

"Tolerance is a virtue that depends upon peace and strength."

— Charles Lindbergh

The Shillong Times

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Dearth of Institution Builders

WHAT is also desirable is to have heads of institutions that understand and imbibe the local culture and sensitivities and do not carry with them the arrogance of the mainstream casteist underpinnings which show up Meghalaya has a number of central institutions with NEHU being the oldest – as old as the State of Meghalaya. Since its inception, NEHU has had its share of problems but those have been resolved, often with the problem being pushed under the carpet only to erupt again. In the late 1990s NEIGRIHMS arrived followed by NEIAH, the IHM, IIM, NIFT and the National Law University among others. These institutions attract students, faculty and staff from across the country since they are centrally funded institutions. They therefore require a campus that supports diversity and where all voices have equal weight. Just because a central institution is located in Meghalaya does not mean that the employment rules should be bent to accommodate only local residents and local interests. The employment rules have to be followed keeping in mind the reservation policy. This requires a climate of transparency on the part of those running the institutions.

Anyone appointed to head an institution in Meghalaya should undergo at least a week's exposure at the Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute (MATI) so they know the subtleties and pain points of the society and negotiate their way around those without creating unnecessary pin-pricks which slowly accumulate into anger and hatred and from which they earn the tag of being anti-tribal. All institutional heads coming from outside also need an exposure to the subtleties of the matrilineal culture and both its upside and downsides. Tribals coming from a casteless society do not often understand the culture of obeisance towards heads of institutions. Their way of showing respect is different; so too their mode of engagement. Heads of Institution are also institution builders and as such they need the co-operation of all stakeholders to ensure that the Institution has better chances of progressing and serving the needs of society without being embroiled in needless controversies that degenerate into a law and order problem. It takes two hands to clap and conflicts are part of human nature. A teacher in an institution is expected to show patience and acceptance of differences and not to promote extremist political ideologies that cast aspersions on certain religions, faiths and their practitioners.

Not everyone leading an institution is an institution builder. The latter have special qualities such as building a culture of trust and transparency and winning people around to their ideas. They listen to multiple voices and create a safe space for people to share ideas, without shouting anyone down. Institution builders invest time in informal interaction and don't mind sharing their weak points while acknowledging the strength in co-workers. An institution builder does not claim credit for everything but gives credit to others for every achievement. Above all, institution builders ensure they are not missed by creating a new generation of leaders. The question to ask is – Do we have such leaders an institution builders in Meghalaya?

Workers' Rights and Public Discourse in Meghalaya

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

It is only when it comes to the Reservation Policy in appointments or promotion, and the demand for increase in remuneration and other monetary benefits, especially in government or quasi government establishments that workers or job seekers in Meghalaya would come together as a collective to pressure the State to redress their grievances. Beyond this, it is business as usual for workers in Meghalaya. Although, Meghalaya has had a long history of workers mobilization by National Labour Unions, like the Left backed All India Trade Union Congress (AITUC) and the Congress backed Indian National Trade Union Congress (INTUC), so far, nothing organic has emerged from the State in terms of labour movements and unionization, despite the fact that workers in Meghalaya are the most exploited segment in society.

Workers in the Neo-Liberal Era: In brief, the adoption of liberalization and neo-liberal policies in India in the early 1990s has indeed led to significant changes in the understanding of who a worker is, of economic production, and the overall labour landscape in the country. Traditionally, a worker in India was often viewed as a permanent employee with job security and benefits. Post-liberalization, there has been a significant rise in contractual, temporary and part-time employment. The in-formalization of labour has put workers and their livelihoods in a precarious situation. Prachi Salve's analysis of job's data in India (2019) is a telling account that after two decades of the liberalization of the economy about 90% of jobs created in India were informal. Many new jobs created have been in the informal sector, where workers lack legal protections, benefits and job security. In short, Liberalization has failed to achieve its objective to alleviate people from the clutches of poverty and to raise the standards of living by providing better wages and improving the working conditions of workers. The International Labour Organization and World Employment Federation have described predominance of informal employment as an indicator of lower quality of life, as workers in such jobs are vulnerable, without the social protections afforded to workers in formal jobs. This trend has continued and new research findings like the "India Employment Report 2024: Youth Employment, Education, and Skills," published by the Institute for Human Development and the International Labour Organi-

zation (ILO), revealed that a staggering 82 per cent of the workforce is engaged in the informal sector, with nearly 90 per cent being informally employed.

According to economic experts, India is entering into the fourth phase of unionism or the mobilization of workers into union formation. This phase has before itself the task to respond to this rapid in-formalization of labour which has led to sharp rise of inequality, income disparity, poverty amongst the work force and dependency ratio in the state/country.

In the absence of accurate or authentic data it becomes difficult, if not hard to ascertain the conditions of workers both in organized and unorganised sectors in the State of Meghalaya. Way back in 2017, Prof S Umdor presented two broad pictures of informal workers in Meghalaya. Firstly, the agricultural informal workers who totalled 6.9 lakhs in numbers which was ten times the numbers of serving state government employees. Secondly, 78 % of the workforce in the State are employed in informal non-agricultural sectors and the services sector accounts for a large percentage of the informal workers in the non-agricultural sector.

Issues with the Gig Economy: Recently, the onset of the gig economy in the workspace seemed promising by the creation of numerous employment opportunities for a significant number of youths. Meghalaya has also witnessed a rise in bike taxis, app-based jobs, deliveries and various service sectors, employing many young individuals. However, this growth is not without its challenges. Many youths engaged in gig work face issues such as a lack of a just and fair system, protection and regulation of their livelihoods due to the absence of specific gig work legislation in the state. There are major concerns regarding job security, health and safety, insurance, compensation, benefits and protection, income inequality, extortion extraction of commission by aggregator companies and market saturation etc.

The situation with the gig economy in Shillong City, Meghalaya is not much different from the rest of India. In food delivery, Swiggy is the dominant player here. Though, taxi services provided by Ola/Uber have not penetrated the city yet; credit goes to the already existing local taxi service. However, due to the excessive traffic jams people are increasingly preferring bike

taxi services and aggregator/app-based companies have gained monopoly since the introduction of app-based bike taxis. The numbers of youths engaging in the bike taxi business are increasing daily. But there is one thing peculiar to Shillong bike taxi services. Today most of the riders operate independently of the aggregator whereby they casually approach the customers in order to bypass the commission deduction by the aggregator companies. From Motphran to Khlieh (Hill top) Nongthymmai one will find hundreds of bike taxis stationed at every junction and the curse of traffic jams makes daily commuters prefer this mode of transport even though sometimes bike taxis charge exorbitant rates. No matter what method the bike taxis are operating in Shillong, they cannot escape the brunt of the gig economy. Unfortunately, there has been no demand for legislation to regulate and protect the gig workers in the State. Perhaps many are not aware of the perils which await them and they have been made to believe that this is the panacea that will sustain and alleviate the state from the pains of increasing unemployment. The independent method which the bike taxi riders employ put both the life of commuters and their livelihoods at greater risk. If an accident happens the blame falls entirely on them and should something bad happen to the customer it will be very difficult for them to settle matters without a law in place.

The Shillong bike taxi riders/drivers also face similar problems like other app-based gig workers in the country. For example, most of them are not aware of the 'Terms and Conditions' they agreed to while joining the platform. One reason is that such agreements are not provided in local languages. In a conversation with some of them, they expressed that when the company started its operations, it used to deduct only 4.5-5% commission, which gradually increased to 30% once the company became the dominant player in the market. Additionally, lack of transparency enabled by technology, and the inherent exploitative framework of the gig economy, which evades and violates labour laws on the one hand and exploits the workers on the other hand is the same phenomenon everywhere.

However, one major difference between the gig workers of Shillong and other cities is that while in other cities the workers either have formed unions or are in

the process of forming one, in Shillong we do not find any such attempts, thereby leaving the aggregator companies a free hand to exploit the workers. The formation of the Indian Federation of App-based Transport Workers (IFAT) in 2019, and the Telangana Gig and Platform Workers Union (TGPWU) in 2020 had been successful in checking the exploitative practices of the aggregator companies up to a certain extent and in drawing the attention of several state governments to pass laws and guidelines on security benefits for gig workers.

Core Principle of Workers' Rights Campaign in Meghalaya: In the past one decade, the Thma U Rangli (TUR), relentlessly campaigned for workers' rights and attempted to unionise workers in Government, private and unorganised sectors. Such a campaign is also aimed at becoming an indigenous, inclusive and organic movement within the State, but with a national outlook. The campaign includes the publication of TUR's core beliefs and charter of demands which were placed in the public domain. The charter of demands include the inalienable rights of the workers and it is important to revisit this so as to create an awareness for the workers to secure their rights. Here is an extract of TUR's core belief as far as workers rights are concerned. All other public demands for workers' rights stem from this principle.

That, the minimum wages in both rural and urban areas be revised annually and indexed to the state inflation rates. Government to commit towards making minimum wages to be in line with living wages which allow a family to live in dignity. Living Wage is a wage that can support a family to live with dignity. A living wage should be calculated on the cost of a basket of goods that would include sufficient calories for a family (using the local dietary habits) and a similar amount for non-food costs including housing, clothing, energy and material goods. Living wages should accommodate the interest of multiple forms of family structure, the reality of care work that women often provide for children, extended family and other dependents. All workers in Meghalaya whether indigenous or those coming from outside the state must enjoy all the provisions of human rights. Workers' rights are part of ensuring respect for human rights enshrined in the universal declaration especially of migrant workers who contribute to the economic well-being of the state.

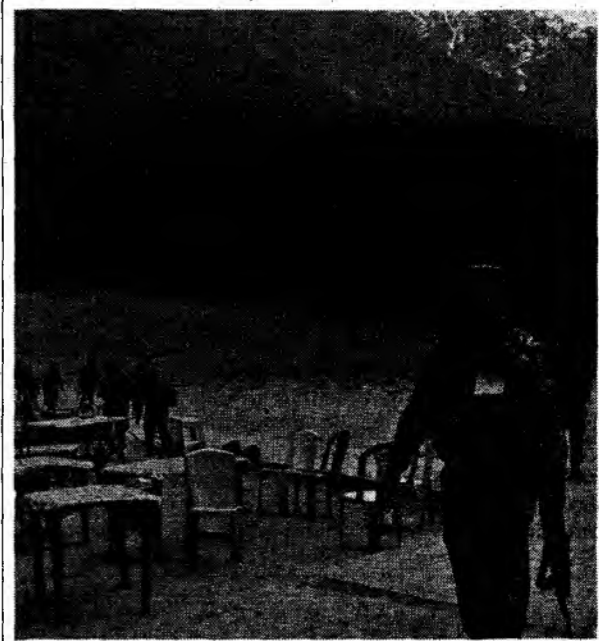
Tremors of Pahalgam Genocide

By Naba Bhattacharjee

The inhuman massacre of innocent individuals in Pahalgam has sent shock waves followed by anger and condemnation all over the country and worldwide. History clearly articulates that religious fundamentalism has always ignited hatred that engulfs humanity in the long run. Pakistan is today the principal country promoting and breeding terrorism, as it accelerates towards a failed nation in every respect. The ruthless persecution also bears ominous portends for our region.

The recent developments and worsening situation in neighbouring Bangladesh and the spurt of infiltration across the border is a cause of concern for Meghalaya and the entire north east. India has responded on diplomatic grounds and keeping in abeyance the Indus Water Treaty etc. A positive feature has been the denunciation of the terrorist attack by the Kashmiris which reflects an organic reaction. More stringent and deterrent action, particularly better in-

the multifarious religious and linguistic groups, co-existing peacefully. There is no other country in the world which can boast of such harmony. With passage of time this binding factor, which initially was an enigma, has been reflecting signs of erosion. The external strategy is to exploit the situation to foment ethnic, religious and communal discord where all Indians are the focus of attack. Illegal migration from neighbouring countries to our region has a definite agenda. The apprehension that the indigenous tribal people may be rendered minority in their own land one day, if concrete preventive measures are not adopted, is genuine. With the present Bangladesh regime adopting a hostile attitude towards our country, states like Meghalaya, bordering that country, have to be more watchful to thwart the possible nefarious Pak-Bangla designs with implicit support of China. Any danger to the demographic status of the indigenous population of the state is bound to have far reaching implications to the genuine



telligence and surveillance systems are the need of the hour so that the blood of our citizens is avenged. At the same time, it is imperative that our intel apparatus also focus more seriously in the

Indians, as well, settled in the region for generations.

As our constitution has no provision to safeguard interests of smaller communities particularly their demographic status, enforce-

"This has also been incorporated in the objectives of the United Nations. Are we ready and vigilant to check and counter the evil designs of such activists, who have now devised a new strategy of using the north east as an entry and transit point to reach the mainland, where chances of assimilation are much higher? A few individuals or a small organization within them may be here as trained agents of destruction."

Letters to the Editor

Struggles of Bakery Business in Meghalaya

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw attention to the growing struggles faced by the bakery business in Meghalaya, especially in recent times. Bakeries play a crucial role in our state's local economy, offering employment and catering to the daily needs of the people, particularly to the low income societies, it is a means for a source of income.

However, due to the rising cost of the ingredients like flour, butter, eggs, oil and many more ingredients required for the said industry, entrepreneurs are struggling to keep their businesses at a sustainable level.

Over and above that, most of the bakeries in state lack access to modern equipment, reliable supply of electricity, and financial support, coupled with poor facilities for loans and finding their own ground while competing with well established bakeries in town, branded products etc. This makes it hard for small businesses to survive.

It is high time the Government takes note of the challenges, either through the Skill Development Departments by making it easier to acquire loan or support or by creating policies that support and enable small bakery owners— whether through subsidies, improved infrastructure, skill development training, or financial aid. This will definitely provide means of employment to many talented households and individuals alike.

I sincerely hope this letter helps create awareness and prompts the concerned stakeholders to take meaningful action by uplifting the local bakery industry in Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Delicia Vanora Lyngdoh,
Shillong

Equal Justice for All Regions Must Be India's Priority

Editor,
The recent terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir was a horrific act of violence and must be unquestionably condemned by all. Targeting civilians is inexcusable, and I commend the Indian government for its swift

action in countering the terrorists responsible for these killings.

But what saddens me most is the stark difference in the response of the government when tragedies like these take place in the Northeast. Repeatedly, justice is postponed or even denied. We must remind the Government of India about the 2021 Nagaland Oting massacre when 13 innocent civilians were shot dead by security personnel and the Government's refusal to go ahead with any criminal proceedings against them. The 2022 Meghalaya Mukroh firing when six civilians were killed by Assam police and the continued Manipur conflict also bring to light this trend of apathy. There have been numerous atrocities perpetrated by the Indian armed forces in the North-East region in the past, but until now, in the majority of instances, the victims have not yet seen justice.

This trend of differential treatment is a basic challenge to our commitment to equality before law. Can we seriously say we are one nation when the devaluation of human life seems to depend on where you are? The Constitution provides equal protection to all citizens, yet

these differences imply that some Indians are more equal than others.

I appeal to the Indian Government to drop this discriminatory policy and maintain equal rights for all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or region. Pain has no majority or minority; it is felt the same by everyone. The country needs to insist on consistent accountability and fairness in the quest for justice.

Yours etc.,
Carmel Fedrick Malngiang,
Sohra

Rising Youth Unemployment in Meghalaya

Editor,
I am writing this letter not just as a student, but as a young person growing up in Meghalaya, who sees and hears the worries of our youth almost every day. Unemployment among young people in our state is no longer just a statistic. It's something that's silently affecting families, causing frustration, and making many of us question what the future holds.

Despite being educated, skilled, and motivated, many young people I know are still struggling to find jobs. I have

witnessed classmates who have completed their degrees but are sitting at home, uncertain of what to do next. Some have even considered leaving the state, not because they want to, but because they feel like they have no choice looking at the present situation where neither Government nor private jobs are available. This situation is heartbreaking.

According to reports, over 1.67 lakh youths in Meghalaya are registered as unemployed between 2018 and 2024. That's a huge number for a state like ours. And although the government has launched schemes like CM-Elevate, PRIME, and Skillerate 2025, I feel these programs haven't reached many of the people who truly need them. In remote villages or even in parts of Shillong, there's still a big gap between what is being offered and what young people are actually able to access.

Another major issue is the lack of job diversity. Most opportunities are limited to government jobs, which are few, or small-scale private work, which often don't pay well. Not everyone wants to be an entrepreneur or start a business either. Some just want stable, fair-paying jobs that match their education and skills.

I sincerely urge the government and other concerned authorities to do the following:

1. Improve awareness about employment schemes through local outreach in schools, colleges, and rural areas.

2. Invest in industries like eco-tourism, IT, green energy, and creative arts that can create more local jobs for the youth.

3. Set up career counseling centers in all districts to guide students early on skills and job pathways.

4. Partner with companies outside the state to create internship or work exchange opportunities for our youth.

If we want to build a stronger Meghalaya, we must invest in the future of our youth not just with words or policies, but with real, visible action. It's time to listen to the voices of young people and give them more than just hope. We need opportunities.

Thank you for taking the time to read my thoughts.

Yours etc.,
Ribhameiaka Khyriem
Via email

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"True art is characterized by an irresistible urge in the creative artist."
— Albert Einstein

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Fear of the unknown

THE subcontinent is gripped by a fear of the unknown – and more so Pakistan, where the political establishment is spending some anxious moments and the military brass is in readiness against any offensive from India. At a time when the national economy is in doldrums, Pakistan can ill afford a war. That India contemplates a military action was all too clear from the very start after the Pahalgam terrorist attack on hapless Hindu tourists on April 22. The religiously loaded attack gave a deeper twist to the Kashmir saga, forcing Prime Minister Narendra Modi to up the ante. That no action has taken place for days on end only added to Pakistan's worries. Instead of an abrupt, casual hit, it could be that India is fashioning a harder response or retaliation with calculated, well-planned, well-organised steps. The fire-spitting in the past seven days along the border region, between Indian and Pakistani soldiers, is perhaps a signal to the larger engagement. Both sides are keeping their powder dry.

A war is no more fought on conventional lines. The US war on Iraq in 2003 was waged principally from the air. Patriot missiles flattened Baghdad's high-rise government buildings one after another, night after night, from the US military ships in the sea. The war was virtually over in a matter of a few days, and yet it killed an unspecified number of service personnel and others. Unlike the US and Iraq, India and Pakistan are neighbours, which heightens the role of the land army. Still, what matters more would be the air power that the Air Force and Naval ships can display. What kind of a strike India plans is unclear. Pakistan's information minister reflected his nation's apprehensions when he said India was planning a war on the "pretext" of Pahalgam "with ulterior motives." In 1984, India captured the strategically important Siachen Glacier from Pakistan. Clearly, India's wait after Pahalgam meant that it would not be a touch-and-go this time, as had happened in Balakot in 2019. Pakistan didn't learn a lesson from Balakot and terrorists continued to be patronized by the state there. India gives due weight to peace in the subcontinent. A line has to be drawn between what's possible and what should be attempted at and achieved.

To Pakistan's disadvantage, world opinion is against its patronization of terror. While the US has been in touch with both nations, urging them not to destabilize the region with war-cries, this would only have a limited impact. China is duty-bound to stand by Pakistan also as its interests in PoK, vis-à-vis the Belt and Road Economic Corridor initiative through this disputed landmass, are well-documented. India's attempt, obviously, is not to destroy its neighbour but to make it see reason at this belated hour and stop its patronization of terror. Strong actions are inevitable even as there could be collateral damage in any military offensive.

Letters to the Editor

Urgent Need to Preserve Khasi Culture and Language

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw attention to an issue that is both urgent and deeply personal to the people of Bri Hynniewtrep — the gradual decline of Khasi culture and language.

Our language and traditions form the core of our identity as Khasis. However, in recent years, the influence of globalization and modern lifestyles has begun to overshadow our cultural practices. The Khasi language is spoken less frequently among the younger generation, with English or Hindi often adopted as substitutes, both in schools and at home alike. This shift poses a real threat to the survival of our linguistic heritage.

Alongside the language, traditional practices such as folk music, storytelling, dance, and indigenous rituals are being neglected. These cultural elements are not just decorative — they are carriers of our history, wisdom, and values. Without them, we risk losing our existence of community and identity.

Preserving our cultural heritage does not mean rejecting modernity. Instead, it means finding a balance — promoting Khasi in schools, supporting local literature and media in our language, encouraging youth participation in cultural events, and using digital platforms to

share our heritage in creative ways. The government, educational institutions, and local communities must work together towards this goal. As a concerned citizen, I urge readers, especially the youth, to take pride in speaking our language and practicing our traditions. Let us ensure that the richness of Khasi is not only remembered but also celebrated and passed on to future generations.

Yours etc.,
Aibanpynskhem Lyngdoh
Mawlong
Shillong

JN Stadium — A Sporting Gem in Need of Better Facilities

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to highlight the immense potential of the Jawaharlal Nehru (JN) Stadium in Shillong, which is widely regarded as one of the best football grounds in India in terms of its natural ambiance, climate, and passionate crowd support. Despite its reputation and historical significance in Indian football, the stadium continues to suffer from a lack of proper infrastructure and facilities.

While players and fans alike praise the quality of the pitch and the vibrant atmosphere during matches, basic amenities such as proper seating arrangements, clean

Protect The Wild In Wildlife

"They tend to the forest; the forest tends them back". An image of trust — comforting and reassuring — describes an ecotourism project run by an indigenous community in the Sierra Norte, Mexico. James Gingell defines a way of life and its outcome — of care given and returned. The verb 'tend', deliberately chosen or not, is brimful of tenderness.

(<https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2025/apr/28/viva-zapotec-a-thriving-ecotourism-project-in-mexico-oaxaca-state>)
The ancient indigenous reverence for the natural world in all its simplicity and effectiveness prevails in the Sierra Norte, stirring within me a deep pool of ancestral memories. But the comfort from these uplifting words is short-lived because in Meghalaya respectful reciprocity is dying. The forests give, and we take...and that too by the lorry load. We strip the land of its goodness ripping apart the unwritten pact between people and their land. Why do we have to put a price on Nature to know her worth? Caring for the forest has largely been selfless community work and this is what the people of Nongkhyllem have been doing until the Tourism Department decided to gatecrash. "...The sanctuary has been carefully preserved by locals for generations and [they] warned that introducing tourism infrastructure would lead to pollution and long-term environmental damage" ... (ST April 25, 2025)

The proposal for an ecotourism scheme (a word deliberately chosen in preference to the more innocuous 'plan') in Nongkhyllem certainly bears the hallmark of a government puffed with conceit for whom our pristine landscapes are merely something to look at and somehow improve upon; not for the sake of the land, but for a public apparently in need of lessons on how to better appreciate wildlife; not as devotees entering a magnificent outdoor cathedral but as easily distracted folk who are not really interested in nature and need to be lured into the wild by the prospect of water-sports and skywalks.

It is tragic that over the years we have all been systematically groomed to become or endorse the most undesirable kind of tourist — a tourist that feels Nature can only be accessed through or literally from over-the-top

manmade viewpoints. Once we looked up to nature, we didn't look down. We saw and sensed the power of a Life greater than ourselves and that was the mystery nurturing our reverence. How on earth are we to regain that reverence if we are surrounded by chattering busloads and carloads of tourists talking over our co-inhabitants in this corner of our planet? With the competition for living space becoming more acute, the Sanctuary is just that — a refuge. I shudder to think what the impact clicking selfies and the sheer volume of human activity will have on wildlife. But prior to that, will not the chug of bulldozers, the moan of chainsaws, the din of drilling-equipment, panic beast, bird, insect and bat? If sonar transmission can disorientate whales with fatal consequences, can you imagine what will happen to forest creatures? We are turning all those living creatures, most of whom we do not know and so don't care about, into exiles constantly seeking somewhere they can call home to live lives already blighted by PTSD.

Having discovered the profitable potential of our 'mesmerising', 'breath-taking' (cliché, cliché, groan, groan) landscapes certain Meghalayans have now weaponised the concept of ecotourism presenting it as a sop to beguile the public into accepting that their intentions are disinterested. Had I not spied the juicy figure of 'Rs 23.60 crore', I would have given the Tourism department the benefit of the doubt. But as we all know Money and Meghalaya are a toxic mix and we can't suddenly start looking virtuous just because we speak from under the sheltering umbrella of Ecotourism. Recalling the Garo Student Union's complaint regarding the shabby tourism infrastructure in Siju which includes an adventure playground, a bird watching tower with an interpretation centre, a zip line (ST February 2 2025), I would be seriously worried about this proposed invasion of Nongkhyllem. Shouldn't we be looking instead to placing NO ENTRY signs for certain members of the state and their mates?

We are now told that despite assurances from the government, seven villages are critical about the Wildlife Department bypassing them in the decision-making process. I then wondered if this is the same wildlife department featured in this documentary — <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QBRzdQiQJoc>
I sincerely hope not because even now we need your wisdom and commitment on the importance and joy of mutual respect and co-existence.

Was the Wildlife Department overawed by the jargon, have they taken leave of their senses or worse? Is it because they won't? can't? aren't dissent — which is it? We need answers because the ecosystem under threat is as fragile as our trust in the government. And why do we have to consult non-local-experts when it is evident that Nongkhyllem has remained a pristine 'sanctuary' for centuries without outside assistance?
But then it is typical of the powerful in Meghalaya who feel that they are there to teach as in give orders, and not to learn anymore. They would have us believe they are in possession of knowledge beyond the reach of the hoi polloi. Why rope in 'experts' from outside the state instead of trusting those within? Doubtless some excuse for that will be glibly trotted out. They rely on the false premise that if you pay someone a colossal amount of money then the 'dumb' public at home automatically believes that the consultation is of great significance.

After all, what does the villager who has never seen chalets and skywalks know? A lot more than you do let me tell you because she/he is in tune with the living heartbeat of the world at home and possesses that most important of all insights: our lives are a part of the natural world not apart from it. Don't corrupt them too by undermining this critical truth. I therefore completely agree with Khur Basan's suggestion that money would be better spent on "improved patrol paths, transparent funding for genuine conservation efforts, and opportunities to establish modest, community-run hostmays at the sanctuary's periphery — not intrusive resorts within its heart". (italics mine)

<https://theshillongtimes.com/2025/04/23/nongkhyllem-is-not-for-sale-rescind-the-eco%E2%80%91tourism-contract-now/>

Yours etc.,
Vianny Genius Nonglang,
Via email

Rise in number of school drop-outs in Meghalaya

Editor,
In recent years, the number of school drop-outs has rapidly increased in Meghalaya. A study shows that Meghalaya is the highest in the Northeastern Region and second in the country, when it comes to dropout at an annual rate of 21.7% (Classes 9 and 10). After the pandemic and with the introduction of the New Education Policy (NEP) students are finding it difficult to pursue their studies.

The reason for this is not mainly due to financial problems. There are other factors as well. Take the rural areas where a large number of students drop out of school after completing the SSLC or some may not even complete their high school. When we look at the school in rural areas, we find firstly that the infrastructure is not well maintained. Some school compounds are very small and do not even have a place for students to play.

When it comes to teachers, many rural schools do not have well trained professional teachers and the ones who are well trained are not being taken care of. Some teachers are not even getting their monthly salaries.

It is insane to allow "... a company specializing in wedding and event management — to construct chalet-style resorts, glass skywalks, and even a water-sports arena inside the 29-square-kilometer Nongkhyllem Wildlife Sanctuary. Such plans threaten to transform a critical refuge for clouded leopards, Hoolock gibbons, and rufous-necked hornbills into nothing more than a boutique amusement park". (Basan) In more ways than one tourism is robbing Meghalaya of her authenticity. Let the wilderness tell her own story. Let the local people be the narrators interpreting a story that has evolved and continues to evolve and teach over centuries. This is the tale a discerning searching tourist will want to hear and one which our own people should hear.

Perhaps the chief minister would do well to produce another guidebook explaining critical words like sanctuary, conservation, restoration. However, if he is oblivious to the irony of posing with his team on the living-root bridge after reports highlighting the stress suffered by these ancient structures due to heavy tourist footfall, then that publication will only be a pie in the sky. Honestly, for once I thought we would take seriously what the papers say but...c'est la vie au Meghalaya.

In our blind rush to be modern we cannot afford to leave the past behind for therein lies the key to our future survival. Nature must never ever be an 'afterthought' (George Monbiot — Guardian, April 24, 2025). The Green-Tech Foundation has raised awareness of the threat to Nongkhyllem and if we lose the battle to protect the Sanctuary then we are signing a death sentence for the rest of our homeland. That death will come is a certainty. All that will remain unclear is how long or how drawn out that end will be. It is therefore time for concerted action. Sympathetic noises on Facebook which amount to little more than virtue signalling, are not enough in these dangerous times. If Meghalaya is not to become a playground for the rich and the supermarket of the clouds, then we need to care for her forests for to walk in them "is to enter a pharmacy, a pantry, a gallery" (James Gingell).

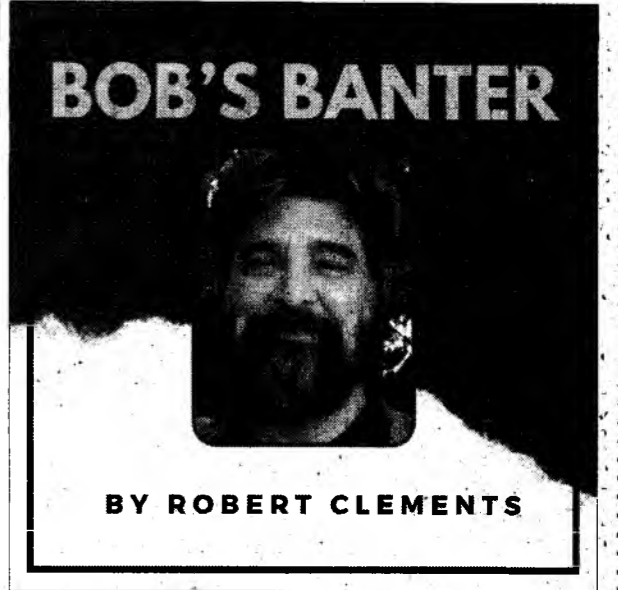
Yours etc.,
Shailang Jyndiang
Shillong

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Did Moses have ulcers? I mean, he must have, right? I'm sure he did—how could he not? Leading a nation of grumblers through the wilderness for forty years would test anyone's patience and gastrointestinal system. Throw in constant complaints about the food, a few rebellions, and the odd uprising, and you'd think Moses would have had a lifetime prescription for antacids. Not to mention a therapist on call, ready to talk him down after every crisis.

But no, that's not the case. Moses didn't have ulcers. The man lived to be 120 years old, and I don't mean a bedridden, arthritis-riddled old man, unable to lift a finger. Scripture says, "His eye was not dim, nor his strength abated." Which makes me squint through my bifocals



(even after my last month's cataract surgery, mind you) and wonder, "What vitamins was he on?"

Because let's face it—Moses didn't have an easy life. Every other day, the Israelites were whining about something. "No meat, Moses." "Too much manna, Moses." "We miss Egypt, Moses." I mean, they acted like he was the tour guide for a vacation that went horribly wrong. One minute they were all excited about this promised land, and the next, they were ready to trade it all for some good old-fashioned Egyptian cuisine and the luxury of slavery. Who could blame Moses for thinking he might be in a bad reality show?

And let's talk about his management team. He didn't have an HR department or a team of consultants to turn to. No, his only resources were a burning bush and a cloud. That's it. A bush that was on fire and a cloud that followed them around like an overly ambitious fog. Sounds like a pretty low-budget operation to me.

Yet, Moses didn't crack under the pressure. Here's where it gets interesting, though—Moses had something that most of us don't. No, not a magic staff that could turn into a snake or part the Red Sea (though, that would be helpful). He had faith. A stubborn, mountain-moving, Red Sea-parting kind of faith. The kind of faith that would make you roll over and go to sleep while your people were up all night complaining about their diet. The kind of faith that lets you rest, even when the world around you is throwing its worst at you.

Today, we have all kinds of men of God—pastors, priests, reverends—blessed with impressive theological degrees, the best sound systems for their choirs, and state-of-the-art air-conditioning units for their churches. And yet, they seem to be under the weather more than Moses ever was. "Father's in for a stent," I hear. "Pastor collapsed after the fifth counseling session." Even the Sunday School teacher's stressed out after every class. Now, I don't blame them. Let's face it—today's flock doesn't just complain about manna. They come with all kinds of baggage—marital problems, rebellious teenagers, crippling housing loans, and the weight of keeping up with the Joneses. They're

went straight to the Source every time a problem arose. And the key is this: once he handed over the problem, he left it there. No second-guessing, no constant worrying. He didn't take the issue back with him. Unlike most of us, who hand our worries to God in one breath and snatch them back the next, clutching them like a precious possession.

How many times do we pray, "Lord, take this burden," only to wake up at 2 a.m., tossing and turning, thinking of every possible scenario, every contingency plan we could put in place just in case God doesn't come through? We make prayer requests, but then we try to solve everything ourselves—putting God in the passenger seat while we take the wheel.

Maybe it's time we took a page from Moses' book. Maybe it's time to truly "hand it over" and leave it there. Believe that God works in ways that are far beyond our comprehension. And let's stop waiting for the ulcer symptoms to show up before we take action. Real faith isn't just about waiting for the crisis to hit—it's about trusting that God has everything under control before it even comes our way. Because real faith doesn't just move mountains; it keeps your blood pressure in check. It gives you the strength to lead, to endure, and to live without letting the stresses of life bring you to your knees. You can go through life ulcer-free if you trust, truly trust, that God is in control.

But let's be clear—absolute trust comes with absolute obedience. If you have ulcers, ask yourself: are you truly obeying God in all areas of your life? Have you truly handed everything over to Him, or are you still clutching the reins of control, just waiting for the next stressful moment to arrive?

It's time we take a deep breath and ask ourselves, like Moses, "What kind of faith do I have?" Because that faith—true, unwavering faith—could just be the one thing that stands between us and a lifetime of ulcers. And I, for one, think I'd rather have a peace-filled life than an ulcer-filled one...

The author conducts many activities connected with writing and speaking. To find out more, log onto <https://bobsbanter.com/a-phone-call-away/>

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"Smart people focus on the right things."

— Jensen Huang

The Shillong Times

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Erosion of Rule of Law

RECENT raids conducted by the Enforcement Directorate (ED) on the cartel involved in illegal coal mining in Meghalaya have established one fact. There is a deep nexus between politicians, businesspersons, sections of the bureaucracy and the police in the continued transportation of coal from different regions of Meghalaya through Assam to other states and also to Bangladesh. In fact, Bangladesh is a recipient of undue favours from Meghalaya where whole hills and mountains are pulverised to supply unlimited quantities of limestone, boulders and sand to that country. Drivers doing the Shillong-Guwahati or the Shallang-Dudhnoi-Assam route all know that coal is regularly being transported out. The police have learnt to look the other way and are paid for doing so. Officials of the Transport Department who provide challans to these coal carrying trucks are also the culprits. That they are all acting at the behest of those in power while also making money on the sly is a no brainer. Sadly, this has been allowed to happen under the watch of respective DGPs in Meghalaya.

Here the Police Department does not adopt professionalism and outcome-based policing as yardsticks for performance indicators. Police are regularly promoted by virtue of their seniority. Law enforcement continues to fail. Those in the profession including direct recruits from the Indian Police Service (IPS) have learnt to negotiate their way in the twists and turns of Meghalaya's political weathervane. They prefer to soft pedal on issue rather than take on criminals—some with connections to the higher echelons of governance. This politician-police-bureaucrat nexus is so entrenched that anyone attempting to dismantle it has to pay the price. Even today when the ED raid has clearly exposed that illegal coal mining continues to thrive, there is complete denial from ministers in government. To state that the coal transported out is what was extracted prior to 2014 when the NGT ban on coal mining was enforced and that because such coal is stocked deep inside forests, policing is difficult, is a complete eyewash. That ministers of the Government should be repeating this lie is a sad commentary on the MDA Government. Justice (retired)BP Katakey who is heading the one-man committee as mandated by the Meghalaya High Court has been discharging his duties responsibly but even he faces stiff resistance from the establishment.

Now that the Government claims to have succeeded in getting the compliance of the central government on scientific coal mining - the question to ask is - what really is scientific coal mining and is that possible in the Meghalaya terrain. Instead of working towards making coal mining legal, can the Meghalaya Government seek central help to address environmental degradation due to reckless mining in the past and of reclaiming the abandoned coalfields - a task laid out several decades ago but which remains unaddressed? When the government is hands in gloves with and actively supporting those breaking the law then what governance can citizens expect? When will the Meghalaya Police learn to function independently and enforce the rule of law? Occasional busting of the drug trafficking nexus is not the end all and be all of policing.

Breaking Stereotypes: De-gendering the Nursing Profession

By KN Kumar

The image of the nurse in India, as across much of the world, is still shaped by a powerful stereotype: that of a compassionate woman in white, tending to the sick with gentle care. While this image evokes respect, it also perpetuates a gendered narrative that has far-reaching consequences for the nursing profession and society at large. Nursing's feminization is a legacy of both colonial and social forces. Florence Nightingale's reforms, while revolutionary, also solidified the idea of nursing as "women's work." In India, this was reinforced by social norms and institutional practices, including gender-based reservations that persist either formally or informally. An 80:20 female-to-male ratio is still observed, justified by perceived "appropriateness" for patient comfort and care, reinforcing the stereotypes and limiting the opportunities for men even as the profession's scope and complexity have grown far beyond traditional caregiving.

The North Eastern Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS) in Shillong has become a focal point of this debate. The Hymnietrep Youth Council (HYC) has been actively demanding the formal implementation of an 80:20 female-to-male nurse recruitment ratio at NEIGRIHMS, aligning with practices at AIIMS, New Delhi, JIPMER, etc.

In early 2025, NEIGRIHMS issued a job advertisement to fill 105 Nursing Officer posts (backlog vacancies) without specifying any gender ratio. The HYC expressed concern that this would lead to a disproportionate number of male nurses being recruited, which they argue is unsuitable given the patient demographic and cultural sensitivities. The HYC president highlighted that some female patients, especially in sensitive wards such as the MICU, PICU, and ICU, often felt uncomfortable with male nurses attending to them or their children. The Council also pointed out that only a few departments at NEIGRIHMS cater exclusively to male patients, making a high proportion of male nurses unnecessary. The NEIGRIHMS clarified that the advertised vacancies were not for fresh recruitment but for "Backlog Vacancies" that arose from non-acceptance, non-joining, resignations, or non-availability of suit-

able candidates in various categories from previous recruitment cycles. Recruitments at NEIGRIHMS are conducted according to the 'Model Roster and Regional Roster' mandated by DOPT guidelines. Currently, there is no provision in the existing Recruitment Rules for an 80:20 female-to-male ratio. NEIGRIHMS had requested the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India, for such a provision in July 2024, but the Ministry, in August 2024, had advised against adopting such a ratio. This decision has sparked protests by the HYC.

The controversy underscores the complex intersection of gender, culture, and healthcare delivery in the Northeast and highlights the challenges of balancing inclusivity with local social realities. It is often argued that women are naturally more considerate and compassionate, and thus better suited to nursing. Scientific research does show that, on average, women tend to score higher on measures of empathy and compassion, possibly due to both biological factors (such as higher oxytocin release) and socialization. However, these are average differences with significant overlap—many men are deeply compassionate and effective caregivers, and individual variation far outweighs group averages. Moreover, contemporary research and patient feedback refute the belief that men cannot be as gentle, concerned, and compassionate as their female counterparts. The skills that define a good nurse—clinical competence, communication, problem-solving, and empathy—are not exclusive to any gender. Nursing is a profession grounded in science, critical thinking, and teamwork, as much as it is in compassion.

Stereotypes Harm Everyone
Labelling nursing as "women's work" perpetuates stereotypes that harm both men and women. Men face stigma, lack of support, and discrimination, while women are boxed into caregiving roles, undermining their natural potential for other professions and career advancement. Gender-based labels such as "male nurse" are injurious, as they, preserve sex-segregation and

reinforce stereotypes that affect both men and women in the profession. Men entering nursing often face scepticism and questioning of their masculinity. Male nurses sometimes encounter resistance from colleagues or are assigned only physically demanding tasks, reinforcing their role as exceptions rather than equals.

A gender-diverse workforce brings a wider range of perspectives, skills, and experiences, which can improve patient care and workplace culture. Research shows that de-gendering nursing and building a gender-balanced workforce strengthens the profession and optimizes its ability to serve society. Besides, modern healthcare ethics demand respect for the dignity and unique attributes of every individual, regardless of gender. Excluding or discouraging men from nursing based on presumed biological differences is discriminatory and does not align with contemporary values of fairness and equality.

India stands at a crossroads. India, like much of the world, faces a severe shortage of nurses. There are over three million registered nurses in India. The World Health Organisation's recommendation is three nurses for a population of 1000 people. The current figure in India is 1.7 per 1000 people. In 2021, a group of nursing and midwifery organisations came together to highlight this acute shortage of nurses through their campaign titled '#NurseMidwife4Change'. They claimed that India would need at least 4.3 million more nurses by 2024 to meet the WHO standards.

To meet this challenge, we must move beyond outdated notions of who can be a nurse. Artificially limiting the profession to one gender reduces the talent pool and makes it harder to meet the growing demand for healthcare services. De-gendering the nursing profession is not just about fairness or equality—it is about building a stronger, more effective healthcare system for all. Encouraging more men to join nursing is essential to address these shortages and ensure better patient care. While social and perhaps biological factors may influence the development of empathy, compassion is not exclusive to women.

Men can and do develop these qualities, especially in supportive educational and professional environments. The idea that only women are suited for caring roles is a social construct, not a biological fact. Male nurses now make up only about 11% of India's nursing workforce; several barriers persist for them.

Policies should encourage applications from all genders and focus on building a workforce that reflects the diversity of the population. Integrate feminist pedagogy and gender-sensitivity training into nursing curricula. This means challenging stereotypes and empowering students to see nursing as a profession for everyone. Challenge the public perception of nursing through media, outreach, and education. Campaigns that showcase male nurses as competent, compassionate professionals can help break down stereotypes and attract a broader range of candidates.

The ongoing debate at NEIGRIHMS exemplifies the challenges and complexities involved, but also the urgent need for dialogue and reform. Balancing cultural sensitivities with inclusivity and merit-based recruitment is essential. Let us envision a future where nursing is seen as a noble, respected profession open to all, regardless of gender. Let us support policies and practices that value merit over stereotypes, and let us celebrate the contributions of every nurse—man or woman—who dedicates his/her life to caring for others. By breaking down barriers, we can ensure that India's nurses, of all genders, are empowered to lead, heal, and inspire. This may call for a wider discussion, for the original policy of 80:20 was implemented at the AIIMS way back in 2019. It is not that anyone is at fault, as of now, HYC insists that NEIGRIHMS follow the practice that is nationally adhered to, while the Director, NEIGRIHMS, cannot violate the current recruitment rules of the DoPT. While acknowledging that short-term expediency always overwhelms the long-term concerns, I urge the stakeholders not to lose sight of the future. A future that demands that we act from now on!

(The writer is former member of the IAS)

Public service or privilege? A closer look at VPP's salary concerns

By Rishanlang Khongwir

The recent statement by the Voice of the People Party (VPP), expressing concern over the financial conditions of Opposition MLAs in Meghalaya, raises important questions—though not all for the reasons intended. At the heart of their concern is the claim that a monthly salary of Rs 2,02,000 is insufficient to cover the expenses involved in public service, including staff wages, fuel, and office operations.

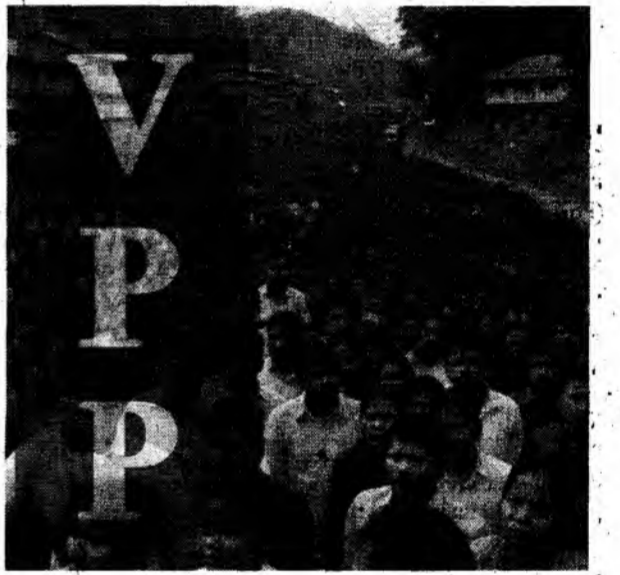
While the issue of un-

Take, for example, the reference made to VPP MLA Bah Brightstar Marbaniang, who reportedly uses a two-wheeler or a modest vehicle due to the lack of official support. While this is cited as a hardship, many may instead see it as a symbol of honest and reliable leadership—an image that resonates with people far more than one of excess. There is also a wider concern that must be addressed which is how certain public officials

Across the country, millions of educated youth remain unemployed, and many workers earn less than Rs 500 a day. For families struggling to make ends meet, the notion that Rs 2 lakhs a month is insufficient can appear deeply disconnected from their lived reality. It is essential that elected leaders remain conscious of the socio-economic backdrop they serve within. Moreover, all the 60 MLAs also receive a sum of 2.5 crore each as MLA development fund which can be used to support developmental work in their constituencies.

equal privileges between political appointees and elected representatives deserves attention, framing a salary of Rs 2 lakhs as inadequate warrants deeper reflection, especially when viewed against the economic realities of the average citizen in India today. Across the country, millions of educated youth remain unemployed, and many workers earn less than Rs 500 a day. For fami-

accumulate considerable personal wealth despite having modest official salaries. This raises important questions of financial ethics and public trust. If the current system leads to disparities in treatment and questionable enrichment, then reform must begin with transparency and equitable distribution of public resources, rather than with demands for more personal benefits.



lies struggling to make ends meet, the notion that Rs 2 lakhs a month is insufficient can appear deeply disconnected from their lived reality. It is essential that elected leaders remain conscious of the socio-economic backdrop they serve within.

Moreover, all the 60 MLAs also receive a sum of 2.5 crore each as MLA development fund which can be used to support developmental work in their constituencies. While there is certainly merit in the

At a time when a vast majority of citizens are striving to survive on modest incomes, a monthly salary of Rs 2,02,000 cannot, in good faith, be described as insufficient. In any part of the country—including Meghalaya—this is a significant amount of money, placing an MLA among the top earners in society. It is not just a salary; it is a position of privilege, responsibility, and public trust. Rather than diminishing the value of this remuneration, elected

Citizens expect their leaders to embody simplicity and responsibility, particularly during times when economic disparity is so stark. Take, for example, the reference made to VPP MLA Bah Brightstar Marbaniang, who reportedly uses a two-wheeler or a modest vehicle due to the lack of official support. While this is cited as a hardship, many may instead see it as a symbol of honest and reliable leadership—an image that resonates with people far more than one of excess.

VPP's argument that political appointees enjoy extensive privileges—vehicles, housing, drivers, fuel, and staff—despite lacking an electoral mandate, the response should be a call for greater accountability and transparency across the board, not simply a demand for matching perks. Rather than viewing public service through the lens of what is lacking in personal convenience, there is a greater need for representatives to focus on efficient governance and ethical leadership. Citizens expect their leaders to embody simplicity and responsibility, particularly during times when economic disparity is so stark.

leaders should recognise it for what it is—a generous compensation for public service—and focus their energy on building systems that are fair, transparent, and efficient. Raising the bar of accountability and reducing wastage in governance will benefit both the representatives and the people they serve. Leadership is not measured by the car one drives or the size of the allowance one receives, but by the integrity of one's actions and the impact made in public life. In a nation where financial hardship is the reality for millions, Rs 2 lakhs a month is not a burden—it's a privilege that demands humility, not complaint.

Letters to the Editor

Eco-Tourism Park in a wildlife sanctuary: Are we joking?

Editor,
News of the Govt planning an Eco Tourism Park at Nongkhylliem Wildlife Sanctuary, Ri Bhoi District has been doing the rounds for quite some time now. Public resentment and objections by environmentalists have been on the increase with each passing day. Janet Hujon's write-up on the subject (ST 2nd May 2025) is the latest public expression of disgust and abhorrence at such a proposal. Now lets admit that a wildlife reserve and sanctuary is supposed to be just that - a non human intrusive space where wild animals can live in peace in their own wild freedom, just as God planned them to do so. Wild animals don't want to see any human being near them. In fact they run away as far as possible whenever they sense human presence. So why open this stupid Eco Park in a sanctuary, force raucous human noise in the peace and quiet of the forest and scare the poor animal out of their wits? Its animal cruelty and the local people of Bhoi area have respected this animal need for their own wild habitat for ages. As a matter of fact there is also Global recognition on the need to prevent disturbance of wild animals and their environment. The International Fund for Ani-

mal Welfare (IFAW), in fact works to protect animals and their habitats, including rescuing animals, preventing cruelty, and advocating for wildlife protection. Those interested in preserving the Nongkhylliem Sanctuary as it is, can approach the above organization for help or closer home can approach the National Green Tribunal for assistance.

Now lets take the viewpoint of the other side. The Tourism Department needs to make money and also to show the world that its doing its work - attracting tourists into the state! Fine, but can we do it legally, lawfully and by abiding by the rules and regulations through official permission from the authority designated for such permission? We are given to understand that clearance from the National Board for Wildlife is needed for such intrusion into declared sanctuaries. Also required are an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) and a Public Hearing before proceeding with such projects. It is given to understand that in the case under discussion, none of the above have been done. Why all this secrecy when this Government never misses the opportunity to blow the trumpet about its accountability and transparency?

So what the hell is the State Wildlife Board headed by the Chief Minister of Meghalaya doing? Is it blind or hard of hearing even after all the public hue and cry over this foolhardy proposal that is likely to adversely impact one of its prime wildlife sanctuaries? Shame on this Government! This is a case

that in all probability will adversely affect public interest nor is it designed to promote a desired outcome for a better environment in Meghalaya. I sincerely believe it is a fit case for so motto judicial intervention by the Meghalaya High Court or for some interested party to move an RTI over it.

But we forget about the Tourism Department's need to make money and show activity. We are told it's a 23.60 crore project and contracted to a company by the name of E-Factor Experiences Ltd. It's a company that specializes in weddings and event management. Zilch on wildlife protection, environmental conservation et al. Yet they now want to venture into wildlife eco-tourism but confined within their own event management experiences. I have an excellent suggestion on how this can be done. Please shift their project site from Nongkhylliem to Police Bazar. One can come across all sorts of wild, feral untamed creatures after 10 pm in and around the area. One can find wild animals fighting, roaming around aimlessly, making unintelligible animal noises, attacking without provocation and if one is lucky, even spot in some dark corner a mating pair in the bushes! It's a savage jungle out there. A skywalk around the area with strategically placed spotlights will really attract hordes of inquisitive tourists. Some adventurous tourist might even be tempted to join the fun. Wouldn't that be lovely! The Tourism Department might also just tell the police not to play spoilsports

and then we might even be presented in the mornings with the sight of a stiff or two. I mean this proposal is being made in the interest of promoting wildlife tourism but lets keep the poor innocent wild animals and our pristine forests out of it.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Growth of tourism in Meghalaya: A blessing or challenge?

Editor,
I am writing this letter to express my views on the rapid growth of tourism in Meghalaya. As a resident of this beautiful land it fills me with both pride and concern to see our state become one of India's top tourist spots. People from all over the country and outside come to witness our stunning landscapes, immerse themselves in the rich cultures and experience our one-of-a-kind attractions, such as the living root bridges and crystal-clear rivers of Dawki.

Local entrepreneurs, home-stays, and small businesses have opened up new opportunities due to tourism. Rather than migrating in search of work, many young people are finding employment as tour guides, drivers, and in the hospitality industry. Our culture has been better showcased thanks to government initiatives that

support festivals such as the Cherry Blossom Festival and the Shillong Literary Festival.

However, this growth comes with certain problems that must be addressed. Irresponsible tourism is causing harm to our delicate ecosystems. Natural sites like Shnongpdeng and Laitlum are seeing increased littering, water pollution, and damage due to overcrowding. There is a danger of degradation to the precious rivers and woods that are very important to our indigenous communities. Moreover, when traditions are turned into commodities for profit, they run the risk of becoming nothing more than tourist attractions, losing all of their authentic character.

Taking immediate action to guarantee sustainable tourism is crucial, as I believe in responsible tourism - one that gives back to local communities without harming the environment. Encouraging eco-tourism, managing tourist flow to avoid overcrowding, and promoting awareness among visitors are small steps that can make a big difference. Most importantly, the local population must be involved in the planning and decision-making processes to ensure that tourism uplifts rather than exploits our culture and environment. Let us, as citizens, embrace responsible tourism in Meghalaya and work together to safeguard its future.

Yours etc.,
Agreecy Kharumnuid
Shillong

Wrong answer keys provided by MPSC

Editor,
The answer key for the test conducted for the post of Field Assistant under the Directorate of Economics and Statistics held on April 19, 2025 which was released by MPSC on April 24, 2025 needs to be rechecked as some of the answers given were incorrect. From my side on checking the questions from the Mathematics section - questions No. 108, 136 and 141 for Series-1, the options given were incorrect. The answer should be (D) 20Years, (A) 4 times and (B) 4 Years respectively. Hence, I would request the concerned expert to kindly recheck the questions and answers. I have proof of the errors not only from my own calculations but from a particular website https://www.doubtnut.com in case they want to consult. I am left with no options than to write this letter because filing OMR representation against the answer keys from the MPSC account is very difficult as it always gives error messages.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

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Sitting down, getting back up: An important health test for you

If you or someone you love finds it difficult to stand up from the toilet without using your hands, it might seem like a small issue. But in health and ageing, this movement – known as the “sit-to-stand” – can be a red flag. It’s one of the strongest indicators of frailty, a condition that can threaten independence and quality of life.

Frailty increases the risk of falls, hospital stays, slower recovery from illness, and early death. It’s more than just about being thin or weak – it’s about reduced muscle mass, strength and energy – and it’s one of the main reasons older adults lose the ability to live on their own.

This loss of muscle strength and function isn’t just about growing old. It often begins as early as your 30s and accelerates after 60. The good news? It’s not inevitable. Frailty can be prevented – and even reversed – with simple, targeted changes in diet and physical activity.

Surprisingly, carrying a bit of extra weight in older age can be beneficial. Studies suggest that being in the “overweight” BMI range is often linked to better outcomes than being underweight – as long as you’re carrying muscle, not just fat.

What matters most is body composition – the ratio of muscle to fat. Lean muscle supports mobility, balance and resilience during illness or injury. In contrast, excess visceral fat (around the internal organs) increases the risk of disease.

Muscle is made of protein and, as we age, our bodies become less efficient at using it. That means older adults need to eat more protein than younger people – not less. Aim for 1 to 1.2 grams of protein per kilogram of body weight per day. For a 70kg person, that’s around 70–85 grams daily, ideally spread across all meals.

- Good protein sources include:
- Eggs, milk, cheese and yoghurt
 - Chicken, turkey, beef and oily fish
 - Lentils, beans, tofu and soy products
 - Nuts, seeds, and whole grains

Also, don’t forget total calorie intake. If you’re undereating overall – especially during illness – your body will break down muscle to compensate, even if protein intake is adequate.

Move it or lose it

Muscle only stays if you use it – the “move it or lose it” mantra applies here. Regular strength training is one of the best things you can do to stay independent and strong.

Aim for two to three sessions per week focused on strength. You don’t need a gym – bodyweight exercises at home count too.

- Effective strength activities include:
- Sit-to-stand repetitions from a chair
 - Functional movements like stair climbing, gardening, or carrying groceries
 - Squats, lunges and push-ups
 - Using resistance bands or light weights

Walking, swimming and cycling are great for cardiovascular and joint health, but they aren’t enough on their own to maintain muscle mass. Challenge your muscles regularly – even in small ways.

Things to watch out for:

- Struggling to stand up from low chairs or the toilet
- Clothes feeling looser around the thighs or arms
- Feeling weaker carrying bags or household items
- Avoiding stairs or certain movements you used to do easily

Catching these signs early can help you act before it affects your independence.

Here are five things you can do for healthy ageing

Prioritise protein: include it in every meal. Think eggs for breakfast, beans at lunch, and fish or chicken for dinner.

Strength train weekly: find something you enjoy and can stick with – gardening, resistance bands, or a local class.

Don’t fear healthy weight gain: especially if you’ve recently lost weight unintentionally. Focus on building muscle, not fat.

Stay active daily: every movement counts – walking, stretching, or lifting household objects.

Monitor your function: the sit-to-stand test is a simple way to track your strength. If it’s getting harder, take action.

We can’t stop ageing, but we can age well. That means making muscle health a



priority – not just for appearance, but for independence, dignity and quality of life.

So, whether you’re thinking about your future or supporting an older loved one, remember this: building and maintaining muscle is one of the most powerful tools we have for healthy ageing.

With the right habits, you can protect your strength, mobility and independence.

And next time you sit down – think about how easily you get back up. That small action might be the most important health check you do all day. *(The Conversation)*

Scientists to explore potential of antibody against Long Covid

US scientists are undertaking a clinical trial to decode the efficacy of a long-acting antibody against Long Covid – a condition that affects at least 65 million people worldwide.

Long Covid affects people after an infection caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The condition not properly defined yet presents with more than 200 symptoms.

The team from the Nova Southeastern University (NSU) and the Schmidt Initiative for Long Covid (SILC) announced that a clinical trial is underway to assess the effectiveness and safety of sipavibart – a long-acting monoclonal antibody designed by the FDA earlier this year. It aims to improve patients Long Covid symptoms and restore them to full health.

The team enrolled 100 patients in the multi-year research, reviewed and cleared by the FDA earlier this year. It aims to improve patients Long Covid symptoms and restore them to full health.

“Like many multi-symptom, post-viral conditions, Long Covid is incredibly complicated and thus little understood,” said Nancy Klimas, director of the Institute for Neuro-Immune Medicine at NSU. “Finding a treatment will be life-changing for patients suffering from the myriad symptoms of Long Covid,” she added.

The study will test whether the monoclonal antibody sipavibart – approved for the pre-exposure prophylaxis (prevention) of Covid-19 in Japan and the EU – is effective in treating Long Covid. The trial is one of three Long Covid treatment trials expected to begin in 2025.

“Long Covid affects at least 65 million people worldwide, and with more than 200 symptoms, the health impacts of the disease can be debilitating,” said Dr. John Redd, CEO of SILC.

“This trial represents our overall commitment to addressing the most pressing health challenges of our time. We’re leveraging our research expertise to potentially transform treatment options for millions suffering from Long Covid, advance knowledge, and improve patient outcomes through innovative clinical research,” added Dr. Ken Dawson-Scully, NSU’s senior vice president for research and associate provost.

Long COVID or long-haul COVID is a group of health problems persisting or developing after an initial period of COVID-19 infection. Symptoms can last weeks, months or years and are often debilitating. The World Health Organization defines long COVID as starting three months after the initial COVID-19 infection, but other agencies define it as starting at four weeks after the initial infection.

Long COVID is characterised by a large number of symptoms that sometimes disappear and then reappear. Commonly reported symptoms of long COVID are fatigue, memory problems, shortness of breath, and sleep disorder.

Several other symptoms, including headaches, mental health issues, initial loss of smell or taste, muscle weakness, fever, and cognitive dysfunction may also present. Symptoms often get worse after mental or physical effort, a process called post-exertional malaise. There is a large overlap in symptoms with myalgic encephalomyelitis/chronic fatigue syndrome (ME/CFS).

The causes of long COVID are not yet fully understood. Hypotheses include lasting damage to organs and blood vessels, problems with blood clotting, neurological dysfunction, persistent virus or a reactivation of latent viruses and autoimmunity. *(Agencies)*

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 4, 2025

‘Birthday Forecast’
Moon conjunct Mars on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results during the year ahead. It is an ideal time for the new practices and expansion plans that you always wanted to implement. You will take up projects that were in the pipeline for a long time. You will be flush with funds and money will not be a constraint. You will receive some good and important opportunities in your business. You will give a stiff challenge to competitors and commercial opponents and put difficult objectives in front of them. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will get the desired assistance from your friends and you will be ready to help your friends in all possible ways. You will enjoy the best of health this year. Those who are single can get married. You will enjoy good relationship with your brothers/sisters. Your spouse will keep supporting. Elders will bless you.

‘This week for you’

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) You are committed, bold and adventurous right now. You are more effective in general, in attempts to express your creativity. You have a stronger ability to hold the attention of an audience. Love, love affairs, and other social activities help to enhance a healthy self-image. You may spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant, and work that needs to be done in and around the home becomes a priority. You may find yourself in a position in which there is a blending of the financial with social or public affairs.



Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) By the present planetary combination you would focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. A love affair may become a little more serious now. Spending time with someone special is a focus. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or brand new subjects. It’s a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally. You derive pleasure from your health regimen.



Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This is an excellent time for travel, education, communications, and higher learning. You might consider furthering your education and hobbies; it is a fabulous time to do so or simply broadening your knowledge in a more informal manner. Career and vocational issues may benefit from the increased clarity you possess. Much of your energy will be applied to vocational achievement, professional success, and leadership during this period. Some form of pleasant results in your education or profession brings rewards and recognition.



Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) Your natural talents would meet with reward and acceptance. Practical matters are a large focus and are very strong. More security in your job is likely. You are more willing than usual to work diligently for money, and your natural talents are likely to be utilized more in the work you do and appreciated by others. You would enjoy some time in your family and there you find affection and love. This is altogether a happy and relaxed time for you. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.



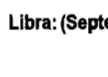
Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Communication, creativity and authority in professional matters are highlighted as an exciting job offer, reward, recognition, or promotion is possible. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual. You are ready to perform and express yourself and take charge and responsibilities on your shoulders. This is a very significant period when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Romance could make you think along serious or practical lines and look to a more committed relationship.



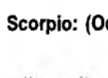
Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) You would enjoy making things that are beautiful and you succeed in areas that require an aesthetic sense as well as artistic ability. Matters concerning your career come to the fore. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of



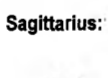
happiness and solidarity in friendship and love. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don’t get caught up in the past. You are physically fit and on top of things.



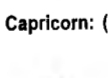
Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This is a period of romance, creative activities, entertainment and children. There would be cooperation and harmony in relationships and this is the time in which you can work on resolving differences with loved ones. You are in a position to inspire others through your work. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You work on your effectiveness and examine exactly what has been holding you back from achieving the results you want. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.



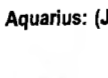
Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) This phase brings responsibilities, seriousness and sensitivity in relations. The purpose of this combination is for you to make the connection between your own feelings of self-worth and what you produce in the real world or get back from the real world. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this time. Health issues will settle down as you get back into your normal rhythm.



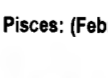
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) The planetary configuration brings financial gains and profits from business. This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel is possible now. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps away others to your position. More contact with authority figures is likely at this time. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the forefront of things. Finding a balance between your public life and your private life is in focus.



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) You pour more energy into self-promotion or business activities. It’s a good time to work out money problems or other issues of sharing with a partner. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love and relations. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in several aspects of your career. You enjoy doing things with others at work and home, as synergy and cooperation are available to you now.



Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Taking care of business is primary during this phase. You need the energies, companionship and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your career. You are called upon to deal with the details and practicalities of everyday life, to become more organized, and to take charge of your routines. It’s time to formulate some clear goals and plans. Circumstances are such that you need to develop some healthy habits, routines, and schedules.



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or at a place where you are a volunteer. Your job could become rather tedious and boring, or working conditions may be poor, demanding, or frustrating. Believing in a grand plan is fine, but practical concerns need to be dealt with as well. Recognizing your personal limitations in terms of just how much you can give to others and just how much compassion and understanding you can show is essential now. It’s time to structure your life. Issues of guilt, worry, and anxiety could crowd your mind – relaxation techniques and drawing on your inner strength would be beneficial.

If we must bring back extinct species, let’s focus on herbivores

The American genetic engineering firm Colossal Biosciences recently announced to much fanfare it had “de-extincted” the dire wolf, a canine species that was wiped out around 10,000 years ago. However, the three animals it presented are actually modern grey wolves with some genetic modifications.

Regardless of whether you consider them dire wolves or not, Colossal Bioscience made the interesting claim that it had genetically engineered lost ecological function. This made me ponder what ecological functions are missing from today’s ecosystems as a result of extinctions we have caused.

By ecological function, I am referring to the way all animals have some sort of influence on the ecosystems they inhabit. Honeybees and many other insects pollinate flowering plants, beavers build dams that create ponds and alter the flow rate of streams, elephants knock over trees helping to keep savannas open, and ants and termites shift vast amounts of soil and help decompose plant litter.

It is not clear to me what functions Colossal’s genetically engineered wolves might have that is different from grey wolves, but it is hypothetically possible they would hunt different animals in different ways or places. With only three wolves, they are unlikely to have the statistical power to compellingly demonstrate any new ecological effects. But nonetheless, the idea that these wolves may play different ecological roles from grey wolves is more compelling than the claim they have brought back the dire wolf.

One group of animals that have ecological functions that are oversized as they, are those that weigh more than half a tonne. These animals have also been hit hard by humans, and many species went extinct in the past few tens of thousands of years.

Each time our ancestors colonised new continents as they

spread around the world from Africa, large animals were driven to extinction at a higher rate than smaller ones. Giant ground sloths, mammoths and elephants, giant bison and tapirs, even species of massive armadillos and camels all died out in the millennia after humans arrived in the Americas.

Australia lost all its large animals, including a giant wombat-like relative called diprotodon, giant short-faced kangaroos, and a marsupial that resembled a huge tapir. Along with these massive herbivores, marsupial lions that evolved from a lineage of herbivores, terrestrial crocodiles, giant constrictor snakes and huge monitor lizards were also lost. Europe and Asia similarly lost many large species when our ancestors settled these lands.

THE WHOLE WORLD WAS ONCE LIKE AFRICA

Africa is the only continent to maintain lots of large herbivores, including rhinos, elephants, hippos, giraffes and buffalo. However, even on the continent where we evolved, losses occurred. Gone is a giant gnu-like beast and at least one elephant species, extinctions both attributed by some scientists to our ancestors.

In Africa, the remaining giant herbivores play important ecological roles that have been lost elsewhere in the world. Elephants knock down trees keeping savannas open, while hippos create grazing lawns on land and add nutrients to the water through their dung, fuelling aquatic food chains.

All giant herbivores trample vegetation and riverbanks and are key players in nutrient cycling thanks to the vast quantities of faeces they produce. They can also help disperse seeds and generate a mix of different habitats. These processes can determine how often an area is burned by wildfire, the type of ecosystem in an area, and can indirectly affect weather patterns and climate.

The loss of these large ani-

mals, particularly in Australia, led to very significant changes in ecosystems ranging from tropical forests to deserts. Cycles of fires and nutrients changed with the extinction of giant herbivores, and the loss of all the apex predators led to an increase in grazing and browsing pressure from smaller herbivores including kangaroos, wallabies and koalas. This made it harder to avoid woodlands turning into savannas and semi-arid lands.

The absence of large native predators meant the remaining marsupials lost their fear. When cats, dogs and foxes were introduced by humans, they decimated populations of many marsupials, driving some extinct. Lesser bilbies, desert bandicoots and broad-faced potoroos are gone for good, having been easy prey for introduced carnivores.

An impressive feat for Colossal Biosciences would be re-engineering large animals to provide lost ecological functions. De-extincting large herbivores like diprotodons and short-faced kangaroos, or even predators like marsupial lions, would be a seriously impressive achievement, but I suspect will be forever beyond the reach of science.

Jurassic Park is fiction, as is recreating the fauna of Australia 60,000 years ago. Even if we could do this, it is not clear the de-extincted animals would thrive given how much the ecology of Australia has changed since their extinction.

Instead of trying to recreate lost ecological function through the genetic tinkering of living animals that are unlikely to be allowed back into the wild any time soon, we should take a different approach. The focus should be on maintaining and restoring ecological function using existing species within the areas in which they live or once lived. The science of doing this may not be as exciting as the genetic engineering of Colossal Biosciences, but it will be easier to deliver and will be more ecologically useful. *(The Conversation)*

"The best luck of all is the luck you make for yourself."

—Douglas MacArthur

The Shillong Times

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Census as allurement

THE row over the abrupt turnaround and announcement of the Caste Enumeration decision, as part of the upcoming National Census, was only to be expected. Clearly, and openly, the Congress party and its leader Rahul Gandhi have been airing this demand in recent times. The NDA dispensation led by Narendra Modi had gone on record in Parliament some time ago to say the government did not intend to do a caste survey. Modi went around the states to say that unlike in the conventional sense, he regarded farmers, youths, women etc as 'castes' in the modern sense and would rather work for their uplift. In a way, such compartmentalization for governmental favours is in bad taste. India is not a just society. Large segments of the population remain where they are in the past several decades, despite the offer of reservations to disadvantaged sections like the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, which were later extended in some fields to backward classes too. In a real sense, these had only marginal effects as most of those who were born in these communities never ever got a fair deal from the establishment. India's governance system remains overwhelmingly concentrated in the hands of elites. It's here that the relevance of a caste enumeration or census comes into play. It would, among other things, give statistics on their population strengths and which all segments among them gained or failed to progress.

A caste census by itself is no panacea for the ills plaguing India's disadvantaged army of underlings, who are mostly and pitifully voiceless. For instance, the representatives of the SCs and STs, elected to legislatures and parliament or even to local bodies thanks to the reservation system, hardly get their voices heard in these august institutions by virtue of the 'elitist' mindset of the others around them. The SC-STs should thank Babasaheb Ambedkar and the accommodative nature of Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru to have included "provisions for inclusiveness" in the Indian Constitution. Yet, they remain at the margins. Empowerment is nothing more than lip-service by politicians to get their votes. The Congress party itself does not have the moral authority to claim credit for the present decision by the Modi government for a caste survey. No Congress government ever did this. The last caste survey was done by the British Raj a hundred years ago. Caste, in the Indian context, is inseparable from life; and more so in the Hindu society that forms around 80 per cent of the population. The buck should not stop with a simple caste census. Feelings are strong that Modi is fooling around with the SC-ST-BC populations to win upcoming assembly polls and not allow the Congress to steal the wind over the BJP. This is quite possible. The Congress has rightly demanded a time-line for follow-up actions after the census-taking, to rectify the wrongs. This is important, no doubt but anything done for political optics is suspect.

Unity, the Holy Grail of the Hynniewtrep people

By Toki Blah

If there is one thing on earth that all Khasi Pnars agree upon, it is the need for unity among the community. Unfortunately it continues to elude us. One can safely claim that Unity is the illusive Holy Grail that has so far eluded the Hynniewtrep people. But hold on! Hang on a minute! Come to think of it, its most ironical that Unity is also the one of the items that Khasis dispose off like unwanted garbage every opportunity that come their way. Khasi Pnar Unity became the first casualty when we got introduced to and enthusiastically embraced Party Politics. Eloquent wagging political tongues, driven by pure self interest, strove to address our base emotions and prime instincts and succeeded in no small way in polarizing our tribal cohesion. Social harmony became the first casualty. The inability to think as a cohesive community followed. Today we adhere, act and move as various political groups each as dissimilar from the other as they can be. Surprisingly there is no indecent, unrighteous or outside ideology that is responsible for such a state of affairs. It simply needs a thoughtless mindset; a leaderless society; a merry ear for nonsensical tunes one can dance to and of course the main divider - wads of 500 rupee notes. That's how easily the cry for Hynniewtrep unity can be politically dispensed with.

Then our trust with religion and faith has been no unifying factor either. Rigid stands have been taken by both the indigenous faith holders and the non indigenous believers. The Niam Tre and Seng Khasi adherents have roundly accused those who have left the original faith as betrayers and turncoats of Khasi culture and identity. Those accused have, on the other hand, stoutly defended themselves with the argument that God and faith is a personal choice and has nothing to do with either culture or tribal identity. With a bit of provocation from vested interests, the row has only worsened and threatens to become a full-blown discord. In the meanwhile both parties merrily continue with what they as a community have collectively been doing from the dawn of time. As a tribe they continue to speak the same language; cling on with fierce devotion to their singular identity as a matrilineal society; speak with one voice the need to safeguard their land and ownership over it; gracefully and effortlessly

come together at times of death or bereavement; at Village Dorbar meetings differences in faith are transcended to create a common goal of collective well-being.

On a larger social scale, irrespective of God and faith, everyone collectively and together cringe in fear over the unfounded unsubstantiated belief that the railway is as dangerous as the nuclear bomb. Intriguing also is the united conspiracy of silence from all and sundry on how an improved economy can lift all of us from our present pecuniary misery. To an outsider not conversant with these complex social shades that make up our society, we must appear as the most baffling and muddled up group of people on Gods own earth. The dissimilarity in faith so perceptible yet the cohesion as a tribe so consistent! In the midst of it all, the cry for Hynniewtrep Unity has only grown shriller. So exactly what do we want?

Poverty and unemployment are another set of concerns that have further accentuated the feeling of disunity, friction, disharmony, division or what ever you prefer to call it among the Khasi Pnars. The gap between the haves and the have-nots; the rich and the poor has widened in the last 50 years. There has now emerged that creamy social layer mockingly called the "The High Level". These are mostly comprised of individuals who spend crores in getting elected as Peoples Representatives. Now don't get me wrong but most 'High Level' individuals get elected not to serve but to be served! To be addressed as the Honourable MLA or Honourable Minister is the ultimate social goal of such people and if the truth be told it is this egocentric group who has betrayed the real needs of our people. The sole objective of this group is to stay in power and if persistent incompetence; backstabbing; evading real issues or dividing society be the price towards that goal, so be it. I say this in the full knowledge that it will be hotly denied but sadly its there for everyone to see. Then we come to the Riew Duiburom. These are usually educated individuals of both genders, holding good jobs or in professions that draw respect from the ordinary man. This is the middle class of Khasi society and usually comprise of Govt officials, teachers, professors and church leaders. They unfortunately repre-

sent the Khasi intelligentsia that identify with Gandhi's three monkeys - See no evil; hear no evil; speak no evil. And they refuse to speak! The usual excuse for refusing to come out of their self imposed shells of silence is often attributed to the fear of "ioh shah peit khmat" (the fear of being singled out for speaking). In the process, injustice thrives; governance takes a nose dive and corruption escalates, yet as the proverbial ostrich, our intellectuals prefer to bury their heads in the sand! The unity of silence from our educated intellectual leadership is a conspiracy that has only encouraged mediocrity and stupidity to emerge as qualities for leadership!

At the other end of the spectrum is that huge mass of humanity we tongue cuss over as "ki baphi kiba duk" and these are the most ardent and passionate seekers for a decent leadership that can provide us with unity. As mentioned above we have failed in our search for unity but the funny side of it is that in this social clamour for unity none has a clue as to what unity actually comprises of or in our case, what do we mean by it. As a society we are so disparate in our idea about unity that it is well nigh impossible to say whether it is political, social, economic or whether it is just a 'Will o the wisp' idea born of social desperation. To one it might mean something to another something entirely different. Fact is we all are clueless as to what we mean by unity! So what is unity? Its clear that unity is the opposite of being divided. It means being together or one towards a common objective. It is also becoming increasingly clear that the common objective for us is to retain our identity as Khasis despite the challenges of time. We have to ask ourselves is this possible? And if possible where or what is this fulcrum that makes this possible? As a Khasi, following the matrilineal system of lineage, I identify the clan or kur as that rivet that binds us to the idea of Hynniewtrep unity and identity. Undoubtedly some might disagree, so let me try and explain.

"Ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country" is the famous quote from J F Kennedy's inaugural address of 1961. It's a call encouraging individuals to contribute to the public good and to focus their united responsibility to the nation.

It resonates flawlessly with a Khasi's feelings towards his Kur. No Khasi will ever ask or expect anything from his Kur but its blessings. He is however always there to ask "What can I do for my Kur?" The Kur incidentally is the bedrock of ancient Khasi political thought and today we find our people turning back to this traditional platform for reassurance and social confidence. Party politics has failed us or has even ruined us.

As Meghalaya continues to slide down the path of a failed state; as elected representation become increasingly irrelevant as a forum for governance, the platform of the Dorbar Kur has recently emerged as the podium, for the voiceless to address their fears, worries, hopes and aspirations; as the dais from where the sane advice and counsel of experienced elders is listened to with respect and deference. For once in its dismal history the KHADC woke up to this budding social trend and came forth with an Amendment to its Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act wherein due recognition was given to the Dorbar Kur and the Rangbah Kur. The Khasi Dorbar Kur exemplifies the perfect example of classless egalitarian assemblies. As of today the main focus of such Dorbars is perhaps for members to get to know each other; for drafting of Kur constitutions; for the election of Kur Office bearers and for the sounding of the traditional rules and decrees that regulate Kur interaction.

At present the Dorbar Kur is just a social gathering where, barring party politics, ideas are shared and independent thinking encouraged. Meanwhile more and more are turning towards the formation and registration of their respective Dorbar KURS. So is this the societal opening we were in search of where issues of community importance are openly debated? Are our people turning back to the Dorbar Kur for the illusive vision of Unity and self Identity? I don't know. I don't know whether this will grow beyond a social get together and eventually evolve into a socio-economic empowering institution for the Jaibnyriew. Only time will tell.

It could however form an interesting study for serious sociologists. In the meanwhile the KHADC should come forth in collaboration with some University to conduct a proper census of all KURS within the Hynniewtrep umbrella and if possible facilitate on how the Dorbar KURS should envision our future.

Manipur's Education Crisis: Big Budgets, Broken Promises

By Divesh Ranjan

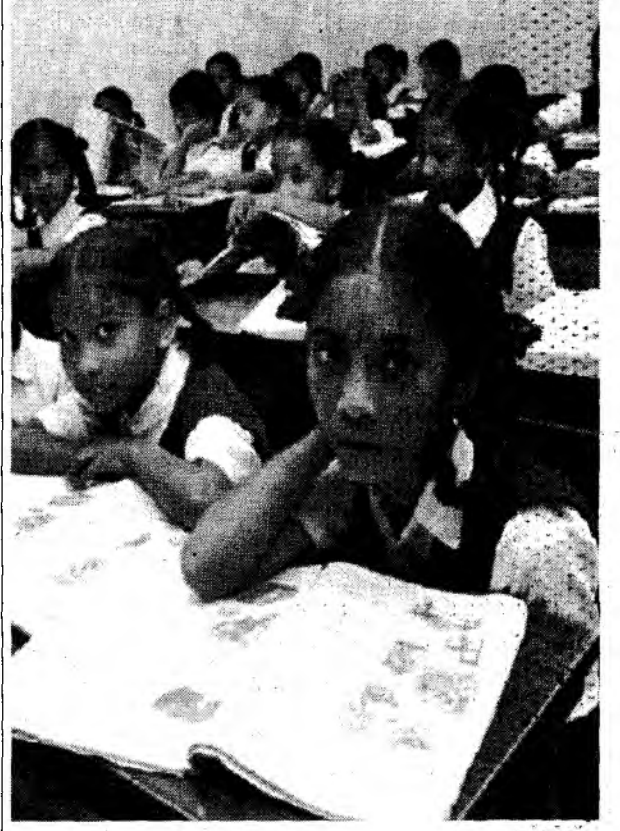
As India surges ahead with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and ambitious goals of digital literacy, the state of Manipur remains shackled to an education system that is crumbling—both physically and administratively. On paper, the state has never been better resourced. The 2024-25 financial year has earmarked an impressive approx ₹91,775 lakh under the Samagra Shiksha scheme. But behind the spreadsheets lies a different reality: one of unfinished classrooms, teacherless schools, and a generation of students slipping through the cracks.

The crisis is not for lack of vision or funds. Of the sanctioned amount, approx ₹60,312 lakh is for fresh initiatives across elementary, secondary, and teacher education, with central assistance making up more than half. Another approx ₹31,463 lakh, however, is tagged as spillover. This backlog underscores a deeper administrative malaise: sanc-

tation of reforms. While the VSK has a mandate to provide real-time feedback for policy corrections, Manipur missed the September 2023 deadline to even begin operations. Similarly, the state has failed to act on Section 12(1)(C) of the Right to Education Act, which mandates private schools to reserve 25% of their seats for underprivileged students—a statutory right that continues to be ignored.

This is not to say all is bleak. There are promising proposals: restructuring Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) to strengthen girls' education, expanding eco-clubs for environmental awareness, and introducing digital tools through schemes like Vidya Pravesh. But these initiatives remain largely theoretical. Without implementation, they are just bullet points in PowerPoint presentations.

The broader question, then, is not whether Manipur has a plan—it does. The real



tioned infrastructure remains unbuilt, approved projects are not implemented, and critical reforms stall in a web of red tape.

The scale of underperformance is staggering. Out of 5,287 infrastructure interventions approved in previous years, more than 85% remain incomplete. In essential categories like computer labs, ramps for students with disabilities, and even upper primary school buildings, pendency rates are 100%. It's not just digital education that's being held hostage—basic, physical access to education is too.

This inertia extends to human resources. Across Manipur's 2,889 government schools, 131 are run by a single teacher, and 40 have no enrolled students at all. These aren't anomalies—they are symptoms of a failing system. Worse still, nearly 65% of sanctioned posts in District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), responsible for upskilling educators, remain vacant. Without trained teachers, policies like NEP 2020 are reduced to bureaucratic jargon.

The numbers get grimmer. Manipur's dropout rates—13.3% at the primary level and 5.6% at the upper primary—are significantly higher than national averages. Behind every statistic is a child who may never return to the classroom, often for preventable reasons: dilapidated buildings, no toilets for girls, absent teachers, or economic desperation. And while other states are implementing second-chance programs or linking students to skilling initiatives, Manipur offers little by way of re-enrollment or rescue.

There's also a severe accountability deficit. The state has yet to operationalize a Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK), a crucial mechanism for monitoring student learning outcomes and implemen-

tioned infrastructure remains unbuilt, approved projects are not implemented, and critical reforms stall in a web of red tape.

Even the central government has signaled impatience. It has imposed strict conditions on fund utilization—75% usage per tranche, digital reporting via the PRABANDH portal, and adherence to submission deadlines. Yet, the very institutions expected to comply—like Block and Cluster Resource Centres—are often underfunded and understaffed. Add to this the challenge of a fragmented fund release system; where money moves from central coffers to state budgets to specific institutions with little transparency or accountability, and delays become the norm.

This crisis is not just educational; it is moral. In a state battered by conflict, instability, and displacement, schools are not merely buildings—they are sanctuaries of hope, continuity, and future-making. To leave them half-built or empty is to abandon the very idea of equity and empowerment.

The solution lies in execution, not just intention. Teacher vacancies must be filled urgently. Infrastructure projects, especially spillovers from past years, must be completed before the September 2024 deadline. VSK must be operationalized without further delay. Most importantly, a culture of transparency and urgency must replace bureaucratic inertia. If not now, when?

Education is more than a development agenda—it is the foundation upon which every other right and opportunity is built. If we fail Manipur's children today, we do not just delay their future; we deny them one altogether.

(The writer is Communication Strategist and Educationist. Contact: diveshranjan@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Pradip Kurbah should be our next Padma Awardee!

Editor, It would be a delight to have someone like Pradip Kurbah, the torch-bearer of our film scene in Meghalaya be nominated for the Padma Awards 2026. This letter would have been supported by an array of evidence but Pradip's history is not alien to any of us. Pradip has been one of Meghalaya's torchbearers, bringing the stories and identity of the state to national and international platforms. The accolades he has earned for his art of film making has increased the visibility of Meghalaya's cinema everywhere. He has earned National Awards for lewdah, Ri-Homeland of Uncertainty and Onaatah over the past few years and well, there's a possibility that his upcoming film Ha Lyngkha Bneng/The Elysian Fields would bag the national awards too. I recommend that his name be nominated for the award because of his humble beginnings and his accomplishments. Several interviews that are available online suggest that Pradip has never had a formal education in film-making while his craft proved otherwise. His expertise in screenplay and direction is the fruit of his consistency and his vision. He substantiates to the world that what you learn in the four walls of a formal setup is nothing compared

to what you learn through practical experiences. If he even gets nominated for the award, a wave of inspiration will hover in the air of the film scene in Meghalaya, and this will greatly inspire many youth of the state. I can't think of anyone else but Pradip Kurbah to be nominated from the state for Padma Awards 2026 under the Arts category.

Yours etc., Emidao Shylla Via email

Nongkhylllem Forest and Ecotourism

Editor, Apropos of the recent letters of Mr Khlor Basan, Janet Hujon and Toki Blah, I write to state that I fully endorse their views which oppose the setting up of a recreational place for tourists in the middle of Nongkhylllem Reserve Forest. The very name 'Reserve' should indicate that the area is not to be tampered with in any way. Dumping concrete and erecting buildings in the middle of a pristine forest cannot be called Ecotourism. Do the residents of the forest not have the right to be left in peace? Who are we humans to invade their piece of heaven? I ask a question of those who endorse the project - "if tomorrow the Tourism Department starts erecting tents in your compound as part of Ecotourism and without your permission, would you allow

them to do so?" So, what gives us the right to treat the animals and the forest with such contempt and in such a shoddy manner?

I do hope those responsible for pushing this project will come to their senses because, as God is in heaven, our own destruction will follow the ruining of wildlife and pristine forests.

Yours etc., D M Pariat, Shillong

Alarming decline in educational quality in Shillong: Call for urgent intervention

Editor, With the onset of the admissions to undergraduate classes in Shillong, unscrupulous competition arises among institutes vying for students, prioritizing profit over quality. This alarming trend threatens Meghalaya's education system, calling for urgent intervention to prevent irreparable damage. Unchecked commercialization risks eroding the state's academic foundation. Once Northeast India's education hub, Shillong's prestige fades as institutes chase revenue over excellence. Despite engaging so much in superficial talk on quality education, many institutes have diluted standards for financial gain, setting a dangerous precedent. This erosion undermines the city's legacy,

necessitating immediate action. The Meghalaya Department of Higher and Technical Education Department, and the state's lone affiliating university must take bold steps to restore integrity and uphold academic standards.

The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 expands syllabi and courses, increasing pressure on institutes. Yet, the so-called prominent colleges exploit brand names, enrolling excessive students, running more than two shifts a day, and cramming over 200 students into a classroom. Such overcrowding stifles effective teaching and learning, as personalized attention becomes impossible. These highly government funded institutes, driven by greed, prioritize maximum business over education, threatening the existence of smaller but credible colleges. These lesser-known institutes, with qualified faculty meeting UGC norms and adequate infrastructure, struggle to compete against celebrated names, thereby risking their survival. Prestigious names dazzle students and parents with promises of excellence, but quality education requires care, integrity, and adherence to standards, not mere reputation.

Blind trust in brands allows institutes to exploit students, neglecting academic rigor. This commercial pursuit undermines Meghalaya's educational foundation, as profit overshadows knowledge. To avert the disaster, stakeholders must enforce strict regulations ensuring

all institutes maintain quality. This involves capping student numbers per class to prevent overcrowding, auditing infrastructure and faculty qualifications, supporting smaller institutes if they are genuine, to preserve diversity, and aligning with NEP-2020's vision without sacrificing standards. We must save education from becoming a jungle where predatory institutes, like carnivorous beasts, hunt profit with unchecked ferocity, preying on trust. Without intervention from the competent authorities, profit-driven institutes will extinguish genuine colleges and collapse educational standards, leaving a hollow system. Shillong's educational legacy demands collective action. Stakeholders, policymakers, and citizens must prioritize integrity over profit. True excellence lies in fostering environments where learning thrives, not in dazzling names or wealth. Act now to safeguard Meghalaya's educational future by upholding quality, equity, and opportunity for all students

Yours etc., Dr B Blessing Rynthathiang, Via email

Shillong's poor drainage system

Editor, I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities and the general public the persistent and troubling issue of Shillong's inadequate drainage system.

Every monsoon, the same story repeats itself. We have flooded roads, traffic comes to a standstill, and homes too are flooded. Even a moderate downpour leads to waterlogging in various parts of the city such as Laban, Lumdingri, and Polo.

The drains, either clogged with plastic waste or structurally outdated, fail to channel rainwater effectively, while some parts of Shillong even the Smart City system of drainage turned out disastrous.

This situation reflects a lack of proper planning and maintenance. Despite repeated complaints from residents, there has been little visible effort to modernize the city's drainage infrastructure or to ensure regular cleaning and inspection. The health hazards posed by stagnant water, along with damage to public and private property, demand immediate attention.

I appeal to the Shillong Municipal Board and Urban Development Authorities to act promptly. Upgrading the drainage system, enforcing anti-encroachment laws, and launching awareness campaigns about proper waste disposal can go a long way in addressing this issue.

Yours etc., Damemanbha Wanswett, Shillong

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.

"Try to be like the turtle - at ease in your own shell."

— Bill Copeland

The Shillong Times

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School-dropout a major challenge

MEGHALAYA'S Education Minister Rakkam Sangma has acknowledged that student drop-out at the secondary level is very high and warrants a number of interventions. The minister attributed this to several factors which included poverty and dearth of capable teachers many of whom are still untrained and more schools in rural Meghalaya. In 2021-22 Meghalaya recorded the highest percentage of school dropouts at the secondary level at 21.7% which is the highest in the country and way above the national average of 12.6%. This year, courtesy the CM Impact guide book the pass percentage at the SSLC level went up to 87%. The guide book helped bridge the gap caused by poor teaching-learning outcomes. Communication skills are integral to being a teacher. Poor communication skills lead to poor learning outcomes. Teachers who fail to communicate in a manner that the students grasp what she/he is trying to say must take the blame for the students' failure. When such a teacher is allowed to continue in a permanent position, batch after batch of students suffer for several decades. Permanency of tenure in the teaching profession is one important reason leading to students' lack of interest in their studies.

Most teachers lack empathy and don't show reach out to students needing special hand-holding and mentoring because of problems at home. Today, with so much information available, what students need are mentors and counsellors who they can turn to if only to share their personal concerns and the obstacles in their journeys. Teaching does not begin and end with communicating what's in the text books and conducting examinations. There is so much that teachers and students can discuss within the classroom. It is in the classroom that ideas are seeded and discussions on a wide range of topics can happen so that students are better able to apply those learnings in their day to day living. It is because what's learnt in the classroom is not applicable to their daily lives that students begin to feel a sense of alienation. They need to know how to resolve conflicts through discussion and debates. Students in rural Meghalaya do a lot of physical work after school hours apart from helping their parents in the farm. Hence agricultural training should be part of the school curriculum too. The problem with the school curriculum is that it is tailored to meet only the needs of the urban students.

Another problem is the lack of high and higher secondary schools to meet the needs of rural students. After passing their SSLC students need to enrol themselves in schools that are located several kilometers away. This disincentivises parents who need to invest in a rented accommodation for their children and also have to leave them to fend for themselves. In its vision document for 2020-21 to 2024-25, the Government has outlined its priorities towards education by creating Eklavya schools which can provide hostel facilities. There is a great need for such schools especially for poor students who are also the ones that are forced to drop out and start working.

Folklores: A Window to Khasi History and Culture

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The Khasis, like many indigenous hill communities, were a pre-literate society before they came into contact with the British. It does not appear that they ever had a script, although there is a folktale that attempts to describe the lack of script to an accident. According to this folktale titled 'the lost book' in the 1920 book 'Folk-tales of the Khasis' by Mrs Rafy, in the beginning God called a Khasi man and a foreigner (Dkhar) to his abode so that he can pass his knowledge to them. This knowledge was as a book which was given to both to carry back to their homeland. However, on the way home, there was a wide river which had to be crossed. The Dkhar took the book and wrapped it in his long hair which he twisted firmly on the top of his head. However, because the Khasi man had short hair, he had to hold the book between his teeth while swimming. The Dkhar could cross safely with the book intact, which was then used to teach the wisdom received to his own people. Unfortunately, the torrential current caused the Khasi man to lose the book intended for his people as he struggled to swim and breathe with the book in his mouth. And thus, the Khasis lost their script.

There's another story which is connected to lost knowledge from the same book. It's called 'U Biskurom' who was actually the Hindu god, Vishvakarma, who is the deity of tools and metallurgy. In this story, the Khasis captured U Biskurom, trying to force him to share divine knowledge with them. Worried that the Khasis would not let him go back home, the god pleaded to the Khasis that he could only get the knowledge from heaven. Therefore, he suggested they make a strong kite tied to a long piece of string. He would use the kite to ascend to heaven and then he would write the knowledge on the kite and send it down. But after reaching home, he decided not to share the knowledge with people who had mistreated him. Angry, the Khasis sent a great shout to heaven to kill the god for his betrayal. U Biskurom caused some drops of blood to fall from heaven, fooling the Khasis that they

had killed him. This is also another reason the Khasis never gained the knowledge of writing.

There are so many interesting aspects to these stories. While it is about lost knowledge, it is also about the time when the Khasis came into contact with Dkhars i.e., foreigners, and how they tried to gain knowledge from them, through peaceful and not-so-peaceful means but failed on both occasions. There is a suggestion that when the Syiems of the bigger Himas, like that of Hima Jaintiapur (formerly Hima Sutnga) conquered the land of the Dkhars, they used the Brahmans to write letters to the other rulers of the region. The Jayantia Buranjis is an excellent record of the correspondence between Hima Jaintiapur and the Ahom kingdom of upper Assam. In the same document, there is also mention of Hima Khyrim, also sending envoys to the Ahom court. So, by the 16th century, the Khasi royalty appear to have gained literacy through the scribes and Brahmin priests in their court. However, the common people still continued to rely on oral traditions to transmit their knowledge. This oral tradition is now leading to archaeological discoveries which are allowing modern scholars to reconstruct Khasi history.

Among the oral traditions, the most famous is the tale of Lum Sohpetbneng. According to his legend, in this hill overlooking the Umiam Lake there existed a navel string which drew heaven and earth together. Known sometimes as the golden staircase, the celestial families used this to come down to earth to farm. It is well established that the Khasis were among the first wave of Austroasiatic people who brought agriculture to South East Asia and South Asia. They possibly were among the first farmers in the world and part of the early ancient farming societies as described in the 2005 book 'The First Farmers: The Origin of Agricultural Societies' by Peter Bellwood. In his 2018 book 'Ancient DNA and the New Science of the Human Past: Who We Are and How We Got Here'

David Reich also believes them to be the 'Ghost Populations of the Yangtze Rivers' who expanded from the rice growing area of the Yangtze river valley contributing to the ancestry of groups today found in South East Asia (by extension to North East and Central India as well) and Taiwan. There is an agricultural prayer in Namita Catherine Shadap's 1969 thesis 'The Origin and Early History of the Khasi-Synting People' directed at U Blei Nongthaw (The God of Creation) and Ka Blei Synshar (The Goddess who rules over everything) to bless their labour and forgive their trespasses. Thus, the Khasis have always been farmers—among the earliest in the world, at that.

However, the connection between heaven and earth was severed, stranding seven families on earth separated from the nine above. Many versions explain this event, but I recently discovered a lesser-known one. This comes from the book 'Jaintia Folklore and Legends and the History of the Khasi Religion' by Mrs John Roberts published around the 1920s. According to this version, it was a creeper which connected heaven and earth. However, one day when a Khasi man was trying to cut a tree for firewood, he accidentally hacked the creeper. Severed from its source, the part connected to earth died while the other part was drawn up to heaven leaving the two now separated. Interestingly, the Khasi word for creeper, 'jyrmi', also describes the aerial roots of trees such as Ficus elastica—the same species used to build living root bridges in the War region (the southern part of present-day Khasi and Jaintia Hills); a steep, forest-covered area. During the monsoon season, torrential rainfall would swell up the streams, which make crossing them very dangerous. At some point in time, the War must have learned the art of maneuvering the aerial roots of Ficus elastica to build the living root bridges, not found elsewhere in the world.

The version described above could very well be the original form of the

Lum Sohpetbneng story, which, over time, became identified with the place: as ancient Khasis continued moving westward. As Hima Sutnga—founded by the V Var Amwi—eventually became Hima Jaintiapur, the story became associated with the people of the kingdom, who were predominantly Pnar speakers. These Pnar were originally War people who began settling in the plateau region of what is now the Jaintia Hills. The Pnar language appears to have begun as a dialect of War, emerging around 1,400 years ago. Researchers have found that War Amwi is the oldest of all the Khasi languages, originating from Palaung around 4,000 years ago. This 4,000 years period is very interesting because it brings us back to Lum Sohpetbneng.

Lum Sohpetbneng holds a very important place in Khasi cosmology. Marco Mitri, a historian from NEHU, used the folktale surrounding it to 'identify sites for his archaeological digs. He discussed this in great detail in his 2008 thesis, 'Archaeological Investigation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills: A Study on the Distribution Patterns of Neolithic Sites (An Ethno-archaeological Approach)'. The result was the discovery of the oldest Neolithic settlement found in Meghalaya, dated to over 3,200 years ago. Later, he found the oldest Neolithic workshop in Myrkhon, a village to the north, dated to around 4,000 years ago. The clues for these sites came from the folktales. In time, researchers may discover many more sites through other oral narratives.

Folklore and other oral narratives serve as a window into the history and culture of ancient peoples like the Khasis. Despite lacking a written language in the past—and their initial efforts to acquire one (they later adopted the Roman script)—these folk narratives contain a wealth of information about the community. Indeed, over time, they may become the light that illuminates the path to greater discoveries.

(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)

A Naga Father's plea: End the silence that kills

By Aga Rengma

On April 29, 2025, three young Naga soldiers of the NSCN (IM), fell to bullets fired by Indian security forces in Assam's Dima Hasao district. It happened during a declared ceasefire, in a territory that belongs to the Nagas, in our own homeland. The silence we had mistaken for peace was broken, yet again, by gunfire. And as three more lifeless bodies of Naga youths are returned to the soil, we must ask the most painful question of all: What value do these deaths add to the Naga aspirations? Was it all not in vain?

For us, the Nagas, it is deeply tragic to lose the lives of young soldiers not in the battlefield, but during a supposed ceasefire, caught in strategic traps set by the Indian state. Let us be honest with ourselves, these are not martyrs of war, but just innocent victims of a failed and directionless peace process. Our leaders must urgently and sincerely reconsider the implications of this indefinite ceasefire and the silent erosion it has caused to our cause, our people, and our future.

This is not just about a single incident. This reflects the deep rot in a process that claims to be a peace negotiation but has neither delivered peace nor progress. It is about the human cost of waiting. About the illusion of calm that allows violence to persist under diplomatic cover. We have not forgotten the Oting incident where 14 innocent Naga youths were massacred without mercy on December 4, 2021 by Indian forces for no reason.

In 1997, the Naga people, tired of war, longing for a peaceful future, agreed to a ceasefire with the hope that it would pave the road to lasting peace. Dialogue, not death, was to be our path forward. Yet nearly three decades later, what has that promise yielded? We have watched the years pass by, the graves multiply on both sides, and the peace talks spiral into stagnation. We have raised a whole generation under the banner of ceasefire only to show them that even silence has a body count.

Security forces claim the recent killings followed a "tip-off" and led to an arms recovery. But to me, this incident is no routine encounter, it is a rupture of faith. It is a brutal reminder that while we lay down arms in good faith, the other side may not see restraint as peace but as permission. The NSCN (IM) has called it a betrayal of the 1997 truce. Perhaps they are right. Perhaps we must admit that this ceasefire, meant to be a bridge, is now a brittle crutch.

The recent clash is not the first and will not be the last, so long as there is no political resolution, no mutual respect, and no clearly defined framework. Ceasefire is supposed to protect lives on both sides and give peace a chance to breathe permanent resolution to conflicts without loss of lives. If a ceasefire cannot protect lives of soldiers, then what is it protecting, what is its purpose? Worse, the language of "peace" is now being used to paralyze our collective will. We are told to be patient, to stay calm, to keep talking. But talking has its limits when the other side listens only to the sound of compliance. The peace process has become a performance of the government, and we are its silent audience, watching our youths die, our lands militarized, our dream of a Naga nation reduced to a shadow.

These three fallen men were not statistics. They were sons, brothers, neighbours and friends, and so are the many Indian soldiers who lost their lives trying to please the Indian government. Their deaths demand more than ritual mourning. They demand a reckoning. How many more lives must be lost while we wait? How many Naga and Indian mothers and fathers must bury their children before we ask whether there is going

to be an end to this "mere management" of Naga political issue in the guise of ceasefire.

Let us remember: the ceasefire was never meant to be permanent. It was a breathing space, a fragile pause meant to lead to a just conclusion. If that conclusion remains elusive, and the pause itself becomes a new form of control, then we must confront an uncomfortable truth: this ceasefire, once a gesture of hope, now risks becoming a cruel deception for both Nagas and Indians.

The ceasefire, while reducing direct violence, has entrenched a political limbo that allows fragmentation, corruption, and moral decay to fester. It has weakened the legitimacy of both the armed movement and the state, creating a society stuck between unresolved history and a compromised present.

This is not just about Naga lives lost. Indian soldiers too have died or been wounded in these encounters, young men drawn into a conflict they did not start, tasked with enforcing policies they did not create. The state may declare them martyrs, but we must ask: what honor is there in dying while trying to suppress another people's right to self-determination?

These soldiers are not enemies; they are also victims of a failed political system, of a historical injustice left unresolved. Like the Naga youths, they bleed because of broken promises and political paralysis. And in this, we are all diminished. The longer this festers, the more it becomes a war without enemies, just humans on both sides caught in the machinery of a conflict that should have ended long ago.

What pride or honor is there in telling their families, their children, that their father died not defending their own land, but attempting to occupy someone else's? What comfort can be offered to sons and daughters who learn that their parent's life ended in the service of suppressing another people's rights, seizing ancestral lands that were never theirs to claim? These are not heroic deaths. They are just casualties of a morally bankrupt enterprise, of a state's policy that values domination over dignity, control over coexistence. Both Naga and Indian lives are being wasted in a conflict that should have been resolved through justice, not perpetuated through force.

To the families who lost their sons whether Indian or Naga, words offer little comfort. But to the rest of us, their deaths offer a final warning: we are living in the pause between betrayal and collapse. We cannot afford to be bystanders to our own tragedy. Let this incident not be buried in bureaucracy or forgotten in tomorrow's news cycle. Let it be the turning point.

Both the Government of India and the Naga national government must treat this issue with utmost seriousness and bring the peace talks to a conclusive end without further delay. It has already been over three decades, and it should not continue indefinitely at the cost of public suffering and inconvenience.

Let us honor the fallen not with slogans, but with a unified and fearless pursuit of a just future. Let us make their legacy not just about how they died, but what we did in their name.

Because if we cannot protect the living, then what did they die for? As I write this from my son's hospital bedside, I'm reminded that every word I pen is also a promise to him. A promise that he will grow up in a land that chooses justice over control, unity over division, and peace with dignity, not silence born from fear. No child should inherit a broken future while we stand idle today.

The writer is Interim Convenor, Western Naga Youth Front. Contact agat@nagafront.org

Letters to the Editor

Pak General's irresponsible statement

Editor, The headlines "B'desh should occupy NE States if India attacks Pak: Yunus aide" (ST May 3 2025) was amusing. Major General (Retd) ALM Fazlur Rahman has gone crazy. My advice to him is to read history. I would suggest that he should see the historic photograph of Pakistan Army Chief, General AAK Niazi in the presence of Lieutenant General Jagjit Singh Aurora. Pakistan had surrendered with 93,000 troops, ending the war. Let us see what will be the fate of Bangladesh when it tries to occupy NE States. Now what had happened to Gen Niazi who is also called the Butcher of Bangladesh?

The story of 1971 ended with the signing of the surrender document on Dec 16, 1971, but Niazi's story continued. Very few people know that Pak General AAK Niazi was brought to India as a prisoner of war after the 1971 surrender agreement was signed. On the day the surrender document was signed, Niazi went on to have breakfast, meet fellow personnel. In Dhaka. He also met journalists and the Indian Army officers in the Governor House. He was then taken into custody by the Indian Army, along with Pakistani Army personnel. The Bangladesh government wanted Niazi, and

other Pakistani officials to be charged with war crimes and various other acts and possibly even be given the death penalty. However, India did not do so.

Yours etc; VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Death of IAS representation from Meghalaya - A matter of deep concern

Editor, I write this letter to express a growing concern that deserves urgent public and government attention—the shockingly low number of Civil Service Officers from Meghalaya, particularly those clearing the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) examination. Since 2013, Meghalaya has seen barely a handful of candidates clear the UPSC Civil Services Examination, and in recent years, not even one; same for this year too. This stark under-representation is not merely a statistical gap—it is a reflection of systemic issues that continue to sideline tribal and local youth from accessing India's highest levels of bureaucracy.

Civil servants are not just administrators; they are decision-makers who shape policies related to land rights, tribal welfare, environment, education, and governance. When people

from outside the state—often unfamiliar with our culture, customs, and constitutional protections under the Sixth Schedule—occupy these roles, we risk policies being implemented without sensitivity to the unique social fabric of our state.

This situation also creates a psychological barrier for our youth. When no role models emerge from within their own communities, it leads to a lack of confidence and the belief that such exams are not meant for them. The cycle of exclusion continues.

It is high time the state government steps in with concrete steps:

- Establish state-funded UPSC coaching centers in Shillong, Jowai and Tura.
- Provide scholarships and mentorship programs for tribal aspirants.
- Integrate UPSC awareness and foundational learning in schools and colleges.
- Create a database of successful officers from the Northeast to act as mentors.

We need a collective effort to ensure that our youth not only dream big but have the means and guidance to achieve those dreams. Representation matters—not just for the sake of numbers, but for justice, cultural understanding, and equitable development.

I urge the concerned authorities and civil society to take this matter seriously. Our future deserves nothing less.

Yours etc., Patrina Fayth Bareth Shillong

Full spectrum of proxy warfare in NE India?

Editor, A recent remark by a retired major general in what was then the Bangladesh Rifles (Border Guard Bangladesh) ALM Fazlur Rahman that the country should invade and occupy all the Northeastern states if New Delhi launches retaliatory attacks for the Pahalgam terror incident require deep analyses. Historically speaking, the Pakistan military gained greater control after the assassination of the founding fathers of independence, which also fuelled a rapid transformation of Islam.

Foreign assistance solidified organizations like the Jamaat-e-Islami, establishing Bangladesh as a potential operational base. As Beijing is inching closer towards the Northeast, the Institute for Strategy and Policy - Myanmar in its analysis, 'EAOs Control Four Trade Stations on China Border', mentions the trade value of approximately 10 billion US dollars or roughly about 97 per cent of the gross cross-border engagement between China and Myanmar.

The chink in the armour of security analysts would be South East Asia while China is still thirsty for the jade industry and rare earth elements to topple the balance of power. Indian intelligence has to bolster its capability through counter-intelligence collection, partnering with

and partaking information using innovative tactics and strategic operations against non-state actors. With adversaries adapting on the grand chessboard, diplomatic channels have to be opened which could leverage the playing field and, in the same vein, securing these embassies is imperative. Finally, understanding the network of foreign banking institutions which aid and finance, collect reports of investments, transactions and companies guarding against current and future threats is important.

'Dragon on Our Doorstep: Managing China Through Military Power' by Pravin Sawhney and Ghazala Wahab explains why the Indian security architecture has to change for the better.

Yours etc., Christopher Gatphoh, Shillong-10

Menace of stray dogs in Laitumkrah

Editor, I am a resident of the Laitumkrah locality, and I wish to draw your attention to the alarming rise of stray dogs in our locality. These animals have become an increasingly visible presence, roaming the streets and parks, presenting a substantial threat to public safety, especially for our children and the elderly.

Their unpredictable behaviour can be intimidating, and their potential to carry diseases poses serious public health risks. Many of these dogs appear malnourished and frightened, yet their

defensiveness may lead to aggressive encounters with pedestrians.

Beyond safety concerns, the presence of stray dogs also contributes to sanitation issues within our neighbourhoods. They often rummage through trash, scattering waste and create unsightly conditions in our public spaces. This situation not only affects the aesthetics of our community but also raises concerns about hygiene.

To address this pressing issue, I urge our local authorities to consider implementing the following measures:

1. Strengthening animal control initiatives to manage the stray dog population effectively.
2. Launching community awareness programs to educate residents on safe practices around stray animals.
3. Collaborating with animal welfare organizations, if any in our city, to ensure the humane treatment of these dogs.
4. The Urban Affairs department and Municipal should also take action.

The residents of our locality would deeply appreciate your immediate attention and action on this critical matter, as we strive for a safer and cleaner community for all.

Yours etc., Etaduale Pame Shillong-3

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

"Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."

— Maya Angelou

The Shillong Times

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Slow, steady build-up

WHEN it comes to war, a prediction about its course or final outcome is best left to one's imagination. When Vladimir Putin, at the height of his glory, launched a full-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022, his expectation was to take the small break-away territory in a matter of a few days. Now three years have passed and he's squirming in his chair, unable to fulfill his wish in the face of steadfast defiance from President Zelenskyy. It's here that many are keeping their fingers crossed vis-à-vis an "impending" showdown between the nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. The UN Security Council has advised patience on both sides, but two things are clear from that front. One, its call for talks to sort out the issues was by no means a bar on either side to engage in a confrontation. The UN increasingly proved its limitations, vis-à-vis its avowed goal of averting future wars. Two, China would be at hand to help Pakistan in any difficult scenario with its Veto power. A Veto power however does not help avert a war.

Intentionally or not, the "drag" on India's part to take on Pakistan, lasting a fortnight's time by now, has rather hurt Pakistan on multiple fronts. The top brass in both Islamabad and Rawalpindi jumped to the conclusion at the very outset that a war was at hand. The full-scale preparations it did, including the ferrying of hundreds of thousands of its soldiers and weaponry from the western sector to the LoC, and the high alert it maintained for all these days, cost the Pakistani exchequer heavily. It would now appear that India might strike from the western end too, from an air base it has in Tajikistan. Clearly, India is planning its response in minute details. At the diplomatic level, it took both the US and Russia into confidence. Irritants could be Turkey and Iran. But, with Vladimir Putin extending his full support for India in a likely military response to Pahalgam, Pakistan's main hope rests on China backing it.

Pakistan is bleeding on many fronts. While international airlines are avoiding Pakistan in view of the safety fears post April 22, causing huge losses to the Islamic nation, the national carrier PIA itself is put in a worst plight. It was already struggling in recent years, and the few flights it operates too are caught in uncertainties now. Indian airlines too face a similar ban from Pakistan, but these are better positioned. The Pakistani markets, which largely depended on India for goods, are troubled by the trade ban that New Delhi has imposed on it. The water ban, though its full impact could be known only later, is already causing heartburns for Pakistan. The real action, on the military front, hasn't started yet. The air raid sirens, the security drills etc., being announced here are hints that "some big action" is imminent.

The Railway Crossing: Time to straighten the Tracks!

By KN Kumar

Shillong is one of India's last state capitals untouched by the whistle of a train. For over a decade, ambitious railway projects like the Tetelia-Byrnihat and Byrnihat-Shillong lines have languished, ensnared in a tug-of-war between dreams of economic progress and fears of cultural erosion. The recent decision of the state to return Rs 270 crore in central funds to the Indian government, prompted by unrelenting protests, has cast a stark light on this impasse. As Meghalaya grapples with its future, the railway debate once again sweeps us as a narrative of aspiration, resistance, and the search for a balance.

The story begins with a promise. In 2010, the Tetelia-Byrnihat line, a modest 21.5-kilometer stretch, was greenlit to link Assam's plains to Meghalaya's Ri Bhoi district. A year later, the 108.76-kilometer Byrnihat-Shillong line was envisioned to bring trains to the heart of the capital. By 2017, Rs 209.37 crore was allocated for land acquisition, and in 2023, a new Chandranathpur-Jowai line was proposed. Yet, these plans have barely left the drawing board. The Tetelia-Byrnihat line stops abruptly at Meghalaya's border, complete only on the Assam side. The Byrnihat-Shillong project is frozen, and the Jowai line faces early opposition. Mendipathar, a lone station in North Garo Hills operational since 2014, stands as Meghalaya's only rail outpost, its freight trains carrying oranges, ginger and pine apples. The central government's frustration boiled over in early 2025, when it demanded the return of Rs 270 crore earmarked for the Byrnihat-Shillong line. Caught in the crossfire, the Chief Minister warned that another Rs 200 crore hangs in the balance if consensus remains elusive. Without resolution, Shillong risks becoming India's only capital without a railway, a symbol of both its isolation and its fierce resolve to protect its identity.

At the heart of this saga lies a profound tension. On one side, the central and state governments see railways as a lifeline to economic vitality. In Shillong, where cement and vegetables cost 40% more than in nearby Guwahati, rail connectivity promises relief. Farmers, tending to ginger, potatoes, and turmeric, watch helplessly as up to a third of their harvests spoil on costly road journeys—Rs 400 per quintal by truck compared to Rs 60 by Mendipathar's trains. There, farmer incomes have surged 40% since rail services began, a

testament to what connectivity could achieve. Railways could open distant markets, making crops competitive and livelihoods sustainable. Tourism, a cornerstone of Meghalaya's economy, would flourish with easier access to Shillong's pine-clad hills, while industries, like PepsiCo's bottling plant in Mendipathar, could spark jobs and investment. For the CM, the calculus is clear:



"Railways simplify moving goods, securing better prices for everyone." Beyond economics, connectivity could stem the tide of 12,000 youth leaving annually for work and weave Meghalaya closer to India's heartland.

Yet, across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, this vision meets fierce resistance. Social activists led by the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) and political parties like the Voice of the People Party (VPP) see railways as a harbinger of demographic upheaval. Meghalaya's tribal population, once 86% in 2001, has dipped to 82% by 2021, and fears of an outsider influx run deep among the Khasi and Jaintia communities. The KSU, halting the Byrnihat-Shillong line since 2016, demands an Inner Line Permit (ILP), a mechanism to regulate migration used in states like Nagaland. Jaintia groups, including the Hyniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organization, echo this stance against the Jowai line, pointing to Sikkim, where railways ushered in demographic shifts that marginalized indigenous Lepchas. "Railways will flood our hills, turning Khasis into minorities," warns KSU president. In East Jaintia Hills, surveyors faced black flags in May 2025, a vivid sign of grassroots defiance.

Mendipathar offers a counterpoint. Since its trains began running, no significant influx has disrupted the Garo Hills, and tribal land ownership remains intact. But the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, somewhat closer to Assam's migrant-heavy Barak Valley, feel more vulnerable. The

Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA), meant to register outsiders, has faltered—only 23,000 non-tribals enrolled since 2020, leaving communities sceptical of its protections. Meanwhile, the people of Meghalaya are torn. In Shillong's bustling Lewduh Market, traders bemoan the price of rice, Rs 3,000 per sack compared to Rs 2,200 in Guwahati, and farmers in Ri-

schools near rail routes—could be considered. Rail routes must skirt sacred sites and fragile ecosystems, with transparent environmental and cultural assessments aligning with the state's ecotourism ethos.

The cost of inaction is steep: the state's real GDP has grown at an average rate of 2.1 percent during the period from 2012-13 to 2021-22, which is much lower than the national average growth of 5.6 percent. GDP growth lags, Transport inefficiencies drain Rs 18 crore daily, and youth unemployment festers at 14%. Meghalaya's railway tale, therefore, is more than a story of twisted tracks; it is a referendum on balancing tradition with modernity. Mendipathar shows that progress and preservation can co-exist, so what we need is evidence-based discussion. When the Government publishes a document on the impact of Mendipathar on the local economy, with new facts in the open, a new space for negotiation may open up. At least that has been my experience in public life. Dig, dig, and dig till you get to the bottom.

Bhoi lamenting losing a third of their potatoes to road delays. Yet, in the same breath, many question the cost of progress. After 75 years without trains, some ask why they should risk their identity now, their voices blending pride with apprehension.

This struggle is not Meghalaya's alone. Across the globe, railway projects have sparked similar resistance. In Canada, the 2020 Wet'suwet'en protests halted rail lines over a pipeline threatening indigenous lands, resolved only through land rights assurances. In Australia, Aboriginal communities in the Pilbara region resisted rail expansions until job creation and community benefits were guaranteed. France's Lyon-Turin rail project overcame local and environmental opposition with transparent consultations and ecological safeguards. These stories reveal something: progress hinges on dialogue and trust.

To move forward, a formal platform for dialogue, bringing together the KSU, VPP, District Councils, and farmers, could foster consensus, with independent mediators ensuring fairness. Strengthening the MRSSA with biometric checks at stations and tighter land-leasing rules to prevent exploitative benami transactions could ease fears without the divisive ILP. A freight-first approach, mirroring Mendipathar's success, could deliver economic gains while minimizing demographic risks, with passenger trains introduced later as trust grows. Community incentives—job training, revenue-sharing, or

Farmers, the backbone of Meghalaya's economy, stand to gain immensely. Subsidized freight, market linkages, and modern farming techniques could curb spoilage and boost competitiveness, but their voices must shape the railway's path through inclusive dialogues. The most severely impacted group in this crisis is the farming community, yet their voices are conspicuously absent from the discussion. Why are farmers, who bear the brunt of these challenges, consistently overlooked in these conversations? What kind of democratic system allows the exclusion of its most vulnerable citizens? At the heart of any true democracy lies the principle of prioritizing the needs of those most in need. Shouldn't a democratic society ensure that the concerns of its most marginalized and affected populations, like farmers, are not only heard but placed at the forefront of policy and dialogue? Ignoring them raises serious questions about the integrity and fairness of our democratic process itself. By fostering trust and prioritizing farmer welfare, cultural identity, and economic growth, Meghalaya can write a new chapter—one where trains arrive in Shillong, carrying not just goods, but new hopes for a connected, vibrant future. No matter what anyone says, we are all bound, as Indians.

(The writer is former member of the IAS)

Manipur's Education Crisis: Big Budgets, Broken Promises

By Divesh Ranjan

As India surges ahead with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 and ambitious goals of digital literacy, the state of Manipur remains shackled to an education system that is crumbling—both physically and administratively. On paper, the state has never been better resourced. The 2024-25 financial year has earmarked an impressive approx Rs 91,775 lakh under the Samagra Shiksha scheme. But behind the spreadsheets lies a different reality: one of unfinished classrooms, teacherless schools, and a generation of students slipping through the cracks.

The crisis is not for lack of vision or funds. Of the sanctioned amount, approx Rs 60,312 lakh is for fresh initiatives across elementary, secondary, and teacher education, with central assistance making up more than half. Another approx Rs 31,463 lakh, however, is tagged as spillover. This backlog underscores a deeper administrative malaise: sanctioned infrastructure remains unbuilt, approved projects are not implemented, and critical reforms stall in a web of red tape. The scale of underperformance is staggering. Out of 5,287 infrastructure interventions approved in previous years, more than 85% remain incomplete. In essential categories like computer labs, ramps for students with disabilities, and even upper primary school buildings, pendency rates are 100%. It's not just digital education that's being held hostage—basic, physical access to education is too.

This inertia extends to human resources. Across Manipur's 2,889 government schools, 131 are run by a single teacher, and 40 have no enrolled students at all. These aren't anomalies—they are symptoms of a failing system. Worse still, nearly 65% of sanctioned posts in District Institutes of Education and Training (DIETs), responsible for up-skilling educators, remain vacant. Without trained teachers, policies like NEP 2020 are reduced to bureaucratic jargon.

The numbers get grimmer. Manipur's dropout rates—13.3% at the primary level and 5.6% at the upper primary—are significantly higher than national averages. Behind every statistic is a child who may never return to the classroom, often for preventable reasons: dilapidated buildings, no toilets for girls, absent teachers, or economic desperation. And while other states are implementing second-chance programs or linking students to skilling initiatives, Manipur offers little by way of re-enrollment or rescue.

There's also a severe accountability deficit. The state has yet to operationalize a Vidya Samiksha Kendra (VSK), a crucial mechanism

for monitoring student learning outcomes and implementation of reforms. While the VSK has a mandate to provide real-time feedback for policy corrections, Manipur missed the September 2023 deadline to even begin operations. Similarly, the state has failed to act on Section 12(1)(C) of the Right to Education Act, which mandates private schools to reserve 25% of their seats for underprivileged students—a statutory right that continues to be ignored.

This is not to say all is bleak. There are promising proposals: restructuring Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalayas (KGBVs) to strengthen girls' education, expanding eco-clubs for environmental awareness, and introducing digital tools through schemes like Vidya Pravesh. But these initiatives remain largely theoretical. Without implementation, they are just bullet points in PowerPoint presentations.

The broader question, then, is not whether Manipur has a plan—it does. The real question is: who is ensuring that the plan gets executed?

Even the central government has signaled impatience. It has imposed strict conditions on fund utilization—75% usage per tranche, digital reporting via the PRABANDH portal, and adherence to submission deadlines. Yet, the very institutions expected to comply—like Block and Cluster Resource Centres—are often underfunded and understaffed. Add to this the challenge of a fragmented fund release system, where money moves from central coffers to state budgets to specific institutions with little transparency or accountability, and delays become the norm.

This crisis is not just educational; it is moral. In a state battered by conflict, instability, and displacement, schools are not merely buildings—they are sanctuaries of hope, continuity, and future-making. To leave them half-built or empty is to abandon the very idea of equity and empowerment. The solution lies in execution, not just intention. Teacher vacancies must be filled urgently. Infrastructure projects, especially spillovers from past years, must be completed before the September 2024 deadline. VSK must be operationalized without further delay. Most importantly, a culture of transparency and urgency must replace bureaucratic inertia. If not now, when? Education is more than a development agenda—it is the foundation upon which every other right and opportunity is built. If we fail Manipur's children today, we do not just delay their future; we deny them one altogether.

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Letters to the Editor

When terror travels without a passport

Editor,

The recent terror attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir has thrown up many shocking revelations about how terror is manufactured in Pakistan and how it is let loose in India. Amidst ongoing threats to humanity, complacency only helps terror modules spread their tentacles. How that is possible remains another serious concern. The Congress MP from Tura, Sailesh A. Sangma, was among the first to sound the alarm. He expressed deep concern for Meghalaya, which shares a 443 km border with Bangladesh, warning, "Meghalaya will turn into Bangladesh if the influx is not stopped" (ST, April 21). This statement clearly highlights the pressing need to curb cross-border infiltration to ensure the safety of peace-loving citizens.

Well, the situation in West Bengal should also serve as a wake-up call for the entire Northeast. In particular, the provocative statements and speeches made by top leaders of Bangladesh and even the Army Chief of Pakistan should no longer lull the citizens of the Northeast into a state of inaction. Can we ignore the harrowing condition

of innocent native Bengalis in West Bengal, who have become the victims of brutal extremism? Many have been rendered homeless in their own homeland and forced to seek refuge in camps.

Environmental expert and President of the MCA, Naba Bhattacharjee, also expressed his deep anguish in a recent article published in this daily, "Tremors of Pahalgam Genocide" (ST, May 1, 2025) emphasizing that the inhuman massacre in Pahalgam has sent shockwaves across the nation and the world. He noted that religious fundamentalism has historically ignited hatred, engulfing humanity. Bhattacharjee further pointed out that Pakistan continues to promote and breed terrorism, accelerating its descent into a failed state, and warned of the ominous implications for the region.

Frankly speaking, what if the Assam government had not promptly taken a hard stance following the Pahalgam attack? The state might have plunged into chaos, with the natives caught hopelessly between the devil and the deep sea. The situation could be much like the unrest in West Bengal, with ripple effects spilling into neighbouring states as well. Kudos to the Assam police for acting swiftly and allegedly arresting 39 individuals, including an MLA, for mak-

ing inflammatory speeches and supporting Pakistan.

Richfield Kharbudon, a socially conscious young entrepreneur from the town, lamented, "How can certain individuals take others' lives while claiming to be the sole believers in God? Such dangerous ideologies and thoughts are the root causes of growing hatred. Will hatred ever bring peace?" A profound question in a world today where some confuse God devotion with blood thirst.

In response to the Pahalgam incident, a learned Islamic scholar Maulana Kalbe Jawad came down heavily on religious fanaticism, stating, "Though practicing different faiths, we are brothers and sisters --- we must not let politics divide us with hatred. Islam teaches us never to harm the innocent. Prophet Mohammad said even if a non-Muslim cries out for help, it's our duty as Muslims to stand by them. If we turn away, we fail the very essence of our faith. Those who kill in the name of religion are not true Muslims." Maulana Kalbe has won the hearts of millions with his amazing humanitarian service.

In light of all these acts of violence, it is extremely important for society to remain vigilant and address the root causes of growing extremism. It is time we

worked towards upholding the values of humanity and peace, never tolerating the roar of hatred and violence. For heaven's sake, let's agree -- when terror speaks, silence becomes complicity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

Ongoing tension in the Assam-Meghalaya border

Editor,

Through the columns of your respected newspaper, I humbly appeal to the concerned authorities to take sincere and timely steps for resolving the long-standing Assam-Meghalaya border issue.

For decades, people who live in the border areas have faced certain levels of uncertainty, administrative confusion and sometimes even violence. The incident in Mukroh, along with the other similar incidents all highlight the immediate necessity for both a peaceful and permanent solution. We feel disheartened because the situation on the ground remains tense and unclear, not to talk about the fear that grips the people in the border areas despite several rounds

of talks now.

I sincerely request both the State and Central Government to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves. Incorporating the voices of each of the local communities that have been living with the issue for generations into the decision-making process is of great importance.

Peace will be restored by means of a resolution that is fair and also transparent. Development and cooperation within the region will also be possible. The authorities should take all the necessary steps as early as is reasonably possible.

Yours etc.,
Phidaaisuk Diengdoh,
Via email

Retired teachers out on a limb

Editor,

Referring to the letter in this paper under the caption 'Retired Teacher's Plight: A plea for Timely Pension Implementation' (ST April 25 2025), the undersigned fully support the views expressed by Mr J Chhetri. It is a matter of grave concern that a teacher, who dedicates his entire life to imparting knowledge and shaping the future citizens of our country should face such a precarious future upon retirement.

Instead of security they are left to shiver with fear, lacking adequate social security and forced to survive solely on their CPF amount and Gratuity.

The stark contrast with Government officials is disheartening. While Government employees receive their accumulated funds within two months, a retired teacher often faces agonising delays for their rightfully earned CPF money and gratuity sometimes having to wait for a year or even two if they are fortunate. This raises a critical question as to why this unacceptable delay in releasing their dues

The situation has become even more dire recently. Retired teachers are now being deprived of their CPF amounts due to funds being deposited in Non-Government School and Colleges centralised pension and provident Funds. Consequently these teachers are left with absolutely no benefits. They no longer get a salary after retirement and their accumulated savings are also not accessible. What a pitiable condition for someone who has dedicated their life to education! How are they expected to run their households?

The retired teacher is left with no viable options. I therefore implore upon the Education Department to urgently look into this

matter and take necessary action at the earliest. If the pension scheme is to be implemented, it must be done without further delay to alleviate the grief and sorrow of these retired educators. Has anyone truly considered how a retired teacher is currently surviving without a single penny? I bring this to the urgent notice of the Government lest the very makers of our future citizens are left to starve and beg on the streets after their years of dedicated service.

Yours etc.,
H.Joshi
Shillong 2

Urgent need to address harassment of women in public transport

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to raise serious concern about the sexual harassment faced by women and girls while using public transportation in Shillong. Incidents of inappropriate touching, staring, and verbal harassment in taxis, buses, and other shared vehicles have become alarmingly common. For many women, a simple com-

mute becomes a daily battle between fear and necessity. The lack of surveillance, accountability, and sensitivity among transport staff has made public transport spaces unsafe and untrustworthy. This is not just a social issue—it is a violation of Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to move freely and dignity. It also disregards the Vishaka Guidelines and the Sexual Harassment Act 2013, both of which stress the need for safe public spaces for women.

I strongly urge the authorities to take immediate action: install CCTV cameras in public vehicles, maintain a verified database of drivers and conductors, and conduct mandatory gender-sensitization training. For shared taxis, a simple rule should be introduced—if a woman is present, the backseat must be reserved for female passengers only.

Women deserve mobility without fear, and dignity without compromise. The time to act is now.

Yours etc.,
Phayoton Zimik
Shillong

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"Smart people focus on the right things."

— Jensen Huang

The Shillong Times

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India's Measured Response

INDIA'S early morning strikes into areas occupied by terror outfits inside Pakistan was a calculated move intended to avoid civilian casualties but to hit at the heart of the terror architecture there. This was a strategic response considering the audacious attack on tourists only of a particular religion, at Pahalgam on April 22 – an attack that claimed 26 innocent lives. India has responded to the Pahalgam saga with what military strategists call a strike with smart, multi-domain precision. At present when both India and Pakistan are nuclear-capable a full-scale war with Pakistan would be infertuous due to nuclear risks. India has a wide range of conventional and unconventional warfare options with each carrying different levels of impact, escalation, and risk but it is to India's advantage to extract a cost from Pakistan without triggering a catastrophic conflict.

In terms of military strength, India has 14 lakh troops whereas Pakistan has 617,000. This manpower strength is an advantage should war break out on multiple fronts, such as Punjab, Rajasthan, the LoC etc., India could aim to capture strategic territories or paralyze Pakistan's military structure. It serves India or indeed any country at war to practice 'Precision with Restraint.' Perhaps a more calibrated attack on the terrorist-occupied regions in Pakistan would deal it a severe blow and for this India could deploy its fighter planes or cruise missiles and destroy the ISI and Jaish-e-Mohammad camps inside Pakistan. India needs to strengthen its covert operations and ramp up intelligence driven operations. For instance, questions have been raised in several quarters as to why the terrorists who literally strolled into the Baisaran Valley meadow are still at large. How did they manage to throw the Intelligence Bureau and RAW off their tracks? These are issues that would need to be analysed in great detail as India cannot afford to demoralise its citizens and make them sitting ducks at a tourist resort.

As far as a counter-strike by India is concerned the suspension of the Indus Waters Treaty is expected to deliver a body blow to Pakistan. Also considering that Pakistan's economy is at present teetering, the trade ban by India is expected to further choke its economic lifelines. What is of concern though is China's interest in what is panning out between the two countries and its open support to Pakistan by way of armaments – all for its long term advantage. This is where India needs to be on high alert, more so with Bangladesh also threatening to annex what it calls the "land-locked North eastern states," because of its recent proximity to China. For India, it's important to give equal attention to its eastern borders as well – something it has not done after the Chinese invasion of 1962. It is only in recent times that roads and other infrastructure have been built in the Indo-Chinese borders with Arunachal Pradesh. A full scale war is not an option in the age of nuclear missiles, hence India needs to cripple its enemy using the best minds to craft out an effective geo-political strategy both in the western and eastern borders.

Emergence of a "Third Front"

By Jaideep Saikia

Indian military strategists have been speaking of a two-front war for a long time. The apprehension and consequently the need to prepare for such an eventuality stems from the premise that there is a well-grounded "all-weather-relationship" between China and Pakistan.

Be that as it may, the optics were not very clear during the Kargil war. China did not militarily intervene directly.

In his seminal book, *Kargil: From Surprise to Victory* (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2006), former chief of army staff, Gen VP Malik writes in the chapter titled, 'The China Factor' that "In recent years, China has been stating that it is pursuing an "independent foreign policy and that its relations with Pakistan would not be at the cost of its relations with India." During the Kargil conflict, at the political level, China did indeed articulate the above view and did maintain a neutral posture. However, at the ground level, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) had enhanced its level of activity along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Ladakh and along the Arunachal Pradesh border.

This writer has had a few occasions to discuss the matter with Gen Malik via email and in personal meetings. One aspect that the former chief informed was that (as indeed he recorded it in the above-mentioned book) the Indian army received intelligence reports that the PLA's director in the Department of Armaments, handling the conventional weapons and equipment of the Chinese army, visited Islamabad during the conflict to help the Pakistan army overcome its critical deficiencies in conventional armament, ammunition and equipment. These developments and also the fact that both Gen Parvez Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif had visited Beijing after the commencement of the Kargil war did cause some concern for India.

Yet another steadfast mandarin and present Indian foreign minister, S. Jaishankar in his book *The Indian Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (HarperCollins Publishers India, 2020) states in the chapter titled "The Nimzo-Indian Defence," that, "The other big issue that shapes the narrative of this period is China's relationship with Pakistan. The origins of this friendship are worth revisiting, because an understanding of the past provides insights to its future. For an authoritative account of these ties, S. Jaishankar quotes Andrew Small's, "The China-Pakistan Axis: Asia's New Geopolitics," and asks why a relationship that otherwise lacks a bond of cultural affinity or common values—normally the basis for alliances—has outlasted the test of time and global changes. Its answer is worth reflecting on. China obviously is essential for Pakistan to address a power imbalance in relation to India, especially after Western powers showed

declining enthusiasm for that goal. And Pakistan, in turn, is useful for China as it transitions from being a regional power to a global one. It not only helps keep India within the South Asia box but also provides pathways to the Islamic world.

This writer met S. Jaishankar when the latter was then the Indian Foreign Secretary, in Jaipur. Both were delegates in the Counter-Terrorism Conference organised by the India Foundation, New Delhi in February 2016. They conferred on a variety of issues on the sidelines of the conference, but much of it had to do with Myanmar and the North East.

On hindsight and if S. Jaishankar's, "The Indian Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World," had been published at the time and had been read, it would have been fruitful to have queried of the then Indian foreign secretary about the deeper nuance of what Jaishankar meant by "Pakistan's usefulness to China (among other aspects!)" because it also provides, "pathways to the Islamic world." Almost a decade later one wonders whether—during the time when the book was published (2020)—China, anticipating the withdrawal of the United States from Afghanistan and the return of the Taliban, simply had only Afghanistan in mind. But today, the anti-India trioka that is shaping up in the Indian subcontinent by way of Bangladesh, Pakistan and China may well have been at the back of one of India's finest diplomatic minds.

In any event, India has waged war with both its northern and western neighbours. In 1962, India faced defeat at the hands of the Chinese. The debacle was primarily because of the ineptitude that characterised India's politico-military-intelligence at the time. But it was also because of the lack of correct preparedness in the Indian armed forces during the period.

However, the power differential between India and China has reduced considerably over the years. India of 2025 is not the India of 1962. The narrowing down of the disparity, especially in the military domain, between New Delhi and Beijing is a result of three important reasons.

Firstly, India has undertaken massive military acquisition as well as indigenous armament production that has more or less equalled China. The manner in which the Chinese misadventure in Galwan was handled is testimony to Indian reciprocal belligerence.

Secondly, Indian strategists have been clinically "war-gaming" a war scenario with China, although the pragmatic approach would be to nullify the Chinese threat by amicably solving the 3,488 Km long India-China boundary. This can perhaps even be achieved

by carefully examining an avant-garde concept such as the "Line of Amity", which this writer propounded in 2014 during the course of a Track II Dialogue with China of which he was a member of the Indian delegation. However, discretion must continue to be the better part of valour. India cannot let its guard down. Such an alertness has become even more relevant in the present circumstances with Rawalpindi going berserk in its ineffectual attempt to undermine India's growth trajectory and military might under the present dispensation.

Thirdly, India's growing proximity with the United States and Russia as also the fact that Modi's voice is being heard across the world is an eyesore for India's adversaries, particularly China. The fact that the Quad has taken on board India by providing it the "security space" to counter the threat of Chinese encirclement has upset Beijing. The Chinese threat by way of the "first front" that India would have to encounter in the event of "hot-war" has to be factored in with great finesse and calibration. Indeed, the new-found bonhomie between a surrogate Dhaka and Beijing whereby India's North East was sought to be dragged in, is yet another attempt by China to engineer aggressive anti-India behaviour.

The impostor, Yunus is but a lame pawn in the sinister chess game that is unfolding in South Asia. Pakistan under the two Asims (the Pakistan army chief, Asim Munir and Pakistan's ISI chief and NSA, Asim Malik) have always endeavoured to "bleed India with a thousand cuts". The craven act in the meadows of Pahalgam was just another heinous manifestation of the sole raison d'être of the failed state of Pakistan.

If China and Pakistan constitute the two-front that Indian strategists have been directing their stratagem against, it is important, at this critical juncture in India's national security calibration, to caustically fathom the emergence of a "third front" by way of a wayward Bangladesh.

While the efficient cause for the hostility emanating from Bangladesh towards India can be attributed to a nefarious and baseless "students' movement," the sufficient cause of growing anti-India sentiments inside Bangladesh and the appearance of radical Islamism are the two most important reasons for the "great turnaround" by a country whose very creation was ordained by India.

History informs that the Taliban (The Seekers) was the creation of Pakistan. But like Frankenstein once they got "too much" inside Pakistan, they were handed another country abutting Pakistan, Afghanistan!

Yunus is today facing an existential dilemma. Gen

Waker-uz-Zaman, the Bangladesh army chief is not quite comfortable with Yunus and his cabal of advisers. The students, having tasted power, are never going to leave the streets nor would they abdicate power. Most of all, the Islamists that Yunus has unleashed, almost in the image of the one-eyed Mullah Omar's Taliban, are careening out of control.

Of late, the radical Islamist group, Hifazat-e-Islam are up in arms against reforms. The Islamists have even threatened members of the illegitimate Yunus dispensation if the Awami League is not banned. Indeed, such a ban has been demanded by the new political party, Jatiyo Nagarik Party as well. It was formed on 28 February 2025. The members of the new party are the ones that ousted Sheikh Hasina. The toxicity of Bangladesh's politics, even as a sane Bangladesh army chief calls for restraint, has more or less overwhelmed the Land of Bangabandhu.

If China and Pakistan constitute the two most palatable military fronts for India's policy planners, then Bangladesh has emerged as the "vicious backyard" for the national security apparatus of India. In just eight plus months, Bangladesh has become a lackey of both China and Pakistan.

Observers in right thinking India, including the author, are awaiting, or even expecting, a decision by the Modi government about "equivalent response/retaliation" for the Pahalgam bloodbath by Pakistan. It is the considered view of the author that important military installations in Pakistan and terror camps inside the unholy land should be completely demolished. It is certainly not the "Indian way" to target the civilian population even in an enemy land. Indeed, such a belief system about humanitarianism is what separates India from Pakistan, a country that has been misruled ever since its inception.

Whatever the outcome it can be expected that China could enter the anti-India fray in one way or the other. If the atmospheric do come to such a pass, it is almost certain that Bangladesh would undertake certain disquieting measures that may disturb India's eastern seaboard. As a matter of fact, both China and Pakistan would goad the erstwhile East Pakistan to act as a vital anti-India staging ground.

It is time for India to quietly celebrate and formulate plans to decisively address and confront the emerging "third front".

And now, as India has operationalised "Operation Sindoore" to target the terror camps inside Pakistan, to avenge the Pahalgam terror attack, we wait and watch as the country adopts what it calls a measured yet strategic response.

(Jaideep Saikia is India's foremost national security strategist and bestselling author)

Will PM Modi be allowed to end his confrontation with limited strikes in Pakistan?

Shehbaz Sharif and his military preparing for more retaliation in coming days

By Sushil Kutty

Prime Minister Narendra Modi came up with the name 'Operation Sindoore' that targeted terrorist hubs in Pakistan. Modi sat through the night monitoring 'Operation Sindoore', named for the 'Hindu widows' of the Pahalgam terror attack. Pakistani terrorists snuffed the 'Sindoore' of these women and 26 Hindu men were killed. A Nepalese citizen was also killed for being a Hindu!

'Operation Sindoore' is Prime Minister Modi's answer to Pahalgam. The name struck Modi and Modi couldn't resist Modi! The tri-services chiefs, who were given a "freehand" to choose time and place for "unimaginable punishment", did not have the spark in them to come up with a name like 'Operation Sindoore'.

The Indian Army, Navy and Air Force carried out 'Operation Sindoore', hitting nine targets Pakistan says five Rafale jets were downed by Pakistani missiles during the course of 'Operation Sindoore'. The Indian armed forces say the precision strikes at 1:44 am dismantled nine terror hideouts in Pakistan's 'Punjab', and in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir, killing "900 terrorists, breathing fresh life in 'Modi hai Mumkin hai'".

The widows of Pahalgam have the option to marry again to sport the Sindoore but Prime Minister Narendra Modi stayed up all night and monitored 'Operation Sindoore'. India targeted terrorist bases in Pakistan and PoK, a total of nine strikes involving 24 missiles. By morning the media were talking of "an ode to the women whose husbands were slaughtered in Pahalgam."

On Wednesday the Modi media was singing hosanna, congratulating Modi for the brilliant masterstroke, 'Operation Sindoore'. The overnight strikes are a bigger version of the surgical and airstrikes. But there are conflicting reports and differing narratives. Both India and Pakistan are claiming victory.

And it is nobody's guess that India lost the "dish-information" war. Pakistanis on social media and the legacy media of Pakistan were first off the block to spread the word that Pakistan won and India deserted positions and ran!

Pakistanis ran story after story claiming "three Rafale were downed." The Indian media could not get beyond singling Prime Minister Narendra Modi for praise, and how, but for Modi, 'Operation Sindoore' wouldn't have been.

Conflicting reports in-

cluded the one about "ghar mei ghus ke marange". Some Indian reports said the Rafale didn't enter Pakistan or POK and that the Rafale had the capability to strike Pakistani targets deep in Pakistani territory.

That said, it is difficult to separate Pahalgam from Pulwama. "Our actions have been focused, measured and non-escalatory in nature. No Pakistani military facilities have been targeted. India demonstrated considerable "restraint in target selection and method of execution... We are living up to the commitment that those responsible for this attack will be held responsible," India said in a statement.

Importantly, 'Operation Sindoore' wasn't anything close to the "unimaginable punishment" that Modi cranked up with his unbridled imagination. Reports say this was only the first phase of 'Operation Sindoore' and that there will be a Phase 2, too, depending on whether Pakistan retaliated.

The immediate Pakistan retaliation was cross-border firing and artillery shelling at Indian villages along the Line of Control. Three Indian civilians were killed. Chances are Prime Minister Narendra Modi will soon be out of the country on an urgent hugging spree.

Did Prime Minister Modi achieve the goals he had set to avenge Pahalgam? If the goal was to give his Hindu vote-bank a sense of pride and accomplishment, he has. Knowing the man, however, it is a cinch that Modi will revert to 'Sabka Saath Sabka Vishwas'. That he only chose to strike "terrorist hubs" and not "military installations" is proof he never wanted a full-fledged war.

Wars cost money and Modi knows it well. One night of airstrikes is enough for Modi. It is a Muslim world and Prime Minister Modi is acutely aware he can't achieve other goals without Muslim largesse. Go the extra length in exacting revenge and Modi will no longer be the posterboy of the Gulf states, forget Indian Muslims! There is no guarantee that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will resume 'Operation Sindoore' anytime soon.

But the ball is in the Pakistan Army's court and the Pakistan Army has got the "go ahead" from Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif to go and free Pakistan's jugular. Our Prime Minister has to show that he is the Lion of the sub-continent by winning the limited war. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Drought of UPSC aspirants: The wait goes on

Editor,
For more than ten years, the state of Meghalaya has not seen a single local candidate successfully clear the Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) Civil Services Examination. This troubling trend stands in stark contrast to the consistent performance of candidates from other Northeastern states like Manipur, Assam, and even smaller states like Sikkim, where aspirants regularly secure ranks in one of the most competitive exams in India. This drought of success is not due to a lack of talent or capability among Meghalaya's youth, but it appears to stem from a deeply rooted mindset — one that prioritizes comfort over ambition and places undue emphasis on the security of state government jobs.

In Meghalaya, there is a

cultural inclination towards remaining within the familiar. Many young people aim for clerical or Group C and D state government positions. The result is a preference for short-term security rather than long-term impact and leadership roles that the UPSC offers. The rigorous preparation needed for UPSC — often spanning years — is seen by many as an unnecessary risk. This comfort zone mindset can be partly attributed to family and societal expectations. There is immense pressure to find a job early, and a state government job is often perceived as the ultimate achievement. Parents and community elders may not actively discourage UPSC preparation, but rarely do they encourage the bold pursuit of all-India services either. The state's economy, driven heavily by the government sector, has made public employment the default career path. Meghalaya has a significant working-age population, with a large proportion relying on government employment for their

livelihood. For many, this has resulted in a narrow view of success — one limited to state employment, with little exposure or encouragement to compete on a national level. The consequence is a shrinking pool of aspirants even daring to attempt the UPSC, let alone clearing it. Civil Services coaching centres are few and far between in the state, and those that do exist often lack the depth and rigor found in metros like Delhi or Hyderabad. Aspirants who do take the leap often face challenges in accessing high-quality mentorship, peer groups, and resources.

Another issue is the lack of recent role models. In states where someone clears the UPSC every few years, it creates a ripple effect — motivating others, setting expectations, and building a community of support. Meghalaya has missed out on this cycle. The absence of visible success stories creates a vacuum where young aspirants lack both guidance and inspiration. Government initiatives have also fallen

short. While schemes to support civil services aspirants exist in theory, their reach and effectiveness have been limited. There is an urgent need for better infrastructure, scholarships, and institutional encouragement to raise the bar for ambition among Meghalaya's youth. Reversing this trend requires a cultural and systemic shift. The youth need to be shown the larger canvas on which their potential can be painted. UPSC is not just about getting a job — it's about entering the nation's highest decision-making bodies. Meghalaya needs to inspire its students to think beyond the state's borders, to aim for national and international excellence. Educational institutions, NGOs, and the government must come together to build a UPSC ecosystem — through dedicated coaching, awareness campaigns, mentorship networks, and success stories. Parents and communities, too, need to redefine what success looks like.

Until this mind set changes, Meghalaya risks losing a

generation of leaders who could represent the state and the Northeast in the corridors of power.

Yours etc;
Rishanlang Khongwir,
Via email

Railway Expansion Stirs Demographic Questions

Editor,
I appreciate the article by KN Kumar on the dilemmas that face the state and its indigenous population vis-à-vis railways. While he highlighted the various advantages that can come with introducing railways, he also admits to the fear of being demographically overwhelmed as the major cause of its opposition by various groups in the state. There are those who support the idea of linking Meghalaya to the railway map of the country, but from my personal ex-

perience, the opponents are more in number. Personally, I support the introduction of railways for the simple fact that I don't believe in the argument of demographic change happening in Meghalaya because of the railways. As KN Kumar has rightly pointed out, we have thousands of our own people moving out of the state in search of jobs and a better life and becoming migrants themselves. To think that there are those who are going to reverse the cycle when the native indigenous population sees no opportunities in the state and the non-indigenous population does not have many rights, is highly unlikely.

This reasoning is because the Census data has shown a continuous decline of the non-indigenous non-tribal population of the state, with a consequent increase in the indigenous tribal population. However, the demographic data shared by KN Kumar threatens to break that narrative. According to him, "Meghalaya's tribal population, once 86% (85.9% actually) in 2001, has dipped to

82% by 2021, and fears of an outsider influx run deep among the Khasi and Jaintia communities." In 2011, Meghalaya's indigenous tribal population was 86.15%. If his figures are correct, this over 50-years trend of continuous increase in the indigenous tribal population has ended.

In a program I attended a few weeks ago, a government official informed the audience that Meghalaya's population has reached 36 lakhs. If we accept the data shared by KN Kumar, it means that over the last 20 years, the non-indigenous population has increased by over 2 lakhs. I am not sure where he got the data from since we didn't have any Census survey in 2021 and even if you were to extrapolate, the proportion of the indigenous population should have gone up, not down, based on the past trends.

It could very well be that as a former IAS officer, he has access to internal reports that are based either on electoral roll data, hospital records or sample surveys.

He can tell us better about the source of the data, but if it is authentic, I am no longer inclined to support the railway as the fears raised by the various groups have been proven true. In such a situation, the introduction of railways will definitely worsen the situation. At this moment, I think it's best for the government to wait for the Census survey before taking any decision on the railways. Now that the Union Government has talked about it, we could have official data soon. If what KN Kumar has claimed about the fall in the indigenous tribal population is true, we can bid the railways goodbye. It will also be a vindication of the Jaidbyriew politics and we will all have to brace ourselves for a very volatile future. Let's wait and watch.

Yours etc.,
Bhogtoram Mawroh,
Via email

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*"If you do not think about your future,
you cannot have one."*

— John Galsworthy

The Shillong Times

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Truth as casualty

IN any war, truth is the first casualty. So too with the present engagement between India and Pakistan post the Pahalgam massacre of innocent tourists by Pakistan-trained terrorists a fortnight ago. Lies are traded generally by those who are on the defensive. Yet, fact is, the subcontinent is bracing a full-scale war even as India claimed it made an offensive only against terrorist targets inside Pakistan or PoK, and not against civilians and military establishments. On Thursday night, a full day after India hit nine specific targets – five in PoK and four deep inside Pakistan, including in its Punjab province for the first time since 1971 – Pakistan attempted and failed to target 15 cities/military establishments inside the Indian territory. These were foiled by an alert, highly sophisticated Indian air defence system. This meant an "escalation" of the scenario, against which India had warned Pakistan. India stresses that it has only "responded" to this by going one more step ahead and smashing Pakistan's air defence system in Lahore and elsewhere. With all these, the scenario is now fully surcharged – also meaning that Sindoore 2 is on. Notably, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh stressed at the all-party meeting in New Delhi that this engagement has not stopped.

Pakistan has been passing through a deep crisis due to a difficult economic downturn. It neither has money to replenish or strengthen its military stocks, nor the wherewithal to keep its national airlines up and flying. It just has a handful of planes. Pakistan could not deter India's offensive this time too, even as the scale was larger, targeting as many as nine locations, and decimating over 25 terrorist infrastructures. The Pakistani military could only blink this time too. Its systems are obviously in a pitiable state. This, however, did not deter its army chief from bragging, blowing hot and cold, and even giving a religious slant to whip up feelings within Pakistan against India. Worse, what Pakistan faces now is an internal revolt as well in a more pronounced fashion. Some 14 Pakistani soldiers have been killed in an ambush by Baluchistan Liberation Army, which has also uprooted Pakistani flags from government establishments in the province plagued by the separatists. This, for them, is the time – to strike when the iron's hot.

The Pakistani military and political establishments that tried to browbeat India and the world with threats of use of nuclear bombs, should India turn aggressive, are shocked. The deafening silence on their part in the past two days is perhaps proof they are barking up the wrong tree. Any nuclear attack could be an invitation to worse retaliation from this side, decimating the Islamic nation in one go. Question is, why did Pakistan precipitate matters to this level by herding its bunch of terrorists to unleash mayhem on the Indian soil at this hour. The Indian leadership cannot be faulted if it saw an opportunity to set matters right once and for all times to come.

Much Ado About the Clan

By Patricia Mukhim

When it comes to living in the past but labouring for a top of the economic ladder for the future, we Khasis can beat anyone hollow. Our romance with the past is almost legendary but perhaps our fatal flaw is to remember only those aspects of the past that were "glorious," whatever definition we may have lent to that term. We don't dig deep enough about the heroes we worship perhaps for fear of finding some character flaws that any human is prone to. More so after we have painted such heroes in glowing terms. There's really no harm in revering heroes. Every tribe needs a hero or heroes and even heroines (think Ka Phan Nonglait) to show us the way. But nostalgia alone does not help. The reality of today demands that we be more emotionally stable and not allow ourselves to be led by the turbulent waves of emotions that grip us from time to time, especially during elections. And as a Khasi I know we are a society driven by emotions more than pragmatism. Of course, no one will analyse these character flaws so brutally because, again at the end of the day we all want to be part of the society and not be excommunicated as iconoclasts that don't fit in.

Yes, fit in and that's exactly the point. We all want to fit in and walk the path often travelled. No one wants to strike out on a new path for fear of the unpredictable. Are there flaws in our societal architecture that we need to revamp and re-craft? We are great ones to refer to the first matriarch (Ka Iawbei) that gave birth to the "Kur" or clan as the progenitor. And yes we "ting kur" or weave a net of relationship with anyone who is of the same clan. Our elders tell girls that we should never cast a longing eye on any male of the same clan for that is, "ka sang ka ma," a taboo and an outrage that would result in being excommunicated from the clan and thereby living a life of social seclusion for generations.

The clan is therefore a sacrosanct thread that binds its members in a sort of social contract and which from time to time organises meetings and picnics so that members of the clan from across the Khasi-Jaintia

Hills get to know each other. For the Khasi-Pnar the first question one asks a person one meets for the first time is – Phi dei ki jait aiu? (Which clan are you from?) It's an ice-breaker of sorts but also a way of knowing if the person is somehow related to you. But what happens beyond that clan bond? Nothing beyond attending funerals and making a small contribution on that day. But even here, clan members will only attend a funeral if they are informed and are living within the vicinity of the deceased person. Often, they are not informed and get to know of the death only after the funeral.

Over the years, clan meetings have dwindled since everyone is busy chasing their dreams. Yet the Khasi Hills Autonomous District

wrong in my surmise, I am open to correction. I also know that an article like this will win many trolls but so what?

Now let me come to the crux of the matter. As pointed above, the clan (Kur) is meant to be a solidarity group where members stand by one another and if I may use the moral yardstick – to assist the financially weaker members. There are many among the Kur that are filthy rich but others that are sending their kids away to different states in India to study, when those offering them that facility do so with an agenda. It's not charity by any stretch of imagination. When one looked at those 22 students who were escorted back from that school in Karnataka that was functioning illegally, one wondered how the parents so

Our elders tell girls that we should never cast a longing eye on any male of the same clan for that is, "ka sang ka ma," a taboo and an outrage that would result in being excommunicated from the clan and thereby living a life of social seclusion for generations.

Council (KHADC) is now mooted the idea of turning the clan into some sort of administrative and governance unit but only to the extent of helping the Council identify the bonafides of those claiming to be from such and such clan. For that they are going to rely on clan elders (Rangbah Kur) to certify whether a person really belongs to the clan he/she claims to or if the person is an impersonator, more so when it comes to children born out of mixed marriages between a Khasi woman and a non-Khasi and especially a non-tribal male, as if that is a sacrilege of sorts. This conundrum continues and the Lineage Act of the Council is aimed at shooting in the foot those women who marry non-tribals and to prevent them and their children any right to land and inheritance.

The clan which should have been a comfort zone where clan members find solace and empathy is now going to police its female members who decide to marry non-tribals and report back to the Council. If I am

willingly let their children go so far away from home at a time when they need parental love and care the most. Each of those kids belong to a clan. How is it that the more well to do clan members not extend help to their kin? If each clan were to have a fund for assisting the more needy members, especially to help their children through school, would it be too much of a sacrifice? If so, what is the purpose of the Kur?

Granted that there were no such arrangements in the past and that is because Khasi-Pnar society was supposedly egalitarian. Those who managed to get rich because they knew the tricks of the trade were cut down to size by being labelled as Nongri Thlen (keepers of a certain python that needed to be fed human blood so that it makes the keepers rich). How a python could print bank notes is of course not explained but possibly the python ensures that any little business its keepers do yields more profit than it would for those who are not keen on keeping the Thlen. We may

dispel such beliefs as myths and superstitions but some people have, even in recent years, been lynched on the allegations of keeping the Thlen, whenever a mysterious, unexplained death happens. No one has ever seen the Thlen but Khasis believe in it and that is why the Syiem Sad of Smit (the sister of the Syiem of Khyrim) even to this day dispenses a sort of water that is blessed to be given to children or even adults that are believed to have been cast a spell by the Thlen either in the form of some hair or a piece of cloth being stealthily cut off from a person and offered to it.

We once had a discussion at the Khasi National Dorbar Hall as to whether the Thlen actually exists. The discussion remained inconclusive. So, we are still groping in the dark about the Thlen. But the equivalent of the Thlen today are the filthy rich members of society who have twisted the governance system such that they rake in money by the lakhs and crores while the large majority scrimp and scrounge and are unable to even send their kids to school. True, that the state offers free and compulsory education up to the age of 14 years but the state does not provide free uniforms or textbooks. Only the fees are taken care of. There are families today that live in stark poverty. They too belong to some "Kur" but they live lives of isolation. No member of their Kur actually asks them how they are managing to keep body and soul together. No one cares that their kids have dropped out of school due to sheer poverty. So, of what use if the "Kur" then?

In this society we hardly discuss these crucial issues. The well to do are ensconced inside their bubbles while the poor continue to dip further down the poverty line and there seems no cure to this socio-economic malady.

The question I ask therefore is – What is the purpose of the Kur today? We need to look for answers because the number of young drop-outs in Meghalaya is swelling and we have not done a proper survey on that. Without a census how can we even arrive at any conclusive figure? Will the Rangbah Kur please mull over these issues and rediscover their role?

China and the India-Pakistan conflict

By Srikanth Kondapalli

Indian armed strikes as part of Operation Sindoore on nine sites in Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir on May 7 in the aftermath of the attack on tourists in Pahalgam on April 22, have rattled China. Lin Jian, the foreign ministry spokesperson of China, described the Indian military strikes as "regrettable". Beijing called on India and Pakistan "to avoid worsening the situation" and "remain calm and exercise restraint".

This call for restraint may seem to be at odds with China's sabre-rattling in the Taiwan Straits and against the Philippines in the South China Sea. But here it would not like an escalation in the face-off between the two South Asian nations given their proximity to China. Besides, there is also China's extensive cultivation of interests in Pakistan. China's assistance has been a pillar of support for Pakistan, a position mirrored by the Chinese media. China's State-run media agency Xinhua said at least 26 people were killed and 46 injured after India carried out strikes on "six civilian settlements in Pakistan". It also said that the Indian government confirmed strikes

nine Chinese engineers and technicians were killed at the Dasu hydroelectricity project by terrorists on July 24, 2021, the communist party-backed Global Times called for missile strikes on terrorists in Pakistan. China today is contemplating the establishment of "police stations" across Pakistan to counter this menace, even as the Pakistan army has dedicated one division of troops to protect China-funded infrastructure projects. Such projects, packaged since 2014 into the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), violate India's sovereignty and territorial integrity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated at the Qingdao summit of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation in 2019. In fact, in addition to the lands occupied in Gilgit and Baltistan, China is also stationing thousands of "security guards" in the region.

China's analysts suggest that these "security guards" are to protect its interests in these restive regions, even though they may also potentially come under the cross-fire between the armed forces of India and Pakistan in any kinetic shoot down. There are a few "red lines"

"China has contributed to arming Pakistan by transferring weapons worth more than \$20 billion. These constitute over 80 per cent of China's arms transfers world-wide, thus making Pakistan the single largest recipient of Chinese arms."

on nine identified "terrorist training camps" in Pakistan. While China's "Global Times" spoke of three Indian fighter jets being shot down by Pakistan, prompting the Indian Embassy in Beijing to send a "fact checking" advisory to the tabloid cautioning against spreading "dis-information".

Chinese support is linked to the number of stakes Beijing has in Pakistan. Since 1963, after the border clashes with India, Beijing assiduously built relations with Islamabad. China did not stop Pakistan from taking up gauntlets with India. In March 1963, China received portions of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir and Gilgit and Baltistan and incorporated large swathes of lands in Aghil, Shimshal, Ruksam and Saksham, in addition to occupying 38,000 square kilometres of Aksai Chin. With so much land, China has heightened interests in the current India-Pak standoff. China has also built an "all-weather" road from Kashgar in Xinjiang to Islamabad to further its connection to Pakistan.

China has contributed to arming Pakistan by transferring weapons worth more than \$20 billion. These constitute over 80 per cent of China's arms transfers world-wide, thus making Pakistan the single largest recipient of Chinese arms. For instance, the latest supplies of JF-17 fighter aircraft, drones, space-based support, beyond visual range PL-15A air-to-air missile systems and others, were pitched against India in the last few days. China has also provided assistance in missile platforms to Pakistan. The range and reach has been bolstered to cover the entire Indian subcontinent, thus encouraging Islamabad's stance at moments of bilateral tension.

China has also provided support to Pakistan at the UN Security Council #1267 committee on counter-terrorism and avoiding any proscription of Pakistan-based terrorists. After the Pahalgam terror attack, China's backing helped water down the UN Security Council resolution on the incident.

However, this is contrary to China's position on countering terrorism. When

that have been laid down for their intervention in the region. These include any killing of Chinese citizens in this cross fire and any damage to CPEC projects.

China's analysts have criticised India for keeping the Indus Water Treaty in abeyance and also invoked the UN resolutions on Kashmir. However, China itself has never signed water treaties with any of its lower riparian states. Also, China was not a UN member when Resolution #47 was passed on April 21, 1948, whose Article 1 actually called for Pakistan to withdraw from Kashmir as a precondition for plebiscite.

Five days after the terror attacks at Pahalgam, China's foreign minister Wang Yi spoke to his Pakistani counterpart and advocated "swift and fair investigation" and said that "conflict does not serve the fundamental interests of either India or Pakistan, nor does it benefit regional peace and stability". Though China itself may not entertain any "fair investigation" into terror attacks on its soil, it does look out for a way out of rising tension and conflict.

China's policy makers and analysts do not see any problem with Pakistan, nor is much stock placed on democracy, civil society, the judiciary or the media. For China, Pakistan and its army are a good bet that helps Beijing balance India and power equations in the region.

With \$52 billion in investment in CPEC projects, over \$20 billion in arms supplies, several billion dollars in aid and loans, China today feels "entitled" to intervene in Pakistan as it has a high stake in the country, particularly at a time China has been feeling the heat of President Trump's mounting tariffs. It is also confronted with the relocation of several multinational companies like Apple from China to other destinations in South Asia and India. In such a situation, China could also do with supportive countries like Pakistan. India needs to address this issue.

(Dr. Srikanth Kondapalli is Professor in Chinese Studies at Jawaharlal Nehru University) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Why mothers are smarter than AI and always will be

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to highlight the truth that, "No technology can replace a mother's wisdom and love." While technology advances, a mother's intuition continues to outpace artificial intelligence. Artificial intelligence may be able to compose essays, solve complex equations, and simulate human conversation – but let's be honest: no algorithm can match the everyday brilliance of a mother's wisdom. AI can offer pre-programmed sympathy, but mothers deliver comfort with precision. When you've had a rough day, ChatGPT might say, "I'm sorry you feel that way." A mother, on the other hand, gives you food, quiet company, and the kind of understanding that no machine could ever replicate.

Digital assistants like Siri and Alexa can't detect our emotions. But a mother? She can decipher a shaky "I'm fine" in the middle of her tasks, and still know you've had a terrible day. She doesn't need algorithms to decode your emotions – she's had years of field experience, and nothing gets past her lie detector ears. Google might help you find answers in seconds, but only a mother knows where your missing sock is, what you meant when you said, "nothing's wrong," and exactly where your school ID is, even though you haven't seen it since last term.

AI uses a code whereas mothers on the other hand use a secret language that includes: "Because I said so" and "Wear a jacket or you will catch a cold". Years later, you realize – she was right every single time. Much is said about AI's multitasking ability, but mothers are the original masters. From preparing meals and managing schedules to solving household puzzles and delivering life advice – all at once – their efficiency runs deeper than any AI's processing speed. Most importantly, when something breaks – whether it's an object or a person's spirit – AI offers instructions. A mother offers presence. Comfort isn't downloaded; it's delivered through small acts of care, timing, and unspoken understanding.

So, this Mother's Day, while marvelling at the progress of machines, it's worth celebrating the original, irreplaceable intelligence that has raised generations. Technology may evolve, but the love, wisdom, and emotional depth of mothers remain unmatched. If AI ever hopes to match that – good luck.

Yours etc.,
Aldenberg Pyngrupe &
Congenial Kharsahnoh
Shillong

Full-scale war not an option

Editor
The editorial "India's Measured Response" (ST May 8, 2025) has raised a very vital point in the last paragraph. Since a full-scale war is not an option in the age of nuclear missiles, India's geopolitical strategy in the nuclear age requires a multi-dimensional approach

that balances diplomacy, economic influence, military deterrence, and strategic alliances. Given the challenges posed by China in the east and Pakistan in the west, India must craft a strategy that ensures regional stability while safeguarding national interests.

First, to strengthen strategic alliance, India has to deepen ties with the US, Japan and Australia to counter China's influence in the Indo-Pacific. India needs to maintain a balanced relationship with Russia to ensure defence cooperation while avoiding over-reliance. It also has to strengthen ties with the Gulf Nations for energy security and counter-terrorism cooperation. Second, when it comes to military modernisation and deterrence, India's No First Use (NFU) nuclear policy ensures deterrence while maintaining strategic flexibility but to upgrade its defence, it has to invest in hypersonic missiles, cyber warfare and AI-driven defence systems to counter emerging threats. It also has to enhance surveillance and rapid response capabilities along China and Pakistan borders.

Third, it has to diversify its trade routes by reducing dependence on Chinese imports while expanding trade with ASEAN, Africa and Europe. Strengthening port connectivity and digital infrastructure to boost India's global trade position is imperative. For energy security India has to invest in renewable energy and strategic reserves to reduce vulnerabilities. Fourth, India has to engage with global institutions and strengthen its role in the UN, G20 and

BRICS in order to shape global policies.

To counter China's Belt and Road Initiative, India has to offer alternative infrastructure projects to South Asian and African nations. It should lead peace initiatives in Afghanistan and Myanmar to prevent instability from spilling over. Lastly, there is a need to strengthen cybersecurity to counter Chinese and Pakistani cyber threats and expand India's space capabilities for satellite surveillance and defence applications. The approach must be adaptive and proactive, ensuring economic growth, military readiness and diplomatic influence while avoiding direct conflict.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Who will mediate over Kashmir?

Editor,
The Indian security establishment launched 'OPERATION SINDOOR', a military operation aimed at destroying the Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Tayyiba terror infrastructure (including recruitment and training centres), as the veil of Kashmir is again wide open. This ongoing skirmish has continued for decades, with Pakistan even becoming a safe-haven for Bin Laden's Al-Qaeda network and foot soldiers. Foreign terrorist organisations fuel the asymmetrical war by raising funds through money transmitters who are inspired by ISIS or domestic violent extremist groups who may be indoctrinated to violence through the internet.

War is an expensive and

dirty affair which is better to be served cold, not forgetting the economic implications for both sides. The India Today article dated Jun 30, 1990 (A 1,000-hour war with Pakistan will cost India Rs 27,000 crore) by Shekhar Gupta and Ravi Rikhye, is a demonstration of the economic cost of war.

To bring tensions between India and Pakistan under control requires a mutual willingness to seek peace which could happen if there is room for intermediaries or emissaries opening up back channels. Managing diplomacy between India, Pakistan and the United States is like walking on a tightrope.

While Russia and China are steamrolling with their aim to change the global order, averting war in South Asia is in more dire need than ever through deterrence, safeguarding nuclear weapons, international agreements, securing cyberspace and sanctions.

Former CIA officer and senior advisor on South Asia and Middle East Bruce Riedel's book, 'Avoiding Armageddon: America, India and Pakistan to the Brink and Back' delves into the historical perspectives of two important countries and efforts to balance the state of affairs in the subcontinent.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathphoh,
Shillong-10

Need to build empathy among youth

Editor,
India struck back to avenge the Pahalgam attack that saw the gruesome

coldblooded murder of 26 innocent lives. India indeed exercised its right as a response to the Pahalgam attack. The attack was an act of terror and the deeds of devils incarnate. Lives lost can never be replaced and family members of those who saw their loved ones killed before their eyes will never forget and forgive. Today when India struck back, there was a sense of gratification that our country did what it had to do.

However, what lurks in one's mind is fear of the present and the future. What is the world turning out to be? Yes, there had been battles and wars in the past that saw the loss of lives but perhaps no lessons learnt. With every passing day, human beings are displaying their lack of empathy and fellow feelings. Every single day we fight one another, uprooting the sanctity of brotherhood and camaraderie. Every single day we defy our birth and existence, destroying lives unabashedly. In a way we are daily fighting wars that will only ruin this beautiful world. What is the way out of all the destruction and killings? Sowing seeds of love and friendship in young minds and hearts while we elders are to lead by examples. Perhaps then we will share more love and less hatred. Can we? We sure can if our children are to have a safe and secure world.

Yours etc.,
Jemieffer Dkhar,
Via email

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"Use plants to bring life."

— Douglas Wilson

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SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MAY 10, 2025

CUET: Good Intent, Shoddy Application

THE introduction of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) in 2022 might have been well intended but its application is haphazard and does not take into consideration the difficulties that students from small towns and rural habitats face to travel outside the state to write the Test. Now writing an entrance test is fine if such tests are held in locations within the candidate's state. But for students to have to travel to other states involves needless expenditure which pinches the pockets of those who scrimp and scrounge just to support their children's education up to the time they pass their higher secondary levels. Now to have to spend money not only to travel outside the state but also for accommodation and other expenses for at least three days is a huge burden that many parents can ill afford. For many who have never stepped out of the state, having to sit for an examination in an alien environment is traumatic enough. It can be assumed that they might not be able to do well in the CUET due to the unfamiliar surroundings.

CUET is a case of good intent but faulty application. The test is conducted by India's National Testing Agency (NTA) and is meant to help students get admission to courses in 45 central universities, including for doctorate, undergraduate, postgraduate, integrated postgraduate, certification courses, diploma, and research programs. In addition, many central universities and state universities in India accept CUET scores for admission. Earlier, the admission process for undergraduate and postgraduate programs varied across central universities in India with each university conducting its own entrance test. It was to streamline this process and ensure consistency that the Ministry of Education introduced the CUET. The main purpose for conducting the CUET is to provide a level playing field and equal opportunity to each student and to end the subjective bias inherent in entrance tests conducted by individual universities.

The CUET provides students with a clear understanding of their rank, allowing them to assess their position in the admission process. Hence it is a transparent process. It also eliminates the competition based on cut-off marks and allows for a more equitable admission system. As a result of CUET, central universities are able to take in students from a broader pool of candidates and to get the most deserving students for their courses. To that extent CUET cannot be faulted. It is the faulty implementation that is to be addressed. State governments have to have some say in the matter and impress upon the Ministry of Education that the CUET be held in each state for students of that state but under strict supervision in the same manner that other examinations are also held and supervised. Last year the CUET was conducted in North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) and turned out to be a disaster. The reason was that there was not enough preparation time and the faculty were not involved in the process. Students coming from distant villages left without writing the test as they had to wait interminably to be called to the respective examination hall. This is patently unfair and needs to be urgently addressed.

Khasi-Garo should be made compulsory till the 10th Grade

By Emidao Shylla

Introducing Khasi and Garo languages as compulsory subjects in school is a great initiative. Humans convey meaning, knowledge, social identity and culture through language which is the primary medium — (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2018). For decades, it has been recorded that most students from the Khasi and Garo communities do not take Khasi and Garo as a subject in schools and would rather opt for Additional English. This is due to many reasons. Firstly they find their language very descriptive and tough and secondly these subjects are introduced rather late in schools. Literature is the expression of human thought, feelings, and experiences through the medium of written and spoken words, often distinguished by their artistic value and capacity to reflect the culture, history, and identity of a people. — (Abrams & Harpham, 2015). Literatures have always been vast, descriptive and tough but consistency in learning and a strong foundation make the subject attractive.

From a personal perspective, I attended a school that didn't have Khasi as a subject in the elementary or Lower Primary Section and there are many such schools in Meghalaya. Reflecting on my school days, I had Hindi as a compulsory subject till Class VIII, and never learnt Khasi. We were introduced to the Khasi subject much later in Class VII and were then taught the basics of the language; the letters of the Khasi Alphabet. On the other hand, I was an inquisitive young lad who read the Khasi newspapers at a very young age and hence I do know bits and pieces of the language. Credit for this goes to U Nongsain Hima, U Mawphor and Kynjatshai. Part of the problem is that students are often not exposed to their mother language at the elementary or Lower Primary sections.

Ideally making Khasi and Garo languages compulsory in school is necessary considering that children need to learn their mother language before they learn other languages. In Punjab for instance, Punjabi is taught as a compulsory subject from Class I to Class X, some schools that I know and personally witnessed taught the language right from Upper KG. The subject is made compulsory for both Punjabi speaking students and others. The Pun-

jab Learning of Punjabi and Other Languages Act 2008 was enacted to make Punjabi a compulsory subject in all schools across the state whether government, private or those affiliated with other boards. The Act states that Punjabi is a mandatory subject that all schools must follow regardless of the medium of instructions or board affiliation.

Remarkably, it also mentions that schools which do not comply with the law would be penalised with fines ranging from Rs 25,000 to Rs 2,00,00 based on the number of offences committed. Fundamentally, the act aims to promote Punjabi language and culture. On the other hand, the Punjabi Learning of Punjabi and Other Languages, (Amendment) Bill 2021 recommends that Hindi must be taught as a compulsory subject from Classes III to VIII, while Punjabi as a compulsory subject from Classes I to X.

Children at a very tender age can learn as many languages as possible, depending on the environment and society they are raised in (Bialystok, E. 2001). Narratives of the past have shown that teaching students' more than one language creates confusion, however research studies have different interpretations altogether. In a study published in 2010, psychologist Esther Adijapha and her colleagues at Bar-Ilan University in Israel found that four- to five-year-old bilingual children showed more creativity than did their monolingual peers when asked to draw a fantastical house or flower. The monolingual children tended to draw flowers with missing petals or leaves, whereas the bilingual children drew imaginary hybrids, such as a "kite-flower" and a "robot-house," indicating a superior ability to grasp abstract concepts. Hence learning another language does not confuse children, rather it enhances their cognitive abilities, improves communication skills and fosters a deeper appreciation for diverse cultures.

While implementing the Khasi and Garo languages as compulsory subjects for students of other communities may not be viable, it will benefit society at large in one way or the other. Meghalaya has no common local language with which to communicate with people

belonging to the Khasi and Garo community. It saddens me that speakers from Khasi and Garo languages would communicate with each other in English or Hindi, in a non-Hindi speaking state. The introduction of these languages as compulsory subjects up to Class X would enrich the future of linguistics in the state in the coming years.

Practical examples can be seen in government schools in remote villages of Mawkyrwat, where teachers from the city are appointed to teach students, most of whom belong to the Garo community. These teachers often struggle to do justice to their work because students only understand Garo, while the teachers can communicate only in English, Khasi, and Hindi. In some cases, teachers posted in these areas are from Shillong or the other district headquarters and they do not even know Hindi. The teachers do not know the ABC of Garo language and the students know nothing about Hindi or English. There are wide language barriers between students and teachers. Hence introduction of these languages will bring about a significant change in the education system. Learning a new language opens doors to cultural exchange, fostering empathy, appreciation, and better relationships between different communities — Kramsch, C. (1998). This will not be solely beneficial to the educational sector but a cross-cultural exchange of language and culture among the students.

As citizens of this State we ought to have questioned many things but how many of us pause to ponder and take a moment to think of an alternative picture. Questions like why are the youth of Meghalaya good in English while they have English fillers when they speak their own mother tongues? Do they speak English or do they actually speak in English? Do the youth speak in Khasi or do they speak Khasi? How many of them speak their mother tongue without adding a word or two in English in their conversations? What may be the root cause of this? Who coined the terms 'Khalish', 'Galish' or 'Jalish'? Why was there a need for these words to be coined at all? Who influences the youth or the speakers? Why is it that Khasi youth, despite being in the company of their

own community and fully able to speak their native language, often revert to English rather than in Khasi? Why is English given priority over the Khasi and Garo language among the youth population? Decades have passed and today, it is time to admit and acknowledge the problem and its root cause.

Perhaps the implementation of these two languages as compulsory subjects will right the decades of wrong inflicted on students. Additionally, it will also be an added advantage if the Government of India recognises the two languages under the Eighth Schedule. Possibly at that time we might witness dozens of students clearing the UPSC Examinations. One should remember that bright students are not only confined to cities and towns but in the remotest hamlets of the state and the country. There are bright students inhabiting the remote village of Meghalaya and they are adept at speaking and expressing themselves well in their mother tongues, while English is their secondary language. Could the language gap be the obstacle that hinders Meghalaya from producing IAS, IPS, and IFS officers? Now it's time to bridge that gap. The enactment of the Khasi and Garo languages as compulsory subjects will help Meghalaya in the long run.

The youth residing in cities and towns have an unfair advantage in that they can express themselves fluently in English, since they are exposed to the language at a tender age or at the start of their lives. Similarly, youth dwelling in villages can express well in their mother tongue simply because their mother tongue takes precedence over other languages.

To sum up, it will be interesting to know the number of students from among the ST candidates from the city and smaller towns of Meghalaya who have cleared the SSLC examination 2025, opting for MIL (Khasi/Garo) over Additional English. Without taking the pain of doing research, I can hypothetically mention that the percentage of students opting for Additional English will be more than those who opted for MIL (Khasi/Garo). (This hypothesis is based on the observations highlighted in the content above).

These observations have disturbed me for a very long time and it's about time that it is shared with readers here for their consideration.

Reducing Import Dependence and Strengthening Domestic Manufacturing

By Mmholumo Kikon

India's industrial strategy is undergoing a significant transformation in response to global geopolitical shifts and supply chain realignments. The government's renewed focus is on self-reliance (Atmanirbhar Bharat), technological innovation, and strategic global partnerships. Insights from a conversation that I had with Shri Amardeep Singh Bhatia, IAS, Secretary of the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), highlight how India is steering its industrial ecosystem towards resilience, inclusivity, and global competitiveness. And in the light of the increasing reliance on technology, as evidenced from the war in Ukraine and elsewhere, it is necessary to revisit the strides that India has made in this important sector. The following are the salient points discussed with him before the onset of the present conflict.

India's reliance on imports for key components such as lithium-ion batteries, industrial machinery, and raw materials, particularly from China—poses both strategic and economic risks. The government's approach is holistic, stimulating both demand and supply to build a robust domestic industrial base. The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme, with a total outlay of Rs 1.97 lakh crore, is a cornerstone policy designed to boost domestic manufacturing and reduce import dependence in sectors like solar PV modules, advanced chemistry cell (ACC) batteries, and telecom equipment.

Quality Control Orders (QCOs) have been effective in curbing the import of substandard products. For example, in the toy sector, imports dropped by 52% and exports rose by 239% from FY 2014-15 to FY 2022-23. This model is being extended to high-priority sectors such as electric vehicles (EVs) and renewable energy, with initiatives like the PM Surya Ghar Muft Bijlee Yojana aimed at driving both demand and supply chain resilience.

Support for MSMEs and startups is being provided through the Raising and Accelerating MSME Performance (RAMP) scheme, which focuses on innovation, sustainability, and market access. Over four lakh MSMEs have benefited from this initiative. Additionally, the government is promoting R&D in alternate battery chemistries, such as sodium-ion, under missions like MAHA-EV, launched by the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF). The MAHA-EV mission, in particular, is driving research in tropical EV batteries, power electronics, and charging infrastructure, positioning India as a future leader in electric mobility solutions.

Catalyzing India's EV Ecosystem
Reducing oil imports and advancing clean mobility are central to India's climate and industrial policies. Since COP26, the government has expanded EV infrastructure, committed to achieving 500 GW of non-fossil energy capacity by 2030, and set a net-zero target for 2070.

Schemes such as FAME-II and the National Electric Mobility Mission Plan (NEMMP) 2020 have provided upfront incentives for EV buyers. The recently launched PM E-DRIVE scheme, with an outlay of Rs 10,900 crore, aims to further boost EV purchases and expand charging infrastructure until March 2026. The EV sector is projected to grow at a 45.5% CAGR between 2022 and 2030, creating a fertile environment for domestic manufacturing of EV components and battery systems.

The government is also leading by example, with officials—including Shri Bhatia—adopting EVs in their own operations. This comprehensive approach,

from demand incentives to supply chain development, is designed to make India a global leader in EV manufacturing.

Strategic International Collaborations in Emerging Technologies

While self-reliance is a priority, strategic international collaborations are essential, especially in advanced and emerging technologies. Through initiatives like the U.S.-India Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET), India is partnering with global leaders in semiconductors, quantum computing, AI, and biotechnology.

The Quad framework has further strengthened these collaborations, with projects such as the Indo-Pacific Logistics Network and the AI-ENGAGE initiative for agricultural innovation. A joint fund exceeding USD 7.5 million has been allocated for collaborative research. India's G20 presidency also emphasized technology-driven inclusive growth and the development of digital public infrastructure.

These efforts demonstrate India's commitment to co-developing cutting-edge solutions with global partners, ensuring that domestic innovation benefits from shared expertise and research synergies.

Strengthening Global Trade through Lines of Credit

To promote industrial growth and exports, India has actively utilized concessional Lines of Credit (LOCs) to enhance trade ties and infrastructure development in partner countries. Under the Indian Development and Economic Assistance Scheme (IDEAS), over 300 LOCs worth USD 32 billion have been extended to 68 countries, supporting India's "Neighbourhood First" and "Global South" strategies. These LOCs facilitate diplomatic goodwill, mutual economic benefit, and market access for Indian businesses, particularly in sectors like railways, IT, and agriculture.

Bolstering Intellectual Property for Innovation Security

A robust intellectual property (IP) regime is vital for safeguarding innovation. India has made significant progress through policies supporting startups, fee reductions, and expedited patent examination. The National Intellectual Property Awareness Mission (NIPAM) has reached over two million students, and the IP Mitra scheme provides expert guidance for startups.

The introduction of a regional-language adaptation of the WIPO IP Diagnostics Tool has streamlined the IP filing process. Patent grants in India have increased from 5,978 in 2014-15 to over 103,000 in 2023-24, and startup patent filings have risen more than tenfold since 2016-17. However, enforcement in cyberspace, pharmaceuticals, and economic offenses remains an ongoing challenge, though the government is actively working to strengthen these areas.

Conclusion

India's industrial and innovation policy is multi-dimensional, aiming to reduce strategic dependencies, enhance domestic capabilities, embrace global technologies, and build a resilient ecosystem for startups and MSMEs. As highlighted by Amardeep Singh Bhatia, India's path forward is one of confident self-reliance, underpinned by strategic global partnerships and robust domestic capacity-building. The pursuit of technological sovereignty, sustainable growth, and export competitiveness marks a pivotal shift in India's industrial journey—balancing ambition with pragmatism.

(The writer is Fellow, India Technology Policy, Pacific Forum)

Letters to the Editor

Struggles of Meghalaya's students: A system in crisis

Editor,
How can we expect students to compete nationally when we haven't even given them the means to show up?

The educational infrastructure in Meghalaya is failing its students, and the consequences are dire. Students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are being forced to travel hundreds of kilometres to appear for crucial exams such as the CUET due to the lack of local testing centres. This travel imposes both a financial and emotional burden, especially when students are required to stay in unfamiliar places for extended periods. In some cases, students are opting not to appear for the exams at all due to these overwhelming circumstances, while others are pushed to their limits, battling exhaustion and stress.

This situation mirrors the systemic neglect faced last year by students who went to North Eastern Hill University (NEHU), who also struggled with inadequate resources and logistical challenges. Despite such previous failures, the administration has not learned from its mistakes and has left students strugg-

gling once again.

But it's not just about travel and infrastructure. The curriculum discrepancy between MBoSE books and NCERT for students pursuing political science is another glaring issue. Arts students, who study from MBoSE textbooks, find themselves at a disadvantage as their material doesn't align with the NCERT syllabus followed by students from CBSE schools. As a result, students are forced to juggle multiple sources of information, increasing their risk of burnout and under-performance.

For students who dream of studying in prestigious institutions, these compounded issues make it even harder for them to succeed. While students in science and other mainstream subjects seem to fare better with a more standardised curriculum, arts students are left to navigate a broken system, a system that demotivates rather than supports, causing many to reconsider or even abandon their aspirations.

If Meghalaya's educational authorities are serious about improving student outcomes and reducing dropout rates, they must address these issues. It is time for the government to prioritise infrastructure, educational resources, and equal opportunities for all students, ensuring that every learner, regardless of background, has a fair chance to suc-

ceed.

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein &
Josephine Bareh,
Via email

Conrad K Sangma – A Chief Minister who stands with the people

Editor,
In today's political climate, it's not often that you come across a leader who truly connects with the people. But Meghalaya's Chief Minister, Conrad K Sangma, has built a genuine bond with the public—one that goes well beyond the usual boundaries of politics. Warm, approachable, and down-to-earth, he's rightly earned the title of a People's CM.

One of the key ways he keeps in touch with citizens is through the CM Connect initiative. It's more than just a government programme—it's a way for the Chief Minister to directly engage with people from all walks of life, hear their concerns first-hand, and act on them. Rather than staying confined to government offices, Conrad K Sangma makes it a point to travel to even the most far-flung villages, bringing governance closer to the ground and making it feel more human and accessible.

What really sets him apart, though, is that his connection with people isn't limited to official meetings or speeches. He's often seen joining in with the everyday lives of locals. A recent and memorable example was when he played a friendly match of cricket with the youth in Rengmalgre village, a village in Garo Hills and in Upper Shillong. It wasn't just about the game—it was a moment that showed his genuine interest in the youth and his belief in building trust and confidence with the next generation.

Another heartfelt moment came during a visit to Syntung, a scenic village nestled in the East Khasi Hills. There, he was welcomed by a group of local musicians performing. Rather than just watching, he joined them in a jam session—a spontaneous and sincere gesture that left a mark on those present. Deeply moved by their talent, he immediately announced financial support to help them grow their musical journey. It was a touching example of how he values local culture and is quick to offer real support to grassroots talent.

Having a Chief Minister so hands-on and personally involved with people's lives is both refreshing and encouraging. Conrad K Sangma shows us that leadership isn't just about policies and plans—it's about being present, listening closely, and

showing care in real, visible ways. Whether through CM Connect, picking up a cricket bat with local youth, or supporting village musicians on the spot, he brings a heartfelt touch to governance.

Meghalaya is truly fortunate to have a leader who doesn't just lead from the front, but walks side by side with the people.

Yours etc;
Rishanlang Khongwir,
Via email

Pope Leo XIV's election a miracle of sorts

Editor
The impossible has happened. The Vatican has broken its reticence with respect to the US and elected the first ever American Pope -- the second from the Americas. Based on the status of the US as a global superpower, this reticence is justified. Given the might a superpower already possesses, it is perhaps too worldly to produce a pontiff. Yet, more than any other nation, a superpower -- even one like the US, with its system of checks and balances -- stands in need of spiritual guidance and vigilance. So, why did the conclave break with tradition and vote for a US pope -- the first ever? Perhaps to deter the abominable four now ruling this nation -- Trump, Vance, Homan, and Musk.

Indeed, Pope Leo, the XIV, may be the only person on earth, capable of correcting, reining in, scolding, and guiding the abominable four. A quiet reserved man -- modest, humble and self-controlled -- Pope Leo appears like the very antithesis of Donald Trump. Unlike politicians, popes are supposed to draw their earthly power -- not from money, or votes -- but from God. As chief vicars of God, they are supposed to guide human affairs, at a human (not a mystical) level. Yet the more saintly of popes also possess the metaphysical and mystical power to bless human affairs. I fervently believe that it was Pope Francis' blessing that caused Trump to meet with Zelenski in St. Peter's Basilica before his funeral.

Pope Leo has been described as a centrist. Like Pope Francis, he is perhaps a humanitarian who transcends Left and Right. One thing is clear. He seems to possess the moral authority (which no college credentials can give us) to take Trump and his minions to task.

Surely this choice of pope was divine dispensation and a miracle!
Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

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

People hope new Pope will protect Amazon rain forest

The bishop sat quietly near the front row, hands folded, listening as Indigenous leaders and church workers spoke about the threats to Peru's northern forests, a part of the Amazon rain forest. It was 2016, a year after Laudato Si, Pope Francis' encyclical on the environment.

When he was up to speak, the bishop didn't preach though he was in his city of Chiclayo as host of a regional gathering. Instead, he reflected on things he had seen.

"It's a very important encyclical," he said. "It also represents something new in terms of this explicit expression of the church's concern for all of creation." That bishop, Robert Prevost, is now Pope Leo XIV.

"He was always very welcoming, very close to the people," Laura Vargas, secretary of the Interreligious Council of Peru, who helped organize the event, recalled in a phone interview with The Associated Press.

"He had no problem saying yes when we proposed it - he was genuinely interested in social pastoral work." Since then, Prevost deepened his ties with interfaith environmental networks like the Interfaith Rainforest Initiative and Indigenous organizations such as AIDSESP, which place forest protection and rights at the center of Church concern.

Such credentials have brought hope to clergymen and faithful in the Amazon region, a vast area with 48 million residents and 6.7 million square kilometers (2.6 million square miles) in South America. They see Chicago-born Prevost, who spent about two decades in Peru's countryside, as a pontiff who protect the region and fight against climate change.

NAVIGATING THE AMAZON

Many Catholics have said they believe Prevost's experience as bishop of Chiclayo, a city of 630,000 residents in Northern Peru and not too far from the Amazon, was one of the key reasons he was chosen. They also said the pontiff's hands-on experience in an impoverished area far from major cities could also serve him well in dealing with the Amazon and navigating its challenges.

The Amazon is a key regulator of the climate, as its dense forests absorb carbon dioxide, a greenhouse gas that when released into the atmosphere heats the planet. But many parts of the Amazon are under threat from a wide range of illegal activities: farmers clearing trees to raise cows, gold miners dredging rivers and destroying local ecosystems and land-grabbers seizing territories. Wildfires and droughts, exacerbated by climate change, have also hit Amazon communities hard in recent years.

Prevost is well acquainted with these issues,

having presided over the Pontifical Commission for Latin America, which helped him bond with colleagues of the nine countries touched by the Amazon. Many of them are among the 105 bishops of an organization he openly supports, the Pan-Amazonian Ecclesial Network, a Catholic Church network focused on the Amazon region.

"I spoke to him a number of times about the Amazon and the environment. He doesn't need to be convinced of its importance," said Cardinal

Steiner, Xavier and the Manaus archdiocese have invested to get the encyclical into the hands of locals, even when that means jumping on small, motorized canoes through the brown waters of the Negro River to reach isolated villages in journeys that can last days on a boat.

POPE FOR ACTION

In November 2024, the Vatican News reported that Prevost called for more action to tackle cli-

mate change and protect the environment during a seminar in Rome. He cited efforts the Vatican has taken such as installing solar panels and electric vehicles.

On the social media platform X, Prevost has reposted messages about protecting the environment. One message he reposted on April 1, 2017, expressed concern about emissions of carbon dioxide, a planet-warming gas, during President Donald Trump's his first term.

Laura Vicuña, an Indigenous woman of the Kariri people and the vice president of the Ecclesial

Conference of the Amazon Region, said in a letter published on social media that she hopes the pope will be an ally in the fight against climate change. The conference was created by Francis in 2020 to promote discussion between clergymen and laypeople.

"From our dear Amazon, we plead with you to be our ally in the defense of what is the most sacred for us; life, land and rights," Vicuña wrote.

Indigenous peoples like Vicuña's Kariri are often regarded as key protectors of the Amazon, but for many years they have been forced out of their lands by criminals, deforestation and famine, as seen in the Yanomami lands in Northern Brazil in 2023.

Spaniard Luis Ventura, the executive secretary of Brazil's Indigenous Missionary Council, said he prays for the new pope to keep his eyes close to the Amazon, with a special attention to the Indigenous. Founded in 1972, the council had rare occasions to meet with pontiffs until Francis rose in 2013. Its members hope Leo doesn't change that.

"Leo XIV will have a big impact on the Amazon," said Ventura. "His life was always with the people in Peru, and that allows us to think the church will be deep into the territory."

CLIMATE URGENCY

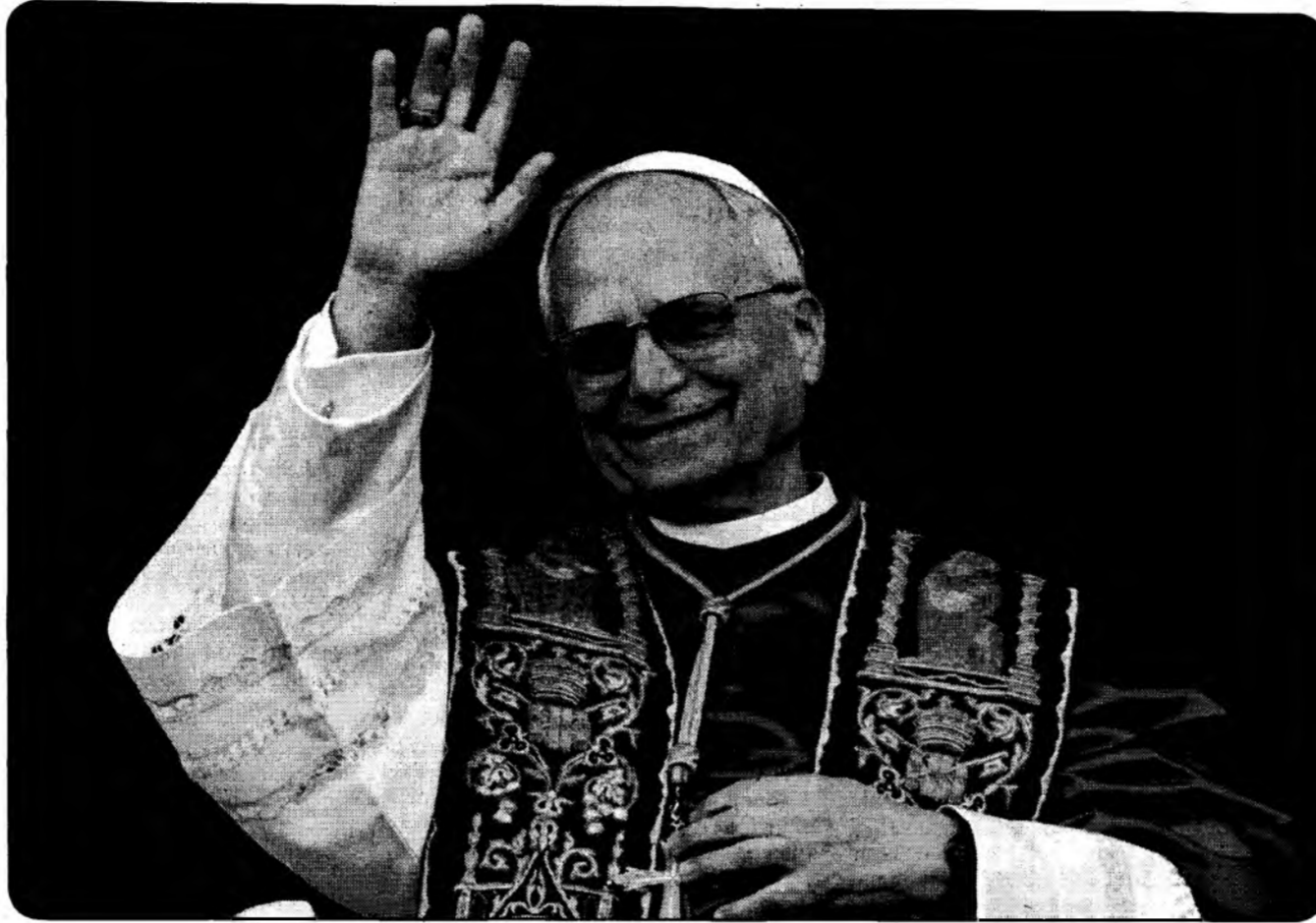
Francis showed great interest in the Amazon during his pontificate. Four years after Laudato Si, he hosted the Amazon Synod, which sought "new Paths for the Church and for an integral ecology." Rose Bertoldo, one of the secretaries of the Manaus archdiocese, said she is hopeful for the region's future under Leo, given it would build on Francis' interest. She added the new pontiff will have a chance to visit Brazil, the nation with the most Catholics in the world, during this year's U.N. climate summit, known as COP30, in the Amazonian city of Belem in November.

"We know that the urgencies and the challenges in the Amazon will be bigger because of the global political context of division. We need him at COP," Bertoldo said.

Irish priest Peter Hughes, who spent most of his life in Peru, met Prevost shortly after he arrived in the Andean nation in 1985. They quickly became friends, and would see each other when the bishop of Chiclayo was in the capital Lima.

"Back then, (Prevost) was worried about extractivism in the Amazon and the effect it had on the poor," said Hughes, referring to the new pontiff. "Now it is a much more complex world, the urgency is evident."

(The Associated Press)



Pedro Barreto, the president of the network, who has known Prevost since he became the bishop of Chiclayo in 2015.

Brazilian Friar Paulo Xavier agrees.

"Leo will follow Francis; we are going forward with environment protection," Xavier said. "The Holy Spirit has acted on our behalf." Xavier is based in Manaus, a city of 2 million residents in the Amazon which received its first-ever cardinal appointed by Francis in 2022: the now 74-year-old archbishop Leonardo Steiner, an enthusiast of Laudato Si.

mate change and protect the environment during a seminar in Rome. He cited efforts the Vatican has taken such as installing solar panels and electric vehicles.

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Laura Vicuña, an Indigenous woman of the Kariri people and the vice president of the Ecclesial

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 11, 2025

'Birth Day Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Venus on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. You could indulge in multiple love affairs. But will not be so lucky in love matters. You will have break ups soon. It will cause you some pain but you will quickly come out of it. A right person will come in your life all of a sudden bringing lot of joy and bliss. You will think about marriage. But take decision after a thoughtful consideration. You should invest your money after taking proper expert advice. Those who are professionals/businessmen will do well. Those who want to go abroad for higher studies will be able to do so. Finance position is good. You could buy a new property / land / commercial outlet. You will come in contact with influential persons. It will open the doors of progress for you. You will also develop religious inclinations. Your elders will keep blessings.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) The week begins on a positive note. The planetary configuration indicates that your efforts, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains and your energy increases for work projects. Your job environment is lively. Your outlook on life has been a little more serious and responsible. In the past while, you might have reached out to others in an attempt to validate yourself, looking for ways to boost your confidence. Health is likely to prosper and medical procedures or programs, if necessary, are more likely to be successful.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This week brings love, harmony and entertainment in professional and personal relations. Your physical body and mannerisms are a focus. There would be a newfound identity and a realistic understanding of your own limitations and your capabilities as well. In terms of career and projects, outward signs of progress would lay a foundation for future success and progress. Lifeless or outworn relationships may have been especially hard to bear for you. You could take up some form of physical program that completely changes the way you feel about yourself. The things that give you joy and positive feedback figure prominently and you feel renewed and regenerated.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This phase brings success in professional and personal relations. You would feel particularly strong and personally powerful. There is no such thing as playing the victim, you're the victor and you feel it. You enjoy an increased ability to concentrate and focus on what really matters to you. It would be wise to make something of your hobbies—even if it doesn't bring an income, you might find that expressing yourself creatively really helps to define yourself and to understand yourself better. Health is likely to be balanced.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This is favorable period for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. Your creative abilities are reflected in your outlook on life and love and romance are life experiences you strongly identify with. You display great skills in sports or physical activity that wins you appreciation and an opportunity to travel. Try to be just and fair when making decisions, as you do your best to see both sides of an issue. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality. You are bolder in expressing your love, yet not aggressive either. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, fashion and writing. A strong desire for companionship dominates at this time.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) The first phase of this week increases confidence and courage at work place. It's a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figure strongly. Although you like the good things of life and may spend quite a bit on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, your innate sense of security will not permit you to go overboard to the point of extravagance. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this planetary placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) An excellent week for money, career, and romance awaits you. Friends and loved ones take priority. You don't find yourself lacking in opportunities to socialize. You are likely to enjoy a strong feeling of happiness and solidarity

in friendship, or with groups of like-minded individuals. You are more peace loving than usual and slightly detached on a personal level as you feel drawn towards religion and spiritualism. This is a good time for research and meditation; but do avoid being dragged down by issues that have outgrown their worth and purpose. Examining the past in order to improve the future is certainly worthwhile, as long as you don't waste your energy.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) The planetary configuration brings success, responsibility and maturity. You have much energy for new moneymaking projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role to the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. Relationships take on a fun outlook and activities with children increase. You possess extra charm in your professional interactions. A new affair is in the offing for the unattached. More opportunities to socialize and network could present themselves now.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) This period is good for money, family, status and happiness. Money matters come into focus for you. You adopt a serious approach to business because you are in the spotlight. The desire for some form of recognition and financial success is apparent. Being part of a community or circle of friends and building your social network is important to you at this time. Your love life is more attractive and charming. Public relations work, marketing, promotional activities and other such endeavors are favored now. You may face some minor ailments on the health front.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public contact. You feel drawn to intellectuals with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others and you do so in a natural and warm manner. Recognition is likely to come your way whether you ask for it or not along with the responsibility that comes right along with it. Do what you feel is right, keeping in mind that you are in the limelight during this phase.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) This is an excellent time to create a budget or financial plan, or to rid yourself of old habits that undermine your sense of personal power and self-mastery. Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy. If single, you are more than willing to enter into a committed relationship. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to your affections. Foreign places may particularly appeal now. You tend to be expansive and generous when it comes to love. Dealing with one situation at a time releases some tension and anxiety.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering at this time. On a more practical level, you may be dealing with joint finances and shared resources. Social life takes priority in your life. You would become serious about family relations and feel responsible towards them. Social interactions of a personal, one-on-one kind are emphasized. Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are likely to occur. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. Taking care of business is your main focus. A health routine started now is likely to be successful.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This is a generous, pleasantly emotional, and creative phase. Striking a balance between your attention to your career and to your family life is necessary. Taking steps to improve your family and home life as well as your career and public life will be in order. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. However, bending too much to the will of another is not advised either.

Insect trafficking poses risk to wildlife, human health

Four men were recently arrested and fined for attempting to smuggle more than 5,000 ants out of Kenya. Aiming to sell them as part of the exotic pet trade, these ants were being stored in individual test tubes and syringes with small amounts of cotton wool for transportation. This unusual case highlights an important yet overlooked aspect of wildlife trafficking.

Wildlife trafficking is a crime against nature which occurs mainly because of consumer demand. Trafficking refers to the illegal smuggling and continued exploitation of wild animals, plants or timber. That includes, as in this case, insects.

Much conservation effort, reporting, study and enforcement activity focuses on recognised species such as rhinos. Wildlife trafficking is often associated more with these charismatic species and products made from them such as elephant tusks and rhino horn.

But wildlife trafficking includes a whole spectrum of illicit animal trade from poaching and smuggling to the distribution of protected and endangered species. There is also thriving illegal trade in insects.

For avid collectors, trophies and the exotic pet trade a wide array of insects have been seized over the years including rhino beetles into Japan, praying mantis eggs into the US and butterflies out of Sri Lanka.

Globally, insect species are declining. This is caused by an array of threats such as pollution, pesticides, climate change and urbanisation. Although the extent of the harm being caused by trafficking is unknown, this adds further pressure to species that already face extinction.

Protections for insects vary. The conservation status of each ant species affects their level of protection both nationally and internationally.

Ants that are on the red list - which is the largest classification of endangered species produced by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) - and classed as critically endangered or endangered cannot be captured, killed or disturbed in any manner. An example is the anathema ant, which is currently listed as an endangered species.

International law puts controls on wildlife that may be threatened by trade. Some ants are protected under UK law which makes it an offence to disturb or destroy the nests of species like the red

wood ant. This case shows how wildlife trafficking extends to areas such as the smuggling of, and illegal trade, in ants. Some organised crime groups have moved from smuggling drugs and weapons to trafficking in plants, medicinal compounds and animals - including insects. Organised crime can include smaller and partially disorganised groups and networks. Where there is money to be made smuggling, networks will target wildlife.

The scale of the insect smuggling problem is unknown. Many cases will go unreported due to the clandestine nature of the trade. As such, both law enforcement and the wider public might not know or care about this being an offence.

Although there have been some insect trade seizures, law enforcement agencies are often underresourced and may view wildlife crimes as a low priority in comparison to other areas of criminality, such as drugs.

Often, insects are easily concealed. For example, 37 rhino beetles were discovered at Los Angeles International airport hidden within sweet and crisp packets.

Even once insects are seized, it can be difficult to identify the species to find out whether they are protected, given so many different levels of protections for species internationally.

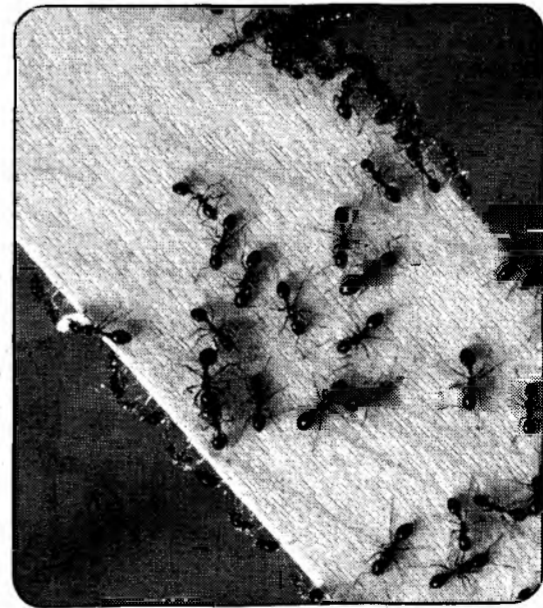
Invasive species risk

Insect trafficking could introduce non-native species to new places. If they establish a breeding population and pose a threat to local ecosystems, they can become known as "invasive species". Invasive species can outcompete native species for food. Some destroy habitats. Others have the potential to bring new diseases to a country.

Not only can invasive insects pose threats to the environment such as the ongoing issue of invasive Asian hornets within Europe, but also affect people. Hawaii spends US\$10 million (£7.5 million) on invasive species control measures - US\$2.4 million of that is set aside just for coconut rhinoceros beetles.

Although predicting which species and when they may become invasive is a challenge, insect trafficking can cause serious consequences. Under-valuing some species protections provides avenues for traffickers, so enforcing trafficking laws for all wildlife, including insects, is crucial.

(The Conversation)



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"Respect for ourselves guides our morals, respect for others guides our manners."
—Laurence Sterne

The Shillong Times

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Confusion confounded

IT came like a tornado – and ended in a whimper. Indians remain totally confused as to how a “ceasefire” was effected abruptly after raising passions to a high pitch. More importantly, the people are more confused as to how a “ceasefire” was announced by US President Donald Trump from the comfort of his home and on his Twitter handle. The confusion on multiple fronts is compounded by the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi avoided addressing the nation. It’s up to the government to take a decision whether to continue an offensive or not, based on the ground realities and evolving situations. An unsubstantiated claim now is that the US received “alarming intelligence” from its sources. This perceived N-threat, at this hour, could simply be “fodder” for the over-excited Indian channels to give some solace to their highly disappointed viewers.

Salute to India’s armed forces for their high sense of precision, the admirable courage and the high action they performed on all fronts, thanks also to high military preparedness India has achieved through decades of sustained efforts. While stating this unambiguously, it must also be stressed that some goof-up has occurred at the political level, due to which Pakistan has obviously not learned a lesson yet. The denouement must have come about in a more calculated fashion. Instead, consider the manner in which Prime Minister Shahbaz Sharif rubbished “enemy” India, praised the Pakistan military brass and its chief of staff Syed Asim Munir repeatedly, as also the US and other allies to have effected a ceasefire. Without doubt, Sharif had remained jittery all through the present military engagement, which affirmatively proved that his country was no match to India when it came to a direct confrontation. Yet, he showed the gumption now to claim the Pakistani forces gave India a fitting reply.

India left the stage half way through the engagement – and in an unacceptable manner. The military engagement was all about Kashmir. India’s long-held policy is no third party would be involved in discussions on Kashmir. Now, the Modi establishment effectively turned this policy upside down and allowed direct US involvement. India will in future pay a heavy price for this. Worse, as geo-strategist Brahma Chellaney stated, we “seized defeat from the jaws of victory” and India’s political leadership has not “learned lessons from history.” The perfection of India’s indigenous military technology that was proven in this military engagement, including the role of the Brahmos missiles in the decimation of key targets in Pakistan, must be hailed. It’s important that the political leadership must match its will with the huge advancements that this nation has made in defence preparedness and in their effective, timely use. It should not go unnoticed, also, that the rebels in Balochistan who took some decisive steps at the back of India’s military offensive against Pakistan are perhaps left high and dry. Who ultimately gained is open for a detailed analysis.

Meghalaya should chip in to India’s Silicon story

By K N Kumar

The winds of change are sweeping across Northeast India, and at the heart of this transformation is a bold move by the Tata Group: a ₹27,000 crore semi-conductor manufacturing facility taking shape in Jagiroad, Assam. This isn’t just the region’s largest private sector investment ever – it’s a signal to the nation and the world that the Northeast is ready to be a player in India’s high-tech future. For neighbouring Meghalaya, this development is both a wake-up call and a golden opportunity, one that could forever alter the state’s economic and social landscape.

To appreciate the magnitude of what’s happening, let’s first talk about why semiconductors matter so much. These tiny chips are the unsung heroes of our digital age. They power everything from the smartphones in our pockets to the cars we drive, the medical equipment that saves lives, and the computers that run our businesses. India, despite its prowess in software and IT, has long relied on importing these essential components. That reliance has been a vulnerability that became painfully clear when global supply chains faltered during the pandemic and geopolitical tensions. Suddenly, factories making cars, phones, and appliances faced crippling shortages. It was a wake-up call: India needs to make its own chips, not just for economic growth, but for national security and technological independence.

Now, with the country’s semiconductor market expected to double to a staggering \$108 billion by 2030, the stakes are higher than ever. If India can meet even part of this demand at home, it means billions saved on imports, thousands of high-value jobs, and a seat at the global technology table. That’s why Tata’s move into Assam is such a game-changer, not just for the company, but for the entire region. Imagine the ripple effects. The new facility is expected to create more than 25,000

jobs, both directly and indirectly. And these aren’t just positions for engineers and techies. There will be opportunities for support staff, logistics workers, administrative teams, and a whole ecosystem of allied industries. Local businesses – from transporters to hotels and restaurants – stand to benefit from the activity. Suppliers and ancillary industries will be drawn, creating a cluster effect that could turn the state into a bona-fide electronics hub. And with all this activity comes better roads, more reliable power, improved water management, and a boost to connectivity – improvements that will lift up communities far beyond the factory gates.

But perhaps the most exciting change is what this means for the region’s youth. For decades, talented young people from the Northeast have felt compelled to leave home in search of better opportunities. Now, with world-class jobs and cutting-edge technology arriving at their doorstep, many may choose to stay and help drive their home states forward.

For Meghalaya, the message is clear: the time to act is now. The Tata investment in Assam is both an inspiration and a challenge. Meghalaya has a chance to ride this wave of technological progress, but it will require vision, planning, and swift action. The first step is to articulate a clear, forward-looking semiconductor policy that aligns with the national Semicon India programme. The state needs to identify and reserve land for high-tech industrial parks, making sure these sites have reliable power, water, and easy access for workers and materials.

But it’s not just about infrastructure. The real key is people. Meghalaya’s technical institutes should start offering specialized courses in chip design, electronics manufacturing, and the crucial processes of assembly, testing, marking, and packaging. Imagine students in

Shillong or Tura learning the skills that global tech companies are desperate for, right in their backyard. Partnerships with industry can provide internships, hands-on training, and exposure to the latest technologies, ensuring that Meghalaya’s youth are ready for the jobs of tomorrow. On my part, I can tie up with semi-conductor industries based out of Hyderabad, a major technology hub for the semi-conductor industry as of now. Why not create a task force with officials from industry, academia, and government? Why can’t we launch a Meghalaya Semi-conductor Mission?

Of course, attracting big investments means making it easy for companies to do business. Meghalaya should roll out the red carpet: capital subsidies, tax breaks, and a fast-track clearance system that cuts through red tape. The state has unique strengths – its cost-effectiveness, improving connectivity, large numbers of English-speaking youth, and a key resource base for development. By marketing these advantages at investor summits and tech expos, Meghalaya can put itself on the map for semi-conductor firms looking for their next big opportunity.

But even the best plans can be derailed by bureaucracy. (A bit of self-flagellation is okay, once in a while.) That’s why the government needs to set up a single-window clearance system for semi-conductor projects, supported by a dedicated team. This task force can monitor progress, solve problems as they arise, and make sure projects stay on track. Public-private partnerships will be crucial for building training centres, research labs, and the physical infrastructure needed to support a high-tech industry.

So, what does a winning blueprint look like for Meghalaya? (1) It starts with a strong policy and a clear vision. (2) Next comes investing in education and training

to build a workforce that’s ready for the semiconductor revolution. (3) The state should identify and prepare industrial sites with reliable utilities, then (4) actively court investors by showcasing its strengths, and (5) encourage local businesses, especially micro, small, and medium enterprises that become suppliers for semiconductor units. And by emphasizing sustainability, such as using green energy in new industrial clusters, Meghalaya can position itself as a modern, environmentally friendly destination for tech investment.

Collaboration will be key. By partnering with Assam and other Northeastern states, Meghalaya can help create a regional semi-conductor corridor, sharing resources, expertise, and best practices. The state doesn’t need to jump straight into full-scale chip fabrication, which is capital-intensive and complex. Instead, it can focus on niche areas like assembly, testing, and chip design segments that are easier to enter and still offer huge opportunities for growth. And by tapping into central government schemes like the ₹76,000 crore Semicon India programme, Meghalaya can access the funding and technical support it needs to get started.

The Tata semi-conductor facility in Assam is more than just a factory – it’s a symbol of what’s possible when vision, investment, and determination come together. For Meghalaya, this is a moment to dream big and act boldly. The journey won’t be easy. It will take leadership, smart policies, and the collective effort of government, industry, educators, and communities. But the rewards – a vibrant economy, world-class jobs, and a future-proofed workforce – are well worth the effort.

Meghalaya has a unique chance to seize the moment and shape its destiny. The time to act is now, and the future is waiting to be built – one chip at a time.

(The author is former member of the LAS)

Ban cannot destroy Awami League

By Jaideep Saikia

The illegitimate regime of Md Yunus has banned the Awami League. The illegal order comes in the wake of protests by a group of foreign funded students and radical Islamists.

Indeed, it would not be unfair to state that “fair-weather” Bangladesh was shepherded into pressing a non-democratic dispensation to ban a political formation that had fought for and founded an independent country in 1971 after severing itself from a bestial Pakistan. This article terms a section of present-day Bangladesh “fair weather” because of the manner in which it is courting opportunism. It may be recalled that there was no hesitation whatsoever in the hearts and minds of the people of Bangladesh when the International Crimes Tribunal formed in 2009 to investigate and prosecute individuals suspected of war crimes committed during the Bangladesh Liberation War of 1971 wanted revenge against the collaborators of Pakistan.

Indeed, not only were six top leaders of Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh) and one Bangladesh Nationalist Party leader handed after they were convicted by the court, but there was a clamour in Dhaka’s Shabbagh on February 5, 2013 when a convicted war criminal, Abdul Quader Mollah was given a lenient sentence of life imprisonment by the court. Later, the sentence was changed to death by hanging as a result of the huge outcry. The demonstrations also sought the government’s ban on the radical Islamist group, Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh) from participating in politics, including elections, and a boycott of institutions supporting or affiliated with the group.

Alas! today Bangladesh has taken a 180-degree turn! While it would ultimately fall on the “jury of history” to determine whether Sheikh Hasina earned the ire of a section of her people and had to flee Bangladesh because of what is being termed as her overseeing extra-judicial killings, brutal crackdown and authoritarian rule, the fact of the matter is that earlier regimes in Bangladesh – including the democratically elected Bangladesh Nationalist Party – had resorted to repression and viciousness as well. Institutional memory should recollect the 2004 Dhaka grenade attack that took place at an anti-terrorism rally organised by the Awami League in Bangabandhu Avenue on 21 August 2004. The incident left 24 dead and over 500 injured. Among the dead were Hasina’s bodyguard, Mahbubur Rahman and the Awami League’s Women’s Affairs Secretary Ivy Rahman, who succumbed to her injuries a few days later.

Therefore Bangladesh’s “Legacy of Blood” is not so cut and dried as it is being made out to be at present. Yahya Khan’s Pakistan had unleashed a reign of terror by way of Operation Searchlight on 25 March 1971. Pakistani soldiers and local pro-Pakistan militias (primarily the Razakars) massacred close to three million Bengalis and raped between two to four lakh women in an organised campaign of mass murder and genocidal carnal sadism. In any event, it is important to be clear-eyed in order to comprehend that the 10 May 2025 banning of the Awami League and prohibiting it from participating in any political activity including in cyberspace is just a rerun of earlier rancorous events in a country which Lawrence Lifschultz terms as a country of “unfinished revolution”.

It is also important to unravel that the mastermind behind the Awami League ban is from within the so-called interim government of Md. Yunus as well as his foreign handlers. The drumming up of protest marches and sloganeering was merely to showcase to a gullible world that the call for the ban had popular support in the erstwhile East Pakistan. However, in reality the demonstrators who gathered outside Md Yunus’ residence and later in Shabbagh were members of either the students who had ousted Sheikh Hasina or the ones who are currently members of the newly formed National Citizen Party and radical Islamist

organisations such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, Hifazat-e-Islami, Islami Chhatra Shibir, Inqilab Manch and kindred organisations.

The illegitimate interim cabinet headed by the Nobel peace prize laureate Md. Yunus decided to ban the Awami League’s activities under the country’s Anti-Terrorism Act. Although it is not immediately known as to under what clause of the Anti-Terrorism Act, 2009 such a ban is being imposed (it has to be state-sponsored terrorism as Sheikh Hasina was in the seat of governance), the ban would reportedly be in-situ until a special tribunal completes an investigation of the political party and its leaders over the deaths of protesters during the anti-government rebellion in July-August 2024.

One of the purported reasons that have been proffered is that the “ban” is intended to safeguard national security and sovereignty, ensure the protection of leaders and activists of the July Movement, and guarantee the safety of plaintiffs and witnesses associated with the International Crimes Tribunal. A complete mockery has been made by tending such a reason. Bangladesh of the present may continue to harbour considerable Awami League supporters and sympathisers (primarily people who are against Islamisation of the country!), but almost all Awami League leaders have either fled the country fearing persecution or have been arrested. For all intents and purposes, Bangladesh of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman has been rid of all secular Awami Leaguers. An unholy mandate rests in the hands of pro-Pakistan Islamists that are on the fast track to what the United States’ Director of National Intelligence, Tulsi Gabbard termed as an alliance with the Islamist Caliphate.

It would be of interest to note that the cabal of advisers also approved an amendment to the International Crimes (Tribunals) (ICT) Act, 1973, giving the tribunal the authority to punish political parties, their affiliated organisations, or support groups. The ICT was originally formed in March 2010 by the Awami League government to try the perpetrators of the crimes committed during the Liberation War in 1971. The manner in which the ICT – during Sheikh Hasina’s rule – tried and convicted war criminals who joined hands with Pakistani slaughterers was lauded by all right-thinking people of not only Bangladesh, but around the world. It is wondered whether 31 years old in 1971 – was witness to the pogroms committed by Tikka Khan’s executioners which included members of the Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh). Yet one of his first acts – after having assumed ill-gotten power – was to release the war criminals and lift the ban on radical outfits such as the Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh). The Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh) is an offshoot of the Jamaat-e-Islami which was founded on 26 August 1941 in Lahore. The grouping was strongly supportive of the idea of an undivided Pakistan.

The ban on the Awami League has been goaded by an obvious motivation: to momentarily halt its return. Therein lies the rationale of the ban. But the men who rule the roost in Bangladesh of the present are fully seized of the fact that the oldest party in Bangladesh could rise like the phoenix if its innards are not decimated. However, they are also aware that a political formation that was founded almost 75 years ago, on 23 June 1949, can never be removed from the essence of Bangladesh. After all, it is the party which, after having fought a war and sacrificed countless lives, gave birth to a new nation. It is not easy to erase memories of such a progenitor. Besides, the phoenix does rise from its ashes!

(Jaideep Saikia is India’s foremost strategist and best-selling author. He was also the sole Asian Fellow of West Point, USA in 2022)

Letters to the Editor

Balancing physical & intellectual merit in Police recruitment

Recently, the Police Department introduced a policy limiting recruitment to only 20 times the number of vacancies after the physical efficiency test (PET). While this initiative has its merits, a closer examination reveals that the demerits could far outweigh the merits. For the Armed Branch category, this 20-times policy might be well justified due to the nature of marks distribution and job profile. However, for the Unarmed Branch Sub Inspector (UBSI) category, it presents significant challenges.

Data from the 2022 recruitment process for UBSI shows that the selected candidates had PET scores ranging from 50 to 100 marks. This indicates that even those who scored as low as 50 in the PET UBSI can still compete in the written examination. Most selected candidates in 2022 had average PET scores of 70, 80, or 90, but performed well in the written test. However, under the current policy, candidates scoring 70 or below would not qualify for the written examination. In fact, many candidates with 80% marks in the PET would also be excluded.

If the recruitment board strictly follows the “20 times” rule, only candidates with the fastest PET timings, within the top 20 times the number of vacancies, should be allowed to proceed to the written examination. From a logical perspective, the PET carries 100 marks, while the written examination carries

300 marks. This distribution clearly prioritizes intellectual capability over physical ability. However, under the 20-times policy, thousands of physically capable candidates may not even get the opportunity to compete in the intellectual test, despite successfully completing the PET. Their ability to finish the test within the required time itself proves their physical competence.

While cost-cutting may be one reason for this policy, an important question arises: Are we willing to compromise the quality of the selection process, which could cost the system more in the long run than what it saves today? If the flaws in this policy are overlooked, it will not only impact the rights of aspirants but will also have long-term consequences on the police department and policing as a whole.

A police officer must be both physically and mentally fit; therefore, both tests should be given due weightage. If at all one test must be prioritized over the other, it should be the intellectual test. This means the written examination should be conducted first, selecting candidates at 20 times the vacancies, followed by the PET. However, the current policy contradicts itself. On one hand, it seems to value intellectual capability by providing 300 marks for it; on the other hand it allocates only 100 marks for PET. Most aspirants will be eliminated on the basis of the 100 marks PET, denying them the opportunity to compete in the 300 marks test.

In life, change is permanent. We must accept and appreciate change but such change/reforms should be implemented prudently. As

the saying goes, “Better late than never.” Hopefully, the government and the recruitment board will take the necessary steps to ensure that any reform serves the intended purposes effectively.

Yours etc.,
Nam withheld on request
Via email

Government’s new policy to boost local businesses

As someone who believes in the power of local businesses to uplift communities and drive the economy, the MDA government’s newly introduced Policy aimed at supporting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) is a promising step forward. The proposed tax relief of up to 15%, financial grants for startups, and low-interest loans could be a real game-changer for small business owners who’ve been struggling. It’s refreshing to see a policy that recognises the vital role SMEs play in the economy and offers practical support.

Stories like that of Sarah Thompson, a bakery owner who can now invest in better equipment and hire more staff, show how impactful this Policy can be. This sort of local development initiative benefits not just individuals, but entire communities. However, concerns raised by economists about sustainability and budget implications should also be taken seriously.

Responsible implementation, phased roll-outs, and regular reviews will be essential to ensure the long-term success of this Policy. I believe that if handled well, this initiative can spark in-

novation, create employment opportunities, and foster economic resilience.

I encourage all eligible business owners to explore the Government’s new online portal for access to these benefits.

Yours etc.,
Dahunika Mawthoh,
Via email

India must hit back where it hurts

Apologues of the editorial “Truth as casualty” (ST May 9, 2025) the observation, “Lies are traded generally by those who are on the defensive” is an interesting perspective. People often resort to deception or misinformation when they feel cornered, vulnerable, or when the truth might expose them to risk. In politics, conflicts, and personal interactions, individuals or groups may manipulate narratives to protect their position or shift blame. However, maintaining credibility and trust is crucial—lies tend to unravel over time, leading to greater consequences. This is exactly what Pakistan is indulging in and the evidence is an open secret as Pakistan’s Defence Minister Khawaja Asif has acknowledged that Pakistan has a history of supporting and funding terrorist groups. In a recent interview, he admitted that Pakistan had been involved in such activities for decades. Additionally, former Prime Minister Imran Khan who is now languishing in jail had previously stated that 30,000 to 40,000 terrorists who had trained and fought in Afghanistan or Kashmir were present in Pakistan. This admission aligns with longstanding concerns about

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Rise of the Military-Industrial Complex

Media channels have increasingly transformed into war rooms, showcasing comparisons of military spending, the latest weaponry acquisitions, and shaping public opinion on the battlefield of newsrooms. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued

militant groups operating within the country.

Operation Sindoore, conducted by the Indian Armed Forces, targeted nine terror sites in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). These sites were linked to groups such as Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), and Hizbul Mujahideen (HM). Additionally, sources suggest that Pakistan has a complex terror economy, with militant groups operating through illicit channels such as drug trafficking, misuse of charities and extortion. While specific numbers vary, intelligence reports indicate that terrorist training camps and recruitment centers remain active across various regions. The editorial is absolutely correct that the “Indian leadership cannot be faulted if it saw an opportunity to set matters right once and for all times to come.” And that time is now. India should hunt down these wolves and bring them to book or eradicate them from the face of the earth. Indian Armed Forces can do it and that privilege has been given by the Chief Executive of the country. The moment is NOW.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Rise of the Military-Industrial Complex

Media channels have increasingly transformed into war rooms, showcasing comparisons of military spending, the latest weaponry acquisitions, and shaping public opinion on the battlefield of newsrooms. The Ministry of Information and Broadcasting has issued

a recent advisory to content creators, urging them to avoid producing content that could harm national security, in line with Part III of the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. The interconnectedness of a globalised economy and rising competition are starting to affect citizens through international relations. As technology advances, our world feels smaller.

We are witnessing a complex interplay akin to Game Theory, illustrated by the \$5.43 billion deal S-400 missile system in comparison to China’s HQ-9 medium-to-long-range air defence missile system, developed by the China Precision Machinery Import and Export Corporation. This also includes systems like the Hammer glide bomb from the French defence firm Safran.

The question arises: How much military spending is enough? Decision-makers steering this ship often find themselves without a clear direction. According to a report from the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, global military spending surged to \$2.718 trillion in 2024, enriching numerous enterprises, including Lockheed Martin and Raytheon, with billions of dollars.

In a world captivated by arms trade, Andrew Feinstein’s, “The Shadow World”, unravels the harsh realities of a never-ending market.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathphoh,
Shillong-10

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.

“Necessity dispenseth with decorum.”

— Thomas Carlyle

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXVII No. 270 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MAY 13, 2025

Dhar versus HNLC

TRADING of charges between the outlawed Hyniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) and Deputy Chief Minister (in charge Urban Affairs, Transport etc), that the latter had been paying money to them is a serious one. Whether, the allegations have any basis can only be ascertained by an independent probe. The MDA Government should not be waiting for the Opposition parties to demand that probe. We live in uncertain time and post the Pahalgam massacre of 26 tourists, terrorism in any form or assisting militant outfits no matter how genuine the cause they propound, cannot be condoned. While the HNLC may attribute to itself the status of freedom fighters (but freedom from whom?) its mode of addressing those causes by resorting to terror and the gun culture cannot be condoned. And certainly, anyone who aids and abets the Organisation by paying protection money, is answerable.

Sniawbhalang Dhar has as expected rubbished the HNLC claims and asked a counter question as to whether the HNLC a militant outfit can be taken seriously. Dhar has also blamed the Opposition for adding fuel to the fire, but that is to be expected. Trading of charges between the ruling party MLAs and those in the Opposition is common fare. It is here that the matter attains significance and must be handled with the seriousness it deserves. The problem is with the HNLC is its mysterious presence. It sends regular press releases through an email named Winner H Mark but signed by Sainkupar Nongtraw. It is not known whether anyone by the name of Sainkupar Nongtraw even exists. The recent allegations of a huge mafiadom surrounding the Transport Department in Ri Bhoi district and reference to the Transport Minister, Dhar as being part of the mafia that collects money from trucks is ominous. That a particular policeman and transport official have been named does not auger well for the state. But worse, is the silence of the Home Department on these serious allegations. Now if Government is part of the whole illegal coal transportation nexus then how can the State investigate itself. It is here that central agencies are expected to carry out an independent enquiry.

Anything related to underground/militant outfits cannot be taken lightly in these times, more so when Bangladesh which has offered safe sanctuary to many such outfits on its soil is today in a state of flux and is sending out all the wrong signals vis a vis the North East region. The question to the HNLC is why it has made public this insidious nexus only now. What went wrong between Dhar and the outfit that they are exposing him only now? This again will not surface unless an independent agency does a thorough investigation into the whole trading of charges between the HNLC and Sniawbhalang Dhar who also owns a construction company that is taking up major road projects in the state. In any other state this would have been construed as conflict of interest but not in Meghalaya.

Role and purpose of education

By Toki Blah

The 2025 Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) SSLC (Class 10) results were announced on April 5, 2025. The overall pass percentage for the state was 87.10%, an astounding leap from the previous year's pass percentage of 55.80%. Of 63,682 students who appeared for the exam, 55,473 passed. Fantastic results or to be more specific an incredible achievement in the pass percentage as compared to the previous five years which had average pass percentage of not more than 50%. The MBOSE, supposedly staffed with the creme de la creme of knowledge and learning, must be highly elated with this singular achievement. Now that the euphoria, celebrations and elation over the results are over, let us bestow all those who made it with our best wishes, not forgetting to congratulate their proud parents.

However, humans will be humans and doubting Thomases always exist. In this case, I am afraid to admit that I am one of them. I believe it's time to do a bit of digging into this 21st Century MBOSE miracle. What else can be called if not a miracle taking into consideration that in the Performance Grading Index (PGI) for school education (All India level), Meghalaya consistently ranks at or near the bottom of the list among Indian states and Union Territories. Specifically, in 2021-22, Meghalaya ranked at the bottom, and in the 2020-21 PGI, it was second from the bottom. Now out of the dismal depths of an educational collapse, we suddenly surface with a 31.3% improvement in pass averages. Either MBOSE has stumbled across a secret educational formula or a Fairy God Mother must have waved a magic wand for this marvel to happen. If so, the pertinent question is why; for whose benefit and with what purpose did this divine intervention happen? Will Meghalaya benefit or suffer from it? Let's try and find out for we might uncover some very interesting facts.

But first things first. Let us first try and define what is education and what are its purposes. In the modern world that we live in, Education is defined and accepted as an infrastructure or a major system on which society is built and founded upon. Its exceptional importance is not what it delivers today but in its ability and power to sculpt and produce future citizens who will uphold the ideal standards for a civilized society of tomorrow. Education is a complex process. It requires time, patience, a missionary calling from those who teach, plus a bit of facilitation from those who rule or govern. Secondly, within the modern understanding of education, especially in an era overflowing with

superfluous information, what to teach (the curriculum, the detailed plan of what is to be taught, the pedagogy itself) and outlining what students ought to learn and how they should learn, it assumes an importance that requires no clarification. Here is where strong, down to earth support and sustenance from the Government plays a decisive role.

Thirdly Education requires scholars (students, pupils, learners called by whatever name) who are willing and ready to be taught. It should involve persons (students and parents alike) who realize that learning and knowledge go way beyond securing a paper certificate or a government job. This is crucial for Meghalaya to understand. An Educational Certificate is so often taken as the passport to a ten to five government job and look where this defective belief has landed us! Education should be understood for what it really is. It's the potter's wheel upon which the child is shaped and structured towards becoming a desirable citizen of a civilized society. An educated person is one who is imbued with intelligence for social responsibility and acumen for public duty. Getting a government job is not the end all and be all of education. Once this is understood and practiced we can proudly claim that quality education has been achieved!

Today in Meghalaya, the government of the day is experimenting with an educational intervention called the CM IMPACT guide book, which it proudly proclaims is solely responsible for that incredible jump in the pass percentage of its school students. With this proud proclamation of the MDA Government comes the corollary as to whether this action of the Education Department helps meet the purpose and objectives of education or not? This question needs to be asked and who best to answer it but the stakeholders of Education themselves. So let's ask the main stakeholders, the teachers of schools affiliated with MBOSE. 99.9% of teachers asked replied with a resounding "NO!" They feel that this particular action of the Govt aims only at increasing pass percentage while ignoring the real aspects that configure education. They have no complaints against help books per se which are available in all book stalls. If however 70% to 80% of SSLC MBOSE questions are directly 'cut and pasted' from the CM Impact guidebook itself then they feel that their presence as teachers; their commitment to their profession and the love they have for teaching is being undervalued. They feel irrelevant,

unwanted, abused and superfluous as the need to imbibe students with knowledge and learning has obviously been overtaken by the government's obsession for high percentage pass. They feel that in this obsession for a high percentage pass, the value of merit has been ignored, thereby depriving the student the respect for competition and hard work, habits the student will sorely need as he progresses up the academic ladder.

The impression gathered is that teachers of MBOSE affiliated schools are a dispirited and depressed lot. They care and are concerned for the future of their students but believe that the Education Department is simply out to burnish its image through artificially-inflated pass percentages. This is a dangerous state of affairs to happen in a Department in whose hands the future of our children is being placed. The need therefore for the Government to climb off its high horse and review its take on school education cannot be over-emphasized. Meghalaya education needs a leg-up, not sneering patronising. Please shed political ego before its too late.

Other main stakeholders in education are the students themselves and their parents. This section of stakeholders have a mixed reaction to the outcome from the CM's Guide Book. Some are pleased that they managed to cross over to Class XI. Others happy that their wards and children at last possess a School Leaving Certificate. However silence or a muttered, "God will help" are the answers to questions as to how they expect to manage in Class XI where comfort in the form of government help-books do not exist. Its pathetic as they seem least prepared as to what the future holds for the tomorrow. Then there are the serious students and their equally serious parents who resent this injustice to all the hard work they have put in and the merit they feel they deserve. They feel betrayed by this MBOSE CM Impact Guide Book since they believe it destroys creative thinking and the aptitude to solve problems while simultaneously killing all efforts at creativity and exploration of new ideas in the child's mind. They bitterly object to what they see as an arbitrary government shifting of educational goalsposts from those of learning and knowledge to one that seeks praise from the ability to score high pass percentages through unfair means. They see only self goals being scored in such dim-witted initiatives. Maybe their criticism is not far from the mark.

As citizens of Meghalaya we have to ask ourselves these questions as they pertain to the

viability of an infrastructure that helps classify Meghalaya as a dumb or a smart state but most importantly because it impinges on the prospects of our future generations - our children! Be that as it may, at this juncture one is baffled by the silence of hordes of retired officers and so called experts who had served in the Education Department. Do they have nothing to comment on these developments or do they believe that because they are retired their brains too have stopped working? Its sad to see the investments made on such people and the experience they gained during their service life, go to waste!

To conclude, we as Hill people demanded our political Right to be a State and in 1972, we got Meghalaya. Together with this political Right we also feel we have the Right to development. By development we probably meant improvement of the economy, where infrastructure perks up; job opportunities start opening up; the demand for skill, experience and expertise comes into play and prospects in wealth-creation becoming plentiful. These expectations are real and genuine and there is nothing wrong with such dreams. The sad fact however remains that the political leadership of Meghalaya in the last 50 years forgot or neglected to prepare its people towards this dream.

A skilled and educated workforce is essential for economic growth. For this to happen we needed a merit based education system where competition and struggle form the mainstay of academics. Such a merit based pedagogy where competition of local tribals with non-tribals was encouraged in academics pre-Meghalaya's statehood existed pre-1972 and was perhaps the main reason for an unbroken inflow of local tribals into the All India Services). That generation produced some of the best politicians, administrators, teachers and educationists of our times. Merit then was the yardstick. Unfortunately jingoistic politics then stepped in and Meghalaya slowly became mired in reservation based performance. That's when the slide downhill began. Tragedy is we still continue to play with our education system and the future of our children.

But enough is enough. Those directly involved in education, teachers and their associations; bodies of parents with school going children; pressure groups like the KSU, GSU and JSU must now decide. Can we still allow political one-up-man-ship to take control of our children's future or do we as stakeholders demand a more commonsense, rational, coherent and futuristic educational approach for Meghalaya? The time to take a stand on this vital issue is now. Are we up to it?

For our own

By Oliver Lyngdoh

"Im Ka Kyrteeng, Sah Ka Nam!"

Now that I have your attention, I want to tell you that this write-up has nothing to do with what the Khasi phrase means. Rather I am just using it as an attention grabber so that people will read this small write-up. And for my non-Khasi speaking friends who do not understand the phrase please ask your Khasi friends to translate it for you. For my Khasi friends who do not understand the phrase, this write up is meant exactly for you!

Sometime ago, I attended a function where important officials, ministers, educators and other dignitaries were present. I won't bore you with the details of the event but two particular performances stood out. One was the "Khasi Harvest Dance" as the announcer informed the audience and the other was a traditional musical number performed by an all-female ensemble.

The important guests who were from various parts of India and some international guests were in awe at the breathtaking performances and at the end of the program, where a small group of us were gathered, a question was asked if those who had performed were people from the department itself. To our dismay, the response was that the performers were all hired from a famous local group who had recently gained traction and fame nationally. The reason given was that the employees of the said department lacked the knowledge and know-how of such cultural themes and didn't have the time to learn the same. But it was not because of lack of talent.

This led us to question firstly the lack of cultural knowledge in the department and secondly the lack of knowledge and the neglected interests of our own people for our own cultures and practices and surprisingly, even to our own language (dialect)?

Our conversations and the narratives which lead to debates and arguments can be summed up as the recent trend of neglect of culture and cultural elements due to a highly globalised world; a lack of interest from people concerned, disengagement of students and the absence of cultural education in mainstream curricula. Additionally, the uncritical adoption of western media - content, fashion, living standards etc, - and western educational models without retaining our unique traditions contributes to the erosion of our cultural identity.

Any person with a smartphone can now easily access the internet and with a single sign on can sign up to various Social Networking Sites (SNS). This easy access is not only limited to the access of entertainment websites, but to a whole lot of other educational, financial and other important information on the digital world. But that is beside the point of this article. The world has become so connected that it is hard to comprehend where one block starts and where the other ends. This has led to people from the rural corners of Meghalaya to be able to connect with someone in rural Africa- bridging the gap of information sharing, building bridges and bringing the whole world together. But the main point of discontent here is that people focus more on 'entertainment' rather than the educational aspects of this connected world.

Education plays an important role in shaping the mindsets of students, individuals and communities. Unfortunately the neglect of cultural education in the curriculum has contributed to the dilution of our own cultural heritage. Add to this the reluctance of parents and teachers to teach and talk about our cultural heritage due to their own lack of knowledge of the same or due to the excessive burdens in their own lives has led to the slowly diminishing connection to our roots.

The rise of Westernization, driven by connectivity and globalisation and the prevalence of western ideologies or the unwarranted desire to western

culture and philosophy is another factor eroding cultural diversity. The best example to be taken on this is the widespread adoption of cafes in our city serving international cuisines. Very few however actually serve our own authentic local cuisines. Musical shows, which are plentiful, due to our government promoting local talent showcases best in class artists and performers. However, the sad part here is that there are hardly or very few artists and performers who would showcase our own cultural heritage via song and dance.

Our musical interests and inclinations, mine included, are shaped by the rock and pop stars, metal bands and pioneers of the 80's-90's-2000's music which we grew up listening to on cable TV and tape-recorders. But very few of us would know our own local artists and bands composing songs in our own mother tongue or using our own instruments and genres. Even the Khasi-Jaintia pioneers in music might perhaps have been influenced by others back then; "might" being the focal word.

The blind imitation and adoption of western values, models and lifestyles and the mere replication of the same without understanding the underlying principles and adapting them to suit local needs and customs has led to a form of cultural homogenization. This perhaps might cause the loss of our own roots. It has been prevalent for quite a while now as evident from the Gen-Z and Millennials of our generation not being able to converse and write in their own tongue, this author included.

This mimic of western ideologies and practices, albeit not a bad thing, but without retaining our own unique standards and ideals, our own rich tapestry of local traditions has become increasingly threadbare.

While adopting western influences, curricula, lifestyles, brands, values, models etc, it is also appropriate that we tailor the same to our own traditions and cultures to better ourselves. Copying structures, without the understanding of the underlying principles and understanding the basic reasons why the West do what they do, is a recipe for the demise of our own heritage. There is also, in recent times, this growing school of thought that "culture"- read dances, songs, festivals etc; should only be celebrated and performed by those who practice the indigenous belief system. This defeats the purpose of trying to revive and safe-guard our roots. For if we can blindly accept and follow the West with no question or understanding of underlying principles, why should we be offended if others want to step in to learn and partake in our customs? If we are against this so-called intrusion, but continue to blindly take in others', we face a future as a dying breed. Our roots will disappear and we will be left with oral tales of traditions and history while being homogenized into something new while losing sight of where we came from.

The disappearance of culture and traditions is a complicated issue that stems from blind adoption and acceptance of alien influences, disengagement of people from their roots, an absence of cultural education in our mainstream curriculum and to an extent social exclusion of those who want to genuinely revive and partake in it. To reverse this trend, a concerted effort is needed to instil pride and interest in one's cultural heritage, integrate cultural education into mainstream curricula, and critically evaluate and adapt foreign educational models to suit our unique needs. Hopefully, perhaps through these measures can we dare hope to safeguard and revitalize the cultural richness that defines our societies.

I hope this article opens up the floor for societal conversation and a pooling of minds and hearts for the whole point of human existence is to think, debate, discuss and find common ground for the way forward.

Letters to the Editor

High hopes, higher hurdles: CUET trouble for state students

The recent allotment of CUET exam centres has stirred anxiety and frustration among thousands of students in Meghalaya. Just days before the exam, students were notified of their exam centres, many assigned to faraway states like Assam, Mizoram, West Bengal, and Nagaland. This short-notice announcement has created a storm of logistical and emotional difficulties.

With barely a week to make arrangements, students and their families are left scrambling to find affordable transport and accommodation. Many flights and train options are already full or too expensive, pushing students from economically diverse backgrounds into an impossible corner. The emotional weight of unfamiliar locations, disrupted routines, and navigation uncertainties has led to severe stress and anxiety. Concerns about safety and performance are now major hurdles for aspirants.

Parents, too, are bearing the brunt of this crisis. "We don't know where our children will stay, how they'll eat, or if they'll be safe. It's terrifying," shared a concerned father from Shillong. The financial strain is compounded by the emotional toll of sending their children far from home

for an exam that could decide their future.

The issue of long and unfair intervals between exam papers further exacerbates the problem. One student's schedule includes a first paper on May 16 and the next on May 24. For families who cannot afford to stay for extended periods or travel twice, this arrangement is simply unjust.

Another root of the crisis lies in Meghalaya's lack of digital infrastructure. While exams like NEET are conducted via OMR sheets (pen-and-paper), CUET follows the CBT (Computer-Based Test) format. With inadequate facilities in the state, students are forced to travel long distances to access exam-ready centres, something that could have been addressed with better planning.

While students are deeply grateful to Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma and state authorities for their recent steps to address this crisis, they also urge that faster and more concrete action be taken to support affected students. The incident at NEHU last year should have served as a wake-up call for better preparedness, unfortunately, the lessons seem unlearned.

The students of Meghalaya are not asking for special treatment, only a fair chance at shaping their futures without undue burdens. Time is running out, and we hope the authorities move swiftly to bring relief and restore hope.

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
Via email

Footpaths occupied by street vendors in Motphran - Pedestrians endangered

I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities over the congestion at the commercial areas of Motphran, which is catastrophe for the general public and pedestrians in particular.

Starting from Mawkhar point till Jeep Stand, Mawlonghat and Bimola Point, have turned into a challenge for individuals trying to reach their respective destinations without being pushed and pulled around on a daily basis. Some have lost their belongings or are being picked-pocketed. Most prefer not to lodge any complaints knowing very well that the can never trace back their lost articles or cash.

I am deeply concerned about the growing difficulties faced by pedestrians in such busy market areas, where footpaths are heavily occupied by street vendors, forcing people to walk on the roads instead of safe pedestrian walkways, which vanish during the day. This situation is not only inconvenient but also extremely dangerous, especially for school-going children, elderly citizens, and people with disabilities.

The roads in these areas

are already congested with traffic, loading and unloading of goods throughout the day and the added burden of pedestrians walking alongside vehicles increases the risk of accidents. For small children, it is particularly unsafe as they often have to navigate through busy roads with little visibility and no protective space to walk on. While street vendors are also trying to earn a livelihood and deserve support, their occupation of footpaths is making everyday movement for pedestrians both unsafe and uncomfortable. It is essential that a balance is struck between supporting vendors and ensuring pedestrian safety.

I urge the concerned authorities to:

1. Designate proper vending zones away from narrow footpaths, especially near schools and traffic-prone areas like Motphran, Jeepstand, Mawlonghat and G S Road.
2. Enforce regulations to keep footpaths clear for pedestrian use.
3. Install barriers or railings in high-risk areas to guide pedestrians safely and prevent them from stepping into the road.
4. Improve traffic control measures, especially during school hours.

It is high time we rethink urban space management in Shillong and ensure that public walkways serve their primary purpose - safe passage for pedestrians. I hope the authorities will take immediate and effective steps in this regard.

Yours etc.,
Elakyntiew Lyndem,
Via email

Demand for local exam centres for CUET

As students across the country prepare for the Common University Entrance Test (CUET), I would like to draw your attention to the plight of many aspiring candidates.

With short notice periods, emotional baggage, and demotivated parents, the stress of appearing for exams in distant cities or states is overwhelming. The financial burden on students who have to travel to other states or towns/cities to appear for the exam is substantial, and it's imperative that the National Testing Agency (NTA) considers this aspect.

The government should be prepared with proper infrastructure to accommodate students in their own towns/cities. Allowing students to appear for exams in their local areas would greatly reduce the stress and expenses associated with travel. This would also enable them to focus on their preparation without the added burden of long journeys and accommodation. Moreover, it would be beneficial for students who have to balance their preparation with other responsibilities, such as part-time jobs or family

obligations.

Furthermore, the traditional pen-and-paper format (OMR sheets) requires careful planning and execution. Intervals and other logistical aspects must be managed efficiently to ensure a smooth experience for all candidates. The NTA should prioritize the well-being and convenience of students, ensuring that the examination process is conducted in a fair and transparent manner.

I urge the NTA and the government to take immediate action to address this issue. Allotting seats to students within their town/city would be a significant step towards making the examination process more student-friendly. This would not only reduce the financial burden on students but also provide them with a more comfortable and familiar environment in which to take the exam.

By providing local exam centres, the NTA can demonstrate its commitment to making the CUET a more inclusive and accessible examination. I hope that the authorities will take note of this pressing issue and work towards providing a more student-centric approach to the examination process.

Yours etc.,
Sudarshan Dasgupta,
Shillong -4.

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

"The temple of art is built in words."

— Josiah Gilbert Holland

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Supremacy of systems

PAKISTAN has been having a poor reputation for not only acting as a terror factory but also for spreading lies and making tall claims, all of which obviously are typical of a weak nation and a cloistered mindset. Pakistan had not accepted defeat in previous wars with India; it had claimed to have inflicted huge casualties on this side while mischievously downplaying its losses. Ditto, this time. Social media is awash with fabricated news about Pakistan's bravado in last week's military engagement it had with India. In no war would we get to know the whole information. We will, in part, be in a make-believe world. So were the situations involving India in the past and this time, too. Yet, from what we got to know, the Indian military systems did a valiant job in the four days of intense action, our missiles ripping through Pakistan's air defences and doing precision strikes across regions, reaching up again to the military headquarter town of Rawalpindi. The way India targeted and decimated terror fountainhead Masood Azhar's base, killing over ten of his kith and kin including his sister, showed the vulnerability of the place. No one can feel safe there any longer.

It was significant that Prime Minister Narendra Modi went up to the Adampur Air Base on Tuesday and posed for pictures with an S400 system in the backdrop. Among other unsubstantiated claims, this was one that Pakistan claimed it destroyed. Developed by Russia, the S400 systems remain a star attraction, the hero of all heroes, alongside Akash in the just-suspended military engagement in the subcontinent. Hailed as the "most-advanced surface to air missile systems, these units located along the vulnerable border states have a range of 400km and a threat-detection capability of up to 600 km. Apty named Sudarshan Chakras, signifying divine protection, these can target aircrafts and even cruise and ballistic missiles in the air. The system's strength is also evident in the fact that these can track up to 100 targets at a time. The presence of these systems was why Pakistan could not enter India's airspace all through the present engagement, other than through the hundreds of drones, which too could not inflict any significant harm.

While no confirmation is available, a general perception is that India lost one Rafale fighter jet, which was downed perhaps by China's J-10C, both being the 4.5-generation systems. The Indian Army has neither confirmed nor denied this. Prime Minister Modi has warned that the Pakistani government, its military and its terrorist modules would be equally targeted in a coordinated manner hereafter, as Operation Sindoor is the "new normal." This sends out the right signals to Pakistan. Hopes are that, having learned a bitter lesson, both the military and political leaderships out there would act with restraint hereafter. Some 100 terrorists have been killed in the present operations, as India claims, but notably the gang of terrorists that staged the bloody mayhem in Pahalgam remains untraced.

Climate Change and the Future of Farming in Meghalaya

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A recent article by Anna Notsu titled 'A Rain of Blessings': Rethinking our Future with Water', brought to light the very intimate connection that rains have to the landscape of Meghalaya and the culture of its people. She mentioned the unprecedented hailstorms in Shillong to the unusually prolonged dry, hot days in East Jaintia and how water, whether too little or too much, has become a topic of everyday conversations in the state. She asks the pertinent question: what will happen if the situation repeats in the future, possibly worsening in the coming years? Looking at the weather pattern of the last few years, it seems her fears are coming true a little too soon.

On June 17, 2022, Mawsynram recorded 1,003.6 mm of rainfall in a day, breaking the record it had held since 1940. On the same day, Sohra, also known as Cherrapunjee, recorded the maximum daily rainfall of 972 mm—the highest in 27 years. I accompanied a team from The Wire, a national publication, to Sohram on the day these records were broken, documenting the agricultural practices of the Khasis living on the watershed dividing Sohra from Khat-ar Shnong. Strong winds almost blew me off the cliff as I struggled with my umbrella while trying to climb down 3000 steps to the village where the community was waiting for us. Innumerable waterfalls had begun streaming down the steep walls of the watershed, making the entire landscape appear like something out of a movie depicting a magical scene in the Amazon, in search of a lost city or hidden civilization. However, the heavy rainfall had a devastating impact especially on the potato crops elsewhere.

Over the next weeks, as I travelled to the different villages on the plateau, I heard the same story repeated by the farmers—crops being destroyed by the strong winds and heavy rainfall. The following year, 2023, was also extreme—but in the opposite direction. Besides the monsoon season (June to September), Meghalaya receives substantial rainfall during the pre-monsoon season, from April to late May. Rainfall during these months is comparable to the monsoon season and is vital for vegetable crops like beans. Any delay in rainfall could have adverse effects on the farmers who are looking to harvest these crops and prepare the field for planting new crops. That year, however, the rains were uncharacteristically very late. I had gone for a workshop with the farmers in West Khasi Hills. But while I waited with my colleagues for the farmers, someone informed us that the farmers could not attend the program. The evening before, the rains had finally arrived, and they immediately went to the fields to prepare the land for sowing crops. Any delay and the entire year could have gone to waste. I learned this lesson again during a visit to a village in Ri Bhoi last month.

Around the same time that Anna's article was published, I accompanied a photographer from National Geographic who was working on a story for Nature's 'Where I work' series. During our interaction with the farmers, they pointed out the dried-up leaves and the widespread pest attacks affecting the bean plants. The delay in rainfall slowed the maturing of the crop and the farmers could not harvest them. Soil temperature was also quite high, delaying the planting of ginger, which is one of the most important cash crops for the community in this village. Near to the village is Bhoiryombong, which is the largest wholesale market for ginger, bringing traders from inside and outside the state. So, any impact on the ginger crop could have had a devastating effect on the local economy and lives of the farmers. Fortunately, rainfall arrived soon after, saving the farmers, at least temporarily.

The delay in rainfall also has the effect of raising the temperature, whose impact can go beyond desiccating the crops and delay the planting season. In 2023, the temperatures rose sharply and many parts of the state started experiencing heat waves. The temperatures in Garo Hills reached almost 40 degree Celsius, forcing the closure of educational institutes in many parts of the state. I'm already planning to buy a fan for the summer months—something I never imagined would be necessary in Shillong.

As an organisation which is working with the revitalisation and strengthening of the Indigenous Peoples Food Systems, NESFAS (North East Society for Agroecology Support) is very concerned with the impact that climate change can have on indigenous peoples. They contributed a case study to the 2024 CSE (Centre for Science and Environment) publication First Food: Future of Taste. In the chapter titled Solace in Diversity, written by NESFAS, farmers in West Khasi Hills reported a trend of decreasing summer rainfall coupled with rising winter temperatures, sparking concerns about potential rice harvest failures in the future. A similar situation is being faced by farmers in Ri Bhoi as well. In Sohra, areas where jhum cultivation is practiced have seen a decline in the yield of jaiing, or black mustard. The central uplands where bun is practised are also experiencing extreme weather, which are affecting the yield of vegetables like cabbages and cauliflower. Farmers in Jaintia Hills have also seen the yield of tuber crops like potato, taro, and especially sohphlang, a local nitrogen-fixing perennial herb, being severely affected by the changing weather. In fact, in 2021 the yield of both potato and sohphlang failed completely in some villages of West Khasi Hills, leaving the farmers with no seeds to plant for the next sea-

son. Farmers had to source seeds, either by borrowing or buying them with cash, from neighbouring villages that still had some seeds to spare.

The changing climate has also affected foods that the local indigenous community harvests in the forest. Wild vegetables like jamyrdoh (Houttuynia cordata), and jatira (Oenanthe linearis) are an integral part of the local dishes and are highly rich in micronutrients, especially Vitamin K. These are now becoming difficult to find. This appears to be true for wild fruits as well. In the past, people found wild fruits like solophie (Myrica esculenta) abundantly during April. But now its fruiting season has been getting delayed by more than a month, i.e., May, which coincides with heavy rainfall. This result in a lot of fruits getting damaged, reducing the amount of fruits people can collect. The community is concerned that if this continues, they may not harvest solophie anymore in the future.

Last year, I participated in a stakeholder meeting organized by a firm appointed by the Government of Meghalaya to discuss the 'Meghalaya Climate Emergency & Green Growth Framework'. According to their press release the government appears to have already prepared the draft, which will eventually become law. I'm unsure if the Assembly passed such a bill. But considering the challenges that the farming community is facing and will face in the coming years because of climate change, such legislation is the need of the hour. All of us will therefore look forward when the discussion happens on such a bill in the Assembly. The time to act is already overdue, and any further delay could have devastating consequences for our farmers.

(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)

Stories, metaphors that matter to our knowledge system

By Isaid Khongjee

Stories, statements of sort are around us. Some make us laugh out loud. Others in context, that the writer wishes to share are those that make us think, reflect, look back in space and time, re-interpret in the light of practices, reconstruct the knowledge system, and some that open the mind's eyes into the nature of human existence in the cosmos.

Source of the stories: Our prominent stories are a result of inference from natural phenomena and were written in our hills, rivers, plants, animals and so on and many of which are related to us humans. As to the twists and turns in these stories, one thing we are sure of, are the flavours of the same to catch the interest of listeners. That they didn't get lost after hundreds, or thousands of years is because of the element of awe and interest involved.

How knowledge is passed on over generations: After knowledge is established, the same is passed on through word of mouth in the form of metaphorical one-liners. Frankly speaking, this is what makes many lose patience before coming up with a general principle of the nature of our universe and existence. That's why we say "ki longshuwa kim ju ai pateng ia ka jingstad", meaning "the ancestors never share their knowledge with their children". But my village background has a different story

all the words we say to the law make a covenant; neither does the covenant, or the cosmic law accept the words we convey. It's only when we tell the ultimate Cause / Godhead that something was unduly taken from the perfection of life due to untoward incidents or encounters with fellow existents like the spirits, diseases, human actions, we appeal for restoration of the balance lost, or disturbed. This is what the holder of the covenant understands and accepts. Outside this scheme, words, rites and rituals, however grand they may appear, are mere symbolic acts. This constitutes the core of the knowledge system. Miracles never had a place. All was known about the holiness of this existence, and was embraced. Their morals are guided by the conscience embedded.

"Mybha u bried bad ki mrad ki dang ia kren kajuh ka ktien" (once-upon a time when humans and other creatures communicated in the same language).

When elders tell a story about the past events, they begin with this phrase. This metaphor speaks about the mutual communication, or a perpetual intensive interaction between all creatures existing in Nature, in line with the Cosmic design, a self-sustaining, self-preserving consciousness that preserves, sustains the ontological foundation of the uni-

"A young man from Khat-ar-shnong once said, "U brew ba dang wad Blei, dei uba khlem Blei" which means "one in search of god is an atheist". In those areas and nearby, women talk in the same language. My father spoke the language to me once, and only once when he said "ka mattah kaba kit ia ka knup, ka kit ia ka kynram katba dang im," meaning "the snail having a shell, carries it eternally"

to tell. A young man from Khat-ar-shnong once said, "U brew ba dang wad Blei, dei uba khlem Blei" which means "one in search of god is an atheist". In those areas and nearby, women talk in the same language. My father spoke the language to me once, and only once when he said "ka mattah kaba kit ia ka knup, ka kit ia ka kynram katba dang im," meaning "the snail having a shell, carries it eternally"

verse. The communication (ka kren-ka khana) manifests not only orally; for example the plant and the sun communicate with each other in a fashion in line with their ontological value. Ancestors communicate to fellow creatures by speaking the language (ontological value) of other creatures. Without this knowledge, our prayers would be mere routines, only placebo tablets.

Ka Dorbar Blei: This is a Creation story. It speaks about the desire of the Essence (jingthrang-jingsliang jong ka Hok) of the Creator that Nature - the universe be born to manifest itself into the physical form we see now. It is the same energy that assigned ontological powers, and boundaries to all creatures before sending them to their realm, including all that are in the sky. Before sending them to their places, the same Essence melts itself into their being in order to sustain their ontological behaviour eternally. This sustaining dimension is locally known as "Ka Hukum". The universe we are a part till present is a perfect universe; it is in the beginning. And the potential energy to evolve is involved.

How our stories degenerate: the severance of the golden ladder, the ancestral knowledge and practice never had an element of a dichotomy between the Essence and the created. They believe that the universe we live in is organic where all creatures are interrelated, interdependent. This is the quantum understanding of our ancestors about this Nature. In the golden era, as a result, all lived life; no one searched to realize the Creator, or seek redemption. It's only in recent times that we, under the influence of education and religion from the west, pinch our own arm into a feeling that we need someone to mediate between us and our own essence. I have had the opportunity to listen to many healers' communication; in those acts, there's no substance of inconsistency - but all of them were illiterate.

The story of the fall of "Ka Diengiei" the gigantic tree that connects heaven and earth, at the same time stifling the growth of smaller plants under its foliage, symbolizes the will of the cosmic design to see that creatures get their food supplies. The story of U Sier Lapalang represents the eternal love of the mother for the children in the animal kingdom.

"Ka ieng rangbah u bried, ap Jutang U Blei n jrong": This statement takes into account one thing - the communication from man to the Cosmic Law (God or Creator) by using the word of mouth to remind the Creator of the Jutang (Covenant) made between the two realms from the beginning of time. Reminding what? As per practice, not

Letters to the Editor

Challenges in implementing the National Education Policy 2023

Editor, I would like to draw attention on the challenges faced in implementing the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. While the policy seeks to transform the education system, issues such as inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and limited access to technology are hampering its application especially in rural areas.

The new 5+3+3+4 structure, along with the focus on regional languages as the medium of instruction, creates challenges, particularly for students moving between states. Additionally, teachers, who are central to the policy's success, have not received sufficient training or support to effectively implement the new curriculum and teaching methods. Without proper training, many educators struggle to adapt, potentially affecting the quality of education.

Moreover, digital learning is still inaccessible for many students due to poor internet connectivity and a lack of devices.

I urge the concerned authorities to address these issues promptly so that the vision of NEP 2023 can be realised for all students.

Yours etc.,
Dahunika Rymbai,
Shillong

Urgent need for proper fencing & surveillance on Umiam Bridge

Editor, I am writing to draw the

attention of the concerned authorities and the general public toward a grave and growing concern—the increasing number of suicides occurring at the Umiam Bridge. What once stood as a scenic and symbolic structure in our region has, sadly, become a site of tragedy and loss.

Over the past few years, numerous cases of individuals taking their lives by jumping off this bridge have been reported. Each incident not only devastates the families involved but also deeply affects the collective conscience of our community. It is heartbreaking to know that a place of natural beauty has become synonymous with such sorrow. This recurring tragedy demands immediate intervention.

One of the major contributing factors to these incidents is the lack of adequate physical barriers and surveillance. Unlike bridges in other parts of the country and world where preventive measures like high fencing, surveillance cameras, and patrol systems have been installed to deter suicide attempts, Umiam Bridge remains vulnerable and unprotected.

Installing high, tamper-proof fencing could serve as a physical deterrent and make impulsive attempts more difficult. Surveillance cameras, on the other hand, would provide real-time monitoring, enabling timely intervention by local law enforcement or emergency response teams. Even the presence of visible security measures and signage offering mental health support helplines can make a significant difference.

I urge the Meghalaya government, local municipal authorities, State Electricity Board and police departments to treat this matter with the urgency and seriousness it deserves. Mental health is a critical issue, and

while the causes of suicide are complex, limiting access to means is one of the most effective prevention strategies, as shown by numerous studies and successful case examples globally.

In addition to infrastructural improvements, public awareness campaigns and increased mental health outreach are vital. The community must come together to ensure that individuals in distress are heard, supported, and helped in time.

Let us not wait for more lives to be lost. A proactive and compassionate response today can prevent a tragedy tomorrow.

Yours etc.,
Andrina Myllienggap
Via email

Illegal charcoal production in Meghalaya

Editor, Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw urgent public and administrative attention to the growing menace of illegal charcoal production in Meghalaya—an activity that is not only damaging our precious forest cover but also flouting clear environmental laws and government directives.

The Meghalaya Charcoal (Control of Production, Storage, Trade and Transit) Rules, 2008 strictly regulate charcoal activities in the state. Yet, in many forested regions, large-scale illegal cutting of forests continues unabated. Shockingly, even saplings and young trees are being felled, leaving hillsides barren and vulnerable to soil erosion and biodiversity loss.

While charcoal production is not entirely illegal, it requires producers to register with forest authorities and follow strict documentation and transit guidelines. Sadly, enforcement remains weak. Reports have revealed how

illegal charcoal is transported through forest routes and highways—often bypassing checks with bribery—causing tremendous ecological damage.

What adds to the concern is the complete lack of replantation efforts, despite deforestation happening at an alarming rate. Forests in Meghalaya are not just ecosystems—they are vital cultural and economic lifelines for indigenous communities. Their degradation poses long-term risks to water security, air quality, and local livelihoods.

It is time we pivot toward sustainable alternatives. A promising and practical solution lies right under our feet: the dry broom grass (Thysanolaena maxima), which grows abundantly on Meghalaya's hill slopes. Its dried sticks burn cleanly and efficiently and have long been used in rural households. Promoting its use as a charcoal substitute can reduce pressure on forests and support the local broom-based economy—a traditional livelihood for many in the Khasi and Garo Hills.

I urge the concerned departments and citizens to take the following immediate actions:

1. Strictly enforce the 2008 Charcoal Rules, penalizing illegal producers and transporters.
2. Launch reforestation and sapling protection drives in affected areas with community involvement.
3. Promote broom sticks as a clean-burning alternative through awareness and subsidy programs.
4. Support local broom cultivators with incentives, training, and market access to ensure economic viability.

Meghalaya's forests are among India's most fragile and unique ecological treasures. If we fail to act now, we risk losing them forever. Let us move from words to

action—for the forests, for the people, and for future generations.

Yours etc.,
Elakyntiew Lyndem
Shillong-8

Addressing mass misinformation during the India-Pakistan conflict

Editor, Through this column, allow me to highlight how social media needs to play more responsible and accountable role, especially during the India-Pakistan conflict and many more such conflicts that may occur in the future.

The ongoing India-Pakistan conflict has triggered a flood of misinformation across social media and news outlets, exacerbating tensions and spreading fear. Unverified claims, manipulated images, and sensationalized reports are circulating widely, often outpacing accurate information. This not only misleads the public but also risks escalating an already volatile situation.

Both nations' citizens are urged to exercise caution and rely solely on official sources, such as government or military announcements, for credible updates. Newsrooms and social media users must prioritize verification over speed to curb the spread of false narratives. Responsible reporting and critical consumption of information are vital for maintaining clarity and calm during this crisis.

An ethical approach to news dissemination would have actually helped to maintain peace and harmony during the recent India-Pakistan Conflict.

Yours etc.,
Himanjal Protim Bora
Shillong -14

Shillong's Rock Capital legacy

Editor,

Through this letter I wish to highlight and celebrate Shillong's enduring identity as the "Rock Capital of India." Over the years, our city has proudly hosted legendary concerts and welcomed global icons like Akon, Jonas Blue, Boney M, Neyo and more. Shillong's love for music, particularly rock, is not just a phase—it is a deeply rooted cultural identity, passed down through generations.

Local bands such as Soulmate, Snow White, and Lou Majaw have carved their names into India's music history, with Lou Majaw's annual Bob Dylan tribute becoming an iconic event that draws fans from across the country. More recently, the success of events like the NH7 Weekender and indigenous music festivals further proves that Shillong is not just keeping rock alive—it's evolving with it.

Music here is not confined to stages; it echoes in cafes, schools, and homes alike. The youth of Shillong continue to embrace instruments and songwriting as a natural extension of their identity, and the local support for live music remains unparalleled.

As we look ahead, I hope our city continues to be recognized nationally and internationally as a beacon of musical talent and cultural pride. Let us preserve and promote this legacy—not just as entertainment, but as a vital part of who we are.

Yours etc.,
Sandiniald Syiem
Shillong-8

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

"Mere goodness can achieve little against the power of nature."

—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 15, 2025

Citizens' Engagement in Governance

THE Government is not the sole repository of wisdom. Normally governments engage in crisis management and hardly have the time to think long term. In such a scenario it is important for the Government to discuss thorny issues with citizens who are willing to engage in policy objectives that can redeem the state from its burgeoning problems. Take the example of the Common University Entrance Test (CUET) which has created a crisis of sorts in the state today. A similar crisis afflicted the students and their parents a year ago in 2024 when NEHU conducted the CUET. Following that misadventure the situation should have been discussed and the loopholes for that fiasco should have been identified so that they are not repeated. But once the CUET was done and dusted for that year everything was forgotten until it arrived with a bang this year as well and left the whole state facing another CUET crisis.

Now that the Government has written to the National Testing Agency (NTA) it is learnt that the CUET would be held in certain institutions in Meghalaya which have enough computer support systems. The question is why this attempt to find solutions was not thought of since last year so that 2025 would not see students facing the same crisis all over again. Without the Government's initiative, concerned citizens, particularly those familiar with such testing models and leaders in education should have, on their own called for a meeting to discuss the matter and then taken their suggestions to the Government, asking it to study the feasibility of such suggestions/recommendations and to get the NTA to agree to such possible solutions. This is how democracy is meant to function. The Government does not have all the answers to citizens' problems and would, if engaged be willing to put its weight behind such citizen efforts.

This citizens' engagement is not just about CUET. It can be on any governance issue. When citizens sense that things are not working they should be engaging in a process of finding out where the problem lies and what the solutions are. For instance, those who complain of poor quality water supply in Municipal areas should be engaging with the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) and finding out the reasons for the problem. The SMB is under the Department of Urban Affairs; not under the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department. Why the SMB should be burdened with water supply is a legacy of the past which should have been rectified. It is important that all water-related issues be tackled by the PHED so that there is proper focus and citizens know who to approach for what. A citizens' think-tank is a much-needed public body in Meghalaya. This would also expose citizens to the burden of governance and to be active partners in the process rather than spectators watching from the sidelines.

How the fight for a nation's backbone has brought unity to residents of a region is an account worth passing on from one generation to the next.

Since 1972, the residents of Langpih and its neighbouring villages were in the wilderness, not only literally but metaphorically as well. The sorry plight of its residents is reflected in their tattered clothes or as one of its oldest residents says, "Their clothes were more patched than sewn." This destitution was not a result of unemployment or indolence. People worked on the fertile lands of the region, on plantations or farming of certain fruits endemic to the region like the mandarin orange and pineapples. An alternate source would be trading at Hahim, a village in Kamrup District of Assam, but that too was hindered by the lack of proper transport services. Transporting goods on horseback was possible only during the dry season but during the monsoons, people struggled to even fulfill their daily meals. Travelling on foot from one place to another was certainly a feat that only some could accomplish even without bearing any burden. It was, therefore, almost an impossibility to transport goods on impoverished backs through muddy and slippery summer paths. Sadly, to the residents of this area, the thought of any road existing in the region - kutchra or pukka, was laughed off as a far off dream where even the gods couldn't guarantee.

As usual, the divine never pays a deaf ear to the complaints of mortals. In 2008, to everyone's surprise, under the leadership of K.P.Pangniang, a group of some distinguished men arrived to build a road from Khliehthawiar to Langpih. The awe-struck residents quickly united as one to help in constructing the road. It was not a smooth process. Despite the challenging topography of the region, there wasn't any obstacle that hindered the progress of the construction from Khliehthawiar to Mawlan B. On reaching Mawlan B, at the junction leading to Umptang, disruptions happened. One unexpected morning, the Assam police with a group

of Nepalis holding iron clubs/iron rods in their hands and the then service Gaon Bura of the Nepalis approached the construction area. There was a hue and cry whereby the men, women and youth from six villages in and around this area came out to unanimously demand the reason behind the sudden arrival of the said group from Assam. A group of Khasi women cornered the Gaon Bura to enquire who he was and why he was there. Mischievous as they were, they poked at him with safety pins to get answers out of him. Embarrassed to be cornered by women, he was left in a state of discomfiture. The hot-headed youths though were ready for fist fights and violence but they were stopped by the elderly men of these villages. Meanwhile, the engineer with his group of workers, were suddenly stopped by the Nepali group but they were advised by the villagers to continue working on the construction and not to listen to the brawls between the two squabbling sides. It was only after mid-noon when the Assam police with its group left that the crowd dispersed from the area. Though tired and hungry, the villagers left home with a sense of accomplishment since their united stand had paid off.

As the construction of the road continued, one could only wonder at how enthusiastic and eager the villagers were to complete it. The quest for a better livelihood, a hopeful bright future, perhaps for generations to come, fueled the youth of these villages to volunteer in the construction work. They sweated and toiled as a united body to complete digging drain channels all the way from Mawlan to Nongma. At Nongma, though, a group of fifty volunteers were kept in relays to oversee the work of the 'bulldozers' (excavators).

The joy that radiated on everyone's faces even on the women's who no longer feared the opposing forces of the Assam police was palpable. Ironic as it might have seemed, the dust and the dirt at the construction site beckoned at the awe-

stricken residents who spent hours of their time admiring the process. At Langpih, when Hopingstone Lyngdoh, the paramount figure in the fight for Khasi Jaintia State, another instance of a fierce display of power by the Assam police happened. This time though, women did not hide behind their jaijkyrshah but challenged the infiltrators by climbing, and clinging on trucks laden with policemen, to chase them away from the village. Their firm grasps were no doubt a symbol of resilience against power shown on lands that weren't their own. Of course, there was a huge sigh of relief and empowerment when the villagers saw the advent of their then MDC, K.P.Pangniang to intervene on their behalf.

The rough road, rustic or however it might have been, became a blessing to the people of the region. Upgrading the kutchra road to pucca, was a feat of the continued appeal of the then MDC with a few of the earliest settlers of the region, to the District Commissioner, West Khasi Hills.

With the presence of proper road infrastructure in Langpih, the advent of knowledge gradually started changing young minds of the region. Education has played an important role in changing the mindset of the people of Langpih and its neighbouring villages. The Raid Mynsaw Upper Primary School was established in 1964. With a humble beginning, it was gradually upgraded to the secondary level. Grants from the government helped the school grow. The earliest initiative to help the school was taken by Hopingstone Lyngdoh, lovingly known to the people as 'Maieid', who was the then MLA of Nongstoin constituency. Strenuous efforts by the then MDC of Rambrai Jyrngam Constituency, K.P.Pangniang, to bring the school to its present status is also worth acknowledging. The then Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Donkupar Roy, various organizations and groups have throughout the years played important roles

in the advancement of the school to its grand height. Opinions about the success of the school may vary, but taking to consideration the location, the tumultuous events that have taken place in the region from time to time, the Raid Mynsaw School, has become a beacon of light in the midst of chaos, struggle, unrest, ignorance and abject poverty. Juxtaposed against the far advanced neighbouring schools of Assam, it has withstood derogation and criticism and produced meritorious students in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examinations. The fact that it has catered to students of various ethnicities is a feat unto itself. Nepali students achieving distinctions in subjects like Khasi at the SSLC level, radiates so much pride in how far the school has come and how much potential it has to positively change Langpih in general and the region as a whole.

Bloodshed, is not blood wasted: Acts of valour can wake up a people from its complacency. On May 14, 2010, a dispute between the migrant Nepali people and the local Khasi and Garo peoples began after the Nepalis claimed the local "hat" (weekly) market in the area. The Assam Police were called in and fired on the Khasi, killing 4 - Columbus Hujon, Charles Lyngkhoi, Dennis Nongsiej and Ekros Rani and injuring some fourteen to twenty others.

This incident is deeply etched in the minds of the first-hand witnesses, wives, aunts, mothers, children of the ones gunned down for standing to protect their own land. It should also be a reminder to a 'jaitynriev' that has buried itself so deep in complacency, to wake up and stand for what is honourable. A conversation over a delicious cup of tea with the elderly people of the particular village reveals that the residents of the border area want peace, and they have high hope and confidence that the present Government will bring a once and for all solution to this long pending issue.

(The writer is a student of M.A Political Science and resident of Tynghor, West Khasi Hills District. Contact: joelpynshai@gmail.com)

Emmanuel Macron, Vladimir Putin, and Keir Starmer, who preach reconciliation without deeper reckoning, to attempt negotiations with a nation that glorifies extremists is not diplomacy. It is a farce. It is the height of delusion.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

India proves its strategic strength

Editor,

Apropos the headline news "PM warns against 'nuclear blackmail'" (ST May 13, 2025) the Prime Minister rightly declared that India will not succumb to nuclear blackmail and emphasized that any discussions with Pakistan will only focus on terrorism and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. Navroop Singh the author of 'The Great Reset' and an expert in geopolitics and international affairs, analysed India's counter-attack on Pakistan and described it as both, "a military success and a psychological rupture that was unexpected by global powers." Operation Sindoor has unsettled policymakers in the West, China and Turkey. The Operation marked a shift in India's approach to defence, challenging the long-held assumption that India would exercise restraint in regional conflicts. John Spencer, US Warfare expert praised India's approach, calling it a "new doctrine" that redefined red lines in dealing with terror attacks. He emphasized

that "restraint is not weakness - it is discipline in pursuit of strategic clarity." Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's offensive and defensive military capabilities, including indigenous platforms in live combat. India responded to Pakistani escalations (such as drone swarms) with strength but avoided full-scale war - exemplifying disciplined deterrence. India managed the crisis independently without seeking external assistance, reinforcing its sovereign strategic independence.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Wake up, Gen Z; become cultural ambassadors

Editor,

Oliver Lyngdoh's piece "For Our Own" (ST, May 13, 2025), hit me harder than that moment when I realised the only folk song I knew is the ringtone my uncle uses. And rightly so, when we start outsourcing our own traditional performances because no one remembers the steps, what next? Hiring foreigners to teach us how to pronounce "U Khasi"?

The article lays bare an uncomfortable truth: we're slowly ghosting our own culture. And while it's easy to blame "the system," let's be honest many of us are busy being cultural tourists in our own homeland too.

Now, a humble note to my fellow millennials and Gen Z warriors: I get it. There's

nothing quite like binge-watching Korean dramas while sipping bubble tea in your oversized hoodie that says "Weekend Vibes." But perhaps—just perhaps—we could dedicate one Instagram story, or one YouTube short film to our own folk songs or dances. Imagine the content: "Day 1 of learning how not to trip over my own jainsem." Viral potential: unmatched.

We've perfected the art of digital consumption, but sadly, forgotten the recipe for our own rice cakes, or rice beer too. Culture isn't something to dust off for tourists and school exhibitions. It's living, breathing and desperately waiting for a like, share, and subscribe.

So, let's stop treating our heritage like an awkward relative we only meet during Wangala, Shad Suk Mynsiem or Behdienkhlam. Let's embrace it, laugh with it, post about it and maybe, just maybe, we'll remember who we are before we turn into culturally confused avatars.

Yours etc.,
Sam Nongrum (a culturally concerned youth),
Via email

Traffic jams: Is there a solution?

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to highlight the rising problem of traffic jams in Shillong. It has become a common issue that affects students, office-goers, and

daily commuters.

One of the key reasons is the increasing number of vehicles compared to the population. People prefer using personal cars rather than public transport, leading to more congestion. Many love their cars more than considering the space they occupy. Another cause is the poor traffic culture. Many drivers park their vehicles carelessly on footpaths, in the middle of the road, or along embankments without concern for others. There is also a severe shortage of proper parking spaces.

Parents often hesitate to use school buses, fearing safety and reliability. This leads to more cars on the road during school hours. If car-pooling is encouraged, it could reduce the number of vehicles.

We can take inspiration from Sikkim, where people follow traffic rules with discipline. Their traffic culture is a good example that Shillong can learn from to improve road conditions. I sincerely hope the authorities and the public will consider these issues and work together for a smoother traffic experience in our city.

Yours etc.,
Remaiah Khrawbor
Rynjah
Shillong

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.

Keep off the North East!

By Jaideep Saikia

Md. Yunus has once again provoked India's North East. He reportedly told the Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives of the Federal Parliament of Nepal, Indira Rana on 12 May 2025 when the latter called on him in Dhaka that, "there should be an integrated economic plan for Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and the Seven Sisters."

The reference to the "Seven Sisters" is a clear and deliberate reference to the Indian states of the North East. The temerity has been compounded as Md. Yunus told this to a visiting foreign dignitary.

The first time around he spoke about how the North East is land-locked and had no access to the Bay of Bengal. His reference to the region by stating, "They have no way to reach out to the ocean. We are the only guardians of the ocean for this region," was brazen to say the least. The fact that he did so on Chinese soil was particularly insulting and quite rightly the Chief Minister of Assam, Himanta Biswa Sarma objected to Md. Yunus' uncalled for remarks, especially as he was encouraging India's adversary, China to expand its economic influence in the region by suggesting that, "it could be an opportunity for both China and Bangladesh".

A few weeks later, a retired Bangladesh army officer, Major General. ALM Fazlur Rahman who is reportedly close to Md. Yunus called for the occupation of the North East in, case India launches an attack on Pakistan over the Baisaran incident. Rahman, who had headed the Bangladesh Rifles went so far as to suggest that Bangladesh, "needs to start discussing a joint military system with China." Although officialdom in Dhaka distanced itself from the post, it is well-known that China not only covets the 90,000 sq km of Arunachal Pradesh, but has entered the North East insurgency game by proxy. Important insurgent leaders such as Paresh Baruah (ULFA-Independent) and Manohar Mayum (PLA-Manipur) are billeted in China's Yunnan province.

Therefore, there is a clear agenda in the recent pronouncements that are emanating from Bangladesh about India's North East. Clear-eyed observation and analysis are of the opinion that Md. Yunus is deliberately attempting to not only utilise the geographical imbalances that the North East has been afflicted by, but stoke up the occasional dissonances by way of insurgencies that had been distressing the region, but has been successfully controlled by New Delhi.

But the manner in which Bangladesh has been eyeing India's North East is not new. The search for lebensraum or living space in the North East for Bangladesh's burgeoning population and the "rapidly shrinking living space" (as a result of climate change!) has engaged the sinister minds of several Bangladeshi intellectuals.

In an article in the weekly magazine Holiday, Sadeq Khan, former diplomat and editor of the magazine blantly wrote, "it is said that a borderless world has become the prime requisite for economic growth under the new world order. In fairness, if consumer benefit is considered to be better served by borderless competitive trade of commodities, why not borderless competitive trade of labour?"

Khan further goes on to write, "it is doubtful that Bangladesh may develop sufficient urbanisation or can engineer sufficient reclamation of habitable land from its own offshore potential to settle its projected population growth in the next decade. A natural overflow of popula-

tion pressure is therefore very much on the cards and will not be restrainable by barbed wire or border patrol measures. The natural trend of population overflow from Bangladesh is towards the sparsely populated lands of the South East in the Arakan side and of the North East in the Seven Sisters side of the Indian subcontinent". (Quoted in "Our Land, Their Living Space" by D.N. Bezboruah in "Bangladesh: Treading the Taliban Trail", Jaideep Saikia (Ed), Vision Books, New Delhi, 2006).

Md. Yunus, it is certain, has probably not only the same lebensraum concerns as Sadeq Khan, but other strategic motivations as well when he and his associates make statements pertaining to India's North East.

Bangladesh's growing affinity with China and Pakistan has identified the North East as India's soft underbelly. With an ongoing ethnic strife in Manipur and apprehensions of radicalisation of a crucial piece of real estate in the region, forces inimical to India's sovereignty and integrity are viewing the possibility of a balkanisation of the North East as India's soft underbelly. China to expand its economic influence in the region by suggesting that, "it could be an opportunity for both China and Bangladesh".

Further, Bangladesh of earlier times had been the happy hunting ground of several anti-India insurgent groups such as the ULFA, NDFB and a host of radical Islamist outfits such as the Harkat-ul-Mujahideen and Muslim Tigers of Assam. It was only as a result of the aid that Sheikh Hasina had provided India, that Bangladesh was able to get rid of such elements. However, with her outer there is a serious possibility that insurgent leaders like Paresh Baruah of the ULFA could return to Bangladesh, especially as he not only has his family residing in Dhaka, but a plethora of businesses as well. Baruah is a wanted man in Bangladesh because of his complicity in the Chitragong Arms Haul episode of 1 April 2004. But if Md. Yunus's dispensation can lift the ban on the Jamaat-e-Islami (Bangladesh), the Islami Chhatra Shibir and release several Islamist terror actors from prison, the return of Paresh Baruah and his cohorts to the erstwhile east Pakistan is not unthinkable at this juncture.

It is high time New Delhi works out not only a robust course of action whereby the manner in which the North East is being continually drummed up by a Bangladesh in the throes of insanity (diplomatic statements and demarche' have not served their purposes), but work out a comprehensive action plan such as the institution of a North East Security Council (NESC). The blueprint of such an apparatus had been conceived by the author and presented to the BJP's prime ministerial candidate, L.K. Advani way back in 2008. Nothing came of it despite the fact that the NESC was part of the BJP's election manifesto during the general election of 2009. The formation of a NESC is particularly important as it is the considered opinion of many in the North East that not only would it be able to provide focused attention on the security of a crucial real estate of India, but decisively counter statements such as the ones that are originating from hostile lands about a region that is integral to India. The North East which Delhi clamours is part of the Indian nation-building exercise can stand compromised if caution is not correctly and expeditiously exercised.

(Jaideep Saikia is a Conflict Theorist)

"Have patience. All things are difficult before they become easy."

— Saadi

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Region, geopolitical games

INDICATIONS are that the South Asia region is increasingly getting caught in a geopolitical power play. India perhaps unwittingly gave the US the role of mediating a ceasefire after Pakistan sent an SOS to President Donald Trump. Now, he's expressing an interest or rather a resolve to end the "thousand-year-old" Kashmir problem. Just a few months into his second term, Trump is reaching out to the South Asia region in other ways too, as is evident in the US meddling in Myanmar in the cover of a humanitarian assistance to militants—the Arakan Army—in the restive Rakhine state, which borders Bangladesh.

Reports were that some senior US officials quietly flew down to Bangladesh to oversee not just humanitarian aid but also arms support to rebel fighters in Myanmar. The setting up of a "humanitarian corridor" through Bangladesh to the restive Myanmar region is part of a UN initiative. But sections of the population within Bangladesh are seeing red. They have started criticising the Muhammad Yunus-led interim government for such "dangerous drifts" from established foreign policy objectives, even as his government is not an elected one. Obviously, Bangladesh in the post-Hasina phase is undergoing a major churning. Americans' interests in the geopolitical region are well-documented. With the Myanmar dictators edging closer to China, Americans are keen on working out counter-strategies. Democracy's angel, Aung San Suu Kyi, who headed the National League for Democracy and was part of the power structure for some years, is currently languishing in jail through an iteration of sentences for unending years. On the other hand, the hapless nation is inviting more trouble to itself. All these are bound to have serious implications for India in the eastern sector, where fissiparous tendencies are generally under control now. Yet, a spark can ignite a fire. India cannot afford to be a silent witness to the US and Chinese games. It has to be keeping a close watch on the evolving situations in both Bangladesh and Myanmar.

Muhammad Yunus has obviously bitten more than he can chew—with internal dissent palpable against his government on the one side and India's growing military might sending new signals to him, on the other. When the Indian military targeted Pakistan earlier this month, squirming in his chair was Yunus too, who threw a new protective ring there around the minority communities, mainly Hindus. The military brass in Bangladesh is having its reservations over the way Yunus conducted himself in recent months. Those among them who might perhaps have fancied restoration of a Pakistani link should now be a chastened lot. The political and governance systems in Bangladesh would take more time to stabilize in the post-Hasina era. This too poses new challenges for India in the eastern sector. In other words, India's attention will remain equally divided between its western and eastern borders, while China would not give India any comfort along the northern borders.

Unintended implications of Operation Sindoor

When politics takes precedence over military calculus

Dr. Salikyu Sangtam

In the early hours of May 7, 2025, the Union Ministry of Defence announced that India had launched Operation Sindoor, a response to the 22nd April 2025 Pahalgaon terrorist attack that killed 26 tourists inside India Administered Kashmir. The operation, the Ministry of Defence mentioned, is aimed at "hitting terrorist infrastructure in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir from where terrorist attacks against India have been planned and directed". It is important to add here that no Pakistan military facilities were targeted. The aftermath of the operation led to a steady escalation of attacks between India and Pakistan. The constant military escalation between the two sides was brought to an end just as rapidly as the operation had started. On the evening of 10th May 2025, India and Pakistan agreed on a "full and immediate ceasefire" to the escalating confrontation following India's Operation Sindoor on May 7, 2025.

Following the ceasefire between these two antagonists, one of India's foremost geo-strategists, Prof. Brahma Chellaney from the Center for Policy Research, termed it as India "snatching defeat from jaws of victory". Now, what do we make of such a virulent remark? More importantly, Prof. Chellaney's comments direct us to question the foundational basis of the whole operation. This foundational basis of the operation is, perhaps, based on two goals aimed specifically at two different sets of audiences. The first goal and the first set of audience the operation was intended for was the government of Pakistan and the terrorist groups it sponsored (such as Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM), and Hizbul Mujahideen). By destroying the terrorists' training facilities in nine different locations within Pakistan and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK), India sent a message to Islamabad that if it cannot handle such groups, New Delhi will hunt the terrorists even inside Pakistan's territory. And to the terrorists, New Delhi's message was to show that India can reach them even inside their assumed haven.

The second goal and the second set of audience are perhaps the most vital elements and it is also here that the cracks in the whole framework of the operation begin to emerge. It is here that we begin to see murky intentions behind goals that should not have been part of the force calculus of Operation Sindoor. The second goal was, with high plausibil-

ity, political, i.e., for electoral gains for the coming state general election cycle in Bihar, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry, Assam, and Kerala. And the second set of audience the operation was intended for was the Indian electoral voters. What is clear as daylight, based on how the situation is rapidly panning out, is that this specific goal and the specifically targeted audience superseded all other military calculus and considerations. India's foreign secretary in

(UK), the Washington Post, Reuters, Le Monde (France), and France 24 have already brought out pieces on the downing of an Indian Air Force (IAF) Rafale jet by a Chinese supplied J10C Pakistan jet fighter. As stated in Le Monde on May 8, 2025, "New Delhi has begun to acknowledge the loss of several fighter jets during 'Operation Sindoor'".

If military calculus had taken precedence over trifle electoral considerations, then proper military planning

"The first goal and the first set of audience the operation was intended for was the government of Pakistan and the terrorist groups it sponsored, such as Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammed, and Hizbul Mujahideen."

his press briefing immediately following the launching of Operation Sindoor mentions that India's response is "measured, non-escalatory, proportionate, and responsible." This statement itself is a vivid indication from the start that the operation is limited in its scope and aim, i.e., "measured, non-escalatory, proportionate, and responsible." Indeed, no military structures were targeted, which adds credence to the "measured (and) non-escalatory" part of the briefing.

Add to this are the images on big billboards and social media depicting India's Prime Minister in Indian Air Force (IAF) jumpers with fighter jet behind him. Now, where are the Indian soldiers and Air Force that are at the forefront of the actual operations in the depictions? If there should be any valourizing, then our soldiers and air force should be the ones, who selflessly defend the country, on the billboards and social media, not the elected officials. This is another overwhelming indication of how the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) is spinning an important military operation into a political and electoral play for its electoral advantage.

These considerations, i.e., the second goal and the second set of target audience, superseded all other military calculations. That is why, one gets the indication that no thoughts were spent on planning out the rest of the operation after the initial strikes on nine terrorist locations. This may be perhaps why the ongoing speculations about the downing of the Indian Air Force Rafale jet are gaining more credence. Some of the most reputable news agencies such as the Telegraph

concerning the bombing of the terrorist camps, countering Pakistan's response after the attack on the terrorist facilities, attaining full knowledge about Pakistan's air radar and defense systems, the quality of attack jet fighters, the range and capabilities of Pakistan's fighter jets and missile systems, history of Pakistan's fighter jets performance in the past 15-20 years, and what kinds of war games Pakistan's air force have participated in recent years, among numerous other considerations would have been deliberated. But in the face of mounting evidence, we are brought to accept a compelling conjecture that military calculations were not given due precedence - that eventually led to the downing of the IAF Rafale jet fighter. If the military was given full rein over the military operations, then they would have studied all of Pakistan's fighter jets, weaponry, radar systems, air defense system, response time, "kill chain", and other capabilities. This way, we could have avoided such an international embarrassment. But, Alas! party interests, elections, and votes took precedence over the country's dignity and honour that is attached to military victory. More concerning is that the downing of the IAF Rafale inadvertently exposed a major weakness in India's army. What's more disturbing is that this weakness is in one of India's most elite armed branches, the IAF.

Because party interests, electoral votes, and election cycle considerations superseded all other considerations, the civilian government that commands the armed branches implicitly and deliberately restrained the operational planning.

That is because the main goal of this operation was to provide sensationalism to the intended Indian voters, who are the targeted audience. The Indian mainstream media, who rely on government advertisements for their revenue, jumped on the government's bandwagon and, as usual, succeeded in crowding out and out-voicing in their loudness all other rational deliberation and sane discussions. The sensationalism it managed to produce flooded the media space with a plethora of misinformation such as attacks on Karachi, Islamabad, and so forth. Claims too outlandish, yet a messaging technique that has been the 'standard operating procedure' to influence average Indian voters because of its effectiveness, despite its melodramatic elements, in the past decades.

In the final analysis, what ultimately matters for the present government is not what the international community thinks, but what average Indian voters think of this operation. Whether the Indian military weaknesses exposed in this operation are of concern is not important to the BJP government, what matters for them is that Operation Sindoor, an emotionally charged term used to galvanize the emotions of Indians, succeeded in influencing the voters for the upcoming state general election cycle in the vital states of Bihar, Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala. As long as the voters have been influenced and brought under the information bubble of the BJP, the ruling party will internally deem Operation Sindoor as a success.

Peeking from this lens, Prof. Chellaney's remark about India "snatching defeat from jaws of victory" seems misplaced since war never was part of Operation Sindoor. We can only speak of 'victory' and 'defeat' in the context of 'war'. One can sense an air of frustration on the part of Chellaney because, like many other Indians, we all were led to believe by the rhetoric making-machinery (such as the Indian Mainstream media and WhatsApp university) that India will comprehensively teach Pakistan and terrorists a lesson, not knowing that such saber-rattling jingoisms were distractions for another more sinister goal of attaining electoral advantage. Has this operation made India more formative and credible or weak and unreliable, only time will tell.

Note on Author: Dr. Salikyu Sangtam is an Associate Professor of Political Science at Teiso College (Nagaland).

Not competition, but collaboration

A democratic approach to Meghalaya's capital vision

By Georgeprince Ch. Momin

The recent demand by the Jaintia Students' Union (JSU) to declare Jowai as the Summer Capital of Meghalaya, in response to the ongoing call for Tura to be granted Winter Capital status, has stirred an important conversation. While every community has the right to voice its concerns and aspirations, the tone and intent of such demands matter just as much in a democracy.

Let's be clear from the outset: Meghalaya is a democratic state, not a totalitarian regime. In a democracy, every community—be it Khasi, Jaintia, or Garo—has equal rights to advocate for their people's development, recognition, and representation. However, those

scales. Democracy doesn't work that way. Fairness doesn't mean giving the same thing to everyone regardless of their need or context—it means ensuring that every region gets what it genuinely requires to thrive.

More importantly, the warning tone used by JSU—threatening agitations if Jaintia Hills is left out—does little to strengthen the democratic spirit. It's disheartening to see youth bodies, which should ideally lead through vision and dialogue, resort to language that divides rather than unites.

This is not a race or a rivalry. Garo Hills asking for a Winter Capital does not take away from Jaintia

"The call to make Tura the Winter Capital is not a sudden or isolated request. It stems from decades of administrative marginalisation and infrastructural neglect faced by the people of Garo Hills."

demands must come from a place of understanding, not as reactions to another community's long-standing aspiration.

The call to make Tura the Winter Capital is not a sudden or isolated request. It stems from decades of administrative marginalisation and infrastructural neglect faced by the people of Garo Hills. Residents of this region often travel hundreds of kilometers to Shillong just to avail basic state-level services. Establishing a winter capital in Tura is not an act of favouritism—it is a strategic step toward decentralisation and inclusive governance.

Moreover, the distance from Shillong to the two district headquarters of Jaintia Hills—Jowai and Khliehriat—can be covered within two to two and a half hours, making it easily accessible for administrative work and official purposes. This proximity ensures that the Jaintia region already benefits from logistical convenience. In contrast, people from Garo Hills often spend an entire day just traveling to Shillong, making routine state-level tasks burdensome and time-consuming. Therefore, I would urge our Jaintia brethren to support our genuine cause, which is based on the longstanding issues and unmet aspirations of the people of Garo Hills.

In contrast, the JSU's recent statement appears less about genuine regional development and more about balancing perceived political

Hills' right to demand better roads, healthcare, or educational institutions. If Jowai genuinely needs greater administrative importance, that case must be built on facts, not on friction.

Let's also remember, the idea of seasonal capitals isn't new. Jammu and Kashmir followed this model for practical and geographic reasons, not to appease regional sentiments. If Meghalaya were to follow suit, the decision must be grounded in administrative logic and regional equity—not communal arithmetic.

All three major tribes of Meghalaya—the Khasis, the Jaintias, and the Garos—are partners in the state's future. But partnership means we uplift each other, not pull each other down. True equality is not when everyone demands the same thing at the same time, but when everyone understands the different challenges we face and support each other in overcoming them.

Hence, instead of issuing counter-demands and threats of agitation, let's embrace what democracy actually calls for: constructive engagement, respectful discussion, and shared goals. If Jaintia Hills has unmet needs, let's highlight them with clarity and confidence, not as a rebuttal to Tura's case, but as a cause worth standing for on its own merit.

In the end, democracy is not about getting even—it's about getting better, together.

Letters to the Editor

Khasi worldview then and now

Editor,
The special article "Stories, metaphors that matter to our knowledge system," by Iasaid Khongjee (ST May 14, 2025) is excellent. Stories and metaphors are essential to our knowledge systems because they shape how we understand the world, communicate ideas, and make sense of complex concepts. They serve as cognitive tools that help us process information in a way that is engaging, memorable, and deeply meaningful. Metaphors play a crucial role in both science and philosophy, helping to explain complex ideas by relating them to familiar concepts. They serve as cognitive tools that shape understanding, communication, and discovery. Metaphors are more than just figures of speech—they shape how we think, learn, and innovate.

What struck me most in Khongjee's article is about the young man from Khatar-Shnong who said, "U-

briew ba dang wad Blei, dei uba khlem Blei." In English this translates to, "One in search of God is an atheist." This is a profound piece of Khasi wisdom! It suggests that the very act of searching for God implies doubt about his existence—making the seeker, in a way, an atheist. It challenges the idea that faith is unquestioning and instead presents the pursuit of truth as an essential part of belief. The Khasis have a rich philosophical tradition, often blending spirituality with nature and deep introspection. Their wisdom reflects a nuanced understanding of faith, where questioning and seeking are not signs of disbelief but rather steps toward deeper understanding.

Does searching for God make someone an atheist, or does it make them a true believer? The question really gets to the heart of faith and doubt! Searching for God suggests an openness to discovery, an acknowledgement that one's understanding may not be complete. In some ways, it challenges the idea that faith must be unquestioning and instead frames doubt as a necessary part of belief. Some might argue that only a true be-

liever feels the need to seek God, as it reflects a deep longing for connection and understanding. Others might say that this search itself indicates a lack of certainty, which could align more with atheism. The Khasi wisdom beautifully captures this paradox—the seeker, though searching, acknowledges their uncertainty, which can be seen as both faith and scepticism intertwined.

Khongjee has also beautifully dwelt upon another fascinating piece of Khasi wisdom, the idea that humans and animals once shared a common language which appears in many indigenous traditions and myths worldwide. It suggests a time of deep harmony between all living beings, where communication was not limited by species but was instead a universal exchange of understanding. In Khasi folklore, this belief reflects a worldview in which nature and humanity were once interconnected in a profound way. It could symbolize a lost era of coexistence, where humans respected and understood the voices of animals, trees, and the earth itself. Some interpretations see this as a metaphor for

intuition—perhaps early humans had a heightened ability to interpret animal behaviour, sounds, and signals in ways that modern society has lost.

Interestingly, modern science has uncovered remarkable ways in which animals communicate, and some researchers even explore the possibility that early humans had more direct interactions with wildlife. While we may not speak the same language today, the idea that all creatures once shared a common tongue remains a powerful reminder of our deep connection to nature. The last two paragraphs of Khongjee's article are profound.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Why is Aadhaar compulsory for opening bank accounts?

Editor,
Of late I have learnt that all the banking institutions

in Shillong are refusing to open a bank account unless the client possesses an Aadhaar Card for personal identification. But was it not the intent of the BJP Government to enforce the Aadhaar biometrics in order to ensure that societal benefits accrue to those in dire need of such benefits, from authorized fair price shops. The Aadhaar was meant to establish the bonafide poor sections of the society. In this noble venture the concerned authorities should be complimented.

However, it befuddles me as to why banks should insist on the Aadhaar for opening an account to deposit the savings earned from the sweat of our brow after prolonged hard work and unwavering patience. Indubitably, we, the bank account-holders, do earn an interest benefit after a certain period of time but the lion's share of net interest-benefits are appropriated by the commercial banks by way of lending personal loans and to manifold sectors at much higher rates of interest than what is being paid out to savings account holders.

By opening a bank account, the clients/account

holders are enabling the banks to lend out their money at far higher rates and that is how banks earn. That being the case, will the experts of the banking institutions answer why they have made Aadhaar biometrics a mandatory instrument for opening a bank account. I hope to get the answer sooner than later so that we are all better informed about the need for an Aadhaar Card to open a bank account.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

A step ahead!

Editor,
Upon reading the VPP's remarks regarding the CM IMPACT guidebook, I found their assessment to be both inaccurate and unjust. While I acknowledge that no educational resource is without its flaws, describing the guidebook as an absolute failure is neither fair nor reflective of its actual impact.

The jump in the SSLC pass percentage from 55.80% in 2024 to 87.10% this year says a lot. That kind of progress doesn't just happen overnight, and

it certainly isn't just a number to gloss over. It reflects the hard work of students, the dedication of teachers, and yes, the real impact of support tools like the CM IMPACT guidebooks.

Living in a state where many students—particularly in rural areas—have limited access to quality learning materials, I witnessed firsthand the positive difference these guidebooks made. In regions such as the Garo Hills and West Khasi Hills, where textbooks are often shared, electricity is inconsistent, and online learning remains a distant privilege, the guidebooks proved not merely helpful, but essential. They were written in simple, understandable language. They offered summaries, important questions, and clear direction. They didn't replace teachers, but they gave structure to students who were otherwise struggling to find their footing. For some students, they became the very reason they could prepare confidently for exams.

Yes, there's been criticism—some say the guidebooks focus too much on exam preparation, others talk about political branding.

These concerns are fair and worth discussing. But for the many students who saw their names on the pass list this year, many of them the first in their families to do so—none of that mattered. What mattered was that they finally had the tools to succeed. And they used them well. Let's also be clear, these guidebooks weren't rolled out on their own. They were part of a larger effort to build stronger academic foundations, ease exam pressure, and support students who needed extra help.

I truly believe we need to keep working to improve the quality of education in our state. There's always room to do better. But throwing out a resource that has already helped thousands of students take a real step forward would be a mistake. We should be building on what works, not tearing it down because it isn't perfect.

Yours etc,
Jack Vyemlieh,
Via email

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"Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom."

— Francis Bacon

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Assembly sessions short-circuited

A report by the PRS Legislative Research - a non-profit engaged in research work to help legislators better understand their mandate and the public to seek accountability from their elected representatives, states that the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly met only 13 days in 2024. Considering that the legislature is the only platform where MLAs from the Opposition can seek accountability from the executive - the government - which is the custodian of public funds and is responsible for governance, this short duration session would seem like a license for misuse of such funds and to escape accountability. The legislature is above all the law-making authority and with the passage of time new laws have to be in place and outdated laws reformed. Of course, it takes a lot of preparation both from the side of the Government and the Opposition MLAs to debate issues in the Assembly. It requires going into the entire gamut of the Constitution and judging which laws need to be in place for the state. For instance, there was a time when rivers were clean and pristine. Now there is a law stating in clear terms that no construction can take place within a designated area and any violations would result in punishment under various sections of the law. In fact, river pollution and how that needs to be tackled has never been discussed in the Assembly.

The issue of children as young as 10-12 years dropping out of school and having to work because of extreme poverty has never been discussed. Poverty alleviation measures have not been spelt out as a goal that the state would adopt through a set of interventions. True the state has come up with several schemes to create livelihoods but only a few have been able to access them. These are subjects that need deliberation and substantiated with concrete data. The issue of road connectivity and the quality of roads built which are of very inferior quality carried away by the first heavy monsoon showers and the demand for a strong monitoring mechanism has never been demanded by the Opposition MLAs. Water supply through the Jal Jeevan Mission and the challenges faced were not discussed. The Government had the option of laying its cards on the table and seeking out the cooperation of all the MLAs but never did that. The duties of legislators do not end with the Assembly session. They need to be continuously engaged with the Government to point out governance failures.

It is also noticed that not all MLAs are present during the sessions. The last session had scanty attendance especially from the ruling party. With regards to passing of bills, however, the PRS data also showed that while in some states bills were passed on the first day after minimum discussion, in Meghalaya 75% of bills were passed after 5 days of discussion and deliberations. This is a good indicator that MLAs take their jobs seriously. What needs greater attention is for MLAs to discuss the budget allocations and to deliberate on why a certain amount is allocated for education or health and how the allocation was arrived at. For this to happen we need MLAs to be better informed and with adequate financial literacy.

Reflection must follow retribution

By Jaideep Saikia

The year was 1956. Lal Bahadur Shastri was then the Minister of Railways in the Jawaharlal Nehru cabinet. Two back-to-back train accidents took place that year taking the life of several people. Shastri, owing moral responsibility, offered to resign on both occasions. Whereas Nehru did not accept Shastri's resignation after the Mahbubnagar rail accident, he did so after the Ariyalur train accident in (Tamil Nadu) which happened just three months later after the one that took place in present day Telangana.

Accidents happen on roads, trains and air. Stray cows, errant flight of birds leading to hits on aircrafts, heavy downpour and even drunken driving have resulted in disasters. Both the Mahbubnagar and Ariyalur train accidents were not premeditated. Nor were they guided by a forbidding foreign hand.

But Lal Bahadur Shastri owned moral responsibility and resigned from his position as the Minister for Railways. It took far more than mere conscience to do so. Above all, in both the above-mentioned train accidents there were no hints of Pakistani or anti-India perpetrators having a hand in them. Clearly there was no intelligence failure. Both the train accidents happened as a result of torrential rains. Acts of God.

But Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned. Nearly 70 years later, twenty-six innocent civilians died in Kashmir's Baisaran meadows. They were innocent tourists, some of whom were reportedly on their honeymoon. Kashmir was on the upswing and there was a tourism boom. Elections to Jammu & Kashmir were peaceful and the world felt that the Union Territory status had finally put fear and terror behind. But destiny and envious eyes had ordained otherwise. Terror struck just six months after the new government of Omar Abdullah took over the reins of office.

In 1956, tragedy had visited two places in India because nature fated it. But on 22 April 2025 the innocent people did not meet their end because of torrential rains. Their deaths were ordained

in Pakistan months ago by a group of anti-India terror actors. The meadows of Baisaran had been identified, reconnaissance made, and clinically mapped for the 22/4 attack by the two Asims of Pakistan (Pakistan army chief, Asim Munir and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence chief, Asim Malik). Indeed, it was Asim Munir who had orchestrated the attack on a CRPF convoy when 40 personnel of the para-military force were killed on February 14, 2019 in Pulwama.

The objective this time around had other motivations including distracting attention from Pakistan's failed state status, a possible coup d'état against Munir and a deep conspiracy that had China and Pakistan in dual concert. But it was also propelled by a savage glee to instil both insecurity among 150 crore patriotic Indians as well as to drive a wedge between well-meaning religious communities that are co-existing in peace in India.

But Pakistan succeeded in neither of its objectives. Kashmir or Kaziranga (or the elegant climes of Cherapunji or the backwaters of Kerala) will continue to attract the rest of India. Nor can the motivation to divide Indian brethren ever win.

However, it is also true that India of 2025 (immediately after the Baisaran carnage) sought revenge against Pakistan. Indeed, the Indian armed forces (the only organisation in the country with both a sense of duty and a conscience) carried out successful surgical strikes against terrorist camps billeted inside Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and inside Pakistan.

The government of India made the correct moves, economically and militarily. It was also done with patience and precision. It did not act in haste, but in a calibrated manner after weighing all the pros and cons. The air strikes of 7 May 2025 had to be undertaken. After all, the country had experienced great distress as a result of Pakistan's barbaric act. The families of the victims

wanted concrete visible action even if it meant India waging war against Pakistan. The operational response should ideally have been systematically tracked down the terrorists which according to the author are still hiding in Kashmir or perhaps Ladakh, even as they are trying to reach Nepal.

Pahalgam is quite far from the Line of Control. It was impossible that they could have gone back to Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) so quickly. The National Intelligence Agency has identified one Sheikh Sajjad Gul as the mastermind of the Baisaran attack. According to another report, one Asif Sheikh of Tral near Pulwama and another Adil Thokar of Bijbehara of Anantnag district were part of the five-member death squad.

But the Indian intelligence has not been able to track down any of the five even (at the time of writing on 16 May 2025) after 25 days. Instead, a limited war was launched against Pakistan which by a convincing yardstick was fair. The terror sponsoring Pakistan had to be taught a lesson. Indeed, India achieved its objective when it destroyed nine terror camps in PoK.

However, it is unfortunate that innocent civilians were killed in Poonch and thereabouts as a result of relentless Pakistani artillery shelling and drone strikes, and there continues to be speculation about losses incurred by the Indian Air Force and the army. Indeed, some among many were of the opinion that war was not the answer to a terror attack. Instead, New Delhi should have taken a page out of Israel's book and replicated the manner in which it tracked down the perpetrators of the Munich massacre of 1972.

Pakistan, despite the losses it has suffered, will continue to support terrorism against India. They did so in Assam (recall the ISI operatives which the Assam Police had arrested in 1999-2000!); they have done so when the Indian parliament was sought to be stormed, they did so in Mumbai on 26/11 and in Pulwama. Twenty-five

days ago, they perpetrated the terror in Pahalgam. In fact, the atmospheric in the Indian subcontinent has become more conducive for anti-India action. The manner in which a rogue Bangladesh is mouthing efrontery about the North East seems to be indicative of a sinister agenda. China has showcased itself primarily as an observer in the drama that is being played out. But the fact that it carefully watched the "effectiveness" of its armaments in combat reveals that it played an important role behind the curtains.

The long and short of the article's essence is that a complete rehaul of India's top intelligence apparatus has to be undertaken. The old school failed to comprehend the larger picture by which India is being compromised time and again. The present crop of intelligence czars just does not have the ability to think "out-of-the-box". The days of traditional intelligence engineering are over. Today, a country that has been repeatedly afflicted by terror must know the imperatives of the three ocular sights. These, apart from the technologies and gambits (as in a game of chess!), are a "satellite point of view", a "room's point of view" and an "ant's point of view". It is only a sophisticated combination of the three aforesaid views that would bring forth the clairvoyance and the sophistication that India needs to attain and achieve at this time in its history. There is a clear need to "ring out the old and ring in the new". The country needs a set of fresh attire in its wardrobe of intelligence.

Lal Bahadur Shastri resigned because of torrential rains.

Must not people today in the helm of India's national security and intelligence ponder as to what they must do because they failed to read the signs of the Rawalpindi murderers?

The least they can do for God and Country is to apologise and, in the noble legacy of Lal Bahadur Shastri, graciously step down.

(Jaideep Saikia is India's foremost strategist and best-selling author)

Crime and Curriculum

By Ellerrine Diengdoh

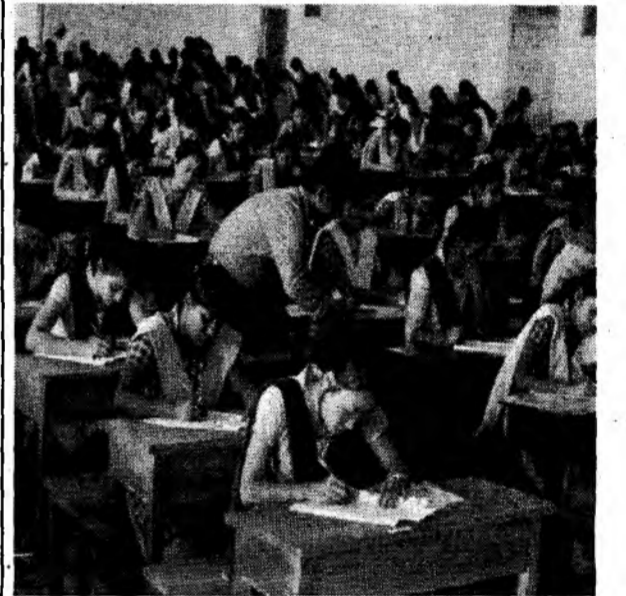
Education is the process of learning things you didn't know you needed, so you can forget them later. It is also how the system takes tiny children and gradually turns them into taller, more confused adults with degrees and no jobs. In Meghalaya, this process has reached new heights—mostly because no one's looked down in a while.

Let's begin with the NEP. That's the New Education Policy, not a new shampoo brand, though both promise transformation and mostly leave you with regret and split ends. The NEP was meant to revolutionise education across India, which is why, in our state, it began right at the top—with postgraduate programmes. Apparently, if you want to change how six-year-olds learn counting, the best place to start is with people who've already studied quantum mechanics. From there, it trickled down slowly, like a stubborn tap, into colleges, where no parents nor students asked questions, because they weren't quite sure which ones to ask. Eventually and almost by

collecting documents, clearing their browser cache, praying to the router, and reading instructions that appear to have been written under duress. If they manage to pass, it won't be because of the system. It'll be in spite of it!

Just when you thought things couldn't get stranger, the Class 10 results arrived with a shock. They were so unexpectedly good, that they caused a crisis. The administration immediately held emergency meetings, not to "celebrate", but to figure out what to do with all these newly qualified, bright-eyed students. Until then, the plan is to have no plan. Apparently, nobody expected success. Success wasn't in the budget. Now, schools are scrambling to find space, desks, teachers, possibly even bunk beds. If there's one thing we know, it's that the system works best when its collective rear is on fire. That's when things move—not with strategy, but with smoke trails and panic.

Then there's inclusive education—our bold commitment to ensuring every



accident, it reached schools. Which makes perfect sense, because when you build a house you start with the roof and move down to the foundation. I could say more, but I'm saving it for my next article, which I'll also write backwards, just to stay true to the spirit of the NEP.

child gets a chance, preferably sometime before they turn 30. Word on the street is that the authorities have hired exactly one special needs teacher. For all the schools in town. What is interesting, is that inclusive education now means, inclusively sharing one exhausted

"The idea was to have a single test for all students across India. Unfortunately, the script seems to have gotten lost somewhere between Delhi and the Northeast. Now, with the test so close that you can smell the ink on the question papers, it's finally occurred to someone that students might—just might—need an exam centre in the state they live in. So, in a last-minute scramble, officials rushed to ask the NTA if they'd be kind enough to conduct CUET here."

Next comes CUET, the Common University Entrance Test. It's called "Common" because it is meant for everyone, "University" because you'll need one to decipher it, and "Entrance" because escape is no longer an option. The idea was to have a single test for all students across India. Unfortunately, the script seems to have gotten lost somewhere between Delhi and the Northeast. Now, with the test so close that you can smell the ink on the question papers, it's finally occurred to someone that students might—just might—need an exam centre in the state they live in. So, in a last-minute scramble, officials rushed to ask the NTA if they'd be kind enough to conduct CUET here. The NTA, naturally, responded by blinking slowly and refreshing the page.

When asked why none of this was planned earlier, public officials pointed at each other, then at the sky, and finally at their shoes—possibly in case responsibility had fallen on the floor. As for those responsible for last year's CUET mess, they've vanished. Some say they're on leave. Others say they've transcended to a higher plane of bureaucracy, where nothing happens and no one is to blame.

Still, the exam will happen. Students are preparing

human being among dozens of classrooms and saying, "we sort of noticed the problem and tossed one person at it before running away".

In a scene straight out of a farce, we finally arrive at Meghalaya's first State University. It exists, or it doesn't, depends on who you ask and how loudly. The administration said colleges wouldn't be forced to affiliate, which in official language means, "You have a choice, between yes and yes." Twenty-two colleges "agreed," either out of enthusiasm, confusion, or the timeless instinct to nod, just to get the meeting over with. NEHU, the existing university, wasn't too thrilled about colleges two-timing it. Because in academia, playing the field only leads to heartbreak and a mountain of angry emails. Now, colleges are in a state of uncertainty—not the deep philosophical kind, but the literal kind. They genuinely don't know who they belong to, or whether their degrees will arrive in envelopes or through a séance.

Our education system isn't collapsing. It's just been asleep so long, we've started calling the snoring "progress". As Mark Twain put it, "I have never let my schooling interfere with my education." And judging by how things are going, that might be the only advice left worth following....

Letters to the Editor

Mapping forward on Geospatial intelligence?

Editor,
Encircled by inhospitable topography, which includes the world's highest range, the Karakoram, Kashmir remains a bleeding wound from the partition of British-ruled India in 1947. With America acting as the peacemaker, the geographical chessboard pendulum is swinging as potential enemies leverage the internet to gather intelligence. The Indian Parliament introduced the Geospatial Information Regulation Bill, 2016 shortly after the Pathankot attack to regulate information such as Google Maps data. The availability of sensitive points, considered a new kind of oil and easily accessible through platforms like LexisNexis, Janes, and OpenStreetMap among others, allows potential adversaries to monitor and understand the terrain and patterns of history. Geography, as a subject, functions more as an intelligence process that contributes to the coordinated understanding of various specialized fields, ultimately aiding in area synthesis.

Two articles substantiate the necessity of safeguarding national security assets: 'The importance of geospatial data in national security' by Shrawishtha Ajaykumar (Observer Research Foundation), published on July 26, 2022, and 'Declassified Documents Trace U.S. Policy Shifts on Use of Commer-

cial Satellite Imagery from 1970s to Today' by Jeffrey T. Richelson (The National Security Archive), posted on November 27, 2012.

As the landscape evolves with complex, ambiguous challenges, our national defense policy must be elevated to enhance protection against aggressors. We could consider setting aside disclosures for programs such as Imagery Analysis during natural disasters (e.g., earthquakes, typhoons, and cyclones), severe drought conditions, or instances of industrial pollution affecting rivers and forests. Future scenarios require thorough planning; recently, the National Security Advisory Board was reconstituted with former R&AW chief Alok Joshi as chairperson and seven new members, thereby strengthening the security framework of the country.

Erik J. Dahl's book, 'Intelligence and Surprise Attack: Failure and Success from Pearl Harbor to 9/11 and Beyond' provides insight into the crucial nature of timely, tactical intelligence and the importance for decision-makers to pay close attention to the Cassandras.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gathphoh,
Shillong-10

Celebrating the revival of Akashvani FM Jongphi

Editor,
I am writing to express my sincere delight and ap-

preciation on the occasion of the revival of Akashvani FM Jong Phi on April 27, 2025. As a dedicated radio listener, I, along with countless others, keenly felt the absence of this vibrant and engaging FM service after it went off-air on August 7, 2023. The return of Akashvani FM Jongphi, which broadcasts on the FM band 103.6MHz, marks a significant and welcome development for the radio landscape of our region. For many years, this station served as a vital source of entertainment, information, and connection, particularly for the youth. Its unique blend of Khasi, Jaintia, English and Hindi music and other shows, fostered a special bond with its listeners. The absence of such localized and relatable content created a void that I am confident its revival will now fill.

Local radio stations like Akashvani FM Jongphi play a crucial role in our communities. They provide localized information that might not always find its way to mainstream media and cover local events, thus preserving and promoting our cultural heritage. They also offer a platform for local voices and can contribute significantly to community building and a sense of belonging.

While I also advocate for the revival of The North Eastern Service Of Akashvani's shortwave radio service, as highlighted in my letter published in your esteemed newspaper on March 27, 2025, and my ongoing petition, the return of Akashvani FM Jongphi is a positive step in ensuring diverse and

accessible radio broadcasting in our state. I commend Akashvani Shillong for recognizing the importance of Akashvani FM Jongphi to its listeners and for bringing it back on air. I am hopeful that its second innings will be even more successful, continuing to enrich the lives of the people of Shillong and beyond.

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh Lawai
Via email

India re-asserts its sovereign status

Editor,
Apropos of the headline news, "PM warns against 'nuclear blackmail' (ST May 13, 2025) the Prime Minister rightly declared that India will not succumb to nuclear blackmail and emphasized that any discussions with Pakistan will only focus on terrorism and Pakistan-Occupied Kashmir. Navroop Singh the author of 'The Great Reset' and an expert in geopolitics and international affairs, analysed India's counter-attack on Pakistan and described it as both "a military success and a psychological rupture that was unexpected by global powers."

Operation Sindoor has unsettled policymakers in the West, China and Turkey. The operation marked a shift in India's approach to defence, challenging the long-held assumption that India would exercise re-

straint in regional conflicts. John Spencer, US Warfare expert praised India's approach, calling it a "new doctrine" that redefined red lines in dealing with terror attacks. He emphasized that "restraint is not weakness - it is discipline in pursuit of strategic clarity." Operation Sindoor demonstrated India's offensive and defensive military capabilities, including indigenous platforms in live combat. India responded to Pakistani escalations (such as drone swarms) with strength but avoided full-scale war - exemplifying discipline and deterrence. India managed the crisis independently without seeking external assistance, reinforcing its sovereign strategic independence.

Yours etc,
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Give us back our footpaths!

Editor,
I would like to thank Elakyntiew Lyndem for her letter and for the suggestions made vis a vis freeing the footpaths for pedestrians. I strongly share her anger and agony because I feel the same. I wish to add that nearly all of our pavements are taken away from us. Pedestrians have no claim on the pavements at all. Of greater concern is the fact that the encroachment by the hawkers in and around Motphran, Jeep Stand and Bimola Point is posing a real threat to the pedestrians as there is a convergence of hawkers, pedestrians and ve-

hicles all in one place. These are not the only spaces where hawkers have set up shops. In fact, opening of shops and laying out wares by the hawkers just about anywhere with no permission required, exemption from paying rent are common images here in the state capital.

As always, one urges the Government to find vending zones for the hawkers and not nonchalantly settle parking lots as befitting vending zones to the inconvenience of others. Well, there are as yet no hawkers to take up the stalls yet but the vehicle owners are certainly deprived of parking space. However, to come back to the need to return the pavements back to the pedestrians, one cannot help but point at the two gates at the Shillong Civil Hospital that have permanent stalls of those who set them up a few years ago and new ones that have just emerged. Convenient, aren't they? Between these two gates the bus shed has turned into another space for hawkers. It is next to impossible for pedestrians to use this stretch of the sidewalk. This is just another pavement that no longer belongs to pedestrians.

Will we ever find a solution? Will the hawkers get their vending zones? Will the pedestrians get their pavements? Only time will tell.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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Four lifestyle habits that may help you live to 100

A 115-year-old Surrey woman named Ethel Caterham has officially been handed the title of the oldest living human alive.

Many people reading this news may wonder what Caterham's secret is. While it isn't usually a good idea to take health and longevity advice from supercentenarians (as they're often the exception rather than the rule), there are some lifestyle pointers that we can take from research on groups of long-lived people that might help us increase our chances of living a longer life.

Physical activity

Physical activity is good for you - who knew? Research shows that people who are more physically active each day tend to live longer, healthier lives. One study found that going from no physical activity to about 75 minutes per week of brisk walking increased life expectancy by about two years.

But perhaps less well known is just how bad inactivity is for your health and longevity. It's a tad difficult to explain, but the positive effects of exercise are actually different from the negative effects of inactivity. That means that you can have a positive influence on your health by being both more active and avoiding being inactive.

Yet as good as structured exercise is for you, it can't by itself offset the harms of inactivity and sitting all day. Research even shows that being sedentary is associated with higher risk of premature death from any cause.

If you want to live longer, you should try to avoid sitting for long periods of time if possible. Practical tips for this include standing up every 30 minutes, going to see someone in the office instead of calling or emailing them and standing on public transport during commuting. This, plus the aim to do about 30 minutes moderate exercise most days will help maximise your odds of a long, healthy life.

Eat your veggies

The advice many kids dread: eat your vegetables if you want to live a

long time. A recent study that followed around 100,000 people over a 30 year period

lifespan in humans. **Sleep**

Regular, good quality sleep is also important for lifelong health and overall longevity.

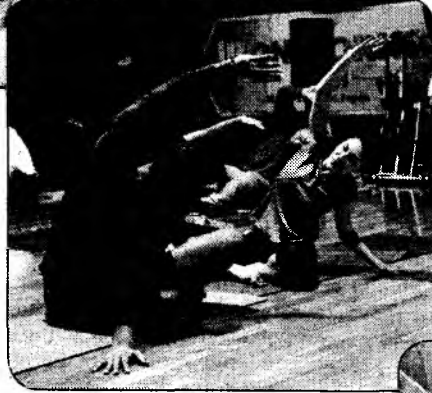
In a study of about 500,000 British people, irregular sleep patterns were associated with a 50% higher risk of early death compared to those with regular sleep patterns. Shift workers showed higher risk for strokes, and nurses who worked rotating shifts for decades were less healthy and had earlier deaths at retirement compared to nurses who didn't work shifts. While this data suggests that good quality, regular sleep is important



found that people who made it to 70 years of age in good health (meaning they had no chronic diseases) typically ate more fruits, vegetables, whole grains, nuts and legumes, and fewer trans-fats, red or processed meats, fried foods and sugary foods. Importantly, this study doesn't say that you must be a vegan, or never eat red meats - it only identifies trends within diets associated with healthy ageing.

When and how much you eat may also play a role when it comes to ageing. Research on caloric restriction and intermittent fasting in animals has shown both can increase lifespan.

Our preliminary work in humans has also shown that following a fasting diet for three weeks can cause similar, positive metabolic shifts that match what we've seen in animals that will live longer. However, larger studies over longer time-frames are needed to establish effects on healthspan and



for good health, how much sleep you need and when you should go to bed appears to be highly individualistic.



This makes giving population-wide recommendations difficult - which is why the NHS recommends adults get between 7-9 hours sleep.

Stress

Stress has many effects on your health. For instance, increasing evi-

dence shows that early-life stressors (such as loss of a parent, neglect or abuse) can negatively affect health later in life - even down to a molecular and cellular level by increasing inflammation levels in ways that could increase the risk of poor health and premature death in older age.

Conversely, older adults that show increased psychological resilience to stress are less likely to die from any cause.

As little as eight weeks of regular yoga is enough to improve psychological resilience in older adults.

Possibly linked is the effect of social connections. Those that live more socially active lives also tend to live longer. In fact, people over 65 who are socially active daily are three times more likely to live for five more years compared to those that almost never engage in social activities.

It's a common finding that strong social networks appear to enhance longevity. This may be due to the way social connections help us alleviate stressors in our lives.

The role of genetics

While there are many lifestyle habits we can change, one thing we can't control when it comes to our lifespans is genetics. Some research suggests that naturally occurring mutations in genes associated with longevity are more common in long-lived people.

Although it's hard to tease out the role of genetics versus lifestyle when it comes to lifespan, current predictions suggest that longevity is between 20-40% related to genetics.

But good genetics aren't everything. Although Ethel Caterham has made it to the remarkable age of 115 - and one of her sisters lived to be 104 - Caterham's two daughters pre-deceased her at 71 and 83 years of age. (*The Conversation*)

Power of insect protein!

When we think about the future of food, it's unlikely that crickets, meal worms or grasshoppers come to mind. But believe it or not, insects might just be one of the most promising answers to two big global problems: feeding a growing (and ageing) population and fighting climate change. As the world's population heads towards 10 billion by 2050, we're going to need a lot more food - and especially more protein.

In Ireland, where our research was based, this matters even more because our population is ageing. Older adults need more protein to stay healthy and independent as they age, but often they don't eat enough of it.

At the same time, we also have to take care of the planet. Producing traditional protein sources like beef, pork and chicken uses up a lot of land, water and energy - and creates a lot of greenhouse gases.

Where do insects fit in?

Insects are packed with high-quality protein. They also contain good fats, vitamins and minerals like iron and zinc. Some species are just as nutritious, if not more so, than chicken or beef. Even better, they're much more sustainable. Insects need very little space, water, or food to grow, and they produce far fewer greenhouse gas emissions. For example, crickets need 12 times less feed than cattle to produce the same amount of protein.

This makes them a great option for countries like Ireland which wants to cut down on its environmental impact while still providing healthy food for everyone, including older adults who need extra protein to prevent muscle loss and frailty.

Despite all the good things about insect protein, most people in Ireland aren't exactly rushing out to eat a cricket sandwich. I led a research project, conducted by Sarah Mae Crosse, Aoife Finlay and Sarah Dooley, which looked at what Irish adults think about eating insects. We found that while some people are open to the idea, many still say "no thanks".

The main reasons? Disgust, fear of the unknown and not knowing how to cook or prepare them. People also worry about taste and texture. One participant said: "It's just weird - it makes my stomach turn," while another admitted they'd be okay with it "as long as I don't see any legs sticking out".

Insects are packed with high-quality protein. They also contain good fats, vitamins and minerals like iron and zinc. Some species are just as nutritious, if not more so, than chicken or beef

Increasing appeal

The way insects are served also makes a big difference. People are much more willing to try insect protein when it's ground up into a powder and added to foods they already like, like protein bars, pasta, bread, or burgers. In this form, it's just another ingredient and it doesn't look like a bug anymore.

Another big factor is education. When people learn about how insect protein can help the environment and support healthy ageing, they're more likely to give it a go. In our student-led focus groups, some participants changed their minds after hearing about the benefits. "I didn't realise it was so high in protein or that it's good for the planet," one said. "I'd try it now, especially if it tasted okay".

Getting more people on board with insect protein isn't just about making it tasty - it's also about trust. Clear rules and food safety standards from the government can help people feel more confident about trying something new. Plus, supermarkets and food producers need to make these products easy to find and affordable.

Schools, colleges and community groups can play a big role too. Cooking demos, taste tests and education campaigns can make insect protein seem less weird and more like a smart, forward thinking choice. As more people try these foods and share their experiences, the idea of eating insects could go from gross to normal.

With the right mix of science, education and smart marketing, we might all be munching on insect powered protein foods before long. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 18, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Saturn on your solar return chart which is good. You will have a wonderful time. Financially you will be strong and stable. New sources of income can be tapped. Money and wealth will keep coming. You can invest in land, building, real-estate, gold, fixed deposits etc. You can also enter into a new business in partnership or collaboration. Your business will rise and you will get good profits. Your associates/partner will help you a lot. New job offers too can come. Your professional circle will grow. You will meet a lot of influential persons. A lovely person will come in your life all of a sudden leading to a very warm and fulfilling relationship. Marriage looks certain. Your siblings will make good progress and you will keep on guiding them. You will share good bonding with your spouse. Health will remain perfect. Children will shine in studies.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) This phase brings mixed results. You are able to find a healthy balance between work and home. Relationships and partnerships benefit from expansive, warm energy, or successful new ones are entered into in this period. You are likely to benefit through marriage, business partnerships and negotiations. You need to negotiate with more care than before. Financial benefits could possibly come through partnerships. You may find yourself taking on the role of consultant or advisor. Good publicity may come your way. If your work takes you before the public, you can safely expect popularity.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You would have an excellent aptitude for understanding the fine arts; especially activities related to dance, music and singing. You are more productive with a responsible outlook. Although you have a desire to make contacts, you are now rather pre-occupied with learning or producing. You could feel an unusual pressure to structure your time and effort, and to cut out communication that seems unnecessary. You will have ideally gained a greater depth of understanding, having focused on information and communication that you really can use to feel more effective in the world. You maintain harmonious relations in friendship and love.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This is a phase that brings fortune, trips, creativity and communication. Plenty of social activities also figure at this time. A strong mental connection with a loved one is likely. You might meet a partner through learning avenues. A tendency to think too much and to focus on serious or even negative issues should be watched. The skills you are working so hard on will be valuable in the coming weeks. Work could involve more counseling or collaborating with a partner. This is a favorable time to reach out for higher learning and join new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. You may redecorate your house as you bring new furniture, soft furnishings and decoration items.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This phase brings new beginnings, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. Power struggles are possible in close personal relationships. Your relationships tend to have distinct themes revolving around personal power, domination, jealousy, manipulation, or self-will. Study business offers and professional opportunities in detail before rejecting or accepting them. You are especially fond of higher studies, children and spirituality. It is a time when you need to let go of things that no longer serve their purpose and hold on to things that have a future.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) The planetary configuration would help to boost your morale and self-confidence as you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues. The lines of communication open up between you and your partner. Sharing daily events and going-on with one another gives you much pleasure. This can also suggest a real learning experience with someone with whom you can share ideas and come to a better understanding of how you define yourself. Meeting a partner through travel or educational activities is also possible. Partnering with a co-worker, or working with a partner, could also figure strongly.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) This period brings commercial transactions and business deals to the forefront. Money matters take priority, as some unexpected expenditures have to be met. You would have cordial relations with colleagues and friends and have an enjoyable time in interacting and conversing with your loved ones. Life picks up pace considerably, and you feel like you can move mountains; and you probably can. This is the time to go after what you want. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) The planetary configuration brings success, responsibility and maturity. You have much energy for new moneymaking projects, or for stepping up existing ones. Matters of the heart touch you deeply. You may willingly play a supportive role to the family and offer compassion and selfless love. This is a rather happy, goal-oriented time on the professional front. Relationships take on a fun outlook and activities with children increase. You possess extra charm in your professional interactions. A new affair is in the offing for the unattached. More opportunities to socialize and network could present themselves now.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) You would exhibit mastery in your field of activities during this phase. You achieve goals and targets on time. This is an exceptionally exciting time as professional and business opportunities are offered to you at this time. Your communications, presentations and style bring you closer to people who matter to you as you make a favourable impression on them. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities in these areas of life. You might also spend a lot of time in physical activities like sports and games.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) You are emotional, loving and caring in personal relationships and family situations. You are more receptive and gentler on a romantic level and tend to be sentimental with your family and relations. If you do get a chance to travel, which could come up quite unexpectedly, unusual, eye-opening experiences may be in store for you. The people that you meet tend to stir you into new ways of thinking. You are more inclined towards a personal philosophy that is traditional now. You may encounter some challenges regarding shared finances or property.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) Issues of shared resources, shares and possessions are featured this week. Take charge of your life by taking the necessary steps to make yourself feel secure - on solid financial grounds. You have more work, and you may be offered a leadership role in your organization. This is a phase of professional stability and good financial returns. You are called upon to take a stand. If you continue to tend to your partner's comfort levels while ignoring your own, feelings of resentment and neglect can affect your relationship.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You would get mixed results this week. You would initiate a current of forceful energy to achieve success in an important venture. Finances are a serious matter for you, and you could take pleasure in building your resources and analyzing your cash flow. There is a fine line between financial discipline and worrying excessively about financial details. You tackle domestic and work-related issues and handle all these issues successfully. Surprises surrounding personal matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This phase brings cooperation and harmony professionally and enhances your reputation and public standing. You would find more joy in your daily routines. Although work can be rather hectic at times, you tend to enjoy taking care of all the details. A move towards working out of the home is likely for many of you. If you have been trying to land a dream job, this is more likely to occur now. Get in touch with what feels most comfortable for you, and the intimacy level in your relationship will step up. Avoid over-analyzing your relationships or treating them more like businesses.

From GPS to weather forecasts: How Australia relies on foreign satellites

You have probably used space at least 20 times today. Satellites let you buy a coffee with your phone, book a rideshare, navigate your way to meet someone, and check the weather.

Satellites are also essential for monitoring floods, cyclones and bushfires, and supporting the people they affect. Farmers depend on satellite data, too, as does everyone trying to understand and tackle climate change, not to mention our military.

Yet Australia's access to space services depends almost entirely on satellites owned and run by foreign governments and companies. In an increasingly uncertain world, having our own sovereign space technology is becoming even more important for security.

But what exactly do we need to secure? And how can space help us do it? My colleagues and I at the Australian Centre for Space Governance have thought through these questions and presented them in a policy paper series -- and we have some recommendations for the government.

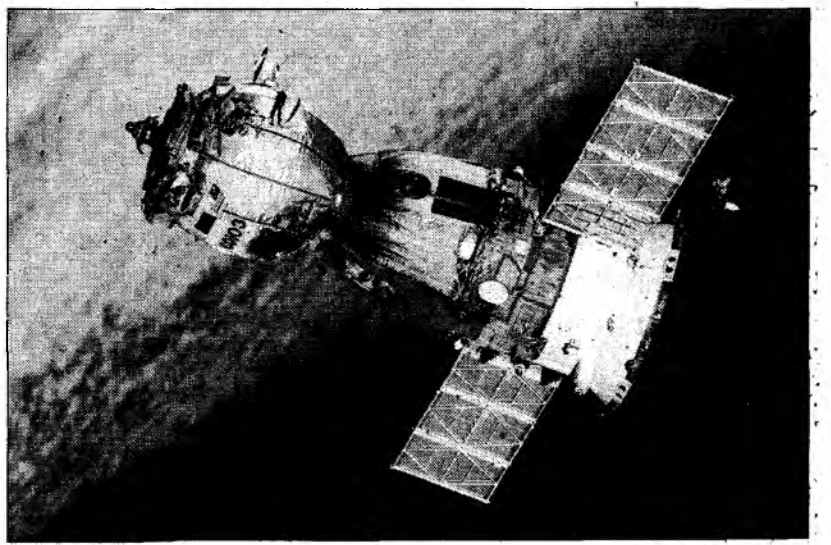
Space services are essential

Since 2022, the Australian government has considered space technology to be "critical infrastructure". In other words, if the space-based services we use were destroyed or disrupted, it "would have a debilitating impact on Australia's defence and national security, a destabilising effect on the population, and cause significant damage to the economy".

However, Australia is entirely dependent on foreign partners for space-based services such as communications and Earth observation.

Another crucial kind of satellite-powered service is "position, navigation and timing" -- things like GPS, which is owned and operated by the US government. Even a temporary loss of these services could pose significant risks to Australia's telecommunications and energy systems, as well as disaster response.

According to Australia's 2024 National Defence Strategy, space capabilities are "equally as important as the maritime, land and air domains". But we are in many respects simply users of space infrastructure that belongs to partner countries for our military needs. There are opportunities to



increase our role in these partnerships if we place more emphasis on how Australia can be a contributor.

An uncertain world. Almost all the satellite data that supports our agriculture, banking, transport, climate monitoring, bushfire and flood response -- and connects rural, remote and regional Australians -- comes from the US, Europe and Japan. This dependency poses significant risks.

If any of those countries have to prioritise their own national needs in a natural disaster -- such as the Sea of Japan earthquake in January last year -- we might lose access. Even temporary loss of service can be disruptive, such as the temporary outage in 2023 of a UK satellite that impacted farmers in Australia and New Zealand.

The same might happen if any of those countries stopped providing data for political or national security reasons. These risks are only increasing as our dependency on satellite services grows, and our relationship with the US may become less certain.

What do we want from space?

Many of Australia's international partners are also questioning their dependence on the US, and prioritising their domestic needs. Many have national space policies, or at least a clear idea of what sovereign space capabilities they want to invest in. This is what Australia needs, too.

Greater cooperation on new space technologies could help our shared interests with our neighbours. Obvious

areas include regional security, climate response, supporting agriculture, and internet connectivity needs.

One obstacle, as we discovered when we ran a national public opinion survey last year, is that Australia doesn't have a clear vision of what it wants from space.

In government, too, there is little shared understanding of how satellites and related infrastructure feed in to our national priorities and needs.

Sovereign satellites

Our country already excels at what's called the "ground segment" for space -- things like satellite dishes and data management. One example is the satellite dish operated by Geoscience Australia in Alice Springs, on land leased from the Indigenous-owned business, the Centre for Appropriate Technology. But we don't have any sovereign satellites.

In 2023, the government scrapped a billion-dollar project including four Earth-observation satellites, citing budget constraints. In 2024, a planned military-grade satellite communications system worth AUD seven billion was also cancelled due to lack of cash.

But in 2025, it's a new term of government. New minister for industry and science Tim Ayres may revisit these decisions. It certainly aligns with his support for a "Future Made in Australia". This time around, the space industry and researchers will need to do a better job at communicating why satellites matter so much to our national well-being and security. (*The Conversation*)

"The art of communication is the language of leadership."

—James Humes

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, MONDAY, MAY 19, 2025

Strange 'advance info'

SEVERAL situations surrounding India's cross-border engagement with Pakistan were not normal in nature or perception. Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has rightly caught on to a statement that 'advance information' had been given from the highest government level in Delhi to Pakistan that a 'retaliation' to the Pahalgalam massacre was in the offing, and that the idea was only to target terrorist outfits, not the military. This obvious info-leak was attributed to External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar. Reports from Pakistan had hinted as much — that they were informed about some action, though it happened all of a sudden after a brief pause; which 'caught them off guard' and yet they "caught up" with the situation in a jiffy through military retaliation.

On the face of it, this "sharing" of information looks abnormal if not absurd. Pakistan was repeatedly provoking India with its 'terror' tactics; and the surgical strikes did not have the desired impact in the long run. Killing of over 40 CRPF jawans by a suicide squad with Pakistani link in 2019 was a big provocation; now, what happened in Pahalgalam was a worse provocation — identifying Hindu tourists and killing them right in front of their women and children. Some 26 persons were slain in the most brutal manner. With an avowed aim to inflict a thousand cuts on India, Pakistan was never a friend to this country. Moreover, hits on terrorist outfits within Pakistan did not warrant an advance intimation or concurrence. Such an indulgence would defeat the very purpose of a military action — more so as these terrorist outfits were offshoots of the Pakistani military. Its military intelligence is directly involved in the training and arming of terrorists. It is also perceived that Pakistani soldiers with special training are sent in as terrorists to unsettle life in Kashmir. Clearly, informing the military there that India was targeting only the terrorists and not the military was a grave error. For sure, the Pakistani military went into quick action and moved the likes of Masood Azhar into "safe" locations and provided them double protection. Which could be why India could liquidate only Azhar's sister and her family, not the terror mastermind himself.

The abrupt manner in which the military action was ended by India — immediately after demolishing Pakistan's air defence systems — raised many an eyebrow. In normal course, this was 'facilitation' for a larger offensive; not an end in itself. Then, abruptly, things cooled down. How the leadership should act in such sensitive situations is not for us to dictate. Yet, there are many unanswered questions. Deputing an all-party delegation abroad is seen as an attempt to "buy peace" within and to win the allegiance of those countries. Rahul Gandhi was also justified in demanding that the government make clear how fighter jets India lost in action. The Modi government tactfully maintains that Operation Sindoor has not been called off — thereby keeping its mouth shut on many vital aspects. Clearly there are missing links that do not add up.

A Game Changer for Meghalaya's Economy

By Toki Blah

At the outset I want readers to understand two basic issues that this write-up will cover. First is the prime desire of the indigenous tribes of Meghalaya to develop, while also being masters and in control of their land, its resources and in particular its economy. Second, it shall try and analyse the latest opportunity to come our way in achieving the first primary desire mentioned above. The greatest fear we have, and this is drummed into our psyche since childhood, is the fear of one day becoming "hewers of wood and carriers of water," in our own land. Well the way we are going about fiddling and fooling around with our resources, both human and natural, might well make that sad day come about earlier than desired. So, time to change that. Time to rid ourselves of the demoralising conspiracy theory that we are underdogs, constantly under threat of losing ownership of our land. We have more than adequate laws to protect our tribal interests. That we don't use them is a different story. However the time has come for a more aggressive broadband vision of the future. Time has arrived to become more positive; to instil hope, aspiration and self confidence in our youngsters; to hone their survival skills; manage their own land; become masters over their own destinies. The job of our generation is to facilitate the process. Time to accept we have only borrowed our children's tomorrow for our today. Not the other way round.

At this juncture I refer to K N Kumar's article "Meghalaya should chip in to India's Silicon story" (ST May 12, 2025). It's something that all who desire Meghalaya's economic development must read, especially our politicians. It speaks about the Tata Group's latest semi-conductor investment of Rs 27,000 crores at Jagiroad Assam that holds promise to provide tens of thousands of jobs, directly and indirectly, to boost up Assam's economy. The article questions as to why Meghalaya should not be part of such opportunities? I endorse his question: Why? Why shouldn't Meghalaya and its people also benefit the same way, especially with jobs for our unemployed youth? We have 9,44,350 unemployed youth, aged between 15-29 years, representing 85% of the total 11.11 lakh unemployed persons in the state (GoM figures). Government jobs have dried up so there's no scope of employment there. Thousands line up for one single government clerical vacancy. So what livelihood prospects does the state offer the youth? Hardly anything.

Desperate youths after years of investing in education end up as daily wage labourers, taxi drivers, rapido riders, sewing and embroidery entrepreneurs, vendors stall owners or street vendors and hawkers. This is the urban employment scene. In the rural areas it's even worse. There our educated youth simply disappear into the cracks of ignominy. It's pathetic if not so downright

tragic! Meanwhile those who manage to take up higher studies in specific technical courses cannot return home because of lack of employment opportunities matching their talents. Such highly qualified youth have no option but to leave Meghalaya and seek employment elsewhere. A brain drain of our brightest is taking place. This cannot go on. We need to put a stop to this sorry state of affairs and the only way to do this is by improving our economy. Can we? Let's try and find out, shall we.

For starters let's take the introduction and establishment of a semi-conductor assembling industry in Meghalaya as a game changer for our Economy. In Assam the semi-conductor industry came about because of a dynamic and far-sighted Chief Minister. The political will was there. So does Meghalaya possess such political will and perception? My belief is yes, as Meghalaya can match this through our own Chief Minister who is technology savvy and quite well versed with the intricacies of the electronic world. The corollary to this positive political quality is, if other corporate bodies, desiring to set up similar microchip and semiconductor units were to approach Meghalaya, are we institutionally prepared to accept such an offer? Again I say, 'why not?' We have the Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) that was established specifically for such circumstances. The MIDC can set up a semi-conductor industrial park to accommodate the needs of this particular industry. Tribal ownership over land will not be compromised as it will remain and owned by an entity of this tribal state and not handed over to outside corporations. The fear of alienation of tribal land is thus nullified. Within the Park the MIDC should be made to address other issues of 'Tribal Interest,' such as maximum employment opportunities, at all levels, for locals. This is important and should form the basis for any tie-up with outside investors. Government should also step in to provide other infrastructural amenities such as roads, drinking water, housing and electricity (recent announcement of existence of surplus power by the Power Minister is most assuring).

The question of skilled workers will however definitely arise. Do we have such workers? Doubtful at present but once there is political will, this handicap can easily be overcome. One is given to understand that a class 12 pass (regardless of stream), can be given adequate training to fit in as a skilled worker for the unit. We can develop partnerships with local and national academic institutions (IIT Guwahati, NIELIT, and IITs) for workforce training, diploma, and certification programs tailored to semi-conductor manufacturing and ancillary services. A training programme for Master trainers to train people in Meghalaya

and Facility Maintenance to provide mechanical, electrical, and civil engineering services for plant infrastructure, utilities, and facility upkeep.

11. IT and Automation Solution Providers - Companies offering process automation, data analytics, ERP, MES (Manufacturing Execution Systems), and cyber-security solutions.

12. Transport and housing — People will need transport to and from work; products will need to be transported; people will require accommodation. These are requirements locals can benefit from.

Vendor and Ecosystem Development

Tata Electronics has already signed MoUs with vendors from Singapore, Malaysia, and Japan for equipment, engineering, and support services, and is expected to build a network of 1,000 suppliers and partners as the ecosystem matures. This will include both global and local ancillary units, fostering technology transfer and skill development. The same is expected of a Meghalaya unit.

In Assam the government is already considering incentive schemes (such as subsidies and sops) to attract ancillary units, especially those providing critical inputs like chemicals, gases, and equipment, to co-locate near major semi-conductor facilities. This too should happen in Meghalaya to provide impetus to self employment units desirous of linking themselves to the main industry.

In conclusion, what is immediately required is an exposure tour, especially by the MIDC together perhaps with high officials of interlocked private universities of the state, of ongoing semi-conductor assembly units operating outside Meghalaya. We need to know how such an industry can be fitted into the Meghalaya ecosystem with special attention to known bottlenecks that need to be circumvented. I had spoken in Hyderabad and is willing and ready to act as a resource person and arrange site visits for the team at Hyderabad. Meghalaya is lucky to have a resource person who is well versed with the industrial environment of Meghalaya while also being well acquainted with the industry under discussion. Full advantage of this asset must be made use of. The team should visit and interact with officials of some notable semi-conductor companies in Hyderabad including NXP Semi-conductors, Qualcomm, Micron Technology, Broadcom, Cypress Semi-conductor, and Infineon Technologies, among others. Additionally, Hyderabad is home to semi-conductor startups like MoSChip, Apollo Microsystems, and Ananth Technologies.

MIDC can return perhaps with names of companies that are keen in expanding their semi-conductor activities in Meghalaya. Knowing our CM, I have no doubts that he will facilitate such an exposure trip. Now if Southern Indian states can be called Silicon Valley states of India I see no reason why Meghalaya cannot emerge as the Silicon Tableland of the NE.

1. Specialty Chemicals and Gases Suppliers to provide ultra-pure chemicals (acids, solvents, etchants) and process gases (nitrogen, argon, hydrogen, etc.) essential for chip assembly, packaging, and testing.

2. Cleanroom and Environmental Control Services to provide Design, construction, and maintenance of cleanrooms and controlled environments to ensure contamination-free manufacturing.

3. Precision Equipment and Tooling Suppliers to (a) Supply specialized machinery for assembly, wire bonding, flip-chip packaging, testing, and inspection (including automated optical inspection and X-ray machines); (b) Maintenance, calibration, and spare parts services for these machines.

4. Packaging Materials Manufacturers to produce lead frames, substrates, ceramic and organic packages, plastic encapsulation materials, and advanced packaging solutions (such as Integrated Systems Packaging).

5. Electronic Components and Consumables to supply solder balls, bonding wires, adhesives, tapes, and other consumables required for chip packaging and assembly.

6. Logistics and Supply Chain Services - Warehousing, specialized transport (including temperature and humidity-controlled logistics), and inventory management for sensitive materials and finished chips.

7. Waste Management and Recycling Services for management and treatment of hazardous chemical waste, water recycling, and recovery of precious metals from process scrap.

8. Testing and Quality Assurance Services for third-party testing labs for reliability, failure analysis, and certification of chips and packages.

9. Industrial Gases and Utilities Providers for supplying high-purity industrial gases, de-ionized water, and uninterrupted power supply (power backup systems).

10. Engineering Support

and Facility Maintenance to provide mechanical, electrical, and civil engineering services for plant infrastructure, utilities, and facility upkeep.

11. IT and Automation Solution Providers - Companies offering process automation, data analytics, ERP, MES (Manufacturing Execution Systems), and cyber-security solutions.

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We have a 'Teacher-Counsellor!' Four recommendations to enhance school-based Drug intervention efforts

By David H Blah

As a parent, the only time that I would trust a stranger to play a significant role in my daughter's life is when they carry the title 'teacher.' Teachers are in most part our second adults that we look up to and they take the place of our parents when we are in school. With time, we are inspired by them and their passion, and grateful for their attention and care.

In the growing problem of drug use and addiction, the Government's move to formally train teachers to protect the children that they have committed to devote their lives to, is a great step forward. Not only are they up-skilling teachers but they have also found a way round the structural and financial challenges that may have stalled the mission to keep children from drug use and addiction. Parents are once more assured their children will be in good hands and their fears addressed.

It is with a spirit of sincerity and collaboration, that I offer suggestions aimed at strengthening this initiative by building upon it a multi-dimensional framework to address the issue, taking into consideration the expressed concerns of professional counselling bodies. These thoughts are limited by the fact that I have not seen the overall strategy of the government or the contents of the month-long training or any Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that teacher-counsellors would use in their schools.

My first recommendation would be to develop a multi-tiered system of support in schools to address the issue holistically. Structurally, school level psychological interventions are tiered into three levels—the universal level targets the school students, staff and parents on key mental health literacy and developing protective skills and environment. The second level targets groups of students who are at risk of using drugs or experiencing mental illness by planning group activities, clubs or workshops. The third level is individualized intervention by trained professionals. The overall framework aligns with the early identification and intervention for mental health problems in school going children and adolescents released by the Department of School Education & Literacy, Ministry of Education.

If this is the structure, where will we find the individuals for it? Collaborative engagements and smart resource utilization is the key. Schools and Government departments can engage teachers and especially future social workers and counsellors in various educational institutions. This will open up opportunities to fill in the human resource gap in schools and also bridge the field for prospective counsellors and social workers effectively. To achieve this we would need only to map out ways to leverage existing resources, adopt standardized protocols and manuals of practice to be used in schools, and set up a robust monitoring system to track progress, gaps and challenges in the pursuit of measurable effectiveness of the program.

The second recommendation is: Adopt Specific Titles for Teacher-Led Support Roles. This will clarify roles and respect professional distinctions. It is recommended that the terms counselling and counsellor or teacher-led support initiatives may be replaced with more specific titles. Designations such as Well-Being Coordinator (WBC), or Allied Professionals for Psychological Services (APPS), could better reflect their primary role as teachers, while respecting the professional aspect of their work and distinct professional domain of counselling. This change is proposed for the following reasons: Firstly, the word counselling and counsellor are common terms with diverse meanings—formally helping conversation with someone we respect to conversations with trained professionals. Using distinct titles for teachers performing supportive roles helps everyone—students, parents, and staff to understand the precise nature and limits of the help offered. Not all doctors do similar things. Each one specialises in an ailment. This differentiation of terms is seen in the Allied and Health Care Act of 2022. One needs to

complete a required amount of training to be able to carry out specific counselling and therapeutic interventions, and to earn a name that matches their training and ability.

Secondly, the change in name may also reflect the training they will receive from SANKER, a reputed institution that has served the community for decades with professionalism and effectiveness. I would assume that they will be trained as the first responders to address any mental health or specifically drug related issues, and the training will not be comparable to a full 2-year counsellor training program.

Thirdly, teachers are more like mentors rather than counsellors. I see this emerging from their desire to teach and from the years they had spent learning on how to be teachers. The academic and experiential process of being a teacher is different from that of a counsellor, right from the courses taught; the internship experienced to the initial decision to enrol in a B.Ed. program rather than a M.Sc. counselling program. Clear evidence of this is when teachers express their desire to help but express their inability to do what professional counsellors can, on account of their lack of knowledge and training. Fourthly, the space for professionally trained counsellors to be employed in a school is left open when structural and financial constraints are no longer an issue for a particular school. This recommendation may address the concerns raised by professional counselling bodies and individuals when teachers step in as counsellors.

The third recommendation is to develop an application that leverages the network that facilitates holistic care from use to dependence to recovery to new path. There are many people and organizations working to address the issue, with each bringing their specific expertise and offering diverse services. However, their resources are limited to only those who know them or are aware of them. That such life-saving knowledge is available but is not known to many in need of counselling is of deep concern.

I have heard several people speak of the struggle to locate a particular type of service or to identify a particular type of expert. With the Government's push for IT and AI applications, and with the pool of talent that we have in government institution, private IT firms, and educational institutions, speed up this development and a beta version of the app can be released within a year's time, to enable people in need to connect with the right counsellors.

The fourth recommendation is to create a popular culture of abstinence, moderation and responsibility via existing media related platforms and schemes. People are creatures of habit that are shaped by the culture they live in, and drug use is shaped by a sub-culture. Those in the outside may not understand it and only have stereotypes of it. When we act on these stereotypes it will push drug users to that sub-culture and encourage them to be subsumed in that culture. If we are to engage with that sub-culture, two of the most proven mediums are that of art—expressed through songs and movies—and the market.

This recommendation entails a sustained, long-term engagement but it is one that will create lasting change in future generations. This is executed through collaborative engagements with different key stakeholders, smart resource utilization and creation of teams all moving towards the same agreed goals.

To conclude, these recommendations have been suggested because they do not entail huge effort, cost or reorganization to execute. These are pertinent issues and areas of engagement that are complex, time-consuming and where costly bottlenecks exist. That said, we should not be disheartened but continue to celebrate the lives gained when the young stop using drugs.

(The writer is Educator and Counsellor Lecturer, St. Edmunds College)

Letters to the Editor

Teachers in crisis: Salary delay sparks concern

Editor,
Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to highlight a pressing issue affecting the teachers and staff of Deficit Schools in Meghalaya. The delay in sanctioning salaries for nearly three months has caused significant hardship for these educators, who are the pillars of our education system. Many teachers are struggling to meet their daily needs, pay for their children's education expenses, and some are even finding it difficult to cover medical expenses or pay insurance premiums and loan repayments. The mid-term examinations are approaching and if students cannot pay their fees they may be debarred from writing their examinations. This is a matter of great concern for parents awaiting their children's salaries.

Despite repeated appeals and assurances, there has been no concrete action, thereby leaving teachers in distress and unable to meet their daily

needs. Such neglect not only demoralizes the teaching community but also hampers the quality of education in the state. I urge the government to treat this matter with utmost priority and expedite the sanction and release of salaries at the earliest. This prompt action would bring much-needed relief to our teachers and help maintain the quality of education in our state.

We hope that with your platform's support, our voices will be heard, and the necessary steps will be taken to address this issue.

Yours etc.,
Aldrin M. Sangma,
(Assistant Teacher),
Rongkhon Deficit U.P.
School, Tura

Peace cannot be brokered by those who enable war

Editor
Apropos the thought-provoking letter titled "Can India make peace with a nation that celebrates terror?" by Salil Grewal, (ST May 15, 2025), I am inspired to write this letter,

which I believe offers some informative perspectives.

Since independence, India has fought three full-fledged wars against Pakistan and one against China. The USA and UK were never fully on India's side but consistently advocated for "ceasefire." But that ceasefire was in vain, as underscored by Salil Grewal.

We all remember what happened during the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War. Even in 2016, after the surgical strike on a terrorist camp in Pakistan, the US called only for de-escalation. During the ongoing Operation Sindoor, the US initially voiced support for India's fight against terrorism—but then, quite prematurely, tweeted on X calling for a "full and immediate ceasefire," for reasons best known to the POTUS and the CIA. The follow-up tweet suggesting a "trade bait" was baffling, especially considering that complex trade and tariff negotiations are still underway.

Pakistan's Defence Minister, Khawaja Mohamud Asif, admitted in an interview with a British news channel

that Pakistan had carried out "dirty work" on behalf of the West when questioned about its history of funding and backing terrorist outfits. Doesn't this raise questions about the US's direct or indirect involvement in terrorism across India over the years? A look at historical evidence shows that the US has allegedly supported and financed several militant or insurgent groups, many of them Islamist. These include:

- The Mujahideen in Afghanistan (1979–89)
- The Contras in Nicaragua (1980s)
- The Mujahideen in Bosnia & Herzegovina (1990s)
- The Northern Alliance in Afghanistan (1996–2001)
- Kurdish militant groups (some factions of the PKK and others supported selectively by the US in Iraq and Syria in different contexts)
- Syrian rebel groups (2011–17) In the present context, has the USA really abandoned Pakistan to fend for itself? It has rather supported Pakistan by facilitating a \$2.8 billion IMF loan in the middle of Operation Sindoor. Hasn't the US claimed to support India's war

on terrorism? This suggests that the US still has geopolitical compulsions and strategic interests in Pakistan.

With regard to the heinous Pahalgalam terror attack on April 22, investigative journalist Sonia Pillai from The Print reported that Abdullah Syeed, a convicted US federal offender and owner of Business System International Pvt. Ltd., Karachi, was found to have acquired high-resolution, real-time satellite imagery of Pahalgalam and its surroundings via Maxar Technologies (based in the USA) every day from April 1 to April 21, 2025. It is not far-fetched to conclude that this imagery was likely passed on to the Pakistan Army. Can we not then deduce that the entire Pahalgalam attack was planned, monitored, and executed by the Pakistani military? Pakistan has officially described the attack as an act of "tactical brilliance."

Adding to this, former CIA agent and analyst Larvy Johnson has hinted that the CIA and MI6 may have had prior knowledge of the attack, discussed it with the ISI, and even

green-lit the operation.

If West hoped to provoke India into launching Operation Sindoor in order to boost the arms market, they may now be regretting it. Reports suggest that shares of major American and Chinese defence manufacturers have dipped.

Whatever the case, intelligence agencies must now do their job, verify facts, analyze the evidence, and take decisive action. They owe it to the nation's safety, security, and sovereignty, and the values of humanity should be upheld, as rightly emphasised by Salil Grewal through his letters.

In the end, I firmly believe that India has proven itself to be a military superpower—perhaps for the first time recognized as such in just a few days of Operation Sindoor. The world may take time to acknowledge it, but they can no longer ignore it.

Yours etc.,
Jethro B. GC
Dehradun

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

"Nothing can be done except little by little."

— Charles Baudelaire

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Case for Winter Capital in Tura

THE Garo Hills have long been relegated to the background and it would be fair to say that this region of Meghalaya has been neglected, more so South Garo Hills which remained in the same state of under-development long after it became a district. It is important for every part of Meghalaya to develop at the same pace. What has happened however is that the distant villages and border areas in particular have languished in obscurity even while all the development projects are capital-centric with some funds flowing towards development of the district headquarters but very little resources being invested in the villages beyond the townships.

As pointed out by people of Garo Hills, it takes a whole day for someone from the periphery of Garo Hills to travel to Shillong on some government work. This often necessitates an overnight stay in Shillong which adds to the expenses. It's high time that departments open up facilities for people from different districts to access services from the district headquarters. Taking governance closer to the people is a much-touted phrase but has it happened? Meghalaya touched half a century in 2022 but governance is still distant from people. Forget about participatory governance where people themselves decide the development priority in their districts. It is in this respect that a winter capital in Tura where the winter session of the legislative assembly can also be held would be a great step in bridging the divide between the legislators from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and the people of Garo Hills. Only when the legislators from one region travel to another region will they be able to understand the development backlogs in that region. The fact is that most of the 36 legislators from Khasi-Jaintia Hills have not visited Garo Hills and do not understand the plight of people there.

The reverse is also true in that most MLAs of Garo Hills have not visited the rural hamlets of Khasi-Jaintia Hills. There is an unspoken divide between the tribes which has not been addressed. If the Garo ministers and MLAs spent more time in the Khasi—Jaintia hills and the Khasi-Jaintia MLAs in Garo Hills it would have eased the divide. In rural Meghalaya, irrespective of the region, there is stark poverty, illiteracy, high school drop-out rates, malnutrition and poor health outcomes. These can be addressed by taking governance closer to the people. What Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma is doing by way of the CM Connect initiative is to connect directly with people in rural Meghalaya so as to find out the development deficits they face. Since most or all MLAs live in Shillong and only visit their constituencies as chief guests for functions but never to listen to their voters and non-voters alike, the development deficit is staggering. There are villages without water supply for decades. These are beginning to surface only now. If the winter capital shifts to Tura, there should be no heartburn. Subsequently all regions will be adequately served if the CM meets the needs of the rural populace.

Mynser and the Legacy of the Kherwang Khasis

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A couple of weeks ago, Pynshngainlang Rattane, President of the UKPO (United Khasi Peoples' Organisation), Karbi Anglong Central Executive Committee, and adviser of Seng Raid Kherwang invited me to the Thoh Lyngdoh ritual in Mynser village, Chingthong, West Karbi Anglong. He had been inviting me to visit the Khasis living in Karbi Anglong, but for various reasons I could not accept his invitation. However, this time around, I was determined to honour his request. Inviting a friend along, I left Shillong around 6.30 in the morning and took the Mawlasnai road to enter Karbi Anglong. The drive to Mynser took over three hours and we passed through a few Khasi and Karbi villages on the way.

As I was planning for the journey, I was told that the roads would be in terrible condition and therefore we took a bigger car. But barring a few sections, the roads were very good. However, as we approached the Khasi village of Mynser, the paved road gave way to a dirt path which would have been quite hazardous during the monsoon season. Luckily, the sky was clear, and we were able to reach the village, where we asked a woman for directions. We told her we had come for the ritual. She showed us a path which led to an open valley at the end of which we saw people had gathered over an open space. It was there we met Pynshngainlang, busy with the elders who had gathered to conduct the rituals.

There were Khasi men dressed in the traditional attire standing in front of the items used for the rituals. We were told that there were 12 clans in the past, but now only 7 clans remain. The gourds, placed on the ground along with the bamboo mugs, incense sticks, and branches of leaves, represented these clans. Four of the elder clans were back in the house of the Lyngdoh, where they awaited the report of the clans about the auguries from the rituals. Based on the feedback, the four elder clans including the Lyngdoh would decide the course of action for the next year. Pynshngainlang took us to a hut where we met the four clans, together with

Shemborlang Rynjah, CEM Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council, whom they had also invited.

Thoh Lyngdoh is a pre-sowing ritual performed asking the gods for a successful cropping season. Historically, this must have been a common sight in all Khasi villages, but now only Mynser village, with its households maintain the indigenous faith and continue the practice. The village could very well be one of the few left outside Meghalaya where people still practise Niam Khasi. One must perform the rituals before sowing seeds. This explained some sights that we saw while on our way to the village.

As we were driving through the villages, it was heartening to see that jhum was still being practiced in the area. There were numerous clearings lined with fallen trees lying on top of charred soil, a tell-tale sign that people had recently used fire at these sites. But I saw no young crops. It was only after hearing from the elders in Mynser that we realized they had not yet sown the seeds. The ritual was therefore very important and not just a cultural performance for the outsiders. Bah Khrwabok Shadap, who had arrived a few days earlier from Shillong for the ritual, remarked that this was not a revival, but a preservation of traditions passed down through generations. I was honored to experience these authentic, long-practiced traditions.

Mynser is a very important site for the Khasis and there are many historical events connected to it. From the discussion we had with the elders, we were told that the village is part of the Raid Kherwang, a traditional Khasi polity. In the past, both Hima Jaintiapur and Hima Shillong (?) fought over control of this area, and the Raid paid taxes to both of them at various times. The taxes were for the produce of the hall (paddy fields) and not on the produce from the hills where jhum is still being practised. Since the village of Mynser and the area it (i.e., the Raid Kherwang) imcludes

had a lot of paddy fields, this was a very attractive area to control for both the Himas. Many sites around the village yielded iron slag, clear evidence of a once-thriving iron industry. We were told that the iron ore manufactured here was used to make swords and guns.

Archaeology has established that the oldest iron smelting site in the Northeast is in Nongkrem (2000 years ago) and the area around Sohra (1000 years ago). These areas inhabited by the Khasis—the second-oldest community in South Asia—Macro Mitri, in his 2008 PhD thesis 'Archaeological Investigation in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills: A Study on the Distribution Patterns of Neolithic Sites (An Ethno-archaeological Approach)', proposed that Karbi Anglong and Dima Hasao were the initial locations where the Khasis must have settled when they arrived from the east. So, this area must have had a thriving Khasi population for a very long time, at least for the last 4000 years, much before the Tibeto-Burman groups, first the Kok-Borok groups that include the Garo, Tiwa and then groups like the Karbi arrived a little later. Someone also told us that the Don Bosco Museum found belts worn by Khasi warriors in the neighbouring Amri area. Over time, as the Khasis migrated from the area, groups like the Karbi and Tiwa moved in and started settling down. However, many Khasis also remained, and colonial documents mention this group, now known as the Kherwang Khasis.

When PRT Gurdon wrote his book 'The Khasis' in 1907, he noticed that among the Khasis only the Kherwang/Kharwang villages along with some in Mynso and Sutnga were still weaving their own clothes. The Kharwang especially weaved "a special pattern of cotton and silk cloth, striped red and white." Clubbed under the group of Khasis speaking Pnar, this is a strong sign that Kherwang Khasis have inhabited these areas for many generations. Most probably they were under the juris-

diction of Hima Jaintiapur, asserting their independence as a Raid from time to time attracting the attention of Hima Shillong which also eyed the rich taxation from this area. Even in the recent past, the area has been an integral part of Khasi history. During the rebellion against the British in Jaintia Hills, Kiang Nongbah had used a cave known as Krem Len found in the village's sacred forest to hide and plot his attacks, strengthening the connection with Hima Jaintiapur. However, because of lack of time, we could not visit the cave, but that is a site for a future visit.

Mynser village and the Raid Kherwang are a very important parts of Khasi history, stretching back to the Neolithic period when Khasis brought rice and farming to South Asia. Today it's an area inhabited by Karbi, Tiwa and other groups who must have influenced Khasi culture and got influenced, making it a fascinating area for understanding the cultural and ethnic churn that characterises the North East. At present it is a site of contestation between Karbi Anglong and Meghalaya, which could continue for some time to come. But whatever the outcome is, we must ensure that the continuing legacy of the Kherwang Khasis must endure as it gives us a glimpse of our past and our culture. We will always have Khasis living in what today are non-Khasi dominated areas and vice versa. That will not change. What can happen, however, is that we live in harmony with each other, as there are many who are ready to exploit strife and marginalize the indigenous communities in the North East through politics and religion. From my interactions with some student leaders and politicians from Karbi Anglong, it's clear that this process has already begun. Fostering solidarity among the Khasis, Karbis, and Tiwas is crucial, and the Kherwang Khasis can play a vital role in helping to achieve it.

(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)

A Pine Mount for Every District!

By Avner Parlat

The Education sector in Meghalaya stands at a crucial crossroads. While education is universally acknowledged as a fundamental driver of human development, social mobility, and state-building, the current system has become unsustainable - drained by inefficiencies and dominated by private institutions that consume copious amounts of public funds. The Education Department's recently released Discussion Paper on the Consolidation of Government Grants reveals a troubling pattern: private schools and colleges, though largely funded by the state, remain structurally unaccountable, operationally fragmented, and resistant to reform. It is high time for the government to reclaim control and establish a system grounded in equity, performance, and transparency.

As per the Discussion Paper, private educational institutions in Meghalaya receive the lion's share of government funding, with 67% of the Rs 2,197.39 crore annual salary expenditure directed towards their teachers and lecturers. That means that every year the Government allocates Rs 1,472.25 crore to private educational institutions. That is just for salaries with little left over for infrastructural intervention and other improvements.

Yet, it is my opinion that these same institutions operate with limited transparency and little obligation to demonstrate outcomes. Most of the deficit and aided private schools are run with significant government support, yet they maintain private-style autonomy over admissions, fee structures, and internal operations - often excluding the very communities whose taxes fund them. This has left many citizens visibly disappointed and angry. For them, it is not a matter of the macro-level data quoted in the Discussion Paper but how they are made to feel. And many feel (and have felt for a long time now) that their children's futures cannot be handled so haphazardly by private players without governmental oversight. If there is no mechanism to regulate fees, these schools will continue to burden parents with high fees - essentially double-dipping into both public and private pockets without delivering commensurate educational outcomes.

Again, in my opinion, very few of these private institutions have shown significant improvements in student learning outcomes, infrastructure, and governance. Meghalaya ranks last in India's Performance Grading Index (PGI), with especially poor scores in Learning Outcomes, Infrastructure, and Teacher Training - areas where many private institutions should have led, given the generous financial support they receive.

Many private schools have also exploited the fragmented Grant-in-Aid (GIA) system to multiply their claims. It is now common for a single institution to register as multiple schools—LP, UP, Secondary, and Higher Secondary—simply to access more grants. This has artificially inflated school numbers, distorted Unified District Information System for Education Plus (UDISE+) data, and weakened the government's ability to plan and monitor effectively. 6,702 schools fall under this duplicative model, often operating on the same campus under different funding schemes.

This manipulation is not without consequences. Infrastructure indicators are diluted across artificially divided schools, resulting in falsely low coverage rates for electricity, water, and sanitation—thereby dragging down the state's PGI scores and obscuring the real conditions of education delivery.

Perhaps the most alarming issue is the absence of performance-based accountability among private schools. Despite receiving government salaries, teachers in these institutions are often poorly monitored. School Management Committees (SMCs), which are supposed to ensure local oversight, lack the authority - or perhaps do not care - to take disciplinary action or enforce standards. As a result, absenteeism and even the

use of proxy teachers remain widespread in private-aided schools, especially those under the deficit system.

Even within the same institution, as revealed in the Discussion Paper, the disparity in teacher pay is stark. Government-sanctioned teachers may earn up to Rs 1,00,000 per month while equally qualified staff appointed by the management earn as little as Rs 10,000. This internal inequity fosters resentment, erodes morale, and undermines the credibility of the teaching profession.

Despite their dependence on public funds, many private institutions have resisted consolidation, rationalization, and the introduction of performance-linked funding. The Private School Lobby (PSL) remains one of the most influential and powerful vested interest groups in the state, often deploying religious and minority status cards to lobby for and against numerous issues and reforms.

In addition, there are numerous fragmented teacher associations - over 25 - which though well-meaning, end up diverting the Education Department's focus away from systemic reform and distracting administration through the continuous grievances they bring to the table. Grievances which could be fixed easily if reforms were allowed to be brought in immediately.

What can be done? Given this scenario, the government has not only the right but the obligation to step in. The proposed Meghalaya Education Grant (MEG) scheme is a much-needed correction. By consolidating the existing GIA schemes into a single, rule-bound, performance-linked framework, the state can ensure that public funds serve public goals.

Key to this reform is aligning funding with outcomes. Schools and colleges should be rewarded for enrolment, infrastructure development, academic performance, and fee transparency—not for historical privilege or political influence. The MEG also promises greater autonomy to School Managing Committees (SMCs) and Governing Bodies, but this autonomy must come with responsibility and measurable targets.

Additionally, the government must demand transparency from private institutions. Full disclosure of finances, staff rosters, infrastructure status, and student performance must become prerequisites for continued funding.

The crisis in Meghalaya's education system has been exacerbated by private institutions that benefit from public funds while evading public responsibility. These schools and colleges cannot continue to operate with minimal accountability and unchecked access to the state budget. It is time for the government to reassert its role—not to micro-manage schools, but to set the rules of engagement, ensure fair distribution of resources, and protect the interests of students, teachers, and communities.

To truly challenge the dominance of private schools and restore balance in the education ecosystem, the Government of Meghalaya must invest in building and strengthening a robust network of high-quality government schools like Pine Mount, Shillong Public School etc at every district level. At present, many families turn to private institutions not out of preference, but out of necessity—driven by the perception that government schools lack basic infrastructure, qualified teachers, and academic rigour. This has created an uneven playing field where private schools, often subsidized by public funds, continue to thrive while public institutions struggle. By establishing well-equipped, professionally staffed, and transparently managed government schools that offer quality education at no or low cost, the state can create real competition and offer parents a viable, affordable alternative. This will not only increase access and equity but also force private schools to improve their standards in order to remain relevant. Strong public schools will serve as a benchmark for quality, ensuring that education remains a right, not a privilege.

Letters to the Editor

NEP a distant dream in St Anthony's College

Editor,
I wish to bring to your kind attention some pressing concerns regarding the implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 at St. Anthony's College, Shillong. While the NEP promises revolutionary changes in India's education system by promoting multidisciplinary learning, skill development, and a flexible curriculum, the ground reality at many institutions, including St. Anthony's College reveals several challenges. One major issue is the acute shortage of qualified teachers required to successfully implement the new policy framework.

The NEP demands a broader range of subjects, vocational courses, and interdisciplinary teaching. However, without the recruitment of sufficient specialized and trained faculty members, the burden falls heavily on the existing staff. This not only compromises the quality of education but also dilutes the very spirit of the NEP. Students are left with limited course options, overburdened teachers struggle to deliver content effectively, and the overall educational experience suffers.

Moreover, the lack of faculty for new and emerging fields means that students may not receive the guidance and mentorship the NEP envisions. If not addressed urgently, this gap may lead to increased dissatisfaction among students and undermine the college's reputation for academic excellence.

I sincerely urge the concerned authorities and the college administration to prioritize the hiring of adequate qualified teachers before fully implementing the NEP structure. Without the necessary human resources, even the most visionary policies can falter.

Yours etc.,
Siddhartha Nandan,
Via email

Indian cinema has the tools, but not the courage

Editor,
As someone deeply passionate about cinema, I often reflect on the widening gap between India's filmmaking potential and the courage to explore truth through storytelling. Globally, cinema has long been a mirror to the human condition—not always flattering, but always honest. In films like *The Seventh Seal* and *Cries and Whispers*, Ingmar Bergman explored death, despair, and silence with painful intimacy. With *Zodiac* and *Se7en*, David Fincher crafted stories not for comfort but for confrontation, where morality blurs and obsession consumes. Akira Kurosawa's *Rashomon* and *Ikiru* dealt with justice, memory, and the search for meaning, using cinema as a philosophical inquiry. These films disturbed, yes—but they also transformed.

In India, we too have directors who dare—Anurag Kashyap, Vetrimaaran, Sudhir Mishra, and Guru Dutt in his time. But when they touch societal wounds—caste, corruption, or blind faith—they're met with bans, outrage, or worse, silence. The moment a

film dares to ask "why?" It is branded anti-something. Yet what is cinema if not the most empathetic way of asking uncomfortable questions?

We have the technology, the platforms, audience—our mainstream system rewards safety. We prefer spectacle over soul. We avoid narratives that may unsettle, challenge, or offend—even when they're needed most.

India is a country of poetry and paradox. Why should our films only show the poetry, and never the paradox? Cinema should not be limited to escapism. It must also be allowed to dive into the shadows of our reality—into what we hide, ignore, or fear. Until we do that, Indian cinema will remain visually ambitious but emotionally shallow.

Let our filmmakers be free. Let our stories reflect who we are—not just who we pretend to be.

Yours etc.,
Akhil Dwivedi,
Via email

Keeping Meghalaya clean: A shared responsibility

Editor,
Meghalaya's breathtaking landscapes and rich cultural heritage make it a paradise for tourists and locals alike. However, the state's growing popularity and rapid urbanization have become a cause of great concern in terms of maintaining cleanliness and proper waste disposal.

As a local from Shillong, I believe it's our collective duty to maintain cleanliness and proper waste disposal beginning with our streets, and rivers. We should take

initiatives and be an example to non-residents and tourists coming to Meghalaya. We applaud Asia's Cleanest Village, Mawlynnong but what about the rest of the city and towns? Article 51-A(g), says, "It shall be the duty of every citizen of India to protect and improve the natural environment including forests, lakes, rivers and wildlife and to have compassion for living creatures."

Take the example of Sikkim Administration; Sikkim mandates tourist vehicles to carry garbage bags. They have strict rules that prohibit smoking and littering in public places. Anyone found disobeying the rules is fined. The locals there are well educated on proper waste management and they have adopted cleanliness while also safeguarding the environment from reckless tourist behaviour.

Tourism is significantly boosting the state economy, generating employment and supporting local communities. However, there are pros and cons as well. I was in Lyncsuar falls with my friends, serenading the beauty of the fall when we saw some tourists smoking and drinking beside the waterfall. After they were done, they threw the cigarette buds and beer bottles right there. I stopped them, showed them the bamboo basket ahead where they could dump their garbage. When I asked the locals in Sohra about their experiences with tourists littering every space, some shared that they were hesitant to step in and intervene. They expressed concerns about being perceived as rude or confrontational, especially when dealing with visitors from outside the state.

In the locality where I come from in Shillong, the

Dorbar Shnong convenes a meeting where it is mandatory for all residents to attend once or twice a year. It is in this Dorbar meeting this year, (2025), that we heard some good news that people are coming forward to safeguard the environment. So, if anyone sees a particular person littering even after being warned, such persons are taken to the Rangbah Shnong. It helps to have proof in the form of a picture. The Shnong will then take action and the litterer has to pay a heavy fine. I believe if all Dorbar Shnong in Meghalaya from the city to the small towns and villages educate their residents well on maintaining cleanliness, avoiding polluting rivers, streets, roads, markets and if whoever disobeys is strictly punished or fined then and only then will change happen.

Hence if you are a local and a litterbug, stop it right now and be a responsible citizen to keep Meghalaya clean and green. We locals should be an example to tourists and outsiders by working together, to preserve the state's natural beauty and promote a healthy environment for future generations.

Yours etc.,
Banteihun Mary Lyngdoh Mawphlang,
Via email

Tourism and its impact on local communities

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to draw attention to an increasingly significant issue—the growing impact of tourism on local communities

in Meghalaya.

While tourism has undoubtedly brought economic benefits and wider recognition to our state, it has also led to unintended consequences that deserve urgent attention. Many popular destinations such as Dawki, Sohra, and Laitlum are facing overcrowding thereby putting a strain on natural resources, apart from rising waste pollution. The very beauty that attracts visitors is now under threat due to unregulated tourism activities and inadequate infrastructure to manage the influx.

Moreover, the social fabric of some local communities is being disturbed. Traditional lifestyles are being commercialized, and cultural values diluted to cater to tourists' expectations. While some residents benefit financially, others feel left out or overwhelmed by rapid changes.

It is essential that the government, local bodies, and community leaders come together to promote sustainable tourism—one that respects local traditions, protects the environment, and ensures equitable benefits. Initiatives like community-based tourism, stricter regulations on waste management, and limiting the carrying capacity of sensitive areas must be prioritized.

Tourism should be a means of growth, not exploitation. Let us act before the damage becomes irreversible.

Yours etc.,
Anurag Paul Shillong

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

"Fear is the mother of foresight."

— Thomas Hardy

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Dhaka in focus

ABRUPTLY and more curiously, focus shifts from the western border to the eastern sector as geo-strategists sound a warning over Bangladesh's attempt to build an airbase with Chinese assistance not far from the Chicken's Neck, the narrow 22-km wide land corridor that connects the Indian mainland with North-East India. This is an extremely sensitive region with strategic significance. It was near here, in West Bengal's north, that the Naxalbari left-wing-extremist-Maoist movement once originated in the 1960s and flourished with Chinese backing. The obvious intent at that time was suspectedly to enable the Chinese to gain foothold or control over this stretch, so as to cut-off India's mainland from the north-eastern sister states. The violent movement was put down by the Indian security forces. Since then, China has been making repeated, covert attempts to militarily equip its land north of this region. China's Doklam military offensive in 2017, which India resisted on cue from the US intelligence and request from Bhutan, was also part of China's hidden designs for the region. Now that Bangladesh has ousted Sheikh Hasina and installed a government with social activist Muhammad Yunus, China probably sees a fresh opportunity to further its plans there. Yunus' recent statements visualising integration of the economies of China, the north-east and Bangladesh; his assertion that the north-east was "landlocked" and the claim that Bangladesh was the "guardian of the sea" obviously carried with them ill-motives. This prompted Prime Minister Narendra Modi to advise caution to Yunus in a meeting the two held last month on the sidelines of a BIMSTEC meeting in Bangkok.

The Indian Government can be trusted with keeping a close watch of the developments in the geopolitical region in the aftermath of Hasina's exit from Bangladesh. To which, however, has been added a new twist with the US seeking to use the evolving situation to its advantage. The relations that the US sought to strengthen with the present Bangladesh administration also did not go unnoticed, evident also in the reported American attempt to arm some insurgent groups in Myanmar via Bangladesh. However, a configuration of objectives of all these players is unlikely given the divergence of interests of the US and China. Yunus's ability to perform a trapeze act is suspect. It would appear that Russia too would be drawn into the geopolitical games in the eastern sector. Bangladesh's army chief General Waqar Uz Zaman's visit to Moscow in April, when he met Russia's deputy defence minister and army chief, among others, is significant. How the discussions there progressed is not clear, but a defence cooperation between the militaries of Bangladesh and Russia was reportedly explored. The differences between the Bangladesh army and the interim government are not a secret. Some generals are not comfortable with the pro-Pakistan, pro-terrorist stands of the Yunus-guided dispensation but some generals perhaps are. All these would mean there could be curious developments linked to Bangladesh in the coming months.

Bring Back the Techies

Make Meghalaya the Silicon Valley of the North East!

By KN Kumar

tech spotlight.

English proficiency further bolsters Meghalaya's appeal. Unlike cities reliant on migrant labour, Meghalaya's homegrown, English-speaking talent offers cultural cohesion and cost-effectiveness, qualities that have fuelled Pune's rise as a BPO hub. This linguistic edge positions the state to attract IT and IT-enabled services firms seeking globally competitive workforces.

Meghalaya's temperate climate, averaging 23°C annually, is another draw. Unlike Hyderabad or Chennai, where scorching summers inflate cooling costs for data centres and offices, Meghalaya's mild climate reduces energy expenses and enhances quality of life. This mirrors the appeal of Himachal Pradesh's Baddi corridor, which has lured companies with its pleasant environment.

Connectivity, a historical challenge in the Northeast, is improving steadily. Umroi Airport links Shillong to cities like Guwahati, Kolkata, and Imphal, with potential for expansion to support tech-related travel. Upgraded roads and high-speed internet infrastructure are critical to a modern tech ecosystem. The International Internet Gateway project, leveraging Bangladesh's network, promises robust digital access, and 89% of Meghalaya's villages now have telecom connectivity. These developments bridge the gap between Meghalaya and India's tech powerhouses.

A hidden strength lies in Meghalaya's diaspora. Thousands of Northeastern professionals work in tech hubs like Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Chennai, with estimates suggesting 15-20% of Bengaluru's IT workforce hails from the region. This talent pool, rich in experience and entrepreneurial ambition, could transform Meghalaya if lured back. States like Kerala, with its "Return to Kerala" campaign, and Gujarat, through the Vibrant Gujarat Summit, have successfully tapped their diaspora. Globally, China's Thousand Talents Plan and Israel's tech repatriation programmes illustrate the impact of such

strategies.

Policy innovation is critical to Meghalaya's tech ambitions. The draft IT/ITeS Policy of 2024 emphasises investment, infrastructure, and skills, but needs bolder measures to rival states like Telangana, home to the T-Hub innovation centre, or Kerala, with its Startup Mission. Meghalaya could offer a three-year tax holiday for IT firms creating significant jobs, streamline land acquisition for tech parks, and subsidise electricity and internet costs to attract startups and multinationals.

I propose that a "Meghalaya Tech Return Scheme" (MTRS) be launched immediately. This initiative would offer relocation grants of up to Rs 5 lakh for tech professionals or teams launching ventures in Meghalaya, incentives for hiring locals, and support for co-working spaces with high-speed internet. Remote work hubs could also attract professionals seeking Meghalaya's serene environment while maintaining ties to larger cities. If implemented properly, it could be transformative.

Consider the economic impact of just 100 returning tech professionals. If each launches a startup employing 10 locals, 1,000 direct jobs would be created—a significant boost for a state grappling with youth unemployment. Assuming each startup generates Rs 5 crore in annual revenue (a conservative estimate for early-stage tech firms), the cohort could contribute Rs 500 crore to Meghalaya's economy by year three, potentially scaling to Rs 2,000 crore by year five, with growth. The government's investment—Rs 5 lakh per techie in relocation grants and Rs 10 lakh per startup in tax holidays or subsidies—would total Rs 15 crore. At prevailing corporate tax rates, the state could earn Rs 100 crore annually from these startups starting in year four (after a three-year tax holiday), yielding a net return of Rs 85 crore in the first year of taxation alone.

The ripple effects are substantial. Each direct tech job typically generates 2.5 indirect jobs in sectors like

hospitality and retail, adding 2,500 ancillary jobs. Returning techies could attract Rs 2 crore per startup in external funding, injecting Rs 200 crore into the economy. These ventures would upskill local talent, creating a pipeline for future enterprises, much like Kerala's IT sector. The MTRS aligns with India's Startup India initiative, which offers tax benefits and a Rs 10,000 crore venture capital fund. By layering state incentives atop central schemes, Meghalaya could amplify its appeal.

These projections, while promising, require rigorous validation. Nonetheless, I believe that a 100-techie pilot under the MTRS could deliver immediate fiscal gains and long-term structural benefits, positioning Meghalaya as an innovation magnet. Scaling this model to attract thousands, as Gujarat has done with its diaspora, could cement the state's tech credentials.

Meghalaya's journey to become the Northeast's Silicon Valley demands vision and action. The Meghalaya Tech Return Scheme (MTRS) promises transformative benefits not only for Meghalaya but for the entire Northeast region. By attracting tech-savvy professionals back to Meghalaya, the scheme will foster a vibrant innovation ecosystem, creating high-skill jobs and spurring economic growth. The resulting tech hubs in Meghalaya could catalyse the Northeast, encouraging cross-state collaboration, attracting investment, and upskilling youth across Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and beyond. Improved connectivity and shared resources would position the region as a unified tech frontier, reducing brain drain and elevating the Northeast's profile as a competitive player in India's digital economy.

By leveraging its youthful talent, English proficiency, climate, connectivity, and diaspora, and by enacting bold policies like the MTRS, the state can redefine the region's economic future. The opportunity is ripe, but leadership must seize it now. Will someone please take charge?

(The writer is former member of the IAS)

Honouring Gerald Durrell by ripping off his title

My Family and Other Animals

By Ellerrine Diengdoh

Now, I come from a family that doesn't just like animals. We hoard them. Lovingly. Compulsively. It is not a hobby. It is an illness.

Growing up, my sister and I lived in a household where the number of paws always exceeded the number of legs. The pets were mostly strays. The rest were just free-loaders who never left. We named them, fed them, nursed them, educated them (emotionally, not academically), and often wondered who exactly was in charge. It wasn't us.

The ringleader of this animal circus is my mother (now a retired nurse), who has always been the unofficial zookeeper of every neighbourhood we've ever lived in. She believes it is her divine duty to rescue every living creature within a five-kilometre radius. She does this with such zeal that she occasionally ends

dog — or to call for the municipal department to make them "disappear" — while ignoring the person who left their "designer pet" on the street, then perhaps the problem isn't the menace. It's the reflection in the mirror.

Let me offer some unsolicited but terribly necessary solutions:

1. The Great Pet Census
Every household must declare the animals they own. This data must not be verified by the owner. Who will, of course, lie. But by their neighbours. Who will tell you everything. Because they know. Because they've heard the 3 am howling. Because they've stepped on the landmines.

2. Real Penalties for Abandonment

You leave a dog on the street? Excellent. You now get to clean every poop from Don Bosco to Iewduh for six months. With a spoon. Wear-

"At one point, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of creatures sharing our oxygen supply, I posted a whatsapp status that read: "We have too many animals. I need to bring the numbers down. Does anyone want to adopt my mother?" I thought it was funny. Everyone else thought I was deranged. I received three angry phone calls and 7 messages in twenty minutes. Apparently, suggesting the rehoming of my mother was monstrous. That, ladies and gentlemen, is my mother."

up rescuing animals that are — how do I put this gently — already rescued. As in, owned. As in, wearing collars. She once returned a dog to its owners with a lecture on responsibility. They thanked her. She did not apologise.

Every other month, we try to rehome a new litter of puppies or kittens. It's a routine now. Our neighbours have watched this ritual unfold with a mixture of admiration, pity, and silent dread.

At one point, overwhelmed by the sheer volume of creatures sharing our oxygen supply, I posted a whatsapp status that read: "We have too many animals. I need to bring the numbers

down. Does anyone want to adopt my mother?" I thought it was funny. Everyone else thought I was deranged. I received three angry phone calls and 7 messages in twenty minutes. Apparently, suggesting the rehoming of my mother was monstrous. That, ladies and gentlemen, is my mother. A one-woman animal welfare department with no budget, no day off, and absolutely no sense of when to stop.

Now, while all of this makes for an entertaining domestic series, it points to a much larger, much less charming issue. Take a walk through any locality in Shillong and you'll see them — the abandoned pets, the accidental litters, the confused little pups dumped near a meat shop, like someone's going to swing by and say, "Ah yes, just what I needed with my pork today". We treat animals like fashion accessories. One day it's, "Oh my God, look at his floppy ears!! He's sooooo cute. I can't even!" A few months later: "We don't have time any more. Maybe we'll just let him out and he'll find his way." Find his way where, exactly?

Meanwhile, the abandoned dogs do what dogs do. They adapt. They form packs. They howl at night. And then we complain. We complain that they bark too much. That they chase schoolchildren. That they dig through garbage. But if your solution to an animal problem is to yell at someone feeding a starving

ing a shirt that says, "I have Commitment Issues". You must also attend a 12 Week mandatory course titled: "How Not to Be a Garbage Human".

3. Mandatory Spaying/Neutering

If your dog isn't spayed or neutered, you must either pay a fine, book the snip or babysit six unadopted puppies every weekend. They will be trained to pee exclusively on surfaces that cost more than your monthly rent. You will host them until further notice — or until you've aged five years and started weeping at the sound of a bark.

4. Dog Ownership License

You must pass a quiz before you get a dog. Sample questions:

a) Can you spell vaccination?

b) What is a vet? Is it short for vegetable?

c) What is your plan when your dog stops being cute and starts shredding your furniture?

d) If your dog barks at 3 am is it:

*Calling the neighbour-hood watch?

*Practising for a singing competition?

*Just generally annoyed at life?

Failure to answer correctly results in a lifetime ban from owning anything with a heartbeat.

5. Rethink What It Means to "Own" a Pet

If you own a dog but it spends 18 hours chained to a gatepost, or locked in some godforsaken room or terrace, you don't have a pet. You have a hostage. Dogs are not props. They are sentient, drooling, emotionally needy creatures who will love you unconditionally and then destroy your sofa. If you cannot deal with that — buy a cactus!

The truth is, Shillong doesn't have a stray dog problem, it has a stray empathy problem. The dogs didn't stray from home, we strayed from basic human decency. My family does its bit, but we can't carry the whole city's conscience. So, if karma is watching, may we all come back as the puppies we so thoughtlessly abandoned. May we find ourselves chained, hungry and cold right outside our own gates. With my mother, nowhere near to save us!

Letters to the Editor

Who's behind the ceasefire?

Editor,
The news emanating from Washington "Trump at it again, says 'ceasefire' a 'big success'" (ST May 17 2025) is amusing. Donald Trump the baron of business is good at taking credit for the ceasefire and claims that it is a big success but Indian officials maintained that the agreement was reached through direct military negotiations between the Director General of Military Operations of both countries. India emphasized that it was a bilateral decision, independent of external influence. Pakistan leadership acknowledged the ceasefire but did not explicitly confirm Trump's role in mediation. Instead, they highlighted diplomatic efforts and international pressure as contributing factors. It is strange how the American President says that the ceasefire was a big success when despite the agreement, Pakistan reportedly violated the ceasefire within hours by launching drone attacks across various parts of India, including Srinagar and Rajouri. Surely this is not Trump's big success but it raises concerns about the sustainability of the peace deal.

Brahma Chellaney, Professor Emeritus of Strategic Studies at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi has been highly critical of India's decision to agree to a ceasefire with Pakistan. He argued that India "snatched defeat from the jaws of victory" by halting military operations just three

days into Operation Sindoor. He warned that the ceasefire may not be sustainable, given Pakistan's history of violating agreements.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

The frustrated unpaid doctors

Editor,
The contractual doctors who are the backbone of medical care at various health centres across the state are facing hardships because the state government does not pay them their salaries on time. The contractual doctors in the state are mostly the young and freshly graduated bonded MBBS doctors who have worked so hard to earn the degree after years of gruelling study and training but just to be exploited by the government.

The government has not paid the salaries of doctors for months; some have not been paid since their joining of the bonded service, hence the phrase "financial independence" does not exist in their dictionaries. I ask you to imagine a doctor asking for a monthly pocket money from the parents who have high hopes and expectations from their in-service doctor child.

When enquired, the DHS officials said that the State does not have the funds allocated for the contractual doctors. That's it! so simple and clear!

The Government boasts around about the investments they have made in the health sector, donating crores of money for the already rich

and wealthy hospitals but just cannot pay the salaries of the doctors who work day and night. Contractual doctors work equally or even more than the regular doctors (who enjoy their credited salaries by the 1st of every month perhaps) sometimes because they cannot even avail leaves other than the 15 days casual leave in a year.

The work is just more than the usual in patient and out patient service. Monthly trainings at their own expenses (TA/DA paid after decades), online meetings, organizing various health melas/ programmes at the facility and in the villages; and to sum up they are just over worked, overburdened but unpaid.

The Government keeps stating that the state is lacking in doctors but there are hundreds of doctors waiting to be recruited permanently. We don't want luxury — only fairness.

Timely payment for honest work. Job security for those risking their own physical and mental health and the dignity every worker deserves. Its not just about the money anymore but basic respect for the service the doctors provide. The will and the spirit that we had to care and heal the sick is somehow slowly diminishing.

To the health administrators and the ones just sitting at the office: if we want a resilient health care system, start by valuing those who run it. Begin by paying the doctors on time.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Enhancing employment opportunities in Meghalaya

Editor,
I would like to share some thoughts on how Meghalaya can increase employment opportunities for its growing workforce.

Employment generation is vital for the economic and social well-being of Meghalaya. The state, blessed with abundant natural beauty and cultural heritage, has immense potential to create jobs if the right strategies are implemented.

First, modernizing agriculture and promoting agro-based industries can boost rural employment. Training farmers in new techniques and supporting food processing units can increase productivity and create jobs.

Second, Meghalaya's tourism sector remains largely untapped. By improving infrastructure and promoting eco-tourism and local handicrafts, the state can attract more visitors and generate employment in hospitality, transport, and artisanal work.

Third, encouraging small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through better access to credit and skill development can stimulate entrepreneurship and job creation, especially among youth.

Fourth, improving vocational training aligned with industry needs will equip young people with skills in IT, healthcare, and manufacturing, making them more

employable.

Finally, infrastructure development and attracting investments through special economic zones can bring in industries that provide long-term employment.

A focused and collaborative approach involving the government, private sector, and communities is essential. By harnessing its resources and talent, Meghalaya can create sustainable jobs and improve the quality of life for its people.

Yours etc.,
Jerry Jeffrey K Marak
Via email

Lets hope Iewduh receives its facelift in a definite time-frame

Editor,
It was not only interesting to read but even more soulful to see our honourable Chief Minister and his entourage paying a visit to Iewduh which is one of the oldest traditional markets of the state. Without a doubt, those who use this market to earn their livelihoods and those who still buy their wares from this place, have been experiencing numerous difficulties daily but more especially when it rains. As the CM said, it was indeed fortunate that it rained on his visit for him to see the filth and dirt that the people go through on a daily basis. It is also very encouraging that the CM was willing and eager to listen to the vendors as they shared the difficulties they wish to be addressed.

Rs 31 crore is a lot of

money that the state government has demarcated for the beautification and infrastructure overhaul especially drainage, public conveniences, electricity and proper lighting. It is common knowledge that these days vendors set up shops anywhere they feel it convenient for them to do so and people too prefer to buy their needs where they have close access to. Yet Iewduh still plays an integral part in the lives of many. Therefore, one feels the need to highlight here that the CM's visit should yield positive results and not be wasted. Let the Rs 31 crore be used entirely and only for the purpose it has been demarcated for. Let the desires of those who had voiced their hardships before our CM be heard and addressed.

As a substantial sum has been earmarked for this project, one hopes that corruption does not play a part at any level otherwise work culture, quality of materials supplied etc would be compromised. One is sure the Government and the Hima Mylliem will supervise the work on a regular basis so that the project is completed within the time frame and would not prolong for decades as it usually happens with other government projects.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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"Nature is not human hearted."

— Lao Tzu

The Shillong Times

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SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2025

Importance of Following Up

MEGHALAYA Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma has blazed a new trail by moving out of his office chamber to connect with ordinary people and listen to their woes. He visited Syntung village where strawberries flourish. Recently he visited the Pynursla region and touched base with the villagers who have nurtured the plethora of living roots bridges left behind by their forerunners as a legacy. Next he visited the border village of Tangmang which specialises in crafts and basketry. No Chief Minister in the past has made such personal contacts with the people, breaking away from the security cordon. The visit to Lewduh, Meghalaya's oldest and biggest marketplace, over which the Syiem of Myllem exercises claims and so too the Khasi Hills District Council, was providential. It gave the Chief Minister a first-hand account of how people have to wade through the slush and garbage during the rainy season since the rains came in torrents providentially.

These visits, while important, should lead to visible outcomes. The CM has assured the people of Lewduh that an additional sum of Rs 15 crore for the second phase of the project would include construction of new footpaths and proper drainage system. Earlier a sum of Rs 6 crore had been sanctioned for renovating internal footpaths. For the longest time Lewduh remained the domain of the Syiem of Myllem who collects taxes from vendors but has never ploughed back anything towards improving the look of this market. It remained a shabby, dirty marketplace yet the most crowded since women in particular hold the belief that anything bought at Lewduh tends to last longer and is cheaper because it is also a wholesale market. Many a CEM has made a brouhaha about Lewduh promising to raise its stature but Lewduh remained where it is. Now that the CM has promised the people of Pynursla region some kind of assistance to better their livelihoods and improve tourism infrastructure, it is equally important that he forms a smart team of officials who will work out an implementation framework according to a definite timeline. If people don't see things moving; they will despair and wonder at the enthusiasm that they had shown when the CM made those promises.

The smart follow-up team should list down clear expectations from the project; have a pragmatic timeline for project completion and make monitoring and evaluation a key driver of every project. They need to take the community into confidence. Not all projects will take off without hiccups. Those hiccups need to be addressed immediately and not left to fester. The smart team should report directly to the CM and brief him about challenges or roadblocks that may arise. Performance reviews are critical and the CM should set aside time to review the outcomes of every project. It is here that the CM can assess the performance of the team leader and take a call on delays. Gestation periods for all government projects are too long leading to time and cost overruns. This needs to change.

Masters of War: Bob Dylan's Song(s) and the Vietnam War

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

Lou Majaw was in his fourth year of celebrating Bob Dylan's day, thematically as the celebration of songs and poetry, when the war in Vietnam came to an end on 30 April 1975. This year marks the 50th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War, but the ravages and cruelties of the war are still being felt by the Vietnamese people to this day.

Local Reportage on Vietnam War: The reportage about the war in Vietnam was also shared in local vernacular newspaper here in the State of Meghalaya, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills region. This period and throughout the cold war era, it was characterised by the demonization of communist regime, portraying communism as an evil and godless philosophy. Meghalaya being a Christian dominated State with a majority belonging to the Protestant tradition, experienced this demonization prominently.

The US military campaign in Vietnam or Vietnam war which lasted for nearly two decades (1955-1975) was part of the overall cold war confrontation and the American campaign against the spread of communism. Not just news about the war that were reported, but informed opinions were freely expressed in the editorial, columns and letters in vernacular newspaper like U Nongsain Hima, on the futility of war, the genocidal killings of innocent, dialogue and diplomacy.

Some of the extracts are presented here— "On 23 August 1967, Stephen Lyndogh penned a balanced opinion in his column Vietnam, whereby he pungently remarked that France, USA and China must be held responsible for the horrible situation in Vietnam. France left desolate the soils of Vietnam and America's intervention to prevent the spread of communism in South East Asia had terribly failed, while China did not give lukewarm support, but material and men (human resources). South Vietnam seemed to be under the safe hands of Marshal Ky, with assistance from America, who was the stooge of the west. Ho Chin Minh's mistakes were no less and if Ho Chin Minh was guilty, Johnson, Truman and others are equally responsible for their acts whether collectively, and otherwise. He further pointed whether the USA can repair the damage done to Vietnam if it has to leave or will North Vietnam be able to guarantee the safety of women, children and the sick?"

In the editorial published on 10 February 1968, the edi-

tor, U Nongsain Hima wrote that dialogue and diplomacy are necessary. In war, no one can tell who is strong and who is weak; nothing can be achieved through bombings, and it is futile to think that one power can be suppressed by the use of force by another. Nothing can be achieved through war except greater loss to the people of Vietnam, who are killed, and the suffering of the American public, who have to bear the increased taxes to support the financing of the war. As the world is watching, it is important for all parties to sit across the table and resolve this crisis, including the immediate cessation of the war.

The local reportage, which included editorials, letters and columns about the Vietnam War, reflect the level of awareness and the maturity of public opinion in this region. It indicates how well-informed the people were about international events and demonstrates their capacity to engage thoughtfully with complex geopolitical issues. The presence of such informed discussions also highlights the region's exposure to global affairs and the development of a critical outlook among its readership.

A Nation Divided and Generation Lost: The socio-political and economic situation in the United States of America during the military intervention in Vietnam had been aptly described by the Stanford University's paper entitled "American and the Vietnam War," that the end result of the war "is a nation divided and generation lost". U Nongsain Hima of April 3, 1968, also reported that the division in American society further deepened after Lyndon B. Johnson took over the presidency and decided to intensify military actions in Vietnam. The public outcry turned against President Johnson and ultimately forced him to withdraw from the presidential race. The more the Presidents of America sought to crush communism in Vietnam, the greater the backlash at home; in equal measure, students across America took to the streets to protest against President Nixon and called for an end to the war. Scores of newspapers, radio, and television programs were highly critical of President Nixon's war strategy, including the decision to drop mines in North Vietnam (U Nongsain Hima, May 13, 1972).

Today, American society is as divided as it was dur-

ing the Vietnam war and the United States is going through a period of intense social, political and cultural polarization. Issues such as racial justice, immigration, gender rights, and LGBTQ+ rights have created polarized debates and movements.

Bob Dylan's Song (s) and the Vietnam War: Artists, songwriters, and singers have historically played a significant role in shaping public opinion against war, violence, racial killings and injustices. Their music and activism serve as powerful tools for raising awareness, inspiring change, mobilizing communities and enabling them to speak truth to power.

During the Vietnam war era, many American artists used their platforms to protest against the military intervention which had led to bloody conflict resulting in deaths and untold miseries. These artists strongly advocated for peace and prominent among them was Bob Dylan, an influential American singer-songwriter. Dylan's songs became anthems of the anti-war movement, capturing the sentiments of a generation disillusioned with violence and conflict. His lyrical storytelling highlighted social injustices, promoted peace and challenged US government policies, especially in Vietnam.

Bob Dylan had written several anti-war and pro civil rights songs, but the anti-war song which figured prominently in the University of Alabama's web page is the "Masters of War", which was adapted by Bob Dylan to protest against the Vietnam war. This anti-war song is still being used today to protest against ongoing wars. According to the University of Alabama web page, "Dylan borrowed the arrangement for the song 'Nottamun Town' recorded by folksinger Jean Ritchie. Dylan changed the lyrics and made it his own, although the lyrics were different from most of his other songs. He was more direct in 'Masters of War' with the message he wanted to convey which was that the people with power in the government are at fault for the atrocities of war and all the unnecessary spilling of blood...Every line in this song is about how terrible these 'masters of war' are and how Dylan can see through them; he knows what they are doing and he hopes that they die and that Jesus doesn't forgive everything they have done...His other songs like 'Blowin in

the wind" and "Times they are a-changin'" became the rallying cries for change and reflected the hopes and aspirations of countless individuals".

War-mongering in India: Post the Pahalgam massacre, social media platforms in India were rife with war mongers who were hell bent in their resolve to annihilate Pakistan and wanted the Government of India to declare outright war against the enemy state of Pakistan. The war mongers were so disrespectful towards India's Foreign Secretary and Major Qureshi, who are the public faces of the army's operation against the terrorists.

While the merciless and barbaric killings of innocent tourists in Pahalgam were deplorable acts, and they have no place in a civilized society, the racial and religious profiling committed before killing those innocent tourists was abhorrent. It could have sparked another wave of communal strife, plunging the entire nation into darkness. We empathize with the families of the victims and firmly stand behind the defence and law enforcement agencies, who are leaving no stone unturned in their concerted efforts to hunt down the perpetrators and bring them to justice. However, war is not the solution and therefore, citizens and civil society groups across the border have called on both governments to de-escalate tensions, urging immediate dialogue and justice in the context of renewed hostilities.

Celebration of Songs and Poetry: Lou Majaw's effort to keep songs and poetry alive is worthy of appreciation and his commitment to make these hills alive with Dylan's songs and music has earned him greater respect as the years passed by. This year the "Celebration of Songs and Poetry" has entered its 54th year and Lou Majaw will continue to enthral the captivating music lovers of Shillong with his musical ingenuity.

Although Lou Majaw never considers himself a fan of Bob Dylan, the celebration of his birthday and honouring his songs and poetry, shows his deep respect for the artist whose lyrical magic has drawn many towards him. As we join Lou Majaw in this celebration and in these hard times when war mongers abound, we must also remind ourselves of the words of Salman Rushdie: "A poem cannot stop a bullet. A novel cannot defuse a bomb. But we are not helpless. We can sing the truth and name the liars."

Meghalaya's political economy: From schemes to chips

By RV Warjri

This article is a response to KN Kumar's out of the box op-ed "Meghalaya should chip in to India's Silicon story" (ST, May 12, 2025) was followed by an op-ed by protagonist Toki Blah's, "A Game Changer for Meghalaya's economy" (ST, May 19, 2025). And again K N Kumar's "Make Meghalaya the Silicon Valley of the Northeast" (ST, May 21, 2025).

I begin with a banter. Chips here is not about potato chips which is Meghalaya leading crop potato can also be turned into and its ubiquitous packed packet which either hangs in shops and kiosks and the empty packets littering the roadside and nullahs. It's about semiconductor chips - an indispensable item in our compulsive mobile as well as in thousands of other technology relating products and goods. It has been the near monopoly of China or imported from Taiwan but now the global geo-politics is shifting its interest to India. Assam has already taken advantage of the situation and I saw with my own eyes recently about work in progress at the 27,000 Cr Tata Semiconductor plant at Jagi Road. Its demonstration effect should prayerfully impact Meghalaya. Inter alia Meghalaya needs a paradigm shift from a political economy that revolves around schemes only, to one that can manufacture semiconductor chips.

The official web portal of Meghalaya Government in its side links has a heading on schemes. About 120 of them! Most of them after the year 2000. Only some of them have mentioned the date of the release of the schemes though the amount has mysteriously not been mentioned. The list of schemes include those from Agriculture, Community & Rural Development, Housing, Fishery, Child Welfare, Handloom, Education, Industries, Water, etc. Then the scheme on start-ups, PRIME Open Venture Scheme.

The well known centrally sponsored schemes implemented by the States are Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Programme, Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Krishi Sinchay Yojana, Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana - PMAY Rural and PMAY Urban, National Drinking Water Mission, Swachh Bharat Mission, National Health Protection Scheme, National Education Mission, Integrated Child Development Services, Mission for Empowerment and Protection of Women, National Livelihood Mission, Jobs and Skills Development, Urban Rejuvenation Mission. Then there are Centrally Sector Schemes implemented by the Centre with higher allocation like LPG connection to poor households, National Aids and STD control mission, Member of Parliament Local Area Development Scheme, Crop Insurance Scheme, National Mission on Food Processing, Integrated Development of Tourist Circuits, Assistance to promotion of Sports Excellence.

The Central scheme SVAMITVA (Survey of Villages and Mapping with improved Technology in Village Areas) aims at providing an integrated inhabited property ownership solution for rural India. For unknown reasons Meghalaya rejected the scheme though it would have been a boon to the urgent need for a cadastral survey in the state and opened up the gates to the ferra of land alienation, apprehension and obscurity about investment in Meghalaya.

Meghalaya is largely agrarian with main crops like potatoes, rice, maize, fruits like pineapples, bananas, papayas and then spices like ginger and turmeric.

If Viksit Meghalaya is on the agenda then it should hop step and jump from predominantly agrarian to the Fourth Industrial revolution of Semiconductor chips.

The First Industrial Revolution started in England since 1794 by using water and steam power to mechanize production. 1870 started the Second Industrial revolution, using electric power for mass production. The British introduced both the revolutions in India albeit for its colonial purposes. The Third in 1969 used electronics and information technology to automate production when Meghalaya had not even existed. Now a Fourth Industrial Revolution

is building on the Third, characterized by a fusion of technologies between the physical, digital, and biological spheres. The Industrial Revolution also introduced the concept of value addition economics when people started making what they needed on their farms with machines instead of by hand.

According to the World Economic Forum, the possibilities of billions of people connected by mobile devices, with unprecedented processing power, storage capacity, and access to knowledge, are unlimited. And these possibilities will be multiplied by emerging technology breakthroughs in fields such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, autonomous vehicles, 3-D printing, nano-technology, bio-technology, materials, science, energy storage, and quantum computing. Semiconductors make up a vital part of the fourth industrial revolution. As crude was to the third, semi-conductors will be to the fourth.

Government of India has launched the India Semi-conductor Mission (ISM). To build a strong semiconductor and display ecosystem, positioning India as a global hub for electronics manufacturing and design. Some units have demonstrated the growing partnership between Taiwan multinational Foxconn a global major in electronics manufacturing and Indian HCL that has a long history of developing and manufacturing hardware. Together they will set up a plant near Jewar airport in Yamuna Expressway Industrial Development Authority or YEIDA. This plant will manufacture display driver chips for mobile phones, laptops, automobiles, PCs, and myriad of other devices that have display.

K N Kumar had opined on the creation of a Meghalaya Semi-conductor Mission which would work on the skills for the youth and tap into the progress which the semi-conductor industry has advanced in neighbouring Assam and collaborating with global leaders in the semi-conductor industry who are already established in India. The story of how the semi-conductor startups in cities like Hyderabad and Bangalore took off should be studied and replicated in Meghalaya. Its the story that attracted IT leaders like Bill Gates to extend all cooperation and partnership and US Presidents like Bill Clinton to visit Hyderabad in 2000.

Toki Blah suggested that MIDC (Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation) takes the lead. Certainly, its website talks about its vision, mission, objectives and functions. It's says "to function as key role in the process of promotion and development of balanced industrial growth leading to more employment opportunities and create industrial infrastructure in order to support economic development of the state." "To promote / establish industrial ventures across the state." MIDC should ask itself to what extent it has lived up to its vision, mission, objectives and functions. Perhaps its watershed project can be leading from the front on the Meghalaya Semi-conductor Mission. The ancillary units that can multiply from the Semiconductor plant has been detailed by Toki Blah.

"You have to dream before your dreams come true," one of the famous lines of the late legendary Scientist-President of India APJ Abdul Kalam. It can be the allegory to turning Meghalaya into a Silicon Valley as proposed by K N Kumar who has also written extensively about tapping the Meghalaya diaspora and creating a Meghalaya Tech Return Scheme (MRTS).

Only recently there was a celebration of the upgradation of the Shillong Polytechnic to a Shillong Government College of Engineering with courses in Civil Engineering and Electrical Engineering. Recognized by the All India Council for Technical Education, the institution can also be platform for imparting the skills and expertise to the youth that can be absorbed in the future semiconductor plant.

All this will however come a cropper if there is no political will, especially in confronting pressure groups who have made a living out of opposing anything to move forward. Paraphrasing Winston Churchill's famous lines "nothing to fear but fear itself."

Letters to the Editor

Political empathy for a change

Editor,
At the very onset, I want to make one thing very clear - I am not particularly fond of politicians. It's not that I hate them; detest them or even bear any ill will. No nothing of the sort. It's simply that I take them as something that I have to live with; something cheerless I can do without! This reaction springs mainly from the actions (mostly nonsensical), performance (purely selfish), attitude (pomposity personified) and lack of good judgment so very often displayed by most of our elected representatives, past and present, which makes us, the citizens, wonder if all our enthusiasm during election time, is really worth it? I happen to know it's a feeling most people harbour but are reluctant to express. Then suddenly out of this gloom of dependency a politician does something totally unexpected; an act that cries for attention; something small but hugely humanely emotive! Suddenly optimism springs back to life. Perhaps we can still drink from this fountain called democracy. Perhaps all is not lost. Perhaps Meghalaya can still afford to hope.
I speak of the viral social media post of our Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma,

visiting Lewduh on May 19, this year. He is definitely not the first politician or minister to do such a thing. The difference however is previous visits by other personalities or VIPs (as they liked to be called) were, to put it mildly - fair weather drop-bys. The 'hellos', the 'How do you dos' and handshakes under a bright lenient sky or if it drizzled, then a chat or two under the roof of some accommodating shopkeeper. The visit on the 19th was utterly different. During the visit the heavens opened up; it poured by the bucketful; rooftops turned into torrential drainpipes; the narrow Lewduh lanes turned into torrents of black, foul smelling drains; the torrent carried all the waste of Lewduh (stinking putrid floating garbage).

What impressed most was not that the CM said nor the funds for Lewduh development he promised that day. Not the entourage accompanying him. It was his body language as he underwent the wet ordeal; his interactions with the people; the matter of fact manner he faced the camera with his wet hair plastered to his forehead; the way he waded through the muck mentioned above. The Chief Minister of Meghalaya that day exemplified to a tee the misery that thousands of shoppers suffer from every rainy day at Lewduh. On the 19th we saw the CM personally experiencing this common man's problem.

He simply shared what the man on the street and every housewife of Shillong experienced everyday of their lives. People saw it and they liked it. I would like to term it as Political Empathy with the electorate. An example perhaps for every politician to emulate. Hats off to you Conrad! Please keep it up and follow up this visit with solid action on the ground.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

A seat of respect: Lack of civic sense or just plain apathy

Editor,
Recently, during a visit to Nazareth hospital as a patient, I not only witnessed but also experienced something both troubling and disappointing. A glaring lack of basic empathy in one of the most critical aspects of care. The waiting area was packed, as is often the case, but what stood out was the number of visibly pregnant women standing, waiting for their turn, some for as long as 45 minutes without being offered a seat. These were not just early pregnancies; many of these women were heavily pregnant, some leaning against walls, holding their backs in discomfort, others clearly struggling with swell-

ing in their legs and feet. While hospital waiting areas are understandably crowded with patients from various departments of neurosurgery, orthopaedics, and more, it remains baffling that attendees accompanying these patients do not voluntarily offer their seats to heavily pregnant women. The weight of their condition, both literally and figuratively, seems invisible to those who choose convenience over compassion.

It is reasonable to acknowledge that attendees are present to support patients, and some may be dealing with their own fatigue or health concerns. However, the fundamental question that lingers is - are these waiting area seats meant for patients or for attendees? If space is truly limited, should there not be a system in place ensuring that those with greater need, such as pregnant women, have priority access?

What's more disappointing is that nothing was done by the hospital administration to address the issue. There was no intervention by staff, no designated seating, no announcement requesting that those more able-bodied offer their seats to pregnant women. It felt as though the suffering of these women (including mine) was invisible both to the people around them and to the system meant to support them.

This is not just about a lack of chairs. It's about a lack of

awareness, accountability, and compassion. While we talk about maternal health and dignity in public forums and policy documents, the reality on the ground tells a very different story.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Stray dog crisis demands urgent, statewide action

Editor,
The Meghalaya High Court's order to extend the stray dog control measures beyond Shillong to the entire state is not just timely—it is essential. Just as the government ensured no citizen was left behind during the COVID-19 vaccination campaign, a similar no-exception approach is now needed for the state's growing stray dog population. The situation in several localities within Shillong has reached alarming proportions. Unchecked birthing among stray dogs has led to a kind of population explosion that is not only a public health concern but a serious safety risk for residents, especially children and the elderly.

One cannot help but wonder what the Animal Husbandry Department and civic authorities have been doing all this while. Despite the evident crisis, there is little to no visible action from either

of these crucial departments. In fact, public memory does not serve a single instance where these departments have led any substantial or sustained effort to curb the stray dog menace in any part of the state.

It is commendable that the court has invoked the Animal Birth Control (Dogs) Rules, 2001, following a PIL, and directed the formation of a committee to implement sterilization and vaccination protocols. However, implementation must not be a tick-box exercise. Without a committed, campaign-style initiative—mirroring the intensity and coverage of COVID-19 vaccination drives—the situation is unlikely to improve. The comparison may seem unusual at first glance, but the underlying principle is the same: universal coverage, accountability, and urgency.

This is no longer a matter of isolated dog bites or nightly disturbances—this is a question of civic sanity and public health. The state machinery must wake up to the reality and act decisively, or else this issue will spiral further into an urban catastrophe.

Yours etc.,
Ranjit Bose
Shillong - 1

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"Gratitude is the fairest blossom which springs from the soul."
— Henry Ward Beecher

The Shillong Times

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Hydra-headed terror

TERRORISM is a hydra-headed monster. It does not work on any established norms. It can hit here, there, and anywhere. This is the reason why the collective consciousness of humanity must rise against the spectre of terrorism. Its latest theatre was Washington DC, where two young Israeli embassy employees were shot down near the Jewish Museum. The demand raised by the assailant Elias Rodriguez at the venue where a congregation of diplomats took place was, "Free Palestine." There's no guarantee to life even in the high-security US capital.

The United States has been the principal, but not the exclusive, victim of terrorism. The epoch-making attacks on the World Trade Towers and other high security zones in the United States on 9/11-2001 sent shivers down the spines of not just the Americans but people around the world. The West Asia region has been a theatre of terror for decades in fights between the Palestinians seeking a home of their own, against tiny Israel that is well-entrenched with able support from the West, principally the United States. India and the entire subcontinent is faced with the spectre of terrorism, mostly exported from Pakistan, while the Islamic nation and the adjoining Afghanistan are struggling from the sway of terrorist mayhem. Syria and Iraq were other theatres of Islamic terrorism, not to mention China that is battling it in its western region through incarceration of hundreds of thousands of suspects. So did Russia. Islamic terrorism was preceded by others like the Irish National Army (IRA) that sent shivers down the spine of the United Kingdom. So too with the LTTE, in Sri Lanka. Indonesia and the Philippines battled with home-grown terrorists in the past, all of which have now been on a tight leash. India's north-eastern states too had their own struggles with militancy, as did the rest of India through the Left-Wing Extremists or Maoists.

Point to note is, the world has to live with acts of terror in one form or another. Terrorism cannot be eliminated even with the latest technology, which can however, with effective use, control it. To an extent, India has been able to restore peace in the Kashmir Valley, but it bled heavily again a month ago through killings of innocents by a Pakistan-trained gang of terrorists. It took India and Pakistan closer to a full-scale war, raising fears of a nuclear explosion to decimate entire landmasses and their peoples. While the military engagement abruptly ended, reports on Thursday were that a terrorist sleeper cell has been dismantled in capital New Delhi with the arrest of two persons with Pakistan-links. This pointed to involvement of ISI and some connected diplomats, their target being the national capital. It prompted a fresh warning from Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Bikaner in Rajasthan that Pakistan, its military and its economy would pay a heavy price for every terrorist onslaught on Indian soil remains unfinished.

Time to grapple with national issues too

By Patricia Mukhim

I have been writing a Friday column for this paper since the 1990s. In recent times I have had to make way for the growing number of columnists contributing excellent pieces to this newspaper. This week though, I felt that it's important to remind readers and society in general that we need to now look beyond the state of Meghalaya and think national. Anything happening in any part of this country affects us too. Ever since the Pahalgam terror attack targeted at Hindu men with 26 of them killed in cold blood, the country has been on high alert. For us in Meghalaya things have started turning ugly since August 2024 when Sheikh Hasina had to flee for her life and seek refuge in India even while Mohammad Yunus who heads the caretaker Government is adopting a belligerent stance vis a vis India.

Meghalaya shares a 443 kilometer long boundary with Bangladesh and large sections of that boundary is unfenced. At Balat the river serves as a boundary and people cross at will. They say that all kinds of products from India are transported from India to the other side across the river at night. It's the same with Ranikor, Bholaganj and Ichamati. This means that illegal migration is not a formidable task at all. The BSF with all their manpower are hardly able to police every inch of the border. Now with Bangladesh having become a close ally of China in the eastern sector (China is already supporting Pakistan in the western front) we in the North East are hemmed in by the fact that our only outlet to the rest of India is through the 22 km narrow Siliguri corridor.

True the Government of India now plans to build the Shillong to Silchar 4-lane highway to take the load off the Siliguri corridor but this 166.8 km four-lane masterpiece connecting Mawlyngkhung in Meghalaya and Panchgram in Assam will only be completed by 2030 which is 5 years away. Government of India claims that this road is meant to fuel economic growth and give a fillip to the Act East Policy. As far as the Act East Policy is concerned the less said the better. With a troubled Myanmar posing security concerns and a Manipur still in turmoil; the Moreh trade point at a standstill, one wonders when the Act East Policy, which in the first place was never intended to address the economic future of a land-locked North East will ever be banished from the Government of India's vocabulary.

Coming to India's retaliation to the Pahalgam terror attack using the nomenclature Operation Sindoor, as

citizens we are still in a state of animated suspension as to who called the ceasefire between India and Pakistan after the launch of what India calls a targeted attack on terror camps in Pakistan and not targeting their military installations or civilian infrastructure. India's Foreign Minister has been at the receiving end of public affront because he allegedly informed the Pakistan establishment that India was going to launch its attack, thereby putting that country on high alert and consequently its ability to adequately respond to the Indian fire-power. One has seen wars in the past too but never has the media gone ballistic in its reportage as in reporting Operation Sindoor. The role of the media is to report facts not to hyper-ventilate and pretend that its duty is to arouse the spirit of nationalism and patriotism both of which have descended into

a few, we don't find citizens rising up to claim their rights. Since 2014 we have been silenced and self-regulated so that we don't step on the toes of the government and end up in jail.

Recently the State BJP called for a solidarity march to express gratitude to our armed forces. What was the intention of this show of strength? Does it mean that only BJP members stand with the armed forces and other political parties and citizens have no allegiance to the nation? But we have been reduced to silent onlookers. This culture of silence which someone rightly termed as a conspiratorial silence is a dangerous trend. Every person is thinking twice about what to say; what to comment on social media and how to steer clear of any controversy lest they be arrested.

What many of us ordinary

"Meghalaya shares a 443 kilometer long boundary with Bangladesh and large sections of that boundary is unfenced. At Balat the river serves as a boundary and people cross at will. They say that all kinds of products from India are transported from India to the other side across the river at night. It's the same with Ranikor, Bholaganj and Ichamati. This means that illegal migration is not a formidable task at all. The BSF with all their manpower are hardly able to police every inch of the border."

the dustbin of jingoism. Today the media is divided inasmuch as the citizenry is completely polarised on ideological lines. And in this cacophony of warmongering aided and abetted by a section of the media, do we in the North East have a say? A voice? Do we matter?

As Indians, we all support our armed forces and rally with them but we don't need anchors of television channels looking for optics to tell us that any question we raise on Operation Sindoor is an act of treason. Since when has it become illegal for citizens to question the government of the day and its acts of omission and commission? Why is the government now conflated with the nation? If India is a democratic nation and the Constitution guarantees its citizens free speech, as long as we do not defame any person in particular, then why are so many people booked for expressing their views on social media? Doing journalism the way we were taught to, is today fraught. Yet barring

citizens want to question is the logic of sending out MPs to different countries of the world to explain India's position vis a vis Pakistan — to expose Pakistan as a terror-nurturing rogue state as if the world does not already know that. Geo-politics today is all about economics and about nations arming themselves to the teeth to protect those economic interests. It's important to count the number of countries that stand with India today. Why has India been so isolated to the point where even the US which we all believed was our greatest pal is lending its weight behind Pakistan. Today China is solidly behind Pakistan; so is the US and Turkey. Where did our diplomacy go wrong? Is it not true that the countries of this world are also aware of the rapid erosion of democratic tenets in India with the freedom of the press in tatters? So, what are the visiting MPs going to tell their counterparts?

The Constitution of India is intended to restrain power and to ensure that citizens access their rights.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is meant to build international alliances to promote peace; our legal systems are created to peacefully settle disputes while our scientific institutions are meant to cure disease and news outlets to inform the public so they can then make informed choices. What has happened to these institutions today? Several NGOs that were working towards easing the suffering of the most distressed lot have lost their funding under the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Universities have become battlegrounds where only one idea and ideology is now allowed the space to flourish. These institutions are all meant to enhance human dignity but they have degenerated into making our lives nasty, brutish and short, which was what human existence was, prior to the spread of civilization.

All of this is happening right before our eyes but we have receded into the manholes of silence each one trying to protect their own backs. But at what cost? We engage individually on social media but have never attempted to meet and brainstorm on what the future looks like. We need to remember that Operation Sindoor is on a pause (ceasefire) and that any of the two countries could go to war again with the threat of nuclear combat hanging over our heads like the Sword of Damocles. Do we have any views to offer from this north-eastern periphery?

Yuval Noah Harari in his latest book "Nexus" says, "We live in an interconnected world where the decisions of one country can have profound impact on others. Some of the gravest dangers posed by Artificial Intelligence (AI) do not result from the internal dynamics of a single human society. Rather they arise from dynamics involving many societies which might lead to new arms races, new wars and new imperial expansions. Thus, a paranoid dictator might hand unlimited power to a fallible AI including even the power to launch nuclear strikes. If the dictator trusts his AI more than his defence minister, wouldn't it make sense to make AI supervise the country's most powerful weapons?"

We are living in a highly wired world and the fact that countries like China are now ready to launch into electronic warfare where they have complete visibility of the enemy's war space and can strike anywhere they want, makes peace a very fragile entity.

These are concerns that affect us all and as citizens we have a right to ask if war is the solution to fighting terror?

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Why Only Him?

There I was, seated comfortably with a steaming cup of chai, the newspaper folded neatly by my side, when the television flashed a headline that jolted me more than the caffeine. "Supreme Court takes suo motu cognizance of MP Minister's remarks on Army Colonel." My ears perked up, as they do whenever I hear the words suo motu — Latin for "we'll step in, even if nobody asks us to," and in India, a phrase often used sparingly, like a vintage Scotch.

This time, the court had taken note of remarks made by Madhya Pradesh minister Kunwar Vijay Shah. And not just any remarks. These were directed at none other than Colonel Sofiya Qureshi, a decorated Army officer and one of the public faces during the briefing on Operation Sindoor, India's cross-border response to terror. Shah had, in all his verbal glory, accused Colonel Qureshi of being the "sister of terrorists."

The Supreme Court wasn't amused. "The entire nation is ashamed," thundered the bench. And rightly so.

But as I nodded in agreement, something itched at the back of my mind. Why only him?

Oh, don't get me wrong, Kunwar Vijay Shah deserved every syllable of that judicial reprimand. When a sitting minister openly disparages an Army colonel based on her religion, calling her kin to terrorists while she dons the uniform and risks her life for the nation — you don't just say sorry. You sit in the dock. Preferably for a long time.

But again, I ask: Why only him? The political landscape these days is overflowing with inflammatory rhetoric. Switch on any news channel at prime time — and you'll see anchors spouting more aggression than an army general on rum. Attend a rally or scroll through the WhatsApp university syllabus, and you're bound to stumble across more hate speech than meaningful policy.

So why does only one man face the music, while the rest continue orchestrating their symphonies of spite?

Let's be honest — Vijay Shah's mistake was being too loud in a country where bigotry is often whispered, winked at, or cloaked in the garb of nationalism. He didn't invent the hate; he simply turned up the volume too high for the nation to ignore.

Now let's talk about Colonel Sofiya Qureshi — the woman at the receiving end of this vitriol. She isn't just an Army officer; she's a symbol of secular India, where merit, not religion, earns you rank and respect. She stood before cameras alongside Wing Commander Vyomika Singh and Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to inform the public about the military operation with poise, dignity, and calm professionalism. Her presence wasn't political — it was patriotic.

But for Mr. Shah, her last name was more relevant than her uniform.

What's astonishing is not that such comments were made — but that we were shocked. Because in today's India, minority-bashing has become as routine as monsoon

potholes. It's not the exception, it's the playlist. And it's played at high volume across social media, stages, and sadly, even pulpits.

The only difference here is that this time, someone important was listening.

The Supreme Court's reaction was refreshingly sharp. They didn't just pull up Shah. They dismissed his apology as shallow. They called his remarks "crass," and ordered a Special Investigation Team (SIT) to probe the issue. Even the Madhya Pradesh High Court described his words as "language from the gutters" and ordered an FIR to be lodged against him.

Now, before you clap too loudly, pause and consider: How many others have gone unpunished?

What about the faceless army of trolls who refer to Christians as "rice bag converts" or Muslims as "jihadi sympathizers"? What about those with mics in their hands and malice in their hearts, who use "desh bhakti" as a license to dehumanize others?

Why aren't they being pulled up? Why aren't they facing suo motu wrath?

The hate isn't coming from one corner — it's a chorus. It's time to say: enough.

Make hate speech — a non-bailable offence. Don't just slap a fine and let them walk out with a smirk. Make them understand that words have consequences. And if that means half of Parliament has to stand in line for bail, so be it. Better in court than in history books as the ones who normalized prejudice.

I also found it rather ironic that Shah tried to waffle out of the mess with an apology. "I didn't mean it," he mumbled, much like a child caught with his hand in the gulab jamun jar. But apologies aren't magical erasers. Not when the damage is already done. Not when your words embolden others to think it's okay to cast aspersions on the loyalty of an officer based on her faith.

The Congress, of course, jumped on the opportunity and demanded that Shah be sacked. Some even suggested charges of sedition. While political rivalries play out, one hopes the focus doesn't shift from the core issue: accountability.

In a democracy, freedom of speech doesn't include freedom to incite. It certainly doesn't include the right to insult those who wear the nation's uniform — regardless of whether their name is Sharma, Khan, or Qureshi. And so, dear readers, as we watch this drama unfold, let's remember: it's not about Vijay Shah alone. It's about an entire culture of selective outrage, where justice is the exception and not the rule.

Let's stop minority-bashing in all its forms — from the drawing room, to the news studio, to the floor of the House. And let's demand action not just when a remark makes headlines, but when it breaks hearts.

Because the question isn't just "Why only him?"

It should be: "Why not all of them?"

And until the answer is: "Yes, all of them," we haven't really won...
bobsbanter@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

A much needed inspection and interaction

Editor,
I write to express my appreciation and support for the recent announcement regarding the Rs 31 crore beautification and infrastructure overhaul of Shillong's historic lewduh market.
For the first time in memory, such a high-level team of government officials—including Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, and Tourism Minister Paul Lyngdoh, visited the market in person. The Chief Minister should be applauded for his willingness to confront the problems firsthand. His statement, "Thank God for the rains," reflects an honest and grounded perspective—using the adverse weather as an opportunity to fully grasp the challenges faced by vendors and shoppers during the monsoons.
The Chief Minister's inspection—despite the rain and challenging conditions—demonstrates a rare and commendable commitment to ground realities. At a time when many

development decisions are often taken from behind office doors, this on-the-ground engagement by the highest-ranking officials stands out as a powerful gesture of responsive governance. It reflects a genuine willingness to witness the issues first-hand and connect directly with the people affected by them.

By walking through the narrow, waterlogged lanes of lewduh alongside Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, Tourism Minister Paul Lyngdoh, senior government officials, and traditional heads, the Chief Minister not only showed leadership by example but also reaffirmed the government's commitment to inclusive development. His interaction with vendors, many of whom voiced concerns over poor drainage, dark alleyways, and congested walkways, brought a renewed sense of hope and optimism to the market community.

Such ground-level inspections are essential, especially in public spaces like lewduh, where thousands rely on the market for their livelihood. Only by seeing and experiencing the conditions themselves can policymakers truly understand the depth of the issues. This visit helped highlight real, day-to-day struggles that otherwise

might go unnoticed—water stagnation, blocked drains, lack of proper lighting, and the challenges of navigating through narrow, overcrowded lanes.

It was heartening to see vendors visibly happy and encouraged, their long-standing grievances finally being acknowledged at the highest level. As many of them shared, it was the first time they had seen senior leaders walking through the same cramped paths they use daily. Their sense of joy and relief was not just emotional—it was a reflection of their belief that change may finally be on the horizon.

The phased improvements, including natural-stone footpath upgrades, better drainage systems, and a plan that respects the market's traditional structure, reflect a balanced and well-thought-out approach. The government's attention to detail and sensitivity to cultural and economic factors deserves praise. The additional Rs 10 crore sanctioned by the North Eastern Council further boosts confidence in the seriousness of this initiative.

This visit was far more than symbolic—it was a critical and meaningful step towards transformative change. It sends a strong message that the govern-

ment is not only listening but is also willing to take proactive, visible action. I applaud this sincere effort and hope this positive momentum continues. With continued dedication, I am confident that lewduh will finally receive the respect, attention, and infrastructure it has long deserved, benefiting not only its vendors but the entire community that depends on it.

Yours etc,
Rishanlang Khongwir
Via email

Unfair recruitment process

Editor,
Through your esteemed paper I wish to draw public attention to the recent results on the Grade IV position of the Shillong Cooperative Urban Bank Ltd. As per the notification posted by the Bank, Advertisement No. SCUB/HO/2024/249, although it has stated that it reserves the right to amend any part of the recruitment process, it did so without any communication on its website. As per the notification, the Bank states that the number of vacancies is six (6) but as per the results only two (2) candi-

dates are to be appointed. This is baffling and confusing as the remaining 4 vacancies are not filled or perhaps they are already filled with people who did not appear for the exam. Secondly, the examination fee for this particular exam is a little higher than exam fees of other exams at Rs 300. What's curious is that when we arrived at our exam centre many of the seats were empty. Many candidates failed to appear due to poor publicity by the Bank. Whether that was intentional is left to our imagination. Finally, as a candidate of many other career exams, I have been used to using black pens to mark our answers, but in this exam some were seen with blue pens and more strangely with pencils to mark their answers, which is fishy. This recruitment reeks of favouritism and nepotism.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request.
Via email

Well done, Shillong Municipality, please keep it up

Editor,
In recent weeks, many

localities in the town have started to wear a very clean look. From the bustling lanes of Police Bazar to the quieter neighbourhoods, Shillong is looking more pleasant and feeling increasingly welcoming. I believe this newfound cleanliness is thanks to the dedicated efforts of the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) and its tireless workers.

Many people are probably aware that, back in March, the CEO of the SMB made a solemn announcement. He pledged to give Shillong a much-needed facelift. Today, that promise is, perhaps in some way being realised. Many SMB workers, some in uniform, are out every day, sweeping the footpaths and streets, pulling out weeds, and collecting garbage in sacks before loading them into municipal vehicles. Their work is truly commendable. In marketplaces like Khyndailad, teams from the SMB's cleaning squad turn out in full force late in the evening to sweep and tidy up. Their hard work should not go unnoticed. They all deserve our loudest applause.

But keeping Shillong clean isn't the job of the Municipal Board alone. It is, in fact, a shared responsibility that rests on all of us. Too often, we

see chips, gutka, cigarettes, biscuit packets, cold drink bottles, scraps of paper, and more thoughtlessly tossed onto the streets, sometimes just moments after they've been freshly swept. Such carelessness and disregard for cleanliness are unacceptable. Even worse, some residents creep out quietly, plastic bags full of household waste in hand, and dump them in secluded corners, an issue that has repeatedly been brought to the authorities' attention by the ever-vigilant social activist Jeffrey Nongkhaw. These practices are disgusting and must end. I believe the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) should urgently consider introducing stricter measures to deal with such irresponsible people. Decisive action is a must to ensure that the ongoing cleaning efforts do not go down the drain. No matter how many workers the Municipality sends out to clean the city, their efforts will be in vain if we continue treating our streets like open dustbins.

The recent Swachh Bharat survey report placed Meghalaya at the "bottom" in terms of cleanliness. It's not just disappointing, it's downright embarrassing. If this isn't a wake-up call for all municipal

boards in the state, then we're clearly sleeping through the alarm, with the threat of environmental fallout looming large. Installing litter bins, using them properly, and holding one another accountable can go a long way in supporting more than just routine sweeping. If someone dumps waste in the wrong place, onlookers should speak up, and if possible, take photos of the act and share them with the local Dorbar or upload them to the Shillong Municipal website. Publicly naming and shaming offenders may be a necessary deterrent. Everyone must work together to support the effort to ensure that no town in Meghalaya, including Shillong, Jowai, and Tura, looks messy. Of course, Shillong is the gateway to the famous Mawlynnong. Tourists shouldn't leave Shillong wrinkling their noses in disgust after visiting the cleanest village in Asia.

Yours truly,
Sajib Gwali,
Shillong

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

"True art is characterized by an irresistible urge in the creative artist."

— Albert Einstein

The Shillong Times

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Education at the Crossroads

THE State Government had constituted an Education Commission in July 2023 headed by Prof S M Sungoh, Department of Education, North Eastern Hill University (NEHU). Other members included Prof. David Reid Syiemlieh, (Adviser Academic), Former Chairman UPSC, Government of India, Tony T C Marak (Adviser School Sector Reforms), Retd IFS and former Executive Chairman MBOSE, Government of Meghalaya as Advisers with Ambrose Ch. Marak, IAS, Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya, Education Department as Member Secretary. The Commission has also co-opted principals of schools and retired college principals. In every aspect this Commission has within its folds the best brains of the state and is mandated to advise the Government on matters related to school and college education; salary disparities, school and college infrastructure, functioning of school management committees and their accountability. Above all the Commission was to give specific recommendations on how the schools and colleges can glide smoothly into the demands of the National Education Policy 2020 — a policy that is an outcome of a cabinet decision of the NDA Government in 2020 in the midst of the pandemic and without public discussion.

Considering that the Commission was given a timeline of two years, its time should end by July this year. In the nearly two years of its existence, we have not heard of the findings of the Commission and whether it accepts the NEP 2020 as a suitable policy for students in Meghalaya. Education falls under the Concurrent list and as such the state has the authority to reject the NEP 2020 if it finds that the curriculum, especially the 3-language formula is not in sync with the needs of students of Meghalaya, particularly those in rural hamlets. In the first place was it necessary for Meghalaya to accept the NEP-2020 lock, stock and barrel simply because it is thrust upon us. Some of the southern states have rejected it and adopted their own state education policy. It would be enlightening therefore to hear from the Commission which has evidently done a lot of ground work as to whether they believe that the NEP 2020 would transform the educational scenario in Meghalaya. Is the problem of poor learning outcomes being addressed by the NEP 2020 if the problem is with teacher quality. When teaching as a profession is also the worst paid and that at irregular intervals the commitment of those taking up teaching jobs is bound to flag. This is only natural. A good and timely paid salary is a great incentive and the profession is bound to attract the best minds.

The problem in Meghalaya is also that there are too many categories of schools and standardising those would be a tall order. It's high time the government seriously carries out intensive research on the reasons for school drop-outs especially in the rural areas. From a casual glance the problem is poverty. Although the Government provides 'free and compulsory' education up to the age of 14 years but uniforms and books are not part of the 'free' deal. And that's what makes children from poor households drop out. The Commission is expected to have taken all this into consideration when giving its considered views.

Menshohnoh are believed to be typical Khasi human-hunters who after they have got hold of the man/woman kill them and feed their blood to a python (Thlen) which then brings wealth to its keepers. These stories are from persons living in villages like Wakhken and Khatar-shnong - areas where the hunters are allegedly still active and killings have taken place. Those who have the time could spend one whole night just to hear how they execute their task and what people think of them. This story is only the tip of the iceberg.

The paternal grandmother (Meikha) of my mother-in-law was the Nongri thlen (a keeper of the Thlen). Her father rejected all material inheritance from his aunt, except the blood relationship which continued with the grandchildren of the keeper, who are no longer alive and who apparently died due to the debilitating effects of the practice.

Other stories are of the uncles of my wife. In their village the hunters and non-hunters live together in peace and harmony — they go about their works; work together in the same field, have no ill feelings, suspicion, against the other; only they are cautious of attacks. They narrate how once in the village after their day's work, they were eating and drinking together. When a Menshohnoh shows signs of being on attack mode during such fun times, a scolding, or a slap in the face is given to wake him up to reality. One person I know and lived together with while at school was possessed by the demon through marriage. What he told his fellow villagers was to slap him if he tries to attack them at night saying "wat pyniap, shu thap" (don't kill, just slap me). Fourteen years ago in a locality where I live, a man due to an unknown illness roamed around the bushes of the village. He was caught, waiting to be interrogated, but a mob of hooligans overwhelmed the elders who could not stand against a brute force and they brutally killed him.

My wife's second eldest uncle, said he had a fight with the menshohnoh on one occasion, and defeated the hunter. In a fit of rage he warned him saying that he would finish him off if he tried attacking him or anyone else in future and then let him go. The other night, the same people who were at war, drank alcohol together, chatting like nothing ever happened before. Once when I was crossing a bush alone at midnight in Sohra someone attempted to harm me.

The Menshohnoh and Society: Real, Imagined or Surreal

By Isaid Khongjee

One thing about being possessed by this Thlen is that it is an accepted part of Khasi society. An uncle of mine who lives in Kongthong related this story: he said he was hunting butterflies in the outskirts of Wakhken village. Suddenly those people said "ngi boit liangwah, boit liangwah" (a boy from the other side of the river), and started chasing him. He told me he was so scared that he ran back to his village. The origin of how he got transformed was at a festival in a village of Khat-ar-shnong

who are kilometres away through whistling; a usual means of communication by such people. He came to his senses when he fell into a stream. After that event he went to the owner and said "phi dei shisha kaba ri Thlen", meaning- you are truly the keeper of the Thlen. The effect didn't last as he has the personal god from his clan to cleanse the spell to its last atom.

At Dewiong, my wife's village, a woman in her eighties from the same clan as the one mentioned above

When a Menshohnoh shows signs of being on attack mode during such fun times, a scolding, or a slap in the face is given to wake him up to reality. One person I know and lived together with while at school was possessed by the demon through marriage. What he told his fellow villagers was to slap him if he tries to attack them at night saying "wat pyniap, shu thap" (don't kill, just slap me).

area, where he ate food, but forgot to pay his bill. It's only after he paid for the food that the evil spirit left him and the spell ended.

At Sokhmi village my father makes alcohol to augment his income. As a young boy, I would steal some of it to give an old man living next door just to hear his stories. The man happened to be immune to dangers from the hunters. In his clan, they have a god that pro-

was attacked by the hunters in her field. They left her for dead after covering her body with dead leaves and whatever was available in the wilds. When the body was found on the third day she was still alive to live for a few more years. The Thlen, a spirit that destroys, is powerless in front of the one that preserves life- this is the law of Nature.

How people in those areas adapt to such an environ-

One night he told of how he purposely asked for liquor from a woman in his native village whom he knew keeps the Thlen. When she refused, he said he asked for a special one, the 'lad Tangsnem (a liquor that makes one to be possessed by the spirit of U Thlen). After drinking it, he immediately lost self awareness and started wandering in the forest nearby his village.

ments, is one aspect of the story. It's a story that matters if one gets possessed accidentally while living with fellow humans in a close-knit society. Never say "kiar raimaw-raidieng wat ia shim'eiei na ki..." meaning "avoid them like the plague; never take anything from them." The snare lies here. The wisdom of those out there tells this: the moment we say the above, the devil would praise saying "O phi shisha kiba tip, kiba lah liar, sngewtynnad" meaning "truly you know, you can avoid me at will." But in life, at times we falter, forget our words, and may happen to

be possessed by the spirit of U Thlen. After drinking it, he immediately lost self awareness and started wandering in the forest nearby his village. He further said that he communicated with other fellow Menshohnoh

beg for a pinch of salt from a neighbour having the Thlen. When this happens, the Thlen who's on the look out to cling to the person, gets his way. When this happens separating the spirit is hard, if not impossible, because we, in the first place courted it with the knowledge of it being evil," the dead end! This is the reason why people in villages live without any superstition, evil eye, gossips, bad name etc against the other; a sophistry in simplicity of life blend! They accept a person for who they are; a give-and-take policy is a way of life; and the Thlen also understands the reality of living among humans.

"Don't kill the Menshohnoh," in areas where this knowledge is alive, people never kill without first speaking to them. First of all they say, "ka brew ne ka mrad. Ong haba dei, ka brew, khapai" (a human or an animal; if a human, it must speak), thus giving another human a chance to live life. It is only when the menshohnoh doesn't heed the word (an ontological facet of being a human being), that he gets a shot; if missed, he's lucky, if hit, it's no fault of the other who has the same Divine right to live. Killing a Menshohnoh who is a fellow human being after he has spoken, is a violence which leads to what is called "toh tyrut." Ka tyrut is a natural law that dispenses natural justice; we may call it "the blood thirsty demon". It is the ancestral quantum understanding of the nature of existence; in war, it's different.

Ka Tyrut is a spirit/a natural law that balances itself by destroying the unlawful destruction of life by another. It is an act of divine retribution. We may call it the devil, but the reality known to us is that the same God when delivering justice to its ontological nature also wipes out those who unlawfully destroy its own Creation. This is our idea of God who's not only a Creator, but also the one who does justice to its ontological nature; a thin line that separates the god of western religion from the indigenous God prevalent in our knowledge system. Who has not killed a human can be healed from ill effects that enable him to live a normal life as per the design of nature, or regaining the primary ontological blessings of Nature to live an ordinary life like other fellows. Against the above (if he killed someone), he too will have to die; a natural way of restoring the Cosmic imbalance caused.

(The author teaches at St John Bosco School, Sohra)

Meghalaya Education Grant: Well-intentioned or Inherently Flawed?

By Dr Mankhrawbor Dunai

The recent Meghalaya Education Grant (MEG) scheme has generated much discussions and will continue to do so in its attempt to bring about much needed changes in the education system in the state. The fact that we have "discussions," let alone a discussion paper, is commendable though it also reveals that as well-intentioned as initiatives may be, they may run foul if they have not been properly analysed. All of us love the idea of a new year and a new "me" only to realize that giving up on things to achieve the new "me" is easier said than done. Gyms however will not complain about February dropouts as they always look forward to the annual spike in new year memberships. I believe this MEG proposal may suffer from a similar dilemma. Since the document has been discussed and shared in various platforms, including this esteemed paper, I will restrict myself to comments that look at the assumptions made by the MEG discussion paper critically and not repeat by summarising the main points of the paper.

In its enthusiasm to bring about positive changes, the MEG runs the risk of misunderstanding the problems of education completely by assuming that it is only a problem of redirecting the money and the problem will likely get fixed. Redirecting the money thrown, I believe will not work. Chief among the problems of this discussion document is a generalisation of the issues faced by the education sector at different levels. The proposals seem akin to a general sledgehammer approach when a customized scalpel is required to address the problems unique to the various levels of education.

Though many commentators will come up with various reasons to defend or rebut this paper (there are many, data being used in a fallacious manner being one of the glaring issues), I choose to take a different approach on the matter. The discussion paper seems to imply that the biggest problem facing the education in Meghalaya can be addressed by fixing the financial problems. The conclusion being made is that education has failed because the money has not been properly utilized. Though that certainly is a factor, the paper seems to imply that this is the root of the problem. I don't think the state government has the moral high ground to use the argument of under-utilisation of funds as a stick to beat down aided institutions. We are a state that has not properly utilized the money allotted to it through various schemes provided by the Central Government in various departments. We see well-intentioned projects lying incomplete or in shambles or failing to achieve their intended purpose. I do not mean to throw dirt at the ISBT terminal but its important to call a spade's a spade.

Money certainly is important but it is only a means to an end. My personal take is that the real problem in our education sector is not financial but one of human resources. Of people. A great academician once told me that money is secondary. The people are what define or redefine an institution, educational or otherwise. If you have the right people in an organization, it will grow. It will be seen for what it is, not for what it promises. Trust is the chiefest of currencies anywhere. Once that has been established, the promises and handshakes that are made at the beginning are not reduced merely to photo ops-sessions to be gloated over in the news or on social media but rather, we can trust the outcomes that will more than likely be actualised. The money should eventually flow to such institutions with a reputation of being trustworthy. Many can testify to the great teachers that have shaped and inspired students to be their best. And that is what we ought to inspire in our students and our children. I believe that every student that leaves a

school or a college will be drawn to the memories of the people associated with the institution and their place in it, not the fancy buildings and expensive instruments but the teachers and staff who brought life and meaning through those tools. Ultimately it is the people that matter.

An organization may have buildings and infrastructure but when the right people are not there, they will not serve their intended purposes. Even if a gifted teacher is given the bare minimum, they can still do wonders despite the limitations. It is no surprise that we have such problems as zero enrollment and single digit enrollments in the statistics found in the MEG discussion paper. Why did this come about? Though each situation will have specific reasons for its failures, ultimately these were decisions made by people who, one can argue, did not "correctly" diagnose the problem. Blanket solutions to perceived problems have resulted in sanctioning of funds for thousands of institutions that were not functioning at their intended capacity. Instead, money and funds have been thrown into the metaphorical bin while someone has gleefully picked up the literal cash credited into their accounts. Does the MEG risk doing the same through its proposal? Quite likely if the problems are not correctly identified and understood. The amount of mis-categorisation and the way data has been thrown around in the discussion paper makes me quiver with trepidation.

Education should be the backbone of every nation that truly seeks to grow. And proper education can come through the right educators. Without them, we will only learn to parrot the opinions thrown to us by the ones that control the narrative. And the best way to counter that is to have individuals and people who will teach the next generation to think critically and to grow as individuals to serve their nation and their communities. Credit should go where credit is due. The private educational institutions have done a commendable job in stepping up when government institutions have been unable to meet the educational needs of the state. And the government should be given credit for doing its part in helping to aid these institutions through various grants. If the government is truly interested in improving education, I believe that it should change the entire optics in its approach through the MEG. Instead of making it a challenge of financial mismanagement, make it a challenge of human resource availability where the best and brightest minds have not been incentivized to serve the public sector through education.

Though there needs to be accountability, it seems odd for the MEG to imply that there is no accountability in Higher Educational Institutions (HEIs) as the existence of accreditation institutions such as National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC), All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE), the National Board of Accreditation (NBA), and the University Grants Commission (UGC) ensure standards are met and institutions are incentivized to meet the criteria stipulated by these accreditation institutions.

The government therefore should not fret about funding private institutions. Instead, it should be happy that these accredited institutions will do the work of ensuring quality in those institutions in accordance with national aspirations. But if the government is only using the guise of improving education through the proposed MEG as a smokescreen to sift funds and move them around to more useful or productive "priorities", whatever they may be, then I believe the problem of education will always persist in our state. More empty buildings and no funds to pay the teachers at the different levels as a result of the persistent fund crunch? I sure hope not.

Letters to the Editor

Rejoinder from the Shillong Co-operative Urban Bank Ltd

Editor,

In response to the letter, "Unfair Recruitment Process," appearing in the Letters to the Editor column (ST May 23, 2025), we refute the allegations as follows:

1. Advertisements for the written test were published in two local papers, The Shillong Times and U Mawphor, both dated January 16, 2025, besides being posted in the Bank's website. Candidates were also intimidated through their mobiles.

2. The fees taken do not even cover the cost of expenditure.

3. That out of 4,185 candidates who applied, only 933 appeared is a loss to the Bank as it is deprived of a larger competition that would unearth higher quality.

4. The written test was conducted by an outside professionally reputed source.

5. The use of pencil was advised as the candidate could rub off his mark if he she wants to do corrections.

6. There are six (6) posts to be filled up, but in a phased manner. The first two are called to fill the two vacancies immediately. The next four will be filled up soon after. The list of 22 other candidates will be kept valid for 3 years and will be absorbed by the Bank as and when and if required.

7. The viva-voce was conducted by a panel of three whose integrity, transparency, and moral character is beyond reproach.

8. To say that the recruitment process reeks of favouritism and nepotism is totally unacceptable and unjustified.

9. The accusations of the aggrieved candidate are understandable as he/she is desperate for a job as also the many thousands of unemployed youths. However, the aggrieved candidate should ascertain the facts before any accusation is made, damaging the goodwill and reputation of the Bank.

10. The policy of the Bank is to be fair, transparent, and maintain high moral standards. Casting aspersions without facts is slanderous and objectionable and is not the attitude of a right thinking and responsible person who would not hide behind a wall and throw stones.

Yours etc.,
CEO, The Shillong Co-operative Urban Bank Ltd
Shillong - 1

Disappointing after-sales experience with Tiago EV dealership

Editor,

I wish to share my experience regarding the purchase of a Tiago EV from Frank Tata Motors dealership at Mawblei, Shillong in 2024. While I am genuinely delighted with the vehicle's performance and the quality of the car and the brand overall—truly an excellent vehicle—the service and communication from the dealership have been disappointing.

At the time of purchase, the salesperson assured me that the government subsidy for the EV would be processed and disbursed within two months. Unfortunately, it has now been over a year, and I have yet to receive any subsidy. Despite numerous follow-ups, I have received only vague and evasive responses, with no clear explanation or resolution from the

dealership.

Additionally, I was never informed about the due date for my vehicle's insurance premium. Consequently, I missed the payment deadline, leading to unnecessary inconvenience and potential financial risk. I had expected the dealership to notify me of such critical dates or provide proper documentation to ensure I was aware; sadly, that did not happen.

The overall experience has been extremely frustrating. Both the local showroom and the company's head office have ignored my attempts to address these issues. Since I am currently out of the country, actively pursuing this matter has become challenging. I can only describe the initial sales pitch as snake oil, promising much but delivering little, and I find the after-sales service to be utterly poor, which has unfortunately diminished my interest in owning the car.

I am seeking the opinions of your esteemed readers on possible recourse or actions I could take to recover my money. Your advice will be greatly valued, as I feel left stranded and unfairly treated in this entire ordeal.

Yours etc.,
P. Sawian
Via email

Concerns of a pedestrian

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to share some experiences and concerns I've come across while walking through the streets of Shillong. As someone who often walks from home to work and back, I find walking not only a way to avoid traffic but also a healthy habit. However, there are certain things on the streets that truly bother me, and I believe the public and authorities should take note.

First, smoking in public is a big concern. Many people smoke openly and blow out smoke without caring about those around them. I have no issue with people choosing to smoke, but doing it in public spaces shows a lack of civic sense. It forces others to become passive smokers and risks their health. Second, there are individuals who stop passersby to preach or share religious messages. While their intention might be good, their approach is often too forceful. Some even pretend to pray for you and then ask for money. Faith is personal, and people

should not be pressured in public spaces. Third, there are groups of two-wheeler riders offering Rapido-like services, but many of them charge unfairly high fares, especially from those who are new or unaware. They often disturb walkers by repeatedly asking if they need a ride. Fourth, the issue of stray dogs is real. In the early morning and late evening, these dogs can be a threat to joggers and walkers.

Lastly, many footpaths get waterlogged even after a light rain. This shows poor planning and construction. It makes walking difficult and unpleasant. These are just some of my personal experiences. I am sure there are more issues that others could add. I sincerely hope the concerned authorities take a closer look and make the streets safer and more pleasant for everyone together with the jacaranda flowers that paint the streets purple.

Yours etc.,
Zeppuh Gangmei
Shillong-3

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

Anti-environmentalism and contradictions

Anti-environmentalism is gaining ground. Attacks on the net zero goal and hostility to conservation measures and anti-pollution targets are becoming more common. And, as recent election results have shown, these tactics are reshaping politics in Britain and across the west.

Anti-environmentalism is a rejection of both environmental initiatives and activism. But despite its sudden rise and bold rhetoric, it is built on shaky foundations. The messages it offers are often contradictory and row against the tide of everyday experience.

Take the US president, Donald Trump. He dismantled many environmental protections in his last term of office, and is now removing those that are left – including support for research that even mentions the word climate. Yet he told a rally in Wisconsin in 2024: “I’m an environmentalist. I want clean air and clean water. Really clean water. Really clean air.”

Some of the contradictions of anti-environmentalism reflect its departure from traditional conservatism. Although routinely identified as “conservative”, the populist anti-green politics of Republicans in the US and Reform in the UK, along with the AfD in Germany and National Rally in France, represent a radical challenge to the ideals of continuity and conservation that were once at the heart of conservatism.

The Conservative Environment Network is an organisation which pitches itself as an “independent forum for conservatives in the UK and around the world who support net zero, nature restoration and resource security”.

Much of this network’s work involves reminding people that important environmental protections, from America’s national parks to controls on pollution and climate change in Britain and elsewhere, were introduced by conservatives.

But few on the right appear to be listening. A populist tide is washing this conservative tradition away, despite the fact that support for environmental protection remains very popular.

Polling indicates that 80% of people in the UK worry about climate change. Public backing for the work of the US Environmental Protection Agency is also overwhelming, including among Republican voters.

In part, this support reflects the fact that environmental damage is an everyday reality: unpredictable weather, the collapse of animal and insect populations, and a range of other challenges are not just on the TV, they are outside the window.

In my research for a forthcoming book on environmental nostalgia across the world, I keep bumping into an irony. In western nations, voices from the right say they want their country back, yet appear hostile to environmental policies that would protect their country and ensure its survival.



There are many reasons for this disconnect, including resentment against initiatives that require lifestyle and livelihood changes. However, the enmity and disengagement is more complicated than a simple rejection of nature.

Many people – including Trump himself – claim they are environmentalists even when the evidence suggests otherwise. The signs and

symbols of environmental care are knitted into every aspect of our commercial and cultural life: if wildlife could sue for copyright, there would be a lot of rich bears.

I argue that a distinction can be made between what I call “cold” and “hot” forms of environmentalism. The former values and mourns the loss of nature, but as a spectacle to be observed – a set

of appealing images of flora and fauna – while the latter feels implicated and anxious.

The former position allows people to claim they love nature yet be indifferent or even hostile to initiatives to save it. However, the line between cold and hot, or between anti- and pro-environmentalist, is neither fixed nor hard.

Reform’s leaders have long flirted with climate change denial. “Climate change has happened for millions of years,” explained former Reform UK leader Richard Tice in 2024, adding that “the idea that you can stop the power of the Sun or volcanoes is simply ludicrous”. Tice has not changed his views but later the same year, the party’s new leader, Nigel Farage, told the BBC that he was “not arguing the science”.

A post-western paradox

Researchers are only just starting to think about anti-environmentalism. One key analysis is environmental politics researcher John Hultgren’s *The Smoke and the Spoils: Anti-Environmentalism and Class Struggle in the United States*. This new book explains how Republicans managed to convince working-class voters that there is “zero-sum” dichotomy between jobs and environmental protection, workers and environmentalists.

This kind of binary has also been found by contributors to *The Handbook of Anti-Environmentalism*, who identify and critique the stereotyping of environmentalism as middle-class and elite in several western countries.

Yet the geographical focus of these pioneering works misses yet another of the paradoxes of anti-environmentalism: that although its rhetoric often accuses China and other non-western countries of doing little, there has been a significant environmental turn in both policy and public attitudes beyond Europe and the US.

Environmentalism is becoming post-western. This is partly because the realities of environmental damage are so stark across much of Asia and Africa.

Extreme temperatures and unpredictable rainfall are leading to food insecurity and community displacement. Environmentalism in the African Sahel and south Asia might better be called “survivalism”.

And despite its continuing reliance on fossil fuels, China’s state-led vision of a transition to a conservationist and decarbonised “ecological civilisation” is positioning it as a global environmental leader.

Stereotypes of environmentalism being primarily a western concern are crumbling. Because of this, along with the many contradictions that beset it, the rise of anti-environmentalism appears not only complex, but curious and unsustainable.

(The Conversation)

‘Star - Gazing’

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, May 25, 2025

‘Birthday Forecast’

Moon sextile Saturn on your solar return chart which is good. You will have a wonderful time. Financially you will be strong and stable. New sources of income can be tapped. Money and wealth will keep coming. You can invest in land, building, real-estate, gold, fixed deposits etc. You can also enter into a new business in partnership or collaboration. Your business will rise and you will get good profits. Your associates/partner will help you a lot. New job offers too can come. Your professional circle will grow. You will meet a lot of influential persons. A lovely person will come in your life all of a sudden leading to a very warm and fulfilling relationship. Marriage looks certain. Your siblings will make good progress and you will keep on guiding them. You will share good bonding with your spouse. Health will remain perfect. Children will shine in studies.

‘This week for you’

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced by the planetary combination. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this period. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. Reliability and creativity will take you places now. The more willing you are to put yourself in the limelight, the more positive the rewards. You are outgoing and your initiative is stronger than ever. You would brilliantly and effectively handle difficult projects at work. Business associates bring good news and lucrative terms and opportunities.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) Friendship, love, romance and children are highlighted. You would have new attitudes towards family, finance, and social relationships. Home and family matters capture your attention and are a strong source of pride. It is a time when worldly matters are not as important to you. Use this energy to find ways to improve your interpersonal relations and your home and work environment. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and for joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your family would be more supportive. It’s a great time to make improvements to your regular routines.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) With communication, creativity and judgment you gain money and influence in business ventures. Success brings status and respect as you dominate the professional scene. This is the right time to participate in community events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This phase brings rewards and recognition in your professional life. You would also work hard with an inclination towards more detailed work, and it can get to you at times. Personal projects are on an upswing. You are in a position to inspire others through what you create. Income from foreign sources could also figure this time. You feel on top of things and replete with good health and energy.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) There will be mixed results as success and good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion and travel. Some changes in the business set up are on the cards. You bring stability and order in business and professional projects with a dynamic and assertive approach. You come up with original and creative ideas that surprise other in the professional area. You support people with loyalty and zeal. A person makes an impact on you and it is hard to stop thinking of this strange connection. Your relationship with your partner is rather tenacious at the moment and requires extra attention and care. Emotive issues arise with family members. Your career, reputation, and public life are influenced.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Practical matters come into strong focus and demand attention. An opportunity to expand on a global level arrives now. You would have more energy for work and your daily routine tends to speed up now. You are required to do a balancing act, and something big is in the pipeline. There may be some confusion about your dreams and ideas regarding your career. Give yourself time to digest everything before you make a move. You will also thoroughly enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities, especially in the company of a loved one. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Increased energy for health routines and work is with you.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) There may be debates and discussions in family and you may face some opposition. You are likely to exert your energy and initiative into actively pursuing a rewarding love life, social amusement, and pleasure in general. You have a likeable and competitive temperament. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner and a few conflicts are possible. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You have a stronger need than usual for intellectual stimulation.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This phase brings good-luck for love and romance. Ego confrontations with family members are possible now, but the best way to handle this is to do your best to strengthen your relationship with your family and your home base. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself, so that regardless of what you meet in the outside world over the next weeks, you have a secure place to return to. Besides spending more time tending to domestic affairs, the focus can be on cultivating and nourishing your inner foundation that support you and your growth.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) Associates at work might find you less sociable, as you are busier than ever and you focus on your activities and your needs. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you status. You are more inclined to seek a broad understanding of people and of your immediate environment. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating, and learning is your best bet now. If health is affected, fevers or infections are more likely.

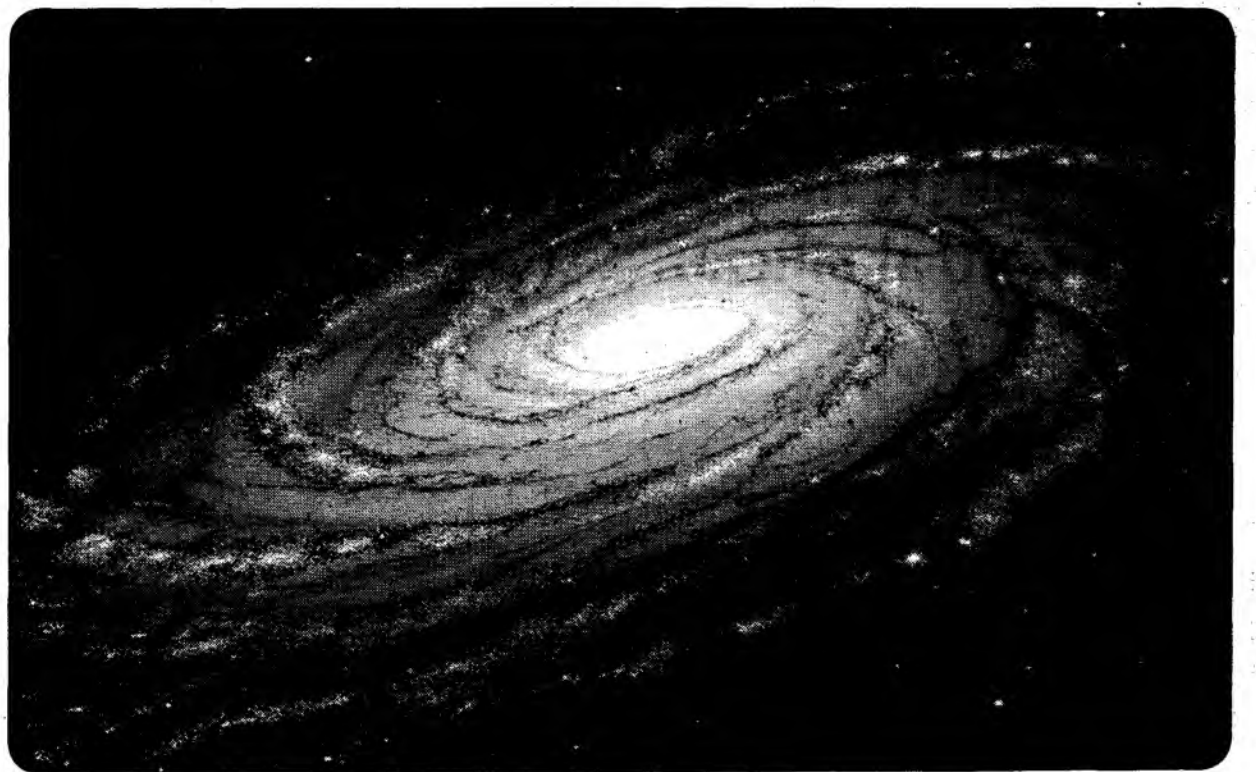
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This period brings new horizons in your romantic and love life. You explore and search, make new connections, and pay attention to your immediate environment. Give other people a little extra time and attention, notice their efforts on your behalf, and strengthen your connections. You are more curious and alert than usual, and you could be quite busy with work. Siblings, neighbours, close relatives, friends, and co-workers may play a more important role than usual in your life. You are eager to investigate new things, whether scientific or technical.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) The planetary configuration promotes your luck in work related areas. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental now. Loyalty and sensitivity in your relationships are more important to you. There would be a bright opportunity to travel, learning or the publishing of a project. Getting your finances on track will be necessary at this time. Do your best to avoid letting emotions rule over good judgment when it comes to expenses and other financial matters. Share your thoughts and feelings with others and you may be surprised at the support you receive from close friends and loved ones.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Pay close attention to performance, it will be rewarded and continuity to perform work would be visible to senior colleagues and people in authority. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and can expect good returns from overseas business. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits. A sense of belonging through connection to something larger than yourself is something that is entering your life now. There may be a development of romance at your work place.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) There would be happiness and fulfillment through the expansion of your mind, widening of your social circle, travel, and connections to people of a different cultural background. Your dreams and ideas about intimacy come into focus, but could also bring the flaws in this area of your life to light. An income boost is likely in this period. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the physical world of the senses, and this is a time to start fresh in terms of how you arrange your life in order to feel a sense of value and worthiness. It is also a wonderful time for taking moments to please yourself through earthy, tactile, and comforting endeavours.

Studying galaxies over 12 bn light years away



The largest sample of galaxy groups ever detected has been presented by a team of international astronomers using data from the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) in an area of the sky called COSMOS Web.

The study marks a major milestone in extragalactic astronomy, providing unprecedented insights into the formation and evolution of galaxies and the large-scale structure of the universe.

Peering back in time to when the universe was younger than the Earth is now, the images span the period from around twelve billion years ago until one billion years ago.

The new catalogue of images, soon to be published in the journal *Astronomy and Astrophysics* (A&A), includes nearly 1,700 galaxy groups.

is currently showcased as the European Space Agency’s (ESA) picture of the month.

“We’re able to actually observe some of the first galaxies formed in the universe,” says Ghassem Gozaliasl of Aalto University, and head of the galaxy groups detection team who led the study.

“We detected 1,678 galaxy groups or proto-clusters -- the largest and deepest sample of galaxy groups ever detected -- with the James Webb Space Telescope. With this sample, we can study the evolution of galaxies in groups over the past 12 billion years of cosmic time,” added Gozaliasl.

The James Webb Space Telescope began operating in 2022. The largest telescope in space, with its higher resolution and greater sensitivity, has enabled astronomers to see farther and better than ever before.

Because light travels at a finite speed, the further away an object

is, the further back in time our image of it. By observing very faint, very distant galaxies -- the faintest galaxies in this dataset are one billion times dimmer than the human eye can see -- the team got a glimpse of what galaxies looked like in the early universe, Gozaliasl pointed out.

Gozaliasl explains that galaxy groups and clusters are rich environments filled with dark matter, hot gas, and massive central galaxies that often host supermassive black holes.

“The complex interactions between these components play a crucial role in shaping the life cycles of galaxies and driving the evolution of the groups and clusters themselves. By uncovering a more complete history of these cosmic structures, we can better understand how these processes have influenced the formation and growth of both massive galaxies and the largest structures in the universe,” added Gozaliasl. (ANI)

"Aging has a wonderful beauty and we should have respect for that."

—Eartha Kitt

The Shillong Times

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Diplomacy, silence

INDIA is currently engaged in a major diplomatic outreach to over 30 countries across continents to explain to the respective governments the context in which the Modi government undertook the multi-level Operation Sindoor offensive earlier this month. This might or might not clear the misunderstandings, if any, surrounding the high-stakes military and allied endeavours. It's true that Pakistan's lie factory went into an overdrive to claim it ably withstood the Indian onslaught. The government here says it wants to explain the context — how terrorists trained in Pakistan have in iterations been engaged in blasts, bloodshed and other acts of violence in Kashmir Valley and beyond. It wants to explain that India, with its superior fire power, "taught a lesson" to the adversary and yet caused too little human or military casualties. However, questions are asked— and rightly so— as to why India does this when no other nation has ever undertaken such a diplomatic outreach.

Without doubt, India can stand on a high moral ground for the fact that the Pahalgam massacre was not only the bloodiest and most inhuman but also the handiwork of Pakistan's ISI-modules. This was a reason why even the Islamic nations in general gave their silent nod to the military operations to neutralize terrorist modules in Pakistan. The world generally understood what India meant also because global communication networks reach information with high speed. Everyone is familiar with the Pakistan military generals' obsession to indulge in bombast. It is likely that the all-party delegations that criss-cross continents make matters more explicit to India's allies and to those who remained silent. Yet, admittedly, there is more drama and hype than stuff to these political or diplomatic engagements. If the idea is to hammer home the point that India stood as one in support of the military and other offensives, the fact is that no one ever doubted it. A question also arises as to what our diplomatic missions in these countries and their staff, trained in the art of communication, are there for — and can these bunch of second-line politicians do a better job at explaining matters or convincing the movers and shakers. Diplomacy is a finely crafted art. Not every politician at home can either communicate well or act impressively on a foreign soil.

An advantage for Modi, perhaps, is that all these 'delegates' can however be depended on to avoid raising uncomfortable questions in Parliament when they meet next time for a discussion on Pahalgam and Operation Sindoor. The government perhaps intended as much. After 'explaining' matters outside, with what face can these worthies now question the government back home? Also, it would sound curious that the Modi outreach is happening when he's not willing to explain many details of the military operations to the people here. There exists a veil of secrecy. Questions raised by Congress leader Rahul Gandhi and others remain unanswered. Silence or drama cannot be an answer to vital questions of national importance.

Traditional Markets and the Economy of the Region

By H H Mohrmen

Coincidentally, before the Chief Minister and some of his cabinet colleagues made their grandiose visit to Jowduh, a scholar visited me to discuss her plan to study traditional markets in the Khasi Hills. Just a few days before the Chief Minister's visit, a student pursuing her Master's degree at St. Anthony's College along with her colleague interviewed me about the Jowmusiang market for her dissertation.

Born to a mother who earned her livelihood by trading in various traditional markets in the Jaintia Hills, I have always had a keen interest in these marketplaces. I was born and raised near the

all dictated by the market. When we were kids, we got to eat rice cake and pork cooked with sesame seeds (dohseif) and Jadoh dohkhleh only on a market day. Everybody's special dinner on market day used to be dohsniang (pork), and the reason was that meat was sold only on the market day.

Traditionally, at least to the Pnar, their calendar comprised only days and seasons, as they had no concept of using dates, but days and seasons only. It is the markets in the region that gave the communities the eight-days-

lowed traditional religion, their daily lives revolved around market days. Understandably, payday was scheduled on market days because they were not only convenient for shopping, but also served as social gatherings which also marked the end of the week.

Market Day: A Day for Recreation

Next to lawmusiang, there was once a small field in front of the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council office, known as Madan Siat Thong, where archery competitions were held on

of beef is prohibited in these markets. Traditional markets were more than just places for buying and selling—they were centers of community life, social exchange, and spiritual activity.

Lewduh and Laban

As we know, Shillong was established by the British around 1862, coinciding with the Jaintia rebellion led by U Kiang Nangbah. Whether the rebellion, and not just the climate, prompted the British to shift the capital from Cherrapunjee to Shillong remains a relevant question. Correspondence between the military officers recorded that on several occasions, the rebels moving along slopes from



Jowmusiang market area, so my life has always revolved around markets, giving me the opportunity to observe firsthand how they function.

Market: An Intricate Part of Our Culture

People living in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have rich folk stories about markets. Among the most well-known is the story of Ka Lew Luri Lura, believed to be a market where both humans and animals once traded during a golden era of the tribe when communication between them was possible.

There is also the tale of the two rivers, Ka Umfiam and Ka Umfaw, the sisters who competed in a race to see who would reach the market in the plains first. A similar story exists about the Lukha and Lunar rivers, again featuring two sisters racing to reach the market. Even the story of Ka Jawchibidi, progenitor of the Lamin and Laloo Dieng-doh clans, is connected to a market in the plains. Clearly, the concept of markets and trade has long existed both within and beyond communities among the Khasi-Pnar people.

Markets were not just about trade and commerce

Traditional markets are not just about trade and business, and because they happened only once a week, these markets were hubs where different activities took place. Before the people learned to count the week using the Western system, market day dictated almost all the activities of the people. From deciding when to rest and even what to eat, it was

a-week calendar. The days in the week are defined by where the market is happening on that particular day. In the context of the Jowai region, Musiang is the day when the market is held in Jowai, the next day is Muchai and Dawki and Shangpung, and Pyngkat is the day when the market is held at Khliehriat. Thymbleit is the market day at Khanduli, Hat at Rymbai, Khyllaw at Sutnga, Pynsyin at Wahhajer, and Mulong is the last day when the market is at Raliang and Nartiang. Most of the traders visit as many markets as they can; hence, there is the concept of Behiaw or following the market in the community. In the past, there was an organization that did exactly this called ka Seif Behiaw, and at one point, it had a fleet of not less than eight buses.

It's Not Just About Days of the Week

Before Sunday was introduced, the day after a market day was typically a rest day. In the Jowai region, Muchai, the day after Musiang, was traditionally a rest day. It was also considered auspicious for weddings and other celebrations, likely because market goods were readily available the day before. Since markets occurred only once a week, people ate meat only on a market day and perhaps the following day. Most families could at the most afford meat just twice a week—on Musiang and Khyllaw, the smaller market day.

In those days, when the majority of people still fol-

market days. Villages would compete in these games, and until recently, the first day of the Bamphalar Theatrical Festival in Jowai began on market day.

The traditional Mih-jaw (visit to the market), part of the Bamphalar Festival, used to occur on Muchai. Interestingly, U Kiang Nangbah was also hanged by the British at Jawmusiang, the premier market of the Jaintia Hills. Market days were also the only time people dressed in their finest and visit the market sometimes just to meet friends or enjoy the atmosphere.

Markets Were Not Meant for Profit Alone

Under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, markets fall under the jurisdiction of District Councils. However, in the Jaintia Hills, there are two types of markets: ki iaw niam (markets with spiritual significance in the Niamtre religion) and District Council markets.

In most cases, the Daloi, or traditional head, collected ka dan ka khat which is a form of tax, on goods brought by outsiders (ki bar elaka). Previously collected in kind, this tax is now paid in cash.

Markets were the economic hubs of their regions, but they were not entirely profit-driven. In iaw niam, the market area is considered sacred. Sacrifices and prayers are still offered by the Daloi as per tradition. These markets are governed by the principles of ka tip brieu tip Blei (respect for fellow humans and God) and ka kamai ia ka hok (honest livelihood). Even the sale

Jaintia hills were attached Cherrapunjee, but ultimately the capital was moved to Shillong.

Till today, the word "Shillong" was not part of the vocabulary of our grandparents. When they planned a trip there, they said "Lai Laban" or "Leit Laban." People from Jowai, Nongstoin, and other areas used the same expression.

This suggests that before Shillong's formal establishment, Laban, or what we now know as Lewdak—was perhaps the most popular market in the region. This raises an important question: Is Lewduh, the biggest market in the state, also the oldest? While British records mention Yewdow, oral traditions indicate that Laban may have been more prominent among older generations.

Now the Plan for Lewduh

The Chief Minister's decision to brave the rain and visit Lewduh deserves praise. As someone who frequents Lewduh, I can say that it takes real courage and skill to navigate its narrow, crowded lanes. The government's plan to improve Lewduh is commendable and should be welcomed. However, there's a catch: how much of the market still belongs to the Syiem or the District Council, and how much is now privately owned?

The proposed plan is ambitious, but its implementation will be a major challenge. How will the government convince private shop owners to cooperate? As they say, this project is going to be easier said than done.

Servant Leadership: Leading with Service Beyond Status and Titles

Restoring Purpose, Reimagining Power, and Raising People

By M. Andrew Passah

In a world where leadership is too often equated with power, applause, or position, we urgently need a different model. One that doesn't begin with ego but with empathy. One that measures success not by the number of followers amassed, but by the number of lives lifted.

Servant leadership is that model. It is not soft—it is strong. It is leadership rooted in humility, courage, and purpose. It invites us to lead not from the top, but from within; not by commanding, but by caring.

This approach isn't reserved for politicians or CEOs. It belongs in every sphere—from classrooms and clinics to boardrooms and village councils. It's not about where you lead—but how you lead.

Meghalaya's Untapped Legacy of Service

For the people of Meghalaya, servant leadership isn't new. It runs through our history. It lives in the Dorbar Shnong, in the wisdom of clan elders, and in the decisions shaped by consensus and community. Leadership in our traditional systems was earned through integrity and trust—not entitlement or ambition. The headman or elder was not exalted because of status, but because they bore the community's burdens with care and justice.

But today, as Meghalaya faces modern pressures—urbanization, unemployment, climate change, health inequality—this indigenous wisdom risks being sidelined. The call of our time is to reclaim that legacy, reimagine it, and reignite it in every sphere of leadership.

Jesus: The Revolutionary Servant Leader

One of the most radical and enduring examples of servant leadership is found in Jesus Christ. He did not lead from a throne, but from among the people. He washed the feet of His disciples. He uplifted the broken, listened to the unheard, and challenged the powerful—not for gain, but for truth.

Even outside the Christian faith, His impact on leadership thought is undeniable. His words echo through time: "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve..." (Mark 10:45). He redefined greatness as the willingness to serve the least. This upside-down model laid the foundation for what Robert Greenleaf later called "servant leadership"—a philosophy that places the growth and well-being of others at the center of leadership.

What Is Servant Leadership, Really?

Servant leadership flips the pyramid. It begins with service—not self-interest. It leads with compassion, not control.

A servant leader embodies:

- Listening before speaking
- Empathy before ego
- Stewardship over short-term gain
- Long-term vision over quick wins
- People over position

Servant leaders go slow when the world rushes, build trust before demanding loyalty, and create value that lasts beyond headlines or reports. This isn't just theory—it's how institutions don't just function, but flourish.

Why Meghalaya Needs Servant Leaders—Now More Than Ever

Meghalaya stands at the crossroads. As our young people become increasingly restless and rural communities struggle to be heard amid the rush of modern life, our model of leadership must change—not through catchy slogans, but through deeper purpose and sincerity.

True leadership isn't about holding a position—it's about lifting people up. Meghalaya needs leaders who treat their responsibility not as a privilege to protect, but as a sacred trust to honor.

Listen Before You Lead

The first act of leadership is listening. In a diverse and often divided society, we need leaders who hear before they speak. Leaders who pause long enough to understand the realities of farmers, students, daily wage earners, and young activists. Listening isn't weakness—it's wisdom. It leads to smarter policies, stronger communities, and more human leadership.

Let Empathy Lead

Our Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo traditions value humility and compassion. These aren't outdated traits—they are leadership superpowers in an age hungry for

emotional intelligence. Leaders in healthcare, education, and administration must look beyond files and statistics. Empathy must guide every policy, every interaction, and every decision.

Be Stewards of What Matters

Meghalaya is rich—not just in minerals and forests, but in people, languages, and cultural heritage. We need leaders who protect these treasures, not exploit them. Whether managing budgets or ecosystems, stewardship means doing what is right, not what is easy. Servant leaders think of the next generation. They do not plunder the future to fix the present.

Empower, Don't Control

Leadership isn't about domination—it's about development. A great leader multiplies other leaders. When young people are trusted, when women are invited to the table, when entrepreneurs are supported, entire communities rise. Empowerment isn't just about giving a voice—it's believing in that voice and making space for it to shape the future.

Lead with Vision, Not Just Urgency

Too many decisions today are reactive. Servant leaders think long-term. They envision a Meghalaya where education transforms every child, where technology reaches every village, where mental health is no longer taboo, and where sustainability is not an afterthought. They invest in outcomes that may never serve them personally, trusting in a vision that transcends their own interests.

How Do We Raise More Servant Leaders?

It begins by changing how we think about leadership. Training institutions like the State Institute of Rural Development (SIRD) and Meghalaya Administrative Training Institute (MATI) can embed servant leadership into their core—not just as a module, but as a mindset. We must train future leaders not just to manage tasks—but to build trust, serve with purpose, and strengthen communities.

Churches, schools, colleges, and NGOs must also work together to nurture character-driven leadership—where ethics, empathy, and service are not extras, but essentials.

The Role of Every Citizen

Servant leadership doesn't start in government halls. It begins in homes, in classrooms, in local gatherings, and in everyday choices. Citizens, too, shape the culture of leadership. By voting with discernment, demanding accountability, honouring integrity over charisma, and speaking up with courage, we set the tone.

Let our student bodies, women's groups, media, and religious institutions become gardens of servant-heartedness. Let us raise children who see leadership not as domination—but as dedication.

There Will Be Challenges—But Also Hope

Let's be honest—servant leadership is not glamorous. It rarely makes headlines. It often feels lonely. But its fruits endure long after the spotlight fades. Meghalaya is already home to quiet heroes—health workers in remote villages, headmen mediating peace, public servants going beyond duty, and teachers shaping lives without recognition. They are not famous. But they are faithful. And they are changing lives.

A Final Call: Lead Differently

We don't need more leaders who seek to be served. We need more leaders who rise to serve. Not for applause, but for purpose. Not for fame, but for future generations. This is not a soft option. It is a bold revolution. Servant leadership is a counter-cultural, courageous act in today's world—and it is exactly what Meghalaya and India need right now.

So wherever you lead—from a council hall or a company, a classroom or a clinic—lead with your heart. Lead with humility. Lead by lifting others. Lead with service beyond status and titles. (About the Author: M. Andrew Passah is an entrepreneur, a graduate of the University of Buckingham, former student missionary to Eastern Europe and a former HSBC compliance executive. His research focuses on servant leadership and its application across sectors. He is passionate about ethical governance, community development, and faith informed leadership.)

Letters to the Editor

An appeal to concerned authorities

Editor, Through your esteemed newspaper, I would like to highlight a few things that are so important in the lives of ordinary citizens but which are often overlooked by the authorities who could make such a big difference in our lives.

Would it be asking too much to appeal to the authorities concerned about repainting the faded Zebra Crossings that have come up at crucial points in the city roads. They are our only life-savers which allows us to cross the roads and feel a little bit safe while doing so. However, there are those motorists and drivers of two-wheelers who choose to disregard these Zebra Crossings and insist on driving on in spite of the fact that there are pedestrians who are already half-way crossing

them. Please could we have some sort of publicity using the FM Radio, sign boards and flashes on the smart boards to educate them on the importance of respecting and allowing access to pedestrians.

The 'No Horn' zone near hospitals are also overlooked by motorists who honk away to glory just so long as they are able to edge ahead of others. There is no respect for the sick. Could we be serious about such rules and let peace and quiet prevail?

Let us make Police Bazar a traffic free-zone once again so that shoppers can shop in peace. We already have GS Road for vehicles to commute to and fro, and why on earth do they need to even go through the market area? And if I can recall correctly the reason for allowing vehicles to go through the market area is to ease traffic. But, has it achieved the purpose? Let us have the courage to shelve the plan if it is not working.

As a parting shot, maybe I belong to a minority who thinks otherwise but are the Stem buses really easing the traffic in Shillong? Let us be honest with ourselves. Have you ever noticed how these buses hold up traffic? Especially when they are breaking the traffic rules and trying to take a Right Turn from General's Point (Rhino Point). That is the time when I really start to wonder.

It's high time for Shillong to have a few fly-overs which would be the only solution to tackle the perpetual traffic congestion that we face on a daily basis. Let us not back out because we face some daunting problems imagined or real. Let us have the spirit of the go-getters to push on until those much needed fly-overs materialise. This is a sincere appeal to the authorities who are in a position to make things happen.

Yours etc., Jayanti Shadap, Via email

Urgent need for timely pension disbursement to retired teachers

Editor, Pension is not merely a post-retirement benefit—it is a fundamental right that ensures financial security and dignity in the twilight years of those who have devoted their lives to public service. Teachers, in particular, play an indispensable role in shaping society, and it is only just that they receive the support they have rightfully earned.

The Government of Meghalaya has commendably committed to providing pensions to teachers from non-government schools and colleges, recognizing their invaluable contributions over decades. In line with this, the accumulated Contributory Provident Fund (CPF) has already been transferred to the Centralized Pension Fund, reinforcing the govern-

ment's obligation to ensure timely pension payments.

However, it is deeply concerning that many retired teachers are facing undue delays in receiving their pensions. Recent representations in the press—by J. Chhetry (ST dated 24.04.2025) and H. Joshi (ST dated 07.05.2025)—highlight the prolonged financial hardship endured by these individuals despite the lapse of significant time since their retirement, reflects their despondency.

For any salaried individual, the sudden halt in income without timely pension support leads to serious financial distress. Without access to regular funds, how can these retired educators meet their daily needs, medical expenses, or maintain basic living standards? The hardship they silently endure is difficult to capture in words.

In light of this, it is strongly recommended that the government consider granting provisional pension to retired teachers whose pen-

sion cases are pending. This interim support could later be adjusted against their final pension arrears, ensuring both compassion and administrative accountability.

We must also remember that retired teachers, due to their age, are often unable to seek alternative income sources. It is therefore imperative that pensions be disbursed promptly—ideally by the end of the month in which they retire.

As a society striving for quality education, our foremost duty is to ensure the welfare of our educators. It is time we honour their service not just in words, but in timely and just action. Let us not allow those who once stood tall in classrooms to suffer in silence during their retirement.

Yours etc... Krishna Chhetri Shillong -2

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"You have to think anyway, so why not think big?"

— Donald Trump

The Shillong Times

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ADCs versus State Government

A remarkable character streak of the former ANVC combatant, now MDC, Garo Hills, Bernard Marak is his ill-fitting belligerence. He demands that the Garo Hills District Council be more empowered than it is today by transferring 13 state departments to the Council. If this is what the GHADC wants they should write to the Centre asking for implementation of the Panchayati Raj Act because all the demands made, fall under the purview of that Act and not under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. Direct funding too is a subject under the Panchayati Raj and not under the District Councils, which since their creation never had a revenue model. They depended on funds released by the state government from time to time and their only internal generation is from fees accruing from trade license applicants, professional taxes, transportation of forest products and toll gates. Sometimes Marak forgets that he represents a constituency and not just the surrendered ANVC cadres. Having surrendered because there was no further option for most of the cadres as they were being hunted down by the law enforcers, they had to come overground and sign the tripartite deal with the Central and State Government. This does not mean an easy exit from sections of the law that the ANVC cadres had violated during their tenure in the 'jungles,' which often were homes of hapless people where they took shelter at gun-point.

As far as strengthening the traditional system of governance is concerned the fact is these institutions have no resources other than the small token fees charged from the residents of the respective villages. The point of debate is whether "traditional institutions" are equal to the task of solving the problems of the 21st century in their present form. Governance whether at the state or the village level requires certain expertise and those holding office should be educated and able to understand the demands of modern governance, apart from having the human resources to carry out those functions. Above all, traditional institutions should be open to elections as against selection. What good governance demands is also strict accountability in the use of public money. In Meghalaya, the syiems (chieftains, not kings), collect taxes from markets etc., but feel they are not duty bound to give an account of their spending via the Right to Information route. This is not acceptable because every penny of public money should be invested to improve governance to the last mile where governments often do not reach.

Bernard Marak is right in pointing at the fund mismanagement in the GHADC and this should be followed up in the right spirit. The Executive Committee is accountable to the public and no Chief Executive Member (CEM) or Executive Member (EM) can be a law unto himself. Unfortunately, the GHADC has faltered regularly. Respective Executive Councils in all the ADCs have appointed more staff than they need, many being political appointees. The ADCs have then ended up not paying staff salary regularly. Who will audit the ADCs if they don't care about the CAG reports? Can they blame anyone for being starved of funds?

Education is serious Business, But not a Business

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A good friend of mine enjoys collecting vintage story-books that he read as a child. These include classic stories like Moby Dick by Herman Melville and Kidnapped by Robert Louis Stevenson. He discovered them at a website offering vintage books at reduced prices. His excitement about collecting these vintage books stems from a nostalgia for the time when he used to borrow them from the school library. He was staying in the hostel, where after a certain time, the warden would walk around to ensure that no one was awake past their bedtime. To avoid detection, he would cover himself with a blanket and use a torch to read late into the night. This way, he finished reading many books. It's a very charming story and I am sure many would have similar stories to share. My story, however, is a little different.

The school I attended was a village school on the outskirts of Shillong. It was a Catholic school and one of the better ones in the area. My memory of the time there, however, was a mixed one and one incident has remained with me for a long time. During one class, our teacher reminded us to ensure that our parents paid our fees on time. I stood up and asked the teacher why we were paying library fees when we had no library in the school. The teacher scolded me, asking me to sit down and never ask such questions again. I sat down promptly, and that was the last time I ever asked questions about the lack of facilities at the school.

Despite being founded in the early '80s, the school had only one student in its almost 20-year history who achieved a first class. That student was our immediate senior. It was his high marks in mathematics that enabled him to cross the 60% threshold. We were all impressed by this achievement and looked forward eagerly to our own results the following year. But it turned out to be a disaster. Everyone got third division, while I managed a second division—just missing first class by a few marks. As was common in those days, around the same

time, a couple of my friends ran away from home and eloped. One of them became pregnant, and I remember going with some school friends to visit her at her home in Polo.

After my matriculation, I was eligible for admission to either St. Edmund's or Shillong College. At the time, I didn't know which college was better, but I had heard rumours about ragging at Shillong College. Feeling uneasy, I chose to enroll at St. Edmund's—and that's where I met the friend I mentioned earlier. He had studied at St. Edmund's School and joined the college after his matriculation. We were among the first batches to become co-ed, and it was during our undergraduate course that female students sat with us in the same class for the first time. This also meant that some of the jokes our teachers used to tell in class became forbidden.

My days in college were the most memorable. I had a lot of fun, but I enjoyed my studies as well. The library was excellent, and I remember spending a lot of time there, especially during exams. Although my honours subject was Geography, I would pore over history books in the library. I particularly remember one on the Sangam Period, which I thoroughly enjoyed. The teachers were outstanding, and there was healthy competition among us to see who would be on the podium at graduation. Being in a good educational institution helped me immensely. I nearly made it into the top 10 in the Higher Secondary Exams, and during my graduation, I secured the second rank in the entire state. Then, during my Master's at NEHU, I finally got my Gold Medal. I attribute my success to St. Edmund's College, which is the best college in Meghalaya—and arguably one of the best in the Northeast. Had I gone to any other college, I might not have achieved the distinctions I did. I realised this after completing my master's degree!

I had a few months before I could apply for my PhD. I

joined a college in Nongthymmai during the interim period. Because my marks were good, they were thrilled to hire me for my first ever job: teaching Geography to Pre-University students. My salary was Rs. 2000 per month, which was grossly low even by the standards of those days. But there were colleges which paid lesser than that. So, teachers would teach in more than one college to earn a decent salary. Suffice to say, none of these colleges, including the one I was working in, produced any students with distinction. Since I was looking to fill my time before starting my PhD, I didn't complain. However, it was after completing my PhD that I truly felt the impact of the low salary and difficult working conditions that plague the education sector.

After my PhD, I wanted to go for my Post-Doc. But the applications were a year later since I got my degree a little late and I needed a job during the interregnum period. I applied to a couple of places and eventually got a teaching position in Arunachal Pradesh. With my luggage in tow, I left Shillong and reached the college shortly thereafter. When I arrived, I was in for a surprise.

The salary was a little higher than the stipend I was receiving during my PhD. And since the college had assured me, they would look after my accommodation, I was confident that I could survive on the salary. However, I was shocked to find out that the accommodation they provided me was a class near the Girls' bathroom. They provided me with a bed, a table, and a fan in a room filled with desks and benches. Since it had a blackboard, I would practice my lessons on it before the next day's class. In the morning, I had to finish bathing and relieving myself before the students arrived. And I could only use the bathroom again after the students had left. But accommodation was not the only problem.

Text books were not enough for teaching the course and I had got used to

downloading materials online and using videos for the lessons. However, the internet was very unreliable and one had to go to the town to get a good connection. That itself was more than half an hour away. Worst of all, there were no Kong Shops where I could have tea.

I taught for a few months and made some wonderful friends. But the lack of accommodation and materials for teaching, coupled with homesickness, made my stay very uncomfortable. Finally, I asked the principal—a kind priest—to relieve me of my position so I could return home. He took some time to get over the shame of having given up, but eventually, I found another job in Shillong.

Recently, I received the draft of the People's Education Policy 2025: An Alternative to the NEP 2020 for review from the Meghalaya Chapter of the All India Save Education Committee (AISEC). I offered a few comments but agreed with most of its points, especially those concerning improved teaching quality and school infrastructure, particularly for children from disadvantaged communities. There is mention of improving the working conditions of teachers, which was quite welcome. Of course, a policy document like this will not include stories of teachers' and students' experiences about their aspirations for a better life. However, it can outline steps to help achieve that, and in that regard, I find the draft quite useful. On 22nd May 2025, the AISEC Draft People's Education Policy was released for consultation at the Shillong Press Club, and I had the honour of being part of the team that launched it. I hope the common public will engage and help refine it. Education is a serious business, but it must never become a business. I hope this proposed policy will help prevent that and make providing and receiving education a more humane experience.

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

which the Umkariar flows should have awakened to the dangers of a river turning into a big garbage dumping place but none have shown concern. And yes, what about the Dorbar Shnong? Is cleanliness none of their concern? Why should only the Operation Clean-Up (OCU) team clean the rivers? True the OCU team is focussed and have been screaming till their cries have gone hoarse and a few conscientious educational institutions have joined in. Sadly, such institutions are few. Most school students are used to taking out processions and celebrating Earth Day/ Tourism Day/ Tobacco free day etc to make their presence felt. But that is a one-day tokenism!

Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma is giving his best shot, visiting Lewduh when it was pouring and expresses the need for a best ever National Games. Does this state belong only to the concerned few political parties? The North East Rising group should make Meghalaya a Golden Circuit of the future Generation but they have to start investing in the cleanliness of Shillong and Meghalaya.

Yours etc,
DD Laloo,
Via email

Teens often start using drugs because of peer pressure, curiosity, or to escape from stress. Sadly, the so-called GenZ are not at all prepared to tackle stress both from society and family alike. Some believe drugs make them feel good or help them forget their problems. But the reality is very different. Drugs damage the brain and body, and once a person becomes addicted, it is very hard to stop. Drug abuse leads to many problems like poor school results, family fights, and sometimes even crime.

Parents, teachers, and the community must work together to solve this problem. Schools should teach students the dangers of drugs and encourage them to take part in sports, arts, or other healthy activities to burn their energy. Local groups and authorities can help by organizing awareness programs and support centres for those who need help.

The government should also ensure that laws against drug dealers are strict and should provide good rehabilitation for addicts. Parents need to talk openly with their children and watch for any signs of drug use.

If we desire a bright future for Shillong's youth, it is important to take strong action now. Fighting drug abuse is not easy, but with care and effort from everyone, we can protect our younger generation and make our community safer.

Yours etc.,
Satyam Paul
Shillong

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Protect the GI of Lakadong Farmers

By KN Kumar

Lakadong turmeric is characterised by its high curcumin content and distinctive flavour. It received a Geographical Indication (GI) tag in 2024, marking a significant milestone for the nearly 12,000 farmers who rely on it for their livelihoods. However, how much does this GI tag benefit them? This question is crucial not only in Meghalaya but also for other farmers across India who possess products with GI tags, such as Darjeeling tea and Basmati rice. Through this article, I aim to raise several questions regarding the GI process, our perception of GI, how GI protection operates, and what the government can do to support the farmers.

The GI tag for Lakadong turmeric, awarded on 31 March 2024, acknowledges the spice's unique quality linked to the region's specific conditions. The Lakadong Mission, initiated by the Meghalaya government in 2018, has benefited farmers by enhancing the brand and improving their access to markets. Farmers anticipate better marketing opportunities with the GI tag, allowing them to sell authentic products at higher prices. There are already signs that interest in Lakadong turmeric is increasing, benefitting around 30,000 individuals involved in its production, logistics, and trade.

That said, the GI tag does not guarantee success on its own. Its effectiveness relies on strong marketing, improved supply chains, and legal protections. Farmers face challenges such as consumer awareness, competition from cheaper and sometimes adulterated turmeric, and the need for hygienic processing facilities. To make the GI tag effective, these issues must be addressed.

The impact of GI protection varies across the country. For instance, Darjeeling tea, the first Indian product to get a GI tag in 2004, has seen its reputation grow, and it now fetches higher prices. There have been legal actions against fake tea operators to help keep the quality of Darjeeling Tea intact. But many small tea growers still struggle with high costs and limited access to export markets, indicating that the benefits aren't always shared equally.

Basmati rice has also thrived since getting its GI tag, with exports increasing thanks to good infrastructure in certain states. But disputes over what counts as "real" Basmati have caused conflicts among farmers, which points to the need for clear guidelines. On the other hand, Navara rice in Kerala faced issues when the GI tag was given to just one farmer's group, leaving others out and leading to protests. This serves as a warning as to why the GI process needs to be fair and inclusive.

Meanwhile, Kadaknath chicken from Madhya Pradesh has shown a positive side of GI tagging. Since getting its tag in 2018, farmers from the Bhil tribe have been able to access better markets and boost their incomes, thanks to cooperative efforts and support from the government. The Geographical Indications of Goods Act of 1999 provides a robust legal framework to address GI violations. Civil remedies include halting infringement activities and compensating farmers for their losses. For example, someone selling turmeric under the name "Lakadong" without permission could find themselves in legal trouble and compelled to pay damages. There are also stringent criminal penalties for falsely labelling products. Offenders could face imprisonment from six months to three years and substantial fines. These regulations aim to protect both consumers and producers from fraud. The Act covers instances where producers misrepresent their products as GI-protected, which is particularly important for traditional communities that lack the resources to obtain their own GI tags but require protection against unfair

competition.

There have been notable legal victories in protecting Indian GI tags. The Darjeeling Tea Board has successfully prosecuted counterfeit tea operations. In one 2010 case, the Tea Board took ITC Limited to court for using "Darjeeling Lounge" for its hotel, showing how serious the issue of protecting GI terms can be. Similarly, there have been crackdowns on companies wrongly labelling rice as Basmati. Notably, the challenge against RiceTec's attempt to trademark "Texmati" in the UK helped to defend Basmati's GI status. These cases highlight the judicial system's critical role in protecting agricultural products, even though such actions can be very costly for smaller farming groups.

The Central government has been proactive in promoting GI products, but appears to be clueless about the methods of protecting the farmers/GI holders. The Ministry of Commerce has hosted events and set up pavilions to showcase GI products, boosting visibility. Government support for facilities, like the Pineapple-Pack house in Kerala, benefits GI producers. But I do not see much action to generate wider awareness to farmers about how to protect their respective GIs. The Agriculture Departments of state governments also do not seem to be much aware of how to protect the GIs of their states. To strengthen GI protection, the government should (1) Strengthen Enforcement: Train police to handle GI violations and work with customs to stop unauthorized exports, (2) Run campaigns to educate consumers about GI tags to drive demand for genuine products (3) Promote International Recognition: Work on agreements to protect Indian GIs abroad, similar to what was done for Basmati in the EU.

While Northeast India boasts GI-tagged farmer products like Lakadong turmeric, Mizo Chilli, Assam Orthodox Tea, Khasi Mandarin, and Tripura Queen Pineapple, no specific legal cases are documented for unauthorized GI violations as of May 2025. That is not to say that there have been no violations. I have found several websites selling Lakadong Turmeric on Amazon. A few of them were from Meghalaya, but many were not. That means violations are taking place as we speak. The lack of cases in the Northeast likely stems from recent GI registrations, localized markets, and resource constraints rather than an absence of violations. Strengthening awareness, funding legal support, and improving monitoring can empower Northeast farmers to protect their GI rights, ensuring economic benefits and cultural preservation. This contrasts with high-profile cases like Darjeeling Tea and Basmati Rice, where institutional support and market scale have driven enforcement. For Lakadong turmeric, proactive measures like those in the Lakadong Mission can pre-empt violations, but vigilance is needed as its market grows. With solid legal protection and proactive government action, Meghalaya Lakadong farmers can be better supported in preserving their agricultural heritage and securing their livelihoods. The GI tag for Lakadong turmeric has the potential to benefit Meghalaya's farmers, much like it has for products like Darjeeling Tea and Kadaknath chicken. But its success depends on overcoming challenges like enforcement and ensuring that everyone benefits fairly. The Department of Agriculture & Farmers' Welfare of Meghalaya should create a mechanism to protect the Lakadong Farmers in defending their GI. Farmers do not go to courts, they only know how to produce. Then whose duty is it to protect them? For the policymakers, I will only say one thing: When a farmer fails, the country fails. Mind this.

(The writer is a former IAS officer)

Letters to the Editor

A student's experience with arbitrary traffic policing at Polo Point

I wish to draw attention to a distressing encounter with traffic authorities at Polo Point that reflects the growing gap between citizens and the systems meant to serve them.

While returning from Golf Links during regular traffic, I was riding my vehicle at a very slow speed—certainly under 25 km/h—when a traffic officer abruptly raised his hand to stop my lane. I applied the brakes and, due to normal braking distance, stopped slightly ahead. There was no danger posed, no obstruction created. Yet, I was immediately pulled aside while another two-wheeler ahead of me, who accelerated despite the officer's signal, was allowed to pass without question.

What followed was disheartening. I was shuffled between multiple officers, each speaking in a stern and mocking tone. Despite showing my license and explaining the situation, they spoke of impounding my vehicle, of hefty fines, and finally suggested that I "just pay the minimum fine and go"—without issuing a challan or any written documentation. When I mentioned I was not carrying cash, they continued to juggle me around for over 15 minutes before finally letting me go.

What is this "minimum fine"? If a legitimate violation occurred, shouldn't due legal process follow—complete with paperwork? Why the threats and psychological pressure, especially towards

someone clearly not resisting cooperation? Is this how law enforcement should treat students and young citizens?

More importantly, when vehicles are stolen or when serious accidents occur due to reckless riding, we're often told CCTV footage is unavailable, investigations stall, and no one is held accountable. But here, for a harmless moment of braking, an entire swarm of officers surrounded a student, threatened him, and casually joked about fines.

If this is the "system" we pay taxes to uphold—one that fails when real harm occurs, but thrives on intimidating the nervous and powerless—then we are not living in a functioning democracy. We are living in a plague of lawlessness, where fear replaces justice, and laughter conceals a lack of accountability.

My name may not be published so as to avoid further harassment. Those police officers involved in this unpleasant incident know who they are.

Yours etc.,
A concerned student citizen,
Name withheld on request
Via email

A historic milestone for Meghalaya's higher education & development

The Government of Meghalaya deserves commendation for its remarkable achievement in obtaining approval from the All India Council for Technical Education (AICTE) to introduce undergraduate programmes in Civil Engineering and Electrical Engineering at the Shillong Government College of Engi-

neering, commencing from the 2025-26 academic session.

This is a truly historic moment for Meghalaya, marking the establishment of the state's first-ever government engineering college. For decades, students, parents, and educators have hoped for such an institution, one that would bring quality technical education closer home. The government's success in realising this long-standing aspiration is not only commendable but reflects a forward-looking vision for the state's educational and economic future.

The launch of this college at Mawlai Kynnton Massar in East Khasi Hills, will have far-reaching benefits. By offering specialised courses in civil and electrical engineering, it opens up critical avenues for skill development, employment, and innovation. These disciplines are central to infrastructure, energy, and public works—all of which are essential to Meghalaya's progress.

This move is especially significant as it addresses a long-standing gap in higher education within the state. Young people will now have the opportunity to pursue professional degrees without migrating to other parts of the country. This not only reduces the financial burden on families but also helps retain talent within the state, an important factor in building a skilled local workforce.

In the broader context, this initiative is a major step towards the socio-economic development of Meghalaya. A strong technical education system lays the foundation for future industries, improved infrastructure, and overall capacity building. It will also boost employment opportunities, both directly through education and indirectly through the industries and services that grow around such institutions.

Furthermore, the college's

encouragement to participate in national programmes like the Smart India Hackathon, ATAL Faculty Development Programmes, and scholarship schemes such as Pragati, Saksham, and Swanath is another positive stride. These initiatives not only enhance learning and exposure for students and faculty, but also integrate the institution with national standards and innovation networks.

The Government of Meghalaya deserves full credit for this progressive and impactful achievement. It is a clear demonstration of strategic planning, dedication, and a genuine commitment to empowering the youth through education. This is not just a proud moment in the state's academic history, but a decisive step toward building a stronger, self-reliant Meghalaya.

Yours etc,
Jack Syiemlieh,
Via email

When will the behaviour change come about?

I read with agonising interest the news report, "OCU enters 6th year of river cleaning; no change visible," (ST May 26, 2025). Six years and counting with no difference made would have deterred many from carrying on. Normally perseverance rewards and on an issue which is everyone's concern there should have been remarkable changes with participation in big numbers. Alas! The patriotism of pressure groups (wrongly called NGOs) is always at lip service level. Tourism associations, big time hoteliers, village communities even the MLA and MDC of the areas through

which the Umkariar flows should have awakened to the dangers of a river turning into a big garbage dumping place but none have shown concern. And yes, what about the Dorbar Shnong? Is cleanliness none of their concern? Why should only the Operation Clean-Up (OCU) team clean the rivers? True the OCU team is focussed and have been screaming till their cries have gone hoarse and a few conscientious educational institutions have joined in. Sadly, such institutions are few. Most school students are used to taking out processions and celebrating Earth Day/ Tourism Day/ Tobacco free day etc to make their presence felt. But that is a one-day tokenism!

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Yours etc.,
DD Laloo,
Via email

Rise in drug abuse among teenagers in Shillong

In recent years, drug abuse among teenagers in Shillong has become a worrying problem. Many young people are trapped in the most dangerous network of drug addiction, and this is harming not only their health but also their future and the

"True art is characterized by an irresistible urge in the creative artist."

— Albert Einstein

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Bull in a China shop

A deep churning is taking place in the United States after Donald Trump took charge as President for a second term. Several of his decisions and actions are being challenged legally and politically within the US itself, while he's also sending shockwaves to the wider world in terms of an upward revision of trade tariffs for imports and much else. The latest are the changes in the taxation policy in the US, with a process currently on to charge a hefty 3.5 per cent for immigrants sending money to their families back home. The bill, after passing the first post, is now before the US Senate which could pass, modify or even nullify the change. Such moves should be of special concern to us. India is the world's top recipient of remittances, some 28 percent of this is coming from the US now, totalling over \$30 billion as per RBI statistics. In fact, Western nations replaced the Gulf states as the main fund transferor of Indian immigrant populations of late. The Indian workforce in the US is believed to be sending some 20 percent of their earnings to their homes/bank accounts here. Trump's original proposal was to charge as high as five per cent tax on this. Any dispensation that means business would be required to take decisions that hurt one segment or the other for the overall well-being of the nation. A please-all government, as is often the case with democracies like India, is no government worth the name. Yet, freewheeling changes in a ham-handed manner would have their negative consequences too.

Trump, on his part, is picking one and all. That he has put Harvard on notice with curbs on international student admissions and a threat to review \$9 billion in federal funding for the university came as another shock. His plan is to cut it by one-third and assign this three billion to fund trade schools and support the national economic surge. On top of this, in another brow-beating, the administration has warned international students that their visa would be revoked if they skipped classes. Student protests against issues like Israel's genocidal acts against Palestine; pushes against Palestinians in "anti-Semitic" Harvard could be a reason. A threat is also that such students would not get US visas in future. Alongside, there's worry among Indian immigrants about the administration's move to scrap the Optional Practical Training (OPT) for students working in the US after their graduation. Clearly, things are getting hot for the immigrants in the US under Trump's second term. Retrenchments in the IT sector there, which employs large numbers of Indians, have seen a significant increase in recent months. The confidence levels of the immigrants in the IT sector has been hugely dented even as large numbers of Indian companies lead the way in the US.

Letters to the Editor

Is Government serious about improving the quality of education in the State?

Editor,
Article 21A of the constitution, which was inserted through the eighty-six Amendment, guarantees free and compulsory education to children between the ages of 6 to 14 years. It's the obligation of the state government to ensure that every child has access to quality education which focuses on the student's holistic development. To assess and benchmark the performance of states and union territories in school education the ministry of education Government of India in 2017 came up with Performance Grading Index (PGI). Regrettably in the latest performance grading index (PGI 2.0), Meghalaya scores poorly in almost all the domains. Reacting to this low PGI score the State Education Department has come up with a discussion paper titled, "Consolidation of Multiple Grant in Aid Schemes for Educational Institutions in Meghalaya," which is in public domain for views, opinions and suggestions.

To better understand the data in the paper I went through the Education Department website. The first thing that I noticed was that the number of government schools are not evenly distributed among districts; in some district the number is 1,136 and in others it is as low as 140. The reason behind this disparity is not clear but it certainly is not

related to the population distribution. According to data from the website the total number of government schools in Meghalaya is 3540. Of these 3540 government schools, 3271 are primary schools, which is over 92% of the total number of Government schools. The data also shows that there are only 54 government schools providing education up to the secondary level. From the results booklet of the MBOSE Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination 2025 the number of students who appeared for the above examination is 63,682. Looking at these numbers one can easily conclude that the bulk of the students who sat in the SSLC examination 2025 come from private schools. The figure will be similar for other classes too.

Although the data presented here is only for 2025 we all know that through the years private educational institutions have been instrumental in shaping the educational landscape in the state. Despite their contributions a huge gap still exists between the haves and have nots as far as accessing quality education is concerned.

In our State the socio-economic factors still play a significant role in determining access to quality education. Children from marginalised sections, rural areas, or low-income families often have limited access to quality education. It's not the fault of a child to be born in a low income family or in far flung villages. But to deny a child quality education is a violation of his or her fundamental rights, like Right to Education and Right to Equality of Opportunities, guaranteed by the Constitution.

In the Discussion paper, one of the reasons cited for

Hello political opponent – 'hope you slip on a banana peel'

By Benjamin Lyngdoh

The campaigning for the 2028 Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election has begun in earnest. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has hit the ground running and VPP President Ardent Basaiawmoit has made his intention of a state-wide tour public. The norm now is to show a connection with the grassroots. MDA 2.0 is feeling the heat. On the other hand, VPP are sweating every time the state government inaugurates/announces a development project. Both sides are waiting for the other to commit a political blunder. Who will slip first?

Lewduh visit

The May 19, 2025 visit of the Chief Minister and his team to Lewduh, Shillong did make for good optics. The visit was needed to take stock of the crumbling infrastructure at Lewduh. Although the CM's team stressed that it was not a political photo-op, the reality is that it was and any defence is nothing but a slip on a banana peel. When politicians visit a crowded marketplace, it is impossible to isolate the event from the perspective of gaining political brownie points. This type of public interactions at the grass roots will only increase in the coming months. Every politician/party will try to outsmart the other in terms of public immersion. The CM's team harped proudly on the fact that it promised on an infrastructure development package of Rs 21 crores. In truth, this is nothing to sing about because any state government is duty-bound to announce a development package when it goes to a dilapidated space like the Lewduh. On the contrary, it would have been a crime had they not doled out any financial assistance. From that perspective, the visit was pretty mundane.

Check gate

The KHADC letter No.DC.RBF/VIII/25/2025/7 dated April 29, 2025 is an interesting read. Point number 6 of the letter makes it amply clear that 'such checking shall not be on the National Highways/State Highways/PWD Rural Roads'. That is

one major slip although it is true that without check gates the revenue generation of any District Council would suffer. It is to be noted that after following due procedure and permissions the District Councils do have the right to set up check gates at designated spots only. The biggest question here is why there was no tendering initiated for the check gate. If tendering was never a procedure for KHADC, then why was the contract not selected through a 'drawing of lots'? There were others who were

growth and development initiatives. For instance, the entrepreneurial ecosystem of Meghalaya is not that vibrant as the economy does not possess enough purchasing power. This is one of the reasons as to why many of the start-ups which target the local markets struggle. This is also the reason why so much emphasis is given on tourism development as the clients from outside Meghalaya then come and spend and add to the local economy. This goes together with the need for investment from big corpo-

shit ka shai'; (during the day) but the night decides the day. Will the CM's team and the VPP President's team tread these challenging paths, or is it all about optics and taking the easy way out? In any case, what is next? Maybe, visiting the homes of the BPL families and having a simple square meal. Maybe, teach someone to swim. Even better, maybe teach someone how to make tea. This optics is so misleading and unwanted, but, in most likelihood the optics would continue till the time someone has a major slip-up.

Governance perspective

If the governance perspective is to be viewed on the basis of 'outlook' then MDA 2.0 can be considered as having a broader viewpoint. The state government is very clear in its approach. Development means investment from outside the state, sending the human resources outside the state and country, land banks, railways, etc. However, the major problem for it is the allegations of illegal coal mining, corruption and nepotism in its governance. It is a problem because the people do tend to follow and believe these allegations whatever clarification and defence the state government might present. This is a big banana peel with the potential for electoral gains for the opposition parties. The VPP's perspective is more grounded in financial stability and dealing with the issue of debt-trap. It is looking into more sustainable ways of developing Meghalaya without splashing in events like festivals, concerts, etc. If VPP comes to power and leads the government in 2028 Meghalaya can expect a lot of austerity measures. But, this is also a slippery slope as a revenue scarce Meghalaya where would the money come from if not debt-financing?

In the end, it all depends on the wisdom of the electorate. The voters will have to weigh between optics and substance and decide.

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"When politicians visit a crowded marketplace, it is impossible to isolate the event from the perspective of gaining political brownie points. This type of public interactions at the grass roots will only increase in the coming months. Every politician/party will try to outsmart the other in terms of public immersion. The CM's team harped proudly on the fact that it promised on an infrastructure development package of Rs 21 crores. In truth, this is nothing to sing about because any state government is duty-bound to announce a development package when it goes to a dilapidated space like the Lewduh."

interested in the exercise. This is exactly the kind of situation which VPP promised to eradicate during their campaigns right from MLA to MP and District Council elections. No wonder this slip into nepotism has put the party in a bad place and very few defence statements have come on the issue (if at all they can be considered as a defence).

Jaitbynriew politics

Politics tends to blur and sometimes confuse what the 'jaitbynriew' is supposed to do. It is high time that Meghalaya shifts from a narrow-minded connotation of what politics can do and look at political options which can transform the socio-economic status of its people. The term jaitbynriew is equivalent to a 'cocoon of comfort'. It impacts upon the psyche of the youth into myopic viewpoints on

rations in key sectors such as agriculture, livestock, etc. Which politician/party will take up the challenge? In most likelihood, no one will. No one wants to slip. This is due to the fear of a political backlash from the jaitbynriew.

So What next?

The best time for any politician/party to visit Lewduh is during the night hours. It is dark, eerie and dangerous. Plus, will the authorities and the state government take stock of the residents at Lewduh. This writer is not aware of any stock taking till date and the inhabitants who operate in it through the night. Infrastructure is one matter, safety and security is another important matter. The issues at Lewduh can be taken as a prototype for problems in all market spaces of Meghalaya. It is good to do politics 'ha ka

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Crying Wolf..!

So now we've sent a delegation, along with our Oxford Dictionary-Shashi Tharoor!

Yes, a "Truth Team," armed with PowerPoint presentations, diplomatic smiles, and Tharoor's vocabulary, to convince the world: "This time, honest, we're telling the truth."

Apparently, even something as precise, targeted, and necessary as bombing terrorist camps must now come with a disclaimer: "We promise we did it for the right reasons. Please believe us. Sincerely, India."

It should have been a moment of solemn pride—justice delivered with restraint and military efficiency. But instead, it has been drowned in doubt, not because of what

security."

And then, just like that, in the middle of the digital din, the government says: "Believe us, this strike was real. It was justified. We have evidence."

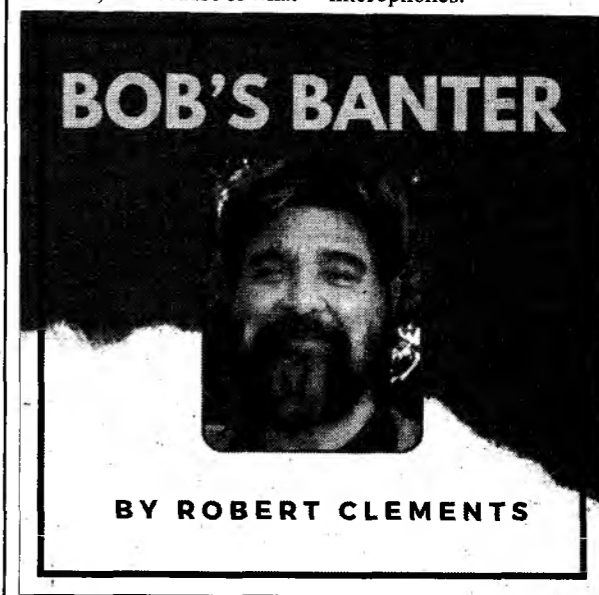
And many of us whisper back, "Do you?"

Not because we're unpatriotic. But because we've heard this voice before—in fifty different accents and contexts—and too often, it was selling us snake oil.

So what do we do now? We send a delegation.

We round up opposition MPs—many of whom were vilified yesterday—and tell them to play backup singers in the symphony of "Truth, India Style."

And you can almost hear the irony crackling in the microphones.



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

we did this time, but because of what we've done so many times before.

Because when you make a habit of yelling "fake news!" at every uncomfortable truth, of branding every international report as "foreign propaganda," and of treating fact-checkers like enemies of the state—don't be surprised if, when we finally tell the truth, no one listens.

That's what happens when you cry wolf.

For years now, we've swung a torch of bravado at the world's eyebrows. When the UN said hunger in India had worsened, we accused them of being anti-India. When global watchdogs flagged declining press freedom, we claimed they were colonial stooges. When journalists were arrested for doing their jobs, we said they were threats to peace and national security.

We didn't pause to think that truth was quietly exiting the building while we danced in the glow of jingoism.

Minorities lynched? Fabricated.

Dissenters jailed? Necessary.

Activists raising red flags? "Urban Naxals."

Poverty reports? "West jealous of our economic growth."

We became experts at rubbishing the world's concerns while simultaneously craving their validation—an odd contradiction best performed under prime-time studio lights with ticker tapes flashing BREAKING: INDIA UNSHAKEABLE.

But the consequence of all that spinning, twisting, denying and deflecting is this: Now, when we actually have something to say that matters, we sound like those WhatsApp forwards we warned the aunties about.

The wolf has entered the village. But the villagers, tired of false alarms, have rolled their eyes and gone back to sleep.

Even worse, we're not just losing the world's trust. We're losing our own.

Scroll through your Twitter feed. Flip through Instagram reels. Talk to a college student. Speak to the elderly who lived through wars and remembered real statesmanship. And you'll see a sad, growing tribe of citizens who don't know what to believe anymore—not because they don't love their country, but because they've been deceived one too many times.

One day it's about banning maps that show inconvenient borders.

The next day, it's silencing comedians who joked too sharply. The following week, it's another YouTube channel banned for "national

We're not flying out to declare victory. We're flying out to beg for credibility.

Let that sink in.

And in doing so, we learn a lesson we should have never forgotten:

Truth is like a credit card.

Swipe it responsibly—on transparent governance, integrity, and humility—and it'll work like magic.

Swipe it recklessly—on fake data, hollow nationalism, and cosmetic reforms—and one day, at the counter of global scrutiny, the message flashes:

"Declined. Insufficient authenticity."

So, what do we do next? Simple. Radical, even. But simple.

Tell the truth. Start with admitting that we're not perfect. No country is.

Acknowledge those rankings on poverty, education, press freedom—not with angry denials, but thoughtful reflection.

Don't arrest the messenger—engage with the message.

Stop labelling every critique as "anti-national." Pause to ask, "What if they're right?"

Stop scripting every story into a Bollywood thriller. Sometimes the truth is mundane, unsexy—but real. And real is what we need.

Because truth doesn't need a 10-member committee to validate it. It stands tall, even in silence.

Let's go back to a place where we can accept our faults without shame, correct them with integrity, and celebrate our wins without the need for saying like little children, "I swear on my father! On my mother!"

Let's raise a generation that's not suspicious by default, that doesn't smirk when the government says, "We did this right."

Let's remember that real patriotism isn't about blind belief. It's about clear-eyed love—a love that's not afraid to question, to critique, to improve. And maybe, just maybe, next time the wolf comes—be it in the form of a threat, a crisis, or a genuine need for global solidarity—we won't have to send a delegation with brochures and bullet points.

We'll speak, and the world will listen. Because truth, once restored, doesn't need shouting. It whispers—and is heard. Until then, let's keep that credit card in our pocket, but let's also clean up the account. Because this nation has too much potential, too many heroes, and far too much truth waiting to be spoken—to waste on more cries of "wolf...!"

bobsbanter@gmail.com

call, both the insurance renewal and subsidy were discussed in detail. However, despite our team sharing the premium amount, no confirmation to proceed with the renewal was received from the customer.

We have verified that a total of eight insurance renewal reminders were sent to the customer on eight different dates. We are pleased to share the details for verification upon request.

While we respect the customer's right to express dissatisfaction, we respectfully disagree with the phrase, "snake oil promises but delivering little," used in the letter. Frank Motors has always operated with integrity, transparency and a genuine commitment to customer service. Our team has acted in good faith and strictly within the scope of the responsibilities assigned to us by policy and procedure.

We fully understand the customer's frustration and empathise with their concerns. However, it is also important to state that the issues raised were outside our direct control. We acknowledge there may have been gaps in communication or timing and regret any inconvenience caused. Should Mr Sawian wish to further discuss or resolve any outstanding concerns, we encourage him to reach out. Our team is more than willing to engage through the appropriate and official channels to ensure a constructive resolution.

Yours etc.,
Rimika Nongrum,
Frank Motors, Laitkor

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

Response to the letter – 'Disappointing after-sales experience with Tiago EV dealership'

Editor,
Apropos of the above letter (ST May 24, 2025) written by Mr. Patrick Pugh Sawian regarding his experience following the purchase of the Tiago EV MR XE from Frank Motors on 09 March 2024, at the outset we thank Mr Sawian for his feedback. At Frank Motors, we value all customer inputs and treat them as opportunities to reflect and improve. We regret the inconvenience the customer may have faced and would like to respond with clarity on the concerns raised.

With regards to the EV subsidy, the Tiago EV purchased falls under the purview of the Meghalaya

Electric Vehicle Policy 2021, notified by the Transport Department, Government of Meghalaya, 2021. As per Section 7 (7.1.3), points (i) and (ii) of the policy, the electric four wheeler subsidy is subject to certain criteria, namely, a benefit of Rs 4,000 per kWh and a maximum ex-factory price of Rs 15 lakhs, applicable to the first 2,500 eligible vehicles registered during the policy period.

We further clarify that the dealer's role is limited to assisting customers with documentation and timely submission. In this case, Frank Motors submitted all required documents within the stipulated time. The dealership has no influence or control over the processing, approval and disbursement of the subsidy. That said, we have consistently followed up on behalf of the customer wherever possible to support the process despite it being beyond our direct purview.

On the matter of insurance renewal, the customer's Own Damage insurance policy was valid until March 8, 2025. As per our standard practice, our team made repeated attempts to reach the customer on the registered mobile number through phone calls and WhatsApp. However, the number was found to be unreachable and inactive on WhatsApp during that period.

On March 8, 2025, we received a WhatsApp message from the customer referencing both the insurance renewal and the pending subsidy. That same day, our team also received a WhatsApp call from an international number, during which the renewal premium was clearly explained. It is likely that the query was prompted by a reminder from our insurance backend partner, TMI Insurance. During the

"Find a place inside where there's joy,
and the joy will burn out the pain."

—Joseph Campbell

The Shillong Times

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Perils of Tourism

WITHIN a short 2-month interval Meghalaya's tourism sector has another problem on its hands. First a Hungarian tourist ventures out on his own and goes missing for several days before his body was found. The cause of death was apparently a fall from a height. Now a couple from Indore, Madhya Pradesh has gone missing since, May 23. The couple rented a scooter from Shillong and left it parked near Sohra Rim before launching off into some unknown destination. Unknown because the couple like many other tourists didn't think they needed a guide and preferred to go off on a solitary adventure. To have a guide accompanying them is the last thing that a newly married couple on a honeymoon would want. But that's if they are familiar with the place and the terrain. Meghalaya's landscape is not the most friendly, particularly on those routes leading to the living root bridges. While most destinations now have carefully made steps others are still left untouched and can be slippery. On the one hand the fact that the treks are tough leaves them undiscovered except by experienced trekkers who also have a deep reverence for nature, but they can be treacherous too. But those who understand nature are the kind of tourists that Meghalaya needs and should encourage.

Sadly, there are bus loads of tourists these days that rely on drivers from Assam to take them around. Needless to say they miss out on some of the sights and sounds they should be seeing and visiting instead of the beaten tracks. This is where the fault of the Tourism Department lies. Why should buses and taxis venture deep into our tourist spots? Should there not be a general parking space at Sohra from where the local taxis along with a guide could take the visitors around and also explain to them the legends surrounding the places. Is this not how Tourism supports the local economy? Instead, we have vehicles from Assam going deep inside our villages where the tourists are not even given a briefing on how they should treat the local communities with respect and empathy and not look down at them simply because they are not dressed well or they cannot speak Hindi or English.

There has to be an entry and exit point where tourists register their names and also inform the registration desk which places they will be visiting. At this point there has to be an entry fee since Meghalaya is selling its natural landscapes. The Tourism Department now has to think of a tracking system once the tourists have registered themselves at the entry point. Otherwise, the State will continue to have a bad name for not being able to keep track of tourists who then go missing. At one time Meghalaya had considered training a special force called 'tourist police' to keep vigil at all tourist spots. Somehow that scheme fizzled out. Something has to be done to redeem the Tourism reputation of Meghalaya. Tourism can no longer be left only to the communities who are untrained and whose language skills are wanting.

Remembering Fullmoon Pyrtuh: The Football Star of Shillong

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

On May 20, 2025, football lovers of Shillong alongside the football players bade farewell to Fullmoon Pyrtuh, the footballing legend that the State has produced. The passing away of such a towering figure has created a void in the football circles, but the inevitability of death is something that we mortal beings could never escape. However, the memories of achievers will linger in our minds and their contributions will be remembered by the generations to come.

Shillong Football Scene: The seeds of football culture, in Shillong in particular and State in general, had already been sown long before the State was born and Shillong lads have exhibited their footballing skills since the pre-independence period. Unlike in the past, footballers of the present generation are being provided with proper training facilities and access to quality exposures in terms of frequent matches outside the State and country. Besides, they are well placed and are better paid. In a way they have become sophisticated.

Part of Polo Ground, where the serene racecourse with lush greenery and plush surroundings by the Umkhrak River once existed, is now used for the Shillong Football League since the formation of the Shillong Sports Association in 1916. In the 1980s until the early 1990s, the galleries at the first ground in Polo, would be filled to the brim with passionate fans and supporters of local community clubs. A unique feature of Shillong football in the past was the development and passion of community clubs, known as "team Shnong" or "team Dong." The Christian Athletic Club of Mission Compound and Laban Sports Club (1916) were among the first community-based football clubs to be formed. Wahingdoh Sports Club, established in 1946, had produced football gems like Shlur Nongbri and Fullmoon Pyrtuh.

It is interesting to note that 22 years after Shlur Nongbri showcased his footballing talent at the national stage in the Santosh Trophy in Ernakulam, in 1956, Full-

moon Pyrtuh did the same at the Subroto Mukherjee Cup in New Delhi in 1978. Along with his schoolmates, he brought home the cup by winning the final of the interstate school championship. Hence, there was no stopping for Fullmoon Pyrtuh from rising and shining on football fields both within and outside the State.

Fullmoon: A Rising Star: In 1984, A. Lyngwa and D. Kharkongnor co-authored and published the book, *The Football Stars of Shillong*, and placed Fullmoon Pyrtuh in the galaxy of football stars, terming him as the Rising Star of football then. From the hamlet of Moodymmai in Jaintia Hills to Shillong, where he discovered his talent, Fullmoon had come a long way in developing his footballing skill and for this he owed a great deal to Father George, Bah Rishan Rapsang and coach Kabui for their support, encouragement and guidance.

Bobby Nongbet, Shillong's eminent football coach, aptly described Fullmoon as the fiercest talent who would cause the defenders and goalkeeper of the opposing team to panic the moment he had the ball in control, especially from outside the box. Throughout his career, Fullmoon had earned many feathers to his cap. From winning the Subroto Mukherjee Cup, representing St Anthony's School in 1978, to the most memorable moment in his footballing career when he scored the winning goal for India against Singapore in the 13th Asian School Games. During the 13th Asian School International Tournament held in New Delhi in 1984, Fullmoon was the star striker for India and it was reported by the Statesman, "Fullmoon was the only Indian who made many attempts which included a good run into the box and a powerful kick..." Whereas, the Sports Week, October 24-30, 1984, had this to say about him, "For goals, the reliance was chiefly on Fullmoon and this forward from Meghalaya proved his worth. He was the main scorer for the team and fared creditably. He had some notable performances to his

credit a few years ago in the Subroto Cup...Fullmoon has certainly gained experience and his progress needs watching" (A. Lyngwa and D. Kharkongnor, *The Football Stars of Shillong*).

In the autumn of 1986, during the prestigious Bordoloi Trophy held in Guwahati, it was indeed a challenging day for Shillong XI. The match between Shillong XI and Nagaland Police turned out to be a memorable yet difficult encounter for the team. Despite the setback, football enthusiasts witnessed a display of extraordinary talent and skill, especially from Fullmoon Pyrtuh.

Fullmoon Pyrtuh's performances on the field were nothing short of mesmerizing; he exhibited remarkable dribbling, precise passing and powerful shots that left spectators in awe. His agility, vision and technical prowess laid bare the raw talent that he possessed, making him the standout player of the match. Although Shillong XI faced an unfortunate defeat, Pyrtuh's brilliance became a highlight that football lovers would forever cherish and remember. (Dongmusa 26 September 1986).

Vision of a Humble Footballer: Fullmoon Pyrtuh was not just a household name in football in the State, but he also served as a point of reference in deliberations aimed at improving the standards of football in Meghalaya. On 28 December 1984, Dongmusa published a very compelling op-ed advocating for the enhancement of football in Shillong and Meghalaya, with Fullmoon's achievements being a central talking point. The op-ed lamented the deterioration of football standards in Shillong and the State as a whole. It was argued that the Meghalaya Invitation Football Tournament, launched in 1976 with the aim of promoting local football talents, had made little progress.

Undoubtedly, Fullmoon had emerged as a star following his stunning performance during the Subroto Tournament in 1978, but there were many hidden talents and po-

tential footballers in the State that needed to be discovered and nurtured. It was emphasized that numerous talented footballers like Fullmoon could bring laurels to the State and the community.

Improving the football standards in the State was what Fullmoon Pyrtuh had dreamt of. In his tribute to the football legend Maycoast Marbanian, who also played in the Subroto Mukherjee Cup representing Mawkhar Christian High School, Shillong in 1985, expressed his utmost respect and acknowledged him as a mentor. He also narrated that Fullmoon Pyrtuh was gravely concerned at the deteriorating standards of football in Shillong. Dreaming of improving football, Fullmoon and other former players and teammates founded the Meghalaya Football Players Association with the aim of raising the standard of footballers in the Capital City and State.

Fullmoon's humility as a person was another remarkable characteristic and this was confirmed even by players from outside the state who had the opportunity to play alongside and against his team. Lalminga Darlong, a schoolmate and member of the Subroto Mukherjee Cup winning team, remembered him as a true gentleman. Another former Wahingdoh Sports Club teammate, Lal-tanpuia Bawitlung, shared his experiences with Fullmoon and said that, "beyond his skills on the field, his humility, kindness and gentle spirit touched the hearts of many". Additionally, players from Mizoram who knew Fullmoon remembered his greatness not only as a star midfielder but also as a human being off the football field.

At the end of the day, the Rising star had faded in time and in the words of Edson Arentes Do Nascimento, the world renowned footballer popularly known as Pele, "This is not our life. Everything here is a game, a passing thing. What matters is what I have done and what I will leave behind. Let it be an example for those that come. There are many people with the will to fight. Life is not just this and truth is farther beyond."

The Proposal That Launched a Thousand Facepalms

By Ellerrine Diengdoh

It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a government in possession of a crumbling education system must be in want of a scapegoat.

The Meghalaya Education Grant (MEG) discussion paper, is a 15 page odyssey that boldly attempts to fix everything, from Lower Primary to Higher Education, by treating the entire system like a single misbehaving child. This proposal assumes, what works for a six-year-old drawing a cow that looks like a helicopter, will work just as well for a 20-year-old trying to understand Heidegger's thoughts on "being." I mean, cows, helicopters, existential dread. It is all connected. Somehow.

Let us start with the basic premise. Colleges and schools are the same. One framework. For nursery rhymes and nuclear physics. The same reform must be applied to A for Apple and A for Aristotle. Which makes perfect sense if you've never read a book or met a child in your life.

The Paper expresses great concern about the Performance Grading Index (PGI) for schools. Fair. It then implies, we colleges should also prostrate ourselves before the PGI gods. That's right—colleges, which have NAAC accreditation, may now be assessed AGAIN by a school-based index!

The proposal proceeds to ask the hard-hitting question: "Why do we have so many schools?" A valid concern. But it fails to follow up with an equally important one: "Why do we have so few colleges?" Because once all those bright and beautiful school students graduate, where exactly are they supposed to go? Presumably, into the few crammed classrooms the state can offer. But don't worry. They can queue. In shifts. Till doomsday. Or until they evaporate.

Now, to the part where the document gently suggests that aided college teachers are being paid obscene salaries. Obscene? Really? Last we checked, obscenity is defined as: Obscene (adj.): So excessive as to be offensive. Likely examples would be:

1. Going on "educational" taxpayer-funded trips abroad
2. Skillfully embezzling public funds with a straight face, and
3. Retiring with a pension after a single, forgettable term in office.

Evidently, receiving a UGC-regulated salary for meeting UGC-required qualifications is now excessive. How dare people be qualified and paid accordingly? And the comparison with government college teachers? If you need reminding, the very few drawing the state scale, in government colleges, are those who don't qualify for UGC scales. But why let a small thing like facts get in the way of a budget chart? One official reportedly said, "They get paid salaries just for talking. I talk all day in the Secretariat, and no one's giving me a PhD".

The paper gasps that Rs. 1,473.45 crore was spent on salaries for aided colleges—as if this was an unspeakable scandal! But that's what the GIA scheme is literally for. Paying salaries. That's like complaining that the fund for building a bridge was spent on cement, or blaming the cook because you spent your grocery money on curtains. If they want to expand funding for infrastructure too, that would be generous. But suggesting a salary cut to fund benches and toilets? Don't you think that a little excessive?

There is also, in this magical proposal, the idea, that future funding could be performance-based. Which sounds promising, until you realise no one knows what "performance" means. If it

means NAAC, we're good. If it means actual teaching, we've been doing that. If it means enrolment, we're bursting at the seams, teaching 5 sections of the same class. If it means student-teacher ratio, we are way beyond the permissible level. However, if it means trending online, we will start uploading cat-filter lectures immediately.

The chart also shows that more money goes to private-aided colleges than government colleges. Yes. Because most students are studying in private-aided colleges. Meghalaya currently has 6 government colleges and 44 GIA colleges. That's like being shocked that more lunch was cooked at the canteen than at your own house. It is not a conspiracy. It's pure and simple math.

Meanwhile, students from other states keep pouring into our GIA colleges. Why? Maybe...just maybe...our institutions and teaching are among the best. Or maybe their parents just have a wicked sense of humour...sending their kids somewhere with fewer distractions, or for character building in a Smart City that's clever enough to forget electricity.

So, if private colleges are bearing the weight of the system, should they be supported "less", or "more"? The government has the answer. Give them "less" money and "more" autonomy—so the blame slides downhill faster and with fewer administrative delays.

Private colleges are the fragile spine propping up a collapsing system, and the proposed "autonomy" is a guillotine disguised as freedom. As one weary teacher put it, "Autonomy? That's just the state handing us a rope and saying, Dance for them—then hang yourself when they boo."

Another official insightfully noted, "There are too many teacher associations. They should be one happy family." Interesting take. The system itself has carved teachers into 14,000 categories. Releasing their salaries every solar eclipse. Why wouldn't they form 25 associations? That's not fragmentation. That's self-defense.

What is also brilliant is the data accuracy in the proposal. The proposal says St. Mary's College of Teacher Education has 2,310 students. It actually has 100. Perhaps someone accidentally added the population of a small village to the spreadsheet. Either way, this does raise the question, if one number is that far off, how many other "facts" in the report are doctored?

So what have we learned? That being a college teacher in Meghalaya means juggling endless tasks with no extra hands. It also means being overworked to the bone, being strangled by mountains of mangled red tape and regulations, invisible when things go right, and lightning rods when things go wrong. We're also the scapegoats, the default villains, the punchlines of every failed plan, and when the system creaks and collapses, the first question shouted at us is always, "What were the teachers doing?"

In conclusion, I can only say: "Those who can, teach. Those who can't, write discussion papers." But that would be unfair. Because writing a paper that manages to combine school-level indicators with higher education policy, confuse infrastructure with salaries, misquote data, misrepresent facts, and still claim reform in a single breath? That's not easy.

Should the authors of the MEG proposal get a raise? Depends. What's their PGI score?

Letters to the Editor

A true model of indigeneity!

Editor,
I had always liked and was equally charmed by the voice and charisma of Tipriti Kharbangar, a powerful musician indeed. Thanks to social media I came across an interview of Tipriti Kharbangar on YouTube carried out by Batesi TV that was aired last year in July 2024. Though a year late yet I would like to thank Batesi TV for the interview and an even bigger thank you to Tipriti.

Glued to the screen, I listened attentively to every word she said and my admiration for her has only increased. I had only heard her sing in Khasi and English but have never heard her in conversation with anyone and I must say, my respect for her has increased manifold. She spoke in the language that she was born and raised in, the "klien Smit ktien Nongkrem ktien Malki," that defines her. Towards the end of the interview she spoke of the need for a wake up call for parents and the people of Meghalaya to value the wealth of our language and not let it die out. Encouraging us to speak in our own Khasi language and dialects especially amongst ourselves, she reminds us about how much we need to treasure our language that defines us and our identity. This is very important to take note of because a great many of us seem to be ashamed of speaking in our mother tongue lest we appear uncivilized, uncouth and unpolished. Some who reside in other parts of the country or even abroad have gone to the extent of not being willing to communicate with their children in their mother tongue leave alone teaching them.

Tipriti Kharbangar has made a name for herself not only in the state and the

country but also internationally yet she has not forgotten her roots, her identity and her sense of belonging. I for one am truly inspired by her values and principles. Thank you Tipriti for taking our state to rest of the world and for keeping yourself rooted firmly to your land, your language and your people.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Roadside parking near schools creating daily traffic jams in Shillong

Editor,
I am writing to highlight a growing traffic issue in Shillong that many commuters experience daily—the problem of roadside parking near schools during peak hours. In areas like Laitumkhrak and Dhanketi school zones become highly congested during morning and afternoon hours due to cars and bikes parked on both sides of already narrow roads. This severely disrupts the flow of traffic, causing long delays and frustration for everyone, especially office-goers, college students, and residents simply trying to get from one place to another.

This congestion also creates safety concerns, particularly when pedestrians are forced to walk on the road due to blocked footpaths.

To ease the situation, schools in these busy areas could work with the traffic authorities to arrange proper pick-up and drop-off zones within or just outside the school premises. Enforcing time-limited parking and deploying traffic personnel during school hours could also improve traffic flow. Additionally, public awareness campaigns can help encourage more responsible parking habits around sensi-

tive areas. Shillong's roads are not designed for the volume of traffic we see today, and small, well-planned interventions like these can make a significant difference.

Yours etc.,
Kaushik Das,
Shillong

Women's empowerment and prevention of sexual assault

Editor,
I write this letter with deep concern and hope, to draw the attention of the society about this critical issue of empowering women and the urgent need to prevent sexual assault in our society today. Despite commendable progress in various areas and women across our country (even in Meghalaya) continue to face harassment, discrimination, and violence. Recent incidents in our own region have once again brought to light the vulnerabilities that women face not only in remote areas, but even in a so-called progressive city like Shillong (Umsohsun).

Empowerment of women is not merely a slogan—it is a necessity for the holistic development of any society today. This involves ensuring equal access to education, employment opportunities, and safety, where every woman has the right to feel safe—at home, at work, in public places and even at school. More importantly, we must build a culture where respect for women is taught from a very young age, where victims are heard without blame and where swift justice is delivered in case of sexual assault. Awareness in the community, stronger laws, police trained to handle such cases properly and proper educa-

tion about gender and safety in all institutions are integral to achieving real women's empowerment. Through this letter I would urge the authorities, educational institutions, civil society organizations, media platforms etc., to take an active role in spreading awareness, and break the silence of the heinous crimes against women and girls. I also urge the Meghalaya Police to take swift and strict action against the perpetrators and ensure that justice is neither delayed nor denied. Every woman has the right to feel safe—be it at home, at work, and in public places. Empowering women is not just a women's issue—it is a societal responsibility.

Yours etc.,
Jerry Jeffrey K Marak,
Via email

A safer Meghalaya for tourists with one scan or call

Editor,
Every year, more and more travellers come to Meghalaya, drawn by the living-root bridges, crystal-clear rivers and misty hills. For many, it's the trip of a lifetime. But for some, things don't always go as planned. A wrong turn on a hiking trail and the tourist is lost in a remote, unfamiliar area. Then there's a language barrier in case of a medical emergency. These moments of panic can happen to anyone, anywhere and in those moments, quick help can make all the difference. That's why Meghalaya should consider installing QR codes at key tourist points, from taxi stands and waterfalls to homestays and trekking routes. When scanned, these codes could instantly connect visitors to help with emergency numbers, safety tips, or directions to the nearest police station or hospital. Even more important is having a dedicated Tourist Helpline Number, one number that anyone, from anywhere in

the state, can call for guidance or urgent assistance. Friendly, multilingual support, available 24/7, could be a lifeline for someone who feels lost or scared in an unfamiliar place. Of course, safety needs to be smart. These QR codes should be tamper-proof, clearly marked with government branding and placed where they'll be seen and trusted.

With regular checks and some public awareness, they can be both safe and reliable. Tourism is a gift to our state and our responsibility in return is to keep visitors safe. With just a scan or a call, we can offer peace of mind, show we care and make sure every tourist leaves Meghalaya not just in awe but with a sense of safety and gratitude. Because sometimes, that little sign on a wall and a voice on the other end of the phone can change everything.

Yours etc.,
Zaman E. Tongper,
(Faculty, Department of Tourism and Travel Management Martin Luther Christian University)
Via email

Impact of Reality TV on childhood

Editor,
Through this column, allow me to draw the attention all concerned regarding the impact of Reality TV shows on children. This is a cause of concern with the increasing number of such shows starring particularly children. These programs usually aim to entertain adults rather than the kids they promote, and many showcase competitions, reluctantly accepting kids with promises of fame, riches, and recognition. In most cases, the young participants are actually fulfilling their respective parents' desire who push the innocent kids to compete and in return depriving them of their childhood and shattering the innocence that surround children at that age. Thus children are

thrust into harsh reality shows, constant competition, and careful observation which can inflict trauma on them in case they fail to win the prize.

The promise of quick cash prizes and careers easily seduce parents, and some go as far as to disregard their child's educational and developmental needs. Down the years the children could suffer from:

- Emotional distress and anxiety
- Loss of childhood innocence
- Negative impact on academic performance
- Unhealthy competition and pressure to perform.

I strongly believe that parents should be counselled on the potential effects of exposing their children to reality TV shows. It is essential to prioritize children's well-being, and development over the allure of fame and fortune.

To address this issue, I suggest:

- Implementing stricter regulations on child participation in reality TV shows
- Providing support and counseling for parents and child participants
- Promoting awareness about the potential consequence of Reality TV on childhood.

- The shows should be filmed only during the school holidays.
- The working hours should not be more than 4 hours per day.

By taking these preventive steps, we can somehow protect the innocence and well-being of our children and ensure that their childhood is not ruined by the harsh realities of reality TV.

Yours etc.,
Lamshwa Nathaniel Kharmyndai
Via email

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

"The key to winning is poise under stress."

— Paul Brown

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Ripples of discord

THE ripples caused by Operation Sindoor are being felt far and wide in the form of claims, counter-claims and much else even weeks after India's brief military engagement with Pakistan. It's only natural that Congress parliamentarian Shashi Tharoor leading an all-party delegation to five countries including the US is being targeted by his own party heavyweights for his statements abroad that have allegedly "belittled" the grand old party. Tharoor's was obviously an attempt to explain the "restraint" that India maintained in the face of provocations from Pakistan. Yet, it looked like a heap of praise for the Modi dispensation. His citation of India's responses to terrorist attacks since 2015, including the surgical strikes past Uri, also underpinned the fact that such offensives had not taken place before. In a strong response, the Congress rubbished this claim. The principal opposition is obviously irritated at the way Tharoor presented things before an international audience.

By virtue of Tharoor's major exposure to international diplomacy while holding top UN posts, he was perhaps the right man to go on such an explanation-expedition to the US etc., on India's behalf. Those like Asaduddin Owaisi too could cut ice with the Islamic world by virtue of his own Islamic credentials. Several others in these delegations criss-crossing continents might not have as much clout or gift of the gab while in a foreign soil. The selection of Tharoor and Owaisi for this endeavour was not only due to the Modi establishment's keenness to demonstrate a spirit of national unity, but due to other factors too. The BJP, raised from the inward-looking, fundamentalist Sangh Parivar, and its regional allies do not possess faces that can impress the world other than Modi or external affairs minister S Jaishankar. It could also be suspected that Tharoor might hereafter edge closer to the Modi establishment, much to the annoyance of the Congress. Those who criticised him might have got a silent nod from the high command itself or from president Mallikarjun Kharge.

Operation Sindoor obviously demonstrated India's superior military power over a weak-kneed Pakistan especially at a time when the Islamic nation was faced with a serious financial downturn. Pakistan being looted by politicians and generals alike does not even have sufficient funds to buy passenger planes, other than for the iterations of huge external borrowings it keeps doing. On the other hand it must be said to the credit of the Modi government that it has strengthened the defence apparatus significantly in recent years, and topped it with Make in India or indigenous production/assembly of modern systems of warfare. The argument now is not that India could not match up to Pakistan's military strength, but that Modi could not take full advantage of this emerging situation to effectively discipline Pakistan. Defence minister Rajnath Singh's assertions of his forces having exercised abundant "restraint" during Operation Sindoor have only a limited appeal. Actions speak louder than words.

Much Ado About Community-led Tourism: Where's the 'Community'?

By Patricia Mukhim

Tourism in Meghalaya is in a state of flux. While tourists are pouring in, in droves every single day and in greater numbers on the weekends, the State's ability to cater to this growing number of visitors is looking like a comedy of not so rare errors. On its part the State has created the Rural Tourism Development Society and encouraged communities at tourist destinations to form collectives and register themselves as co-operatives so that funds for developing tourism facilities can be channelled through those societies. This is a fair arrangement and in some villages it has worked very well. In other villages, however, the Rangbah Shnong is averse to the idea of such a society since he might not be elected to lead it. This sense of insecurity among village leaders about someone outshining them is what slows down the progress in most villages.

Nongjrong, famous for its sunrise, is a striking example of such lethargy to register the rural tourism society. As a result, there is no control over the number of footfalls per day; the costing is not adequate to generate enough income for developing the site and for creating employment. Misonwell Rangtong and his cousin Pamela Rynthong have taken on the responsibility to streamline the booming tourist footfalls at Nongjrong but they have also reached a point of fatigue since it is still a personal and not a collective effort. The community can only be involved once the Society is formalised and run professionally. This is the problem with putting the cart before the horse. A tourism destination is promoted before it is ready to take on the challenges. Imagine a tiny village with a few hundred residents being bombarded by hundreds of footfalls and that in the early morning hours when their sleep is rudely disrupted. So why are there no clear rules laid out that tourists wanting to experience the magic of the sunrise have to respect silence? Why the penchant for noise? Why the overnight drunken brawls and the loud music that rudely intrudes into the stillness of nature? A rural tourism society should

be deliberating all this and more. Why are touristy villages so afraid of losing customers and therefore giving in to unreasonable demands of tourists?

What is however most upsetting is the clash among two or more villages over claims of a tourist destination. This week I visited the Daintien Falls at Sohra which has been out of bounds for tourists for nearly a year now. The place was deserted and some rough fencing was put up. A police personnel was posted there to prevent visitors from proceeding towards the waterfall. He explained that there is a clash between two villages both of whom claim dominance over this famed waterfall. In the past when the idea of monetising the waterfall had not entered peoples' minds, the Daintien Falls had its share of visitors, mostly locals. The moment the place turned commercial, greed entered the domain. That's what tourism does to a society. It divides them. In a similar manner the Wei Sawdong, another waterfall close by too, is no longer open to tourists or locals. It's the same fight for control since the money has started to come in. What is surprising is that the Syiem of Sohra — the chieftain who according to traditional practices presides over the Dorbar Raid and Dorbar Shnong is unable to resolve the conflict. The Khasi Hills District Council too has not considered its brief to resolve these contentious issues. The Sub-divisional officer, Sohra has tried to bring about a rapprochement but failed.

Then we have the Bull's Trek in Myllem (Khat-ar Mer) which had become a flourishing tourist destination and was well managed by the locals there. The trek takes visitors to the Wah-niangling river where people go fishing or just to breathe in the zephyr and do a bit of boating. Now that too is closed to tourists because there are two claimants to the place. Why can't the two claimants discuss matters and take a middle path of sharing the income and agreeing to maintain the area for a

better tourist experience. Actually the community there led by Lening Bareh had been running the circuit very well. The children who call themselves "green warriors" keep the place clean and green. In fact the income from there is used to fund the schooling of some of the poor students. That is now disrupted because the matter is in court. Until the place was left to itself no one cared about developing it. Now that it yields an income it is up for grabs.

This is where the word "community" in Khasi society is grossly misleading. According to leading sociologists who have explored the concept of community and have looked deeper to focus on the complex relationships, norms, and shared values that bind individuals together, a community is not just about physical proximity but also the emotional, social, and functional ties that shape the lives of its members. Emory Bogardus, best known for his work on the "social distance scale," focuses on the psychological and social dimensions of community. He argues that a community is not just a geographical or physical entity but is also a social and emotional construct. He believed that individuals often perceive communities in terms of "social distance" — the perceived closeness or distance between people in a society.

Tribal societies have been defined by this very yardstick of social cohesion. But "modernity" seems to have snatched that sense of community from us. Bogardus says that a community is marked by a shared sense of belonging among people. This sense of belonging might be based on factors such as common values, norms, and interests, rather than simply living in the same physical area. In the view of Bogardus the more the "social distance" that exists between people, the less likely they are to form a true community. Hence people who belong to the same social class, share cultural backgrounds, or engage in similar activities may feel a

stronger sense of connection, even if they don't live in the same neighbourhood. The reality is that Khasi society is today divided by class and residence. Those living in cities are far removed from the problems and anxieties that plague their poorer cousins in the rural backwoods.

It would appear that our social skills, if we have any, are inadequate to meet the sort of complexities we live with today. Declining interpersonal trust has emerged as one of the greatest threats to Meghalaya's future. Imagine the situation of two Dorbar Shnong exerting their claims over a waterfall and not being able to resolve the standoff. What does that suggest? A breakdown in communication? An inability to see eye to eye any longer? A standoff propelled by community arrogance or the ambitions of community leaders?

This brings us to the role of the MLAs and MDCs who should be wading through these problems with the people and trying to sort them out. If they cannot resolve such community conundrums and ease the tensions between two groups of the same ethnic mould then why do we wonder at what's happening in Manipur? There too the problems did not erupt in a single day or month. It was fermenting for years but was never attended to until the wound festered and blew up into a conflagration. One sees no conflict management society coming up in a state that is rife with dissensions not with the "other" but within the community. Meghalaya might hit the Guinness Book of World Records as far as the number of pressure groups are concerned but these trigger conflicts; they have no social capital to resolve any conflict.

In the past social capital was what knitted us as a community. Today that thread is broken so let us not pretend to be "united" or of one mind on anything. That veil of pretence is better discarded and we should be doing some serious soul-searching, instead of romanticising our past and engaging only in dance and song and never ending rituals because we don't have the moral courage to confront our demons!

The Shad Lyngdoh of Raid Myllem

By Easterson Sohtun & Rana Khyriem

When we talk about Hima or State rituals in the Khasi-Jaintia region, the famous Nongkrem Dance of Hima Khyrim often comes to mind. However, we tend to overlook or forget the equally important rituals of Hima Myllem. Hima Myllem comprises a three-tier system of administration. At the bottom stands the Village council called ka Dorbar Shnong headed by a Rangbah Shnong or Village Headman, in the middle comes the Commune council called ka Dorbar Raid headed by a Syiem Raid, Lyngdoh Raid or Bongthe Raid and the top rests the State council called Dorbar Hima headed by the Syiem.

Though each council is independent of one another they all however fall under the jurisdiction of the state or of the Chief and his Bakhrav. Hima Myllem is the largest of all the Himas in the Khasi region. It was formed after splitting from Hima Shyllong, resulting in the creation of both Hima Myllem and Hima Khyrim. Geographically, Hima Myllem stretches from Bisi to Bhoi Rymbong and extends almost to the Brahmaputra River. Within Hima Myllem, there are several smaller Raids, such as Raid Marwet, Raid Marngar, and Raid Myllem.

The formation of Myllem State is so complex that it is difficult to say precisely as to when and how the State was established. One possible explanation for this can be obtained from oral narratives which talk about the internal conflicts amongst the elders i.e., ki Bakhrav of Hima Shyllong. The history of Hima Myllem goes way back to the period before the emergence of colonial rule in the Khasi Hills. According to oral tradition, it was said that, before the establishment of Hima Myllem, the earliest Hima within the Khasi Hills was ka Hima Shyllong and Hima Myllem was carved out of this particular Hima. Homiwell Lyngdoh, referring to this internal conflict, describes it as a civil war between two lineages of the Syiem Clan or Jaid Syiem of Hima Shyllong where even the elders or Bakhrav of the State were divided in their support to the two lineages. This civil war came to be popularly known as "Ka Thma Saw Kher Lai Lyngdoh". One unique aspect of Hima Myllem is that, to this day, it maintains its own police department, known as Pulit Syiem. Hima Myllem holds a special place in the Khasi community, particularly due to the leadership of Lajorius Manik Syiem. He organized the Dorbar Hima, which brought together people from different villages, flooding the city with crowds. The main purpose of this gathering was to demand the inclusion of Khasi customary rights and practices in the First Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

In addition, Hima Myllem is cherished by the Khasi people because of Iewduh—a market deeply intertwined with religious traditions (Niam). The market becomes the principal source of revenue collection for running the affairs of the state as well as for supporting the Syiem. Furthermore, the Myllem State collects revenue from the market tolls, court fees, excise and judicial fines. Market tolls were levied as per the commodities of shopkeepers or as per the stall from weekly markets. This revenue is shared amongst the Syiem and his Bakhrav and is used mainly for the development of the State if needed. At present, Hima Myllem has six traditional markets called Iew and they are Iew Umsning, Iew Mawlong, Iew Umroi, Iew Umden, Iew Masi and Iew Duh. Here it is important to point out that except for Iew Duh the rest of the markets fall under the boundary of various Raids. For example, Iew Umroi

falls within the boundary of Raid Mawbuh, Iew Mawlong within Raid Marngar, Iew Umden within Raid Nongtluh, and Iew Masi within Raid Marwet. This implies that the markets were part of the Ri-Raid and it was the Raid who gave a portion of the lands to the State to setup markets for the betterment of the people. Thus, the above discussion emphasizes that land was also the key factor and that the evolution from a small society into a State emerged when land became an economic property. Here it is important to point out that except for Iew Duh the rest of the markets falls under the boundary of various Raids.

Unfortunately, the glory and pride of Hima Myllem have diminished in recent times due to ongoing political turmoil within the Hima. However, my intention in writing this article is not to point fingers or assign blame, but rather to share information about the Shad Lyngdoh of Raid Myllem.

The Shad Lyngdoh of Raid Myllem is distinct and unique. This ritual is performed by the San Kur over the course of a week, beginning at Mawnarian on the first and second days, followed by rituals at Lum ShyHong (Shillong Peak). After offerings and rituals are made to U Lei Shyllong, a three-day celebration of music and dance ensues (from 27-29 May 2025). The Shad Lyngdoh is not merely a cultural exhibition; it holds deep significance for the people of Raid and Hima Myllem. Some of its key significances include:

1. The annual ritual marks an important day for the people of the Hima. It is a time when men, women, and children come together, providing an opportunity for community bonding.

2. The ritual reflects the rich history of Hima Myllem.

3. It plays a vital role in environmental protection, as prayers are offered to the Deity of U Lum Shyllong.

4. Shillong Peak, which provides essential water sources for Shillong and the Khasi Hills, is honoured through thanksgiving dances and prayers to U Lei Shyllong.

5. The Shad Lyngdoh is an integral part of Khasi cultural heritage, showcasing traditional knowledge, unity, and the rich culture of the people of Hima Myllem and Meghalaya as a whole. Today Hima Myllem is considered as one of the most important Khasi States and continues to exist under the administration of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.

6. The dance is especially important for young girls, as participating three times is a significant milestone. Cancelling the ritual would deprive them of this opportunity and negatively impact future generations.

7. Elected clan representatives have a duty to perform these rituals as handed down by our ancestors. Their role is to bring peace, protect against evil, war, and foreign threats, safeguard against plague, and ensure prosperity, health, good harvests, wealth, and favourable weather for the people of Hima Myllem.

There are many more significant features of the Lehniem Lyngdoh or Shad Lyngdoh of Raid Myllem. Despite its importance, a concerning issue has arisen: this year, instead of the Myntis of San Kur, the public had to perform the ritual. As seen on social media and in newspapers, the Myntis, Lyngskor, and many clan representatives were absent. Why? Do they not know about the ritual or the Niam? Are they forgetting their duties and roots? If they are aware of their responsibilities, why do they seem intent on abandoning a ritual handed down by our ancestors?

(All views are personal as Ki Khum Ki Hajar ka Hima Myllem)

Letters to the Editor

Steps to ensure safe and responsible tourism

Editor, Apropos of the editorial "Perils of Tourism" (ST 29th May 2025). Safe tourism requires a combination of personal preparedness, local regulations and responsible travel practices. Some of the key prerequisites for safe tourism, particularly in regions like Meghalaya are:

1. Unfamiliar terrains, especially those with challenging landscapes, often require local guides. Tourists venturing alone into risky areas without knowledge of the surroundings can lead to accidents or getting lost.
2. Establishing entry and exit points where tourists can register their details and planned destinations can help authorities track visitors and ensure their safety.
3. Understanding and appreciating local cultures, traditions, and language barriers is crucial. A respectful approach enhances the tourism experience for both visitors and residents.
4. Governments and local promoters on tourism should ensure well-maintained trekking paths, controlled access to sensitive areas, and proper briefing for travellers regarding safety precautions.
5. Having dedicated security personnel or a tourist police force to assist visitors in case of emergencies or incidents can significantly improve safety measures. The government may kindly

revive the fizzled-out scheme as the editorial pointed out, if the resources are available.

These factors contribute to a secure and enjoyable tourism experience. Whether you're exploring Meghalaya or any other region, staying informed and cautious is always a wise approach! I do not disagree with the editorial that "tourism can no longer be left to the communities who are untrained and whose language skills are wanting."

Yours etc; VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Umsohsun sexual assault case

Editor, On the early morning of the 23rd May 2025, a minor school girl was sexually assaulted by a masked criminal at Umsohsun, Shillong while on her way to morning school. An FIR was lodged and on the 24th May a special police team was set up to investigate the case. On this occasion one must congratulate the Meghalaya Police for a job well done because by May 28 within a brief period of only 5 days, our Police, with the assistance of modern technology identified the criminal; traced him to his village in Jorhat, Assam where he had fled to and promptly arrested and booked him under the POCSO Act. POCSO by the way stands for Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, a law in India enacted to protect

children from sexual assault, sexual harassment, and child pornography. It is a tough law and stringent punishment is meted out under its provisions. This prompt action of the Meghalaya Police is to be applauded as it will serve as a forceful deterrent to future would be criminals that it is not safe for them to criminally monkey around in Meghalaya. The early arrest also is a glaring example that the Police, when left to do their job and freed from the negative pressure of politics, can deliver when the occasion so demands.

Here I would also like to add that it is not only politicians but especially those wanna-be self-styled leaders of society who often get in the way of the swift execution of justice here in Meghalaya. The sentiments and emotions of the public is often whipped into a frenzy sometimes over issues that have no real merit or worth. Sometimes known criminals, extortionists and known murderers are setup on a false pedestal for hero worship when they meet a sad end of their own making. It is only when things calm down that people begin to realize that they had been taken for a ride and that such rable rousing antics only encourage potential criminals to defy and challenge the law of the land. Such actions only lead to public disorder and mayhem, simply helps push governance of the state further downhill. It adds nothing to the well-being and development of the state and its people. I take this occasion to caution our people against such anti

social practices in the future and not to allow sheer emotions to take control of their common sense. I would like to end with once again saying Thank You Meghalaya Police for ridding, from the minds of our innocent young girls, that fear and apprehension of being preyed upon by sexual predators.

Yours etc., Toki Blah, Via email

Concern over unfair practices in Meghalaya Police exams

Editor, I am writing to express my deep concern and disappointment regarding the alleged unfair practices that have reportedly taken place during the recent Meghalaya Police Recruitment Exams. This issue has come to light through public discourse, especially in the comments section of several videos posted by the YouTube Channel Spotlan Dairies where many candidates and concerned citizens have raised serious allegations.

Several comments have mentioned instances of favouritism, using of mobile phone in the examination hall, questions papers have been opened before the exams and lack of transparency in the written process in some of the centres. Such practices not only rob deserving candidates of their rightful opportunity but also undermine public trust in

the integrity of our institutions. While these claims may have originated in an informal online space, the volume and consistency of the complaints cannot be ignored.

I urge the relevant authorities to take these concerns seriously and initiate a thorough and impartial investigation. If there is any truth to the allegations, strict action must be taken against those responsible. At the same time, I appeal to the media and civil society to shed light on these issues to ensure accountability and justice for the aspiring candidates.

The youth of Meghalaya deserve a fair and transparent recruitment system—one that values merit, integrity, and equal opportunity.

Yours etc., Riwanki Suchiang, West Jaintia Hills

Why the frequent power cuts in rural areas

Editor, It is deeply ironic that while the Minister in charge of Power recently declared that our State is now generating surplus electricity, residents in rural areas continue to face frequent, unscheduled power cuts. This stark disconnect between official claims and ground realities is both frustrating and concerning.

Take for example, the situation in Smit village and

its surrounding areas. From May 25 to 26 there was a power outage lasting nearly 36 hours. Again, on May 28, power was cut from 6:30 PM and had not been restored at the time of writing this letter. Such extended blackouts are not isolated incidents — they have become disturbingly routine. Short, frequent power disruptions now seem more like the norm than the exception.

What remains unclear is the reason behind these recurring outages. The MECL has offered no clear explanation to the public. If the State truly has surplus power, why are rural communities being left in the dark—literally and figuratively? Reliable electricity, especially in today's world, is a basic necessity, not a luxury.

While we understand that extreme weather can cause temporary disruptions, regular and prolonged outages in fair weather raise serious questions about the efficiency of power distribution and infrastructure management.

We urge the concerned authorities to address this issue transparently and take concrete steps to ensure uninterrupted power supply, particularly in rural areas. The promise of surplus power must translate into reliable service for all citizens—not just a statement for the press.

Yours etc., DL Wankhar, Via email

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"Religion is the opiate of the masses."

— Karl Marx

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Of Shoddy Journalism

THE disappearance of the newlywed couple from Indore, Madhya Pradesh who came to Meghalaya as tourists has grabbed national headlines. What is called mainstream media has spiced up the story to win eyeballs. This section of the media has caricatured Meghalaya as a land infested with criminals and termed this region the "crime-prone hills." Such reportage by someone sitting several thousand kilometres away from Meghalaya and listening only to hearsay, possibly from the couple's kin and then forming an opinion and labelling the entire Sohra region the "crime prone hills" is scandalous because till date there is not a shred of evidence about the fate of the couple. To label the citizenry of Sohra region as being "crime prone" is libellous and this ought to be taken up by the Government of Meghalaya as it does a huge disservice to the state and its tourism potential. True the Tourism Department has to constantly engage with tour operators and address the pin-pricks that could turn into major calamities such as had happened to the Hungarian tourist who ventured alone into an unfamiliar destination and perhaps lost his footing and then plunged down the steep cliff.

A journalist writing from a distance without having a local source who can provide an accurate account of the place and with no quotes whatsoever from any of the local authorities in the government has failed the basic premise of journalism. There is such a thing as "journalistic truth," a process that begins with the professional discipline of assembling and verifying facts. After that journalist tries to convey a fair and reliable account of those facts, subject to further investigation. Journalists should be as transparent as possible about their sources and methods used. They cannot rely only on one source, especially one that is directly linked to the event/issue. It is then left to the audiences to make their own assessment of the information. This is where accuracy counts. It is the foundation upon which the story is built.

Journalists rely on a professional discipline for verifying information and there is no space for assumptions based on hearsay, in this profession. Granted that the relatives of the couple are distraught at not knowing where the couple has disappeared and they are emotionally surcharged. But to carry only their side of the story and paint a grim picture of the situation as if no effort has been made by the State Government to track down the couple is bad journalism. This profession demands a consistent method of testing information — a transparent approach to evidence — precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work. This discipline of verification is what separates journalism from other modes of communication, otherwise journalists can be accused of spreading fake news or propaganda. Sadly, even renowned media houses today slip on this so while journalism has developed various techniques for determining facts, it has not done much to develop a system for testing the reliability of journalistic interpretation. As of today, Meghalaya's reputation as a safe tourist destination has taken a beating thanks to shoddy journalism.

Letters to the Editor

Useless showpiece for the common Man

Editor,
I am writing to express my frustration and disappointment after experiencing first-hand how meaningless the so-called "Smart City" systems are for common people like us.
In the wee hours of May 24, 2025, at around 2:07 AM, my Honda Activa ML 05 AE 0842 was stolen from right outside my home in Lower Mawprem Main Road. I immediately filed an FIR at Lumdingjri Police Station and began seeking help. What followed was not justice, but a juggling between authorities, each passing the responsibility to someone else.
The Investigating Officer told me that the newly installed Shillong Smart City blue-pole camera might have recorded something — but when I asked about it, I was told it's under the control of the Dorbar Shnong. When I reached out to them, authorities said police are the only ones with access. No one gave a clear answer. Everyone just raised up their hands in helplessness.
This raises serious questions. If none of these Smart City cameras work, why are they powered 24/7? Why are they mounted on massive poles with blinking lights and large boxes, pretending to monitor the streets? Are these just showpieces? Just props for publicity?
What's worse is the

constant boasting of the government across digital billboards, proudly advertising "Smart City Progress," "ICCC," and "Intelligent Systems." But when a citizen like me actually needs these systems, they are useless. No access. No functionality. No accountability.
Where is our tax money going? The system doesn't work when a crime happens. The police say, "vehicles get smuggled to Bangladesh," as though that should make me give up. If they know this is happening, why aren't they stopping it? Why aren't their rings tracked down or broken? Why are citizens expected to simply give up and move on?
The system is designed in such a way that no one seems to know who holds the authority, who gives permission, or whose responsibility it is. It is so fragmented and hidden behind procedural layers that even a genuine victim is lost in it. Thieves know this — they know that a common student like me won't be able to navigate this maze in time. By the time any clarity emerges, the answer will be the same: "It's too late, the footage has been auto-deleted."
Why does the government spend crores installing these camera systems and building an Integrated Command and Control Centre (ICCC), if at the time of real need, every authority claims, "the cameras are not working" or "we don't have access"?
Let me be honest: I've lost all hope in this system. I've done everything I could — filed the FIR, found local CCTV footage myself, reached out to the police,

To Steal and Kill and Destroy: World No Tobacco Day 2025

By Dr. Caleb Harris M.Ch.

Nadu, several generations of youngsters aspired to imitate the 'cigarette style' of a particular actor. Across colleges, smoking was considered 'cool'. This was the lie propagated by the tobacco industry; that it was cool to kill oneself.

Following the 'War against Tobacco' initiated in the United States of America over 50 years ago, there has been a worldwide awareness about the harmful effects of tobacco. The World Health Organisation (WHO) came up with a Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.



(FCTC)

Control, and laws were enacted in several countries to control tobacco. In India, the COTPA (Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act), has very strict provisions and, if implemented well, can be an effective tool in tobacco control. As per COTPA, smoking in public places, selling tobacco products to or by minors, or selling tobacco products within a radius of 100 metres from any educational institution is illegal. Establishments where tobacco products are sold must display messages like "Tobacco Causes Cancer" and "Sale of tobacco products to a person under the age of eighteen years is a punishable offence under law".

Tobacco impacts the society in ways one cannot fathom. Apart from several cancers, tobacco causes several respiratory and cardiac illnesses. This can debilitate the person and reduce productivity. My evenings are spent playing badminton and living in a medical college campus, my co-players are students, some of whom are

less fitter than me. Many of these smoke, thereby making them less fitter than someone much older than them. I have treated patients in their 20s who have developed cancers and spend time in the hospital, rather than a college or a playground. The prime of life is stolen from them.

Others have their lives curtailed. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), each year, there is a death due to tobacco every 6 seconds. The statutory warnings on tobacco products say that tobacco kills but still many continue to

smoke. Probably this is due to the fact that tobacco is a 'slow killer'. The number of deaths due to Covid-19 were much lesser but still there was panic everywhere, because there was immediate death of many patients. In patients who do not die of tobacco, the impaired health affects the lifestyle. Ironically, while the tobacco industry portrays tobacco as the ultimate lifestyle product, all that it offers is a life of illness, poverty and death. The economic impact of tobacco use is often understated, with a lot of expenditure on a product which is of no benefit but harmful. It destroys the life of the user. Tobacco taxation has had the maximum impact on reduction of tobacco use around the world. In India, cigarettes are taxed under the highest GST bracket (28%) but several products such as beedis and chewable tobacco escape taxation. The industry markets tobacco in different ways, using deception. One of the ways is to sell a 'mouth fresher' along with which tobacco is offered free, in a separate unbranded packet.

World No Tobacco Day is observed on may 31 every year, since 1987. An initiative of the WHO, this year, the theme is "Unmasking the Appeal: Exposing Industry Tactics on Tobacco and Nicotine Products" and aims to focus on revealing the tactics the tobacco and nicotine industry use to make their products look attractive despite being harmful. The tobacco industry targets young children because they will continue to use tobacco for several years, and since many of these tobacco users live truncated lives, the industry needs younger people to join the user pool.
In Meghalaya, 47% of adults use tobacco, as compared to the national average of 28.6% according to the Global Adult Tobacco Survey (GATS 2016-17). Sadly, 33% of children aged 13-15 years use tobacco here. This is very alarming as these may end up living truncated lives. The Government of Meghalaya, through a joint effort of the Departments of Health and Education, has successfully implemented the 'Tobacco Free Educational Institution' (ToFEI) program to curb use of Tobacco by school students. As part of this program, the school is expected to ensure that no tobacco product is sold in and around schools (up to a radius of 100 metres), no teachers (or other staff) use tobacco in the school and activities such as pledge against tobacco use are taken up on a regular basis by the students. The students have participated in rallies to spread awareness about the ill effects of tobacco around the state and have conducted a signature campaign to this effect too.
The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. The tobacco industry uses deception to steal people of the prime of their lives, destroy them and their families and kill them. We need to be aware and protect ourselves and our young ones from falling prey to the tactics of the tobacco industry. If tobacco is seen as a harmful product, it may lose its appeal and thereby bring down its use.
The writer is Surgical Oncologist NEIGRIHMS. Views expressed are personal. Email: surgonco@outlook.com

What's next, a banana peel parade?

By Jack Sytemlich

In the context of Meghalaya's political climate, public visits by leaders are often criticised as mere photo opportunities. However, visible governance—such as recent visits to major markets like lewduh—plays a critical role in ensuring that leadership remains connected to the people and their daily struggles. Governance is not confined to offices; it includes listening to communities and responding with urgency and purpose. When the Chief Minister visited lewduh and announced Rs 21 crores for infrastructure improvement, it was a step toward action, not theatrics. Dismissing such initiatives as publicity undermines the importance of timely intervention. Would silence and inaction have been preferable?

No Political Stunt!
Public engagements help hold the administration to account. They encourage faster redressal of issues and more focused development, especially in places that have long been overlooked. Being present in the marketplace when it is at its busiest—during the day—offers a clear picture of real challenges: overcrowding, poor sanitation, lack of safety measures, and infrastructure gaps. While the idea of a night time visit might seem dramatic, it is during the daytime hustle that most issues are laid bare. Why bother with the night? The day rewrites it anyway. Effective governance must take place in the light of day, where accountability is visible, not hidden in the shadows. In the end, visible governance is not theatre—it is a commitment to transparency, community engagement, and practical action.

"Jaitbnyriew"
In recent discourse, the concept of jaitbnyriew — often translated as 'community' — has come under criticism, particularly with suggestions that it has become a limiting factor in Meghalaya's political and economic evolution. However, such a narrative overlooks the deeper role that identity plays in sustaining democratic accountability, cultural preservation, and inclusive governance in a diverse state like Meghalaya. The critique that jaitbnyriew functions as a "cocoon of comfort" misrepresents a foundational element of Meghalaya's political ethos. Far from being a restrictive notion, jaitbnyriew has been instrumental in shaping policies that protect indigenous rights, promote local representation, and ensure that development is not merely imposed from above but co-created with the people it is meant to serve. It is disingenuous to suggest that political parties shy away from reform or modern economic planning due to fear of backlash from the jaitbnyriew sentiment.
In fact, Meghalaya's political leadership has, in recent years, taken bold steps to integrate traditional values with progressive development models. Initiatives in tourism, agribusiness, and youth entrepreneurship are increasingly being structured to enhance local value chains, rather than simply attract external spending. The MDA government has actively promoted local culture by supporting events and initiatives that celebrate Meghalaya's rich heritage. Examples include the Culinary Cascade, which showcases traditional Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo cuisine, and cultural festivals that highlight indigenous music, dance, and crafts. The government has also supported artisans through skill development schemes and provided platforms for local talent in tourism and handicrafts sectors, ensuring cultural preservation alongside economic opportunity.

"Turning a Blind Eye?"
In our society today, it has become almost second nature to criticise the government at every turn. While holding leaders accountable is vital in any democracy, we often forget to acknowledge genuine progress, especially when it happens at the grassroots level. Positive changes that directly impact people's lives rarely receive the same attention as negative headlines. A striking example of this is Meghalaya's Rescue Mission, launched in November 2020 to address high rates of maternal and infant mortality. Since its introduction, the state has made remarkable progress that deserves recognition. By the financial year 2023-2024, maternal deaths in Meghalaya had decreased by nearly 50%,

and infant deaths by around 30%. These figures represent real lives saved and communities strengthened — yet, this success story has received little public or media attention. This achievement is the result of consistent efforts in healthcare outreach, improved medical infrastructure, and awareness campaigns led by the government and health workers. Such outcomes are not accidental; they are signs of effective governance and long-term planning. It is time we shift our perspective. Constructive criticism is important, but so is appreciation for meaningful progress. As citizens, we should celebrate success stories like the Rescue Mission, which show what can be achieved through focused action and political will.

It is often said that Meghalaya's entrepreneurial ecosystem lacks vibrancy due to limited local purchasing power. While there may be some truth to this observation, it would be unfair and incomplete to assess the state's entrepreneurial potential solely on this basis. In fact, a closer look reveals that Meghalaya has made considerable progress in recent years, with strong support from the government and a growing culture of innovation among its youth. One of the most notable steps taken by the government is the launch of the PRIME initiative. PRIME has created a structured platform for nurturing entrepreneurship in Meghalaya. Through financial grants, mentorship, skill development, and networking opportunities, it has empowered local entrepreneurs to develop sustainable businesses, not just for the local market but also for wider regional and national reach. In conclusion, it is inaccurate to view Meghalaya's entrepreneurial landscape as weak or overly dependent on tourism. With initiatives like PRIME and a clear commitment from the government, the state is steadily building a more resilient and diverse economic base. The entrepreneurial spirit is alive and growing, and the future holds much promise.

"Ground Realities"
Some recent opinions have criticised the MDA 2.0 government, suggesting that it focuses more on image than real development. But this view misses the bigger picture. While it's fair to raise concerns, we must also look at the full effort being made by the government to develop Meghalaya. First, the idea that hosting festivals and concerts is only for "optics" is misleading. These events are part of a wider plan to promote tourism and attract investment to the state. In fact, they help bring attention to Meghalaya and open up opportunities for local businesses and employment.
Next, the belief that the government only wants outside investment or sends people away from the state is not entirely correct. Encouraging skilled people to explore opportunities elsewhere is part of today's economy. At the same time, the state is also building local skills and supporting small businesses through schemes and training. It is working on both fronts — inside and outside Meghalaya.
The issue of illegal coal mining and corruption has been raised many times. While these are serious matters, they are still under investigation and must be dealt with legally. Repeating these allegations without proof only spreads negativity and doesn't help the public understand the full truth. The government has tried to explain its side, and those efforts should not be ignored. On the other side, the VPP talks about reducing debt and being more careful with spending. That is a good idea in theory, but it could be risky. Meghalaya has limited income, and without some borrowing, how can it build roads, schools, hospitals, and create jobs? Cutting spending too much could slow down progress and hurt essential services. We should not think of governance as a choice between "optics" and "real work." It takes a mix of planning, investment, and public engagement to move forward. MDA 2.0 has taken steps — not perfect, but real — toward improving tourism, infrastructure, youth support, and entrepreneurship.

Ultimately, the decision rests with the people, and it is important that their choice is guided by a well-rounded and informed perspective, rather than by limited or partial narratives.

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even wrote to the SP. And what did I get in return? Silence, delay, and contradiction.
So here is my sincere advice to fellow citizens: If your vehicle is stolen, file the FIR to protect yourself, but don't waste your energy chasing justice. Don't run shop to shop for CCTV footage. Don't beg authorities to act. Just do your job, pay your taxes — because while the government may do nothing for your loss, they will surely come after you if you miss paying them.
These Smart City systems are not built for us. They're built to look good on paper and on screens. Not to protect the real people who work hard to pay for them.
While I have previously requested anonymity in my letters, this time I choose to publish my name. I wish to see, as a citizen, how far one may be targeted simply for publicly questioning utter lack of unaccountability in the system. I believe that if common citizens continue to remain silent or hidden, nothing will change.
Yours etc.,
Ekramul Haque,
Via email

The Chickens' Necks of Bangladesh

Editor,
Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma presented an interesting geographical fact about two Chickens' Neck in Bangladesh, the 80 Km North Bangladesh Corridor and the 28 Km Chittagong Corridor

on his Twitter handle on May 25, 2025, stating that he is only "presenting geographical facts that some may tend to forget."
If the former corridor spanning from Dakshin Dinajpur (West Bengal, India) to South West Garo Hills (Meghalaya, India) is snapped it would have a significant implication for Bangladesh, especially for Rangpur Division and northern districts which have a population of 17.9 million of that country's administrative divisions, covering an area of 16,709.5 Sq. Km. Northern Bangladesh, particularly Rangpur Division, could find itself isolated from the rest of the country, affecting transport and connectivity. The region depends on trade and movement through India. A separation could increase logistical challenges and disrupt agricultural and industrial supply chains.
Bangladesh's security and international relations with India would be directly impacted by such an event, leading to potential diplomatic negotiations or tensions. A sudden geopolitical shift could lead to population displacement, economic shifts and access issues for essential services.
If the latter corridor which connects South Tripura (India) to the Bay of Bengal were disrupted, it would have serious consequences for Dhaka and Bangladesh. The Chittagong Corridor is a vital link between Bangladesh's economic capital (Chittagong) and its political capital (Dhaka). If severed, Dhaka would lose direct access to Chittagong Port, which handles over 90 per-

cent of Bangladesh's external trade. The logistical challenges for the northwestern part of Chittagong Division (including Brahmanbaria, Comilla, Chandpur, Lakshimpur, Noakhali and Feni) would be cut off from southwestern part (which includes Chittagong, Khagracharia, Rangmati, Bandarban and Cox's Bazar).
The strategic vulnerability is that Bangladesh would face severe difficulties in military and administrative coordination, as the corridor is a key transport and supply route. Given the recent rhetoric of Muhammad Yunus around Bangladesh's strategic position, any disruption to this corridor could escalate tension with India. This corridor is often compared to India's Siliguri Corridor (Chicken's Neck) which is even narrower, making it more vulnerable to that country. These two scenarios are purely hypothetical, but it is an interesting consideration regarding how borders shape nations, economies and daily lives.
Yours etc,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Power woes in a power surplus state

Editor,
I would through your paper voice the disappointment we have with the power supply in our area. While we cannot speak about other localities of Shillong, but in the semi urban locality we live in, in Sharing Lun, near Mayblei Petrol pump, we are

facing daily power cuts. This is not confined to our area alone but the entire Laitkor, Mawlynggad, and other adjoining villages which get their power through the main Station at Mawlyndep face the same problem.
These are not just the one or two hour outages, which are commonplace, but the power cuts last for as long as 10-12 hours. Consumers have little recourse except to call the complaints number, which oftentimes is off the hook, and when we do get through, the stock reply given is, "Duh ka main line," (fault in the main line). This usually means 10-12 hours of power suspension.
Workshops, construction workers, woodworking and steel fabrication units, home construction all come to a grinding halt. This "Duh ka main line," problem is very frequent. It happens twice or thrice a week, which begs the question as to how this problem is allowed to persist for so long.
One does wish that there is a system in place where the Institution/Corporation responsible for the power supply compensates the consumer if the power cut is for an extended duration. While we are proud that the State is a "Power Surplus State," we'll feel even better if uninterrupted power supply is assured to all the needy consumers.
Yours etc.,
R.I.Donn,
Shillong-21