit that lived around it. It was not a Puri but a malevolent one. As soon as the shyngiar disappeared, so did the fear, and we started playing football and cricket around it.

Sonal's book is a timely reminder that it is the stories that give identity to our community. When we lose them, we lose a part of our identity. And in reviving them, we are acknowledging who we are – a people of long history and rich traditions. It's time to bring them back. Let's bring back our rivers. Let's bring back Wah Umkhras. Let's bring back our stories.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

Watching over the hidden world beneath the waves

By Nidugondi L N Sai Pranav

When most people think of the ocean, they imagine open blue water, waves crashing on shores, or schools of fish gliding peacefully beneath the surface. More difficult to visualize is what exists beneath it, along the seafloor: a world of buried pipelines for oil and gas, cables transmitting internet around the world, and framework holding up offshore oil rigs. These are the silent lifelines of our contemporary world, and yet they remain largely invisible to us. Simultaneously, the ocean is an area of immense strategic significance. Ports, harbours, and naval bases depend on maintaining the security of their waters, but they are vulnerable to intrusions by divers, unmanned vehicles, or even sabotage. The challenge is clear: how are we supposed to keep watch on this underwater world when it is so enormous, unforgiving, and volatile?

For several decades, we have relied on set of tools that were tried and tested. Sonar, which sends out sound waves and listens to their echoes (like shouting into a canyon and waiting for the echo to come back), has long been the backbone of underwater detection. It can reveal large objects beneath the waves, from submarines to passing ships. Cameras mounted on underwater robots remotely operated vehicles controlled by humans on the surface offer another way of seeing what is happening down below. Hydrophones, essentially underwater microphones, are left in place to listen for unusual sounds, such as the hum of a propeller. And in many cases, when technology is not enough, human divers are still sent down to inspect pipelines or check for damage. These techniques have guarded the seas for decades, but they're starting to display their limitations.

The truth is that the ocean has become a far more complicated place. Modern shipping makes the water constantly noisy, like living next to a highway that never sleeps. This background noise makes it hard for sonar to separate real threats from everyday activity. Cameras, though useful in clear waters, become useless in the cloudy, murky conditions often found around ports or near the seabed, where sediment and algae block the view. Hydrophones pick up everything, from whales to cargo ships, and cannot always tell what matters. Divers, meanwhile, are expensive to deploy, slow to cover large areas, and at risk in dangerous conditions. Even the robots we imagine patrolling the seas autonomous underwater vehicles, or AUVs are still only just beginning to appear in real-world operations (a bit like self-driving cars: promising, but still many challenges to address). They are promising, but they are not yet common or reliable enough to serve as a widespread solution.

This is where new ideas are needed. The idea is how we might create smarter guardians for the underwater world, using artificial intelligence and deep learning. Instead of depending on one sense alone only sound, or only vision we can combine multiple streams of information. Imagine a system that both listens and looks. If the water is too cloudy for cameras, sonar and acoustics step in. If the background noise is overwhelming, cameras can provide confirmation. Together, these signals make the picture much clearer.

To solve these we need to study how we can build wiser caretakers of the ocean, applying artificial intelligence and deep learning. Rather than relying on a single sense only sound or only sight we can interleave various sources of informa-

tion. Consider a system that listens and sees. If the water is too murky for cameras, sonar and acoustics come to the rescue. And if the background noise is excessive, cameras can offer verification. Cumulatively, all these signals make the image much more discernible. Artificial intelligence provides this system with learning, flexible, and pattern-recognition capabilities. Rather than hand-writing rules for each scenario, we allow the system to be trained on data: recordings of divers, photographs of pipelines, sounds of ships going by.

Energy efficiency is also part of the story. Keeping every sensor switched on all the time would be too costly and impractical. Instead, the system works like a layered guard. Picture a night watchman who listens quietly most of the time but calls in extra patrols only when something suspicious happens. Low-power hydrophones listen continuously, like night watchmen. In a similar way when they hear something suspicious, they trigger higher-power sensors cameras, sonar, or robots to take a closer look. This saves energy and allows the system to stay active around the clock without running out of resources.

What makes this approach truly different is that it connects two worlds that are usually kept apart. On one hand, there is the world of defence and security: keeping ports and naval bases safe from intruders. On the other hand, there is the world of civilian infrastructure: checking pipelines, cables, and offshore platforms for damage. Both face the same problems of noise, murkiness, and unpredictability. By unifying them, the same system can serve both purposes, protecting what matters most under the sea.

This work also fits into a larger conversation. Defence Studies, also known as Defence and Strategic Studies, is an interdisciplinary field that looks at national security, the structure of armed forces, and the strategies nations use to protect themselves. Underwater robotics may sound like a niche technical topic, but in reality, it is part of this broader field. The ability to monitor and protect oceans, ports, and subsea infrastructure is not just a technical challenge but a strategic necessity. A system that can continuously and intelligently watch the underwater environment offers a real advantage, both for military defence and for the resilience of civilian life. Our oceans are more crowded and more exposed than ever before, and the instruments we now use to measure them are ancient and delicate. Sonar, cameras, hydrophones, and divers all serve their purpose, but they function best under perfect circumstances. The oceans of today and particularly the oceans of tomorrow are seldom perfect. By designing a system that listens, sees, learns, and evolves, we can develop more intelligent guardians of the underwater realm. Such systems would not only aid in defending against incursions but also safeguard the cables and pipes that power our societies. The vision here is not about substituting humans or covering the oceans with machines. It is about developing technology that is sustainable and resilient, capable of withstanding the demands of a changing ocean: Just as the ocean links continents, trade, and communication, it now links defence, infrastructure, and sustainability. This problem is not just technical but part of our shared future: how we keep the underwater world safe, secure, and resilient for generations to come.

(The writer is a PhD student at Plaksha University, Mohali)

Letters to the Editor

Endangering Meghalaya's borders

Editor,

Apropos of the special article "Indo-Bangladesh border, threats and non-lethal strategy" by Rattan Chand Sharma, ex-Commandant Border Security Force (ST Oct 27, 2025), the author has covered in-depth on both the software and hardware of the force who are the first line of defence of the country. The perils of the Border Security Force's non-lethal strategy and its long-term implications for national security, particularly in the light of the current establishment's instability given the shifting political landscape in Bangladesh and the porous nature of the Indo-Bangladesh border is a layered and urgent question that the mandarins in the Home Ministry can ignore at their own peril.

The immediate tactical perils are - increased aggression by smugglers and infiltrators which non-lethal posture emboldens cross border actors - cattle smugglers, narcotic traffickers and even armed groups who exploit BSF's restraint to breach security lines. The BSF jawans face asymmetric risk with limited deterrence tools, personnel are vulnerable to mobs' attacks, grenade assaults and sharp weapons injuries, especially during night patrols. Repeated exposure to high-risk situations without proportional response capability affects

jawan morale and long-term readiness.

The strategic risks are amplified by Bangladesh's political flux. Post the crisis created by Hasina's flight to India, instability has triggered political chaos, weakened border coordination and increased infiltration attempts. The rise of anti-India sentiment where certain factions within Bangladesh may exploit BSF's non-lethal stance to test India's border resilience, especially in West Bengal, Assam and Meghalaya is possible. Historical patterns suggest Border Guards Bangladesh has at times patronized illegal immigration and turned a blind eye to smuggling networks.

Hence the non-lethal doctrine signals a soft posture that may undermine India's perceived strength in border regions. It degrades civic trust where local populations may lose faith in BSF's ability to protect them, especially when smuggler aggression goes unchecked. Then there is a geo-political vulnerability with China and Pakistan watching closely. Any perceived weakness along the eastern frontier of the country could be leveraged in hybrid warfare scenarios.

What might a strategic recalibration look like? In the context-sensitive escalation protocols allowing calibrated use of force based on threat density and symbolic capital gradient are needed. Mapping aggression hotspots, civic trust erosion and ritual density to guide enforcement posture is also important. There is need to

balance enforcement with regional stability through scenario simulations of political shifts in Bangladesh. The Ex-Commandant, BSF Rattan Chand Sharma who was a field officer himself in the first line of defence of the nation has rightly concluded in his special article that "those handling policy and conceptual level of border management should realize the perils of non-lethal response and its long-term impact on national security and initiate course correction."

Yours etc,
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Appeal for urgent repair of Arbuthnot Road

Editor,

Through this column, I wish to draw the urgent attention of the concerned authorities to the deplorable condition of the Arbuthnot Road leading to the old DGAR in Nongrimmaw, which has remained unrepaired since 2023. Despite repeated appeals and public concern, no substantial action has been taken to restore this vital route. As a result, residents and frequent visitors are forced to navigate pothole-ridden stretches that pose daily risks to life, limb, and property.

Adding to the distress, portions of the road dug up by the Public Health Engineering Department for the

laying of ductile iron pipes since November last year remain unrepaired. This issue now appears to have extended to other localities in the Laitumkhras area. These excavated sections, left exposed for months, have turned into hazardous traps especially during rains leading to multiple accidents and severe inconvenience for both pedestrians and motorists.

We earnestly urge the authorities to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. The immediate repair and restoration of roads is not merely an infrastructure concern it is a matter of public safety, dignity, and administrative responsibility. Timely action by the concerned line departments is not only expected but imperative.

Yours etc.,
Wankitbok Pohshna,
Shillong -11

Support MSSASA's effort to protect our Teachers and Education System

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to share my concern regarding the recent directive that in-service SSA teachers in Meghalaya must clear the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET) within two years to continue in their jobs. The Meghalaya

SSA Schools' Association (MSSASA) has filed a review petition in the Supreme Court against this decision. Their step deserves public support because it deals with the future of our teachers as well as our children.

These teachers have given 15 to 25 years or more of service, often working in difficult and remote places. They joined under the rules that existed then and have helped build the foundation of elementary education in our state. After such long service, suddenly being told to appear for an exam or risk losing their livelihood feels harsh and unfair. It is painful to see experienced teachers living in fear of losing the jobs they have devoted their lives to.

Teaching is not just about clearing a written test. It is about understanding children, handling mixed-ability classrooms, guiding young minds, and building trust with communities. An exam cannot measure years of experience or commitment. There is no clear proof that making long-serving teachers take TET will improve learning in classrooms. Instead, it may lower morale and create unnecessary tension.

If improving quality is the goal, then the government must invest in proper in-service training. These trainings must be led by experts who truly know the ground realities of elementary education in Meghalaya. Many teachers have had training sessions where resource persons themselves admitted that classroom teachers

know the problems and solutions better. This shows a wide gap between policy and real needs.

Calling teachers "not qualified" after they have served for decades hurts their dignity. These same teachers have helped many students succeed over the years. Their track record should speak louder than any exam.

MSSASA is trying to protect teachers from a sudden decision that threatens their future. This is not about seeking privilege. It is about fairness, respect, and a better way to improve education. Parents, community leaders, and citizens should stand with them so that:

- Long-serving teachers do not lose their jobs
- Experience continues to be valued
- Improvements come through proper support and training
- Teachers feel respected for their service

A strong education system grows when teachers feel encouraged and supported. Our children will learn better from teachers who feel secure and appreciated.

Through this letter, I appeal to everyone to support MSSASA in their fight for a sensible solution. When we stand by our teachers, we stand by our children's future.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Via email

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

The Shillong Times

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Roads, death traps

LAYING of roads and highways alone will not do. Safety must be given its due importance. A road accident in Andhra Pradesh caused the death of around 20 persons three days ago, as a long-distance travel bus hit a motorcycle that was thrown aside by another vehicle and caught fire. The bus driver explains that he could not see the two-wheeler due to poor road visibility. This appeared to be the main issue. But, officials are instead beating around the bush -- diverting public attention to the "technical specifications" of the vehicle even as it had the normal road-worthy certificates. Lack of proper street-lighting on roads including highways has been a serious concern for motorists. Neither the highways authority nor state governments nor local administrations showed any seriousness in the upkeep of streetlights. A recent survey by the roads ministry showed that maximum road mishaps/fatalities took place between 1800 and 2100 hours, the peak travel time since evening. That large numbers of vehicles ply in these hours is true, but as many numbers of vehicles ply in the morning peak hours too, between 0900 and 1100 hours with lesser number of accidents. The issue, thus, is with lack of visibility on roads.

Over 1.80 lakh deaths and nearly five lakh injuries occurred in accidents on roads last year, meaning one death every three minutes. Large numbers of these are youths, also meaning that reckless two-wheel drives prove more fatal. Negligence, over-speeding, lack of visibility on roads, structural issues with road construction and drunk driving are among the major reasons for road mishaps. While rules are in place, enforcement is slack. Even highway constructions are done in a haphazard manner in several stretches, the main contracts having been sub-let to local contracting firms that flout rules in collusion with corrupt officials. There have been situations when a heavy rain could plough away substantial parts of newly built highways. The steady increase in the number of vehicles on roads is not matched with infrastructural improvements, resulting in situations of absolute chaos on urban roads. Notably, India has built several high-class highways in recent years; an initiative that was begun during the AB Vajpayee era. The number of accident deaths on these highways in the first six months of this year was around 27,000 as per a recent reply in Parliament.

Compensations are paid to road mishap victims -- a couple of lakhs for each person, on condition that officials are "satisfied" with the adherence to conditions. Those meeting with an accident when their vehicle's insurance period had expired, or registrations not renewed etc., may not be entitled to compensation. Some of them remain handicapped for the rest of their lives with no compensation/support. Cashless treatment for accident victims is well-conceived. Road safety should be a matter of serious focus for governments while motorists must observe road rules. Enforcement requires improvements, including in cases of over-speeding, drunk drive and helmetless rides. Proper lighting up of city streets and highways should also be a matter of first priority.

Letters to the Editor

The malaise of short-sighted, populist politics

Editor,
The editorial "Sort out the overlaps" (ST October 28, 2025) is a sharp and timely editorial that resonates with many of the governance entanglements. It exposes Meghalaya's governance architecture as a fragmented mosaic where District Councils, Municipal Boards, Dorbar Shnong and Syiemship jostle for control. But beneath the surface, it is not just about administrative overlaps -- it's about fiscal flows because money is what money does, symbolic capital and institutional legitimacy. Infrastructure is a proxy for power where road-building emerges as a metaphor for deeper contestations. The editorial rightly points out that infrastructure is no longer just about connectivity. It is about who controls the purse strings.

District Councils, originally meant to safeguard rivers and forests, preserve culture and traditions now chase road contracts signalling a drift from custodial roles to extractive ones. The editorial provocatively suggests that District Councils should have been sunsetted post-statehood which is a missed constitutional moment perhaps due to symbolic inertia, political fallout or lack of a participatory dashboard to simulate long-term consequences. There is a subtle tension between indigenous institutions (Dorbar Shnong, Syiemships) and state-aligned entities. The editorial hints at a clash

of epistemologies between ritual density and bureaucratic rationality, between place-based trust and formal mandates. The editorial aptly concluded "Why are the Councils then more interested in road making?"

A senior APHLC leader once told this writer that just after statehood there was a proposal to do away with the District Councils but some of the Hill States leaders, particularly, late Captain W.A. Sangma the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya, then, thought it fit to retain them only as a training ground for politicians who aspire to move to the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Shillong

Clarification

Editor,
This is with reference to the report entitled, "Northeast among hotspots of zoonotic diseases, say studies," published in The Shillong Times of October 26, 2025. While IIPH Shillong indeed hosts the Zoonotic and Vector-Borne Disease Research and Training Centre (ZVBDC) and is undertaking field-based studies on zoonotic diseases such as scrub typhus, leptospirosis, cryptosporidiosis, HINI Swine Flu, Japanese Encephalitis, Brucellosis across various sites in Meghalaya, including Ichamati, (recently published https://www.nature.com/articles/d44151-025-00190-3), the data presented in the report does not originate from the ZVBDC studies. The activities of the ZVBDC are funded by the DBT/Well-

What happens when a generation realizes that the rules they played by were not designed for their benefit, but is a trap? How does a society come to terms with the fact that schools have become factories of false hope, instead of an avenue to opportunity? And most importantly, what happens to a democracy when seventy thousand young people in Meghalaya alone seek opportunity every year, but the system puts to work less than two thousand five hundred?

These are not rhetorical flourishes. They are the questions that haunt our hills, echo through our homes, and increasingly, threaten the very foundations of civil order in our state.

The Arithmetic of Betrayal: I encounter them everywhere -- in the tea stalls of Shillong, in the village squares of Ri Bhoi, in the employment exchanges where hope goes to die. Young men and women, certificates clutched like lottery tickets that never win, speaking in the subdued tones of those who have finally understood an uncomfortable truth: they have been systematically deceived.

The numbers tell a story that politicians would prefer remained untold. Meghalaya's unemployment rate hovers at six percent, nearly doubling the national average. In urban centers, it metastasizes to 12.3 percent -- more than twice the all-India urban figure. But these statistics, clinical and sterile, obscure the human catastrophe they represent.

Consider this peculiar inversion of logic that defines contemporary India: the more education you acquire, the less employable you become. Those who complete higher secondary education face unemployment rates of 16.3 percent. Graduates confront 14.5 percent unemployment. Postgraduates -- those who invested the most years, the greatest resources, the deepest faith in the system -- face a staggering 17.5 percent unemployment rate. Even those with technical and vocational training, supposedly the market-ready workforce, encounter 37.3 percent unemployment nationally. This is not market failure. This is design.

The Historical Genealogy of Deception: Robert Greene, in his analysis of how power works, recognises that the most potent power does not require force at all -- but rather the instrument of desire itself.

come Trust India Alliance and not by ICMR, as was stated in the article.

The information cited in the article comes from a research paper published in The Lancet Regional Health -- Southeast Asia (DOI: 10.1016/j.lansea.2025.100601), authored by researchers from the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) -- National Institute of Epidemiology, Chennai, and the South Asia Field Epidemiology and Technology Network, Inc.

We request that this clarification be published to ensure accurate representation of our research and funding sources.

Yours etc.,
Melari Nongrum
Via email

Society must stop to reflect where it has gone wrong

Editor,
Crime could not have been more synonymous with the present time and period. This is not to suggest that crimes did not exist in the past. History records countless instances of theft, murder, violence, exploitation, etc. Yet, what we read, hear, and witness today seems to represent a continuing and intensifying pattern of criminal activity that transcends age and generations. Although the law exists to punish offenders and to provide justice to victims, the persistence and growth of crime raise crucial questions: why are crimes becoming increasingly rampant? What

The Indian state has honed its dark craft for decades. As far back as 1932, visionaries like M. Visvesvaraya had identified educated unemployment as a sore in the body politic. Almost a century later, that sore has devoured entire limbs.

Between 2011 and 2018, youth unemployment in India exploded from 6.1 percent to 17.4 percent -- a nearly threefold increase. Among graduates, unemployment surged from 19 percent to 36 percent; among postgraduates, from 21 percent to 36 percent. The correlation is unmistakable: higher education correlates not with employment but with systematic exclusion from it.

The Theater of Meritocracy: In my capacity as an advocate and concerned citizen, I recently filed a comprehensive complaint exposing irregularities in a government recruitment process. The case exposes the small-scale machinery of deception: well-publicized eligibility requirements, sincere applications from candidates, the selection committee's conclusion that none of them meet the requirements, and yet, inexplicably, an appointment is made. The chosen candidate's salary, which was initially advertised at fifty thousand rupees, magically rises to sixty thousand.

When I exercised my constitutional right to information under the RTI Act, seeking transparency, the response was evasion, delay, obstruction. This is not aberration; this is algorithm. The system protects itself through opacity, operating in shadows where scrutiny cannot penetrate.

Greene teaches that, "reputation guards power more jealously than armies guard nations".

The Educational Industrial Complex: Our colleges and universities operate as what could be called "credential mills" -- organizations that generate degrees rather than competencies and certificates rather than capabilities. About 25% of students between the ages of 14 and 18 are unable to read standard second-level texts fluently in their regional language, according to the Annual Status of Education Report 2023.

Millions of our graduates have degrees but no real-world skills, and they can memorise textbooks but lack critical thinking abilities.

This is the gift we bestow

makes perpetrators act without fear or conscience?

At a glance, it is tempting to put the blame on ineffective legal systems as the laws are not stringent enough to act as deterrents. However, when we look closely, it may not be wrong to assume that we the people lack ethics, morality, empathy and conscience. No matter how severe the law may be, it cannot substitute for the loss of conscience and empathy. The steady rise in crimes suggest that society's moral compass is gradually weakening, and human sensitivity is diminishing. Consequently, crimes today reflect not only a failure of law but also a failure of values and compassion among humankind. This is dangerous and are wrongs that must be set right.

This sad reality is evident even in our immediate surroundings. In Shillong, as in other parts of the country, incidents of crime are becoming distressingly frequent. What has recently shocked the state, however, are the crimes involving children as young as four, seven, and thirteen who have fallen prey to acts that are inhuman and demonic. The tragic fact is that these innocent lives were snatched from this world even before they could truly experience life. Investigations are ongoing, but reports suggesting the involvement of a thirteen-year-old boy in the death of a four-year-old child is very disturbing as the victim was a child and the possible perpetrator is also a minor.

At thirteen, a child is still in the process of emotional and cognitive development. He or she is not mature enough to fully distinguish

upon the children: an education system that prizes rote learning above creativity, examination over exploration, and adherence to rules over creativity. The New Education Policy 2020 has followed the ministerial bells and whistles, concepts around transformation, yet it is a patch for the presentation of symptoms while ignoring the malignancy at the core?

Economist Arun Kumar adds, "We produce 50,000 world-class students and most of them go abroad; while two-thirds of them stay back, we need millions." The education system is a sorting exercise, we identify the elites for export and leave the masses with what research has termed "waiting course" -- a long state of being neither employed nor unemployed, neither progress nor stagnation.

The Meghalaya Microcosm: Our state represents this national crisis in concentrated form. Seventy thousand youth become eligible for the workforce annually; the government creates 2,500 posts -- a deficit of 67,500 opportunities every year. In six years, 167,220 youth have registered as unemployed. Youth unemployment reaches 18 percent compared to the national average of 10 percent. Eighty-five percent of the unemployed fall within the 15-30 age bracket -- an entire generation suspended in temporal purgatory.

Opposition leader Mukul Sangma warns that Meghalaya sits "on a time bomb of unemployment," with youth frustration creating conditions for insurgency revival. This is not alarmism; this is arithmetic. When educated young people exhaust legitimate pathways to dignity, illegitimate pathways begin appearing less unthinkable.

The Psychology of Self-Blame: Perhaps most insidious is how the system transforms victims into accomplices in their own oppression. The narrative of "skill deficiency," places responsibility on the unemployed rather than the system that failed them. Young people are told they lack "soft skills," need more certifications, require additional training -- an endless treadmill of self-improvement that disguises systemic abandonment as individual inadequacy.

Multi-billion dollar ed-tech platforms proliferate; trans-

forming capacity-building into personal financial obligation, extracting resources from those who have least while promising credentials that lead nowhere. The psychological warfare is complete: the betrayed blame themselves for betrayal.

The Constitutional Crisis: This represents not merely economic failure but democratic collapse. Articles 14 and 16 of the Constitution guarantee equality before law and equal opportunity in public employment. The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that advertised eligibility criteria constitute binding contracts between state and citizen. Yet these constitutional guarantees and judicial precedents are honored more in breach than observance.

I discovered a pattern of systematic subversion when I documented violations in the most recent ATMA recruitment case under the Agriculture Department, Government of Meghalaya. There were predetermined selections, arbitrary term modifications, and total lack of transparency. This is what Greene would recognize as the endgame of corrupt power -- the complete hollowing out of institutional legitimacy, where laws exist only to be circumvented, rules apply only to the powerless.

Reckoning: The youth are crying -- not from weakness but from recognition. They understand, finally, that the system never intended to deliver on its promises. The question confronting Meghalaya, and India, is whether we possess the courage to acknowledge this betrayal and the will to rectify it.

True transformation requires radical transparency in recruitment, alignment of education with actual economic needs, accountability for systemic failure, and investment in genuine opportunity proportionate to aspirations. Anything less perpetuates the crime against an entire generation -- a crime whose consequences will corrode democracy's foundations for decades to come.

The covenant is broken. Whether it can be rebuilt depends on choices we make now, in this moment, before the silence of promises becomes the thunder of consequences we can no longer contain.

(The writer is Advocate, Trade Unionist Ethicist & The Humanist Architect)

ing, can also be dangerous. Hence, as adults, we must be vigilant and observant of such emotional disturbances in order to not allow our children to fall prey to or to even cause harmful or even criminal actions.

Therefore, addressing crime in contemporary times requires more than stringent laws. Parents and teachers must look beyond academic performance and focus on the children's ability to recognise, understand, and manage emotions. Schools should integrate counselling, moral instruction, and open discussions on ethics, morality and empathy as part of the curriculum. As a community we must nurture an environment where children feel seen, heard, and supported rather than being judged or alienated.

Ultimately, crime does not arise in isolation. It grows where neglect, injustice and apathy prevail. To build a safer society, we must strengthen not only our legal institutions but also our moral foundations. The true deterrent to crime lies not merely in punishment but in the cultivation of conscience. Only when empathy and human values are restored can we hope to curb the tide of violence that threatens our society. Until then, the crimes we witness today will remain a mirror reflecting not just the failure of law, but the deeper moral decay of humankind itself.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

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Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Public Spaces, Private Fear.

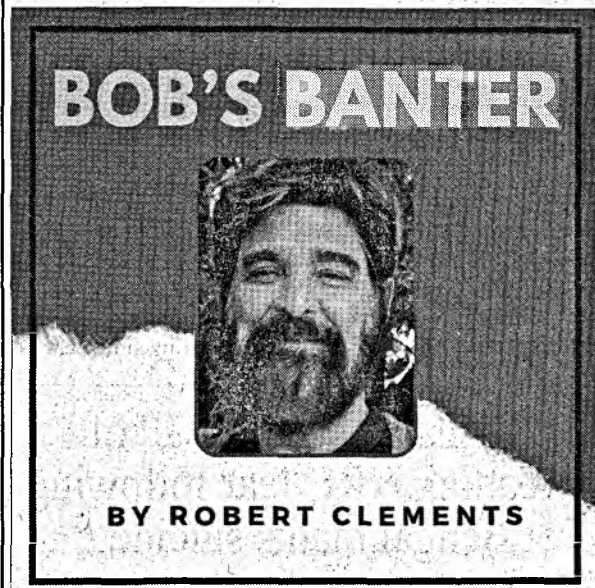
They were just two young women, Australian cricketers, guests of our nation, here to play the game we love more than we sometimes love our women. And yet, as they walked to a café in Indore, a man on a motorbike came close enough to touch, grope, and ride away laughing. Within hours, the police arrested him. Justice, we were told, had been served. But for the two players, and for millions of women watching that video replayed again and again. The damage was already done.

Fear, once felt, does not fade with an arrest. It lingers in the mind. It sits beside every woman waiting for a bus, walks behind her when the road turns empty, and follows her shadow home. Every honk, every revving engine, every group of men laughing too loudly makes her heart race. She clutches her bag tighter, adjusts her dupatta, and walks a little faster. This is not imagination. It is a lifelong conditioning born out of repeated betrayal by a society that

"Bharat Mata Ki Jai." But we cannot guarantee that the women walking our streets are safe. We teach our girls to cover up, to walk quickly, to avoid crowds, to carry pepper spray. But when will we teach our boys that dignity is not something you snatch, it is something you show? Respect cannot be demanded by rules; it must be demonstrated by example.

A woman walking alone at night is not being bold; she is simply exercising her right. Yet in our minds, we make her guilty before she is wronged. We whisper, "Why was she out so late?" not "Why was he there to harass her?" And that subtle shift of blame, that mental conditioning passed from father to son, from film to audience, from parliament to people, is what keeps our public spaces dangerous.

Because the truth is, our public spaces are theatres of private fear. A woman walking alone often plans her route like a soldier preparing for battle. She notes the exits, the lit stretches, the friendly shops that might offer refuge. She carries



does not protect her, and sometimes even mocks her pain.

We live in cities that boast of progress, where every corner has a CCTV camera and every government promises safety. But between the eye of the camera and the eye of the street lies a truth

her keys not as tools but as weapons. And she pretends courage while her mind maps escape routes. Somewhere, a man speeds past, laughing -- his act of assault disguised as a thrill, his conscience asleep. Between them lies a nation that has learned to look away.

Every time a man laughs at a sexist joke, he adds another brick to the wall of fear.

Every time a family excuses a son's temper as "boys will be boys," they reinforce the belief that women must adjust.

we refuse to see: safety is not about surveillance; it is about culture. You can install a thousand cameras, but unless respect is wired into men's minds, the footage will keep repeating the same old scenes. And that culture begins right at the top.

A political leader walks out on his wife and is still cheered at rallies. A film star has two wives and we still give him and the home breaker, seats in Parliament to represent us. Who questions? Who even thinks it wrong anymore? When personal morality becomes optional for those in public life, we as a society lose the moral authority to demand decency on our streets.

Ever wondered or asked the wives how they felt after their husbands left them? Were you ever interested in knowing? Ever thought of the quiet humiliation she faces when the same society celebrates the man who abandoned her? The woman sits alone, her dignity torn, while the man who betrayed her walks the red carpet, hugging world leaders. We clap for him, elect him to office.

Why should we be shocked when decency disappears from the streets? When the men they admire treat women as replaceable, why should the man on the street treat a stranger with respect? Culture trickles down -- from leaders, from stars, from those we put on pedestals. If the pedestal itself is corrupt, the street cannot stay clean.

We build temples to goddesses, call our country their abode, and chant slogans of

Maybe, just maybe, it is time to stop looking away.

Safety cannot be outsourced to the police alone. It begins at home -- in how we treat our wives, in how we speak of women at the dinner table, in what our sons see and learn from us. The police can arrest a culprit, but they cannot reform a culture. That job belongs to us -- parents, teachers, friends, voters.

Every time a man laughs at a sexist joke, he adds another brick to the wall of fear. Every time a family excuses a son's temper as "boys will be boys," they reinforce the belief that women must adjust. And every time we let a public figure escape scrutiny for personal misconduct because "it's his private life," we send a message to every boy watching: character does not matter.

The women who visit us, like those two Australian cricketers, come expecting hospitality, not hostility. They come believing our words when we call India "Atithi Devo Bhava" -- the guest is god. But what sort of gods are we, if our guests leave with fear instead of fondness?

It is time, truly time, to look inward. Time to realize that the safety of women is not a women's issue -- it is a mirror held up to our collective soul. And every time the world looks at us through the eyes of a frightened woman, we will know that it was not the police, nor the camera on the pole.

It is us....!

TMC's Misadventure in Meghalaya

IN the run-up to the Meghalaya state assembly elections in 2022 the Trinamool Congress (TMC) was promoted with a vengeance, not by TMC members but by the team of Prashant Kishor the man known for crafting out successful political strategies that help political parties win elections. His organisation I-PAC played a key role in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's campaign during the 2014 Lok Sabha elections. The campaign designed by Prashant Kishor and his team, included strategies like the 3D rallies and "Chai Pe Charcha," which became game-changers for Modi to win the 2014 election. Interestingly, Prashant Kishor became the brand name behind every successful election. He was not loyal to any single political party. Like an ad-man he crafted a strategy for election campaigns for anyone who engaged him and paid money. It was a business deal; nothing more, nothing less. Prashant Kishor has been associated with several high-profile election campaigns across India which include the 2014 campaign for the BJP and Modi in particular; Nitish Kumar – Janata Dal (United) for the 2015 Bihar Elections and later the Congress. Campaigns designed by Prashant Kishor were instrumental in the success of the Mahagathbandhan idea where the Janata Dal aligned with several other parties. In the 2017 elections in Punjab, Kishor's strategic support helped the Congress led by Amarinder Singh to win the Assembly elections. In 2021 Kishor helped Mamata Banerjee and the TMC win the West Bengal elections. Prashant Kishor is a professional and his campaign is data driven, innovative and focussed on building an emotional connect with voters.

Prashant Kishor used the organisation he built - Indian Political Action Committee (I-PAC) – a political consultancy firm, where he enrolled a team of young professionals who would travel around, meet people, befriend them and encourage them to vote for the party that I-PAC supported. Somehow in Meghalaya, Kishor's strategy failed to garner much traction. The TMC managed to win only 5 seats and even those seats were won not because of the Party but because of the personal connection that voters had with the candidates. And this has been Meghalaya's voting pattern. Political parties play only a limited role; it is the personality of the candidate and his/her personal relations with the voters that help win votes.

One TMC candidate who lost the 2023 election was Zenith Sangma, the brother of Dr Mukul Sangma. Mukul's wife Dikanchi D Shira also lost the 2023 election. From the Khasi-Jaintia region only Charles Pynogrope could win from the TMC ticket. Since then no TMC leader of consequence has visited Meghalaya to ignite interest in the Party. It was left to die a natural death. Now Zenith Sangma has resigned from the TMC and is set to join the Party he deserted in 2022 – the Indian National Congress. Other TMC MLAs are also looking for a bail-out from the TMC knowing it has not been able to make inroads in Meghalaya and that it has always been seen as a Party from Bengal which is neither a national party nor a regional one and it did not resonate with the voters. There is rejoicing in the Meghalaya Congress over the return of the prodigal. It's a matter of time before others also return. The TMC has run its course in Meghalaya.

Boom Boom Diwali: When the Light Lost Its Way

By Salil Gewali

Two letters, one by VK Lyngdoh titled "The True Essence of Diwali" and another, "When Diwali Turns Raucous" by Hamarbakyn-tiew Jyrwa, (ST, October 24), should make many of us pause and think a little more seriously. No wonder people come out to express their displeasure when the situation goes from bad to worse. After all, Diwali is meant to illuminate the soul, a celebration with profound spiritual significance, not to turn midnight into a battlefield of explosions.

The main concern on everyone's lips now is, why do some people feel so insanely crazy to burst fireworks not just at midnight, but at two, three, four, even five in the morning and mess up other people's sleep for days together? Why is the Police Department silent? Many complained of choking pollution that makes it hard for the elderly and the sick to breathe. Certainly, we may celebrate, but our lungs and hearts may not. They suffer in silence which we may know later.

At this point, I feel compelled to write down a few lines from my personal experience and studies, especially about Laxmi Puja and other sacred Hindu festivals and their primary objectives. This feels especially important, given the growing concern among many non-Hindu friends. Of course, as I grew older, I began to understand more clearly what our ancestors truly meant by the festival of light. True, there is no scriptural mention of firecrackers in these celebrations, as VK Lyngdoh rightly pointed out.

It should be borne in mind that Hindu scriptures speak again and again of one's inner ignorance, because of which arise a whole lot of problems in one's life. They remind us with emphasis that the real obstacles to human growth do not come from outside, but from within. The Bhagavad Gita, the Upanishads, and even the Yoga Sutras echo this truth: one who conquers the mind and its vices becomes the master of all external adversities!

Indeed, our effort in decorating our homes with oil-diyas, now dazzling electric string lights, in celebration of the joyous return of Lord Rama, Sita, and Lakshman to Ayodhya after fourteen years of exile and their victory over Ravana is highly exhilarating. But the true emphasis, however, should be to cultivate inner purity and reverence through fasting, keeping away from the sensory world, offering ritual with extreme devotion, not in setting off crackers with reckless pride. Please take no offence -- this is not to say that we must abandon fireworks altogether in celebration, but we may enjoy in moderation, with mindfulness and within the "bounds of dharma".

Waking up sleeping neighbors with thunderous bangs and songs and dances does not summon divine blessings. Causing ear-splitting noise, frightening innocent animals, and disturbing the sick cannot, by any stretch of imagination, be considered an act of worship by the Hindu scriptures -- which I will discuss below. Those who are blindly obsessed with bursting crackers, putting others' health at risk or disturbing their sleep, should turn to the holy texts for guidance. One of my neighbors retorted, "how can we call it a puja celebration when the asthmatic next door cries for breath, or sleeping babies and elderly people are shaken out of sleep, terrified by deafening blasts at midnight -- or even at one, two, or three in the morning?"

Amidst this noisy cacophony, it is equally painful to hear many non-Hindu friends passing negative comments about Hindu culture, which they feel has been increasingly distorted in recent times. These non-Hindus are people who always hold their faith as a "sacred path" and naturally feel disillusioned when they see their Hindu friends getting caught up in unethical excesses under the guise of religious practice. I therefore feel bound to touch on a few fundamental dos and don'ts, and also wisdom, laid down in Hindu scriptures, to help dispel these misunderstandings.

Emphasis on Ecology in pujas not to be undermined

Before setting off on a long journey we carefully check whether a vehicle is fit or not, making sure the engine runs smoothly, the four-tyres are in good condition, the brakes/accelerator function properly,

and all parts are in working order and so on and so forth. Exactly in the same way, prior to commencing any Hindu rituals, be it Durga Puja, Laxmi Puja, Krishna Janmashtami, Vishwakarma Puja, name any, Hindus are traditionally required -- as a prescribed necessity -- to ensure that everything is in perfect order, not just externally but within oneself. For this reason, they are required to recite an "invocation" known as the "Shanti Path" (peace chant) that begins with "Om dyauh shantir antarikSam shanti.....", which all perform, many may have overheard it being chanted by priests, without ever understanding its meaning and purpose.

Among the many peace chants in the Vedas and Upanishads, this particular peace invocation is a solemn call for universal harmony that encompasses ecological, cosmic, and spiritual dimensions. It seeks peace in the physical world, including nature and all living beings, peace from divine or cosmic forces which is beyond human control, and peace within oneself, in both mind and soul. Only when such harmony is genuinely invoked can one enter the heart of devotional rituals with utmost sincerity and focus. In fact, pujas are primarily intended to cleanse the inner self and nurture spiritual growth, helping one rise above material cravings and worldly distractions in pursuit of self-realization.

If this is the sacred intent behind Hindu pujas, then turning them into spectacles of noise and indulgence is nothing less than a sinful act (Hindus may refer to the Gita 3/37-41 for clarification).

Incidentally, there is a deeply intriguing fact as to this "peace chant" which I must not miss mentioning here. While the West was beginning to toy with the idea of ecological interdependence in the 19th century, the sages of India had envisioned, many, many millennia ago, the universe as one vast, interconnected family. This vision is echoed in numerous peace chants and other texts that proclaim everything --- from living beings to inert matter, from planets in solar systems to galaxies beyond count, as

intrinsically linked within an infinite cosmic web.

What makes this even more remarkable in modern times is that Alexander von Humboldt, famously regarded as the "father of ecology," was profoundly moved to discover this very worldview, and a call for ecological harmony and interconnection among all forms of existence, through a secondary source -- the Sanskrit poet Kalidasa's famous drama 'Meghaduta'. Humboldt was so amazed that he spoke of it with deep appreciation in his seminal five-volume work Cosmos. To Humboldt, this poetic rendering of nature's interconnectedness was not merely literary; it carried the force of revelation and immensely inspired his further research.

Let me touch upon an even more profound fact. Many of us probably know that "The Waste Land" was the most read and most celebrated poem of the 20th century. Amazed by the depth of Indian philosophy and, particularly for its "approach to the truth", the Nobel laureate poet TS Eliot thought it most fitting to end his epic poem with the peace-chant "Shantih Shantih Shantih." What's more, to sum up the poem Eliot included the profound ideas of "self-restraint, charity, and compassion" directly from the Upanishads in the final section of 'The Waste Land'. The poet was deeply concerned about the rise in moral and spiritual bankruptcy after the First World War. Eliot was not alone in this quest -- W. B. Yeats too sought to enrich his work with the wisdom of the East.

There can be no greater irony than the fact that while the East once showed the West the way to "Shanti" (peace), sections of people in the East are now embracing mindless revelry and noisy confrontation, putting themselves and others in "Ashanti"!

Come what may, let's fear the bomb, not the light of knowledge; let's reject hatred, not the brilliance of wisdom! True knowledge, free from prejudices, purifies the heart and makes prayers possible for peaceful coexistence. Unity in Diversity is the fundamental law of nature!

passion is proving to be a deadly cocktail. India's demographic advantage -- its young population -- risks turning fragile if its brightest minds continue to view education as punishment rather than possibility. The court's intervention offers an institutional framework, but the real transformation depends on how society redefines success and well-being. The January 2026 review should, therefore, not be seen as a mere compliance report but as a moral checkpoint. It must measure whether educational institutions have become kinder, safer, and more responsive spaces. Every student suicide is not just a personal tragedy; it is an indictment of a system that confuses pressure for progress. If India's schools and universities can emerge from this scrutiny more humane and self-aware, the Supreme Court's intervention will have done more than enforce rules--it will have restored the meaning of education itself.

It is expected that intervention by Supreme Court will show a positive impact on the present situation of mental health and suicides.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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Climate Treks In India: Still Under a Veil

By Chiranjib Haldar

According to the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change, the world will see a staggering 25 million to 1 billion 'Environmental Displaced Persons' in the coming future. This will not only influence transnational relations and geopolitical relations between countries but will also foment fresh problems and conflicts while dealing with this incipient trend. Various terms, like climate refugee, climate migrant and environmental migrant have been devised to denote people displaced by climatic adversities. However, these coinages are under scanner as the concept of climate-induced migration is comparatively new. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM) has elucidated how the word 'refugee' needs to have an expanding definition since environmental migrants do not get recognised which makes their relocation and habitation tough. Every monsoon, India faces a climate exodus as torrential downpours hit North East India, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand and many other states.

The monsoon mayhem that sweeps through India and the subcontinent, killing many, displacing thousands and marooning villages also gives an impetus to climate migration. For example, in Assam this year, over 2.6 lakh people across 11 districts have already been affected, submerging umpteen hamlets and thousands of hectares of cropland. Landslides and glacial floods are common in Sikkim uprooting locals who are always at the receiving ends of nature's vagaries. As communication links are disrupted annually during heavy rains in Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura, especially the bordering districts, there is a riparian population flow often unnoticed. India has witnessed myriad issues pertaining to extreme weather fluctuations such as glacial lake outbursts, landslides, cloudbursts, ice moraine erosion as in upper reaches of Uttarakhand and Sikkim and massive downstream flooding therein.

Climate migration is momentous and substantial in India and other South Asian nations where an unanticipated number of people are facing the peril of displacement with figures expected to rise exponentially. The International Organisation on Migration (IOM) evaluates that on a global scale, between 25 million and 1 billion people would be constrained to drift from their homelands due to climate change and environmental degradation by 2050. In India, 'Climate Action Network South Asia' projects the number of climate migrants in India to escalate to 45 million by 2050. Regardless of the lurking dangers of climate migration, decision makers in India are oblivious to the threat and have no standing policy framework. However, India is a signatory to the United Nations Sendai Framework, which recognises disaster displacement as a major driver of livelihood risk. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) also identifies the trioka of migration, displacement and planned habitation as a fundamental climate risk management issue.

Attempts have been made in the past to raise this sensitive issue in the Indian parliament though there is reluctance among states to embrace mandatory legal obligations linked to climate migration. In 2022, Pradyut Bordoloi, a Congress MP from Assam, had introduced the Climate Migrants (Protection and Rehabilitation) Bill as a private member's bill to 'establish an appropriate policy framework for the protection and rehabilitation of internally displaced climate migrants and for all matters connected therewith'. Bordoloi presented his personal observation in the Lok Sabha on how inhabitants of riverine Assam suddenly become homeless from the inundated Brahmaputra and are forced to settle in prohibited forest land. The bill appears to be in cold storage with no visible urgency of ratification. Cutting across party lines in the same year, Heena Gavit, BJP MP from Maharashtra introduced the Rehabilitation and Relocation of Persons Displaced due to Climate Change Bill. This Bill also proposed a Climate Migration Fund. Both the proposed bills have not been enacted but have only highlighted the crucial need for proper legislation towards climate induced displacement

in India.

In international treaties, there is a distinction between the handling of migrants and refugees on account of the varying obligations that they put on destination countries. The 29th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) held in Baku (2024), reiterated displaced persons and migrants as beneficiaries of climate funding and encouraged their inclusive participation in climate financing for human rights and adaptation. The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage has been operational in 2025 with the scope envisaging "displacement, relocation and migration" and a pledge to widen its ambit at the next UN Climate Conference coming up at Belem, Brazil this November.

As in Bangladesh and Myanmar, women migrants in India recurrently undergo triple discrimination given their position as women, unprotected worker and migrant. Their condition becomes more precarious in India as women uprooted due to climate change are always prone to violence, human trafficking and armed conflicts. Akin to Nepal, Indian women living in poverty are more vulnerable to environmental risks and climate change. Crucially, due to traditional gender dynamics, men's climate mobility can amplify women's immobility. Thus environmental migration can deepen pre-existing gender divides and expose women to new susceptibilities.

Migration during childhood and adolescence can disrupt critical developmental processes such as identity formation and peer integration. These lead to potential vulnerabilities, poor mental health and depression. Adult migration can be more stressful. Older migrants may face difficulties in adjusting to the new cultural settings because their habits and ways of life are already cemented. They may find it tough to find suitable jobs or assimilate socially. Such vulnerabilities increase their risk of isolation and cultural stress. When landslides uproot families and livelihoods in Kerala's Wayanad or the Teesta riverbed rises due to glacial outbursts in North Sikkim, both result in climate induced migration and displacement.

Gender is considered a fundamental variable in the decision process of migration. When frequent flooding and erosion displace marginalised communities in riverine lower Assam, Majuli islands, Brahmaputra churs (silt sandbars) and floodplains, gender becomes extraneous. The migrants flee to a temporary shelter and begin life from scratch. In deltaic Sunderbans or coastal Bay of Bengal, littoral erosion takes a toll; women are seen to fend for themselves and shift in search of alternate livelihoods or shift to subsistence. Bangladeshi women migrants wallowing into India from low lying estuaries are trapped in a vicious cycle where they are exploited for forced labour and trafficking. However women from impoverished backgrounds moving to cities and towns for better sustenance do not bracket as climate migrants.

Climate induced migration is still under the veil in India as in Bangladesh and Nepal. India logged 5.4 million internal displacements from climate-induced cataclysms in 2024, by far the highest in South Asia according to the Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID). Floods in many states and armed conflicts as in Manipur were primary drivers exacerbating these displacements in disaster prone hotspots. The response of both the Congress-led UPA and BJP-led NDA regimes over the years to the needs of climate-conflict related displacements has been arbitrary or ad hoc with notable variations among states that undermine their civil or constitutional rights. On top, disaster cycles in India have become more erratic and frequent, overwhelming traditional coping strategies. The meteorological impact of climate change can be divided into other distinct channels of migration too. A rise in sea levels, salinisation of farmland, desertification and water scarcity also induce migration in India. And non-climate carters like government policy, population growth and community resilience to natural disasters contribute to the degree of vulnerability people experience.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Letters to the Editor

Attack on Judiciary and Resistance through Unity

Editor,

The shocking incident on October 6, 2025, in which 71-year-old advocate Mr. Rakesh Kishore hurled a shoe at Hon'ble Chief Justice of India Mr. B. R. Gavai during Supreme Court proceedings, has provoked widespread outrage particularly among progressive voices across the country. This was not merely an act of contempt; it was a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting our democracy.

That such behaviour occurred within the sanctum of our highest judicial institution is both deplorable and deeply troubling. It must not be viewed in isolation. This incident signals a concerning transformation in our socio-political climate, propelled by the provocative rhetoric of extremist elements that continue to advance caste-based, Manuvadi, and communal ideologies. Such provocative discourse has emboldened fringe elements to act with impunity, corroding the rule of law and destabilizing the democratic foundations upon which our republic stands. The attack on the Chief Justice, accompanied by invocations of Sanatan Dharma, starkly illustrates the pernicious

infusion of sectarian extremism into the fabric of our society. It exposes a profound intolerance among those unwilling to engage with viewpoints that deviate from their rigid ideological stance. This entrenched dogmatism poses a serious threat to the pluralistic spirit and constitutional foundations that sustain our democratic republic. It also undermines our secular cultural foundation, which is essential for fostering a constructive and inclusive society.

We must stand in resolute unity to denounce this act not merely by ensuring individual accountability, but by confronting the wider ecosystem that fosters and legitimizes such conduct. The judiciary, as a pillar of constitutional governance, must be safeguarded from coercion and intimidation. Our democratic framework and secular ethos demand vigilant protection from the corrosive influence of ideological extremism.

Yours etc.,
Dr PC Neogi
Via email

Supreme Court on mental health and suicides

Editor,
Just two days ago another student died of suicide in

Kota. Now the Supreme Court's decision to monitor the implementation of mental health and suicide-prevention guidelines for students should be appreciated by all. Actually this step should have been taken earlier and the present step should be considered an overdue recognition of a growing national emergency.

It is well known that India's classrooms and coaching centres, once seen as springboards for success have increasingly become spaces of unbearable pressure, fear and isolation and now Supreme Court has directed the all states and Union Territories to file compliance affidavits on the guidelines it laid down in July. At the heart of the court's concern lies an alarming truth. India's education system, for all its emphasis on performance, remains poorly equipped to handle psychological distress. The rising number of student suicides, especially in coaching hubs such as Kota, Hyderabad and Vishakhapatnam, exposes a culture of relentless competition where failure is equated with shame. In many cases, students live away from families, under rigid academic regimes and with little access to counselling or peer support. By insisting on a uniform mental health policy and a transparent grievance-redressal mechanism, the court seeks to push institutions toward systemic empathy. Because such em-

pathy is missing and ignored for a long time.

The directive fills a legislative void that has persisted for too long. While mental health has gained some attention in national policy -- through initiatives like Manodarpan during the pandemic and the Ummeed guidelines introduced by the Ministry of Education -- the absence of enforceable regulations has left their implementation uneven and optional. Institutions have treated mental well-being as an afterthought, addressing crises only after tragedies occur. The Supreme Court's move to make these guidelines binding until a formal law is enacted ensures a measure of continuity and seriousness that voluntary frameworks often lack.

Equally significant is the inclusion of private coaching centres within the ambit of these rules. These unregulated ecosystems, where lakhs of aspirants chase limited seats in medical and engineering colleges, have turned into intense pressure chambers. Mandatory registration, grievance mechanisms, and counselling cells can bring long-needed oversight to a sector that has thrived on anxiety and ambition. The proposed mental health policy -- to be displayed publicly and reviewed annually -- could create a culture of openness, allowing students to seek help without stigma or fear of reprisal

However, judicial vigilance must now be matched by administrative will. Mental health policy cannot succeed as a checklist exercise. States must allocate trained counsellors, ensure confidentiality, and integrate emotional literacy into daily academic life. Schools and colleges should move beyond token workshops and invest in building trust between teachers and students. This also means training educators to recognise warning signs, easing parental pressure, and revising curricula that prioritise marks over meaning.

The Centre, for its part, must create a framework to evaluate outcomes rather than intentions -- measuring how many institutions actually provide access to mental health resources and whether those interventions are making a difference. The social context cannot be ignored. India's deep-seated stigma around mental illness often silences those who most need help. Families, bound by aspirations and fear of social judgment, hesitate to acknowledge distress. Students internalise these expectations, often feeling that seeking help signals weakness. Changing this mindset demands consistent public messaging -- that academic success means little if it costs a life, and that mental health is as vital as physical health. The Supreme Court?

Consistent failure to balance ambition with com-

New CJI, ageing system

A new Chief Justice has been appointed to head the Supreme Court. Surya Kant, 63, as the 53rd CJI would take charge on November 24 as per a presidential order. Notably, the average tenure of CJIs is no more than 18 months, as the appointment is made at the fag end of the judges' career on the basis, mainly but not exclusively, of their seniority. This is creating a situation of musical chairs – of frequent change of CJIs. This does not bode well for the institution of judiciary, but no serious thought has been applied by successive governments to introduce judicial reforms. This, even as the judicial system is showing signs of cracks and of bad blood creeping in. This is reflected also in the 'note burning' case at an SC judge's home in the capital involving suspected bribe/corrupt money. The hurling of a chapal on CJI Gavai in the apex court the other day by a lawyer, and the system's hesitation to take action against the perpetrator, adds another dimension to the general drift.

Handling the judiciary is a risky attempt for any government as judges have the authority to punish members of the executive, caught as they often are in cases. Indira Gandhi as prime minister was close to losing her PM post when the Allahabad high court nullified her election to Parliament. She imposed Emergency and temporarily extricated herself from harm's way. Judges decide who should be made judges through the collegium system, as also their salaries etc., though the central government has a nominal role in these, and the appointments are made by the President. An attempt made by the Manmohan Singh dispensation to introduce a Judicial Appointments Commission to select and groom young, bright legal professionals as judges could not succeed as the Supreme Court vetoed it during the term of Narendra Modi as PM. Modi simply left it at that.

While SC judges' retirement age in India is 65, judges in the US do not have a retirement provision and can carry on and on. In the UK, judges have a retirement age of 75. The Indian system might have its better sides. Yet, the short term of chief justices, running into an average of 1.5 years, presents its own problems. Justice KN Singh, the 22nd CJI, remained in the position for no more than 17 days before he retired. A question would arise, why such funny appointments to the highest seat of the judiciary, other than to satisfy the whims of one or another individual. When it comes to the judiciary's functioning, several such issues arise. Over 5.30 crore cases are pending in various courts – nearly 90,000 in SC, 63 lakh in high courts and 4.7 crore in subordinate courts. Cases carrying on and on for more than 20 years means subversion of the legal process. Justice delayed is justice denied. Not many can afford to fight their cases for decades – especially as lawyers by their very nature are Shylocks. Growing instances of corruption in the judiciary adds to the pathos. Judicial reforms are the way forward.

Letters to the Editor

The New Normal in Jowai Town

Editor,

The moment one enters Jowai, one is greeted by a big and large crowd welcoming the people into the town. Come see the beauty of this town, they seem to say. In case one wonders what this colorful crowd is, why, it's the pile of garbage lining the highway from Khliehtyri to the innermost localities of the town! This is Jowai town – a huge pile of garbage!

Is this the new normal for Jowai town? Piles of garbage are increasing by the day. Have we decided that this is the solution to waste management? Why are there no proactive discussions from our leaders regarding waste management? Why should waste management not share the same urgency as for Covid 19? Due to the absence of a proper landfill should our leaders not take this issue as top priority? Also, where are the concerned authorities dumping waste? No one in Jowai seems to know. And those who do, keep their mouths shut, as though it's a top secret experiment being conducted.

Recently, the Swachhata Hi Seva programme was conducted throughout many

localities in Jowai, but yesterday, I saw piles of garbage within and in the vicinity of the lawmusiang market area. Also, every passerby has to cover their mouth and nose when they pass by the lane next to Biar Mythong. This is because most of the time, this area is infested with a pile of Huggies, and faecal matter. This area also happens to be a urinating area. Is the Swachhata Hi Seva working or is it just a publicity stunt? That is for people to decide and be critical in the upcoming elections.

The waste management issue has been a problem in Jowai since 2020 and it remains an issue till date. The National Games will be held in Meghalaya in 2027. Let us see what magic this present government will conjure up with regards to waste management. Can they come up with a solution fast enough like the building of a resort near Thadlaskein? Only time will tell. For now, let us breathe the foul stench coming out of our waste.

Yours etc.,
E.O. Laloo,
Jowai

Baby Come & Light My Fire

Editor,

When Jim Morrison sang, "Baby, come and light my fire," I think he might have

On October 29, the Assam Rifles Public School in collaboration with Project Empathy spearheaded by Vibha Joshi hosted the programme, "I Am With You" an art exhibition on "Empathy," at the All Saints Hall. The art work put up by the students to communicate to the public the meaning and depth of the word "Empathy" were strikingly poignant and touched the hearts of all who saw those paintings, writings, sketches and everything that brought alive the intrinsic meaning of the word Empathy. I have to admit that empathy is a word I started paying attention to only later in my adult life. While we were growing up we had a faint idea of the word "Sympathy." We believed it meant feeling sorry for someone; expressing our feelings to the person who deserves our sympathy and then move on with our normal activities. How that expression of sympathy, actually helps the person who is grieving a loss; one who has suffered misfortune or one who is a victim of violence, never really bothered us because we didn't spend long enough time to understand what the person is going through.

It was only after I suffered a personal loss in 2008 – losing a grown-up daughter in the prime of her life that I realised that all who came and offered condolences did so out of pity and sympathy for me. Other than one or two dear friends who sat quietly but who I know had my back and had always been there in my most trying moments, others just came and went. Those who sat with me through those moments of deep pain and indescribable sense of emptiness and who were ready and willing to travel the long road ahead with me; helping me pick up the threads of life, were the only ones who truly "empathised" with me and truly comprehended my loss. They were and are friends I can just open up to and know I will not be judged. They knew empathy and lived it. I have since learnt what it means to walk in another person's shoes – which actually means to experience what that person has. It takes time and a lot of self-education to be able to feel and take on the pain of another person and help him/her find forgiveness, acceptance and the will power to move on with life and to also develop the strength to fight future battles.

The term 'empathy was

first introduced in 1909 by psychologist Edward B. Titchener by translating the German term *empathie* (meaning "feeling into"). "Feeling into," literally means entering the heart of the person who is in distress and feeling the pain, anxiety and distress of that person. While people are well-tuned to their own feelings and emotions, getting into someone else's head and trying to fathom the real pain the person is going through can be a difficult proposition. Empathy is to feel the emotions of another so deeply that you are actually able to say the right words – words that heal – words that build – words that say, "I am here for you, no matter what?" That sounds like a tall order right? But that is what em-

"While both sympathy and compassion are related to empathy there are important differences we need to understand. Compassion and sympathy are considered passive connections; empathy involves a much more active attempt to understand another person."

pathy is!

But if we believe that empathy is intrinsic to every human we are wrong. Many people don't care what others go through. In Meghalaya today we are all talking about the growing numbers of drug addicts and many speak condescendingly about them. They are called the dregs of society, and even families tend to give up and hand them over to rehabilitation centres and the police. But there is a reason why a person takes to drugs. Our families now comprise of busy parents chasing livelihoods in very challenging circumstances to be able to send their kids to school and give them the best. But "Time" is something every family seems to be in short supply of. Their parents time and a listening ear is what the children yearn for. They cannot articulate that, so they look on with those teary eyes wondering when their parents would ever have the time to hear their stories of pain, of broken teenage relationships and their inability to understand the lessons taught in the classroom. Who do such children turn to? The answer is cruel. They turn to pacifiers – drugs and get a temporary reprieve only to be hooked for good. If only parents had the time. If only

tage of them.

*They sometimes feel drained or overwhelmed in social situations.

*They care deeply about other people.

Very often we tend to confuse empathy, sympathy and compassion. While both sympathy and compassion are related to empathy there are important differences we need to understand. Compassion and sympathy are considered passive connections; empathy involves a much more active attempt to understand another person. Research also suggests that our ability to regulate our own emotions influences how we respond to other people's emotions.

People who lack empathy tend to blame a rape victim for wearing certain kind of clothes; for being out late at night and for not having the moral character as defined by them. Also, there are cyber-bullies that stalk and troll people. These people perhaps have a psychological disorder which also means they need empathy which they perhaps never received at critical moments in their lives.

There are some places where empathy is most needed. They include schools and hospitals. When a sick person comes for treatment

the person is already fragile. Any harsh word or an uncaring body language from the caregiver can send the patient deeper into her/his ailment. But overwork often turns care-givers into tired, listless, emotionless automatons. This is where work-life balance becomes so important yet difficult to attain.

Schools are places where the young spend the formative years of their lives and the large part of their waking hours. Imagine their plight if they have teachers that don't understand their adolescent hormones playing up all over and causing them to do things considered "wrong." If they don't have an empathetic teacher at this point in their lives, their future could be ruined. This is one reason why schools in particular need counsellors that are student friendly and with large doses of empathy. After all they will be dealing with fragile emotions and enable them to come out of their emotional trauma to pursue a more stable life.

We humans are creatures of feelings yet these days we communicate to family members over WhatsApp thereby losing the human touch that is so essential to bonding. Our relationships have become transactional. Recently while visiting the home of Zubeen Garg in Guwahati, one of the visitors while talking to Garima Garg (Zubeen's wife) said, "Be strong, you have to be strong and overcome this sorrow." I think that's the worst thing to say to someone who has lost a loved one. It would have been better to say nothing and just let your eyes communicate your feelings. In fact, many people flounder when offering condolences. Some prefer to leave it to Hallmark cards.

Very often we feel deeply touched by kindness and a smile from the person behind the counter especially when we enter places such as banks and government offices. Government offices are known to treat people with disdain as if they are an interruption to someone's work schedule. Perhaps courses on empathy ought to be given to all those dealing with the public in their daily transactions.

Empathy could turn this world into a better, happier place. Let us be more kind, loving and compassionate and walk a few steps with those needing a listening ear and a shoulder to cry on. We can heal the world with these small steps. Let's start small and begin today...

was declared on 14th August 2025, followed by the Local Language Test on 30th August 2025, the results of which were announced on September 17, 2025.

However, since then, there has been no update regarding the next stage, i.e., the Physical Efficiency Test (PET). It has now been over one and a half months since the last result was declared yet the PET schedule has not been announced. This extended delay has caused growing frustration and uncertainty among candidates who have been waiting patiently for the process to move forward.

Moreover, it has come to our notice that other DSCs from different districts have been publishing their results with both candidate names and roll numbers, ensuring transparency and fairness. In contrast, the DSC East Khasi Hills has been releasing results only with roll numbers, making it difficult for candidates and the general public to verify or confirm the authenticity of the selection lists.

Such a lack of openness raises doubts about the fairness of the process and could potentially lead to nepotism or favouritism, thereby affecting the credibility of the recruitment.

It is also worth mentioning that the recruitment for the post of Lower Division Assistant (LDA), which was advertised only on Sep-

tember 2, 2025, has already progressed rapidly with candidates being called for the written examination on October 8, 2025. This shows that newer recruitments are moving ahead faster than earlier ones, adding to the disappointment of those waiting for the Forest Guard recruitment to conclude.

In view of the above, it is sincerely requested that the District Selection Committee, East Khasi Hills should kindly:

Expedite the remaining stages of the Forest Guard recruitment, especially the Physical Efficiency Test (PET), without further delay.

Ensure greater transparency by publishing results with both candidate's name and roll number, as practiced by other districts.

Maintain a clear, fair, and accountable recruitment process to prevent any scope for nepotism or bias.

Your kind attention and prompt action in this matter will be highly appreciated by all concerned candidates and will help restore faith in the integrity of the recruitment process.

Yours etc.,

A Concerned Candidate
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*

Students, Parents & Teachers – Then and Now: Building Happy, Productive Citizens

By Jairaj Chhetry

"If you want to plan for a year, sow rice; if you want to plan for a decade, plant trees; but if you want to plan for a lifetime, educate a child."

— Chinese Proverb

Education has long been the quiet bridge between generations, linking youthful dreams with seasoned wisdom. Once, it was a deeply human process: the teacher as moral compass, the parent as steady guide, and the student as respectful yet curious traveller. A teacher's praise could brighten a week. A parent's word could steady a struggling child. Schools were smaller, but spirits were larger.

Today, laughter often echoes behind screens. Marks, ranks, and results have grown louder than meaning. The circle that once bound teachers, parents, and students now feels stretched. Its members look at one another through the glass of expectation. In Meghalaya, where nearly half the population is under twenty, this disconnection carries serious consequences. The state's social, moral, and intellectual future rests on how effectively we rebuild the triangle of trust among home, classroom, and community.

Students: From Lamplight to Blue Light:

Then, Learning felt alive. Children sat cross-legged, sometimes barefoot but always bright-eyed. Homework was a ritual of curiosity, not a race of comparison. Evenings meant reading aloud to grandparents. Knowledge flowed naturally through life.

Now, The school bag is heavy, but the heart is often weary. Many students scroll before turning pages. The race for grades begins early and rarely ends. A 2023 Shillong study reported that nearly 70% of college students experience high academic stress, while 75% of adolescents in city schools report anxiety. The numbers speak quietly, yet painfully, of rising strain.

The system struggles too. Meghalaya's pupil-teacher ratio is 21:1 on paper, yet more than 1,600 lower primary schools have only one teacher. Students have information at their fingertips but fewer mentors to turn information into wisdom.

Lessons from the world:

• Finland delays high-stakes testing and places confidence first.

• Japan weaves humility into daily routines as students clean classrooms and tend gardens.

Both systems prove that joy and discipline are partners, not rivals.

Parents: The First Teachers, Then and Now:

Then, Parents provided the silent strength behind learning. They measured growth by curiosity, not only by marks. Evenings were for conversation, and holidays came with reading lists. Discipline and affection worked together. Values were taught through stories followed by a gentle question: "What did you learn from this?"

Now, Modern life has changed the rhythm. Dual incomes mean less time. Migration for work fragments family support. In many homes, "How much did you score?" has replaced "What did you learn?" In urban Meghalaya, time is scarce. In rural areas, reliance on tutors grows. Yet the heart of parenting still beats strong. A 2024 study in Shillong showed that regular evening conversations with parents made students 40% less likely to show anxiety. Affection remains the best teacher.

Lessons from the world:

• New Zealand and Denmark coach parents to support curiosity over competition.

• Simple questions like, "What made you smile today?" strengthen bonds.

Motivation without fear and discipline with dialogue can restore the home as the first classroom of joy.

Teachers: Moral Presence Under Pressure:

Then, With scarce resources but deep trust, teachers were patient gardeners sowing thought and values. A kind glance encouraged. A quiet word transformed.

Now, The role has widened and the day has shortened. Teachers teach, manage records, attend trainings, update portals, run mid-day meals, and adapt to reforms. Meghalaya's 54,000 teachers serve 8.6 lakh students across 14,500 schools. In remote areas, a single teacher may handle three grades, attendance, reports, and meals in one day. A study on trainee teachers highlights rising "technostress" caused not by unwillingness but by overload.

Yet hope lives on through initiatives such as:

• Kendriya Vidyalaya Happy Valley (Shillong): creativity blended with value education.

• Army Public School Happy

Valley: digital literacy with life skills and character.

• Bharti Foundation's Quality Support Program: training and joyful pedagogy in 30 government schools across Jaintia Hills, supporting 6,000 students and 300 teachers.

Lessons from the world:

• Singapore mentors every new teacher.

• Finland reduces paperwork and elevates autonomy.

When teachers are valued, children feel valued.

Then and Now: Discipline, Respect, and the Middle Path:

In earlier years, punishment—sometimes severe—was common: caning, kneeling on pebbles, public reprimand. We rarely complained at home; a second round often awaited us. That fear, though harsh, kept us regular in work and responsible in conduct. Looking back, many of us recognise that the firmness of those teachers planted lasting habits of punctuality, sincerity, and respect.

This is not a defence of harm. Corporal punishment has no place in humane education. What mattered, and still matters, is the trust that families placed in teachers and the shared belief that discipline, rightly understood, shapes citizens. Today, rights are rightly protected, voices are rightly heard, and classrooms encourage creativity and well-being. But when freedom becomes neglect and correction disappears, responsibility can weaken.

We cannot return to the harshness of the past, nor should we. The path forward is a middle way: the strictness of yesterday to anchor habits, the empathy of today to nourish confidence. When the two meet, education becomes complete.

"We teach our children to reach the moon but forget to teach them how to greet a neighbour."

Shared Challenges, Shared Duties

The problem is not in one corner. It lies in the growing distance between all three.

What we face today:

1. Exam-centric learning and rote memorisation

2. Over-reliance on tuition and private coaching

3. Digital distraction and shrinking attention spans

4. Stress, anxiety, and declining emotional health

5. Teacher burnout and under-valuation

6. Limited home-school communication

7. Too little creative and experiential learning

Meghalaya's move toward competency-based education under PARAKH (2025) signals progress. Learning must focus on understanding rather than repetition. However, policy alone cannot repair relationships. Reform requires partnership.

A Path Forward: From Policy to Practice

From our backyard:

• Strengthen parent-teacher dialogue with scheduled, agenda-light meetings focused on growth, not grades.

• Expand value-and-skill programmes in schools across the state.

• Scale teacher-training and joyful pedagogy initiatives, especially in single-teacher schools.

From the world:

• Finland: trust and autonomy for teachers

• Japan: humility and respect through daily routines

• Singapore: structured mentorship

• Denmark: emotional well-being as a key educational goal

The guiding principle remains clear. Happiness and productivity are not opposites. They grow from the same soil: respect, purpose, and balance.

Conclusion: Returning to the Garden

"Education is not the filling of a vessel, but the lighting of a flame."

That flame flickers in the curiosity of a student, the patience of a teacher, and the care of a parent. It needs protection from stress, neglect, and indifference. Let classrooms become gardens again, where knowledge grows beside kindness, where laughter is welcomed, and where mistakes are stepping stones.

Let parents listen more and compare less.

Let teachers be mentors, not managers. Let students feel that learning is a journey, not a race.

When a child learns with joy, a teacher teaches with pride, and a parent guides with love, a society truly grows.

In Meghalaya, as elsewhere, the task before us is both simple and profound: rebuild the triangle of trust so the next generation is not only skilled, but good.

(The author is a retired Headmaster)