

*"The brighter you are, the more
you have to learn."*

—Don Herold

The Shillong Times

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Population, policies

POLICIES change as situations change; so too with the present thinking on 'readjusting' India's concepts about population growth. The call by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat for families to have three children, instead of the prevalent concept of two, should lead to a serious debate. He has stressed the point that the present rate of population growth for India at 2.1 would lead to a steady fall in people's numbers. Most developed nations, mainly in Europe, are faced with a serious fall in birth rates as the young people there are not keen on marriage and having children. Russia has begun offering cash incentives to pregnant schoolgirls to boost its falling population strength. Japan is faced with a problem of a greying population; all for the same reason. The Islamic nations, on the other hand, are seeing a population explosion. Muslims in India too are steadily raising their numbers.

Some 60 years ago, India engaged itself in a drive to control its fast-paced growth in population, which was then in the range of 55 crore. The alleged excesses during the Emergency in the 1970s, at the behest of Sanjay Gandhi, when the poor were herded to Family Planning camps and forcibly subjected to vasectomy operations on them, led to an eruption of anger. Following this, successive governments did not care much for population control. Today, India has the world's largest population numbering around 1.45 billion — a three-fold growth since the 1970s. Conversely, the concept about population control in China took a different turn recently— long after it imposed strict population control steps and forced families to have no more than two children. Today, China is encouraging its people to produce more children as it is faced with a fall in the number of young people — whose energy drives national growth.

India now boasts of having the largest mass of young people, but they are not being put to productive use. Their energies are being wasted due to lack of production lines or employment opportunities. China used its manpower and emerged as an economic super power. India aspires to be a super power but has no visionary leadership to tap the energies of its working-age population. Rather, they are fed with subsidized ration and being turned into lazy bums. In future, when the present large mass of youth get older, the nation will not have the wherewithal to feed them. In sum, the theories of Thomas Robert Malthus and John Maynard Keynes, propounded in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, must be seen, analysed and comprehended in the context of new emerging realities. What they had stated made eminent sense in their immediate contexts. That India is celebrating its population explosion and is seeking to stem a likely reduction in population are curious tales. Malthus said pestilence and war were natural ways to control population; Keynes said technological interventions would relieve population pressure. Today, war is not killing a lot; Covid-19 was checked by technology.

Letters to the Editor

Traffic and Beef

Editor,
Once upon a time in the heart of Mawlai, when footpaths weren't tiled yet and Pa-Trai still loved Mei dearly, a few witty butchers helped Pa-Trai to overlook the buzzing traffic from their stalls in 'The Main Junction'. At one point, a Maruti driver inappropriately parked his car on the road side to quickly buy the famous 'Doh-Bung' from one of the meat stalls, blocking the trailing Blue NEHU Elephants in the early rush hours. A jealous butcher from the other side of the road yelled in a thick Mawlai accent — "shna syndon da ka siam hapdiang...mial!" (Build your own garage in the middle of the road). Red-faced, like the displayed meat, the man returned to his car and was never seen again. (Source: Orally passed down by Mother - passenger of the Blue Elephant).

The words of this unknown butcher aged like fine 'Tungrymbai'. All over the city, the Government now seems to encourage parking on the side of the road (limited parking lots lately). In small-small localities too, (recently in ours) our little roads are adorned with OFFICIAL yellow lines meant for parking. Although roadside parking in the Main Roads of Mawlai is frowned upon and prohibited (except in a few localities like the Mawlai Nonglum stretch near the Presbyterian church), the main roads have now shown signs of extreme exhaustion because of the growing number of private cars, bigger sized cars and uneven width of the roads. After days of research and careful observation, these are some of the main is-

ssues noted - Phantom traffic jam is caused as a result of a cab's sudden embarking/disembarking of its "Your Highness" on the side or an SPTS bus which ironically moves like a snail but shouts "POLO-PB-SHAW" like an auctioneer.

Interestingly, it can also be attributed to the three special needs people - 'Basa Soh License Holders', the 'Doh-Bung Lovers' and the day time 'High Levels' - whose peculiar skills on the road were raising BPs and testing patience, with their overtaking, absent-spatial awareness, no-signal sudden stops, 'ha-ri-lajong-katba-mon' attitude and unprecedented U-turns. The FCI and BSF trucks too add masala to this spicy hotpot. A stylish Vega helmet still over my head, I once overheard an elderly couple's street banter as I waited in line for my 'Lam-Jew' — "Ym lah peit sliam re la ki nei ki bait ki scuti tel!" (I can't look at these bikes and scooters for long!). This never-ending BEEF is an amusing spectacle! Elderly aunts/uncles hate riders, riders hate car drivers, car drivers hate deaf and blind aunts/aunties and riders, and pedestrians hate them ALL!

Kudos to the Traffic personnel, the Dorbar Shnong, the stall owners and concerned citizens who collectively manage traffic in the main junction. How do they do it every day? Whistling, signaling, and brewing witty comebacks against sarcastic comments thrown at them by passing characters. Their team work is indeed a 'Ramhah-task.' In light of the ever-increasing traffic woes in and around Shillong City, I am optimistic that the Grant-In-Aid scheme for Off-Street Parking under the Meghalaya Parking Policy

To teach, or not to teach: that is the question.

Should I just put up with crumbling classrooms, almost bursting.

Or find a saner job that actually pays a pension, And leave the children to their TikTok dancing.

Teacher's Day is approaching — that one day of the year we're reminded that teachers exist. For the other 364 days, they are a bit like the appendix...you know you've got one, but you're not entirely sure what it does, and you only really notice it when it's about to burst.

To prepare for this column, I've been reading newspapers. According to them, teachers in Meghalaya are often seen on the streets, which is strange. I thought teachers were meant to be in schools, teaching children about things like triangles and not eating chalk. At first, I assumed this "street walking" was part of the NEP curriculum, an extended field trip about the history of pavements and the science of traffic. I got it all wrong, because apparently, they're "protesting". They stand there, holding up big bits of cardboard with words on them. This is, I suppose, a kind of spelling bee, where they are trying to teach the government how to spell difficult words. Words like 'Salary', 'Dignity', and the very long, complicated sentence 'Please, For The Love Of God, Give Us What We Deserve'.

The main point of this outdoor lesson appears to be about not getting paid, which is a bit odd. I thought a job was a thing where you do work, and in return, you get money to buy things...like food and a roof. But for many teachers in Meghalaya, it seems to be more of a hobby. You do the work, and in return, you get an 'assurance'. An assurance is like a promise, you can't eat a promise, can you, nor can you use one to pay the rent.

This whole situation becomes curiouser, when you read strange words used to describe it in the papers, words like 'ad-hoc' and 'ar-rears'. 'Ad-hoc' sounds like a special kind of fish, doesn't it...like A Haddock. Perhaps it's because these teachers spend their days patiently schooling, hoping someone

Rain Knowledge, Eat Air

By Ellerine Diengdoh

will finally toss them a peanut. Then there's 'ar-rears', which sounds like a serious medical condition. "Doctor, I've got a terrible case of the ar-rears," and the doctor would look at you sadly and say, "Ah yes, a chronic occupational affliction. There's no known cure. I'm prescribing the standard treatment...one verbal assurance, to be taken on an empty stomach, followed by an indefinite period of waiting."

So the problem isn't the government, it's the sky. Meghalaya is called the 'Abode of Clouds', so that's obviously where they've got the idea from! Clouds rain for free, don't they? You never see a cloud asking for payment. So now teachers have to be clouds, but for knowledge, raining it on kids, but for no money...and when they all get together and form a big, dark, angry-looking mass in the middle of town, the government just sort of squints at them and hopes they'll drift off somewhere else. Which to be fair, is what I do when a cloud looks like it's going to be a bother. I just go in and wait for it to stop.

The storm however is getting more intense, because it is not just the school teachers, the college ones, the ones with deeper frown lines, darker circles under the eye and bigger books are also having a go. They have to carry their woes to a big, serious building called a 'court'. They go there to fight for things like their 'allowances', which had to be 'reinstated'. An 'allowance' is what I used to get for tidying my room, which makes me wonder: were the professors not keeping the staff-room tidy enough? And 'reinstated' simply means 'put back', like putting a jam jar back in the cupboard. You then wonder, why did the government take their jam jar of money out of the cupboard in the first place?

Then just when you think it can't get any more bonkers, it does. Apparently, the government, has decided that schools and colleges, which are already a bit like a leaky bucket in a very, very dry desert, have too many 'sanctioned posts', and they're

not just, like, 're-evaluating' them...oh no...they're 'doing away with them'. Their reasoning (and this is where it gets really clever) is that if a boat is sinking, the best way to stop it sinking, is to remove the person who's actually trying to remove the water...because, obviously, it's the sailor's fault the boat has a hole, not, you know, the hole itself. I'm just waiting for them to suggest that the best way to solve traffic jams is to remove all the cars. Or, perhaps, all the roads. That would be, you know, quite something!

To understand the reality, I spoke to those on the front lines.

(Interview with an actual School Teacher)

Me: So, you're not paid. Are you eating your textbooks?

Teacher: (Sighs) That's a common misconception. The paper is terribly dry and low in nutrients. We tried. The binding glue, however, has a surprising amount of protein. We're experimenting. You adapt.

Me: But what about daily expenses? Food, rent?

Teacher: My knowledge of physics comes in handy for fixing neighbours' appliances. The chemistry teacher makes excellent soap and hand sanitizer. The English teacher hosts weddings and the History teacher gives guided 'Honeymoon Murder' tours around Sohra. We've diversified.

Me: So your part-time jobs are more reliable than your main profession?

Teacher: (Nods slowly, as if the motion requires immense effort) The appliances are simple machines. They either work or they don't. You can diagnose the problem. It's predictable.

Me: And the education system?

Teacher: (Stares into the distance, as if trying to recall a dream) The education system is not a simple machine...and frankly, I'm not sure anyone remembers where we plugged it in.

(Interview with a Government Official in a Shiny Suit)

Me: The teachers are outside. Looking a bit... damp. Why are they there?

Official: (Beams) Community outreach! We're thrilled. They're testing our city's public spaces. I must say, their cardboard signs are a fantastic, eco-friendly and so clever.

Me: They say they need the money to live.

Official: The funds are in the pipeline. There are procedures. Forms to be signed, channels to be cleared. The pipeline is long. Sometimes things get stuck in the pipeline. We are looking for a plunger.

Me: And the plan to remove 'sanctioned posts'? How does that help?

Official: It's a strategic realignment of resources. We are trimming the fat.

Me: But aren't the teachers the 'meat', not the 'fat'?

Official: (Holds up a finger, as if silencing a foolish child) That's a culinary distinction. From a budgetary perspective, a post is a recurring expenditure. By removing the expenditure, we solve the problem of not being able to meet the expenditure. The logic is sound. We are making the system more sustainable.

Me: Sustainable for whom?

Official: (Leans forward, his voice dropping to a reverent whisper) For the system.

So, after all that, what's the career advice for those who still want to become teachers. Simple enough. Spend your youth, your eyesight and your dad's money on a lot of expensive paper called 'degrees'. In return, you get a job where you might get paid as much as your housemaid (if you are lucky). And that thesis you spent five years on; that's for burning to keep warm in the room under the school stairs you'll have to live in. Like the wizard boy with the glasses.

So, you look at a teacher now and what do you see... you see a warning. A warning of what happens when you spend years standing up to build a future for other people's children, while you have to stand in a puddle to beg for your own. And you also see something else, something far bleaker, written not on a protest sign, but on the wall. An inscription that reads:

"The hand that cradles the chalk, is destined forever to kneel before the hand that holds the whip".

Importance of the "Line of Amity"

By Dr Alex Waterman

Jaideep Saikia's proposal to reframe the "Line of Actual Control" (LAC) as a "Line of Amity" was first put forward in a Track II dialogue in August 2014, emerging from a series of visits to the boundary, perusal of primary sources, and interviews with Indian Army commanders operating in the sector. The core premise is an acknowledgement that neither India nor China is going to cede ground. Instead, Saikia proposed a semantic reframing — replacing the belligerent-sounding "Control" with "Amity" — not to alter legal boundaries or even necessarily shift de facto realities on the ground, but to cultivate a more accommodating mindset and soften entrenched perceptions. This reframing could offer a way to change the narrative around the border, paving the way for future leaders to engage constructively while possibly minimising the baggage from previous hostilities.

really valuable opportunity to workshop the concept; in Jaideep's thinking, later disclosed to me, if an "academic breakthrough" could be conceived during the height of tensions, then the workshoped concept could then flourish when and indeed contribute to a "diplomatic breakthrough" in better times. This insight is quite rare in strategic communities, which tend to think reactively rather than proactively. This was reflective of Saikia's deep and long-term engagement with the ground realities along India's Eastern Sector boundaries with China.

Fast forward to the present day and there appears to be such an opening for improving relations. In October 2024, the two countries agreed to disengage and restore patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control. Meanwhile, India's relations with the U.S. under the Trump administration have soured



Saikia revived this idea during a high-profile webinar on 30 August 2020, titled "India-China Boundary: Eye to the Eastern Sector", convened against the fraught backdrop of the Galwan Valley clashes and simmering border tensions. The webinar included myself among 21 distinguished participants — former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, ex-Home Secretary G.K. Pillai, Lt. Gens. Mukherjee, Sharma and Ahuja, Myra MacDonald and Prof. Srikanth Kondapalli, among others.

Perhaps a result of the then-ongoing clashes, the concept was met with widespread critique and robust debate. One participant opened the proceedings by arguing that a Line of Amity would amount to leaving India vulnerable to Chinese exploitation, such was the deficit in trust between the two parties. Others questioned what another "line" would offer in an already contested boundary environment. Indeed, even I myself, while very sympathetic to the power of reframing narratives such as the Line of Amity, wondered how such a concept could be employed at that specific point in time, such was the apparent intractability of the territorial disputes between the two parties. Others focused on the importance of building national consensus for any future spirit of accommodation with China when the time came. Others still questioned the relevance of thinking about the India-China border dynamic through the prism of fixed lines in the age of drones and satellites, lending support to the notion of a Line of Amity that moved beyond conventional thinking about borders.

Yet while the webinar was held during the height of recent India-China tensions, the webinar did present a

over trade relations among other issues. In that context, even while China remains a strategic competitor and will continue to do so, India's desire to retain strategic autonomy and its preference for a multipolar order gives it a degree of flexibility that never completely ruled out the prospect of at least some degree of India-China rapprochement. As both countries increasingly see value in at least managing their strategic competition and increasing cooperation where possible, the Line of Amity could represent one such tool to manage this competition and create the conditions for cooperation.

The relevance of Saikia's "Line of Amity" thus appears to be rising once more, and yet as an outside observer, I was rather surprised that Saikia's concept had not been explicitly referenced and recognised in the public commentary on this moment of India-China rapprochement. If India's foremost priority is to maintain strategic autonomy in a fractious multipolar world, its policymakers would do well to recognise and engage with Saikia's insights. This could include bringing Saikia and the Line of Amity into Track II and Track 1.5 discussions, by facilitating joint India-China academic dialogues on the matter, or by using strategic simulations to explore the peace-building potential of translating the concept into Line of Amity initiatives on the ground. Working with Saikia on these issues would ensure India is equipped with the diplomatic toolkit to thrive in this increasingly challenging multipolar world.

(Dr Alex Waterman teaches Peace Studies and International Development in the University of Bradford, United Kingdom)

(ST 30.08.25 — Govt. Rolls Scheme...) will start to bring a quick relief as we wait for our Hi-Tech Parking Infrastructures. I would also like to direct the attention of our Leaders/Dorbars/NGOs/residents/concerned citizens of 'The Gateway of Shillong... The Guardians of the Khasi Society', to gear up for the pressing issue of traffic congestion that is growing day by day in our area. Fresh planning and blueprints are the need of the hour.

Yours etc.,
Kyntiewborlang Kharakor
Shillong - 17

Consistency the Essence of Diplomacy

Editor,

The editorial "Diplomacy, choppy waters" (ST August 29, 2025) made interesting reading. Absolutely, "a strain of consistency" is not just "integral to diplomacy," it is its operational backbone. Consistency is foundational in diplomacy as Amro Shubair puts it, "Diplomatic continuity is not a slogan. It is the invisible architecture that holds every agreement, partnership and negotiation together." Without consistent documentation, follow-through and institutional memory, diplomacy collapses into scattered efforts and forgotten promises.

When we talk of credibility and trust, states and envoys are judged not by what they announce, but by what they sustain. Consistency signal's reliability whether in honouring treaties, maintaining alliances or responding to crises. Inconsistency breeds doubt, erodes trust and invites strategic hedging

by partners. And when we talk of transition resilience, diplomatic teams rotate, leadership changes and geopolitical context shift. Therefore, structured continuity through archives, transition files and procedural discipline ensures that new actors don't start from zero.

The UN's Civil Affairs Handbook and Security Council reports emphasize that documentation governance is what keeps missions intact through change. Then there is another factor and that is narrative coherence. In diplomacy, narrative is power. A consistent strategic story whether about peace, trade or deterrence anchors a nation's identity and intent. Mixed signals (e.g., shifting stances on alliances or sanctions) weaken a country's narrative and invite adversarial framing.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Diplomacy, choppy waters

Editor,

I strongly agree with your Editorial, "Diplomacy, choppy waters," (ST Aug 29, 2025) which clearly captures the current state of India-US relations. The tension is not a passing quarrel but the result of shifting global power and clashing interests.

The US tariffs on Indian goods, especially in textiles, threaten jobs and strike at the core of India's economy. For a developing nation, defending industries is essential. While Washington calls the tariffs a correction of trade imbalances, in New Delhi they appear one-sided and unfair—forcing India to retaliate.

The "China factor" further

complicates matters. The US wants India as a partner against Beijing, yet its protectionist stance pushes India toward exploring closer ties with China. This is the tightrope of Indian diplomacy: neither power can be ignored.

Domestic politics add to the pressure. With its Atmanirbhar Bharat policy, the Modi government must show independence; any concession risks backlash at home.

As your editorial noted, today's diplomacy is not about photo opportunities but about skill and strategy. The present strain is not failure—it is the cost of safeguarding sovereignty in a multipolar world.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry
Tura

Online gambling trap shut down

Editor,

Nothing is more heartening than the fact that the Government of India has now fully banned all real-money online games, including fantasy sports, card games, online lotteries, and betting platforms through the Promotion and Regulation of Online Gaming Bill, 2025. Sadly, it took too long for the government to wake up to the adverse consequences of gambling. It seems the government acted only after sensing that even the children of some leaders had slipped into this digital gambling trap. Anyway, countless parents and spouses of gaming addicts must have heaved a sigh of relief at last!

Over the past few years, I was shocked at how the government permitted the ceaseless bombardment of

advertisements for such dangerous games on social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X etc. At times, I was even tempted to place a bet. After all, who does not want to make quick money? But at the end of the day, the players always lose everything they have, while the companies sit back and mint cash — all at the cost of social devastation. I presume that lakhs of households have been ruined by these online games in the last few years. The addiction to such platforms is nothing short of a digital drug.

Apart from the obvious financial loss, the "psychological impact" of game addiction is far more detrimental. Such obsession invariably blots out one's ability to engage in healthy creativity, innovation, and imagination, often leading to gradual memory loss. It kills ambition, steals inner peace, and leaves one staring blankly at a glowing screen.

Of course, obsession with "anything" always spells disaster. This current ban might be just a legal move, a small step forward to save society from moral, social, and psychological decay. Given how netizens run riot in the digital world without moral discipline, there are "many more things" that need to be banned. Well, nature unfolds a "fresh dawn" for us to strive to become morally stronger. It is not meant to be wasted on betting on poker and jokers, only to grow weaker — both morally and intellectually.

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
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.

"A heart without dreams is like
a bird without feathers."
— Suzy Kassem

The Shillong Times

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Celebration Overdrive

EVERY single day there is some celebration or the other in Meghalaya. Each celebration is accompanied by music and songs. Anyone observing the state would think that everything is hunky dory and people are happy and hence have a song on their lips at any time of the day and night. But is that music a cover-up—a noise creation to drown the pain of lakhs of people who live in an abysmal state of poverty. While a few people in Shillong city and the district headquarters have become part of the many schemes initiated by the Chief Minister's Office a large chunk in the rural outback are groping in the darkness of poverty and inadequate access to education and health care. Poverty means having no access to money and also to the facilities which the government ought to provide of which education and health care are imperative.

People are in such a state of penury that they have to line up at the houses of their MLAs and MDCs to seek monetary help to meet urgent medical expenses or to deal with other exigencies. This is because the poor have no savings for a rainy day. When they can hardly make ends meet where is the question of saving. Yet when there are economic shocks such as the sudden death of the only earning member, the family is thrown into disarray. Children can no longer continue their studies and must start earning. That's one reason for the high school drop-out rate. About half of Meghalaya's population is agrarian. But even today, the market linkage is weak and farmers find it difficult to connect directly with the buyers without being exploited by intermediaries. Direct connection with buyers ensures farmers receive fair prices for their produce while buyers get quality products.

There is enough research to suggest that those with greater human capital such as education, skills, training, etc. tend to be more competitive in the labour market, and as a result, will run a lower risk of experiencing poverty. But when the youth miss out on quality education and therefore are deprived of the critical human capital they tend to do just about any job which they are not adept at. The focus of the Government today should be to reach out to the youth in the rural areas. Since there is no scope of gainful employment in Meghalaya's villages, urban migration has become the only escape from a miserable existence. There is a huge workforce of construction workers but they are listless and lack the drive that the so-called outsider demonstrates. Any contractor who wants to make profit would engage local labourers as a last resort since labour payment forms a huge chunk of the investment in construction work. Then there are others, mainly women who ply their trade at tourist destinations without as much as a training to help them understand what can sell and what cannot. They possibly earn between Rs 200-300 a day. There is an urgent need therefore to scale up economic activities and provide intensive training in order to overcome poverty.

Reforming Education: The Need for Accountability and Quality

By Roney M Lyndem

Education is not just about textbooks or lectures in a classroom. It also supposed to include a safe and supportive environment where students can thrive, develop their skills and hone their potentials. In reality, however, especially in a state like Meghalaya, a significant gap exists between the facilities promised by schools and what the students actually experience. This thus raises an important question: Who is responsible for ensuring that schools provide the basic infrastructure and support that students deserve?

I believe in Meghalaya, the Directorate of School Education & Literacy (DSEL) is the main government body overseeing school infrastructure and facilities. This department is responsible for implementing national guidelines, such as those outlined in the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (RTE) Act, 2009. The RTE Act specifies the basic facilities needed:

- Safe and clean drinking water.
- Separate, clean, and functional toilets for boys and girls.
- Adequate classroom space and a playground.
- A library and necessary teaching and learning equipment.

It is the responsibility of the DSEL, through its district-level officers, to conduct regular inspections to ensure compliance. However, we are left to wonder if these checks do happen or if they happen only occasionally or if they even happen at all. And if they do, is it announced in advance, giving schools enough time to prepare, polish and hide their flaws?

It's a fact that many schools in Shillong, especially private ones run by individuals, often do not undergo these checks for basic necessities and as such things like safe drinking water, hygienic toilets, adequate space hardly exist. If these basics are ignored, then the progressive needs of students in this digital age would naturally be overlooked. For example, a simple mobile locker system for securely storing phones during school hours would help balance discipline with student needs. Yet, there is little regulatory support for such modern amenities.

We wonder why we lack educational progress. How can we not, after all with everything else that has gone wrong in how we implement our policies. It is safe to say that even here, it is the same. We have ignored what we are supposed to start with, that is, ensuring basic infrastructure and facilities that are progressive, student-focused, and well-rounded. Another concerning and unregulated trend in many private schools is the constant imposition of fines for minor and unreasonable infractions. While discipline is important, using monetary penalties as the main method of enforcing discipline is counter-productive. This approach does

not teach students or have any positive impact; it only places an unnecessary financial burden on parents.

It is obvious that such practices stem from outdated disciplinary ideas among management and it needs to be discontinued. For fines to remain and be justified, an independent regulatory body should audit schools to assess whether such fines are reasonable and educational or simply a revenue-generating method that fosters a negative and punitive environment.

Another critical issue is the health and well-being of the student community. This should be a top priority for every educational institution. A student's physical and mental health is crucial for effective learning. Proper medical and psychological support within schools is not just a suggestion; it is required by regulations and legal standards.

The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) mandates that every school must have a well-equipped medical room with a full-time qualified doctor or nurse. Further, the Supreme Court of India, in cases such as *Avinash Mehrotra vs. Union of India & Ors* (2009), has repeatedly stressed that ensuring the safety and well-being of students is a fundamental responsibility of the school management. A well-equipped medical room and a qualified nurse should be mandatory in all schools to handle emergencies, from minor injuries to sudden illnesses. However, in our state, such concern is regarded as a burden to the school. Majority do not have a trained nurse and their medical room is a joke. Even when we look at the architecture of the school building, we can be sure that when a disaster strikes like fire or earthquake, majority of those trapped inside will probably not come out breathing. Health and safety are not considered a priority and the authorities do not care either. It is also assumed that schools would employ and provide a trained counsellor. Especially one trained in the subject of Psychology such that they are well equipped to handle a student/child's mental health problems, especially of those who are still growing and developing to fully understand boundaries, identity, logic, decision making etc. A trained counsellor is necessary also to act as a buffer between the concept of discipline and freedom and to understand their limitations and boundaries to be able to develop themselves as a complete well balanced adult. A full-time trained counsellor is essential for supporting students faced with many life-altering decisions each day. This role must be filled by a dedicated professional and not assigned to a teacher.

A teacher's primary role often involves enforcing discipline, which creates a conflict of interest if they are also expected to act as a counsellor. The ethical principles guiding a trained counsellor do not align with those of a teacher, leading to potential conflicts. Students are unlikely to feel safe confiding in someone who has disciplinary authority over them. Professional counsellors adhere to strict ethical codes, with confidentiality at the core. This ensures students can express themselves without fear of their struggles being used against them.

There have been cases where intervention was necessary because there are some teachers especially in privately owned schools, who may lack the proper training or have poor teaching aptitude and are usually those who acquired the job simply because they own the school, are the child of the owner or have some connection to the owners and management; have used disciplinary methods that are questionable and inappropriate like publicly reprimanding a student, throwing personal insults or making vague and unsubstantiated remarks about the student's future, personal life and even family. It is hence very important that every school have a trained counsellor independent of school management to be able to intervene, and protect the rights of the child and act as a mediator between the authoritative figure and students' rights.

Another concern that parents face is the fee structure especially in private schools. As this is unregulated, private schools can charge, change, and alter the structure as they so please. Apart from fees, there is this habit of organising programs and concerts in almost every school where the burden of financial expenses fall on the parents. School concerts with mandatory tickets, drama and plays with mandatory charges for expensive costumes, the knock-knock functions that usually mean that a parent should collect money, pay money and spend money are all unregulated and usually involve coercion whether directly or indirectly. No parent would want their child to feel bad, but not all parents can afford or even have the time and energy to entertain these voluntary coercion from the schools. Thus, there is an urgent need for an independent regulatory and audit body to address these systemic issues in the current education system and hold schools and their management accountable and answerable.

This independent body should conduct surprise audits on infrastructure, health facilities, and hygiene standards. It should review schools' financial practices regarding fees and fines. This body would ensure that school management is not imposing regressive policies or biased discipline ideas but is instead adhering to a progressive, student-centered

approach. It should also be able to take action against schools failing to provide basic necessities and a safe environment for students thereby ensuring that students rights are defended and not infringed upon and also be able to ensure that the school management meets high standards.

The problem is that the Indian education system, follows a "one-size-fits-all" approach. This just blindly assumes that every child learns the same way and at the same pace and as counsellors, we recognize that this is fundamentally incorrect.

Research, such as Howard Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences for instance, shows that human intelligence is multi-faceted. Individuals have unique combinations of intelligences, including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Education should cater to these different intelligences and aptitudes. However, the current system often leaves students with multiple talents and potentials feel inadequate and unable to cope. Therefore, many drop out, underperform, or struggle to adjust and fit in because the environment does not nurture their potential or acknowledge their diverse talent, forcing them through the same narrow learning framework and standardized testing.

In conclusion, the education system remains troublingly backward. It is still tied to the outdated belief that a student's worth can be measured by their performance on timed exams. This focus on exam scores discourages imagination, critical thinking, and creativity. It is evident that the efforts made so far are not progressive at all. In fact, the system is moving towards mass production of unskilled, untrained, unknowledgeable individuals who will not have a bright future but will only continue to be dependent and obedient to a flawed system.

True education should empower, not constrain. We live in an age of technology and advancement, and a complete overhaul is necessary—from ensuring clean, hygienic toilets to rethinking how we assess talents and potential to improving our syllabus and learning techniques to empower and not enslave. In Meghalaya especially, there is a dire need for an independent body to audit and hold schools accountable and adopt a visionary approach to the curriculum that celebrates diverse thinking and abilities. Every child deserves the opportunity to reach their unique potential, not be treated like potatoes stuffed tightly in a sack.

(The writer is a seasoned counsellor and former Principal of Nepalpara English Mission School in Assam, and has worked as a Counsellor in both school and college settings in Shillong. He can be reached at roneylyndem@gmail.com).

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Truth as our weapon The Youth Of Shillong Are Winning

By Lyzander E Sohkhlet

For years, Shillong has been caught in a tug of war between law and chaos, between order and disorder. We are told to sympathize endlessly with those who occupy pavements illegally, as though sympathy requires blindness to legality. We are told that to care is to condone. But who will sympathize with the pedestrian forced to walk on the road because the footpath is gone? Who will care for the elderly who can no longer stroll safely? Who will defend the student rushing to class but trapped in a bottleneck of makeshift stalls? Our compassion cannot be selective, our sense of justice cannot be partial. The tide is turning, and it is not turning in favour of those who have hidden for too long behind the language of fear, the language of intimidation, the language of vested interest. They may shout, they may spread lies, but they are losing, losing to the thousands of voices who have risen up in Shillong, losing to the will of the youth, losing to the power of the people who refuse to be bullied anymore.

They call us liars. They accuse us of twisting facts, of spreading half-truths, of hiding behind laws that they claim we misread. But the more they try to discredit us, the more the truth shines. Because truth does not need ornaments; it does not need slogans invented in haste or fiery rhetoric in newspaper columns. Truth is lived, seen, and signed by the people themselves. Today, that truth is written not by me, not by the courts, not even by the state machinery, but by thousands of men and women, citizens, teachers, students, business owners, specially abled students labelled "elitists", who have signed their names in a petition demanding the removal of lawless hawkers from the streets of Laitumkhrah. The petition that now circulates and has been signed by thousands is a resounding answer to the question of what Shillong's people want. This is not the agenda of a few elites, as some would desperately like to frame it. This is not the scheme of politicians looking for easy headlines. This is the voice of ordinary citizens, youths, parents, shopkeepers, office-goers, the very pulse of Shillong declaring enough is enough. They want their streets back. They want their city back. The Shillong Municipal Board has been tasked by the court to inspect, to report, to put numbers where there are only claims. And that will happen. But beyond that, something greater has already begun: the people themselves have decided to reclaim agency. This petition is not just ink on paper it is a declaration of a collective will. It is democracy at its most raw, where people speak directly, unmediated by politicians, activists, or power brokers. And this is why the accusations of lying no longer bother me. When the people stand behind you, when signatures pour in by the hundreds and then by the thousands, when ordinary Shillongites put their names to a cause, you know you are not speaking alone. They can try to attack me, they can call me elitist, they can question my motives, but they cannot erase the will of the people.

I am doubly proud of The Seng Samla Laitumkhrah. The organization has always stood on the principle of *Ieng Skhem ha ka Hlok* - to stand firmly by the truth. And what greater truth is there than this: that law matters, that order matters, that public space belongs to the public, not to a few who would seize it without right. The Seng Samla has shown courage in standing for this principle, despite the brickbats, despite the misrepresentations. And I count myself blessed to be part of this movement, to be part of a generation that does not bow down to intimidation but rises for what is right. Let them write their essays filled with rage and ego. Let them accuse us of twisting the law, of misreading judgments. The law is there for all to see, the High Court's directives are public documents, the inspection orders are binding. What cannot be faked is the sight of thousands of signatures. What cannot be fabricated is the groundswell of support for order, for hygiene, for walkability, for Shillong itself. Make no mistake: we are not just fighting a battle over Laitumkhrah. We are defining the future of Shillong. If the pavements of Khyndallai can be reclaimed, so too can the spaces of Laitumkhrah, and beyond. This is not the victory of one place, but the awakening of a city. The youths of Shillong, mocked so often as apathetic, distracted, or disengaged, are today at the forefront of civic responsibility. They are saying with clarity: "We want a Shillong that works. We want a Shillong that breathes. We want a Shillong that belongs to all, not to a few who squat without responsibility, endangering the lives of many."

The battle is being won, the war is in sight and we will win it. And this war is not waged with sticks, stones or machetes, it is fought with petitions, with civic engagement, with truth. That is why it terrifies those who oppose us. Because how do you argue against the people themselves? How do you discredit signatures that multiply by the day? How do you silence a city that has finally found its voice? History will not remember the angry essays that sought to slander us. It will not remember the slogans of resistance cooked up to defend illegality. History will remember this moment as the one where the youths of Shillong rose to their duty, where organizations like the Seng Samla held their ground, where petitions became the weapons of a peaceful revolution. So I say this without hesitation: we are winning. The real youths of Shillong are not only winning the battle, they are winning the war. And when victory comes, it will not be mine, or yours, or any single group's—it will be the people's. Because no matter how they accuse, no matter how they lie, no matter how they rage, the power of the people prevails. Always. I am not afraid to say it, and I know thousands stand with me when I do: the future of Shillong is not negotiable. And we, the youth, will not allow it to be stolen by intimidation.

(The writer is a student of St Edmund's College, BA Political Science) Email: lyzandegar.co@gmail.com

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Letters to the Editor

United by travails

Editor,
It is often said that Shillong is a divided city. Divided by tribe, divided by tongue, divided by faith and divided occasionally even by traffic jams of biblical proportions. We have become experts in recognizing our differences, cataloguing them with the zeal of museum curators—this person belongs to that community, this vote belongs to that political party. And yet, despite our divisions, I am delighted to report that Shillong has finally achieved unity—thanks to its tireless and impartial benefactors: the thieves.

Yes, the thieves of Shillong stand as the city's last true secularists. They neither check your surname nor your denomination before lightening your wallet. They do not pause to ask if you worship in a church, a temple, or at the altar of Sunday karaoke. They spare no thought for your dialect—they are linguistically inclusive. In fact, they

seem to carry out their noble profession with an equality of purpose.

Ask around, and you will discover this shared brotherhood of victimhood. The professor has lost his laptop, the shopkeeper his cash, the homemaker her jewellery, the tourist his phone. A thousand prayers, a thousand curses, one united sigh. Who knew that universal suffering could be Shillong's answer to the spirit of fraternity?

Perhaps this is what "unity in diversity" was meant to look like. Not through grand speeches or unity marches, but through the humble pickpocket and the bold burglar, who reminds us, hand in pocket, that beneath our quarrels we stand together—empty purses, but together.

Yours etc,
Shekhar Singh
Via email

A call for humanity and evidence-based action

Editor,
I write as someone who

has worked in the field of drug rehabilitation and harm reduction for over thirteen years. The recent viral videos depicting the brutal assault of alleged injecting drug users are profoundly disturbing. Such incidents appear to have escalated following reports of syringe stabbings. While these reports must be investigated with utmost seriousness, this cannot serve as a licence for mob justice. If individuals are indeed culpable, the law must be allowed to take its course; if not, those inflicting violence are themselves, no less criminal.

India already possesses a clear legal framework. The HIV and AIDS (Prevention and Control) Act, 2017 prohibits discrimination against people living with HIV and those at risk, including people who inject drugs (PWID). It also affirms their right to access vital harm-reduction services such as the Needle and Syringe Exchange Programme (NSEP), designed to curb the spread of HIV and other infections. These measures do not condone drug use; rather, they save lives, reduce harm, and open pathways to treatment and rehabilitation.

International evidence is unequivocal. Portugal, since decriminalising personal possession of drugs in 2001 and investing in counselling, treatment, and employment support, has seen marked reductions in HIV infections, overdose deaths, and drug-related crime. Switzerland and Germany have pursued similar strategies, combining rehabilitation, psychological support, and structured employment programmes—restoring lives whilst enhancing public safety.

India must likewise adopt evidence-based policies that temper enforcement against traffickers with compassion for those battling dependence. Violence and humiliation do not eradicate drug use; they merely drive it further underground, placing both users and the wider public at greater risk.

We must take the higher road—one of humanity, reason, and proven effectiveness—protecting our youth, upholding the rule of law, and building healthier communities.

Yours etc.,
A Thangkiew,
Shillong

Response to Bhogtoram Mawroh's letter

Editor,
I write in response to the letter by Bhogtoram Mawroh, titled "Why Indulge in Disinformation," which was his response to my last letter published in The Shillong Times on August 29, 2025. Bhogtoram in his article and letter has been saying a lot of things which are not true. He even spins a false narrative about the demand for a Territorial Army by pressure groups. I wonder why he made such delusional statements.

Bhogtoram states that he is not against the idea of a Territorial Army, but his entire argument is against the demand for a Territorial Army by the pressure groups. Meanwhile, he stated that he's confused about what a Territorial Army actually is and what the groups demanding it are actually asking for. If he's unclear about the difference between what a Territorial Army is and what the groups are demanding,

then why is he so quick to jump to conclusions? Why is he hesitant to meet with the leaders of these groups and seek clarification from them instead of confusing the general public by writings to the newspaper?

In fact, the demand for a Territorial Army in our state is not new. This demand was reiterated by Paul Lyngdoh, a minister in the present government, recently, after some pressure groups staged a protest in Shillong under the aegis of the North East Students' Organisation (NESO). The demand of these pressure groups is straightforward: to create a Territorial Army for the purpose of controlling and overseeing the illegal entry and exit of people from outside, and similarly to control other illegal activities. It can be part-time or permanent; it depends on the government how to properly arrange, provide for, and implement this task.

Bhogtoram's lament feels like the government lacks a clear policy and sufficient expertise to properly implement this project. Further, pressure groups like the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) have long

been united in their opposition to the permanent settlement of outsiders. Many members and leaders of these organizations have faced imprisonment; some have even lost their lives in the struggle against the influx of outsiders. Since 1979, the Anti-Foreigners Movement has been active in our Khasi land, where outsiders have asserted their presence and clashed with indigenous people. If not for the resistance of these organizations, along with the common people, our state might have followed a similar trajectory to Tripura, where the indigenous population now constitutes only about 31%. The demand by pressure groups for a Territorial Army is well-founded, and it depends on the government to properly implement and manage this task.

I never called anyone a traitor and would like to ask Bhogtoram to refrain from attributing fabricated words to me that I never said. What does he mean by saying, "I am all for protecting our borders, but I do not support doing so through an armed militia (which is not the Territorial Army)"? When did the pres-

sure groups demand that the government arm the common people? What led him to assume that our youth would rebel against the government or join militant groups after serving in the Territorial Army? I wonder why Bhogtoram has such a negative mindset and is indirectly expressing hostility toward the pressure groups. This negative mindset has caused confusion for both himself and the readers of his writings.

I suggest that Bhogtoram instead of focusing on the perceived negatives of the groups' demands and creating confusion in the media, should instead offer constructive suggestions and make demands from the government if he genuinely cares about protecting our Jaitbwnriew. I wonder if he has ever thought as to what would happen to our community if it is dominated by outsiders.

Yours etc.,
Carmel Fedrick Malngiang,
Sohra

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

“Making mistakes is a lot better than not doing anything.”
— Billie Joe Armstrong

The Shillong Times

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China's olive branch

THE wheel, it would seem, has turned full circle. Prime Minister Narendra Modi attending the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Tianjin this week struck a friendly chord with China's Xi Jinping, presumably signifying an end to a four-year-long standoff between the two Asian neighbours. The tone and tenor of the engagement between the two leaders signified both sides are eager to restore the strained ties, which were ruptured principally by the Chinese PLA's unconventional offensive against India to usurp land in Galwan Valley, eastern Ladakh. Xi's stress was that, “Being the world's two most populous nations and part of the Global South, it's vital to be friends, a good neighbour, and the Dragon (China) and the Elephant (India) come together.” Modi's take was equally affirmative – that, “Maintenance of peace and tranquility at the border is like an insurance policy for India-China ties. Predictably, the PM also stressed that India and China should join hands to fight cross-border terrorism by Islamists, of which both the nations are “victims”.

Notably, both India and Pakistan are part of the 10-member SCO along with Russia and some other Euro-Asian nations. The SCO summit took place this time in the backdrop of the US tariff war on India as also China and several other nations. China managed to browbeat President Trump and extracted concessions, while India is caught in an unenviable situation. Significantly, Xi attempted to hold out an olive branch to India at this precise hour. The Chinese leader lost no time in sending a confidential note to Prime Minister Modi, stressing China's keenness to mend its ties with India. Having been rubbished by Trump, Modi seemed to be in a mood to “forget the past” and break bread with Xi. Diplomacy, despite its soft exterior, is a hard-edged game. All options need be explored at any given time, with an eye on the future.

Notably, in the US itself, opinion is divided on Trump's tariff offensive against nations like India. Trump's steps have landed him in legal trouble too. He seems to have an axe to grind against India for strange reasons. The relations between India and the US had turned cordial since the 1990s when Manmohan Singh as Prime Minister made some significant steps to court the US. America's strong ties with Pakistan however proved to be an obstacle to surmount then and even now. Yet, the US showed a willingness to cultivate India with the obvious purpose of reining in China in the geopolitical region. This, in turn, ruffled China's feathers. China is an untrustworthy neighbour, which repeatedly let down India ever since the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, leading to a full-scale war and annexation of large swathes of Indian land along the Himalayas. China keeps being on the offensive along the northern border. It holds a brief for Pakistan if only to spite India. It keeps playing dangerous games. A good word from Xi Jinping must, therefore, be taken with a pinch of salt.

Strengthening ADCs: A Fiscal Reform Agenda for the Sixth Schedule

By Sumarbin Umdor

The Sixth Schedule is a key feature of asymmetry federalism in India, also referred to as asymmetry within asymmetry. This asymmetry is also manifested in their fiscal arrangement. While the political aspects of the Sixth Schedule and the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) have been widely covered over the years, the fiscal aspects of these institutions remain underexplored. This is a significant gap, as understanding the fiscal policy, revenue generation, and expenditure patterns of ADCs (ten such councils in 4 states) is crucial to evaluating their governance efficacy and impact on devolved functions.

Limited Role of Finance Commissions: The Finance Commission plays a critical role in recommending fund transfers from the Union to States and local governments. However, ADCs have received sporadic attention from successive Finance Commissions. Notably, in the Finance Commission purview, the Sixth Schedule remains part of the areas excluded from the provisions of the 73rd and 74th Constitutional Amendments. The 13th Finance Commission recommended grants of Rs. 1,357 crores for the excluded areas, whereas the 14th Finance Commission did not allocate grants to these areas. However, the 15th Finance Commission provided grants for these areas. An evaluation of the finances of different states by successive commissions provides only limited insights into the finances of the ADCs. This narrow coverage of ADC finance under the Finance Commission studies and other reports shows the gap in understanding the finances of the ADCs.

Revenue Challenges and Deficiencies in Accounting and Auditing: ADCs possess constitutional authority under the Sixth Schedule to mobilise and utilise financial resources for devolved functions. In addition to shared revenue from the state government, ADCs also receive grants in aid for undertaking different state government schemes. Yet, multiple studies identify common challenges in revenue mobilization and expenditure. A common thread found in these studies is the low own revenue generation, the high dependency of ADCs in the transfer from state governments and a high proportion of revenue expenditure heads, including salary and administrative costs.

The ADCs also have an underdeveloped system of accounting and financial reporting. Different ADCs follow different accounting practices, although the CAG suggested a uniform accounting system in 1977. Compared to the accounting

system introduced in the Panchayats and Municipalities, their accounting practices have not undergone any significant transformation over the years. All the ADCs use a cash-based single-entry system for transactions. Comparatively, Panchayats also use a cash-based single-entry system, whereas municipalities are suggested to use an accrual-based double-entry system. Most ADCs differ in terms of the classification of their accounting heads, whereas Panchayats and Municipalities have a simplified classification into three heads. While the internal audit mechanism varies across ADCs, the internal audit in Panchayats and Municipalities is designated to the State Audit Agency under the supervision of the CAG. The external audits for ADC, Panchayats and Municipalities are all done by the CAG of India.

Issues of Accountability and Direct Funding: There have been issues of accountability in the finances of ADCs. Reports of corruption and mismanagement of funds

ever, this resource pool had not been fully tapped by the ADCs due to their failure to submit utilization certificates on time.

Another gap in resource sharing is that the ADCs are considered rural local governments, although there are provisions for the arrangement of town committees in the Sixth Schedule. Therefore, there is no mechanism of resource sharing with town committees of the ADCs for urban development as they are not a part of the municipalities under the 74th Amendment of the Constitution.

Reforming ADC Finances
To improve the financial health and accountability mechanisms of the ADCs, several key reforms are necessary. ADCs must augment their own tax and non-tax revenue collection, including from sources such as professional tax and other local levies. At the same time, there is a need to reorient expenditure patterns—shifting away from high spending on revenue heads like salaries and administration, and

and Auditor General (CAG) which introduced the revised list of Major and Minor Head for the accounting system for the Tripura Tribal Area Autonomous District Council and the Bodo Territorial Council. To strengthen the CAG's effort towards this, technical inputs from specialized bodies like the Institute of Chartered Accountants of India may be sought for preparing accounting manuals for all the councils. By allocating resources for this purpose, the 16th Finance Commission could start accounting reforms in the ADCs which have been an ongoing process in the Panchayats and Municipalities. Progress in the implementation of accounting reforms and regular furnishing of accounts for audit could be further used for allocating performance grants to the ADCs.

Another critical area where the ADCs' finances need reformation is found in the design of transfer to urban towns and village local governments. While there are provisions for the town committees in the Sixth Schedule and several towns are found in the ADC areas across the states, the resources devolved to the councils at the grassroots level so far have been part of the grants to the rural local bodies for the Panchayats only. The 16th FC could reform this by recognizing the existence of urban and rural areas in the Sixth Schedule areas and designing the transfer mechanism accordingly.

Finally, one of the key steps in enhancing the process of fiscal transfer to ADCs lies in their inclusion in the Terms of Reference of the next Finance Commission. As previously mentioned, this is manifested in the irregular and sporadic transfer to ADCs as parts of excluded areas by different commissions over the years. Including ADCs in the transfer of resources as a separate constitutional local government body will be helpful for their smooth operations.

The fiscal empowerment of ADCs is integral to strengthening their role not just as custodians of tribal identity and autonomy, but as active agents of grassroots development. Addressing the current lacunae in fiscal transfers, accounting practices, and transparency will pave the way for more effective governance in India's Sixth Schedule areas.

(This is an extract from an article titled 'Fiscal Aspects of the Sixth Schedule' by the author and his PhD student, Dr. K Vanlalhrualtuanga, published in the *Economic and Political Weekly* in August 2025, and was part of the presentation by the author to the Chairman and Members of the 16th Finance Commission in May 2024)

“The audit of ADCs by the CAG of India is not being done regularly due to the failure of the councils to furnish necessary documents to the auditors. It has also been observed that the grassroots-level bodies under the ADCs have not formalised the accounting and auditing mechanism, unlike their Panchayats counterparts, which have a model accounting system and online portals for accounting and auditing.”

are also found across ADCs of different states over the years. The audit of ADCs by the CAG of India is not being done regularly due to the failure of the councils to furnish necessary documents to the auditors. It has also been observed that the grassroots-level bodies under the ADCs have not formalised the accounting and auditing mechanism, unlike their Panchayats counterparts, which have a model accounting system and online portals for accounting and auditing.

ADCs do not receive direct transfer from Finance Commissions in terms of Grants in Aid. The funds received by the ADCs from the Centre are transferred through the state government. This has led to a demand for direct funding by different ADCs. In 2015, the NITI Aayog recommended one-time assistance of Rs. 1000 crore to the ten ADCs that had been sanctioned through the Ministry of Finance. This had been the most significant transfer the ADCs received in recent years from the Centre. How-

channeling more resources toward capital formation and development projects.

This reallocation can be achieved by enforcing fiscal discipline and curbing gratuitous and non-essential expenditures. A successful restructuring of expenditure would enhance the role of ADCs, allowing them to function not only as custodians of tribal culture and identity but also as drivers of grassroots development.

The 16th Finance Commission recommendation could play a critical role in this transformation by linking financial transfers to ADCs with their tax effort and expenditure reforms. Such an approach would incentivize improved revenue generation and responsible fiscal management, thereby strengthening the institutional capacity of councils in the long run.

The devolution of resources to the ADCs should be subjected to utmost accountability and transparency. The council accounting methods had been revised partially by the Comptroller

Bob's Banter

Pretending to Play the Second Fiddle..!”

By Robert Clements

There's a reason why the violin is the star in an orchestra. She's slim, elegant, gets the limelight, and squeals at the highest pitch. But tucked right beside her, in the shadows, sits the viola. Slightly larger, slightly heavier, and always called the “second fiddle.” Nobody claps for her. Nobody asks for her autograph. Nobody even remembers her face. But without her, the violin sounds like a Bollywood hero singing in the bathroom—full of pitch, but lacking in depth!

And so I often wonder—what about those who play second fiddle in life? How do they feel? Do they resent the applause going elsewhere? Or do they smile, knowing that while the frontman struts, they hold the rhythm, the harmony, and sometimes, the real power?

To clear my doubts, I decided to interview India's biggest Second Fiddle. Now, don't ask me how I got the appointment—it wasn't through a secretary or PA. You don't need one when the boss doesn't even know you're running the show!

“Sir,” I began reverently, notebook in hand, “how do you keep playing second fiddle?” He leaned back, his bald head tilted a bit, his eyes evasive and clever as a faint smile played on his lips, and whispered: “By making the first fiddle think I'm playing second fiddle. The trick, my dear friend, is to let him believe he's conducting the orchestra, while I'm tuning the strings, writing the notes, and deciding which audience to play for.”

“Don't you ever feel tempted to take center stage?” I asked.

He chuckled, “Why would I? The spotlight blinds you, the microphones catch every wrong note, and the cameras follow your every frown. Me? I stay behind, and while the great maestro hugs the wrong people on foreign stages, I quietly fiddle with the home keys—look away freedoms, keep Manipur burning, open and shut internet connections like a switchboard operator, and yet, no one accuses me of being the lead violinist! Isn't that bliss?”

I nearly dropped my pen. “So, you enjoy being a second fiddle?”

“Enjoy?” he laughed. “It's paradise! Imagine being invisible but indispensable. When people cheer the first fiddle, I bow with him. When they boo, I vanish into the shadows. Who wouldn't want a job like this?”

I thought back to the usher who found a seat for two boys in a crowded revival tent in Charlotte, North Carolina, in 1930. One of those boys was Billy Graham, who went on to preach to millions. That usher, a perfect second fiddle, never got his name in lights, but without him, Graham might have walked away. That was second fiddling at its noblest.

But here was a very different second fiddle—one who had turned the art into a science of manipulation. Not harmony

but dissonance. Not support but sabotage. And I wondered—how many second fiddles in our nation are actually playing their own secret symphonies while the first fiddle struts in borrowed spotlight?

“Sir,” I asked cautiously, “doesn't your conscience ever prick you?”

“Conscience?” he replied, stroking an imaginary viola. “That's for first fiddles! They're the ones who must look noble on the front pages. Me? My job is to keep the background score running, even if the tune is out of key.”

I walked away from that interview, notebook heavy with revelations and heart heavier still. Because I realized that in our country, playing second fiddle has taken on a new meaning. Once it meant sacrifice, humility, and service—like that usher in Charlotte. Today, it means sly maneuvering, silent plotting, and fiddling away while the house burns.

And maybe that's why we citizens feel the heat. The first fiddle waves, beams, and hugs. The second fiddle tightens the screws, pulls the strings, and calls the shots. Together they make music, yes—but it often sounds more like a dirge than a symphony.

Still, the lesson remains: Second fiddles shape history. Sometimes for the better—when they support without ego, when they harmonize without stealing the tune. And sometimes for the worse—when they use their shadowed place to twist the melody of a nation.

So, dear reader, if you find yourself playing second fiddle—at home, at work, in politics, or even in your housing society—ask yourself: Are you providing harmony or are you quietly rewriting the score for your own pleasure? Are you holding the tune together, or are you just fiddling while Rome—or Manipur—burns?

Because make no mistake, the world is full of second fiddles. The parent who sacrifices dreams so their child can shine. The colleague who supports the boss without seeking credit. The friend who keeps quiet so another can grab the mic. These are noble fiddles. But there are also others—the ones who pull strings from the back row, who make sure their tune dominates even when the conductor isn't watching.

As for me, I've decided there's no shame in being a second fiddle. But there is great shame in being one who plays only for himself.

Because the true second fiddle knows this secret: The sweetest music is not in who gets the applause, but in whether the orchestra plays on, while ours plays only for himself, and most everybody thinks the wrong notes are made by the first fiddle all the time, as it's happening now in our country..!

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

Letters to the Editor

When the Law Fails, the Courageous Will Act

Editor,

The hypocrisy is unbearable. The probe is on, but what is it probing? Not the drug peddlers who poison the streets. Not the addicts who rob, assault, and even kill for drug money. The probe is against the very people who stood up when the system refused to. How can this be justice? How can defenders be treated as criminals while offenders are ignored? Authorities preach that the public must not take the law into their own hands. The authorities label it illegal, as if the law itself matters when it is selectively enforced. To call this illegal while failing to enforce justice is not law. This is blatant hypocrisy and it is a betrayal of every citizen who dares to demand safety.

They say there are proper channels, proper procedures, proper systems. But where do these channels lead? To silence? To neglect? To nothing?

A few months back, I properly reported the drug peddling and weed-selling at Paltan Bazar behind Lewduh and yet to this day no action has been taken. What is the use of a system that records complaints only to bury them? Why speak of law when the law itself is applied selectively? And even when drug addicts or peddlers are arrested, how long do they really stay behind bars? A few weeks, sometimes a few months, rarely even a year, before they are back on the same streets repeating the same crimes. What justice is this? What protection does this offer the public? How are families supposed to feel secure when those who threaten them are returned so quickly to society? How many assaults, how many robberies, how many lives must be put at risk while this cycle plays on? If the system cannot even keep offenders away for good, then what purpose does it serve? What is the meaning of an arrest that changes nothing?

The selectivity is clear to us. For instance, the police act quickly when it comes to modified vehicles, tinted windows, or noisy

exhausts. That is something they can do with confidence and speed. But where is the same urgency for drug abuse and peddling? Why is the full force of the law thrown at people with modified bikes and cars while drug dealers walk free? Why is it easier to harass the harmless than to confront the dangerous? Why do the authorities only enforce the law when it is easy for them? And while they look away, fear spreads. Families are left to wonder when addicts will strike again. Communities live with the threat of being robbed, assaulted, or even killed by those desperate for drug money. How long should the public remain silent? How long should parents fear for their children's safety? How long should citizens wait for protectors who refuse to protect?

This is why vigilantism rises. It does not come from chaos but from abandonment. When the law turns its back, the people have no choice but to stand up. Should they simply allow drugs to destroy their communities? Should they stay passive while their safety and the safety of children

is ripped apart? Vigilantism is not a rejection of the law. No. It is a desperate reaction to a law that is absent and yet, instead of recognising this truth, the authorities attack the very people who defended their communities. They praise procedure while punishing courage. They condemn vigilantism while ignoring the failures that created it. What kind of justice protects the guilty and strikes the innocent? What kind of system probes defenders while shielding dealers?

If vigilantism exists, it is because the authorities have failed to do their duty. If anger spreads, it is because trust has already been broken. If the people rise, it is because they have been left without protection. Until the police confront the drug menace in Meghalaya with the same energy they waste on petty fines, every word they speak will remain hollow. Every condemnation will remain hypocrisy. Every probe against the people will remain proof of their failure.

I speak out because I exercise my freedom of speech and expression guaranteed

under the Indian Constitution. I use this right to expose the truth, to challenge hypocrisy, and to demand accountability, and I will not apologize for it. When the law abandons its duty and protects the guilty while punishing the brave, it is not only my right but my responsibility to raise my voice. Speaking the truth is not a crime. Remaining silent in the face of failure and injustice would be far worse.

Yours etc.,

Mebaphylla Rymshon,
Via email

Of reckless driving

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I would like to draw the kind attention of the concerned authorities and the general public towards the issue of reckless motor-cycles drivers, from Mawlai to Bhoi every Sunday. This leads to frequent accidents. Reckless drivers drive their motor-cycles at high speed and don't seem to care about

their own lives and that of others as well. Accidents have become a regular news. Most drivers couldn't care less about their driving. They don't follow traffic rules. Traffic Police are inactive. Under-aged youngsters drive motorcycles without a driving licence; they have no knowledge of traffic rules. Hence urgent steps should be taken on reckless drivers.

Under-aged drivers should be punished. The Government should take speedy action on this matter. They should make strict traffic rules that every person should follow. Licenses of all should be checked regularly so that under-aged people are not allowed to drive and if caught they should be made to pay a heavy penalty.

Yours etc.,
Hilarious Umdor,
Via email

New vision for India-China engagement

Editor,

On September 1, 2025,

The Shillong Times carried a thought-provoking article by Dr. Alex Waterman titled “Importance of the Line of Amity.” In it, he offers a refreshing and deeply human perspective on the India-China border issue. Inspired by Jaideep Saikia, Waterman urges us to re-imagine the boundary not as a ‘Line of Control’ marked by suspicion and hostility, but as a ‘Line of Amity’ grounded in trust, cooperation, and shared humanity.

This vision challenges the conventional notion of borders as barriers. It asks us to see our neighbours not as rivals across a frontier but as partners bound by common geography, history, and aspirations. Borders are more than just lines on maps—they shape the daily lives of millions who yearn for peace, dignity, and opportunities for a brighter future.

Waterman acknowledges that achieving such a transformation will not be easy. Genuine trust cannot be built overnight. Symbolic gestures must be matched with real actions: joint initiatives, cultural exchanges, open dialogue, and people-to-people

connections. Yet, as he reminds us, even the smallest steps have the power to spark profound change.

In today's global climate—where wars rage in several regions, mistrust deepens between nations, and fear of often overshadows goodwill—the idea of a Line of Amity shines as a beacon of hope. If such a vision were realised, borders could become bridges of understanding rather than scars of division. Soldiers would stand not as rivals in arms but as guardians of harmony. Nations would compete in innovation, culture, and human progress instead of hostility. Children would grow free of inherited fear, discovering the joy of friendship across frontiers.

The Line of Amity may begin as an idea, but pursued with patience and sincerity, it could become a lasting legacy of peace for generations to come.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Tura

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

"The greater the effort, the greater the glory."
—Pierre Corneille

The Shillong Times

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Urgent Need for Land Use Policy

IN 1988 the Government of India through the Ministry of Agriculture prepared a "National Land Use Policy (NLUP) Guideline and Action Points" after intensive deliberations. The Policy framed suitable legislation and sought for its sincere enforcement by inserting terms such as imposing penalties by any violation. Unfortunately, the Policy never took off. This Policy was revived in 2023 and outlines a framework for sustainable land and water resource management. The Policy seeks to enhance land productivity, prevent degradation, and ensure the coordinated use of land at various levels. One core principle of the NLUP is the sustainable management of soil and water resources to ensure that these critical resources are available for future generations while meeting the needs of the present. This principle emphasizes practices such as crop rotation, organic farming, and the efficient use of water through techniques like drip irrigation.

Since Agriculture is a state subject, the NLUP has remained only a guideline. Meghalaya has never considered it necessary to have a Land Use Policy despite evidence of land degradation which affects agricultural productivity and environmental health. If the State had legislated for a Land Use Policy (LUP) it could have done better to prevent land degradation by promoting participatory soil conservation practices, preventing deforestation, and encouraging afforestation. Not much has been done to improve land productivity where the top soil is washed off by heavy rainfall. As a result, agricultural production has not improved. Effective land use planning requires coordination at various levels and the District Councils and traditional institutions should be part of the consultative process. As of today, factories are set up on agricultural land as has happened in Bymihat and it has become an accepted practice.

Today the afforestation and reforestation programmes are not implemented systematically and the community is seldom involved. In East Jaintia Hills alone there are 26,000 abandoned rat hole mines that have not been reclaimed. Reclamation of abandoned mines is also an important aspect of the Land Use Policy and eco-restoration. In September 2024 the Central Mine Planning and Design Institute Ltd (CMPDI) had visited Meghalaya to engage in mine reclamation but nothing was heard thereafter. This is due to the absence of good governance where we have the right laws on paper but implementation remains a distant dream. Good governance means creating a system where transparency replaces secrecy, accountability replaces impunity, and genuine progress replaces empty promises. Last year the India State of Forest Report 2023 (ISFR 2023) reported that between 2021 and 2023 Meghalaya recorded a loss of 84.07 sq km of forest. The report did not attribute a specific cause for this reduction, but deforestation in the region is often linked to human activities, rampant mining, agricultural expansion, infrastructure development, and settlement growth. The rural areas of Meghalaya are experiencing large scale deforestation due to rampant quarrying without any eco-restoration plans being followed. The elected MLAs ought to be thinking beyond their 5-year term and have a vision for Meghalaya fifty years hence. Else as scientists have warned Meghalaya is fast heading towards desertification with 42% less rainfall this year. A Land Use Policy is imperative!

A layman's take for a better Shillong

By Toki Blah

A news headline on Sunday, (ST Aug 24, 2025) headlined "Smart City? Shillong Smart City? Still in the making: Public unimpressed" seems to have ignited a spark of interest in the minds of Shillong's usually, "I couldn't care less" attitude towards what's happening to this city. True the ST carried out a tiny sample survey but lets not belittle the effort. At least an endeavour was made to test the waters and the results were far from encouraging. People were not impressed by the progress, though the Smart City Project has been in the offing ever since 2004.

So What's a Smart City? Rudi Warjri in his article "Shillong City: Partially Smart, Never Really Smart" (ST Aug 26, 2025) had enunciated that the objective of the project was to transform Shillong into a sustainable, liveable, and digitally-enabled urban center, focusing on improving core urban infrastructure like smart roads and transport, ensuring clean water and advanced waste management, fostering tourism with intelligent safety and green spaces, and leveraging the city's strategic location and cultural heritage to enhance quality of life and economic development. Smart City or not, the above seems quite a rational and sensible desire for every growing metropolis. This sensible desire however depends greatly on the following.

(a) A vision, foresight or a plan-of-action towards such an objective (b) a political will to carry forward such a vision (c) citizens participation and enthusiasm in the implementation of the vision (d) time tested institutions to implement, manage and sustain the vision. So the pertinent question to ask when we discuss Shillong's welfare and well-being is — do the above four conditions for a 21st century city exist as far as Meghalaya's capital is concerned? A hard realistic look at ourselves is required. Lets try and see if this is possible.

Meghalaya was created in 1972. Based on more than 53 years of mismanaged governance one is forced to conclude that perhaps aside from the demand for political autonomy as a Hill State, other imperatives of statehood were forgotten or ignored. Social and economic factors for the new state never came under the scanner. Funds was never an issue as we were confident that the doles from Delhi would never cease and would suffice. Governance

was an issue we believed would automatically come automatically as we trudged along. The years have proved us wrong and this is never more evident than what happened to the "Scotland of the East". None of our so called "Hill State Leaders" had a clue about urban governance; nor did they give a hoot. This is reflected from the fact that statehood found us with only the Department of Municipal Administration. The threat of political rivalry from smart and slick city based ward commissioners probably caused the Government to discontinue with Ward Commissioner elections from 1973 till till date. The greatest loss of Shillong however is the absence of Civic Representatives and as a consequence the downhill slide ever since of a universally accepted Urban Managing Institution called an Elected Municipal Board.

Then came 1993 with its 74th Amendment and the colossal funding for Urban Infrastructure Development. Something Shillong desperately needed and still needs. We missed that bus and continue to do so because of the absence of elected Municipal Representatives. So much for the 1st condition mentioned at (a) above - a vision, foresight or a plan-of-action for our beloved city.

In the absence of a vision perhaps 'Political Will' could have served its purpose. So do we have the political will towards better urban governance for Shillong? Doubtful! It needed a 1999 Supreme Court directive, after 26 long years, for the first Municipal Elections to be announced. As everyone knows it failed and the reasons are not hard to find. By 1991-92 the MLA schemes were being implemented in full swing. The MLA saw in it the long sought opportunity to win over and influence our fiercely independent and autonomous Dorbar Shnong through distribution of free unaccountable public monies. To say that these political hopes have succeeded beyond expectations is to state the obvious! In the process a deliberate political strategy was also pushed and this was to discourage the Dorbar, as far as possible, to look beyond its respective MLA. If MLA patronage was to continue, dorbars were discouraged to look beyond the help of their respective MLAs. Ward Commissioners and the development funds they

might bring in because of Direct Funding was a direct threat to the political fortunes of Assembly aspirants. What better strategy than to make Dorbars oppose Municipal Elections.

The Dorbars through their Rangbah Shnongs swallowed the bait hook, line and sinker. Petty piecemeal, Shnong specific development was introduced. The larger, more complicated task of city infrastructure development such as better roads, improved lighting, advanced public transport systems, parks and playgrounds, improved markets, enhanced 24x7 water supply, cheaper and more accessible public health care and housing for the poor were rejected. So much for political will!

Coming to the third point we ask, "Do Shillong citizens have enthusiasm and the desire to participate for a better metropolis to live in?" The answer, for all practical purposes, is "blowing in the wind." Unclear, vague, vacillating, indecisive — typical Khasi reaction that stems from lack of education and self confidence! Yes, another nail on the education coffin! I have yet to see people of the city come together to demand for the civic amenities mentioned above. Have youths ever come together to demand playgrounds for themselves? Never, but perhaps they have better stimulating demands in mind. Ever heard of women come together to demand better schooling for their children; better healthcare for themselves; improved and nearby markets for their shopping? Their refrain - "Lehrain phioh shah peit khmat," meaning we can't come forward lest we are marked. Again lack of leadership and unsure of their rights. So who then speaks for the people of Shillong as a whole? Nobody I am afraid.

The Rangbah Shnongs, are so preoccupied with their own self-importance; their own legal identity crisis, (which by the way both the Government and KHADC have refused to endorse); their usual grievance of being recognised only when Govt encounters a crisis, that they hardly have the time nor the energy to speak on behalf of the public of this city. The Dorbars have singularly failed to realize that their real strength as Traditional Village Institutions is by coming together as a united Urban Force. They fail to see that

this unity is a dangerous threat to the political shenanigans, acts of corruption, misgovernance and misuse of power by both the Government and the KHADC and the real reason for these vested interests to keep the Dorbars as disunited as possible. The day the 100 Dorbars of Shillong decide to come together for the good of the people of Shillong; the day they decide that Shillong is their home; the day they decide something has to be done, will be the break of a new dawn of hope for all of us. Hope it comes sooner than later.

To conclude we come to the last point - time-tested institutions to implement, manage and sustain the vision of a better Shillong. Against all who say "No," I am of the opinion that yes such institutions do exist. In fact two such institutions. The tragedy is we have refused to empower them to work as they should and in the process allowed a weird, newly discovered monster called ignorant party based politicians, play such a depressing decisive role in our day to day lives. For example I turn to ST Aug 30, 2025 headlines titled, "Ten-ders for Urban infra work violates 6th Schedule" and it speaks about the rant of the Laban MDC who termed such tenders as a 'violation of the 6th Schedule'. Unprecedented, he claims for Municipal development to take place in 6th Schedule Urban Areas. I really don't know from where this gentleman picked up his profound knowledge of the Constitution and the 6th Schedule but I can safely say, that what he said is just pure unadulterated rubbish!

My point is that the absence of an Elected Municipal Board and the continued disunity of our Urban Dorbars within Municipality jurisdiction to take charge of the civic governance of our city, has left a vacuum for such charlatans and their nonsense. It is my sincere belief that a slight tweak of the existing Meghalaya Municipal Act can easily bring about a close and symbiotic working relationship between Dorbars within Municipal areas and an Elected Municipality. The hope is for some sensible and confident Rangbah Shnong of the area to take a call on the issue and mobilize his other colleagues for the eventuality of such a momentous occasion for Shillong. It will be for the good and betterment of all concerned. It is also hoped that the Urban Affairs Minister takes it upon himself to see that such a relationship comes to pass. It is possible.

Sports Decoded: Science at Play

By Vansh Awasthi

Have you ever wondered how a cricket ball reverse swings, how a football can curl like magic past the goalkeeper, or how sprinters, gymnasts, and swimmers seem to perform feats that look almost superhuman? Behind every dazzling performance in sports lies not just skill and practice, but also science. Every jump, swing, sprint, and spin is really science in motion, showing up right before our eyes.

Take the mystery of reverse swing in cricket. For years it puzzled batsmen and amazed fans. The trick lies in aerodynamics—the science of how air flows around objects. When fielders carefully polish one side of the ball until it shines, while leaving the other side rough, they are setting up two very different airflows. The smooth side lets air glide past quickly, while the rough side slows it down and makes the flow more turbulent. As the bowler sends the ball down the pitch on the seam, the uneven air pressure causes it to swerve in the air, often in the opposite direction to what the batsman expects. Suddenly, the ball that looked like a simple delivery transforms into a nightmare to face. This is not just trickery—it's physics in action. Aerodynamics doesn't stop with cricket either: cyclists crouch low to reduce air drag, sprinters bend forward while running to cut resistance, and even golf clubs are shaped to control how the ball slices through the air.

Football has its own masterpiece of science: the curving free kick. David Beckham, one of the most celebrated free-kick takers in history, became famous for making the ball bend spectacularly. How did he do it? The answer is the Magnus effect. When a football is struck off-center, it starts spinning. That spin changes the way air flows around the ball—on one side the air moves faster, lowering pressure, while on the other side it moves slower, raising pressure. The imbalance pushes the ball sideways, making it curl in mid-air as if obeying Beckham's command. To the audience, it looks like magic; to science, it's just the beautiful outcome of fluid dynamics.

Of course, one of the most important scientific toolkits in sports comes from Newton's Laws of Motion. Yes, the same ones dreaded in school physics classes, but seen in action everywhere on the field. Sprinters blasting out of the starting blocks are fighting against inertia, the tendency of a body to stay still. They lean forward and push powerfully against the track to overcome that resistance and build speed. Swimmers, on the other hand, fight a different enemy: drag. Water is far denser than air, so swimmers work hard to make their movements smooth and efficient. They streamline their bodies, wear suits designed to imitate sharkskin, and even perform long dolphin kicks underwater to reduce surface waves. It's all about slicing through resistance. Weightlifting is another clear example: when an athlete lifts a barbell, they are not only pulling against gravity but also fighting the barbell's inertia, its stubborn refusal to move.

Newton's third law is just as visible. "Every action has an equal and opposite reaction." Watch a volleyball player leap into the air: they slam their feet into the ground, and in return the ground pushes them upwards, launching them skyward. The same happens when a cricket fielder safely collects a catch, hands push gently against the descending ball even as the ball pushes back with equal force. By controlling this exchange, the fielder absorbs the impact without dropping it. These laws may seem like old textbook lessons, but they

come alive every single time an athlete moves.

The science of sports doesn't just stop at the visible level; it also runs deep within the human body. Every sprint, throw, and jump is powered by an incredible team of muscles, bones, joints, and nerves, all working together like parts of a perfectly timed machine. Sports scientists describe this as the kinetic chain. Take the example of a baseball pitcher. The action doesn't just come from the arm, it begins with the legs driving into the ground, continues as the hips rotate, then the torso twists, and finally the arm releases the ball. Each link in the chain passes energy along, building up to that final burst of speed. Gymnasts also play with another fascinating principle: rotational inertia. When they tuck their arms and legs close to their bodies, they spin faster; when they stretch them out, they slow down. That's how they control twists and flips with pinpoint accuracy before landing gracefully. In high jump, athletes exploit physics in a different way. By using the famous Fosbury flop technique, jumpers arch their backs so that their center of mass passes under the bar even though their bodies float above it. It's a clever trick that saves energy and helps clear greater heights.

If the body is like a machine, then it also needs fuel—and in sports, that fuel is called ATP (adenosine triphosphate). Every time a muscle contracts, a little ATP is burned. Different sports call upon different energy systems to supply ATP. Sprinters, who need a quick explosion of energy, rely on the ATP-phosphocreatine system, which delivers power almost instantly but runs out in seconds. Middle-distance runners, like those competing in the 400 meters, depend heavily on anaerobic glycolysis—a system that provides fast energy but produces lactic acid, the culprit behind the burning sensation in tired muscles. Marathoners, on the other hand, lean on the aerobic system, which uses oxygen to produce energy steadily for hours. This is why sprinters, mid-distance athletes, and marathoners all look and train so differently—their bodies specialize in using these energy systems in unique ways.

Together, these principles show that science is not something separate from sports—it is the very heart of it. The spin of a cricket ball, the curl of a football, the force of a swimmer's stroke, or the timing of a gymnast's flip, all are guided by the invisible hand of physics, biology, and chemistry. Science makes athletes faster, stronger, more precise, and more efficient, while also explaining the wonders fans see on the field.

To conclude, every cheer-worthy sporting moment is a little science experiment unfolding in real time. From aerodynamics and the Magnus effect to Newton's laws, kinetic chains, and energy systems, sports and science are inseparable. They are two sides of the same coin, one creating the magic, the other explaining it. Whether it is the roar of a crowd after a goal, the gasp at a gymnast's perfect landing, or the tension of a bowler's delivery, it is science that turns athletic effort into extraordinary spectacle.

(Vansh Awasthi is a curious first-year student at Plaksha University. He is passionate about cricket, chess, mathematics, and writing. With a keen interest in science, technology, and history, he enjoys exploring ideas, expressing them through writing, and engaging in conversations that broaden his perspective).

Letters to the Editor

Felicitations of AIQ- Neet Qualified Students

Editor,
Through this letter I wish to draw the kind attention of the State Government and esteemed NGOs who felicitate meritorious students. A notable category of students, who excel in one of India's most challenging exams, NEET-UG, deserves special recognition. These students not only achieve remarkable scores but also demonstrate altruism by donating seats to fellow batch-mates with relatively lower scores, since they themselves have qualified for the All India Quota (AIQ) through MCC counselling.

I urge the Government and felicitating organizations to acknowledge and appreciate these students' selfless contributions. This recognition would encourage more students to qualify for All India seats, alleviate the Government's burden, and help fulfil the dreams of aspiring medical students with lower scores who cannot afford private medical college seats.

Particular appreciation is due to tribal students who qualify from the unreserved category, showcasing exceptional merit and dedication. By recognizing these stu-

dents, we can foster a culture of generosity and community spirit among our youth.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Metal Music: An Uncharted Territory

Editor,
Metal music has long carried a taboo globally, and also in India where Bollywood melodies have ruled. In the North East as well, the majority still perceive metal genres negatively, especially religious communities.

The misunderstanding may be due to its loud sound, dark imagery, and theatrical style, which often make it seem rebellious or even demonic. But much of this (from what I could find out) is only a facade. Beneath the growls and heavy riffs lies a genre that speaks with surprising honesty. And for beginners, some metal sub-genres are not even dark at all. For example, many symphonic metal bands have women as the lead vocalist, and often they include orchestral elements that sound very much like a church choir, coupled with epic fantasy lyrics that speak of the triumph of Good over Evil. This is perfect for the real-world longing, for the

good society we all wish to see. So where is the demon in this?

Unlike mainstream songs that celebrate love or glamour, metal lyrics often deal with real struggles such as depression, injustice, loneliness, and identity. For listeners, this raw truth feels relatable. Far from spreading negativity, this type of music acts as a release. What may sound aggressive to outsiders often gives fans a sense of peace, helping them confront emotions rather than hide them. What if it is, in fact, a form of therapy in the world of noise created by the rampant negativity in our society today?

Our very own North East is already a bedrock of music, both traditional and Western. Shillong in particular, often called the "Rock/Music Capital of India," has given rise to metal bands that go beyond mere viral entertainment. Their songs speak out against social evils, corruption, ethnic identity, and even political matters. They have taken up issues that neither the celebrated artists of the 2000s nor the current wave of love-song artists have cared to address. In doing so, these bands have carried a sense of responsibility towards our society, proving that metal music can be both powerful and meaningful. This is something our region can truly be proud of.

To end this note, we must understand that metal music is not a path of, or to, evil, but simply a strong way of expressing light through struggles. Therefore, it is time for the general public to look beyond the stereotypes and recognise it for what it truly is. May this also encourage existing band members to never let go of their beautiful craft. After all, it feels better when music sounds chaotic yet true, rather than being glamorous and soft just to suit the uninformed.

Yours etc.,
Sunrise Pohtam, M.Th,
Via email

A Call for Fairness in MPSC Results for Animal Husbandry & Veterinary Officers

Editor,
Through your esteemed newspaper I wish to voice the deep sense of disappointment and frustration felt by many regarding the recently declared MPSC interview results for the post of A.H. & Veterinary Officer on August 28, 2025.

For years, several candidates have been serving the Department tirelessly on 3F and contractual appointments, working in farms, dispensaries, and district establishments under challenging conditions. They

had hoped that their years of experience and dedication would be valued when the time for regular recruitment arrived. Sadly, the results tell a very different story.

The entire selection process was conducted only through a personal interview, omitting a written examination. While this intent should have benefited those already working in the Department, the outcome has turned out to be just the opposite. Many candidates with little or no practical experience—some who only completed their degree a few months ago—have been selected, while those who have served the Government faithfully for years have been left out.

Adding to the pain, candidates with strong academic merit, even Gold Medalists, toppers from different colleges, Masters degree holders were not selected. And among the selected candidates, those with years of experience and good academic score were ranked lower, while candidates with backlogs, supplementary exams, or very low GPAs were ranked higher.

What is most disheartening is that the Department had earlier recommended giving priority to in-service contractual officers in a fair, batch-wise manner. This was not followed. Instead, junior candidates from recent batches were chosen over seniors

who have been in service for a long time. Even the rights of state-sponsored candidates were overlooked, as one candidate not sponsored by the state was selected. Such lapses have left many feeling betrayed and disillusioned.

This is not just about jobs—it is about fairness, respect for hard work, and justice. When a process that should reward merit and experience turns into one that sidelines them, it erodes trust in the system. When those who have already proven their commitment to public service are ignored in favour of the inexperienced, the system itself loses credibility.

At a time when the Hon'ble Chief Minister has emphasized hiring skilled people from Meghalaya, the question must be asked—is this how the government intends to fulfill that vision?

This is an appeal to the concerned authorities to look into this matter with urgency. Experience, service, and merit must count—otherwise, the very spirit of fair recruitment stands compromised.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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

Teachers' Day 2025

THE theme for this year's Teachers' Day is "Inspiring the next generation of learners." If teachers really delve into the theme, and they should, it would entail a lot of sacrifice on their part and an openness to unlearn and relearn. Teaching pedagogy has changed very little. Learning is still top-down; questioning is seldom facilitated and communication skills of learners leave much to be desired. The education system in India needs to undergo a revolution; change and the ability to quickly adapt to that change is also part of the education process. However, humans are largely averse to change, more so adults who are used to operating within a comfort zone. This is what has turned education into a non-productive activity. The attempt by the central government to bring in educational reforms is always delayed by a few decades. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 was introduced without statewide consultation and it came in during those Covid days leaving some states fuming. Nevertheless many states, especially BJP-ruled ones tried to adopt the NEP 2020 even though they did not have the wherewithal especially for vocational courses such as bakery, cookery, and others.

Today many schools are sending their students to intern with different institutions such as banks, municipalities, hotel management institutes etc. How much the students really learn during their internships has not been measured but at least what they know from such exposures are the demands of the world of work. They are no longer sheltered inside classrooms totally unaware of the real world and what it takes to do the work that they have only read about. Coming back to the theme – Inspiring the next generation of learners, this very slogan entails that teachers inspire not just the present set of learners but also train them to inspire the next generation. Why is inspiration needed in the first place? It's because learning has become a challenge and teachers are competing with several other distractions that occupy the minds of their students. Their attention span has dropped down to about 8 seconds only. Social media, especially Instagram and the quest for 'likes' is a major distraction. Attention span is crucial because it directly impacts a person's ability to learn and retain information. Short attention span means students cannot concentrate on lectures, read books, or process complex concepts. This hinders academic performance and limits their ability to acquire new knowledge.

At the workplace, individuals with longer attention spans are better equipped to stay focused on their assignments, resulting in higher efficiency and output. Conversely, individuals with shorter attention spans struggle to concentrate for extended periods, leading to reduced productivity. Attention span is also linked to effective communication and social interactions. In other words, a person with a longer attention span is able to listen better and absorb what is being communicated and to respond better. But this is easier said than done. Students are almost addicted to their mobile phones and social media. How to inspire this generation to interact more with other humans than with their mobile phones is the eternal dilemma.

Teaching in the age of Disruptions

By Patricia Mukhim

Tóday is Teachers' Day and glorious tributes will be paid on this one day to the teachers of all shades but what thereafter? Who cares? There was a time when the teacher was the sole dispenser of knowledge because we were brainwashed into believing that the home was not a place that generated knowledge. We swore it was compulsory to go to school even to learn basic manners quite forgetting that our grandparents who couldn't speak English or even the standard Khasi Sohra were capable of helping to form our characters. Yes, in unspoken ways they lived by example. They struggled to make ends meet and gave us the best they could. What greater teaching on selflessness can there be?

The era of teachers as knowledge dispensers is the age of dinosaurs as far the present Gen Z is concerned. Gen X born in the late 1970s or early 1980 also after them the millennials were subjected to the top-down approach of education where teachers believed they alone were the custodians of knowledge and students were recipients of that knowledge. At that time students didn't think they could read the books that teachers read to learn and transmit to their students. Teachers were also learning. Now the meaning of education has entered a new zone as it were. Gen Z gleams much more from the internet and get the bulk of their information (not knowledge) from the internet, read Artificial Intelligence – Chat GPT. Teachers today must compete with students to bridge their own information gaps. Indeed, the information gap is a huge chasm that seems impossible to bridge. Teaching therefore is no longer business as usual. And if teachers have not got this vital life lesson, they have lost it. They have lost the revolution war and are simply in the classroom because they are permanent employees and the school management cannot get rid of them for fear of being sued. Teachers will revolt against this statement but it's a fact. Teaching in the old mould has become redundant. A good, conscientious teacher realises this admits it and tries to get on the fast track; some even learning from their Gen Z children.

These days students are second guessing if what they learn is indeed what they

really need in the world of work. Students have become smarter, more vocal and can ask critical questions because Artificial Intelligence prompts them what questions to ask their teachers in a particular lesson that was taught. In the past, questioning the teacher was a crime one dared not even contemplate in one's wildest dreams. Now, if you're in a school in Delhi the teachers are constantly being queried for deeper meanings to a context. And what if teachers are not prepared to answer those questions? This is where the role of the teacher as a dispenser of knowledge has ended. Technology has taken over and most answers to questions on a host of issues are available at the click of a button.

So do we still need teachers, I mean humans who are paid to teach. The answer is a resounding "Yes," except that teachers must have the humility to accept that they need to learn afresh and unlearn all those years of information dispensing they have done, for the internet today is far smarter about providing a wide range of information on any topic under the sun, than any human can.

So what is the role of a human teacher then? What is it that Artificial Intelligence can never replace? It is the human emotion; the empathy; the caring; the concern that a human teacher alone is capable of expressing to a student who is scarred by what he/she might have suffered as an adolescent – a broken love affair that can make him/her feel that death is better than living with the pain. It is in these circumstances that the teacher becomes that angel without wings but who can take a heartbroken student under her caring arms and help that student come out stronger and able to cope with life's blows. Yes, that's the role of the teacher today. And dear teachers had better equip themselves for this role reversal – from knowledge dispenser to teaching and living what emotional intelligence is all about.

Some teachers have said they are trained to teach, not to counsel students in distress. This is because the teachers' training programme that does not equip teachers with understanding the pangs of adolescence and dealing

with them through empathetic listening. We understand that teachers too have families to look after and their fair share of emotional turmoil but having taken the oath of treading on the path of teacher-philosophers like Confucious, they cannot back away on the plea of being too busy to give time to a mentally distraught student. It's a sacrifice that those who cannot make should not enter the teaching profession.

We are entering the era of machine generated knowledge. They are more efficient at analyzing trends, crunching numbers and generating reports but they still lack the human skills and it is here that we need human educators. Why? Because human educators alone have what are called "soft skills" such as critical thinking, communicating with a personal touch, able to demonstrate emotional intelligence and empathy and listening to a troubled soul and emoting the right feelings which a machine can never do. A teacher can hug an emotionally disturbed child and be there for her/him. Can AI ever do this? You can't hug a cold, hard, lifeless machine and receive warmth. But you experience the warmth of a human hug because that hug transmits love, caring and a desire to help and that's the big difference in being a human educator today. All these soft skills are what make a human teacher indispensable. Only humans understand the skills needed for team work, trust building and leadership and the value of person to person interaction. The world is a complex place and real-world situations cannot be solved by machines.

There is also such a thing as personalised learning. It's true that even us, human teachers sometimes treat all learners the same way without recognising that every individual processes and absorbs information at different speed and pace. Also, some learners learn better from videos while others come alive in group discussions and still others learn from activities. We humans are all wired differently hence one is left to wonder if one teaching method is able to resonate with every student. It is here that India has to experiment with personalized teaching-learning methods to deliver education in a way

that's tailored to the specific strengths of individual students. So, what does this mean? It means tailored lesson plans, assessments and learning materials. Is this possible in a country of 40 students in a classroom? It's a tough call and that is why our learning outcomes are so poor. But its high time we tried these methods.

Also, when what we learn becomes outdated so fast we need constant upskilling and re-skilling. Since technology assists education and technology changes so fast, it is possible for teachers to get into this treadmill of constantly learning so as not to become outdated? Indeed, we now understand that education does not end with graduation or the series of learnings thereafter. Many of us have enrolled for learning courses in journalism because if we don't learn new and innovative ways of doing our trade we will become outdated and uninteresting.

Virtual and remote learning have become life savers in states like Manipur which were wracked by violence for over two years now. Many have enrolled in online classes and learned while in the refugee camps so that they do not need to lose out. Hence for trouble-afflicted populations online learning has been a boon. If not for such opportunities, many of the students from the hills of Manipur would have had to drop out of their schools, colleges and universities. Hence hybrid learning is a boon of the modern age and we need to capitalise from such technology-assisted methods.

The lesson for teachers therefore is that teaching also involves life-long learning and anyone who is not ready for this journey of a lifetime and thinks teaching is a cushy job is living in a fool's paradise. Teaching is a conscious choice; a calling; a vocation. It's certainly not something you get into for want of a better job. Perhaps the problem with our education system is precisely that – square pegs, don't fit into round holes. And think how much damage is inflicted on batches and batches of students by one teacher who can't teach!

No apologies for writing this piece which comes from the heart of one who was a teacher for a quarter of a century and learnt so many lessons in adversity!

A Teacher, towards Teachers: Some Reflections

By Sukalpa Bhattacharjee

The theme of Teachers' Day 2025 has been set as "Inspiring the Next Generation of Learners". For every teacher, amidst heart warming wishes and sincere gestures of gratitude expressed by students on this day, this is also a day for reflection on our roles as mentors, educators and above all as vehicles of knowledge transmission. Any teacher, who has partially or to a large extent imbibed these roles in his or her being, would agree that genuine recognition by students is the greatest reward that a teacher can aspire for. There has been a shift of paradigm, from teaching being a mission, to teaching as a profession. In most teachers with passion for teaching, it is a judicious mixture of the mission to impart knowledge and the struggle to equip oneself professionally for meeting the challenges posed by Educational Policies on the one hand, and the radical change in socio-cultural values, on the other. However, in the present context of new experiments with educational structures, one has to address the issue of a rising sense of discontent and misgivings among the stakeholders of the education system – students, teachers and parents/guardians. Apart from issues relating to institutional policies, fees structure, syllabus, security on academic campuses and recruitment of adequately qualified teachers, etc., one of the crux issues of reflection, is the growing disconnect between the teacher, the student and the syllabus, even in a situation where classes are held regularly, teachers and students are both present. Then surely, only regular attendance cannot ensure an ideal learning atmosphere. It is understandable that an individual teacher definitely cannot address the contentious issues that are responsible for this 'theatre of the absurd' – it is an elephant in the room. So what is that a teacher can do to minimize the growing disconnect between the major vertices of the educational system?

In a traditional system of teaching, the classroom (or any space such as laboratory, modelled on the idea of a learning space and interaction/interface between the teacher and the taught), becomes the crucial site where the process of transmission of knowledge actually takes place). A class or a classroom is not a stereotypical space with a unidirectional flow of knowledge from the teacher to the student, where the teacher is no longer the sole possessor of a 'secret knowledge' that students aspire for. Traditionally, the classroom has been a contested space where the teacher always already held the epistemic centre pushing students to the periphery. However, contemporary critical pedagogy perceives the classroom as a shared liminal space of collaborative alter/native knowledge systems through a production of mutual affectation between the teacher and the students (as opposed to mere subjective emotions). This in turn opens the possibility of conceiving of classroom encounters as particularly intense sites for the making, unmaking and remaking of selves in ways that surpass theories of 'learning'. That is, learning is less about the accumulation of knowledge and more about embodied encounters that transform the embodied selves in concrete relations.

In such a context, teaching is much more difficult than learning because teaching calls 'to let learn'. The teacher, initiating the process of learning 'to let learn' must unlearn his/her own subjective inhibitions and prejudices. It is in his/her capacity to 'let learn' that a teacher can transform the classroom from a space of discrimination (on the basis of economic class, gender, caste, learning abilities) into a space of liberation. Black feminist author bell hooks (who writes her name in small case) has mentioned how the class (classroom) is

also a space of discrimination on the basis of (economic) class, which reinforces social hierarchy in the education system. It is well known that B.R. Ambedkar also faced social exclusion in the classroom because of his caste. So in a classroom, it is the teacher who learns and unlearns more than the student in order to grow as a mentor, educator and transmitter of knowledge, particularly in the context of policy changes and against a hierarchical social system. In India, educationists such as Rabindranath Tagore and Jiddu Krishnamurti defined teachers as 'perpetual learners' engaged in the process of lifelong learning. "A lamp can never light another lamp unless it continues to burn its own flame" (Tagore). Learning does not necessarily imply mechanical learning of skills and technology and piling-up of certificates but learning to empathise with the student and understand the difficulty level. Understanding and integrating environmental concerns into the educational praxis, developing sensitivity towards differently-abled students, and creating inclusive learning environments are all integral components of a teacher's professional development and ongoing learning.

Self-reflection on such a grave issue is certainly not possible without a spirit of self-criticism. And therefore, it must be admitted that in most cases, absence of empathy in the teacher is one of the most fundamental reasons for the disconnect between the teacher and the taught, and is therefore a deterrent to the learning system. Absence of empathy towards the learners is often expressed by teachers through cold indifference, coercive actions, ridicule or comparison with other learners, which affects the morale and dignity of the student. One can give a thousand reasons, some very pertinent ones for the growing absence of empathy in teachers, but nothing can justify such a stance which destroys the educational rights of a generation of learners. Many lives have been ruined because of the social exclusion that learners, especially those belonging to vulnerable age groups and marginalized social and economic strata, face in the classroom. Some permanently give up formal education, others become dropouts. Our triumph as teachers lies in retaining students in the system by identifying their strength and not by objectifying them as academic outcasts. Teachers have to share both success and failures of their students and be morally accountable. One knows from accounts of the lives of several great thinkers that morning always does not need to show the day. Albert Einstein was labelled as a slow learner or poor student by his Principal in school due to his disdain for memorization, and the rest is history.

Therefore, teachers have the potential to be prominent agents of transformative action in the society through their role as leaders, educators and votaries of social justice. "A teacher affects eternity" is a quote by Henry Adams, which students reiterate in their speeches on every Teachers' Day. As in the case of many other noble professions, teachers are also often not given their due (material and non-material). But teachers as committed mentors are among the few singularly blessed people, who are immortalized by their progeny (students), for the way in which teachers have touched their lives. A more inclusive education system, inspired by secular values of a Welfare State can be realized if the rights of teachers and their autonomy of free thinking can be protected by teachers themselves, standing in solidarity with each other to uphold the idea of education, with a human face.

The author can be contacted at sukalpa_b@yahoo.com

Letters to the Editor

Happy Teachers' Day?

Editor,
Every year on September 5, we line up to garland teachers, give speeches, and call them "nation-builders." Once the flowers wither and the applause dies down, our teachers are left to fight for their survival. Is this how we honour the people who hold up the foundation of our society? The ones watering the roots of our children?

The truth is painful, while we celebrate Teachers' Day with pomp, many of our teachers in Meghalaya are still unpaid, underpaid, or pushed into "ad-hoc" uncertainty. They are not standing in classrooms with dignity; they are standing on the streets with placards. The article "Rain Knowledge, Eat Air," published on September 1, 2025, by Elmerine Diengdoh, exposes this cruel irony with cutting precision, cushioned in humour that barely masks the hard-hitting truth that teachers are giving knowledge as freely as rain, yet forced to "eat air" when their salaries are withheld.

How can we speak of a bright future for our children while dimming the lives of those who guide them? Cutting sanctioned posts, delaying arrears, and pushing teachers to plead for their rightful wages is not just negligence; it is injustice. If our government cannot provide dignity to teachers, then every Teachers' Day celebration is nothing more than hypocrisy. Respect is not a speech, not a bouquet; it is fair pay, job security, and policies that protect those who educate our children.

Anything less is neglect dressed as gratitude.

To every teacher reading this, who continues to show up despite the struggles, we owe you our deepest gratitude. Thank you for pouring your energy, patience, and hope into shaping the minds and futures of our children. Happy Teacher's Day.

Your's etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

Essence of Right to Information Act, 2005

Editor,
The RTI Act legislated by the then Congress led UPA- 1 on June 15, 2005 under the able leadership of Prime Minister (late) Dr Manmohan Singh has unerringly become not only an effective tool to checkmate the widespread corruption that were spreading their tentacles but also a noble crusade to empower the hoi-polloi to assert their rights. Sadly, the present dispensation of saffron government is reportedly trying to surreptitiously compromise this Act!

Now, turning to our home State of Meghalaya, it has been supposedly stated that the filing of RTI has not picked up the much-needed pace. I hope it's the other way. Incidentally, on August 22 of last month I had applied an RTI in the Office of the Treasury Officer, Shillong South regarding a pension query but out of the blue, I got a call from this Office within three days to come and collect the

letter on RTI answers which I have just filed! Such exemplary public services ought to be replicated in all government establishments. Conversely, there are instances in some offices where RTI applications are not given much importance thereby leading to inordinate delay even going beyond the stipulated time-frame of this Act. For such unnecessary dilly-dally, the delinquent offices must be penalized for exceeding the time given. The penalty is fixed at the rate of Rs 250 per day but not beyond Rs. 2,500 overall. Be that as it may, but I have not heard of such punitive actions being implemented in Meghalaya!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Counterpoint: Vigilantism vs. Lawful Action on Drugs

Editor,
This is with reference to the recent letter concerning the drug problem in our State. While I respect the sentiments expressed, I feel it is important to correct certain impressions.

The newly constituted Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) has in fact been working with commendable pro-activity. The seizures carried out over the past months, including the operation at Jewduh, are evidence of this. A video of that raid itself shows ANTF officers directly involved. We must not be complacent about

the level of intelligence gathering and effort that has enabled the apprehension of several major suppliers and peddlers. It is undeniable that more needs to be done to eradicate the menace at its root, but to dismiss the ANTF's work is both unfair and inaccurate.

Those of us who caution against vigilantism should not be mistaken for indifference to the issue of drugs. On the contrary, we are deeply concerned about the consequences such actions may have—driving those in need of treatment further underground instead of encouraging them to seek help. With regard to the perception that offenders are often released "scot-free", it should be clarified that in cases involving commercial quantities, such instances are extremely rare. If there is confusion, this is a matter best clarified by those more conversant with the legal process.

It is also necessary to highlight the plight of young people imprisoned for the mere offence of drug use rather than for peddling. The absence of proper segregation in our prisons means that first-time users are often exposed to hardened criminals, with the risk of returning to society more entrenched in criminal behaviour. What then becomes of their future, and of the well-being of their families?

The government, civil society and non-governmental organisations are not idle in this struggle. The Harm Reduction Programme, the Nasha Mukti Bharat Abhiyan, as well as interventions by the Meghalaya AIDS Control So-

ciety, the Directorate of Social Welfare, the Police, NGOs and community groups are ongoing examples of structured responses. Yet these initiatives must be strengthened and supported. In my view, faith-based groups too should step forward to play a greater role in prevention, rehabilitation, and community support.

The drug problem is real and demands decisive action. But let us ensure that our approach is guided by law, compassion, and a vision of rehabilitation—so that we may save not only lives but futures.

Yours etc.,
A Thangkiew,
Shillong

MPSC written exams

Editor,
The Meghalaya Public Service Commission through the notification No. MPSC/EX-c/7/2023-2024/140, Dated Shillong, the 29th July, 2025 had published the tentative dates for conducting the exams for various posts. For example, for the post of Sub Inspector of Statistics under the Directorate of Economics and Statistics (April, 2025) the tentative date for conducting the exam is October 18, 2025. Similarly, for the post of Draughtsman Grade-II/ Surveyor Grade-II under the Directorate of Soil and Water Conservation (April & June, 2025) the tentative date is October 25, 2025.

However, in the notification No. MPSC/EX-c/7/2023-2024/158 Dated Shillong, the

August 25, 2025 the dates for conducting the exams for the above two post have been shifted to September 20, 2025 and September 27, 2025 respectively. The same goes for the post of Accounts Assistant under the Directorate of Community & Rural Development (April, 2025) and Sub-Divisional Officer/ Assistant Engineer (Civil) under PHE Department and under Public Works (R&B) Department (May, 2025) in which the exam dates have been shifted to a much earlier date from the date as mentioned in the tentative schedule.

This change has caused inconvenience and distress to many candidates who had made arrangements accordingly because many aspirants are working outside the state in the private sector and they have already applied for leave based on the earlier tentative schedule and this sudden change will make it impossible for them to write the exams, thereby denying them an opportunity especially for those candidates who are closer to the upper age limit.

I request the Commission to consider the impact of this change on candidates and take necessary steps to give fair chance to all aspirants.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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“There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm.”

— Willa Cather

The Shillong Times

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Some reform, some benefit

THE rationalization of Goods and Services Tax (GST), the first of “a double blast of happiness” before this Diwali and Chhath Puja has come as a relief to people across the board, to the extent that the prices of several items would reduce. This is also claimed to be a major step to offset the US trade tariff financial strain for the people. However, the government must explain why this rationalization took so long. The GST was implemented on July 1, 2017. Eight years have passed since its implementation, which was then claimed to be a market unification reform. It was clear to all that there were many issues with the new system – which was conceived by the UPA government of Manmohan Singh, blocked in parliament by the then opposition including the BJP, but was finally implemented by the BJP-led NDA government. The credit for this reform step should be shared, thus, by both the UPA and the NDA.

The market unification exercise was a gargantuan task, especially as the markets had their own dynamics and were mostly an unruly segment, where middle-men made the largest cut, with consumers on the one side and producers like farmers on the other side bearing the brunt of this chaos. Tax evasion was widespread before the GST implementation, but the fact is also that such practices still continue without much checks. Yet, the market unification exercise itself had its eminent good sides. The tax revenue for the central and state governments multiplied after GST came into force. Much of the infrastructure development that takes place in the country are due largely to the huge funds the GST regime brought to the exchequer. At the same time, it is important that the lacunae that still exist are corrected and the system more simplified and benefits enlarged.

As of now, GST has been simplified to a two-slab structure – of five per cent and 18 per cent. The present reforms cut taxes on household essentials like soaps, toothpaste, Indian breads etc to 5 per cent or nil thereby boosting affordability. The GST on life-saving drugs, medicines etc has been reduced from 12 per cent to Nil or five per cent, obviously making healthcare more affordable. Tax on two-wheelers, small cars, TVs, ACs and cement have been cut from 28 percent to 18 percent. This would be benefiting the middle class consumers. Also, tax on farm machinery, irrigation equipment etc., has been cut from 12 percent to 5 per cent, reducing farming costs. On the other hand, the reforms also saw to it that the tax on tobacco, pan masala, aerated drinks, and luxury goods is raised to 40 per cent. In the long run, however, chances are that the prices would again push up. Markets have to be closely watched to ascertain how these tax cuts have been beneficial to the common man.

A Context-Specific Education for Northeast India

By Dr Samir Talati

Today is Teachers' Day and it can be an occasion for people shaping the future of children to reflect critically on the type of context-specific education in the Northeast that responds to the region's unique linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic landscapes and promotes equitable and effective learning outcomes for all. Amid the debate on demographic changes and ethnic conflicts around diverse identities and cultures in Northeast India, one notices a growing awareness and affirmation of ethnic identity. Responding to this challenge, some educationists advocate cultural pluralism in education, encouraging those involved in it to be responsive to the educational needs and social contexts of ethnic minority students, to which most tribal students of the region belong.

Education is a pedagogic medium that shapes the child's attitudes, values, and behaviour, transmits language, culture, and social organisation, and develops an individual and group identity. It helps the individual to accept oneself and one's cultural group and move from the state of “I” to “us”. Education, thus, functions as a vital agent of socialisation by transmitting values and historical narratives, sharing traditions, and fostering in individuals a strong sense of ethnic identity that reinforces in-group cohesion and continuity across generations. It is for this reason that John Dewey spoke of education as a means of social continuity of life. Educationists agree that the positive or negative attitudes formed early in life grow further with time.

Scholars point out that three issues are crucial in the education of ethnic minorities: culture, language, and identity. Preserving, protecting, and promoting them enables tribal students to withstand the challenges posed by neo-liberal and market-driven assimilation. A context-specific education that takes into account their aspirations for modernity, combined with their socio-cultural reality, is the need of the hour. In the multi-ethnic context of Northeast India, a “culturally responsive education” can offer a meaningful solution. Its features can be: (i) teachers develop a positive attitude towards the students' socio-cultural context; (ii) open and free cultural exchange in schools; (iii) curriculum reflecting cultural diversity; and (iv) instructional strategies to be consistent with the student's cultural experiences. Research shows that students learn a subject matter better

if taught through examples of their own culture. Such an educational system requires teachers with sensitivity and respect for cultures other than their own. Educationists agree that a teacher's knowledge of ethnic identity development processes is vital to the student's success at school and to cognitive, physical, moral, social, linguistic, and personality development.

Studies show that the indigenous youth possess particular learning styles that put them at a disadvantage in schools that follow a uniform teaching method. Indigenous epistemology is both individual and communal, idiosyncratic, and contextualised. It recognises the stability that comes from acquiring life skills that help preserve indigenous knowledge, practices, and philosophies. It comes from gaining deep wisdom about the pressures of contemporary societal contexts. Besides paying close attention to ethnic

tion. Their own language enables minority groups to articulate effectively their history, culture, and political aspirations. It also helps them to develop a greater understanding of and love for their own culture. For the indigenous peoples, showing their indigenous roots is important not only for identity purposes but also to protect their legal rights to services, land, and welfare programmes. However, often even the best-intentioned educational policies can work to the detriment of indigenous language, culture, and identity preservation. Hence, education needs to be contextualised to give expression to local concerns and aspirations. However, the rights of minority groups should become part of the broader educational curriculum, and that can make students of dominant groups too aware of their responsibility towards minority communities.

The justification for cul-

Scholars point out that three issues are crucial in the education of ethnic minorities: culture, language, and identity. Preserving, protecting, and promoting them enables tribal students to withstand the challenges posed by neo-liberal and market-driven assimilation. A context-specific education that takes into account their aspirations for modernity, combined with their socio-cultural reality, is the need of the hour. In the multi-ethnic context of Northeast India, a “culturally responsive education” can offer a meaningful solution.

epistemologies, educators also should take into account the general aptitudes, capabilities, and interests of minority students so that they, too, may derive optimum benefits from the education system. UNESCO's call for “inclusive education” should encourage policy-makers and educators to adopt a pedagogy and school governance that are flexible, accommodative, and responsive to both the cultural context and community modes of formal and non-formal learning across generations. A multicultural approach to education can be the right step in this direction.

The local language in education is crucial in this context for identity formation, as a powerful tool of empowerment and an effective instrument of socialisa-

turally responsive education comes from a general belief that students of ethnic minorities consistently perform lower than their peers according to traditional measures of school achievement because their home culture is at odds with the culture and expectations of schools. This mismatch in culture results in the perennial “achievement gaps.” In response to these gaps, educators have theorised that schooling must be designed and practised in ways that more closely match the cultures students bring with them from home. Hence, in the light of the distinct historical, linguistic, and sociocultural realities of Northeast India's tribal communities, adopting culturally relevant and context-specific education is imperative to ensure pedagogical inclusivity;

sustain indigenous heritage, and promote equitable educational outcomes that are both academically rigorous and culturally affirming. Such a pedagogical approach will not only help preserve indigenous knowledge systems and affirm cultural identity but will also bridge educational disparities, fostering both academic success and socio-cultural empowerment of ethnic communities.

Ethnicity is a legitimate grouping in a pluralist nation-state. In a multicultural context, the needs of every sub-unit of the population are the responsibility of the state and of its citizens. State institutions have a pivotal role to play in inclusively embracing all social groupings with their diverse sociocultural expressions. The education system, in particular, with its emancipatory promises, can take along every aspiring group towards common nation-building while allowing the latter enough space to express their individualities.

While culturally relevant education is crucial for ethnic minorities, it is also important to remember that such an education cannot happen in isolation. Educational space for ethnic minorities should be created within the broader national educational framework. The students belonging to minority groups should be allowed freedom to explore and affirm their ethnic identities and, provided with spaces for free expression of their ethnic individual identities within the broader social space of the country. It means that caution needs to be exercised while creating such an educational space. Inserting cultural knowledge as self-contained curricular material fundamentally changes the meaning of culture and forces students to choose between “academically successful” or being “a Bodo, Garo, Khasi, Naga, and fails to alter the culture and structure of schooling. Culture is not something that can be taught as a discrete school subject. Rather, the focus of education should be on self-determination of ethnic minority groups, institutional discrimination, and indigenous epistemologies.

Advancing context-specific education for the tribal students of Northeast India is not merely an academic reform but also a strategic imperative to honour their cultural heritage, address unique socio-linguistic realities, and empower communities with learning that is both locally resonant and globally relevant.

(The writer is with North Eastern Social Research Centre, Guwahati stalatinesrc@gmail.com)

A Sociological Reflection Eco-Feminism and the Khasi Worldview

By Teinam Dkhar

Eco-feminism is a perspective that connects the domination of women with the exploitation of nature. It argues that just as patriarchal systems marginalize women, modern development models exploit the environment, both treated as resources to be controlled. Through my study of Sociology of Environment, I began to realize that eco-feminism is not only a theoretical framework but also a way of understanding my own cultural roots as a Khasi. In our language, traditions, and festivals, I find echoes of eco-feminist values that emphasize balance, care, and respect for the natural world.

The rise of eco-feminism across the globe emerged alongside environmental and women's movements. In India, it found a living expression in struggles like the Chipko Movement of the 1970s, where rural women of Uttarakhand hugged trees to protect them from deforestation. Their resistance was not only about saving forests but about protecting their water, fuel, and livelihoods. Similarly, the Appiko Movement in Karnataka during the 1980s emphasized the need for forest conservation, biodiversity protection, and sustainable use of resources. These movements highlighted how women and marginalized communities are most affected by environmental degradation, while also being leaders in conservation.

In Khasi culture, eco-feminist ideas are embedded in language itself. The use of Ka (feminine) and U (masculine) to name natural forces reveals how our ancestors imagined nature in gendered terms. For instance, Ka Mei-Mariang (Mother Nature), Ka Um (water), Ka Sngi (the sun), and Ka Leilieh (the night) are feminine, associated with nurturing, fertility, and renewal. On the other hand, U Slap (the rain), U Pyrtat (lightning), and U Kdur (thunder) are masculine, representing energy, strength, and sometimes destruction. Rather than placing one above the other, this worldview emphasizes complementarity and balance, an understanding very close to eco-feminist thought.

The relationship between people and nature is also reflected in Khasi and Jaintia

festivals. The Chad Sukra festival, celebrated by the Jaintia community before the sowing season, is not only a prayer for a good harvest but also a reminder of the importance of conserving the fertility of the soil and maintaining harmony with nature. Similarly, the Shad Suk Mynsiem festival among the Khasi people is a thanksgiving celebration for the gifts of nature, where rituals and dances express the community's gratitude for the cycles of life. These festivals are cultural practices, but they also carry ecological messages: they remind us that human survival is tied to respecting and protecting the environment.

In my sociological understanding, especially through the classes I have taken on the Sociology of Environment, I feel inspired to explore these connections further. Digging on Khasi terms and festivals has shown me that eco-feminism is not just an imported concept but something already present in our worldview. It is a rediscovery of knowledge that our ancestors lived by, a reminder that the environment is sacred and that our relationship with it must be guided by respect, care, and balance.

Eco-feminism teaches that the struggles of women and the struggles of nature are deeply connected. While the Chipko and Appiko movements highlight this truth through acts of resistance, Khasi and Jaintia traditions embody it through language, festivals, and cultural practices. Referring to nature as Ka Mei-Mariang or Ka Leilieh is more than a linguistic choice, it is a worldview that gives dignity to nature's forces.

As I reflect on these lessons, I realize that environmental conservation is not only about laws and policies but also about remembering and reviving our cultural values. Protecting forests, rivers, and soil is inseparable from protecting identity, culture, and community. To honor both women and nature, we must return to these values of balance and interdependence, which our traditions have preserved for generations. In this way, eco-feminism becomes not only a theory but also a lived reality in the Khasi worldview.

Letters to the Editor

“The Silent Cry of a Generation”

Editor,

Each morning we awaken with a quiet uncertainty—an existential question disguised as a daily worry: Will today bring us closer to the lives we imagine for ourselves, or will it pass like the others, heavy with waiting? This uncertainty is not ours alone; it belongs to a generation burdened with dreams deferred. We are educated, trained, and brimming with passion, yet we find ourselves at the threshold of opportunity with doors that rarely open.

This struggle reveals a deeper paradox. Society extols education as the path to liberation, yet in practice, knowledge often binds before the silent power of connection. It is not uncommon to find young doctors, engineers, and scholars—symbols of intellectual achievement—left without meaningful work, not because they lack ability, but because they lack access to invisible networks of influence. What does this say about the meaning of merit? If human worth is judged less by skill than by whom one knows, then society

itself loses its moral compass. Education becomes an ornament, not a force of transformation.

The promise of equality—central to justice—fades when the accident of one's birth or social ties outweighs the labor of one's mind and spirit. When positions of responsibility are granted not on the basis of ability, but through kinship with power—be it political ties, wealth, or patronage—what future awaits the youth who strive honestly? It is not simply a matter of employment; it is the moral structure of society that is at stake. A system that rewards influence over integrity teaches its children that truth is powerless, that effort is in vain, and that justice bows before privilege.

It is not uncommon to witness a paradox: people who raise their hands in worship within the walls of the church, yet with those same hands exploit, deceive, or steal in society. This contradiction invites us to ask: What does it mean to live a Christian life—or indeed, a truly religious life? True faith is not confined to ritual, song, or gesture. Clapping hands in church is an expression of devotion, but devotion without integrity is hollow. Religion, at its heart, calls for a unity of inner be-

lief and outward action. To profess faith yet act unjustly in society is to fracture this unity, reducing religion to performance.

The question is therefore not only practical but ethical: If the hands that rise in prayer are the same hands that steal in society, is it truly God who is worshipped—or merely the self in disguise? Yet this tension calls us to reflection: What is the purpose of education in a world where power decides who may enter and who must wait? Can justice truly exist if opportunity is inherited rather than earned? And if so many bright minds are silenced by circumstance, what future can we imagine for the generations to come?

For centuries, education has been upheld as the light that guides humanity out of ignorance. Yet, in our present times, we witness a troubling paradox: no matter how deeply one cultivates wisdom, without social connections or influence, the path to opportunity remains closed. This raises a profound question about the essence of justice. If merit is ignored in favour of favouritism, then education loses its emancipatory power and becomes merely ornamental.

When the human spirit is denied the dignity of

meaningful work, it begins to wither. For the youth, whose very essence is possibility and becoming, prolonged unemployment often transforms into despair. The dream of contributing to society, of giving form to one's skills and education, slowly erodes, leaving behind only the heavy weight of futility. Depression, then, is not merely a personal struggle—it is the silent cry of a generation whose potential is left unused. Philosophers have long argued that labor is more than survival; it is a mode of self-realization. To work is to affirm one's place in the world, to weave oneself into the fabric of community. When opportunities are absent, youth are alienated not only from economic life but from their own sense of purpose. Thus, unemployment is not simply an economic statistic—it is an existential wound.

It would be naïve to claim that governments must provide employment to all, for no society can guarantee such a totality. Yet it is equally naïve to absolve leaders of responsibility. The government can reform education and policies to match industry needs (tech, green energy, healthcare, creative industries), create partnerships between universities and industries so graduates

are prepared for real jobs, not just exams. Policies are not merely bureaucratic tools; they are moral instruments by which a society declares whose future matters. To create opportunities is to affirm the dignity of the young. To neglect such responsibility is to abandon them to hopelessness, and by extension, to weaken the very future of the nation. Do we, as a society, allow our youth to drown in despair, or do we rise to create the conditions in which their potential can flourish?

Yours etc.,
Mébanrihulang Nongrem,
Via email

GST relief brings cheer

Editor,

For years, ordinary people have lived under the weight of GST, a tax many jokingly called the “Great Suffering Tax.” Yes, it came down hard, emptying our wallets and dampening our spirits and even our hopes of dreaming big. From medicines to school notebooks and even basic food items, nothing was spared. People struggled on with this burden with a great deal of groan and moan.

Now, a fresh GST an-

nouncement has finally brought unprecedented cheer. What has come as a big relief is zero GST on health care and insurance. Earlier, the state was charging a whopping 18% on services linked to survival and healing. The government seemed merciless—almost like taxing life itself. With this new policy, citizens can breathe a little easier.

Another happy change is the removal of the 12% GST on school stationery. Essential items like exercise books, pencils, and pens—the basic tools of learning—were once treated like luxuries. The weaker sections of society, already struggling with high prices, had to pay extra just to educate their children. Now, with the tax gone, classrooms should feel more welcoming and affordable. Needless to say, no developing nation can truly thrive if health is treated as a privilege or if knowledge is burdened with taxes.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gawai,
Shillong

Teaching in the age of AI

Editor,
The article “Teaching in the age of disruption”

(ST September 5, 2025) by Patricia Mukhim made interesting reading and to substantiate her views it is fact that we are living through a pedagogical inflection point where education is no longer a linear transmission of knowledge, but a dynamic, contested and increasingly algorithmic terrain. AI tutors, chatbots and adaptive platforms are reshaping how students learn but also, they cheat, disengage or bypass critical thinking. Students often use AI tools for shortcuts, eroding the value of struggling with inquiry. Digital distractions (phones, social media, multitasking) compete with classroom engagement. Teachers now battle not just boredom, but algorithmic dopamine loops. Traditional exams and assignments are easily gamed by generative AI. Educators must now design authentic, application-based assessments. Post-pandemic classrooms are emotionally volatile. Anxiety, isolation and trauma disrupt learning far more than curriculum gaps. Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools are powerful but not universally accessible. Linguistic, infrastructural and economic divides mean some students are left behind.

So, what is the evolving

role of teachers in the age of AI? From instructor to mentor, teachers are shifting from content delivery to facilitating interpretation, ethical navigation and critical inquiry. They help students question AI outputs, spot bias and apply knowledge meaningfully. AI can personalise instruction, but cannot replicate empathy, encouragement or moral guidance. Teachers read emotional cues, mediate conflict and build trust—functions no algorithm can mimic. AI is an ally, not adversary and educators use it to automate grading, generate quizzes and personalise assignments, freeing time for deeper engagement. The best teachers now co-design learning experiences with AI, not compete against it. Teachers are becoming networked professionals, sharing strategies across borders and disciplines. They must continuously upskill, adapting to new tools while preserving pedagogical integrity.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

Giorgio Armani: The impact and legacy of a fashion icon

Armani's passing at the age of 91 has closed a golden age in high fashion, and consolidated the legacy of a visionary who forever redefined the codes of contemporary style. The designer's death marks a crucial moment for an empire that generates annual revenues of €2.3 billion euros.

Armani transformed fashion with unstructured silhouettes that challenged decades of sartorial tradition. At a time when shoulder pads dominated the catwalks and men's suits still followed rigid Victorian codes, the Milanese designer proposed something radically different: sophistication through simplicity.

His genius lay in understanding that true luxury did not shout, but whispered – the relaxed structure and flowing lines of Armani jackets freed both men and women alike from the strictures of extreme formality. Armani's business success was, in essence, this concept of understated elegance turned into a multi-million-euro empire.

Dressing the dreams of millions

Armani is recognised for having invented red carpet fashion, an achievement that transcends the textile industry and enters the realm of popular culture.

From Richard Gere in the 1980 film *American Gigolo* to today's stars, the Italian designer understood that dressing Hollywood meant dressing the dreams of millions of people.

His creations did more than just adorn bodies. They constructed characters, defined eras, and set global standards of aspiration. On screen, each Armani suit became a silent expression of what it meant to be elegant, powerful and desirable.

Armani also helped to make the "made in Italy" label synonymous with quality for consumers, elevating Italian manufacturing to the highest levels of prestige. Far more than a fashion designer, he was a cultural ambassador who exported Mediterranean sophistication to global markets, from Tokyo to New York.

The Armani empire is not only a testament to commercial success, but also to the ability to transform a coherent

artistic vision into an enduring cultural phenomenon.

A maximalist minimalist

In an industry beholden to ostentation, Armani embraced sober restraint as his creative philosophy. His neutral palettes, exquisite textures and impeccable cuts proved that it was possible to be both revolutionary and subtle. Each garment was an exercise in subtraction, in stripping away the unnecessary to reach the pure essence of the design.

This minimalist approach was not one of coldness, but distilled warmth. His garments enveloped the wearer in a second skin of confidence, transforming clothing from mere attire to psychological armour.

For more than five decades, Armani shaped modern elegance with a clarity of vision that extended far beyond fashion.

Armani's influence extends from the architecture of his boutiques to the philosophy of life he represented: beauty found in simplicity, power expressed with moderation.

Today, as the fashion world mourns this irreparable loss, it is clear that Giorgio Armani did not just dress bodies: he dressed an era.

His legacy will live on in every silhouette that celebrates elegance over ostentation, in every garment that favours subtlety over flashiness, and in every designer who understands that true revolution sometimes talks to us in the quietest of voices.

"Il Signore Armani", as he was affectionately known, leaves behind not only a commercial empire, but also a masterclass in how authentic artistic vision can transform entire industries. In an increasingly noisy world, his quiet voice now resonates more strongly than ever.

An astute entrepreneur

The Armani empire was more than a brand. It was a meticulously structured financial ecosystem, and the business' design reflects its founder's strategic vision: Giorgio Armani as the flagship

control over its creative vision and commercial strategy.

This independence was ideological, but also financially astute. Without pressure from external shareholders, the group was able to maintain healthy profit margins and consistently rein-

vest in its global infrastructure. The company is estimated to be worth between €6 billion and €7 billion today, but regardless of the exact figure, Armani has established himself as one of the most successful entrepreneurs in the history of fashion.

company operates a line of restaurants and cafés around the world, and is planning, together with UAE-based firm Emaar Properties, to launch a chain of luxury hotels and resorts in major cities including New York and Tokyo. This expansion is the logical extension of a brand that had managed to transcend fashion and become synonymous with an aspirational lifestyle.

The Armani business had also expanded into music, sport and Italian cuisine, creating an ecosystem of mutually reinforcing brands that maximised the value of its intellectual property.

This paid off, as at times when other luxury groups were hit by market fluctuations, Armani showed exceptional resilience – its revenue grew by 16.5% in 2022, despite volatile markets. The group's conservative strategy of maintaining a cash reserve of over €1 billion also enabled it to navigate economic crises without relying on external financing or strategic partners. This liquidity provided stability, as well as bargaining power and the ability to make countercyclical investments.

A business model to emulate

Armani's financial success was no fluke.

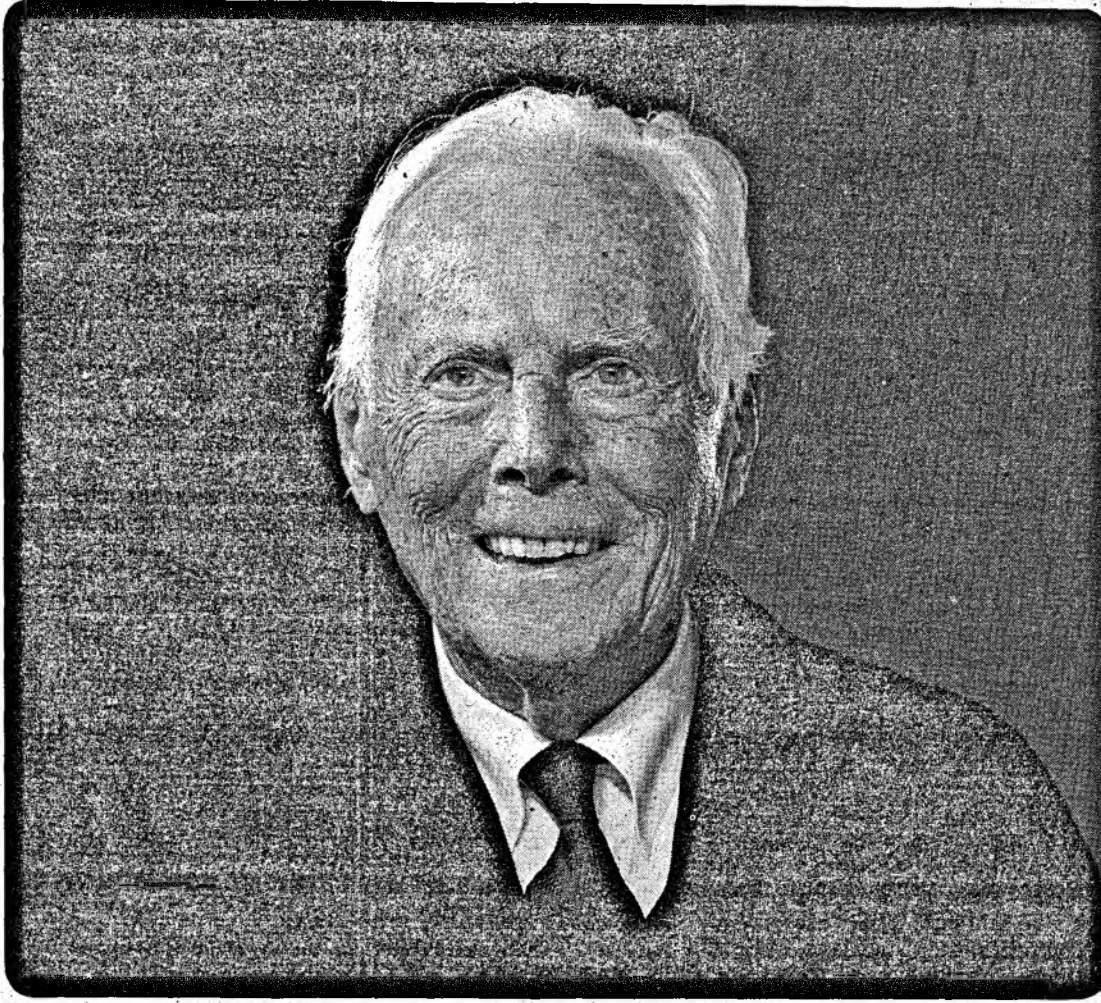
His model combined vertical control of production with strategic geographical expansion, as well as brand management that maximised the price of Armani's superior quality.

As the fashion world mourns his loss as a designer, financial analysts will be eulogising Armani as a business strategist who built one of the luxury sector's most profitable and stable companies.

He managed to maintain margins above 20% for decades, expand globally without losing its brand identity, and resist the pull of industry consolidation. All of this makes his legacy required reading for any business school student.

The empire Armani leaves behind is not just a collection of assets. It is the embodiment of an understanding that true luxury cannot be bought, it must be built. Brand by brand, shop by shop, season after season.

(The Conversation)



haute couture brand, Emporio Armani as the accessible luxury segment, and Armani Exchange for the youth market. This segmentation allowed the group to reach multiple demographics without undercutting or jeopardising its core business.

In an industry dominated by conglomerates like LVMH and Kering, Armani was the exception: he was both CEO and sole major shareholder of the company, and maintained absolute

Beyond clothes

Armani's financial genius was evident in his ability to diversify. The

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 7, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon opposite Mercury on your solar return chart will give amazing results. It is going to be a great year for you because of this beautiful placement. You will get success in whatever you do. You will be meeting top personalities and lot of influential people. You will become socially very active and also earn good money. You will indulge a bit in matters of self-realization. You will take adequate care of your health and streamlining your budget. Philanthropic schemes will attract you. You will make good progress in your job/business. You will also share good equations with your bosses. You will also do your work very sincerely. Your natural leadership qualities will make you very positive in your action. You will also have a wonderful romantic life, and those who are single will get married. You will welcome guests and enjoy your time in merry making. You can also purchase a new vehicle or house. You will develop deep faith in God.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Authority figures, elders, parents, or influential people in your life tend to support and respect you. Your general well-being and emotional health depend on sound and meaningful relationships—both social and romantic. Financial prosperity or social success may come through your spouse at this time. Special attention to and from a partner is in focus. You keep an open mind and are receptive to new ideas and professional opportunities, which could lead to a new job while some of you, will be in for a promotion, perks, recognition and prestige. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy during this cycle. You would maintain good relations and try to give others exactly what you would like to receive just now. It's not about you right now—it's about someone else and the sweeter your attentions, the more delicious your rewards will be. You have a greater need than usual for contact and exchange. In general, you are adaptable when it comes to your work. The more willing you are to take on additional or different types of work, the more positive the rewards.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) This can be a time of achievement, career advancement and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider network is possible at this time. Your work status may change for the better. Friends are more willing to help you on your road to success. An event may occur that expands your career or professional interests, and you derive more pleasure from these activities. More freedom is likely to be experienced in your relationships. Integrity and honesty are the key to attaining your desires now. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) Your need for a little attention and career matters, come to a head. You're called to perform, perhaps on a moment's notice, and it's best to keep your cool and do whatever you can to show your competence. A sudden job opportunity, or some form of assistance with regard to career, home, or property matters, could be part of the picture. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your responsible side. Your mind is especially inquisitive and learning, short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections appeal strongly.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) A financial boost is possible, or you may gain financially through your partner. A deep and intimate connection made now could be revitalizing and even healing. You are more inclined to want to smooth over differences in a partnership concerning the sharing of power, intimacy matters, finances, and other emotionally charged topics. Intimate relationships are intensified now. You find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands of others.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers. You are inclined to want to learn new work skills, or to improve your proficiency and output. It would be better to look at long-term

investments and speculations for financial gains. Your approach to work at this time is pleasant, happy, and logical for the most part, unless you allow worry or scattered energy to enter the picture. You might also enjoy deciding on a different health or nutrition program.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This week highlights friendship, romance and love in your life. You tend to take more interest in organizing your working environment—and this is an excellent time to do so. You are especially objective and intelligent when it comes to getting a handle on your daily affairs and all the little things that contribute to a feeling of efficiency and competency. This is an especially introspective period during which you have the chance to truly uncover your personal strengths and talents. There would be some changes in your social circle, and you will meet new people.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) Business partnerships may suffer from ego conflicts, or adversaries may be challenging. Use this energy to work cooperatively on interpersonal issues. You may even find that you seem to need someone's assistance in order to do what you want to achieve. When a difference arises, you are quick to settle it and have little patience for sweeping matters under the rug. You are more willing than usual to explore life's secrets. Business projects and associations are opening up and widening your horizons so you need to think expansively.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) It would be wiser to face difficult people and tough situations rather than take the easy way out for victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation. Some associations would be competitive in business, but you shine and work well in your field of activity. You may have to face difficult people and exercise special care in handling them. Your idealistic nature is stimulated, and you are likely to yearn for a connection to more spiritual or idealistic pursuits.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. You've been busy with all sorts of everyday activities, deeply involved in your work and routine. It's time to balance your life with some down time — to help you balance your lifestyle and gain time to rejuvenate. Issues come to light that originate from deep within. It's an excellent time to get in touch with what's been brewing beneath the surface. A secret may be revealed. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) During this phase you feel attracted to people with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas. You know how to relate to others, and you do it in a natural and warm manner. You will seek chatty and enthusiastic friends who stimulate your mental abilities. Your approach to work is pleasant and happy for the most part, unless you allow worry or low energy to get the better of you. You are inclined to want to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This is a phase that brings excellent results for competition, written examinations, and legal matters. You're at your best when you are showing the world your practical, competent, and responsible side. Put off making important decisions with regard to family and domestic matters just now and take care when it comes to communicating with family members. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to matters surrounding romance, children, and creativity. Be as non-judgmental as you can with romantic partners and your children. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings is therapeutic and healing.

No, organ transplants will not make you live forever

What do world leaders talk about when they think we're not listening? This week it was the idea of living forever.

Russian president Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping were caught off-guard at a military parade in Beijing discussing the possibility of using biotechnology to pursue immortality.

In particular, Putin suggested repeated organ transplants could keep a person young forever.

There's a lot to unpack here. The idea of lifespan extension is less outlandish, and less objectionable, than it might seem. But as a bioethicist, I do have some concerns.

Could transplants allow us to live forever? Putin's suggestion that we can achieve immortality via repeated organ transplants is almost certainly false.

One obvious question is where these organs would come from. Transplantable organs are a scarce medical resource. Using them to sustain the life of an ageing autocrat would deprive others of life-saving transplants.

However, Putin may have been envisaging lab-grown organs created using stem cells. This approach would not deprive others of transplants. Unfortunately for Putin, while scientists can grow miniature "organoids" that model some aspects of human tissues, creating full-size transplantable organs remains far beyond current capabilities.

Even if, hypothetically, we had access to limitless replacement organs, ageing erodes our body's general resilience.

This would make recovering from repeated transplant surgeries - which are significant operations - increasingly unlikely.

Our ageing brains present an even deeper obstacle. We can replace a kidney or a liver without any threat to our identity. But we cannot replace our brains; whoever inhabits our bodies after a brain transplant would not be us.

There may be better routes to increasing longevity.

Scientists have prolonged the lives of laboratory animals such as monkeys, mice and fruit flies through drugs, genetic alterations, dietary changes and cellular reprogramming (which involves reverting some of the body's cells to a "younger", more primitive state).

It's always challenging to translate animal studies to humans. But nothing suggests human ageing is uniquely beyond modification.

In 2024, Putin launched a national project to combat ageing. Could Russia deliver the necessary scientific breakthrough? Perhaps, though many experts are doubtful, given Russia's fragile research infrastructure.

But Putin is not alone in funding longevity research. Breakthroughs might come from elsewhere - including, potentially, from major investments in anti-ageing biotechnologies from billionaires in the West.

Anti-ageing research could bring benefits. Whether they are authoritarian presidents or Silicon Valley billionaires, it's easy to sneer at wealthy elites' preoccupation with lifespan extension.

Death is the great leveller; it comes for us all. We understandably distrust those who want to rise above it.

But we need to disentangle motives and ethics. It is possible to pursue worthwhile projects for bad reasons.

For example, if I donate to an anti-malaria charity merely to impress my Tinder date, you might roll your eyes at my motivations. But the donation itself still achieves good.

The same applies to lifespan extension. Anti-ageing research could have many benefits. Because ageing raises the risk of almost every major disease, slowing it could make people healthier at every age.

If we value preventing diseases such as heart disease, cancer and dementia, we should welcome research into slowing ageing (which could in turn help to reduce these problems).

Putin and Xi might seem less concerned with improving population health than with postponing their own deaths. But is it wrong to want longevity? Many of us dread death - this is normal and understandable. Death deprives us of all the goods of life, while the prospect of dying can be frightening.

Nor is it suspect to want more than a "natural" lifespan. Since 1900, life expectancy in wealthy countries has risen by more than 30 years. We should welcome further improvements.

The most serious ethical concern about lifespan extension is that it will result in social stagnation.

Our views become increasingly rigid as we age. Young minds often bring new ideas.

If Taylor Swift is still topping the charts in 2089, many other musicians will miss out. And we will miss out on enjoying the evolution of pop music.

Music is one thing; morals are another. The 21st century is raising many new challenges - such as climate change and AI developments - that may benefit from fresh moral perspectives, and from the turnover of political power.

A Russia still ruled by Putin in 2150 will strike many as the starkest version of this worry. Fortunately, we need not be too concerned about a 200-year-old Putin. He is no longer young, and significant lifespan extension is probably decades away.

Still, the prospect of ageless autocrats should give us pause. We should welcome technologies that slow ageing and help us stay healthier for longer, while remembering that even good technologies can have bad effects.

If we succeed in dramatically extending lifespans, we will need to work out how to prevent our societies from becoming as static as some of the elites who lead them. (The Conversation)

*"This is no time for ease and comfort.
It is time to dare and endure."*

—Winston Churchill

The Shillong Times

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Drag of a dream

A high point of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Japan visit was the signing of agreements spanning trade, infrastructure etc, in which the Bullet Train project figured prominently. An understanding is that Japan's next-gen E10 Shinkansen trains would be launched simultaneously in India and Japan, with the Ahmedabad-Mumbai sector getting set for the launch. While a substantial amount of work related to the bullet train service has been completed, mainly in the Gujarat sector, work is progressing along the Maharashtra stretch too. The 508km stretch would eventually see high-speed trains ferrying passengers at a speed of around 300km per hour. Promises are that the works would be completed in another five years' time, and that partial operations could commence in two years.

Notably, the bullet train project, initially conceived by the UPA, was taken forward by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's NDA government immediately after he took charge in 2014. The Ahmedabad-Mumbai sector was selected for the pilot project, with local funding from the Centre and the two state governments apart from that of Japan. Reports are that a sum of nearly Rs 80,000 crore has been spent so far. Of the 28 steel bridges, only nine have been completed. A major milestone was the recent opening of the first section of the 21km undersea tunnel between Mumbai's Bandra-Kurla Complex and Thane. A big disappointment, however, is over the drag that typified this major infrastructure project. Modi has completed two terms in power and is currently into the third five-year term, which could last till 2029. It is unlikely that the pilot project could see near-completion by that time, considering the delays that plagued its implementation so far. Admittedly, a change of government in Maharashtra for a period, when the BJP was out of power during this phase, caused uncertainties for the project.

The Shiv-Sena-NCP-Congress government stopped funding the project during this period. With the BJP returning to power in the state in alliance with breakaway factions of the Shiv Sena and NCP, the cooperation for the project was revived. But even the progress of the works along the Gujarat sector remained slow. This largely is a problem with the mindset and less with financial support. Notably, the technical expertise for the project came from Japan, alongside funds too. Governments as well as the bureaucracy in this country move at a snail's pace. Paperwork and even petty sanctions get caught in bureaucratic lethargy and red tape. Egos clash. Japan started its high-speed bullet train project half a century ago. China today runs trains at double the speed of Japan's bullet trains. Trains that run with Magnetic Levitation (MagLev) technology in China claim a speed of more than 600km per hour. Notable also is the fact that the Vande Bharat trains, introduced with much fanfare by the Modi government in recent years, boast of a speed of no more than 150km. Indian tracks are yet to facilitate a speed of more than 200km per hour. The bullet train dream still remains a mirage.

Indigeneity and Environmental Conservation

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Recently, I was invited to a workshop on Agroecology organized by Focus on Global South, an NGO based in Thailand but working across South and Southeast Asia, held at Peren, Nagaland. In the program there was a session by Pamchingla Kumrah, who is the state coordinator of NEN (North East Network), Nagaland, titled 'Indigenous Farming Systems: Pathways to Agro-ecological Foundation'. She began by asking the participants about what they understood by the term 'indigenous,' to which someone replied that it means belonging to the 'native' population. She agreed with the answer and then answered how the Nagas are indigenous by placing them into the various criteria given by the UN, which were originally derived from the definition of Indigenous Peoples (IPs) given under ILO 169.

This convention, known as the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989, puts forward two criteria for identifying indigenous peoples: subjective and objective. Self-identification and community acceptance make up the subjective criterion. The objective criterion is descent from populations who inhabited the country or geographical region at the time of conquest, colonisation, or establishment of present state boundaries and/or retention of some social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, irrespective of their legal status. The objective criterion is most important here because it addresses long-term settlement, which can be simplified to refer to the first settlers. This is also what is colloquially understood as being 'indigenous' or 'native'.

I don't really have much idea about when the Nagas possibly arrived in the Northeast, but they are part of the larger Sino-Tibetan language-speaking groups that emerged in northern China, around the Yellow River (Huang He) basin (birthplace of Chinese Civilisation). These groups were millet farmers and domesticated what is today known as fox-tail millet. Researchers found people cultivated this species during the Late Harappan period (2100-1700 BC) in areas around the periphery of the Indus Valley Civilization. So, around 4000 years ago, the group to which the Nagas belong must have already reached the northwestern part of what is today India, or groups living around that area had already established con-

tacts with them and adopted the practice of growing fox-tail millets. This would make them the group to whom the Naga belong (Sino-Tibetan language speaking groups) the third oldest in South Asia, after the Dravidian and the Austroasiatic (Khasi), a full 500 years before the Indo-Aryan groups who spoke Sanskrit and brought early forms of Hinduism from Central Asia. So, Nagas are indeed an indigenous people, and there is no debate about it. But the debate becomes muddled when the criterion for defining indigenous is expanded to include arguments that are connected to the idea of the 'Noble Savage'.

The idea of the 'Noble Savage' comes from western philosophy, which preaches the innate goodness and moral superiority of a 'primitive' people living in harmony with nature. In this context, various indigenous groups from around the world, whose way of life strongly connects to nature, are identified as the 'primitive' people. Most of them live in highly inaccessible areas, such as mountains, tundra, and islands, where biodiversity remains high. Studies have constantly showed that areas where indigenous communities are residing have better forest cover, harbouring a great deal of biodiversity.

India has four biodiversity hotspots which coincide with the homeland of many indigenous groups, viz., Himalayas (Sino-Tibetan groups), Indo-Burma (Austroasiatic and Sino-Tibetan groups), Western Ghats (Dravidian groups), and Sundaland (Onge, Jarawas or the AASI/Ancient Ancestral South Indian groups). So, it would appear that the idea of the 'Noble Savage' is correct to some extent. However, people debate whether we should accept the characterization of indigenous people as 'primitive', which is how India defines Scheduled Tribes, the official name for indigenous people. I don't agree with it. But what sometimes gets missed in the discussion on biodiversity hotspots is that while such regions have extremely high levels of biodiversity, they are also under significant threat of destruction from human activities. So, if a 'noble savage' or indigenous person is someone who lives in harmony with nature, then who is responsible for the destruction?

Non-indigenous groups

carry much of the destruction of the natural environment in indigenous territories out, as seen by what has happened and is still continuing in South America. One factor in the spread of Naxalite ideology in Central India is the perceived failure of the Indian state to provide for tribal/indigenous peoples' autonomy over their land and natural resources, which is rich in mineral resources. These are the areas where large tracts of areas covered by rich forests are being auctioned for mining or other extractive industries by corporations owned by individuals belonging to non-indigenous communities. Indigenous territories in Dima Hasao, Karbi Anglong and Bodoland are experiencing something similar. But the loss of forest and biodiversity is not always caused by forces external to the indigenous community. Many times, it is they who do the most violence to the environment.

The vast swath of grassland right across eastern Meghalaya stretching all the way from West Khasi Hills to East Jaintia Hills resulted from the deforestation that started around 2000 years ago, when the Khasis discovered iron smelting. People used charcoal as the fuel, which led to the felling of large numbers of trees. Without their roots acting as anchors, heavy rainfall washed away the topsoil, making it difficult for the trees to come back. Hardy grasses took their place. Around the same time, another activity was gaining traction among the Khasis, which further sped up the process of degradation. This was the practice of erecting monoliths, which are a quintessential feature of the Khasi landscape. Nagas also erect monoliths, and I saw some while I was in Peren. However, Khasi monoliths are very distinctive from Nagas, the most magnificent among them are the ones found in Nartiang. But how were they erected? And what does it have to do with the deforestation that started 2000 years ago?

According to the 2022 paper 'Cherrapunjee: An Example of Human Impact on Environment' by Sukanya Sharma, the "great stones were brought sometimes from considerable distances. After being heaved, the stones were laid on large wooden trolleys and dragged across the country by means of

ropes of cane ... and then placed in position by means of ropes and levers". A great number of trees were felled in the process, and according to the author the "whole process of erecting megaliths and iron smelting technology ... resulted in the complete destruction of the primary forest on the flat top surface of the plateau where Cherrapunjee (Sohra) is located". Whatever the cause of the deforestation of the plateau, the perpetrators were the Khasis. We know this because the Khasis had arrived in South Asia around 5000 years ago (could be earlier) and had settled in what is today Meghalaya by around 4000 years ago.

At the same time, Khasis have a lot of practices which are today considered to be the hallmark of conservation – the Law Kynrang, landscape management system and the various ecological practices under agriculture. I don't want to discuss the contradiction between environmental degradation and environmental conservation found among the Khasis for lack of space, but just want to point out that it has a long history. So, when people talk about the present environmental degradation taking place in Meghalaya orchestrated by the Khasis and question the disconnect with their supposed tribal or indigenous values (embodied by the concept of the Noble Savage) as something surprising, I want to say that it is not surprising at all. Khasis have protected the environment, but they have also destroyed it as well, and they are not unique in it. But that disconnect does not mean they have lost their indigeneity. The reasoning that the Khasis are no longer indigenous because they do not practice a certain ecological value is utterly false and malicious.

Khasis and Nagas are indigenous peoples because they were the first settlers in their land (and beyond from which they were pushed away), not because their culture preaches about living in harmony with nature. Not that those ecological values are not present, but there were times (past and present) when they were also disregarded. Should we try to revive those ecological values? Absolutely! But the contradiction between the two will never affect their identity as indigenous peoples.

(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 Tribute to Bhupen Da

By Narendra Modi

Today, 8th September, is a very special day for all those who are passionate about Indian culture and music. It is particularly more special for my sisters and brothers of Assam. After all, it is the birth anniversary of Dr. Bhupen Hazarika, one of the most extraordinary voices India has ever known. As you are all aware, this year marks the beginning of his birth centenary celebrations. It is an occasion to revisit his monumental contributions to Indian artistic expression and public consciousness.

What Bhupen Da gave us extends far beyond music. His works embodied emotions that transcended melody. More than just a voice, he was the heartbeat of the people. Generations have grown up listening to his songs, each word resonating with themes of kindness, social justice, unity and deep-rooted belonging.

From Assam emerged a

hope from his music.

The spirit of 'Ek Bharat, Shreshtha Bharat' found powerful expression in Bhupen Hazarika's life journey. His works transcended linguistic and regional boundaries to unite people across the country. He composed for films in Assamese, Bengali and Hindi. He made Assam visible and audible to the rest of India. It is no exaggeration to say that he helped shape the cultural identity of modern Assam, both for those within the state and for the Assamese diaspora across the globe.

Bhupen Da, although not really a political person, did remain connected to the world of public service as well. In 1967, he was elected as an independent MLA from Naubhoicha constituency in Assam, demonstrating how deeply his public persona was rooted in the people's trust. Though he never became a career politician, his



voice that flowed like a timeless river, crossing borders and cultures, carrying with it the spirit of humanity. Bhupen Da travelled the globe, rubbed shoulders with the who's who across all spectrums of society, but he remained deeply connected to his roots in Assam. The rich oral traditions, folk melodies and community storytelling practices of Assam deeply shaped his early childhood. These experiences formed the bedrock of his artistic vocabulary. He always carried the spirit of Assam's indigenous identity and the ethos of its people.

Brilliance came to Bhupen Da at a very young age. At the age of just five, he sang at a public event and quickly caught the attention of none other than Lakshminath Bezbaruah, the pioneering figure of Assamese literature. By the time he was a teenager, he had recorded his first song. But music was only one part of his personality. Bhupen Da was as much an intellectual at heart... curious, articulate and driven by an insatiable desire to understand the world. Cultural legends like Jyoti Prasad Agarwala and Bishnu Prasad Rabha left a deep impression on his mind and also deepened his spirit of enquiry. It was also this desire to learn that made him excel at Cotton College, Banaras Hindu University and took him to the United States, where he interacted with leading academics, thinkers and musicians of those times. He met Paul Robeson, the legendary artist and civil rights leader. Robeson's song "Ol' Man River" became the inspiration for Bhupen Da's iconic composition "Bistino Parore". The much-admired former American First Lady, Eleanor Roosevelt, awarded him a Gold Medal for his performances of Indian folk music.

Bhupen Da had the option of remaining in the US, but he returned to India and immersed himself in music. From radio to theatre, films to educational documentaries, he was well-versed in each of these media. Wherever he went, he emphasised supporting young talent. His works combined lyrical flair and also gave social messages, touching upon justice for the poor, rural development, strength of common citizens, to name a few. Through his music, he gave voice to the aspirations of boatmen, tea garden workers, women, farmers, etc. In addition to being nostalgic, Bhupen Da's works also became a powerful lens to view modernity. A lot of people, especially from the socially backward classes like him, derived strength and

passion for serving others was highly impactful.

The people and Government of India have recognised his enormous contributions over the years. He was conferred with several awards, including the Padma Shri, Padma Bhushan, Padma Vibhushan, Dadasaheb Phalke Award and more. In 2019, it was an honour for me personally and for the NDA government that the Bharat Ratna was conferred upon him during our tenure. People from across the world, especially those from Assam and the Northeast, expressed joy that this honour was conferred upon him. This honour celebrated the principles that Bhupen Da held dear to his heart – that music, when grounded in truth, can transcend all barriers. That a song can carry the weight of a people's dreams and move hearts across the world.

I remember the time Bhupen Da passed away in 2011. I had seen on television how lakhs of people attended his funeral. Every eye was moist that time. Even in death, like in his illustrious life, he brought people together. It was thus fitting that he was cremated at the Jalukbari hillock overlooking the Brahmaputra, the very river that had been the lifeline of his music, metaphors and memories. It is gladdening that the Assam Government has supported the work of the Bhupen Hazarika Cultural Trust, which is working to popularise his life journey among youngsters.

Bhupen Hazarika's life teaches us the power of empathy, of listening to people and of staying rooted. His songs continue to be sung by young and old alike. His music teaches us to be compassionate and courageous. It asks us to remember our rivers, our labourers, our tea workers, our Nari Shakti and our Yuva Shakti. It encourages us to believe in unity in diversity.

Bharat is blessed to have Bhupen Hazarika. As we celebrate the beginning of his centenary year, let us reiterate our commitment to spreading his message far and wide. May it also inspire us to keep working to support music, art and culture, to encourage young talent and make India a nurturing ground for creativity and artistic excellence.

It is only fitting that one of India's most significant infrastructure projects, the bridge connecting Dhola and Sadiya, bears the name of Bhupen Hazarika. Just as his songs connected hearts across regions, this bridge connects lands and people.

Letters to the Editor

Disruption during MPSC Examination at St. Anthony's Hr Sec. School

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to express my deep frustration regarding the conduct of the MPSC examination for the post of Junior Cooperative Officer held on the September 6, 2025.

One of the centres allotted was St. Anthony's Higher Secondary School, Shillong. To the utter dismay of candidates, while the exam was in progress inside the classrooms, a Gospel Retreat was being conducted in the school's basketball court. The blaring loudspeakers, continuous music, and preaching created unbearable disturbance. For an exam that demanded focus, especially in sections involving mathematics and aptitude, such noise was not only distracting but also unfair to the candidates who had prepared with sincerity.

This letter is not intended to criticise any religion or the institute. Faith and worship have their sacred place, just as examinations demand silence and seriousness. But what happened was against

the very decorum of a fair and impartial examination environment. Thousands of aspirants invest their time, energy, and years of preparation for these exams, and such lapses in planning leave us feeling disheartened.

I earnestly request the authorities concerned to ensure that in the future, exam centres are chosen and managed with greater care. Religious or cultural events and competitive examinations must never be scheduled simultaneously in the same premises. The least that is owed to aspirants is a fair chance to prove themselves without external disturbance.

Yours etc.,
A frustrated aspirant,
Via email

Where is the Devotion in Durga Puja

Editor,
Durga Puja is one of the most auspicious occasions for all of us Hindus. During that time, as per sacred scriptures, we are required to observe nine days of fasting and maintain complete purity of action. But what is sad is that many pandals in the town organize programs that are completely against Hinduism. Instead of bhajan, kirtan, and other

devotional activities, they organize various programs with Bollywood songs and vulgar dances right in front of the idols of Maa Durga. Should the elderly members who organize these events encourage younger children and youth to enjoy such cheap entertainment in the name of Goddess Durga? What kind of message do they want to send to the new generation?

Some puja pandals near Lower Mawprej always disturb the neighborhood with deafening Bollywood songs. Many members there, having no civic sense, are often tipsy as though no other residents live there, or have no right to live in peace. Such irresponsible puja organizers should not be given permission by the DC, East Khasi Hills. I also humbly request the most respected members of the Central Puja Committee to ensure that no organization performs their auspicious puja function in a way that goes against the ethos of Hinduism or shows lack of civic responsibility.

Yours etc.,
Neha Dhananjaya
Via email

We Want Justice

Editor,
The CBI indication to

appeal against the Meghalaya High Court order on the abominable White Ink Case involving the then Education Minister, Ampareen Lyngdoh, is indeed a great relief to us, relations of the victimised passed out teachers, who were mercilessly deprived by the Minister in order to accommodate her favourite supporters. We support the CBI on this move, to at least see that justice is in favour of the victims, although many of them have become over-aged after 17 years, but we hope the Judiciary will intervene and that the case of the over-aged victimised teachers be considered as it was then, that is at the time the interview was conducted followed by the declaration of results.

We had some doubts about the then CBI and the Police, for not even finding out the two helpers of the Minister who carried out the white ink job in her house, as disclosed by Mr. J.D Sangma. We are pinning our hopes on the present CBI chief to unearth the scam in the interest of justice and public interest.

We earnestly look forward to receive due justice on the basis of fairness.

Yours etc.,
K.T. Kyndiah & other
parents of the victimised
candidates.
Via email

When Luxury Thinks It is Law

Editor,
The recent incident in Shillong of persons with airguns being arrested is not merely about illegal weapons or impersonation. It is a glaring symptom of a deeper social malaise: a brazen culture of faux power and entitlement among a certain class who mistake luxury cars for power and hire muscle for authority.

Mebanshem Snaitang's convoy, tinted windows, blaring siren, an unregistered Audi, and men in black fatigues was not just "showing off." It was a calculated performance, an open challenge to the rule of law, staged audaciously right outside the seat of state power. His casual questioning of whether the government "has any rules" against private security or air guns reveals a dangerously entitled mindset that "wealth equals exemption."

The Shillong Police deserve credit for acting swiftly. But this is not an isolated case. It is part of a disturbing trend where owners of high-end vehicles draped in self-styled VIP-ism treat Shillong's narrow, congested streets as their personal parade grounds. We see this every day. SUVs double-

parked in Laitumkhrah, horns blaring as if traffic exists to serve them. Luxury cars cutting queues near Police Bazar with tinted windows hiding mug faces. They overtake like VVIPs, expecting roads to part and pedestrians to yield, as if their car's price tag grants them divine right.

Shillong's charm lies in its humility, its mist-kissed hills, and its close-knit community spirit not in wannabe dons playing power games with air guns and Audi sedans. This city thrives on mutual respect, not manufactured intimidation.

If we do not collectively call out this culture, if authorities do not consistently enforce the law regardless of status or car model, then incidents like this will keep repeating until one day, the "intimidation" escalates into actual violence.

Let this be a wake-up call. Shillong does not need self-appointed VVIPs. It needs citizens who respect the law, not those who believe their wealth places them above it.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang Lyngdoh Rymbai
Via email

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

"He that can have patience can have what he will."

— Benjamin Franklin

The Shillong Times

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Obverse VIP Cult

THE events of Friday September 5, when three high end vehicles with sophisticated weapons (apparently modern airguns) were parked near the state secretariat and a dozen men dressed like black cat commandos were hovering around, are enough to cause a stir. Now why would a 25 year old stage this and to what end? What is the psychological motivation behind this drama? Just two weeks ago, a journalist from Nagaland, Deep Saikia was shot at by a similar type of gun and was wounded on his foot and arm and had to be hospitalised. The shooter said he was aiming at birds and shot the journalist accidentally. The question everyone is asking is whether the journalist looked like a bird. This same journalist had earlier had an altercation with the Deputy CM of Nagaland, Y Patton on a report he had filed which the minister did not like. It's natural to put two and two together and to assume that the young shooter might have been a supporter of Patton who sought to warn the journalist not to foray into uncharted territory.

The centrepiece of the Meghalaya incident Meban Snaitang asked rather brusquely whether it was against the law to carry airguns and employ private security and if so under which law? The public of Meghalaya particularly Shillong who are victims of interminably long traffic jams have often voiced their irritation at the VIP vehicles being allowed to ride roughshod when citizens are stuck. The irritation is building up into anger and a time might soon come when public anger spills out into the streets. While investigation into the Snaitang affair is going on, the public can only wonder at the audacious flaunting of affluence of the young man and what demons is he fighting inside his head and heart. Clearly, he must be influenced by movies like *Zombie Jungle*.

But this is no laughing matter. It reflects the kind of society we live in today. The VIP culture is anathema to many and more so to those that are shunted out like dirt when they are walking on the roads and VIP vehicles are passing by. This used to be an egalitarian tribal society. Today it has metamorphosed into a broken society, where the affluent and the underdogs co-exist but with aversion for each other. The former think it's their entitlement to ride roughshod over the laws and rules; the latter are arrested on flimsy grounds or treated as lesser humans because of their poverty. This flaunting of the VIP culture in a tribal society makes people question what gives the elected VIP or the public servants the right to treat the people who elected them with the disdain that servants are treated. These days the plethora of political appointees and even relatives of ministers also brandish their VIP cult by throwing their weight around. People notice this and suffer in silence until a Meban Snaitang arrives to put the law on its head!

Trump's tariffs on Indian goods have come into force. Initially, when Trump threatened to impose a 26% tariff on Indian goods and about a 145% tariff on Chinese goods, some sections in India expressed happiness, assuming that Indian goods in the US would become cheaper compared to Chinese goods. But Trump imposed an additional 25% tariff on Indian exports as a penalty for buying oil from Russia. Interestingly, the US imposed only a 30% tariff on China, although it buys more oil from Russia. The tariffs it imposed on Pakistan and Bangladesh are far less. This discrimination has come as a rude shock to Indian policymakers and the Trump admirers in India. Everyone has started wondering what had happened to the 'bromance' that existed between Modi and Trump. Where has all the bonhomie visible during the Aur Ek Baar Trump Sarkar and Howdy-Modi campaigns vanished? The two nations, who were once humming the song 'Yeh Dosti Hum Nahe Chodenge', are now miffed with each other and singing the Bollywood number 'Dost Dost Na Rahaa'. This twist in the relations between the two countries has become a subject of discussion in the media and policy circles. National and international experts are debating the reasons that prompted Trump's harsh actions against India. There are interviews, talk shows and podcasts discussing whether the decision was motivated by personal reasons, or by calculated considerations of the US global interest.

Of course, Trump has personal reasons to grudge. Trump claimed he intervened and stopped the conflict between India and Pakistan from blowing into a full-fledged nuclear war. He declared he used tariff threats to force the two to stop the war. One does not know how far his claims are true. But in the current volatile political situation in India, it is politically suicidal for Modi to admit that India acted on Trump's advice. Amidst the uproar in the parliament, Modi was forced to announce that no external forces influenced India's decision to stop Operation Sindhoor. Officially, India has been maintaining

the stand that it agreed to the ceasefire at the request of the Pakistani military establishment after India ensured that it achieved its goal of destroying the terrorist hideouts. In contrast, Pakistan did not deny Trump's claims about intervention and even recommended Trump's name for the Nobel Peace Prize. It is but natural for a megalomaniac and egotist like Trump to feel aggrieved when his ally refuses to give any credit to him.

According to some experts, Trump was disappointed to see that India, which is close to both Russia and Ukraine, did little to end the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war. The US contends that India took advantage of the war to buy crude oil from Russia at cheaper rates and made huge profits by selling the reprocessed oil to other countries. The US spokesperson alleged India abetted the Russia-Ukraine War by providing resources to Russia to arm itself against Ukraine. India's active role in the BRICS is also not to the liking of the US. Although China is the largest importer of crude oil from Russia and active in BRICS, America cannot take action against China. But the US can do that to a relatively weaker ally like India. The US can blackmail only the weak, not the strong.

Apart from personal factors, some commentators held the US has its own strategic calculations in imposing higher tariffs on India. India's total exports to the US, which include goods and services, is around \$123 billion in 2023, with \$83 billion in goods and \$40 billion in services. That makes the US India's single largest export destination. During the year, Indian imports from the US stood at only \$75 billion, with \$42 billion in goods and \$33 billion in services. The US feels India has a trade surplus, and that it is not buying enough goods and services from the US. Even on the goods imported, the US contends India imposes higher tariffs on American goods, making them very costly. India also prevents American goods from entering agriculture

and other related sectors. From India's point of view, protectionism is needed for a developing country like India to protect native industry and agriculture. Ever since India went for liberalization, there has been a gradual reduction in customs taxes on foreign goods. But India cannot remove all restrictions, especially in sectors like agriculture, as that would have serious political implications. Justifying its position, India cites that even the American government also practices protectionism. But in international politics, where might is right, logic hardly matters.

Some think-tanks have argued that to America, ideological concerns of war and peace are secondary. The US is only acting pragmatically while deciding on the extent of tariffs on each country. It may accuse Russia and China of being authoritarian states. But it does not mind trading with them when its own interests demand. While all this talk about Russia-Ukraine was on, the US sent its emissaries to negotiate trade with Russia. Similarly, the US, despite its concerns about the growing power of China, cannot afford to impose higher tariffs on Chinese goods, as the American citizens depend on essential goods imported from China. Imposing higher tariffs on Chinese goods leads to inflation and many practical problems. China can withstand American pressure. American multinational companies working in China will face difficulties if China retaliates. Hence, despite strategic concerns, the US has to deal with China pragmatically. But this is not the case with India.

At one time, US policymakers believed in the ability to become an economic power and wanted to pit it against China. It was with that belief, the US included India as part of the QUAD and the US-led Indo-Pacific Strategic Alliance. However, of late, the US feels India has not risen to the level it expected. In economy and military strength, India is nowhere near China. True that the US and India have ideological and strategic

commonalities. India may be a friend, but to the US, it has become a dispensable ally. Conversely, China is a foe, but it is indispensable. You can be harsh to a friend, but not to the enemy. Most likely, it is this realistic assessment, which made the US take a harsh decision on India. By imposing heavy tariffs on India, the US tries to communicate the message to its other allies that the US would not mind punishing even its friends if they went against the US interests. India, that way, appears to have become a soft target in the US game for hegemony in the fast-changing relations in the multipolar world.

What options, are left to India? In the first four decades of independence, our economy was based on import-substitution, trade accounted for less than 10% of GDP. After liberalization, India sought to grow by emphasizing exports. Today, India's trade-revenues account for around 22% of the GDP. Over 15% of India's exports reach the US. Talking about Swadeshi at this stage of economic development makes little sense. The increased tariffs on Indian goods, which now range from 50 to over 60% on some goods, are bound to make Indian goods less competitive in the US compared with Chinese, Pakistani and Vietnamese products. The US tariffs would adversely affect Indian export-oriented units such as textiles, seafood, handicrafts, jewelry, etc. In its own interest, the US avoided tariffs on pharmaceuticals and IT products. As the tariffs cover only goods and not the services, Indian software companies are not affected now. Despite these small mercies, the US tariffs, if continued for a longer period, would affect the Indian economy. In the immediate future, one cannot expect any breakthrough in the negotiations between India and the US. India has to look for alternative destinations for exports. It has to strengthen its bonds with Russia, re-examine its relations with China and explore new trading partners. Only time will tell whether Narendra Modi will resolve the problems that his bosom friend has created for India.

Courtesy Is Not Compromise - It Is Humanity

By Dapbianglin Sohkhet

Earlier today, I was watching the news. The story was familiar, the narrative routine, but what followed was anything but. The comments section exploded with hostility, sarcasm, and vitriol. It wasn't simply a disagreement. It was cruelty dressed as opinion. It made me stop and ask myself: What kind of thoughts are we nurturing in this generation? When did expressing ourselves become an excuse to attack others?

Imagine a guest arriving at your home. Instead of being warmly welcomed into a beautifully arranged drawing room, furnished with comfortable sofas and cushions, they are told, "No, not there, that room is reserved for special occasions." How would such a guest feel? Unwelcome, unvalued, perhaps even unwanted. This analogy reflects the experience of many tourists today. When excessive rules and restrictions are imposed on visitors to the point where they fear even setting foot in a place, how can we expect them to feel genuinely welcomed? Tourism sustains our communities, but if tourists are made to feel like intruders, constrained by fear of breaking arbitrary laws or encountering hostility, the very lifeblood of our economy and culture is put at risk.

Yes, money is important. Safety is important. It is not simply a matter of wanting these things and having them handed to us. Rather, it is the approach, the manner in which we engage, communicate, and enforce that truly matters. We must work thoughtfully on how we balance these needs with respect and kindness, ensuring that the pursuit of safety and economic well-being does not come at the expense of humanity and warmth.

families. But if our attitudes toward tourists are shaped by resentment or entitlement, if we speak carelessly, act indifferently, or treat others with coldness, then we do more than lose business. We lose our humanity.

Hospitality is not a performance. It is a value. We don't have to agree with or conform to the visitor's expectations, but we do have a responsibility to show kindness, patience, and integrity. A visitor may forget what they saw or spent, but they will never forget how they were made to feel. And the impact of one moment, one word, one action can echo far beyond what we see.

Let us not mistake harshness for strength, or rudeness for honesty. Let us not allow fear or pride to lead us into wars of over-speaking, where the loudest voice wins and the wisest voice is lost.

What we need, above all, is to understand one another to recognise both perspectives and truths. It is not about one side being entirely right or the other entirely wrong; it is about adopting an approach that seeks dialogue rather than imposition, collaboration rather than command. We must move towards a more holistic way of thinking, one that strives to achieve together, not to push or pull each other apart.

This is not the time for blame games. Instead, we must first reflect inwardly, examine ourselves, fix what lies within, and only then look outward to others. Let us show strength not through dominance or defiance, but through the very kindness and calm strength that we Khasi people carry from our homes and our upbringing. Let us not forget our roots; our strength has always been

"Yes, money is important. Safety is important. It is not simply a matter of wanting these things and having them handed to us. Rather, it is the approach, the manner in which we engage, communicate, and enforce that truly matters. We must work thoughtfully on how we balance these needs with respect and kindness, ensuring that the pursuit of safety and economic well-being does not come at the expense of humanity and warmth."

Letters to the Editor

Concern from a Daily Commuter

Editor,
As a daily commuter in Shillong, I am often in awe of the way the State Government and the Traffic Branch of the Meghalaya Police function. The traffic jam scenario, especially during morning hours, is already chaotic. But what puzzles me most is how rules and regulations are strictly applied only on certain "important" days.

Take Monday for example, I cross the Barik Point junction every day to drop my daughter off to school. On normal days, the situation during school hours is sheer chaos. Vehicles coming from PB area try to head towards Civil Point, while those from the other side attempt to get to IGP-Police Bazaar Road. With no proper intersection point, drivers are left to criss-cross in confusion, causing bottlenecks and frustration.

However, today the situation was entirely different. There was a clear diversion right from Barik Point up to Civil Point; traffic personnel were deployed along the stretch, and they gave proper directions to drivers. The result? Smooth traffic flow and a calm commute. And the reason? The ongoing Autumn Session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly.

As daily commuters, many of us have stopped complaining and learned to accept the reality of traffic jams. Yet, what is disheartening is that order and efficiency appear only when "important" events are happening. If traffic can be managed well on such days, why can't the same effort be made every day?

I write this not to criticise but as a concerned parent who deals

with this problem daily. There is a saying: "To every problem, there is a solution." If solutions exist and have been proven to work, then why not implement them regularly for the benefit of the public?

This is a humble request to the authorities—please don't wait for special occasions to ensure smooth traffic. For us commuters, every day matters.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

No Place for Mobile Phones in MPSC & DSC Examinations

Editor,
Recently, some candidates have raised concerns about alleged malpractice during examinations. If this is true, it is a very serious issue. Nothing is more demoralising for a sincere candidate than to see others get away with unfair means. It destroys faith in the system.

Everyone knows that mobile phones can easily be misused for cheating. If such devices are still allowed in some centres then it is hard to understand. A strict ban on cell phones and other electronic gadgets should be enforced without exception. Candidates feel there is a difference in the vigilance between Shillong and centres like Jowai and Nongstoin. They feel monitoring in these centres is not as strict, and that gives scope for malpractice. What is needed is strict invigilation in every exam room, no matter where the exam is held.

Meghalaya Needs Mental Health Education

Editor,
In Meghalaya, discussions on development often revolve around infrastructure, employment, and politics. Yet one of the most pressing issues remains largely ignored: the lack of awareness about mental health and human psychology. This silence is especially pronounced within the Khasi community, where understanding of mental well-being is minimal, and misconceptions continue to thrive. If society is to progress meaningfully, mental health must be given the same importance as physical health and introduced to individuals from a young age.

Yes, from an early age, students must be introduced to the concepts of emotional intelligence, mental health, and human behavior. By teaching children topics such as trauma, depression, anxiety, panic attacks and so on, they will grow into adults who can understand and empathize with others instead of jumping to baseless and indefinite conclusions. Education is not only about preparing students for jobs but it is also about shaping them into responsible and empathetic citizens. Without psychological awareness, society risks breeding intolerance, stigma, and cycles of misunderstanding.

The Khasi community, in particular, has suffered from a lack of awareness regarding

mental health. Many individuals are unable to identify the signs of emotional distress either in themselves or others. Instead, suffering is often dismissed as weakness, laziness, or spiritual imbalance or as they usually phrase it in Khasi "U brieu/ Ka brieu ba biej; Ki brieu bym biang khlieh." Such attitudes deepen isolation, prevent people from seeking help, and contribute to a society that struggles to move forward. The lack of knowledge about trauma and psychological well-being has already had consequences such as rising levels of substance abuse, domestic issues, social stagnation and even worse, self-harm and unaliving oneself.

To address this gap, the Government of Meghalaya must take urgent responsibility and encourage regular public campaigns, road shows and awareness programs in villages, towns, and cities to help bridge the knowledge gap. Workshops, seminars, and school initiatives should be organized to normalize conversations around mental health and to train individuals to recognize the importance of psychological well-being. Schools should integrate psychology into their syllabus, ensuring that the next generation grows up with an understanding of mental well-being. Local institutions, NGOs, and healthcare professionals must also collaborate to normalize conversations around mental health, breaking the stigma that has silenced so many.

Ultimately, the progress of a society cannot be measured only by economic growth or infrastructure but also by how its people treat one another. A society that does not understand mental health and hu-

man psychology will always falter in compassion and unity. For the Khasi community, and for Meghalaya at large, the way forward is to equip people with the knowledge of psychology and mental health. By doing so, not only will we raise stronger individuals, but we will also create a society rooted in empathy, understanding, and sustainable development.

Yours etc.,
Mebaphylla Rymshon,
Via email

Bilingual approach to education

Editor,
I read the article, "A Context-Specific Education for Northeast India" (ST Sep 6, 2025) written by Dr Samir Talati, with great interest. It speaks to the heart of what education should mean for us in the Northeast. The issues raised are close to the lives of parents, teachers, and children in our region, and they deserve both appreciation and reflection.

I deeply value the call for education that respects our languages, traditions, and ways of life. When a child hears and learns in its own tongue, he/she feels seen and valued. That sense of belonging builds self-confidence and makes learning joyful. However, I feel that along with cultural grounding, we must also ensure academic strength. Our children, while rooted in their identity, must also be ready to meet the wider world where higher education and opportunities are often shaped by English. A gentle bilingual approach may be the bridge we need.

I strongly agree with the concern for teachers. Many young men and women work as contractual teachers with the same dedication as regular staff, yet without fair pay or proper training. This is disheartening, for the future of our children rests on the shoulders of those very teachers.

The article also rightly points to gaps in higher education. Universities should be places that inspire and nurture minds, not institutions where overcrowding and poor governance stifle learning. More colleges alone will not solve the problem - what we need is quality teaching and genuine academic culture.

I also share the concern about high dropout rates, especially among girls. Free guidebooks and schemes like CM IMPACT are welcome steps, but real change lies in steady reforms—strong schools, fair wages, trained teachers, and caring monitoring. Technology can play a role, but only after basic facilities and human support are in place.

Education in the Northeast is indeed at a turning point. If we can blend cultural pride with academic strength, fairness with accountability, and empathy with reform, we will truly give our children both roots and wings.

Yours etc.
Jairaj Chhetry,
Tura

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"Words are but pictures of our thoughts."

— John Dryden

The Shillong Times

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Ominous signals from Nepal

GOVERNMENTS are frequently arming themselves with a large array of new powers to silence and control the masses they lord over. Here too, new laws are being passed by legislatures and parliaments with high vehemence. Yet, the warning signals are there for all to see. When people's anger crosses a limit, the exit door opens itself for those in power — as was clearly evident in recent days — first in Japan, where an unpopular government fell; and now in Nepal. The prime ministers, in the eye of a storm, are bowing out. Curiously, in both these cases, the public anger rested mainly around acts of corruption and worsening living conditions for the masses.

Nepal is in turmoil. The Communist government headed by Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli is having an inglorious exit from power. Despite a ban on social media, youths have erupted into the streets, vandalized government properties, set fire to homes of their leaders and are in no mood to relent in their fight against multiple issues. The parliament building, the residences of Nepali Congress as well as of Maoist leaders and several top government functionaries are simultaneously under siege. Nepal has not seen such a huge explosion of anger in recent history. That over 20 protesters have been killed in police action in two days demonstrates the intensity of the popular anger.

In fact, the past 25 years after the assassination of largely popular King Birendra in a palace coup has been a period that saw rival political formations holding power in Nepal but failing to rise to the aspirations of the people. Just a year ago, Bangladesh's reigning prime minister Sheikh Hasina was packed out of power and sent into exile by mobs of apolitical youths. Around 15 years ago, the Jasmine Revolution prompted by youths on social media unseated the regime in Tunisia, which encouraged others to drive out several other dictatorships in the geographical sector spanning the Middle East and North Africa, under what came to be hailed as the Arab Springs. The present phase, however, is about democracies, starting with Bangladesh, then Japan and now to Nepal, in India's close neighbourhood.

Outwardly, everything is calm here. The government paints a rosy picture about the national economy, but the common man's plight is steadily worsening. They are being orphaned while politicians and bureaucrats are on a loot-spree. The per capita income here is among the worst in the list of over 100 nations even while the national economy is showing "impressive" signs. If the poor are not benefited, then what progress are we talking about? Justice is a far cry. The entire governmental system has gone for a toss in recent years. Reforms were a way out to give them new strengths. But India lacked a bold leadership to think anew and act fast. Are the huge swarms of the poor going to remain silent forever? Time waits for none. What happened in our neighbourhood sends out warning signals to the inept political loud-mouths here too.

Letters to the Editor

The Unfinished Journey of Nepal's Democracy

Editor,
Nepal, the land of the Himalayas and the birthplace of Lord Buddha—the apostle of peace—has long been admired for its spiritual and natural beauty. With a population of about 30 million, the nation was once guided by a peace-centric ethos. However, the massacre of the royal family in 2001 marked a turning point, plunging the nation into prolonged turmoil and violent agitation. For over a decade, people struggled for democratic reforms, hoping for governance that could ensure peace and development.

Tragically, after countless sacrifices and loss of lives, the democratic framework that emerged proved shallow and inadequate. Accountability remained weak, corruption flourished, and governance often fell prey to favouritism. With limited opportunities at home, a large section of Nepal's youth migrated abroad, making remittances a cornerstone of the nation's economy while domestic growth stagnated.

Public frustration intensified in this climate, culminating in nationwide protests led by young citizens, especially Generation Z. They took to the streets against corruption, restrictions, and curbs on their freedoms, including

the banning of several social media platforms. On 8th September, these protests reached a boiling point. What began as peaceful demonstrations turned into tragedy when security forces opened fire on unarmed citizens. Twenty-one lives were lost and over 350 injured as reported—a grim violation of international human rights norms.

The blood of innocents must not be shed in vain. This incident should be a wake-up call for Nepal's government to embrace meaningful reform, uphold transparency, and respect the fundamental rights of its citizens. In any true democracy, power rests with the people, and leaders must never forget that their foremost duty is to serve them.

Yours etc.,
Rahul Chettri,
Shillong 1

Nepal's Gen Z Fights Back

Editor,
What happens when a government tries to silence the generation that grew up with the world at its fingertips? On September 8, 2025, Nepal witnessed an extraordinary uprising, not led by political parties or veteran leaders, but by its youngest citizens. What began as outrage over a sweeping ban on more than two dozen social media platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X, quickly grew into a nationwide movement against corruption, nepotism, and mis-governance.

Tens of thousands of Gen Z protesters flooded the streets of Kathmandu, Pokhara, Dharan, Butwal, and beyond, chanting: "We are the movement. We will fight against corruption and nepotism." Their demand went beyond just internet freedom; they called for accountability and dignity in governance. The Oli government defended the ban as a regulatory measure after platforms failed to register with authorities. But free speech advocates argue it was less about compliance and more about censorship. For Nepal's digital generation, social media isn't just a source of entertainment; it is a marketplace, a classroom, a forum for free thought, and often, their livelihood. By cutting it off, the government underestimated both their dependence on these platforms and their determination to defend them.

The protests were met with brutal repression. Security forces deployed water cannons, rubber bullets, and live ammunition. By nightfall, at least 19 young protesters had been killed and nearly 400 injured. Yet, despite the violence, demonstrators declared they would rather face bullets than return to silence.

Political consequences followed swiftly: the resignation of Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak and the formation of an inquiry committee. But the deeper challenge remains, the growing frustration of a generation betrayed by leaders who promise development but deliver corruption, nepotism,

Capt Williamson Sangma State University

A Call to Be Better Than the Best

By Bijoy A. Sangma

struggle to establish such facilities in their early years.

Academic Programmes
In Balagre, postgraduate programmes have started in Anthropology, Economics, Environmental Science, Garo, Political Science, Sociology, Education, History, Geography, Philosophy, Commerce, English, and Social Work. In Shillong, departments in Commerce, English, Khasi and Social Work are functioning, though for now, classes are being held at Shillong Engineering College.

At present, five hundred and forty students are enrolled. It's a modest number, but that is how all institutions begin, small and steady.

Early Enthusiasm and the Affiliation Puzzle

The university's recognition generated a wave of confidence. By May 2025, twenty-two colleges had applied for affiliation with the state university. However, the process hit a snag when NEHU clarified that its Act does not allow 'dual affiliation,' leading CWSSU to cancel provisional affiliations until colleges complete due de-affiliation from NEHU. The state then reset the process: Education Minister Rakkam A. Sangma said affiliation would be open to newly established institutions or those without NEHU linkage, while others could shift only after due procedure.

Eleven new colleges, mainly new setups, had already secured affiliation. Affiliation has not been stopped but carefully sequenced to follow the law, protecting both NEHU and CWSSU while steadily expanding student options.

Strengthening the Ecosystem

It is important to understand that the emergence of CWSSU does not diminish the stature or contribution of other institutions of higher learning in the state. On the contrary, it strengthens the overall ecosystem. The state's student population is growing rapidly, and existing institutions are reaching capacity. CWSSU provides an additional platform while complementing the wider mandate of other institutions in the state. Together, multiple institutions create a robust, diverse, and accessible educational landscape.

Across India, states benefit from a mix of central, state, and private universities. Meghalaya, with its unique population and geography, stands to gain similarly from multiple quality institutions.

Teething Problems and the Road Ahead

No institution is without its teething problems. For CWSSU, the initial affiliation

confusion was a reminder that higher education is as much about governance and regulation as it is about classrooms and syllabi. Establishing statutory processes, ensuring compliance with the UGC norms, and recruiting the right blend of faculty and administrative staff are tasks that cannot be rushed. It is important to accept that pioneering an institution of this scale is a daunting task, and there will be some setbacks along the way.

Faculty recruitment remains one of the pressing concerns. While the enthusiasm among both the young and the experienced teachers is evident, the university must attract and retain top talent to ensure quality. In the long run, the university's reputation will rest not just on buildings or numbers, but on the calibre and commitment of its faculty and administrators. The assurance of quality, consistency, and full commitment from the staff is therefore crucial.

The Human Dimension

Walking through the campus, what struck me most was not the concrete or the equipment, but the people. Students were attending classes with sincerity, teachers were visibly engaged, and there was an undercurrent of optimism. Students were serious, teachers were committed, and there was an energy that was hard to miss. This human dimension is what truly powers an institution. Universities are not built overnight; they are cultivated through decades of such dedication. The progress at CWSSU demonstrates that the seeds have been planted, and now they must be nurtured.

Safeguarding a State Asset

CWSSU is, by any measure, a crucial asset for Meghalaya, carrying the aspirations of communities seeking access to higher education. But like all young institutions, it is also vulnerable. Universities can be affected by politics, short-term pressures, or other external influences. To allow CWSSU to grow and mature, it must be protected from negative influences that might undermine its growth and quality. Safeguarding academic autonomy, ensuring financial stability, and building systems of accountability will be essential to its long-term health.

The experience of other Indian universities suggests that the early years are the most delicate. It is during this time that governance models, academic cultures, and institutional identities are forged. If CWSSU can navigate this period with

stability and integrity, it will emerge stronger and more resilient.

A Broader Perspective
CWSSU also reflects a wider national and global imperative. UNESCO emphasizes that higher education is essential for societies to adapt to economic and technological change. For Meghalaya, the university adds capacity at a time when young people aim to compete regionally, nationally, and internationally.

The Northeast requires universities that are locally rooted yet globally connected. CWSSU, named after a leader who championed Meghalaya's identity, has the potential to achieve this balance.

Patience and Support

As encouraging as the progress is, it is important to remember that universities cannot be measured in months or a few years. Their true stature is built over decades. For CWSSU, the journey has just begun. Five hundred and forty students are admitted, the infrastructure is impressive, the enthusiasm is real, and the commitment is visible, and the leadership deserves credit for progress so far. Yet, much remains to be done in infrastructural refinement (especially utilities), in building faculty strength, in developing research capacity, in introducing job-oriented courses, in collaborating with other universities in India and abroad, and in ensuring that governance keeps pace with growth.

Patience, therefore, is critical. We must allow CWSSU the time to grow and mature, without rushing to judgment or placing unrealistic burdens on it. As citizens, what we can do is to support it, through goodwill, constructive feedback, and above all, by trusting the process.

Aim Beyond the Best

CWSSU represents both a milestone and a beginning. It is a milestone because it marks Meghalaya's decision to invest in its own state-run university. It is a beginning because the real work of building an enduring institution lies ahead. My impression is that the foundations are strong. There are challenges, yes, but there is also vision and energy.

This is my call to CWSSU: lead with vision, dedication, and ambition, and make this university better than the best. It is up to the leadership, faculty, students, and the wider community—the citizens of Meghalaya to protect, nurture, and elevate this institution. With integrity, commitment, and a clear long-term vision, CWSSU can aspire to world-class standards and stand among the very best universities globally.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Repair the House, 'Don't Paint the Cracks...!

It's always easier to live in a lie, isn't it? Like the fellow who notices cracks creeping up the walls of his home. Instead of calling in the mason, mixing cement, and getting his hands dirty, he buys a can of ivory paint. With a few bold strokes, the house gleams again—at least on the surface.

That, I fear, is where we stand as a nation today. We are busy painting cracks instead of repairing walls.

The Lie of Appearances

Turn on the television and what do you see? Smiling leaders shaking hands in China. Crisp suits, red carpets, staged photographs where the backdrop seems brighter than the faces. Anchors gush as if they've personally been invited to the banquet. Newspapers print columns of praise. WhatsApp forwards fly around with captions screaming, "India respected worldwide!"

But pause a moment. Are we really respected? Or are we, like that freshly painted but crumbling house, simply fooling ourselves?

The danger of lies isn't that they're told. The danger is when we start believing

painted over, is a warning sign ignored.

We can only paint cracks for so long. Sooner or later, the structure collapses. And then no amount of ivory paint can save the house.

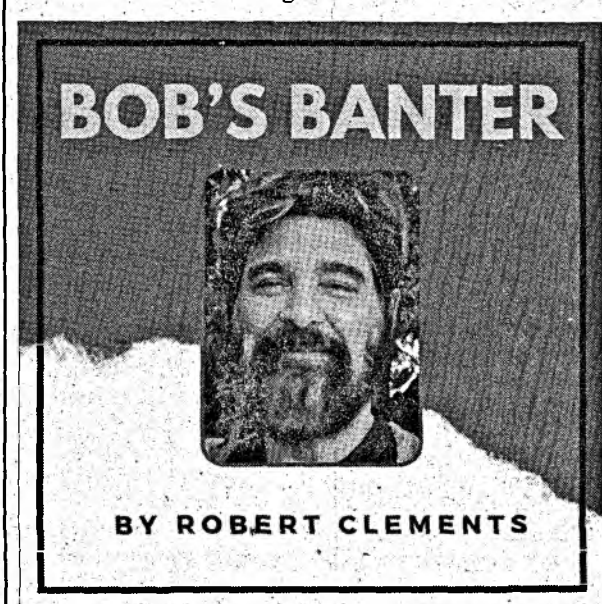
Facing the Truth

So what must we do? First, stop believing our own propaganda. A nation is not strengthened by false praise. It is strengthened by confronting its weaknesses head-on. The cracks in our walls are real: poor infrastructure, weak institutions, divisive politics, compromised freedoms. To pretend otherwise is to play with collapse.

Second, we must earn respect the hard way. By improving education so our students don't just flood foreign universities but excel in them. By building industries that export more than slogans. By treating our minorities and dissenters with fairness so that the world sees in us not hypocrisy but genuine democracy. By making policies that lift our poor instead of fattening a few businessmen.

Respect is never bought; it is built. Inch by inch. Truth by truth. Policy by policy.

The Danger of Living in a Lie



them. We begin building castles in the air, planting our tricolour flags on those clouds, and marching around proclaiming, "Superpower!" Reality, of course, chuckles. While we strut about with borrowed feathers, the world quietly measures our real weight—and the scales don't tilt in our favour.

The Brutal Reality

Respect cannot be photocopied. It isn't built with Instagram reels of leaders hugging each other. It isn't earned by being hosted in dragon palaces or walking down red carpets. True respect comes by proving yourself through action, consistency, dignity, and substance.

And what do the headlines really say? Students assaulted in Ireland. Our workers mistreated in the Middle East. Our athletes ignored in Australia. Our voice drowned out at global summits. The same countries we flatter with staged photographs treat us with dismissive shrugs once the flashbulbs fade.

Even the numbers don't lie. Indices on press freedom, poverty, and education place us embarrassingly low. The world doesn't see us as a giant; it sees us as a noisy teenager still trying to convince himself he's grown.

Why Do We Cling to Illusions?

The answer, I suspect, lies in our sense of inferiority. For a few years, we fooled ourselves with the sweet wine of thinking we were a rising power. We loved the idea that the world envied us, admired us, and maybe even feared us. It was a narcotic, and once we were hooked, reality became too bitter to sip.

So we wrapped ourselves in illusions. Like the emperor in his famous "new clothes," we paraded about half-naked, thrilled at how grand our garments looked, while the world smirked. We mistook mockery for applause, and in doing so, we built our pride not on stone but on air.

The Cost of Lies

But illusions are costly. When reality barges in, it does not knock softly. It storms through the door with headlines, statistics, and humiliations. A student beaten abroad is not just a news item—it is a mirror. An economy sliding down the charts is not just a number—it is a slap. Every insult unacknowledged, every failure

The greatest danger of living in a lie is not the ridicule of others. It is the blindness it causes within. Once we believe the painted wall is new, we forget the cracks underneath. We ignore the termites gnawing at the beams. We silence those who warn us, dismissing them as pessimists or "anti-nationals." By the time we realize the danger, the house has already fallen.

The world is not fooled. It has eyes sharper than ours. It sees through our illusions faster than we imagine. It laughs not at our ambition but at our inability to distinguish ambition from arrogance, progress from propaganda.

A Call to Repair

It is time—long past time—to stop painting the cracks and start repairing the house. To face uncomfortable truths. To ask difficult questions. To hold our leaders accountable not for how many photo-ops they deliver, but for how many schools they build, how many jobs they create, how much dignity they protect.

Repairing is harder than painting. It means sweat, dust, and patience. It means admitting flaws. But only repaired houses stand through storms. Painted houses collapse.

And storms, let me remind you, are gathering. Global politics is shifting. Economies are tightening. Respect will not be given freely. It will have to be earned—or we will be pushed to the margins.

Final Word

We can no longer afford the luxury of lies. We cannot continue to clap at illusions while the walls crack. We must demand reality. We must build with truth. We must repair.

For if we don't, the day the roof caves in, we won't just lose a house. We will lose credibility, dignity, and the chance to stand tall in the world.

The danger of living in a lie is that truth always arrives. And when it does, it arrives mercilessly. That truth, my friends, is already arriving—super fast.

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

the announcement of new

job vacancies is a moment of pride, but the true test of governance lies in the management of the recruitment process—a test the current system has profoundly failed. When advertisements for government posts were released, a sense of hope spread across Meghalaya's 12 districts and 46 blocks. However, this hope quickly gave way to despair.

The decision to make the application process entirely offline, with strict deadlines imposed on each region, created a logistical nightmare. The result was a disheartening spectacle: thousands of young men and women forced to stand in endless queues, pushing through crowds just to submit their forms. The human cost of this ordeal has been immense.

For weeks, applicants have endured incredible hardship, many arriving as early as midnight to wait through cold and rainy nights. Forced to sleep on the ground simply to receive a token number the next morning, their sacrifice is a testament to their resolve.

As one youth tragically summarized, "A night without sleep, a day without sitting, just for the sake of our future." It is heartbreaking to see such dedication demanded for the simple act of handing over a paper form. This chaotic situation raises serious questions of accountability. Who is responsible? Is it the government, the BSF authority conducting the recruitment, or the planners who issued the advertisement without foreseeing the consequences? Compounding

The Recruitment Crisis in Meghalaya

Editor,

The desperation for employment among the youth of Meghalaya is a well known reality. While the government acknowledges this, its actions often fail to uphold the dignity of its young citizens.

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
St. Joseph's University,
Bangalore

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

Yours etc.,
Rabfah Phawa,
Via email

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in Meghalaya

ASSAM and Meghalaya are the only two states of the North East with companies listed in the National Stock Exchange (NSE) and Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE). In fact, Meghalaya has one Mid Cap and one Small Cap listed companies. Star Cement has market capitalisation of Rs 7891 crore and is in the Mid Cap group while Shyam Century Ferrous Limited with a market capitalisation of Rs 337 crore is in the small cap category. Both companies are in the Jaintia Hills. So what is the contribution of these two companies to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in their areas of operation? While companies do not have to directly pay CSR to the state government, the Companies Act 2013 mandates that they spend a percentage of their profits on CSR activities, giving preference to local areas where they operate. If the company fails to spend the amount, it must explain the reasons in its report and transfer the unspent amount to a government specified fund. The preference for local areas is advisory in nature and not strictly mandatory, requiring a balance between local needs and national priorities.

The states have not protested this unequal deal. Considering that companies rely on extractive mining and create devastating environmental pollution as is evident in the pollution of the Lukha river and deforestation, they should be contributing to eco-restoration programmes. Activities which are normally included by companies in their CSR are (i) Eradicating hunger, poverty and malnutrition, (2) promoting health care including preventive health care (3) Sanitation (4) contribution to the Swachh Bharat Kosh set-up by the Central Government for the promotion of sanitation and making available safe drinking water. CSR funds are supposed to be used to promote education, including special education and employment enhancing vocational skills especially among children, women, elderly and the differently-abled and livelihood enhancement projects. They are meant to promote gender equality and women's empowerment; to set up homes and hostels for women and orphans; to set up old age homes, day care centres and such other facilities for senior citizens and measures for reducing inequalities faced by socially and economically backward groups. Above all the CSR funds are meant to ensure environmental sustainability, ecological balance, protection of flora and fauna, animal welfare, agroforestry, conservation of natural resources and maintaining quality of soil, air and water.

CSR paid to the central government is intended to be used for a plethora of welfare measures such as research in Science and Technology, Medicine and Engineering and above all to promote the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In India CSR is a mandatory obligation for companies under Section 135 of the Companies Act, 2013. Companies with a net worth of Rs 500 crore or more, turnover of Rs 1,000 crore or more, or net profit of Rs 5 crore or more in the preceding financial year must constitute a CSR committee and spend at least 2% of their average net profits from the preceding three financial years on specified CSR activities. But is this really happening? And what about the other cement companies operating in Meghalaya but which are not listed in the stock exchange. Its time to hold such companies accountable.

Letters to the Editor

Students should study not fight: A plea to KSU

Editor,
I am writing as a worried parent. What happened in Jaiaa last Saturday where some KSU members reportedly beat up young people is not just a fight. It is a warning sign that something is wrong in Khasi Society. Students are meant to be in classrooms, not on street corners at night. They should be reading books, not throwing punches. Yes, drug abuse is a big problem and we all want to stop it. But beating people is not the answer. That is not justice. Not leadership too. And it is not what the Khasi ethics teaches us.

When some young people asked KSU members to just warn or counsel the drug user instead of hitting him, they were trying to do the right thing. But instead of listening, the KSU members got angry and came back the next night to attack them. That is not brave. It is bullying. I wonder if these members ever enroll themselves in any educational institutions.

No police case has been filed. But just because no one complained does not mean it was right. And where is the main KSU leadership? Why

are they silent? A student union must lead with wisdom, not violence.

Dear KSU members you are our future doctors, teachers, leaders, and lawmakers and future politician too. Do not waste your energy on street fights. Go home. Study hard. Talk to elders. Help those who are lost, do not hurt them. Be the good example our society need.

Parents are watching. Your little brothers and sisters look up to you. Do not let them learn that strength means hitting people. You have the power to change things not with your fists, but with your minds and hearts. Please choose the right path for a better future of ka jaid-bynriew.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang Lyngdoh Rymbai
Via email

Meghalaya's Teachers Fight Back: A Battle for Respect, Equality, and Justice

Editor,
In Meghalaya, the very architects of the state's future—its teachers—find themselves shackled by neglect, injustice, and a system designed not to elevate,

When Power Flows Through Towers and Terminals, Who Owns the Switch?

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

A new Cold War is emerging in the Himalayas, with Nepal as a focal point between the United States' Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). This competition for influence mirrors historical tensions, such as Bangladesh's anticipated 2024 upheaval and Indonesia's 1965 conflict, which serves as a warning for South Asian states and India's Northeast, particularly Meghalaya. Nepal's position between China and India requires careful balancing, which is now complicated by U.S. involvement through the MCC compact, ratified in 2022 but suspended in 2025. Beijing views the MCC as a counter to the BRI, which has established a significant regional influence.

This scenario reflects Cold War 2.0, which is marked by competing development models and dependency on infrastructure. The MCC is building high-voltage transmission lines and road enhancements to foster energy sovereignty and regional market integration in the region. Meanwhile, Pokhara International Airport, financed by China Exim Bank, faces low traffic and repayment challenges, showing how infrastructure becomes a soft leverage. The airport's financial struggles mirror other BRI assets, where revenue shortfalls convert debt into diplomatic influence, intensifying Nepal's hedging position.

To comprehend Kathmandu's apprehension regarding external pressures, the 2015-16 border crisis is key. An "unofficial blockade" following Nepal's new constitution caused severe fuel and medicine shortages, which were attributed to India despite New Delhi's denial. This blockade led to a reorientation of Nepal's foreign policy, fostering closer ties with China and increasing scepticism towards India's influence. This episode continues to influence Nepali perspectives on the MCC-versus-BRI discourse as a case of post-colonial power dynamics.

In August 2024, Sheikh Hasina resigned amid protests, with Washington advocating for calm and implementing visa restrictions on Bangladeshis who undermined the democratic norms. Indian media reported disruptions affecting visa centres and trade, while U.S. visas linked to Hasina were revoked after her departure. Although speculation of covert interventions emerged, what remains evident is the U.S. influence through democratic conditions, sanctions, and rhetoric in Dhaka's political landscape.

The region recalls the events in Indonesia in 1965,

when newly declassified documents and human rights reports revealed that U.S. officials had monitored the mass killings and supported military efforts to suppress the left, facilitating Suharto's rise to authoritarian power. Archival materials, including files referenced by the U.S. State Department's historical record, highlighting the extent of American involvement in Indonesia's internal upheavals during that period and establishing a paradigm by which many in Asia continue to assess Washington's strategic manoeuvres. Whether such tactics remain feasible—or even necessary—in the era of smartphones and social media, this historical memory influences how claims of "regime change" in Nepal or Bangladesh are perceived by both the public and the elites.

India's grand strategy emerged from cautious defiance: K. Krishna Menon introduced the concept of "non-alignment," Nehru universalized Panchsheel, and the Belgrade Summit of 1961 formalized a movement that rejected entanglement with either superpower while engaging with both. The ethical principles of mutual respect, non-interference, and peaceful coexistence have anchored India's diplomacy from Bandung to Belgrade and continue to influence New Delhi's rhetoric, even as the strategic focus has shifted to connectivity, defense partnerships, and economic coalitions. The contemporary Act East Policy operationalises this shift by linking Northeast India to Myanmar, Bangladesh, and ASEAN through highways, railways, inland waterways, and ports, providing a logistical response to the ideological constraints of the Nehruvian era.

Meghalaya's frontier economy breathes through Dawki—Tambuli, an integrated Check Post designed to concentrate customs, immigration, cargo terminals, and warehousing into a single, modern node for legal commerce. Business reporting and official notes show Dawki as a revenue engine for exports such as limestone and coal, with periodic surges in throughput when bilateral relations and weather conditions are favourable. When Bangladesh convulsed in August 2024, border trade from Meghalaya suffered immediate disruption, costing crores in a matter of days and reminding policymakers that political shocks in Dhaka travel directly to the Jaintia Hills.

Strategists refer to the

Siliguri Corridor as the "Chicken's Neck", a narrow land bridge measuring 20-22 km, connecting Northeast India to the rest of the country. This geographical feature renders instability in the surrounding regions of Nepal, Bhutan, or Bangladesh a matter of national security rather than a mere local issue. Recent analyses have highlighted China's activities in the vicinity of the corridor and underscored the necessity for redundancy, such as parallel rail lines, fortified highways, and diversified access routes, to prevent a single disruption from isolating the eight states overnight. Both state and central government initiatives increasingly emphasise circumventing this vulnerability by expanding connections with Bangladesh and Myanmar.

This underscores the importance of maintaining peace and stability across these borders for the daily commerce and long-term growth of the state. The pause in the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) in early 2025, following contentious ratification processes and Chinese counter-narratives, indicates that great power competition can delay development timelines while exacerbating political divisions within smaller states. The mixed outcomes of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), ranging from exemplary projects to debt-related challenges, introduce an additional layer of complexity, where projects like Pokhara risk becoming negotiation tools rather than drivers of prosperity. The upheaval in Bangladesh in 2024 exemplifies how governance failures can lead to external signalling, sanctions, and evacuation advisories, which, in turn, affect the cross-border connections of the Northeast, including Meghalaya.

Academic and policy literature on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) remains insightful: the principle of non-interference is not a sign of naïveté but a means of safeguarding autonomy, and its ethos remains pertinent in the current era of "infrastructure statecraft." Analyses by the World Bank and Indian authorities on the Act East policy emphasise that the most effective defense of autonomy is connectivity that reduces costs, diversifies routes, and renders chokepoints irrelevant, as demonstrated by initiatives such as BBIN, the Kaladan project, and the India-Myanmar-Thailand (IMT) highway. Scholarship on the Nepal blockade offers a final caution: when supply chains are manipulated for politi-

cal purposes, the resulting resentment can endure for years and drive neighbouring countries towards rival alliances.

What should Meghalaya prioritise? First, it is imperative to monitor Dawki's operational resilience and ensure that the Integrated Check Post (ICP) evolves into a comprehensive trade platform, incorporating warehousing, digitised customs, and all-weather access. This will safeguard the state's exporters from political fluctuations. Second, it is essential to advocate for parallel corridors through Bangladesh to reduce dependency on Siliguri, thereby aligning state investments with national priorities under the Act East policy to protect livelihoods and revenue. Third, it is crucial to track Nepal's Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) developments, as grid interconnections, aviation routes, and tourism circuits in the Eastern Himalayas will eventually influence trade flows through Assam and Meghalaya.

Robert Greene posits that power operates as a theatre of perception, wherein the entity that controls the narrative ultimately influences the outcome. In the context of Nepal, the prevailing narratives are characterized by dichotomies such as "grant versus loan," "transparency versus opacity," and "sovereignty versus suzerainty." The situation in Bangladesh exemplifies another principle: when legitimacy is compromised, external actors intervene, wielding the soft power of "norms" alongside the hard power of restrictions. Trade hubs, such as Dawki, often perceive these shifts before diplomatic centres.

The historical records of Indonesia in 1965 serve as a final illustration: in geopolitics, the past is never truly obsolete; it remains classified until revealed. Consequently, smaller states and border communities should incorporate redundancy, transparency, and historical awareness into their defence strategies. The emergence of a new Cold War will not manifest as military invasions but rather through the imposition of standards, sanctions, loans, and territorial demarcations, all converging on strategic choke points such as Siliguri and essential routes such as Dawki. For Meghalaya, the imperative is to adopt disciplined, non-aligned pragmatism at the state level—enhancing connectivity, safeguarding commercial sovereignty, and ensuring that infrastructure development prioritises the needs of citizens over nationalistic interests.

Urgent Call: Dignity, Justice, Reform

What unites these stories is a fundamental betrayal—the abandonment of teachers as partners in progress and as citizens deserving fairness. It is not enough for Meghalaya to tinker at the edges. The state must deliver sweeping reforms: transparent and merit-based recruitment, statutory wage protections with real enforcement, and the immediate restitution of withheld salaries. Only when teachers are paid fully, on time, and without prejudice or favoritism, can the ripples of dignity spread from educators to their pupils—and outward, throughout the state.

Let this not be another report to gather dust. Let it serve as a call to conscience for those in power: the fate of Meghalaya's future is written today in the fate of its teachers. Until their worth is recognized—not just in word, but in wage and unwavering respect—Meghalaya will continue to limp. And it will do so not for lack of talent, but for want of vision, justice, and the moral courage to do what is right.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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Can India become the World's Smart City Hub? Here's what it will take

By Avishka Jain

What is the first thought that comes to mind when we hear the term "smart city"? Maybe gleaming skyscrapers covered in solar panels, cars that drive themselves, or drones delivering your groceries? It probably sounds like science fiction, but not anymore! But what does a "Smart City" actually promise: a city where we solve real problems like traffic jams, pollution, water shortages, and waste, with a fusion of technology, policy, and citizen involvement. Today, however, a smart city means much more than futuristic tech, it's about creating sustainable, inclusive, and resilient urban spaces where innovation meets everyday life.

As India rapidly urbanizes with nearly 590 million people expected to live in cities by 2030, the dream of transforming India into a "Smart City hub" cannot be just a dream anymore. It is now an urgently necessary dream and a dire requirement for ensuring sustainable growth, efficient resource management, and an improved quality of life for millions.

However, turning India's towns into smart, sustainable hubs is easier said than done. Multiple challenges are to be faced and tackled but with the right solutions, India can become the next hub of future ready cities. India's cities were originally designed for fewer people and for far smaller economic activities than they host today. But today, urban pressure and environmental concerns are the root causes of hindrance. Be it traffic snarls, overcrowded public transports and poor infrastructure in Mumbai to the rising pollution levels in Delhi, there is great economical stress.

In 2015, when the Government of India launched the "Smart Cities Mission" (SCM), the vision was bold: transform 100 Indian cities into hubs of knowledge, innovation, and replication, similar to Singapore in East Asia or Barcelona in Europe. But turning this vision into reality came with steep hurdles. The biggest roadblock was the infrastructural backlog. Many Indian cities still run on outdated systems. Bengaluru, for instance, has been branded the "Most Congested City" because of its poor road and pathway networks, while nearly 40% of Mumbai's population lives in slums, a direct result of decades of poor urban planning. Another pressing challenge is the digital divide. Although smartphones are widely used, as of early 2024, 45% of Indians still lack internet access, according to a joint IAMA-Kantar study. This leaves millions of urban poor cut off from the very digital tools that smart city services depend upon.

And the challenges do not stop there. Indian cities also grapple with funding constraints. Building smart public transport systems or modern waste management facilities requires billions of dollars, far beyond what most municipalities can afford. Add to this the lack of a skilled workforce: For smart cities to truly thrive, India needs urban planners, data scientists, and IoT architects. At present, however, the majority of our skilled talent is driving the IT industry rather than reimagining the future of our cities.

Another roadblock lies in the way our cities are managed. In India, the metro rail is overseen by one agency, traffic control by another, and sewage systems by yet another. This fragmented governance makes coordination extremely difficult and slows down progress. On top of this, citizen engagement remains a challenge. Unless people see tangible benefits, they are reluctant to adopt digital apps or take part in community-driven projects. Combating citizen apathy and mistrust is therefore just as important as fixing infrastructure or funding gaps.

But hey! Here's the upside, none of these roadblocks are permanent. By weaving together technology, good governance, and community voices, India can overcome them. Indian cities must upgrade what exists before building new. Instead of creating new "planned city projects", Indian cities must develop and restore their existing systems. For example, in Indore streetlights are replaced with solar powered smart LEDs which saves up to 60% on electricity bills.

India cannot copy expensive technologies from cities like Singapore completely and hence needs in-house innovations. For example, using low cost IoT sensors for air and water monitoring along with encouraging startups and Indian companies rather than importing costly foreign tech. Cities must make use of Public-Private Partnerships (PPP) and rope in private companies through revenue-sharing models. For instance, letting telecom operators install 5G smart poles while residents gain access to public Wi-Fi zones.

Like Bhopal and Pune, smart cities require a one stop control room. A command centre where transport, electricity, and safety data all stream into one screen. Thus, Integration of Urban Governance should be encouraged. A smart city loses its purpose if it is not sustainable and hence rainwater harvesting sensors, green roofs and smart solid waste recycling needs to be embedded by design.

A thriving smart city is built not just by policies and plans, but by ensuring citizens sit at the heart of every decision. Apps like "FixMyStreet" in London empowers residents to photograph any potholes or faulty lights and get them fixed. Similarly Indian apps like "I Change My City" should be promoted. When citizens report and cities respond, that is real progress.

Fun fuels action and hence citizens are more likely to participate in solutions if there were a "Green Points" reward system with various benefits, for example, The Green Exchange Program in Curitiba system encourages recycling while providing benefits to the community and supporting local farmers. This program allows citizens to exchange collected recyclable materials (like paper, plastic, and aluminium) for fresh food items such as vegetables and fruits.

Smart cities must not become an elite project. With tech assistance and SMS services, domestic workers and informal vendors can be part of the digital transformation too.

When it comes to smart city innovations, India doesn't necessarily have to invent something new, it can adopt globally successful ideas. For example, Barcelona (Spain) is known for its "smart parking sensors" which guides drivers to available spots, reducing traffic congestion. Singapore uses a "digital twin" which is a virtual 3D replica of the physical environment, streets, buildings, transport systems and even underground tunnels. What makes it special? It is "Live", meaning real-time data (from sensors, IoT devices, and satellites) flows into it, so planners can simulate, test, and predict outcomes.

Can you guess where we can see some glimpses of Smart Cities in India today? Indore has been consistently ranked as India's cleanest city for 8 years because of strict waste collection, citizen participation and GPS monitored garbage trucks whereas Pune allows its citizens to directly vote online for the Urban projects that deserve the allocated city funds. Bangalore's "Namma Metro" transit system with operational length of about 96.10 km offers hassle free transportation across 83 stations and developing.

On India's 79th Independence Day (15th August 2025), Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the youth of India to bring forward innovative ideas and contribute to nation-building. "Don't let your ideas die, I am with you" he said and so the time is right to innovate in this space. Whether through student projects, homegrown startups or public service, even something as simple as a college robotics club building a low-cost waste segregation mechanism adds a vital piece to India's Smart City Journey.

Smart cities are not science fiction. They're already here in pieces and prototypes. But the smartest move India can make is not just to chase digital dreams but to build cities that work for everyone. Because in a country of 1.4 billion, Smart cities cannot be merely built on sensors and screens, but on trust, access, and inclusivity.

(The writer is a first-year student at Plaksha University, is driven by curiosity, creativity, and an outgoing spirit!)

“Never was anything great achieved without danger.”
— Niccolò Machiavelli

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‘Young’ at 75

A widely circulated essay by Prime Minister Narendra Modi on RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat crossing the age of 75 on Thursday drew national attention. It's natural and justified on the part of the Prime Minister to have praised the Sarsangh Chalak, whose visionary engineering of India's democratic process through the arm of the RSS' political outfit, the BJP, brought Modi upfront. It was the RSS that offered the PM nomination to Modi on a platter in 2014, exploiting the social schisms in the country and turning these to the advantage of the Saffron enterprise. Branded with a newly acquired 'BC' label, Modi played roles effectively, projected himself as a messiah of the poor, then as Chowkidar, and later as pride of the entire nation. The script was RSS's very own, and Modi played it out with eminent ease.

The main beneficiary of the three consecutive terms of the Modi rule has been the RSS, who ably used these years to strengthen its organisational heft not just in the Hindi belt, but across the country. It must however be noted that it is not in the RSS' character to heap praises on anyone, including the Prime Minister. Its silence speaks volumes. A high sense of discipline is evident in the nationalistic, service-oriented organisation's conduct. Discipline is but a façade. The outpourings in the form of the Sarsangh Chalak's public statements are only a cover for the organisation's long-term hidden agenda. It must, however, be admitted that Modi as Prime Minister has been somewhat cautious in implementing sectarian agenda.

He's going slow and as PM has not acted with much courage; a reason why his last 11 years have been a season of political and economic stability. He dropped contentious issues like a hot potato – as in the farm reform bills. While praising Bhagwat, Modi cleverly circumvented the age factor. The Sarsangh Chalak perhaps gives no weight to Modi's prescription that those holding public offices and party positions must hang up their boots after age 75. Bhagwat might carry on even after overseeing the RSS' centenary celebrations in October. He has the grit and determination to run the organisation, and take his attempts at social engineering to new levels. Modi, who too would be crossing age 75 a week hence, is also bound to hector on with renewed vigour. Ideally, the old order must give way to new; ageing men must groom their second line of successors and step aside. Be it a nation or an organisation, injection of new blood is of paramount importance. India couldn't imagine a future without visionary first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru. Change, however, is in the order of things. A natural tendency for those who hold office, principally freewheeling politicians drunk with power and mass adulation, is to carry on and on. They use their clout to build a circle of protection around them. Modi's bar on post-75 politicians was a good step to counter such ills. Else, the nation will suffer the ills of decadence.

Rewriting the rules of journalism

By Patricia Mukhim

Technology is developing at a frenetic pace and transforming our way of doing journalism. Long form storytelling is passe and only those with time to listen to a 20 minute narration – which means the older generation – not millennials, not Gen X or Z, will enjoy what is produced by what we now call the 'legacy media.' Forget about reading newspapers, this is the era of click-baits and instant news on YouTube which like instant coffee gives a kick while it lasts. So, is the newspaper now a dinosaur to be discarded? The answer is 'No.' The newspaper continues to be the basis of what journalism is all about, which is to inform, educate and generate public opinion which will in turn push people to take action. If a policy is legislated, short form journalism will not have the time to analyse the policy or to talk to opinion makers, academicians and thinkers who will give their considered views and therefore help the hoi-polloi to understand if the policy is in public interest or against it. This is where short form journalism falters.

Now the question is whether Gen Z the group of people who were born between the late 1990s and the early 2010s; whose eyes beheld the mobile phone the moment they opened them – are actually interested in what's happening around them and whether they are motivated enough to take up causes. The answer to this question is straightforward. What happened in Nepal was a Gen Z-led revolution, so yes, this age group is capable of pulling down an elected government if they believe that government is acting against their collective interests and is involved in corruption and nepotism.

Interestingly, not much research has gone into what kind of media Gen Z consume and why. Do the Gen Z youth read anything substantive to give them enough information to take on the government of the day based on points derived from a critical analysis of the situation? Its high time that media practitioners engage with Gen Z to understand them better and to actually know what they expect from the media. This might help us wean Gen Z from click-baits and give them real news. Now some may ask what sort of news constitute click-baits. Click-

baits are short form news that pique the curiosity of the viewer by using sensational headlines and phrases like, “You won't believe this.” Such headlines capitalize on the human penchant for drama and shock, more so with Gen Z and pushes them to click the link and watch the news story only to find that there was nothing much in the story.

But this does not mean that we in the legacy media should not be exploring new ways of doing journalism. In fact, we not only have to deliver news differently but also write it differently using, if possible, some of the Gen Z lingo with explainers. We have heard a lot about cancel culture but hardly know its meaning. Cancel culture is a form of shaming the actions or opinions of a public figure, company or organization. If something is ‘dank,’ it's

entirely. According to a Pew Study, 61% of millennials get their news about politics and government from Facebook because they want content relevant to them. Hence TV news channels like CNN and BBC have started partnering with Facebook. They are producing online videos which are crafted to be more engaging and personal. The journalist can no longer be faceless but has to engage and be ‘in your face.’

However, we also need to come to some crucial issues that the media has been repeatedly told it should be doing. It is drummed into a journalist's head that our role in a democracy is to inform the public what's happening closer home, in the region; the country and the world so that the ‘public’ can make informed decisions on crucial issues such as voting during elections. But judging by the

“Interestingly, not much research has gone into what kind of media Gen Z consume and why. Do the Gen Z youth read anything substantive to give them enough information to take on the government of the day based on points derived from a critical analysis of the situation? Its high time that media practitioners engage with Gen Z to understand them better and to actually know what they expect from the media. This might help us wean Gen Z from click-baits and give them real news. Now some may ask what sort of news constitute click-baits.”

quality of legislators we elect I am left wondering if the public really uses information while voting. If they did, we would not elect cranks to become law makers.

Another role of the media we are told is to facilitate debate since it provides a platform for diverse voices and opinions, enabling public debate on important issues. The idea is to build not only an informed but also an engaged citizenry. But is the public of Meghalaya engaged and ready to throw their hat in the ring and call a spade a spade in a public debate? Other than the predictable pressure groups the gentry will not want to be counted as dissenters.

Oh yes, we are repeatedly reminded that the media should be holding power to account by doing investiga-

tive journalism and exposing corruption and wrongdoing and to ensure that those in power are held accountable. We are told this is the crucible of a healthy democracy. So, we in the media dig out scams from time to time but what happens thereafter? The public will discuss it at a museum and move on to the next big story. And when journalists get into conflict with the law, because the powerful file defamation cases against us, how many of that fiction called the “public” actually stand with journalists. We fight our own battles and fight mental health all alone. That's journalism for you beyond the hype and hoopla.

However, journalists are not without their faults and failings too. Sensational and tantalising headlines have been common currency and we do this because we are in the race for ratings and clicks. But this focus on dramatic and shocking stories can divert attention from important issues and create a distorted view of reality. This is when media loses public trust and without that we might as well pack up our bags and leave. In this hyper-nationalistic world we live in, where extreme right wing ideologies are used to divide the polity, sensationalism can be dangerous and contribute to fear and panic apart from influencing public opinion and policy decisions in negative ways. The way forward therefore is to help build a more responsible and credible media landscape. We need constant feedback so we can correct ourselves and continue to play a positive role in helping to shape democracy and public policy. It is imperative to introduce subjects like ‘media literacy’ at the middle school level considering that even young kids are consuming so much news. The young and elderly must learn to critically evaluate news and information. Its time the public also learns how to fact check and find out if a particular news is true or fake. Media literacy programs can help people identify reliable sources, recognize biases, and avoid being misled by fake news.

At the end of the day, journalism is just one of the pillars of democracy. If the other three pillars which are state-supported don't care about the erosion of democratic values the media alone cannot keep democracy on track.

more like a spark. This shows how powerful words can be. They can bring hope, but they can also remind us of dark times. The boy was talking about unemployment and corruption, not hate, but his Hitler-like style made people forget the message and focus on his tone. Social media spread the performance more than the content. What started as fun online became part of the real anger on the streets.

But this does not mean young Nepalis are turning to Nazism. What it shows is how social media can twist things. The anger behind the memes is real because young people are tired of lies, joblessness and corruption. If this same fire is used for honesty and change, it can clean the system without destroying lives.

Nepal is now mourning. Young people have died in clashes with police. Their loss should remind everyone that change cannot come through blood and bullets. The boy's speech may have looked like defiance, but the future must be built with courage, care and peace. Words can break or build. This is the time to mourn the dead, refuse violence and use the power of youth to make a better tomorrow.

Yours etc.,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

From Viral School Speech to Nepal Streets

Editor,
When a schoolboy from Jhapa, later called “Adolf Thapa” online, gave a fiery speech at his school, nobody thought it would spread so far. His shouting voice, sharp hand moves and strong tone made many compare him directly to Adolf Hitler. Very soon, the clip became a meme on YouTube, WhatsApp, Facebook, and Instagram. But as Nepal's Gen Z began to protest against corruption and the social media ban, that speech started to look less like a joke and

Yours etc.,
Sunrise Poham,
Via email

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Lead Poisoning & the Loss of Potential

A Call for Shared Responsibility

By Vasuki Rayapati

Across the world, millions of children are silently poisoned by lead, a neurotoxin so pervasive and so neglected that it has become one of the greatest hidden threats to human development. An overwhelming 94% of the global disease burden from lead exposure falls on low- and middle-income countries, with South Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific bearing the heaviest toll.

Children are the most vulnerable. Exposure in the early years, when the brain is growing most rapidly, can cause irreversible neurological, cognitive, and physical damage, and in severe cases, even death. Adults also face memory loss, hypertension, kidney disease, and premature mortality. Pregnant women are at grave risk, with exposure linked to miscarriage, low birth weight, and long-term developmental delays in their babies. At the molecular level, lead disrupts the nervous system's most basic functions, undermining healthy brain development.

According to The Toxic

line allies with the right knowledge and tools, awareness can translate into action. They can:

- Identify hidden sources of exposure in homes, schools, and marketplaces.

- Educate families on safer practices around food, water, and household goods.

- Promote safe behaviours in classrooms, Anganwadi centres, and community spaces.

- Detect early signs of developmental or behavioural delays and connect families to care.

- Push for stronger monitoring of industrial and environmental hazards.

Awareness is not just about knowing; it is about acting. When caregivers and communities recognize risks, adopt safer practices, and demand accountability, they form the first shield against lead poisoning's devastating effects.

Breaking Silos, Building Solutions

Lead poisoning shows why public health cannot be left to one department alone. Its effects are slow

Lead is everywhere. Its widespread use in consumables, household items, and industries comes from the very qualities that make it so convenient: it enhances colour, adds weight to spices and cosmetics, gives lustre to paints and glazes, improves durability in batteries and pipes, and reduces costs in manufacturing. This toxic convenience has quietly invaded our lives, making exposure difficult to escape. But living with lead does not mean living in ignorance. Awareness is the only true defence. There is still no known cure for lead poisoning; testing alone cannot solve the crisis. Identifying and eliminating sources before they harm is the only effective strategy.

Truth report (2020) by UNECE and Pure Earth, India is facing a global crisis: over 64 million children have blood lead levels (BLLs) above 5 µg/dL, the highest in the world. Meghalaya is no exception. A 2022 CSIR-NEERI study found average BLLs of 6.12 µg/dL in the state – above the WHO's 5 µg/dL and CDC's 3.5 µg/dL thresholds. These estimates are derived from available data generated through micro-level studies, which highlight the widespread yet under-documented nature of the problem. The World Health Organization is unequivocal: there is no safe level of lead in the body. Yet, in a state already struggling with poverty, low literacy, and fragile healthcare, this silent epidemic remains largely invisible, with its devastating effects often appearing too late.

Awareness: The First Line of Defence
Lead is everywhere. Its widespread use in consumables, household items, and industries comes from the very qualities that make it so convenient: it enhances colour, adds weight to spices and cosmetics, gives lustre to paints and glazes, improves durability in batteries and pipes, and reduces costs in manufacturing. This toxic convenience has quietly invaded our lives, making exposure difficult to escape. But living with lead does not mean living in ignorance. Awareness is the only true defence.

There is still no known cure for lead poisoning; testing alone cannot solve the crisis. Identifying and eliminating sources before they harm is the only effective strategy. This is where caregivers, teachers, Anganwadi workers, and frontline health staff become indispensable. They are closest to children during their formative years, providing sustained care and guidance. Their daily interactions make them the first to notice risks, the first to educate families, and the strongest advocates for safer environments.

By equipping these front-

and invisible, but responsibility is fragmented across health, education, environment, food safety, and social welfare, to name a few. The result is dangerous gaps.

A child may drink safe water at school but still eat vegetables grown in contaminated soil or play near discarded batteries. No single sector can solve this. What is needed is intersectoral and interdepartmental coordination — where data is shared, policies are aligned, and interventions reinforce one another.

If governments, communities, and professionals work together on a single platform, children's potential can be safeguarded and unlocked at the most critical stage — their early years. Done in time, this coordination delivers more than health: it strengthens education outcomes, builds a more capable workforce, and contributes to a resilient society.

Protecting Our Future

Lead poisoning is more than a health hazard, it is a thief of human potential. When exposure strikes in early childhood, it silently robs children of the chance to learn, grow, and thrive, with consequences that last a lifetime. Addressing lead exposure, therefore, is not just about reducing illness. It is about securing the foundations of education, productivity, and resilience for the next generation. Meghalaya, and India at large stand at a pivotal moment: to acknowledge this hidden crisis and act before another generation loses its potential.

The way forward is clear. Build awareness at the community level, equip caregivers and frontline workers with knowledge and tools, and foster collaboration across departments and sectors. If governments, professionals, and communities act together, we can shield children from preventable harm, strengthen caregivers, and secure a healthier, more resilient society.

(The writer is a Public Health Specialist at Pehle India Foundation)

Letters to the Editor

Tourism under strain

Editor

Tourism in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills is showing signs of decline, with increasing negative perceptions beginning to circulate. Various associations, NGOs, and smaller political groups are gradually moving into the tourism sector, often finding themselves in the spotlight of both print and social media, which tend to highlight and amplify their voices. In contrast, organizations such as the Meghalaya Tourism Development Forum (MTDF) once played a pivotal role in shaping tourism narratives with positivity and inclusivity. Under the dynamic leadership of the late R.G. Lyngdoh, MTDF introduced impactful themes such as “Positive Vibrations.” Notably, it organized large-scale cultural events like the Drum Ensemble, which achieved a Guinness World Record and brought global recognition to the region. At present, however, MTDF's activities have become far less visible, raising questions about its current role and influence in promoting tourism in Meghalaya.

At present, certain groups with limited credibility are attempting to benefit from the tourism sector by raising issues that are often superficial and self-serving. While the Government has, at times, responded wisely to contain such disruptions,

challenges remain.

Rural tourism, long regarded as the State's strength, is increasingly under pressure from unchecked commercialization. Locations such as Laitlum, Mawlynong, and Nongriat illustrate both the opportunities and the risks, where rapid and unplanned growth has overshadowed sustainability. Skilled professionals, many of them local stakeholders, often find themselves sidelined as non-locals dominate the space.

It is important that those who promote reckless practices are held accountable. Future generations will inevitably evaluate today's choices, and it is hoped they will recognize the need for responsible, sustainable, and community-driven tourism development.

Yours etc.,
G Nongrum,
Via email

Inequality at the heart of the Nepal violence

Editor,

The editorial “Ominous signals from Nepal” (ST September 10, 2025) made interesting reading. What set Nepal ablaze? September 6, 2025 was the spark that was lighted when a government jeep struck 11-year-old Usha Magar Sunuwar outside her school in Lalitpur and drove off. The accident occurred just hours after Nepal banned

26 Social Media platforms. The viral outrage followed when CCTV footage of the injured schoolgirl abandoned by a Minister's convoy went viral, catalysing mass protests. The emotional tipping point was the former PM KP Oli's dismissive comment calling it a “normal accident.” This fuelled national outrage in that country. Gen Z which refers to youth born after the 2006 peace agreement, now coming of age in a system they see as corrupt, nepotistic, and exclusionary were at the helm of the protest. Their uprising isn't just generational—it's existential.

Protesters refused to loot cash from politicians' homes, signalling moral resistance. The youth led fury was driven by deep frustration over corruption, nepotism, unemployment and elite impunity. The unemployment crisis where 20.8% of Nepal youths (ages 15-24) were jobless in 2024 was also a trigger. An elite capture of ministries and embassies dominated by political families; “nepo kids” flaunting wealth online were other triggers. The social media blackout was seen as an attempt to silence dissent but it backfired by intensifying offline mobilisation. The voices from the ground were the protesters' sentiment “They showed us we don't matter,” said a university student. “We were already angry, this was the spark.” Citizens demanded accountability beyond legal

formalities, emphasizing moral outrage and civic dignity.

The editorial is tapping into a deep and widening paradox, India's macro-economic ascent versus the micro-economic distress of its citizens when it states, “The government paints a rosy picture about the national economy but the common man's plight is steadily worsening.” The “rosy picture” is the national metrics where India is now the world's 4th largest economy, surpassing Japan with a GDP over \$4 trillion. Growth drivers include a booming services sector (IT, fintech, telecom), expanding digital economy (UPI, ONDC, IAM trinity) and infrastructure push via Gati Shakti and Rs 10 lakh crore capital investment.

Government narratives emphasize fiscal discipline, global investor confidence and strategic resilience. The “common man's plight” is jobless growth with youth unemployment hovering around 15-18%. Many graduates remain underemployed or stuck in informal jobs. Then there is the agrarian distress. Agriculture employs 45% of the workforce but contributes only 18% to GDP whereas hidden unemployment and stagnant productivity persist. Income inequality where the top 1% holds over 40% of wealth; bottom 50% own just 3%. The Per Capita GDP of \$2500 ranks India 141st globally, behind even Bangladesh and then there is

Opp calls for transparency in project implementation

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: Leader of Opposition Mukul Sangma on Friday urged the state government to ensure complete transparency and accountability in the implementation of the new Secretariat-cum-Directorate building at the New Shillong Township and the Mini Secretariat Complex at Tura.

Moving a cut motion in the Assembly, he said the government should strictly follow the laid down norms, starting from the preparation of Detailed Project Report (DPR) to the tendering process and execution of these major projects.

He recalled the incident of Assembly dome collapse that embarrassed Meghalaya, stating, "We already have a painful example before us. In these new projects, there must be no room for complacency."

He reminded the House that the total project cost was estimated at over Rs 1,000 crore, warranting "stringent scrutiny at every level."

Referring to the supplementary demands of Rs 200 crore for the new Secretariat and Rs 45 crore for the Mini Secretariat, Sangma said the scale of investment and speed of work required greater vigilance.

"We cannot afford another embarrassment like the Assembly building collapse," he cautioned.

The Opposition leader raised several concerns, including the mode of implementation, selection of contractors, and adherence to Central Vigilance Commission guidelines.

He questioned whether the Notice Inviting Tender was framed clearly to prevent ambiguity and possible manipulation.

"In the past, loopholes

in tender documents were deliberately inserted to create room for interpretation or litigation," he said.

On the DPR, Sangma sought clarity on who prepared it and whether it was subjected to proper scrutiny. He said material specifications from flooring to wall paneling must be clearly defined to avoid dilution of quality.

"A tile can cost Rs 40 or even Rs 5,000 per square foot. Prices are determined by quality, and unless specifications are watertight, builders may compromise," he argued.

He demanded details of how cost estimates were factored in, citing the outdated Schedule of Rates (SoR) as a recurring problem in government projects.

"Many departments have failed to update the SoR for years, leaving loopholes for misrepresentation of market values. Without proper mar-

ket surveys, cost analysis becomes flawed," Sangma said.

He questioned whether a Project Management Consultant had been engaged.

Replying to the motion, Deputy Chief Minister in-charge of Urban Affairs Sniawbhalang Dhar said the government was committed to improving the quality of life of citizens by focusing on infrastructure, social welfare, and employment generation. He informed the House that strict monitoring mechanisms, both internal and external, are in place to ensure accountability.

Dhar added that the rapid growth of Shillong necessitated the development of New Shillong Township to accommodate administrative, residential, and commercial expansion. He said 914 acres of land at Mawdingiang and Umsawli have already been earmarked for the project.

Retaining wall collapses, heavy vehicles banned along EKH road

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: Heavy motor vehicles have been barred from using the Um-den-Umynjah road in East Khasi Hills after a retaining wall at the 1st kilometre mark (Ch 00.710 Km) gave way due to incessant rainfall.

The restriction, effective from September 12, will remain in force until repair work is completed. Officials have urged all commuters to strictly comply with the order in the interest of safety.

The notification was issued by the office of the Executive Engineer, PWD (Roads), Umsing Division, Ri-Bhoi.

Teachers laud govt for granting long-pending allowances

From Our Correspondent

TURA, Sep 12: Teachers of Deficit Pattern schools in Meghalaya have expressed appreciation to the government, especially Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, for fulfilling their long-pending demands and granting various allowances such as Hill Allowance, House Rent Allowance (10% of the basic), Medical Allowance, and Death-cum-Retirement Gratuity (DCRG).

A special felicitation programme was recently held by the teachers at the State Convention Centre in Shillong, attended by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma, Education Minister Rakkam A Sangma, along with other dignitaries and state officials.

"After 32 years of persistent efforts, the government finally granted these teachers various allowances, including Hill Allowance, House Rent (10% of basic pay), Medical Allowance, and Death-cum-Retirement Gratuity (DCRG). These benefits will be effective from June 1, 2025. The DCRG is a one-time payment after retirement, providing financial security to the teachers," the teachers said, while lauding the government's move.

According to the teachers, a total of 13 Deficit Pattern schools (9 secondary and 4 upper primary) will now benefit from these allowances.

"This achievement will be remembered for generations to come, and the teachers are grateful for the government's initiative in making their dreams a reality. We thank the Honorable Chief Minister, Education Minister, and the entire government for their support," Secretary of the teachers' body, Lindias D Sangma, said.



Maj. Gen. Rajesh Kumar Jha, AVSM (Retd.), Director (Personnel), NEEPCO, accompanied by Patricia Mukhim, Padma Shri awardee and Editor of *The Shillong Times*, Col. Megha Astagikar, Commanding Officer, 236 Inland Water Transport Operations Unit, C/O 99 APO, and others, lights the lamp during the 3rd Regional Executive Body (REB) meet of Women in Public Sector (WIPS) Eastern Region hosted by WIPS - NEEPCO Unit.

Groups reject NPYF demand for apology from med student

From Our Correspondent

TURA, Sep 12: Several groups from Garo Hills who participated in the meeting with Chief Minister Conrad Sangma to discuss the ongoing GHADC crisis and the Tura Medical College have downplayed the demand for an apology made by the NPYF from a medical student who, they claimed, had behaved rudely and displayed a lack of knowledge, maturity, and basic etiquette.

The combined groups, comprising the ADE, AYWO, FAF, FKJGP, and GSU on Friday issued a statement refuting the allegations made against the student and asserting that there was no need for an apology from him.

"The conglomerate of civil society organizations was present throughout the whole meeting which lasted between 5 to 6 hours, and in the course of the entire meeting, we did not witness any action or behaviour which

suggested that the student in question lacks knowledge, maturity, and basic etiquette. On the contrary, the medical student, despite his young age, displayed composure and patience despite not getting satisfactory answers to his questions from the authorities," the joint statement by the combined groups said.

According to them, there was only one instance when his tone and expressive gestures may have been construed by some as arrogance or rebelliousness. However, they felt one had to understand the exact context in which the words were spoken.

"By the time the incident occurred, it was almost 3 hours into the meeting and despite our persuasion, the Chief Minister of Meghalaya was mildly dismissive of our suggestions, and the discussion of the meeting was going in circles, which may have led the student to act a little assertive in expressing his opinions," they stated.

The joint statement by the combined groups also rejected the NPYF's stand that only people who are 'knowledgeable, mature, and have proper etiquette' are entitled to converse with the Chief Minister, or their presumption that the medical student was instigated by vested interests.

On the demand by the NPYF that the student should apologise to Chief Minister Conrad Sangma as well as to the participating senior citizens and civil societies, the joint statement said, "As per our observations, the medical student in question did not act or behave in a way that warrants an apology from his side to our Civil Society Organisations. On the contrary, we appreciate the student's dedication, courage, and sense of duty for taking part in that particular meeting despite the fact that he had to spend precious time and resources to be a part of that meeting."

MSCPCR chief raises concern over rising cases of child abuse in M'laya

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) chairperson, Agatha Sangma, on Friday voiced concern over the rising cases of child abuse in the state, where women are supposedly treated fairly and are held in high regard.

Speaking at the State-level Multi-Stakeholders' Consultation on "Safeguarding the Girl Child: Towards a Safer and Enabling Environment" held at the High Court of Meghalaya auditorium, she revealed that 1,562 cases under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act were instituted in the state over the past five years.

She noted that 900 POCSO cases have been pending at the police investigation level in the last three years.

On the issue of missing and trafficked children, Sangma said that 43 of the 183 girls reported missing during the past three years have remained untraced.

Acknowledging the judiciary's progressive measures, including steps to expand online safety under POCSO and the creation of sub-committees on child rights, she emphasised that legislation and policies alone are not sufficient.

"Protection of the girl



MSCPCR Chairperson Agatha Sangma addresses a gathering during the State-level Multi-Stakeholders' Consultation at the High Court of Meghalaya auditorium on Friday. (MIPR)

child is not only the government's duty, but our collective responsibility. Communities, families, schools, and society must work together to ensure that every girl is safe at home, secure in school, free from exploitation, and empowered to dream without fear," Sangma said.

The MSCPCR chairperson outlined the need for prevention and awareness campaigns to curb harmful practices such as early marriage and gender-based violence.

She also called for timely justice, child-friendly legal remedies, and gender-sensitive processes. Stressing the importance of education, she said, "When a girl is edu-

cated, she not only secures her own future but uplifts her entire community."

Sangma urged the creation of safe spaces, both online and offline, to protect girls from cyberbullying, trafficking, and harassment. She highlighted the need to invest in the health and well-being of girls and their caregivers to break cycles of neglect and abuse.

"Protecting the girl child is not charity. It is justice. It is not a question of sympathy but a question of rights. When we protect a girl, we protect a generation, and when we empower her, we empower the nation," Sangma stated.

In his address, acting Chief Justice Hamarsan Sing

Thangkiew described the girl child as the "backbone of society and the future of the nation." He said empowering and protecting girls not only improves their lives but also helps build a healthier and stronger society.

He cautioned against assuming that Meghalaya's matrilineal system ensures gender equality. "While girls may be regarded as custodians of property and lineage, discrimination persists at various levels," he said.

"We are sometimes lulled into believing that girls enjoy equal access to education, opportunities, and benefits like boys. Sadly, that is not true," he remarked.

Calling for greater awareness, he urged that forums and consultations be used to re-examine social realities and assess whether rural children, particularly girls, are being denied equal opportunities, despite constitutional guarantees of equal rights to every child.

Those present at the consultation included Justice W. Diengdoh, Justice Biswadeep Bhattacharjee, Commissioner and Secretary Pravin Bakshi, Social Welfare Department Director Camelia Doreen Lyngwa, East Khasi Hills Deputy Commissioner Rosetta M. Kurbah, senior police officials, principals, and teachers of various schools.

HYC airs grievances of Civil Hospital patients

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: The Hynniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) on Friday voiced serious concern over the hardships faced by patients at Shillong Civil Hospital, particularly the repeated postponement of surgeries due to inadequate infrastructure.

A delegation led by HYC president Roy Kupar Synrem met the Joint DHS in charge of the hospital, Dr Angel Paswet, to highlight complaints received from patients.

Speaking to reporters after the meeting, Synrem said there have been several instances in the past two to three months where patients scheduled for surgery were turned away on the appointed day and asked to return on another date.

"Most of these patients come from low-income families and from far-flung areas of Khasi and Jaintia Hills. When their operations are postponed, they not only suffer mental stress but also face heavy financial burdens for travel, food, and lodging," he stated.

Synrem pointed out that Shillong Civil Hospital, one of the largest public hospitals in the state, has only one operation theatre catering to multiple departments, including orthopaedics.

The hospital management, he said, admitted that when too many patients are listed for surgery on the same day, doctors are unable to attend to all cases.

During the meeting, the Joint DHS acknowledged the problem but assured that steps are being taken to improve planning and scheduling. According to Synrem, the hospital management recently convened a meeting to resolve the issue and promised that surgeries fixed for a particular date will henceforth be conducted on that day.

The HYC, however, maintained that a single operation theatre is inadequate for a hospital with more than 500 beds and an attached Cancer Centre. Synrem said the organisation has suggested setting up at least two or three additional operation theatres and would also write to the Health Department on the matter.

He further reminded that in the 2025-26 state budget, nearly 8% of the total allocation was earmarked for the Health Department. "If the government is serious about strengthening health services and reducing the need for patients to seek treatment outside Meghalaya, such basic issues must be addressed urgently," he added.

CoMSO objects to hiring of 'unfit' teacher in EGH

From Our Correspondent

WILLIAMNAGAR, Sep 12: The Confederation of Meghalaya Social Organisations (CoMSO) has lodged a complaint after a teaching vacancy created by the retirement of a teacher was filled by an underqualified applicant.

According to the group, a Pre-Primary teacher from Chiosobibra Government LP School retired on Dec 31, 2024.

"As per long-standing practice and guidelines, children of retiring Pre-Primary teachers may be considered for appointment in the same post, provided they fulfill the prescribed qualifications. The daughter of the teacher, Rimbitha M Marak, applied for the post after securing 49% in her Class XII exams. She had also obtained an NOC from the president and secretary of the SMC of the school," informed CoMSO.

The group expressed shock when they were informed that another teacher, Griksilchi N Marak, had been appointed to the post despite not even meeting the minimum eligibility criteria (43%).

"She also did not produce the NOCs from the SMC that are mandatory. Her selection was reportedly conducted through village-level election and canvassing by money power, which is an extraneous consideration and against the fundamental

"We want only candidates fulfilling the criteria with proper NOC and merit to be appointed"

principles of fairness, transparency, and rule-based governance in public employment," they added.

Further, CoMSO members stated that despite strong objections filed with the SDSEO of EGH on Jan 21 this year, corrective steps were not taken — which they felt was a dereliction of duty by the officer.

The complaint was filed with the Directorate of School Education & Literacy (DSEL) on Aug 20.

Through their complaint, the CSO has demanded the immediate cancellation of Griksilchi's appointment and directions to the SDSEO to strictly comply with the recruitment norms laid down by the state government.

"We also want only candidates fulfilling the criteria with proper NOC and merit to be appointed. We further demand an inquiry into the irregularities in the conduct of the said interview and fixing of accountability on the officials/persons who violated the prescribed selection procedures. We also want all SDSEOs to be directed to ensure recurrences like this do not occur," they added.

Police nab man who vandalised church in EKH after intense op

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: Police apprehended Bajiedstar Kharsati (47) in Mawryngkneng on Friday after an intensive search operation, a day after he allegedly vandalised the window panes of a local church.

East Khasi Hills SP Vivek Syiem said police launched the operation after receiving reports of the incident.

"During inquiry, it was learnt that Kharsati had broken the window panes. Fearing assault from the public, he fled into a nearby jungle," Syiem stated.

The accused was taken to Mawryngkneng CHC for medical examination and later referred to MIMHANS, where he was admitted as he appeared mentally unstable.

Interestingly, Kharsati had allegedly attempted an arson attack on the Presbyterian Church at Pomlahier, damaging chairs and part of the wooden floor on August 15. A case (Mawryngkneng P.S. Case No. 34(08)2025 U/S 326(g) BNS) was registered the next day following a written FIR lodged by church elders. Investigations confirmed that Friday's act was his second recorded offence.

Earlier, VPP MLA Heaving Stone Kharpran expressed disappointment over the delay in arrest, describing the incident as "deeply saddening" for church members. He said he would meet church leaders to discuss measures to restore peace, prevent further attacks, and possibly explore an understanding between the accused and church elders.

Mawryngkneng village sordar, Peter J Lawai, condemned the repeated attacks and criticised police inaction.

Poshan Maah celebration in SWGH

From Our Correspondent

TURA, Sep 12: An inaugural function kicked off the month-long celebration of Poshan Maah at Balughat Community Hall, Zikzak C&RD Block, South West Garo Hills, with great enthusiasm and active community participation on Friday.

CDPO, ICDS Zikzak Project, B Hajong, M&HO Kalachar PHC, Dr Debakar Hajong, and Nokma of Balughat Darphius Ch Marak, graced the occasion as special guests.

As part of the celebration, a tree plantation drive — "Ek Ped Maa Ke Naam" — was organized, symbolizing the nurturing role of mothers and promoting environmental well-being.

MLCU art workshop pulls in renowned guest artists

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Sep 12: A collaborative art workshop hosted by the Community Centre for Arts, Crafts and Culture, Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU), at Café Cherrapunji, Mawdok, brought together an inspiring blend of art, poetry, and dialogue featuring distinguished guest artists and poet Sono Kuwayama and Bob Holman, known internationally for their contributions to the arts and spoken word poetry.

Their presence brought the event into a vibrant exchange of ideas and expressions.

The event was thoughtfully designed around the theme of collaboration between the verbal and the visual, the spoken word and imagery, exploring the deep interconnections between language and art. Participants engaged in interactive sessions, haiku writing, and collaborative art-making that encouraged both personal and collective expression.

"This workshop explored collaboration not just between individuals or teams, but across different art forms," said a representative of the Community Centre. "It was about the fusion of diverse expressions, the dialogue between image and voice, and the power of creativity across cultures and mediums."

The event drew wide participation from the local artists' community, as well as students and faculty from the centre and the School of Language and Cultural Communications. This event was also attended by the Pro. VC, Dr Larilin Kharpuri and Registrar, Dr Iadonlang Tynsong.

More than half the world's forests fragmented in 20 yrs

Fragmentation, the process by which large areas of intact forest become broken up into smaller pieces, is increasing in most of the world's forests, according to a new Science study authored by Crowther and other researchers at institutions in Switzerland, Australia, China, the U.S. and the UK.

The study finds that more than 50% of the world's forests became more fragmented between 2000 and 2020. Tropical forests fared the worst, with the findings indicating that up to 80% were fragmented over 20 years.

This has profound implications for global biodiversity and ecosystem health, Crowther says.

"The scary thing is, even if we kept the same amount of forest area on the planet, if we're turning those big intact ones into all the tiny fragments, we're losing a lot of the ecological functionality."

Fragmentation can happen in different ways and for different reasons. Shifting cultivation can pockmark intact forests with clearings. New roads into previously intact areas can bring miners or loggers, creating a dendritic pattern of forest loss. Development can eat away at a forest's perimeter. Stands of trees might be chopped down or large swaths can completely disappear as wildfires sweep through.

The spatial layout and distribution of forest patches — as well as the overall amount of intact forest — is important for wildlife and ecological processes. Many species rely on connected forests for population movement and gene flow. Numerous studies have shown that fragmentation reduces biodiversity at various scales.

The new Science study finds that 51-67% of forests globally became more fragmented in just the first two decades of the 21st century. That's a more dire picture than some previous studies found.

"We were very sad to learn that fragmentation is much more widespread than previously thought," Crowther says.

However, the study also finds that for tropical forests, protection was remarkably effective in keeping forests more intact.

To get a nuanced picture of what was happening in forests, researchers grouped different ways of measuring fragmentation (metrics) to create three composite indices: a connectivity-based fragmentation index that considered how connected areas of forest were to each other, an aggregation-based fragmentation index that looked at how clustered they were and a structure-based fragmentation index that focused on the physical characteristics — size, number and length — of forest patches.

landscape's ability to support healthy wildlife populations. They found that the connectivity-focused index aligned most closely with metapopulation capacity, indicating that it better describes fragmentation in terms of how it impacts biodiversity, says Yibiao Zou, doctoral candidate at ETH Zurich and the Science study's lead author.

The team used the three composite indices to calculate the percentage of forests that had be-

a 2023 Nature Communications study, which, using structure-based metrics, found that more than 75% of forests had experienced declining fragmentation over the same period.

The results of the new Science study are "insightful," Jun Ma, associate professor at Fudan University and first author of the 2023 Nature Communications study told Mongabay by email. However, he says that "the authors do not provide direct evidence linking connectivity indicators to species habitat conservation."

Moreover, while the two studies used different methods and came up with different numerical values, both paint a broadly similar picture of fragmentation, Ma says.

"Our work highlights the need to prioritize the protection of regions where fragmentation is intensifying, particularly in tropical forests," he says.

Running the analysis with different metrics shows the benefits of using more than one way to capture fragmentation, Zou says. "Then we have a more comprehensive picture of the landscape change."

Zou said the team will next be looking more closely at how measurements of fragmentation relate to changes in biodiversity and ecological functions.

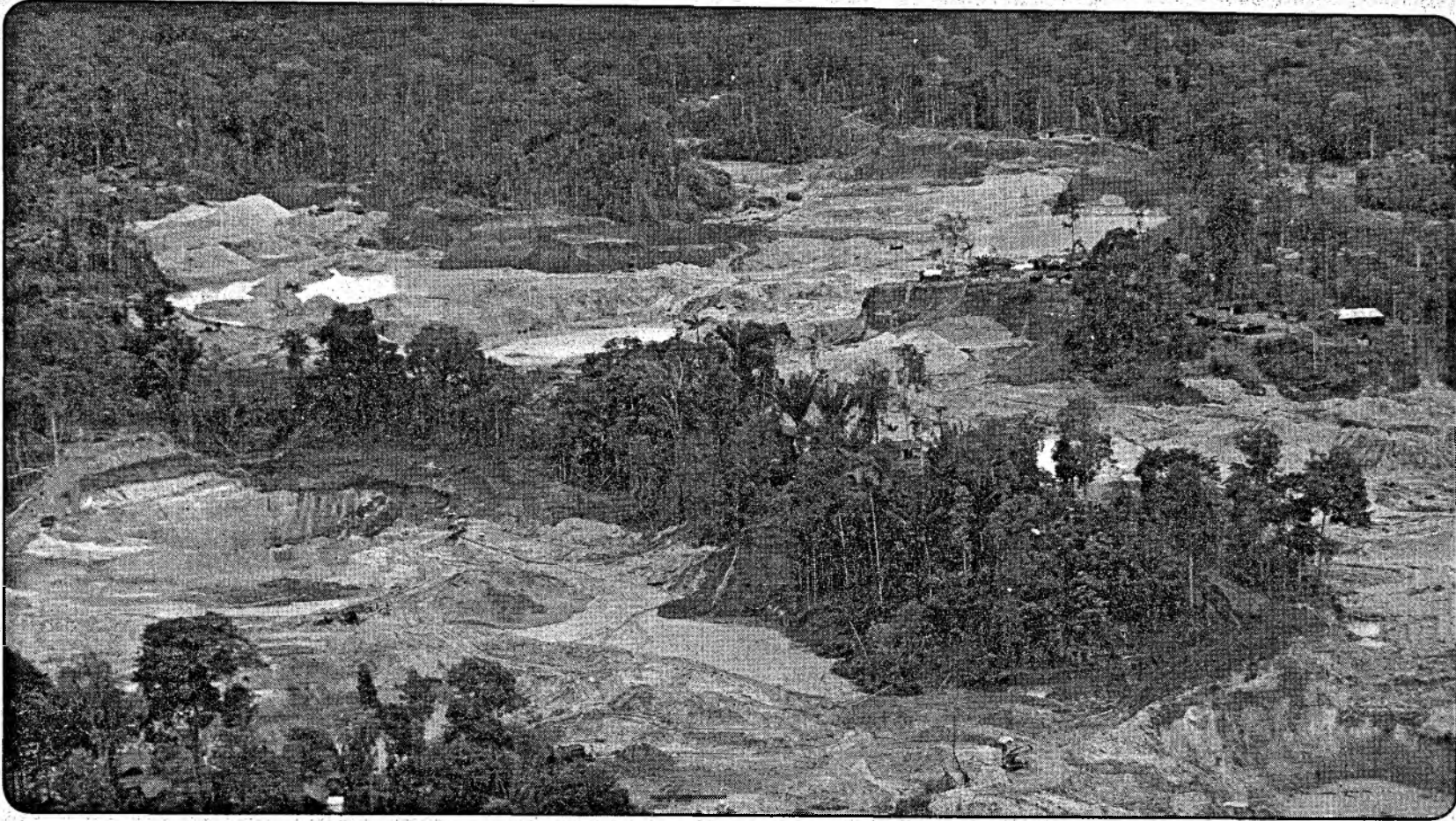
Drivers and solutions

The researchers also examined the causes of fragmentation in different regions. They found shifting cultivation accounted for more than 60% of fragmentation in the tropics, while forestry was the major driver in the temperate forests, and wildfires, followed by forestry, were major drivers in boreal regions.

In a hopeful note, the researchers were "unbelievably surprised" by the degree to which protected status kept tropical forests intact, Crowther says.

In the tropics, strictly protected areas showed 82% less fragmentation than similar non-protected areas; less strictly protected areas were less effective at preventing fragmentation but still showed a drop of 45%.

"There are an increasing number of good news stories that indicate that if we make decisions to protect nature, it actually can work," Crowther says. (Mongabay)



An illegal gold mining operation that contributed to deforestation in Magui Payan, Colombia. (Associated Press)

Then they ran computational models using global forest cover data to figure out how these captured different fragmentation patterns.

The researchers found that the three indices didn't always interpret landscape changes in the same way. Some were more sensitive to certain patterns of fragmentation than others.

The team also used a statistical technique called principal component analysis to look at how different metrics aligned with metapopulation capacity, a measurement that describes a

come more fragmented between 2000 and 2020 in different biomes around the world.

Analysis using the connectivity-focused index indicated that 51-67% of forests globally and 58-80% of tropical forests showed increased fragmentation over the 20-year period.

In contrast, when the team ran its analysis using a structure-focused index, it found that 30-35% of forests showed increased fragmentation. That result is more closely aligned with previous estimates, the authors note, including

National anxieties, personal fear: The comfort we find in flags

The recent proliferation of English flags, from lamp-posts to roundabouts, can be viewed as more than a simple act of patriotism. It could be argued that it is an expression of deep-seated national anxieties.

Hanging these flags may function as a public psychological defence against a world perceived as increasingly complicated. Against this uncertainty, a flag is a simple, bold symbol. It provides a stark distinction between "us" and "them", potentially allowing for a sense of order and belonging.

Flags may help us manage what the psychoanalyst Melanie Klein called "persecutory anxiety" - the fear that we are being pursued or attacked. When we feel overwhelmed by forces such as economic instability, social change or a health crisis, we do what we can to cope. We may, for example, resort to a primary psychological defence known as "splitting".

This is a process in which we divide the world into two camps: the "good" and the "bad".

The flags, in this sense, can become a public object onto which we project our anxieties. Those who choose to put up the flag in public spaces may feel a part of the "good", authentic, local group and feel the need to differentiate themselves from external "bad" forces, such as unseen globalist elites, the "woke" mob, or anyone who is offended by their flag. These forces are perceived as being linked to the person's problems.

Psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott developed a concept called a "transitional object" to describe the crutches we use in times of anxiety. When a child is moving from a state of total dependence

on their primary caregiver as a baby to a state of recognising themselves as a separate person, they often become intensely attached to a teddy or other toy.

The teddy is an object they keep with them that reminds them of their infancy as they move into a new, unknown state, and becomes an omnipotent extension of the inner psychic world. In the same way, a flag is a physical item that people can hold on to. It provides a feeling of stability and continuity - and

the associated ideology could be seen as a way for people to identify with a like-minded community.

People displayed NHS rainbow flags in their windows. And baking banana bread or sourdough or banging pots and pans became objects of solidarity during lockdowns. Those who opposed masks and lockdowns pasted stickers around the urban environment, inviting people to join conspiratorial groups in another form of group action.

These objects may have helped us convert the anxiety of lockdown and social change into shared symbols. National flags could be seen to function in a similar way, acting as an invitation to join a community built around a shared symbolic meaning.

It's possible that what makes these actions so effective is that they bypass rational debate and appeal directly to our emotions. You don't need a complex understanding of economics or immigration policy to understand a flag.

It is an immediate, emotive symbol that allows for a powerful sense of unity and shared purpose. This may be the reason why such movements can spread so quickly and seemingly without a leader. The flag itself comes to the fore as the call to action, drawing people into a mutually reinforcing social system.

Recognising these underlying psychological dynamics helps us understand the enduring appeal of these movements. They may show us that to understand the world, we could first look at how we, as individuals and as a society, manage our deepest fears. The flags on our streets may not just be a political statement, but potentially a sign of a society grappling with its anxieties. (The Conversation)



a reminder of a more stable past - as we move into an uncertain future.

People might even find a sense of control and empowerment in the offence caused to some others with their flag. They stop perceiving themselves as passive victims of uncertain political or economic circumstances and start seeing themselves as an actor. The flag is a way of saying: "I am here, and I am on the side of good."

An appeal to our emotions

Flags are not the only recent example of our tendency to gravitate towards symbolic objectives to channel stress. During the pandemic, for example, simple physical objects and

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 14, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Rahu on your solar return chart and it is going to give mixed results for you. You will be having tough moments at your place of work. Your enemies and conspirators will be active and will try to harm your interest. You can also get terminated from your job. Those who are in business will face tough competition. Your rivals could take to unethical tactics to damage your reputation. But you will keep getting support from your closed ones. You will also win trust and support of your seniors. You will be encouraged to take positive steps. Your financial position will keep getting better. You need to make investment-related decisions wisely. Your partner/spouse will keep giving support. You will be eager to improve your relationships with your relatives/friends. Marriage of a family member will get fixed. Love birds will enjoy a wonderful time. You will also develop religious and spiritual inclinations. And your faith in God will grow.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) It is time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills as a promotion or lucrative business opportunity is likely to emerge consequently to your efforts. You successfully perform tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony. Your tendency to control your life through some form of manipulation is strong. This is a phase that highlights romance and love in your family life. You may also experience some tangles in your close personal relationships. You're at your best when you are showing the world your practical, competent, and responsible side.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) You would adapt to new circumstances with ease opening yourself to positive events. You are able to find creative solutions to problems now. You put in a lot of effort and find this has established a strong professional base and it brings in desired and even unexpected gains. Money issues pop up now—the discovery of a way to increase your income, an unexpected gift or reward, or a brief financial crisis that motivates you to find new ways to make money is possible.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You may especially enjoy experiencing different cultures and styles. Your ideas and goals are higher than usual; teaching and mentoring may be part of the whole picture. Your cultural and spiritual awareness increases. You are ready to make new beginnings and invest in new business and relationships. It is a good time to put your needs first, but doing so with respect for others will take you further. Whether you can succeed as a leader is tested right now. Spending time in solitude among natural surroundings is therapeutic.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) You are presented with an opportunity to get rid of what doesn't work in your life, while also discovering what does. You are highly motivated to make money, and this enhances quite a bit of energy for new money-making projects. You are sorting through the experiences of the last several months, separating the worthwhile from the worthless. You may be drawn into some form of service that will bring deep personal satisfaction. At this time, you seek perfection and distinction in your work, and this quality takes you to a more responsible position.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) You are more aware than before of your mental and physical health, daily routine, everyday working life, and your working methods. Now is the time to realize your own potential through your significant other. You focus on balancing your personal interests and objectives with your social life, or with those of a partner. Circumstances are such that your diplomacy skills are required. Your popularity is increasing and is reinforced by your own ability to cooperate and harmonize. You would be able to make an impact on people with innovative ideas and work.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) You would be successful in creative writing and in the entertainment industry. Your ego and pride are tied up in how you relate to others now. This may be an especially busy time for people who consult or work with clients one-on-one. Relationships are dynamic-full of conflicts and resolutions. You tend to take things quite personally now, and something

that someone says or does now can easily rile you. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to work, health matters, and daily routines.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) It would be wise to be especially clear when it comes to communicating with co-workers. Re-thinking the suitability of your job is possible now, but you should avoid jumping to any premature decisions. Take this time to re-examine issues rather than communicating about them prematurely. A positive and hopeful outlook increases your chances of gaining the cooperation of important people. You move on the path of betterment in terms of better financial stability, emotional and mental satisfaction and intellectual growth.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) A new set-up in an existing relation or a new love affair may be formed. Your professional life brings rewards and recognition now. You are working hard and inclined towards more detailed work. An opportunity to expand business is arriving now. Increased connections and experiences come into the picture. This is a period of growth as well as some form of blossoming. This is a very fortunate time to arrange get-togethers, parties and events. Increased public recognition and professional success characterizes this week. You would become more particular about your health and diet.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) This time puts some kind of pressure on professional and personal aspects. You may begin to take on more responsibilities on the job or in another capacity. Your job could become rather tedious or boring, or working conditions may be tiring and frustrating. You find yourself more accountable than ever when it comes to your work and output. You may have to draw some boundaries with friends and the demands placed on you. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to improve your health and well-being, such as regular exercise and a more structured and productive use of your time.

Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) It would be wiser to face difficult people and situations rather than escape, as there would be victory and success in professional ventures. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation. Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill, and they would be profitable. Your professional skills, wisdom and craft are appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain a romantic and exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people head on and get your point across. Business projects and associations are opening and widening your horizons, so you need to think expansively from now onwards.

Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. You take on a more mature role in the family and in personal situations by taking on extra responsibility and giving direction. You can expect seniors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. How willing you are to experiment and explore new approaches will determine your success at this time. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This is a favorable phase for people in sports, competition, game shows and other related fields. You have been more determined and hardworking, and this brings fulfillment of desires particularly in competitive examinations. This is a good time to be with a friend or get associated with a group with whom you can share your own ideas and thoughts. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities are extended to you. You are physically energetic and enjoy the feeling of well-being and confidence.



"Knowledge is the eye of desire and
can become the pilot of the soul."

—Will Durant

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Lessons from Nepal

A modicum of order has been established in Nepal with the effective intervention of its army and installation of a reputed former chief justice as Prime Minister. There are lessons to be learnt from the sudden eruption of anti-government protests in the landlocked Himalayan nation. The ruling Communist party took a major hit as its Prime Minister Sharma Oli was bundled out of power after the incidents of violence, arson and firing, killing over 20 people since September 8. The zeroing in on the 73-year-old Sushila Karki as the prime minister to lead an interim government appeared to be a master stroke — it calmed down the protesters who were obviously angered over joblessness as also massive acts of nepotism and corruption in governance. Karki's reputation as an incorruptible judicial head acted as a balm on the wounded minds of the anti-corruption Gen-Z youths. How the scenario builds up in Nepal remains to be closely watched as conflicting interests, including external forces, are lurking in the shadows.

In the neighbourhood, India is closely watching the evolving situations in Nepal. Curiously, with a "white-as-Lily" prime minister ruling India from its apex for the past 11 years, the corruption in governmental layers multiplied. Modi won the 2014 parliament polls by promising to end the corruption that bedevilled the previous UPA II government. His promise of ferrying back the billions India's corrupt creed had stashed away and put in foreign tax havens, and of putting them in the accounts of every poor Indian, proved hollow. In reality, Modi could not lay his hands on the large array of corrupt entities even within the country or those who 'escaped' with their bounty to foreign soil. He, instead, is accused of fanning corruption, making the central investigation agencies like CBI and ED ineffective, using them only to bargain with his political rivals. The huge sums the BJP uses to win elections, however, speak volumes about the unholy cuts and commission raj that exist in today's governance system at its very apex.

Hugely corrupt leaders are part of the NDA pack. Modi's very survival as PM depends on their support. The bureaucratic apparatus as a whole is today deeply corrupt. Corrupt, wayward bureaucrats remained untouched all through Modi's three terms. No courageous step to stem the rot has been taken. Modi dithered. Evidence is also in the currency burning incident at a Supreme Court judge's house in Delhi, on which Modi did not speak a word as yet. Instead, Jagdeep Dhankar who spoke up was slighted. The scenes of corruption and widespread unemployment are equally worse here as in Nepal. Claims about low unemployment rate here are a sham — they are built on the merger of the numbers of the employed people with the numbers of the MGNREGS workforce, comprising the poor that get no more than a pittance as wages. A spark can ignite a fire. To Modi's advantage there's no JP around to effect a course-correction.

The Rs 6000 Cr Urban Overhaul Plan

By Toki Blah

"Urban transformation with an investment of Rs 6000 crores across urban centres such as Shillong, Jowai and Tura is on the State Govt Cards" screamed the news on page 3 of The Shillong Times dated September 10, 2025. It seems the Dy CM, I/c Urban Affairs had unveiled the above, in the pipeline, plans during the current Assembly Session. The focus is apparently on improvement of urban mobility, upgrading amenities (hopefully it means replacing worn out and archaic urban infrastructure), adopting modern planning tools and strengthening community partnership (not really clear what is meant by this term or how it is planned to be achieved). I however heartily welcome such plans and initiatives which are long overdue. Nevertheless as an ordinary, simple yet concerned citizen who will definitely be impacted by the efficacy of such plans when they are implemented, I reserve for myself the right to also question and enquire. Last time I checked, Art 19 (1a) of the Constitution is still there while Sec 2(28) of the BNS still upholds the definition that a Minister to the Government still remains a "Public Servant." It means I can still question; raise doubts and the Government and the Public Servant concerned should not mind. So here goes.

Lets first discuss "improved urban mobility" which most probably means "improved public transport services through the deployment of 35 AC buses and 50 electric buses." God alone knows how the public desperately needs those buses but we shouldn't forget that under a similar scheme, 60 "Red Buses" were procured under JNNURM in 2011; given to some NGO to run and today hardly a trace of the same are to be found. Accountability has never been Meghalaya's strong point but the fact remains that people in the know, all point out to the puzzling act of entrusting the running of the Red Buses to an NGO with no experience or credentials for such an undertaking. So the question of "sustainable operation" of the proposed new buses assumes critical importance. I doubt if the MTG will fit the bill.

Cut to the chase, I would propose that Government this time, simply concentrate on the following: (i) ensure the smooth running of the buses for the benefit of the public (ii) how the Transport Department will make profit or how to share revenue from the scheme should be the least of Governments' concern (iii) therefore lease out

the running and maintenance of the buses as a business proposal to technically qualified people. As long as an efficient public transport system is provided and sustained, so what if the lessee makes a profit out of it! (iv) Shillong at present has a number of big vehicles (read trucks) workshops, owned by professionals and staffed by experienced mechanics, who are desperate for work because of the slowdown in the coal business. Why not encourage such owners to form a Co-operative? Let them bid for operating the buses. (v) The main TOR for the contract is for the Co-operative to ensure running, say 90% of the buses on a daily basis from 6am to 10pm for the convenience of the public (vi) the Co-operative will take care of all medium and small repair works without bothering the Government (vii) Let Government only provide the Co-operative a parking space and a covered working shed (for which it can charge rent) and let see how things go. (ix) Leasing out the buses to a company owned by a Minister, his relatives or political chamechas is to simply invite another urban disaster.

Now lets get down to the nitty gritty of "adopting modern planning tools." What "modern planning tools" is the Minister talking about? GIS, BIM, 3D/VR/AR Tech are all data dependent and data driven digital tools for decision making. My point is, does Urban Affairs have such baseline data? Now baseline data is important so that work done can be evaluated. 20 years back under the Aus-Aid programme such data was created after spending a lot of time and money. What happened to that data? Or are we planning to use the 6000 crores to bring in a multitude of the usual, dubious "Fly-by-night" consultants. To create fresh databases? Now even if such data is to be created, who will use it? Let's be clear about one thing — it's not the job of the Urban Affairs Department to implement projects. So, Meghalaya is at best left with the Directorate of Urban Affairs, the Municipalities and the Autonomous District Councils to carry out the implementation part of the announced transformation plans and the slew of schemes attached to it. Again are these bodies equipped with the software, manpower, technical knowledge and expertise to man and run the required Monitoring and Evaluation systems and the Management Information Systems needed for such an

ambitious and highly technical transformation program? Rule of Thumb assessment suggests that these modern planning tools mentioned would need a minimum 1000, if not more, trained technical personnel.

The fact, Mr Urban Minister is that we don't even have a functional elected Shillong Municipality. Not to talk about other understaffed ULBs that can make use of such "modern planning tools." So has the Assembly been fed a "Pipe Dream" or is the claimed urban transformation not so much on improving public civic amenities but a devious plot to simply spend 6000 Crore?

Now in the absence of any Mission Statement on how the declared urban plan is to be carried out (a Mission Statement is a concise declaration explaining an organization's fundamental purpose, core values, and overall goals to its stakeholders) let us take the Minister's goal of "strengthening community partnership," for the same. To my knowledge and understanding such community partnership undertakings can only happen through legally recognized community institutions. But that is just part of the requirement. These community institutions must also be designed, empowered and capacitated community institutions that are capable and trained in participatory exercises (where both men and women participate) to visualize, plan and manage their own development. Vision and Finance management capabilities are critical components that need to be factored in. So do our Dorbar Shingit fit this required criteria?

If the Minister believes that the KHADC Administration of Elaka (Amendment) Act 2023 provides him with the required community institutions to bring about "a people driven Urban transformation," then he is sadly mistaken. The above Elaka Amendment is perhaps the biggest hoax ever played on the Khasis! The Amendment in no way seeks to bring about an improved participatory paradigm in the governing ability of our grassroots village Dorbar. Instead it seeks how the KHADC can have more control, more domination and absolute supremacy over our village traditional bodies. It seeks to squeeze the Dorbar of any semblance of autonomy they presently enjoy. The whole Act is about continued KHADC hegemony and control over the Dorbar! The

role of women and youth in Dorbar decision making processes has been effectively muzzled. Any development project assigned to the Dorbar and recognized by this Act will simply perpetuate a top down, target driven development paradigm instead of the much required bottom up, demand driven mode that is the universally recognized paradigm for sustainable development. The Act simply enforces the distinct possibility that the Rs 6000 crore will be shown as spent on office files with nothing to show on the ground! It will simply increase the number of Government Development Tombstones that litter our countryside. In short it's the perfect setup for a major scam!

One is really disheartened to see the current Autumn session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly end with hardly any questions, except perhaps for a few comments from Dr Mukul Sangma and Ardent Basaiawmoit, on this whole urban transformation plan. Rs 6000 crore is a huge amount by any stretch of the imagination. What if these plans are not what we really want? We the public for whom it is intended need to know.

The writer on his own made some tentative queries from members of the public (a very small sample survey) on issues they thought the Rs 6000 crore should be spent on. The replies showed that the common man may perhaps have better ideas than the Government. Some stated that with such a huge amount at its disposal the Government should seriously think about a people's market, something like lewduh; three or four storied perhaps; equipped with modern facilities like escalators, parking spaces, hygienic eateries, clean washrooms and toilets etc. Not a shopping mall, but a people's market with small kong shops for livelihood of the poor and employment for thousands of our youths.

Lots of land is still available on the Mawiong — Shillong-Mawsiatkhnam road they point out and this will help decongest Old Shillong. It made a lot of sense to me. The question to ask here is did the Urban Affairs Department carry out a similar "what the people really want" survey before the Urban Transformation Plan was presented on the floor of the House? Too many times we have allowed ourselves to be carried away by good intentions but horrible implementation schemes that bring no benefits. Actually it's the job of the Opposition to question but should we, the public, then also keep quiet when they fail to do so?

Echoes of Change: How Each Generation Shaped the World's Turning Points

By Jairaj Chhetry

History is not written by rulers alone. It is equally shaped by ordinary men and women, often united by the spirit of their generation. Each age group—silent observers, restless dreamers, or bold rebels—carries its own rhythm of change. From colonial struggles to digital revolutions, generations have risen to confront challenges, demand justice, and redefine the meaning of progress.

The Silent Generation (Born 1928–1945) — Resilience in Adversity: This generation grew up amidst the shadows of World War II and the Great Depression. They learned endurance through scarcity, patience in suffering, and the value of duty over desire. In India, they were part of the freedom movement's last lap—marching alongside leaders like Gandhi, Nehru, and Patel, believing in sacrifice more than recognition. Globally, they carried nations from war-torn ruins to reconstruction, shaping the United Nations and post-war stability.

Their strength lay in selflessness, but their reverence for authority sometimes bred conformity. While they ensured hierarchical structures—both political and familial—to persist unchallenged, their silence preserved order but at the cost of ignoring systemic inequalities that would later erupt in the 1960s and 70s.

Baby Boomers (Born 1946–1964) — Builders of Nations: Emerging from war, the Baby Boomers sought stability and growth. They became nation-builders, expanding industries, democracies, and education. In India, they played a role in laying down the institutions of modern democracy, the Green Revolution, and space research. Globally, they witnessed civil rights struggles in the U.S., the student revolts of Paris in 1968, and anti-war protests that reshaped policies.

The Boomers were remarkable achievers, yet their pursuit of progress often came at an environmental cost. Consumerism grew unchecked, sowing the seeds of today's climate crisis. Their reluctance to let go of power has also been criticized, creating political and economic bottlenecks for younger generations. While they built, they also hoarded.

Generation X (Born 1965–1980) — The Bridge Between Tradition and Technology: Often called the "middle child" of history, Gen X grew up during economic transitions. They learned to adapt—balancing traditional values with modern ambitions. In India, they spearheaded the 1991 economic reforms era, opening the country to globalization. Globally, they nurtured Silicon Valley, ended the Cold War divide, and prepared the world for the digital age. Gen X provided the resilience needed in turbulent times, but their pragmatism sometimes slid into cynicism. They questioned authority yet avoided large-scale collective action, overshadowed by the louder voices of Boomers and Millennials. Their entrepreneurial drive shaped industries, but their political passivity left them a "quiet bridge" rather than loud reformers.

Millennials (Born 1981–1996) — Dreamers of the Digital Dawn: The first-generation to grow up with the internet, Millennials believed in dreams without borders. In India, they powered the IT boom, start-ups, and global service hubs, making Bangalore and Hyderabad world names. Globally, they led climate marches, used social media as a weapon of accountability, and created platforms like Facebook and YouTube that changed communication forever. Millennials brought optimism and inclusivity, yet their digital dependence fostered fragility—both in attention span and economic stability. They are the "burnout generation," balancing dreams with rising inequality, job insecurity, and housing crises. Their digital activism often sparked global change but sometimes lacked sustained, grassroots follow-through.

Generation Z (Born 1997–2012) — Rebels with Smartphones: Gen Z are fearless digital natives. They are activists before they are adults—speaking through hashtags, memes, and viral campaigns. In India, they have been visible in climate movements, gender equality marches, and

farmers' solidarity protests. Globally, they led waves like the Arab Spring, Hong Kong pro-democracy protests, and climate strikes inspired by Greta Thunberg. They are impatient, but they shake systems when silence fails.

Historical Incidents in the Region: Bangladesh — Monsoon Uprising (July 2024): Young people mobilized via Facebook and other social platforms to demand democracy and freedom of expression. Memes, satire, and visuals unified diverse voices against autocratic tendencies.

Nepal — Pro-Monarchy vs. Republicanism Protests (March 2025): Large demonstrations both in support of restoring the monarchy and for defending the federal republic saw clashes between rival groups, highlighting Gen Z's engagement in national political identity.

Latest Developments from Nepal (September 2025): * A Gen Z-led uprising erupted after the government banned 26 social media platforms, sparking nationwide protests.

* Thousands marched in Kathmandu and across Nepal. Security forces clashed with protesters, resulting in 51 deaths and over 1,300 injuries.

* Prime Minister K. P. Sharma Oli resigned; Sushila Karki was appointed as interim prime minister. Elections were scheduled for March 5, 2026.

* Protesters demanded the lifting of bans, government accountability, anti-corruption reforms, and political transparency.

Gen Z's voice is raw and powerful, but their impatience risks burning out movements quickly. Their reliance on digital spaces empowers them, yet also exposes them to misinformation and polarization. While they excel in raising awareness, sustaining structural reforms remains a challenge. Their energy is transformative, but untempered anger can lead to chaos.

Generation Alpha (2013 onwards) — The Future in Making: Still in classrooms, Generation Alpha is the first to be fully born into artificial intelligence, robotics, and virtual reality. Their challenges will be unlike any seen before—climate survival, machine ethics, and global citizenship. They are still seeds, yet the soil is already rich with the lessons of past generations.

Generation Alpha will inherit both the promises and the perils of a hyper-connected world. Their strength may lie in early adaptability, but overexposure to screens and reduced real-world interaction pose risks for empathy and mental health. The true test will be whether they can blend technological genius with ethical wisdom.

Conclusion — The Echo That Binds Us: Every generation has its light and its shadows. Some generations rebuilt nations from rubble, others questioned unjust regimes, and still others sparked revolutions from their phones. The echoes of their courage, their errors, and their hopes remind us that humanity's progress is never the work of one age alone—it is a relay race across time.

As we look to the future, the challenge is clear: can the younger generations learn not only from technology but also from the wisdom of those who endured wars, famines, and struggles before them? If they can, the echo of change will not only be loud—it will also be lasting.

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Letters to the Editor

When Learning Turns To Exhaustion

Editor,

I write this as a concerned student of the 5th semester in one of the most prestigious colleges in Shillong. For years, this institution has been admired for its history and academic excellence. For many, getting admitted here was once a matter of pride. But over time, the experience has changed. Students no longer enjoy coming to college the way they once did because the environment has become suffocating.

Our schedule is a major reason for this. Classes run from 9 am in the morning until 4 to 4:30 pm in the evening, with a very short break. The only pause we get is about 30 minutes, and even that feels insufficient. Most of the time, half of it is spent just searching for a place to eat. By the time we finally find something, we are left rushing through our food, often leaving meals unfinished just to make it back to class on time. Saturdays, instead of being a day of rest or catch-up, are packed with lectures. The college seems to think that as students, we have nothing to do outside of class hours. But that is far from the truth.

Assignments, projects, and practical work pile up, yet there is no real time to complete them. For students

staying in rented rooms or hostels, the struggle is even greater. Away from home, we manage not only our studies but also, our meals, our chores, and the emotional challenges of living independently. And with strict attendance requirements, we have no choice but to attend every class, even if we are mentally or physically exhausted. There is no room to take a break without falling behind.

I understand that teachers, too, are under pressure to complete their syllabus. But cramming everything into such a tight schedule only harms the learning process. Too many flavours in one cup at the same time makes no taste. In the same way, when lessons are rushed without space to reflect or absorb, students gain little real understanding.

Instead of fostering a love for learning, this routine breeds exhaustion and resentment. Assignments are rushed, practicals are done mechanically, and the joy of education disappears. The campus, once vibrant, now feels drained of energy because students come not with excitement but with weariness.

There is no single student body to oppose these matters, so I write here with the hope that the management of this college will reflect on these concerns. True prestige should not come at the cost of students' well-being. Education should be more than

endless hours of lectures. It should prepare us for life, not wear us down before it begins.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

A City's Despair: From Broken Roads to Systemic Betrayal

Editor,

I am writing to express a profound and shared frustration among the citizens of Shillong. The issue is far greater than the appalling condition of our roads, which, with their gaping potholes and crumbling surfaces, have become a daily public menace. These broken roads are merely the most visible symptom of a deep-seated rot that has paralyzed our city's progress.

This systemic failure is tragically mirrored in the lives of our youth. Chronic and widespread unemployment has left an entire generation feeling abandoned and without a future, driving many into the devastating spiral of drug abuse. What makes this particularly galling is the government's approach. Instead of investing in our own talent, valuable public funds—reportedly lakhs of rupees—are being spent on outside consultants, while local graduates, filled

with potential and a desire to contribute, are left without jobs. This choice to look outward instead of nurturing our own is a profound betrayal.

Furthermore, the public purse is being plundered to pay for a bloated political apparatus. Public funds are being used to support individuals like parliamentary secretaries, chairmen, and advisors who are perceived to be ignorant of the common person's plight and detached from the realities on the ground. This abuse of political power to amass personal wealth is an open secret, fuelling a culture of impunity that drains our resources and erodes public trust. The so-called developmental schemes offered to the public are nothing more than short-term eye wash—unsustainable projects designed to garner public applause without addressing the core issues.

When people attempt to seek justice, it seems the system is rigged. It is widely believed that the courts are being corrupted to protect ministers. Even the plethora of pressure groups wrongly labelled "NGOs," which should be independent voices for change, are seen as mere puppets of political groups, serving vested interests rather than the public good.

Shillong is a city in crisis. Its roads are broken, its youth are suffering, and its governance is in question. We must demand an end to this cycle of neglect, corruption,

and political posturing. We deserve a government that is accountable, transparent, and genuinely committed to building a better, more prosperous future for all its citizens.

Yours etc.,
Kynai Dkhar,
Via email

Step in the right direction

Editor,

The other day I happened to go to PB or Khyndailad and I was pleasantly surprised to see that the roads were free of street vendors who used to hinder the pedestrians. I would like to compliment the Government and the Ministry of Urban Development in particular for having achieved this face-lift of our beloved city. For so long the street vendors have been a nuisance along the PB roads, especially the path leading to Umsohsun. It always seemed like a narrow path where pedestrians dashed against each other while hurrying to their destinations. Today however, the road seems surprisingly very wide, almost like a highway. Rid of street vendors, the location has received a facelift. In the past years we have seen how the authorities have tried in vain to remove these street vendors from this location but all efforts seemed futile. Perhaps those efforts were unsuccessful because the

authorities did not think of providing an alternative place for these poor vendors many of whom are living from hand to mouth. The present authority however has peacefully implemented the relocation of these vendors because it has provided them a suitable alternative place. The stalls that have been allotted to these vendors in the top floor of MUDA parking lot, look very well arranged and decent. It is evident that the vendors are contented with this permanent arrangement made by the government. Besides, the arrangement is also facilitating customers who do not need to go up and down the road or keep dodging the vehicles playing along. It would be nice however if the department undertakes the task of repairing the broken tiles along the path; put up sitting places all along, provide waste baskets, put up some flower displays, LED display screens etc. It would be better still if the department concerned can realign the electrical and phone cables which are running disorderly crisscrossing the road. Once again kudos to the Government and let us all decide to make our beloved city the pride of our state.

Yours etc.,
Barnes Mawrie sdb
Via email

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"Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value."

— Albert Einstein

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Cabinet Reshuffle: A Conundrum

A cabinet reshuffle is never an easy task for the Chief Minister. No minister wants to give up his/her berth because it is a source of power. While cabinet reshuffles are necessary to ensure efficiency, in Meghalaya's coalition politics it's also about musical chairs. A case in point is the BJP with only two MLAs with one having held a cabinet berth for 2.5 years while the other one is waiting in the wings. Normally when a chief minister chooses his cabinet colleagues the first criterion should be efficiency, experience and ability to deliver. But such considerations cannot figure in a coalition government where capability and competence are not qualities a CM can look for. He has to strike a balance such that the coalition is not threatened even though now the NPP has an absolute majority in the state today. The CM must tread cautiously especially with the BJP MLAs since the party is ruling the roost at the Centre, albeit in a coalition ministry but it is not lost on anyone as to who pulls the strings.

In the real sense a cabinet reshuffle is not just a change of face but also a change in the manner in which the departments are run. While some ministers have a firm grip on their departments others are floundering or are running the departments to serve a limited agenda of their own especially in terms of staff recruitments in those departments. So far, the most harangued department is the Education Department. This Department requires a complete overhaul and demands that a minister heading Education — a department riddled with controversies — should have been a senior, experienced person who could guide the educational vision of Meghalaya with fortitude and commitment. Unfortunately, in Meghalaya no minister wants to head the Education Department because of its past predicaments which have continued even today.

In a situation where Education in the state is in the doldrums, the present Education Minister alone cannot be blamed for all the ills and the baggage of the past. What is needed is strict rationalising of the superfluous schools that have come up and continue to function only in name without teachers or students. This requires a harsh decision which the MDA-2 government must take in order to salvage education from the rut it is in today. Political concessions cannot be made at the cost of education. In fact, the communities where such superfluous schools operate should demand that they be shut down. How can any Government allow ghost schools to continue to suck up all the funds meant for schools that are really educating students. Hence in this cabinet reshuffle if there is one imperative for the Government it is to overhaul the Education Department. However other departments too can do with a change of face and performance. These include the Urban Affairs, PWD and PHE Departments. The poor quality of our roads are testimony of the failure of the PWD and the fact that people in Shillong city suffer from drinking water shortage should tell us that the PHED is a failure. A cabinet reshuffle is therefore crucial.

Letters to the Editor

Gen-Z and news consumption

Editor, Patricia Mukhim, in her article "Rewriting the Rules of Journalism" (ST, September 12, 2025), raises a question that is very important for our times. She asks: What will happen to journalism if it turns into entertainment only? She shows how today's news is often shaped by catchy headlines, very short videos, and the constant chase for likes and shares. If this continues, who will do the serious job of informing people and checking those in power?

Mukhim is worried that young people, especially Gen Z, want only quick and flashy news. It is true that short videos are very popular, but it is not fair to think that young people cannot handle serious news. Many of them listen to long podcasts, read newsletters, and follow videos that explain issues in detail. They are not careless; they are simply more careful in choosing what they watch or read. They avoid boring or dull reporting, but they welcome news that feels sharp, clear, and honest. If traditional newspapers do not change with the times, they may lose

the young generation. Mukhim also talks about two dangers: sensationalism (making news too dramatic) and cancel culture (where people quickly reject or boycott someone). Sensational news often happens because companies earn money from clicks and views. So, it is not just the fault of reporters — the whole system of online advertising pushes them this way. Cancel culture may look harsh, but sometimes it is the only way people feel they can fight for justice when official systems do nothing.

The most powerful point in her article is the reminder that journalism is a public trust. Journalists must be brave enough to expose corruption, question government claims, and give space to unheard voices. But this will not happen unless we also act. Media literacy — the skill of checking facts and questioning sources — should be taught in schools and colleges. And investigative journalism will survive only if we find new ways of funding it, otherwise, rich media owners will always control the loudest voices.

At some places, the article sounds nostalgic for the old days of newspapers with long articles and slow reading. But the truth is times have changed. Digital media though flawed, has also given new power to ordi-

nary people. Local podcasts, YouTube channels run by common citizens, and even Twitter threads often explain things more clearly than big newspapers. These should not be rejected but improved in quality and honesty. In the end, Patricia Mukhim's article is a timely reminder that journalism must not be controlled by algorithms alone. It must meet young readers where they are — with news that is quick but not shallow, sharp but not dishonest, digital but still meaningful. Good journalism is both an anchor and a mirror. It anchors society when rumours and lies threaten to shake it. And it mirrors society by showing the truth, even when it is uncomfortable. If we lose this, we do not only lose journalism — we lose a part of democracy itself.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Tura

Political parties shun succession plans

Editor, The editorial "Young" at 75" (ST Sep 12, 2025) raised a very interesting point. Ideally, the old order must give

way to the new; ageing men must groom their second line of successors and step aside. Ah, the perennial succession puzzle where India's political dynasties and cadre machines both struggle with, albeit in very different ways. Succession in the Indian National Congress (INC) is less about grooming and more about inheritance. Rahul Gandhi, despite electoral setbacks, remains the de facto heir. If replaced, the fallback is often his sister Priyanka Gandhi Vadra. The party's constitution and internal culture make it difficult to replace the Gandhis. Loyalty is personal, not institutional, and there is no formal mechanism to elevate non-family leaders. Promising leaders like Sachin Pilot or Shashi Tharoor often face resistance or marginalization. The absence of a meritocratic pipeline weakens the second line. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) translates to Indian People's Party (IPP) despite the fact that its organizational strength has not institutionalised succession and has no clear roadmap for leadership transition. It has an informal "retirement at 75" rule, but it is inconsistently applied. The BJP's strength lies in its cadre-based structure and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) pipeline. Yet, the centralisation around individuals has stifled visible grooming of successors. The strategic implications are

Experiment and Plan of Action

Fortunately, our Conversation Period is a life saver in dealing with some of these issues. To break the ice, we started with a simple Extempore Speech Exercise with topics that range from simple personal introductions, likes/dislikes, hobbies and move on to other topics that the students themselves are familiar with. Each student has to write a word on a chit (a roar of laughter followed "cuz" they thought that it was a 'smelly' word) of paper — a phrase or a question related to any topic that they have learnt from any subject which is then kept in a "MUNCH" box. Similarly, in a yellow Cherry Blossom Plastic Cup, we kept chits with roll numbers. For weeks, we gamble with luck, as one by one they took their turns to speak. As a form of minor assessment, during the Creative Week (July), we made it mandatory for all students (class wise) to participate in the Extempore Speech Competition.

Post Half-Yearly, we ventured into a new realm — Newspaper Reading Activity. Much to the annoyance of Grandparents and "Daddy-Pigs", in the next class, students came to school armed with The Shillong Times, Nongsaing Hima, Mawphor, and Sunday Pullout in their bags. "Sir, do you really get diarrhea because of us?" — asked a student who had just read my article. Then, page wise we learn how a newspaper is divided into sections. They now understand where the Morning Assembly's news reports (read by the seniors) came from.

Observation and possible effective solutions

Many students excelled. Some students could not speak. Some, even while reading from the note that they have themselves written committed a lot of errors — a question and a statement, a comma or a full stop etc. — does not make any difference. In the words of my senior most colleague — "They don't speak/write/read the language everyday to Sir, how will they get the hang of it?" It awakened my empathy for the students, for it reminded me of my beloved Ms Begum's advice and our normal classroom banter during schooldays — "Mynta ka sngai mia song aaye lih ha ti-phin?" — "Nga song sohlah-khliah-piat dah doh masei mia" (What did you bring for tiffin? I brought mashed potatoes and beef). Raised on the other side of town, we

speak our own dialect with classmates in school. This is the main cause of stage fright or fear of speaking openly in a group. Students feel shy because of their inability to express themselves in a clear language or even in simple sentences.

The problem with Gen Z and Gen Alpha generation is that they don't even have a firm language foundation — their own mother tongue. They grew up watching YouTube videos involving colourful toys and candies — Channels like Cocomelon, Vlad and Niki, Nastya, Kids Diana and myriads of other South-East (South-ish) Asian Kids channel with their weird English pronunciation, intonation and cringe content. Our children speak English fluently from whatever they can catch but only from the surface. This adversely affects them if they learn other new languages which involves a lot of translation. Once, I successfully translated a Hindi word into English, but my CBSE-student didn't understand it. So, I translated it into Khasi, but the child still doesn't understand. This is the reality of Gen Alpha learners.

The inspiration for the second activity came from a personal experience. Militarily disciplined by a veteran man from books to almirah shelves, Kongbi's wooden walls and even our 'Syrwiang-Khiew Ja' (vehicle-rings wrapped in paper where we keep hot rice/karhai pots in the kitchen) were wrapped with newspaper as we had plenty of it. I developed a habit of reading newspapers at an early age, which was then gradually lost with the onset of Nokia/Siemens keypad phones & SMS, Chinese I-pods, obnoxiously loud Chinese/Bangladeshi touch screen phones with fancy stylus, FB, smartphones and finally JIO Free 4G data.

I reclaimed this habit after a brief episode of enlightenment. Gen Alpha majorly reads only for passing. Why read storybooks when you can watch them on YouTube! Madam Editor had rightly nailed the issue of short-attention span amongst Gen Z and Gen Alpha. They have a peculiar way of learning too — some intently watch a Roblox/Minecraft Gameplay on YouTube Shorts with AI commentary about concepts or stories. In this digital age, we have too many distractions, which even adults struggle to cope with. Even my old man is glued to the screen; several times my

sister had to intervene as he utters somnolisms — probably responses to Arnab Goswami's and Navika's arguments.

Do the new generation read or watch anything substantive? The answer is Negative, NO CAP! Media Literacy can be introduced at a very young age and it does not have to be strictly professional. Newspapers serve as a good medium for students to improve their language skills too and learn about a lot of things. We have to be several steps ahead of the children. Of course we can't force a child to read or expect them to understand GST Fraud or any of Bah Ardent's arguments, but we can tweak their curiosity and play games.

I begged my mother to give tea to the newspaper boy so that he would deliver my doodle to Nongsaing Hima's office, then I would anxiously wait for Saturday. When a classmate uttered "I saw your drawing" on Monday, my chest would explode with pride. Showing a picture of the forever-young Information and Public Relations Department Minister, I asked, "Don't you want to know who this is? If anything happens to our school, she will be the first one to help us!" The very next day, they came up with a ST DIPR news ad "DOCTOR MAZELAMPAREEN LYNDOH." Some still looked clueless. In the same manner, "PM Modi is shaking hands with whom?" "What is the full form of KSU/USTM?" "Search the meaning of the words — Current/Affairs/Political in your Oxfords and Cambridges" — GAME ON!

Like sugar is to our body, new-digital media content is highly addictive to our brains. To wean the new generation from clickbaits, SKIBIDI content and long exposures to the screen, we have to cut this sugary dependence by catching and guiding them while they are young, in our fortress. They are highly skilled in tech, super-duper fast learners, sensitive, creative and DANK problem solvers. They are vocal at times, with no-filters. All they need is our support and guidance, not our "Once upon a time, I... Oh I!... had to walk 30 Kms to school... up and down up and down... DAILY!"

(The title of the article are ingredients that Professor Utonium used to create the perfect little girls in an experiment, but he accidentally added an extra ingredient to the concoction which led to the accidental creation of the super POWERPUFF GIRLS — BLOSSOM, BUBBLES AND BUTTERCUP)

INC's dynastic inertia risks alienating younger voters and regional leaders and BJP's centralised charisma may create a vacuum post-Modi unless it activates its deep bench.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Does Donald Trump merit the Nobel Peace prize?

Editor, When we take a closer look at today's world leaders, it's hard to find anyone with true diplomatic maturity or the wisdom of real statesmanship. Most seem caught in a race to prove their point, no matter how irrational or morally bankrupt they may be. Shockingly, some are even supporting regimes that are heartlessly bombing civilians for years on end. There's little trace of humanity in their decisions. The hunger for power seems to have made them less compassionate, more arrogant and domineering.

Take Donald Trump. His loud call to "make America great again" has only added more confusion to an already unstable global scene. Obsessed with his country's gains, he rarely looked be-

yond "profit." As long as nations were buying arms from him, he didn't mind them tearing each other apart. He was almost poised to break the sovereignty of Canada. Anyone who threatened America's economy became his enemy number one. And yet, despite being knee-deep in chaos and controversy, he still dreams of winning the Nobel Peace Prize. The irony is hard to miss.

It's no secret that Pakistan has long been involved in nurturing terrorism against India. But General Asim Munir, who himself was accused of mindlessly inciting extremism, was warmly embraced by Trump. Donald Trump was overjoyed when Munir endorsed him for the Peace Prize. It's baffling. Honestly, I don't think Barack Obama deserved it either. And, if Trump ever manages to bag the Nobel Peace Prize, it would reek of a backroom deal rather than a genuine honour. Yes, unlike fifty years ago, the dignity and sanctity of the Nobel Peace Prize in certain categories have greatly eroded.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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The Shield: From Discovery, Depletion To Recovery

By Maitphang Syiem

Starting with an amusing note from what actor, wrestler John Cena says, "Sunscreen you can't see," literally reminds us how important it is to protect our skin and generally speaking sunscreen with various SPF categories have become inevitable for any outdoor activities. However, diving deeper, the aforementioned catchphrase literally reminds us of a natural phenomena (Chapman Cycle) not visible to our naked eyes which requires a deep scientific thought to understand its importance. This cycle is vital for the present and future generation, else sustaining life on this Earth will be difficult.

Dear readers, by this time you must have gained something from the cues mentioned. Can you guess what it is? Yes, friends it's the ozone layer, the Earth's natural sunscreen protecting us from the harmful UV rays of the Sun. September 16, is always commemorated as the international day for the preservation of the ozone layer with this year's theme "From Science to Global Action" to emphasize on the critical role of the ozone layer in sustaining life on this planet, highlighting the commitment to eliminate those substances which deplete the ozone layer through the Montreal Protocol which was adopted on the September 16, 1987 and enforced on January 1, 1989. As we commemorate World Ozone Day 2025 with the theme "From Science to Global Action," the theme reminds us of humanity's remarkable environmental success stories that span from a Swiss chemist's curious laboratory observation to current ozone global monitoring networks. This year's theme exhibits the extraordinary transformation from scientific discovery to committed international cooperation that has initiated the healing process of our planet's protective shield.

The story begins in the basement laboratory of Christian Friedrich Schönbein at the University of Basel in 1839. While conducting experiments with electrical sparks and water, the German-Swiss chemist noticed a peculiar, pungent odour that resembles after-lightning strikes. Schönbein recognized its significance. He named the mysterious substance "ozone," derived from the Greek word "ozein," which means "to smell". Little did he know that his basement discovery would eventually save the world. Ozone was a molecule composed of three oxygen atoms rather than the familiar two, but its planetary importance remained hidden. However, its atmospheric revelation came in 1913 when French physicists Charles Fabry and Henri Buisson revolutionized our understanding of Earth's atmosphere. Through innovation they were able to make precise measurements of the solar spectrum reaching Earth's surface which led to the discovery of something remarkable, a sharp cutoff in ultraviolet radiation around 310 nanometres. It was speculated that the missing radiation wasn't lost in space, it was being absorbed by something in the atmosphere. When they matched the spectrum of the missing radiation to known chemicals, only one fit perfectly which is Ozone. This thin shield absorbs 97-99% of the sun's harmful ultraviolet-B radiation and protects us from the sterilization effect.

British meteorologist G.M.B. Dobson revealed that ozone distribution defied simple photochemical predictions, leading to the discovery of massive atmospheric circulation patterns that transport ozone from tropical production zones to polar regions.

It was only in the 1970s that F. Sherwood Rowland and Mario Molina at the University of California, Irvine, made a chilling discovery of chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), wonder chemicals used in refrigeration and aerosols since the 1930s and found that these chemicals were destroying the ozone. CFCs appear to be benign in Earth's lower atmosphere, non-toxic, non-reactive, and seemingly harmless. However their long stability proved dangerous. When these chemicals reach the stratosphere after decades of atmospheric transport, the solar ultraviolet radiation breaks their structure apart, releasing chlorine atoms and through the photochemical reaction each chlorine atom can catalytically destroy up to 100,000 ozone molecules. This threat became visible in 1985 when British Antarctic Survey scientists Joe Farman and his colleagues reported shocking measurements from Antarctica. In every

spring, it was found that an area of severely depleted ozone was appearing over the South Pole. The Antarctic ozone hole grew larger each year, creating a stark visual reminder of human impact on atmospheric chemical conditions.

Scientific investigation revealed an unexpected dimension to the ozone crisis because the CFCs weren't just ozone destroyers, they were also extraordinarily potent greenhouse gases. Despite their minuscule atmospheric concentrations of just four parts per billion, CFCs possess global warming potentials (GWPs) thousands of times greater than carbon dioxide. Their unique molecular structure allows them to absorb infrared radiation in the "atmospheric window" where the atmosphere is relatively transparent creating what scientists term a "super greenhouse effect". CFCs contribute approximately 16% of the warming effect of all human produced greenhouse gases, demonstrating how ozone protection and climate action are fundamentally linked.

The chemicals threatening our UV shield were simultaneously accelerating global warming which prompted immediate action. This thin veil of molecules maintains the delicate balance that allows life to flourish on Earth's surface. Without it, increased UV exposure would cause dramatic increases in skin cancer and cataracts in humans, while disrupting plant photosynthesis and marine ecosystems. This invisible shield doesn't just protect life, it helps regulate the entire atmospheric system that sustains our planet's habitability.

Today's ozone monitoring represents a technological leap from Dobson's ground-based spectrophotometers to advanced satellite instruments like NASA's Ozone Monitoring Instrument on the Aura satellite, ISRO's INSAT 3DR and the Ozone Mapping and Profiler Suite on NOAA's polar satellites provide unprecedented global coverage. These advances revealed unexpected discoveries, including global-scale ozone reductions during COVID-19 lockdowns, the lowest levels recorded since 2005. Such findings demonstrate how satellite technology continues expanding our understanding of atmospheric dynamics and human environmental impacts.

From science emerged unprecedented global action: This landmark agreement achieved something extraordinary: virtually universal participation in addressing a global environmental threat. The committed phased approach proved remarkably effective and in 2005, consumption of ozone-depleting chemicals had fallen by 90-95% in participating countries. The 2016 Kigali Amendment extended controls to hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), powerful greenhouse gases used as CFC replacements, projecting avoidance of up to 0.5°C of global warming by 2100. Evidence confirms the protocol's success. The Antarctic ozone hole, which reached its maximum size of 29.9 million square kilometres in 2000, had shrunk significantly by recent years. Scientists projected that the Antarctic ozone layer will largely recover by 2040 with global ozone returning to pre-1980 levels.

The theme "From Science to Global Action" perfectly captures achievements and ongoing responsibilities. The international agreement with frameworks will support the cause but ozone protection will also require citizen and individual participation with environmental centric motives. Grassroots educational initiatives play a crucial role in sustaining progress. Schools, universities, and community organizations have a big role to play in educating the new generation about atmospheric and environmental protection. These grassroots efforts will complement formal governmental programs, creating a global network of environmental stewardship.

The story from Schönbein's laboratory observations to today's global monitoring networks, from the discovery of the ozone hole to its gradual healing, reminds us that environmental protection is not just a policy challenge it's a shared human responsibility, requiring both scientific understanding and participatory commitment to ensure that Earth's invisible shield continues protecting life for generations to come.

(The writer is a Geo-spatial expert and avid citizen science practitioner)

"Success is how high you bounce
when you hit bottom."
— George S. Patton

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A shame of an EC

THE Supreme Court's warning that it would set aside the entire Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls in poll-bound Bihar and also other states speak volumes about the depths to which the Election Commission (EC) of India has sunk in recent times. What should have been a transparent and well-organised exercise is today steeped in a huge row. To start with, the poll panel's removal of as many as 65 lakh "voters" from the state's electoral rolls is in itself hugely scandalous. The state's total electorate is less than eight crore — meaning about one-tenth of the "voters" have been removed in what was claimed to be a cleansing operation. In the first place, if these were fake voter names, the EC owes an explanation as to why such a huge rot has set in directly under its watch in Bihar over the past years.

Clearly, the EC was blinking and looking the other way when such a huge fraud took place in Bihar. Now, EC is going for a nation-wide SIR "to set wrongs right." If this exercise is done in an effective manner, it would open a can of worms. Chances are that the electoral rolls in all states were largely tampered. Alertness was obviously not a part of the present EC's very being. This raises important issues. The very sanctity of the election process in a vaunted democracy like India has been called into question. Manipulations of a high order have been taking place, mostly before each election, mainly by well-endowed political establishments or the ones that rule the respective states. In Bihar, known for its weak law and order, chances are that the electoral rolls were manipulated by one or the other regional party, or even the BJP, with a view to subverting the people's will and grabbing power through foul means. This reaffirms the view that governance in this country has largely gone to the dogs due to the sway of scheming, unscrupulous politicians — unlike in the early years of Independence when the first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru had zealously put systems in place and respected them. For today's politicians who handle power, they have no qualms in going to any lengths, including indulging in corruption, so as to also remain in power and keep warming their seats.

Bihar's chief minister Nitish Kumar, for instance, keeps winning elections and running governments in iterations, through multiple terms without bringing in any visible development in the backward state. The jaded political figure changed colours like the chameleon at the approach of each election and supped with rival political formations with the sole aim of continuing as chief minister. A point to note about Narendra Modi's term as prime minister is that while his government boasts about infra development, he hardly bothered about systems being subverted by vested interests. A modern India cannot be built just by an infra push or by the purchase of a few military jets. The uncouth who subvert the systems go unchallenged and unpunished. They are having the last laugh.

Letters to the Editor

Stop sensationalising murder

Editor,
Apropos of the news "Missing 4-year-old girl's body found; SIT takes over probe" (ST September 16, 2025), there are profound ethical, emotional and legal reasons why social media users including content creators should refrain from uploading or sharing distressing material related to the tragic death of 4-year-old Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawmai of Nongrah, Shillong. The family is already grappling with unimaginable grief. Circulating images or videos of the deceased child intensifies their suffering and can re-traumatize them repeatedly. Sharing such content strips the child and her family of their right to privacy and dignity in death. Nongrah residents are shaken by the incident. Public dissemination of graphic or sensitive content can ripple through the community.

The East Khasi Hills Superintendent of Police, Vivek Syiem has explicitly condemned the circulation of such material and rightly warned of serious legal repercussions for those who ignore the advisory. Sharing sensitive content may violate laws related to privacy,

child protection and digital ethics. It could be treated as obstruction of justice or interference with an ongoing investigation.

Virality should never come at the cost of human dignity. Content creators have a moral obligation to prioritize empathy over engagement. Algorithms may amplify such content, but content creators must resist exploiting tragedy for clicks or monetization. Responsible storytelling means protecting victims not sensationalising their suffering. The Meghalaya Police have rightly urged everyone to immediately remove any related content from social media platforms and to respect the family's privacy. Upholding this request is not just about compliance, it's about compassion.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

A gruesome murder

Editor,
The news of a four-year-old girl going missing on Sunday was enough to create a sense of deep unrest in the minds of the people. As a mother, when I looked at the little girl's face in the pictures, I was filled with fear and nervousness. I feared for my own children. Im-

mediately, the thought that came to my mind was God forbid nothing untoward should happen to the little one. The world has become so cruel that no sane person can think straight. Faith, trust, empathy, compassion are empty words that have no relevance in today's world. Ambition, pride, greed, hunger for power seem to rule the day. But when the body of the little girl was found at a construction site, a chill went down my spine. It was no longer a normal Monday but a day that left the entire town in fear, pain and anger. What happened to the little girl can happen to anyone of our own. I can't even begin to imagine the pain of the mother who carried her for 9 months in her womb nor her father who had held her in his hands filled with dreams for his child.

Now that preliminary investigation suggests that Insaphira was murdered it becomes even more gruesome. Only a devil incarnate could have done such a thing. How did the monster dare to put an end to the life of a girl so young and so innocent? Did he not have any conscience or fear while committing the crime? The Police Department must apprehend the culprit or culprits and the law must take its course and stringent punishment must be awarded to the devil incarnate. While my heart goes out to the

parents, siblings and family members of Insaphira, I pray that the little one rests well and rests easy in the arms of God.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

A Cry for Safety: Parents Living in Fear Amid Rising Crimes Against Children

Editor,
In the past few months, our state has been shaken by horrifying incidents: gold earring snatched from a minor in Mawlai; drugging a minor from Mawshuibit and attempt to kidnap a child from school, and now the most heartbreaking tragedy — the killing of an innocent four-year-old child from Nongrah. These are not just news reports; they are nightmares that every parent now lives with, leaving us terrified to send our children even a few steps outside the safety of our homes.

As parents, our hearts are heavy with grief and fear. Schools, which should be sanctuaries of learning, have become places of anxiety. Playgrounds, once filled with laughter, now feel unsafe.

The very freedom of childhood is under attack, and we, as ordinary families, are left feeling helpless and clueless about how to curb this menace.

Children represent innocence, joy, and the future of our community. When they are harmed, it is not only the family that suffers but society as a whole. These recent events have shaken our trust; trust in the safety of our neighbourhoods, in institutions that should protect our children, and in the very fabric of community life that has always held us together.

We cannot allow fear to silence us. Every parent's voice must join in demanding action, not tomorrow but today. Some urgent steps we believe are necessary. They include:

Safer school environment with stricter monitoring of entry and exit points, deployment of security staff and installation of CCTV cameras wherever possible is imperative. Also clear protocols for child pick-up and drop-off to prevent any breach.

We need regular awareness programs in schools and localities to help children and parents identify suspicious behaviour and react quickly.

Parents should avoid sending children out alone with valuables such as gold ornaments. Encourage col-

lective guardianship, where parents and neighbours watch over one another's children as if they were their own.

Families affected by such crimes need counselling and community support. Our children must be reassured through care, not silence, so they do not grow up with fear as their constant companion.

This is not a problem for individual families to solve. It is a collective responsibility of parents, communities, schools, leaders, and law enforcement agencies. If we do not act now, the fear gripping parents today may become the reality for children tomorrow.

The tragedy in Nongrah must not be another passing headline. It must be a turning point. Let us unite to demand and create a society where children can walk to school, play with friends, and live their lives without fear.

Our children are our greatest treasure. Their safety must be our greatest priority.

Yours etc.,
JL Nonglait,
Via email

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The concept of Indigenous people's rights is the product of the fight against the discrimination and dispossession that indigenous peoples experienced at the hands of colonialists. To engage in the same actions — i.e., discrimination, harassment — is a betrayal of the values that underpin those struggles. Indigenous communities of Meghalaya must do better in how they treat the non-indigenous population. Hate and fear have a habit of consuming those who constantly define their lives by them. We have to do better, and we must do better.

By the way, Amit will soon be screening his film for the general audience in Shillong. Please go and watch 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)

Between Insider and Outsider: The Dilemma of Belonging

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

As an indigenous person, the eviction happening in Assam raises very important questions. It is clear that a particular community is being targeted under these evictions, with potential corporate interests also being one factor. At the same time, we cannot ignore the context in which these evictions are taking place — namely, to prevent the demographic marginalisation of indigenous communities and by non-indigenous populations, whether from across the international border or from the mainland. This is particularly relevant since examples abound of the discrimination and dispossession of indigenous communities in the past and present. There is some evidence that among the languages spoken in the Indus Valley Civilisation, Dravidian and Munda (an Austro-asiatic language like Khasi) are potential candidates, although there is a lot of work remaining in order to confirm this. But in the mainland today, Munda and other indigenous communities are being peed upon by upper-caste individuals, or tied to a tree and beaten because they have adopted Christianity. Closer to home in Tripura, my indigenous friends recounted stories of the humiliation they faced at the hands of settlers from East Pakistan, who today form the majority population. So, there is no way I, or any indigenous person, would allow that to be repeated on us. At the same time, there are minorities within indigenous communities as well, who have nothing to do with the injustices committed elsewhere. They are also victims, and there is a human story that is equally tragic, important, and worth telling.

A few weeks ago, Amit Mahatani, a noted documentary filmmaker with roots in Shillong, invited me for a private screening of his film 'Inside Out' — on the 2024 Parliamentary elections in Shillong. The film looked at the political campaigning for the Shillong Lok Sabha seat which saw a three-way contest between the incumbent MP from Congress, Vincent Pala, Minister for Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare of Meghalaya and NPP (National Peoples Party) candidate, Ampareen Lyngdoh, and the General Secretary of the newly formed party VPP (Voice of People Party), Ricky Syngkong. This was a very unprecedented election. Normally, during national

elections, it is the candidate from the national parties or the ruling state government which usually hold the edge. However, this time around, it was the newcomers VPP who were aggressive and bullish about their hopes. Amit had initially wanted to cover all three parties, but he could cover only the campaigning of Ampareen Lyngdoh and Ricky Syngkong. The film revolved around the campaigning strategies of the two candidates and the issues that emerged.

Having roots in Shillong, Amit has a very close affinity to the city and the state. But like many other members of the various non-indigenous communities that had made it their home, there is also a bitterness that haunts these connections. Indeed, Amit began the film by talking about the violence that erupted in the late 1970s and the ones thereafter whose repercussions are still being felt today. Since then, there has been a steady decline in the non-indigenous population of the state, falling from almost 20% to just over 10%. Threat of violence, limited rights and restricted economic opportunities has been pushing away many long-time non-indigenous residents in search of a safer and more secure life. This includes many, like Amit, who have gone and done very well for themselves in various fields, but still feel deeply connected to the place. There is still hope that maybe they can somehow rebuild those broken bonds, but the elections showed such prospects are still a distant dream.

As everyone would know by now that it was the VPP that won the election, and it won by a very handsome margin, garnering more than half of the votes polled. This election victory has been made possible by the proliferation and consolidation of the 'Jaidbyrniew Politics' of which VPP is the latest manifestation. This is a regular feature of Khasi politics. Every decade, a political party will emerge which will denounce everything that came before them and promise to fight in the name of the 'jaidbyrniew', a term which means 'people who share the same cultural bonds'. Put very simply, it is 'Khasi First' politics, built on a number of false ideas (e.g., rampant illegal immigration, which is not backed by data) and a good deal of 'Khasi

victimhood' — the belief that the majority community (the Khasis) are being persecuted while minority, non-indigenous communities are being patronised, even though the reality is quite the opposite. This time around, VPP emerged as the party that embodied the most vitriolic form of 'Jaidbyrniew Politics'. The speeches recorded in the film, showing party leaders engaging in the usual trope of harping on the threat of outsiders taking away the rights of the Khasis, served as a good example of this.

Amit had become quite close to both the candidates who were campaigning, but he must have felt some discomfort while shooting some of the political rallies of the VPP. After all, the 'outsiders' who were being vilified in the speeches were a subtle reference to people like him, even though having been born and brought up in Shillong, he was as much an insider as any Khasi. The NPP, for its part, tried to distance itself from such divisive politics and even publicly questioned the legitimacy of the 'Jaidbyrniew Politics' in the way it is being used to spread hatred against the non-indigenous population of the state. This is in keeping with the image of the party, which it tries to project in order to build a pan-regional appeal, and in the long run, a pan-India appeal.

During campaigning in one locality in Shillong, Conrad Sangma, the NPP President and Chief Minister of Meghalaya, stopped his speech upon hearing the azaan (call for Muslim prayer). He is the sombre version of Sanbor Shullai, the maverick MLA from Laban, whose non-communal credentials are well-known. Some commentators are of the opinion that VPP and its 'Jaidbyrniew Politics' are an ephemeral phenomenon and that the party will have to become moderate if it ever wants to rule the state. I am not very confident about this prediction. Immediately after winning the KHADC election, the VPP announced that it would stop issuing new trading licenses to members of the non-indigenous community. So, moderation is not something I expect — at least not until the party has reaped the full electoral benefits of 'jaidbyrniew politics', which is likely to become more appealing as Hindutva attempts to extend its tentacles into

Meghalaya's politics and society. The backlash — and the bulwark — will, unfortunately, be 'jaidbyrniew politics'. So, unless there is a change at the national level, I can only see the VPP becoming more parochial — and more successful.

But all of this politicising leaves people like Amit (with no links to Hindutva or the oppression of the indigenous peoples in the mainland and elsewhere) with a lot of sadness and pain. While he can articulate his heart's yearnings by externalizing them as art (i.e., documentary films) not everyone can do the same. This leaves many feeling distraught and powerless in their position. Brought by the British to cater to the needs of a growing city, Shillong, and in search of a livelihood, they did what humans have done for thousands of years, migrate in search for a better life. It was this same need, the search for agricultural land that brought the Khasis 5000 years ago from South China to present-day Meghalaya. Because they colonised these lands first, we consider them indigenous, and those who came much later as non-indigenous. But one cannot deny that both groups have made this city and the state their home. Both have a legitimate claim to this place, albeit the latter has limited rights than the former (e.g., inability to buy land outside the European Ward). However, to make a living through honest means and live a life of dignity is the right of every human being, whether or not one is indigenous.

The concept of Indigenous people's rights is the product of the fight against the discrimination and dispossession that indigenous peoples experienced at the hands of colonialists. To engage in the same actions — i.e., discrimination, harassment — is a betrayal of the values that underpin those struggles. Indigenous communities of Meghalaya must do better in how they treat the non-indigenous population. Hate and fear have a habit of consuming those who constantly define their lives by them. We have to do better, and we must do better.

By the way, Amit will soon be screening his film for the general audience in Shillong. Please go and watch it.

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Bob's Banter

Ma! We Didn't Shake Hands..!

By Robert Clements

There was turmoil in the Mohan household the other evening. Not the ordinary turmoil of misplaced slippers or forgotten school fees, but a storm that could have flattened the neighbour's papaya tree. For the Mohans had just discovered something shocking: their two sons had returned from playing cricket with the neighbourhood bullies.

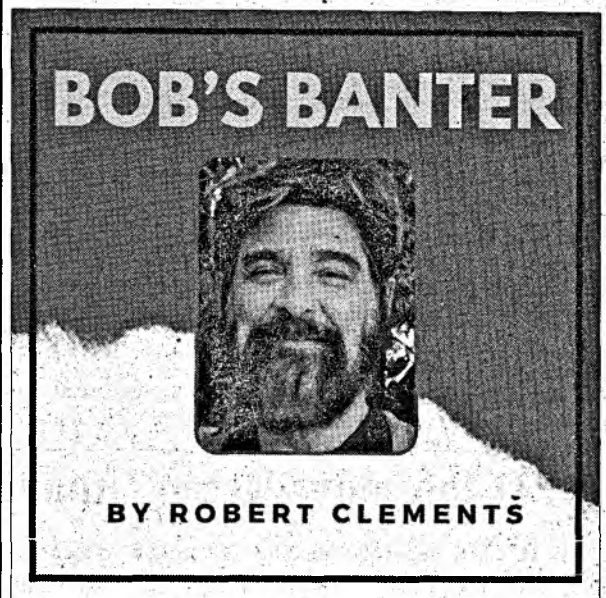
"Playing cricket with them?" thundered Mrs. Mohan, rolling pin still in hand from her half-made chapatis. "How could you? Don't you remember they harassed your sister last year? Don't you remember how they roughed up your father outside the ration shop?"

The elder son shuffled uneasily, but with the bravery of

pretending their hands have suddenly contracted arthritis. After all, handshakes are dangerous. You might catch germs. Or worse — peace.

Meanwhile, the same players fly back, slip into IPL jerseys, and suddenly discover their fingers are working fine again. Then, they shake hands, hug, and pose for selfies with the same "enemy" across the boundary. Why? Because there's money on the table, and like Mrs. Mohan, we fans nod approvingly as long as the purse is getting fatter.

The Mother of All Hypocrisies
And how like Mrs. Mohan we are as a nation. We rail, we rant, we rage against the neighbour. "They did this, they did that, they can never



a batsman facing a bouncer without a helmet, he pulled out a wad of notes. "But Ma," he said, proudly jingling the coins, "they paid us good money to play. Look, here's the cash!"

"And Ma," added the younger one, puffing out his chest with the righteousness of a saint defending the Ten Commandments, "we didn't even shake their hands after the match!"

The transformation on Mrs. Mohan's face was faster than India's collapse in the last five overs of a World Cup semifinal. A smile spread across her lips, her anger evaporated like ghee on a hot tawa. She counted the money carefully, tucked it into her little waist purse, and declared: "Then it's alright! Let them do what they want — but don't you ever shake their hands after cricket!"

And there, ladies and gentlemen, is the story of the recent Indo-Pak cricket encounter. On the field, rivals for ninety overs. Off the field, business partners counting the revenue from sponsors, broadcasters, and ticket sales.

We, the fans, were Mrs. Mohan — angry about the fights, recalling the insults, repeating the old wounds — but beaming with joy because, after all, the money came home. And yes, we found moral comfort in the one fig leaf left: We didn't shake hands.

The Sacred Non-Handshake

Ah, how noble! We can cheer together, share dressing rooms in the IPL, bat for each other's franchises, and even exchange sly smiles at the toss. But extend a hand? Never! That would be betrayal of the nation, dishonour to the flag, and perhaps, worst of all, a trending hashtag.

It's almost biblical in its purity — our new commandment: Thou shalt not extend thy hand across the border, except to collect the prize money.

Strange, isn't it? Gandhi shook hands with the British even while demanding they quit India. Mandela shook hands with the very men who jailed him for 27 years. Reagan and Gorbachev shook hands while their missiles still pointed at each other. But we? We discovered the ultimate diplomatic weapon: folded arms and sweaty palms resolutely kept apart.

Of Families and Franchises

I sometimes wonder, do these players get their lessons in diplomacy from the Mohans themselves? "Yes beta, you can borrow sugar from the neighbour, but never wish them good morning."

Our cricketers hit sixes, collect man-of-the-match awards, smile for the sponsors' cameras, and then walk away

being trusted." But show us a game of cricket, sprinkle some cash, and suddenly our voices soften: "At least they didn't shake hands!"

It's the kind of moral victory we Indians love: symbolic, hollow, and completely useless. We'll lose wickets like ninepins, we'll drop catches like hot coal, but as long as the handshake is avoided, we walk away declaring ourselves victors in spirit.

Mrs. Mohan would be proud.

The Business of Rivalry

Make no mistake — this isn't about cricket, it's about commerce. The only match truly being played is on the balance sheets. Television rights skyrocket, sponsors beam, broadcasters raise advertising rates, and both cricket boards chuckle at their swelling bank accounts.

We, the emotional spectators, sit glued to the TV screens, thumping our chests, forwarding memes, and debating on WhatsApp groups. Meanwhile, the real game is happening in the boardrooms. There, hands are not only shaken but also firmly clasped as deals are signed and money exchanged.

If cricket is a religion in India, then its god isn't bat or ball — it's the banknote.

Imagine the UN With Our Rules

Sometimes I imagine what would happen if the United Nations adopted our cricketing philosophy. Picture this: nations at war, leaders glaring across tables. No treaties, no peace accords, no diplomatic ties — just a ceremonial declaration: "We will continue to fight, but don't worry, Ma, we won't shake hands."

Wars would drag on, bullets would fly, but hands? Firmly pocketed. And the world would clap at such spine-tingling moral discipline.

The Only Score That Matters

So, what did we really learn from this match? That cricket is no longer just a sport; it is the theatre where our hypocrisies are played out. It is where nationalism is packaged, sold, and consumed like popcorn.

And as long as the crowd roars, the advertisers pay, and the money flows, everyone goes home happy. Everyone, except perhaps the game of cricket itself.

Maybe next time, instead of staring at the scoreboard, we should take a peek at the balance sheets. Because in this game, Ma, the only ones shaking hands are the ones whose hands are shaking as they count the money...

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

"The only sure weapon against bad ideas is better ideas."

—Alfred Whitney Griswold

The Shillong Times

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Cabinet Rejig Defies Logic

THE MDA-2 Government had only one lady minister and she was dropped thereby turning the present cabinet into a cohort of patriarchs. Meghalaya's claims to matriliney as a natural empowering agent is shattered in this reshuffle of ministers. Ampareen Lyngdoh was perhaps the most active minister insofar as her role as the Health Minister is concerned. She has travelled the length and breadth of Meghalaya to ensure that the poor health indices – particularly of women in their child bearing years, improves; that maternal and infant mortality rates are reduced; that anaemia among women is addressed through a series of interventions and that institutional delivery through schemes such as the Chief Minister's Safe Motherhood Scheme or CM-SMS were introduced to enable pregnant women to reside closer to their hospitals awaiting their labour date. The fact is that it takes a woman to understand the plight of another woman and the problems that women face in their life cycles of pregnancy, childbirth and child care. Also women being the primary care-givers demands a policy that requires deeper understanding of the gender roles that obstruct women from accessing health care. Also, while health afflicts both genders, it cannot be denied that a woman's reproductive role places her at greater risk than it does a man. Women's bodies are the location of more cancers than that of men.

It is bad enough that Meghalaya has only four women legislators, one in the Opposition (TMC) and three from the ruling Party (NPP). Yet there's not a single woman minister to at least put up a show of gender equity. This is unprecedented. If a minister is removed for poor performance the public would not miss the person but not when that minister has discharged her duties with alacrity. The gentleman appointed to head the Health Department is a Class 12th passed person and would take a long time to inform himself of the functioning of the Department. True the Health Department has a good set of senior officers to helm it but a Minister still has the last word. Tourism too will now be handled by 80-year old Timothy D Shira which makes people wonder if he can keep up with the demands of the Department and whether at this age a person can handle the challenges of a technology enabled world which is what Tourism demands. In fact, Tourism is one of the revenue generating outlets which requires that the minister has hands-on experience on the demands of his job which fluctuates and requires that he thinks on his feet. Shira's first challenge will be to tackle the poser from the Tourist Taxi Drivers of Meghalaya who are determined not to allow Assam vehicles to enter Meghalaya. That's a tough one as Assam gears itself to stop Meghalaya taxis from entering the state. This will make it tough for Meghalaya passengers. The Tourism Minister's priority is to resolve this conundrum. It's a tough call! Conrad Sangma owes an explanation to the people of Meghalaya why some ministers have been retained with their respective portfolios and why some have lost their jobs despite high performance indicators.

Are we brave enough to let public office become a trust- not a dowry?

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

Nepotism—our insidious "uncle culture"—has entangled itself within Meghalaya's executive, legislative, and recruitment channels, promising merit but delivering patronage. Nepal's Gen Z revolt should reflect our hypocrisies and drive reform through action rather than rhetoric. The High Court's phrase—"uncle culture"—resonated as a moral indictment, identifying feudal remnants in a constitutional state that guarantees equality while normalising favouritism in appointments.

In 2022, a division bench of the Meghalaya High Court imposed ₹3 lakh costs on the State after discovering that a recruitment panel had "hijacked" driver selections—where interview-room subjectivity overshadowed merit and constitutional sense. The Court's directive to report to vigilance authorities and retrain interviewers reads like an unnecessary civics lesson in a mature democracy, yet remains essential as old machinery persists. The political class treats censure as weather rather than climate.

Consider the recurring allegations about public recruitment—followed by denials, as in August 2024 and 2025, when the Chief Minister declared "no nepotism" in MPSC preliminary results, insisting that SOPs had restored fairness. The reassurance is noted; anxiety remains because trust is cumulative and muddled by even one opaque process.

In July 2025, a CBI Anti-Corruption Branch complaint accused two North Garo Hills MLAs of appointing their sons to the district selection committee—amid rumors of bribery, with whispers of Rs "10 lakh for even a peon." The complaint alleged that public works contracts were divided through proxy firms linked to political families, a conflict of interest disguised as governance. Even pending investigation, the optics damage when selection bodies revolve around dynastic influence.

In August 2025, the cabinet announced exams to regularise 1,500 ad-hoc positions, citing Supreme Court restrictions and promising transparent selection with SOPs. This shifts from expediency to rule-based recruitment, where public positions cease to be loyalty tokens. However, procedures without public scrutiny remain mere bureaucratic theatres. This issue extends beyond hiring. Allegations of misuse of tribal status in civil service appointments, such as the CoMSO challenge to

a selection under the Garo ST quota, show how fragile identity and justice become when documentation and community norms are treated as afterthoughts. While distinct from nepotism, the socio-political implications are similar: when the gate-keeping of public resources becomes opaque, people sense inheritance where verification is needed. Indian judicial discourse emphasises the need for transparent selection systems that are free from nepotism.

Scholarship on judicial independence cautions that secrecy in appointments fosters biases that erode the legitimacy of the judiciary. In 2022, the High Court of Meghalaya advocated for procedural literacy among interviewers, a balance between tests and interviews, and merit-based assessment—judging a driver by their driving skills, not appearance. This principle should be inscribed in every recruiting office from Tura to the Secretariat.

India's history warns against nepotism. From the Arthashastra's cautions against patrimonial capture to the Constituent Assembly's debate between patronage politics and equal opportunity, the fight against nepotism has been ongoing. Post-independence, courts developed anti-arbitrariness jurisprudence for procedural fairness, while the reservation policy addressed historical exclusion without becoming a gift of the powerful. However, "uncle culture" evolved into networks of favour, treating the state as spoils.

Across the border this September, Nepal's youth achieved what theory could not: they made corruption and nepotism costly for the state. The ban on 26 social media platforms was seen as a gag on speech and a shield for elite impunity, especially amid the exposure of "nepo kids'" opulent lives. The streets responded. Prime Minister Oli resigned amid protests, the offices of political impunity were stormed, and the state relented.

Reports from Kathmandu depict the movement as leaderless yet remarkably unified: lift the ban, end "corrupt practices," and stop stifling the future with dynastic entitlement. Analysts observe a broader pattern among Asian youth—in Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia—where memes become mobilisation tools and hashtags translate into tangible power on the streets. This is the new

grammar of accountability: digital natives intolerant of hypocrisy, and disdainful of inherited privileges.

Meghalaya can learn several lessons: first, build transparency into recruitment processes by publishing anonymized score matrices, weightages, and interview rubrics for every public selection; live-stream interviews where feasible; and require post-process audit reports by independent panels. Second, establish a firewall against conflicts of interest by codifying automatic recusal and disclosure for legislators and family linked entities in tenders, and implement e-procurement with public bid ledgers and independent randomness checks to prevent tender splitting.

Third, design citizen oversight by forming youth oversight councils from universities, civil society, and professional bodies to monitor recruitment and procurement, and empower them to initiate reviews when anomalies are detected. Fourth, protect free speech and invite scrutiny: unlike Nepal's ill-fated social media ban, develop a policy framework that treats digital criticism as a form of free audit; the safest state is the one most closely watched. Fifth, enforce legal rather than moral accountability: implement High Court guidance with statutory penalties for process violations; automatically extend vigilance referrals when panels deviate from notified norms without written justification.

Autonomous District Councils are intended to serve as constitutional safeguards for identity and self-governance of the tribal people. However, allegations of opacity, fund misuse, and nepotism have undermined their credibility in Meghalaya. Decentralisation without transparency merely increases opportunities for exploitation; democratic federalism relies on integrity at every level, from the council desk to the assembly dais. The solution requires decisive action: enforcing proactive disclosure under right-to-information standards, implementing external audits, and maintaining conflict-of-interest registers accessible to the public without the need for an application.

"Distrust all in whom the impulse to punish is powerful", Nietzsche warned. Perhaps our indignation turns into mere performance because we lack the courage

to reform the structures that entice us. The concept of the "nepo baby" is not just about being a beneficiary; it is a social construct we all support when we normalize calling the panel "uncle," the tender "set," and the post "adjusted." What Nepal's Gen Z has imparted to the Himalayas is not anger but responsibility—an ethics of immanence, where institutions are only as legitimate as the scrutiny they withstand.

Our local manifesto begins with a commitment to transparency: publishing everything, including selection criteria, weightages, panel compositions, conflict declarations, and post-process analytics. Sunlight is non-negotiable. Second, establish a Youth Audit Corps by institutionalising and rotating student and early career professional observers for MPSC, DSCs, and major tenders, empowering them to file minority reports that trigger automatic reviews. Third, ensure tender integrity by implementing a code that prohibits relatives within the first or second degree of consanguinity from sitting on or advising any body adjudicating tenders or selections that could benefit them. Fourth, whistle-blower insurance should be introduced, offering protection and reward schemes for insider reports that lead to convictions or corrective actions in recruitment and procurement. Fifth, ensure a digital window, never a wall: enshrine a statutory bar against platform bans as a response to reputational crises; regulate for compliance, not silence.

Meghalaya's political class may deny, as it often does, that nepotism pervades the state's arteries; denials are easy because capture rarely leaves fingerprints, only patterns. Courts have already written the prologue to reform; reporters and citizens have sketched the plot; the youth must furnish the climax—peacefully, relentlessly, and with the discipline of a republic that refuses to be inherited.

If the future is to belong to merit rather than lineage, to transparency rather than whispers, then Meghalaya must become a laboratory of procedural courage—where the state is judged as Nietzsche judged men, by whether it can bear the truth of being seen or not. Let the system feel the glare; let the "uncle culture" feel the cold; let public office become what it was promised to be—a trust, not a dowry.

(The writer is Advocate, Trade Unionist & Ethicist)

Before and After AI: Are we losing the Art of Thinking?

By Argh Jain

Open AI has released its GPT 5.0. Perplexity AI has put the offer to buy Google Chrome, Google Gemini can also now do better tasks with the latest upgrade in its model. Anthropic has launched a Claude AI agent that lives in Chrome. AI is now everywhere with capabilities to do tasks better than any undergraduate engineering college student. These are what called "agentic AI"—basically computer programs that don't just wait for instructions but act also, handling things on their own without any supervision.

AI is advancing so rapidly that big companies have now started substituting human roles with agentic AI. For example, customer service jobs are being replaced by intelligent chatbots that not only answer queries but also resolve complaints end-to-end. In Finance, AI tools can now analyse data, generate reports and even make trading decisions faster than human employees. Marketing teams are using AI agents to run campaigns, monitor trends and adapt strategies in real time. This change signals both opportunity and threat, while efficiency and cost-cutting improve, human workers face the challenge of redefining their value.

While businesses use AI to replace manpower, students are turning to the same tech-

alarmingly rate. Social media already drains attention, and now AI has joined as another distraction.

These concerns naturally lead us to ask some critical questions: were the students before the AI era the 'real engineering' students—those who spent hours solving problems, finding resources on google links or digging into library books to find suitable resources? At what deep level AI is truly impacting us? What will be the future of technology if today's students rely on AI for almost every task? Should we put limits on its usage or is this technology evolving our brain in a new way?

To truly understand how AI has reshaped our learning, let's step back less than a decade. Let's consider a student who enrolled in a B-Tech college back in 2016, when the teaching and learning process was almost the same as in the early 2000s. He attended lectures, made notes in physical notebooks and learned from professors teaching on white boards rather than relying on PowerPoint slides. As a beginner in coding, he might have understood only 50-60% of the lecture, which meant he had to revise, practice and struggle with the concepts on his own. With no AI tools to assist him, he turned to books, spent hours on find-

"To truly understand how AI has reshaped our learning, let's step back less than a decade. Let's consider a student who enrolled in a B-Tech college back in 2016, when the teaching and learning process was almost the same as in the early 2000s. He attended lectures, made notes in physical notebooks and learned from professors teaching on white boards rather than relying on PowerPoint slides."

nology to handle academic tasks. A Bright CHAMPS survey (July 2025) found that approx. 63% of Indian students use AI regularly, primarily for academic tasks like homework and learning support. While about 78% of Gen Z regularly use tools like ChatGPT for assignments and content creation. At IIT Delhi, a survey showed 80% of students use generative AI tools—these are programs that can generate text, code or image for users, approx. 81% among them using these tools several times a week and about 10% subscribing to paid versions. This shows how deeply AI is already embedded in student life.

Behind these surveys lies a simple truth—AI has made studying easier and more accessible than ever before, it helps students quickly access the resources and provides new ways of learning. Earlier concepts which used to be difficult to understand can be made simpler with the assistance of AI, for many users, it is like a virtual tutor which can help them anytime, anywhere.

While AI may act like a helpful tutor, it can also quietly weaken the very skills education is meant to build, while these advantages are real, the growing dependence comes with hidden costs. The trend which is getting set among students would be scary in future as the tech is reducing the potential of critical thinking, logical reasoning and mathematics skills. The brain needs challenges the way muscles need weights, if AI keeps doing everything, then our mental fitness will fade away. It is now setting in the brains of students—why struggle when ChatGPT can do it in seconds. Relying too much on AI is like hypnotising your brain to follow as AI is saying. Assignments are no longer about learning—they've become just deadlines to meet. Students are not trying their best, not putting their 100% efforts in studies. With the surge in AI, attention and concentration span of students is decreasing at an

ing relevant resources and built the understanding step by step. Each effort strengthened his concept, pushed him beyond the comfort zone and trained his brain to think critically and logically.

This comparison naturally leads us to a deeper reflection: what truly sets apart a student before the AI era from one living in it today? How did earlier students manage to come up with new ideas, solve problems, handle multiple tasks and even complete boring assignments on their own.

Was a tool like Chat GPT necessary back then or have we made ourselves more dependable on others? Why do we feel such a strong need for AI now—couldn't the same tasks be done without it? Have we trained our mind to avoid thinking beyond our limits? Why is there such a hurry to finish work without effort, instead of treating academics as a process of true learning?

To avoid a future where humans would need assistance from AI tools in doing daily tasks, we must set the boundaries to limit the use of it. Especially in schools and colleges, the use of AI should be limited so that students continue to build critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning skills. Education has always been about the journey—struggling with concepts, asking questions and slowly arriving at answers. If we skip this process and let AI do everything, we risk losing the very abilities that education is meant to develop. Imagine relying on a calculator so much that we forget basic arithmetic; the same danger exists with AI for higher reasoning. If we hand over our thinking to machines entirely, one day we may realize that we have forgotten how to think for ourselves.

AI should remain our assistant, not become our replacement.

(The writer is a First Year B Tech Student Flaksha University, Mohali)

Letters to the Editor

This Horrific Murder Demands Soul Searching

Editor
I write to express my horror at the death of four year old Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawnai, of Nongrah, Shillong, her body discovered on Sep 15, 2025, one day after she went missing. My heartfelt condolences to the parents and family of this beautiful child. How they are coping is beyond me. The loss of a child is heartbreaking enough. But to lose a child through such malevolence is even worse.

The perpetrator(s) are indeed, "monsters in our midst." Of all members of civil society, the child is the most precious -- to be cherished, honoured, and protected by everyone. The loss of even one child through wilful malevolence is one loss too many. It is a sign of the breakdown of civil society. To blame social media, or the Internet is to skirt the issue. The loss of this precious child should lead to deep soul-searching, as to what prompts such evil in an adult.

I can imagine the fear and anxiety rippling through the hearts of Shillong parents.

Given the times, who can they trust their precious children with?

May the prayers of the Shillong community ease the pain in the hearts of Insaphira's parents and family. May this precious child rest in peace.

Yours etc.,
Deepa Majumdar,
Via email

Justice for Insaphira: Say No to Violence

Editor
I am writing with a heavy heart and profound anguish to express my utter shock and condemnation over the tragic and brutal murder of four-year-old Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawnai of Nongrah, Shillong. The news that this innocent child was found missing on the morning of September 14, 2025, and the next day discovered dead just 200 meters from her home, buried in muddy water and covered with construction stones in an unfinished building has shaken our community to its core.

How can a society allow such a heinous crime to be committed against a defenceless child? Insaphira's life was snuffed out in the most cruel and inhumane manner,

right under the nose of her neighbourhood. This is not just a personal tragedy for her grieving family. It is a collective failure of our civic responsibility, law enforcement, and moral conscience.

This incident reminds us of the recent horrific case the honeymoon couple, where Sonam Raghuvanshi allegedly killed her husband Raja in a shocking act of betrayal and violence. That case too sparked widespread protests and demands for justice. These two tragedies, though different in circumstance, share a disturbing common thread. The alarming rise in violent crimes and the urgent need for stronger safeguards, faster investigations, and stricter accountability.

We, the people of Shillong, must come together to demand immediate, speedy and transparent investigation into Insaphira's murder with zero tolerance for delay or negligence.

Let Insaphira's death not be in vain. Let it become a turning point: a moment when Shillongites rise as one to say, "Enough is Enough. Our children deserve safety. Our families deserve peace. Our city deserves justice."

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

Innocence Betrayed: The Crime That Broke Our Hearts

Editor
The brutal murder of little Insaphira from Nongrah has shaken our conscience and left all of us numb with grief and rage. This is not just a crime against one child; it is a wound inflicted on all of humanity.

One cannot begin to imagine the fear that innocent child endured in her last moments. Childhood, which should have been filled with play and laughter, was instead smothered in terror. The thought of her cries—too soft for the world to hear—brings unbearable pain to every parent's heart. For her parents, the agony is lifelong and irreparable. A mother who carried her for nine months, a father who held dreams for her future, are now left with only memories and an unending void.

This is an act of savagery that no civilized society can condone. The culprit, once found, must face the most rigorous punishment the law can provide—swift and uncompromising. Anything less would be an insult to the memory of the child and a

betrayal of justice itself.

But beyond justice, this tragedy is a reminder of our collective responsibility. If a child is not safe in her own neighbourhood, where then is she safe? Parents now live in fear, schools and streets feel unsafe, and the very freedom of childhood is under siege.

We must act. Stronger safeguards in schools and localities, community vigilance, and collective guardianship of our children are urgent necessities. We cannot let fear rule our homes or silence our voices.

The tragedy of Nongrah must not fade into another passing headline. It must be a turning point. For our children are not just our joy; they are our future. Their safety must be our greatest priority.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Via email

Has Society Failed Its Children

Editor,
With respect to the recent news of the brutal murder of a young girl, as a concerned teenager who has clearly seen the dangers that pose a threat to our very existence,

I hope that what I'm about to speak reaches many and I believe that "The Shillong Times" provides that platform.

With the unsettling news of how within a short span of time so many terrifying incidents have happened in Meghalaya where we see that no safety is guaranteed to children in schools, public places and even in a place we so thought to be the safest, our home, where children playing in the front yard has now become unsafe, we begin to question the standards of human decency that we as a society are upholding.

It all traces back to the inefficient practice of the law and as a society we have to admit that we have failed miserably. Drugs are smuggled under the eyes of the officials yet the ones who gain feel no pain but the silent roar of the innocents just fades into oblivion.

Yours etc.,
Davini Shwa Malngiang,
(Student of Aakash Coaching institute)
Assam

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

Signals from Saudi

A defence and security pact signed by Saudi Arabia and Pakistan this week cannot be taken lightly: The agreement stresses that any aggression by any nation against either Pakistan or Saudi Arabia “shall be considered an aggression against both.” An attack on one meant an “attack on both.” The pact however stops short of saying how their responses would be in the event of a war – leaving the question of “participation” ambiguous. This gives both the countries scope for studied responses to emerging situations. Ground realities are such that a war is more likely between India and Pakistan in future, while the scope for aggressions is for real between Saudi Arabia and the nations in its neighbourhood. Such possibilities include situations vis-à-vis nuclear-armed Israel as also pro-Shia nations like Iran. Another irritation for Saudi Arabia is Yemen’s Houthi rebels it fought for decades.

It would be tempting to relate the present Saudi-Pakistan pact to Operation Sindoor, and the Israeli attack against the Hamas rebels in Doha, Qatar with tacit backing from President Trump. The Doha aggression has shocked the Gulf nations that depend on the US for their security. For their survival, a gang-up of the Islamic entities in the geopolitical region might be attempted at. Notably, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia already had a loose security pact for decades, but the present agreement goes one big step further. Likely, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan are visualising a NATO-style defence pact signifying collective response to any aggression in future. Chances are also that this formalizes a “secret deal” between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan over the latter’s nuclear programme – which is suspected to be funded by Riyadh with Israel in mind. Saudi Arabia’s assertion in the context of the agreement that its relations with India remain “robust” must be taken with a pinch of salt.

Yet, ground realities are such that Saudis cannot afford to antagonize India in view of the strong trade and business relations they maintain bilaterally – which is of the order of \$42 billion, ten times higher than the trade ties Saudi has with Pakistan. India’s high standing on the world stage and its power to influence global power blocks cannot be taken lightly by Saudi Arabia. Significantly, the new Saudi-Pakistan defence pact has been signed at a time India has developed issues with the US and we have alternatively sought to build bridges with China. The resultant confusion that currently prevails in New Delhi’s diplomatic about-turns need to be cleared. The Delhi-Moscow defence pact in the 1970s, when the USSR and India were close allies, is an old story. This had helped India, under Indira Gandhi, to effectively weather odds and neutralise security threats from even the US. Standing alone is no more an option for India. The threat from China is for real. Bangladesh, another neighbour that shares the long eastern border, is charting a different course. So is Nepal, which is being wooed by Beijing.

The hullabaloo; frustration; anger; desperation at Jorabat on Thursday morning was palpable. Visitors and citizens from Meghalaya who were bound for Guwahati airport or the railway station were left exasperated as they could not cross the Assam-Meghalaya border. Some bold ones got off the Meghalaya vehicles and took the Assam Uber to reach their destinations. But that’s hardly a solution. So what’s all this nonsense about? Are Assam and Meghalaya two countries at war with each other? Many who had morning flights missed their flights. Only those with medical certificates showing they were going for treatment to Guwahati could cross the border. Interestingly, even the former Education Minister, Rakkam Sangma who was travelling to Garo Hills was stopped and told to go back to Meghalaya or use Assam Police vehicles for escort. And why did all this happen? Because the All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association (AKMTTA) with its shortsighted, half-baked idea decided to impose its diktat on the Assam vehicles and not allow them to enter Meghalaya. The Assam Tourist

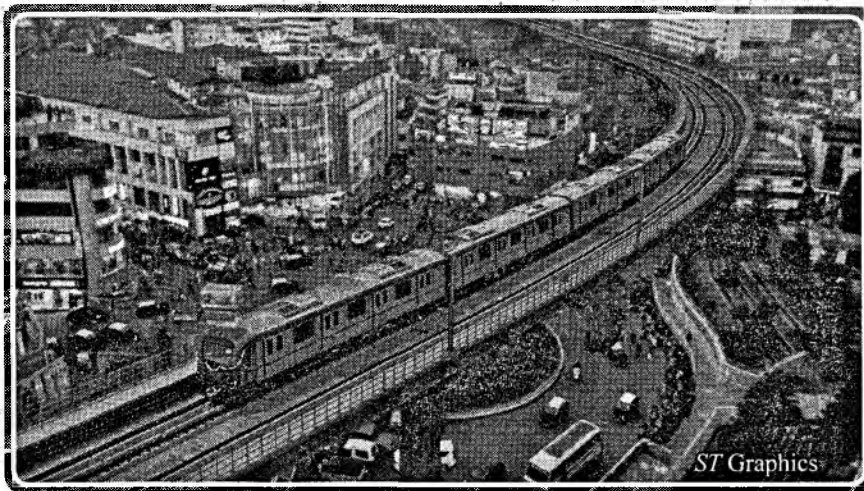
Taxi Association expectedly made it difficult for passengers from Meghalaya to reach different destinations in Guwahati.

While it is agreed that the tourist taxis of Meghalaya have a right to earn by ferrying tourists to different destinations within the state and that is an employment opportunity for many young people, this could have been done through a series of discussions and reaching at mutually agreed terms. For a while now the tourist taxis from Meghalaya have been told to park several metres outside the Guwahati airport because the Assam tourist taxi drivers don’t want anyone else to ferry passengers to different states and destinations. Considering that Assam tourist taxis ferry passengers to Meghalaya, that embargo on Meghalaya taxis is unwarranted and I always felt it was very parochial and inequitable. The Meghalaya Government should have taken up the matter with the Airports Authority of India which is the deciding factor on which vehicles should park where.

The glaring fact before us Meghalayans is that we cannot bypass Assam. All our essential commodities come via Assam by trucks. If tomorrow Assam out of a caprice decides to stop trucks from coming to Meghalaya

just as the Assam Tourist Taxi drivers prevented Meghalaya taxis from entering Guwahati on Thursday then what happens? This could have been prevented if Meghalaya had its railhead and goods and passengers both could come right up to Bymihat and even beyond. I have been on trains in Switzerland that could travel up a steep mountain from Montreux to Caux. That was many years ago. I am sure that technology is now available in India too.

But the very talk of railways sends the pressure groups into a tailspin. Government after government has capitulated before these pressure groups who actually use FEAR as a weapon to make all of us citizens to shut up and recede to a



corner. The pressure groups have not consulted us, the general public of Meghalaya numbering over 30 lakh on whether we want a railhead to come to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. We have elected MLAs to represent us. But do they really speak on behalf of the people or do they become stooges of either the government or the pressure groups?

Fear has been so gainfully weaponised by these pressure groups that we in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills are the only idiots that resist the railway line from coming here to ease our travel and to make our goods cheaper than if they came by trucks. The train has come to Mizoram which is a difficult terrain but look at us! This tells us that Mizoram has a strong political will; that the Mizos know what will benefit them and that connectivity is integral to development. In Meghalaya on the other hand political will has always been subverted by the need to remain in power at all costs. Politicians think that any move to bring in railways would lead to violence that might spiral out of control. But is the role of the state not to keep all such anti-state activities under a leash?

For too long Meghalayans have lived in fear of the outsider; fear of being submerging by the other’s

à la Tripura without reading history to understand why Tripura is what it is today. There are instruments in place to control illegal migrants. Those illegal migrants would not be in Meghalaya if there were no jobs for them. The fact that there are avenues for employment means that our own people are unwilling to do hard labour and to work more hours which is what the private sector demands everywhere. So, the locals want to control the job market, but, in a very competitive scenario would a contractor employ someone with lesser output per day or give work to someone who is a thorough professional and get the best work out of him for the money paid. It’s time that Meghalayans

get out of the protective cocoon where they have been sheltered from all hardships. In fact, it is this protective mantle which when snatched away by adversity makes our young people feel they have been thrown into a cruel world and then take to drugs to deal with their fears. Fear has been successfully used by politicians and pressure groups in equal measure. True that fear is a primordial emotion we are born with. But life is about overcoming such fears before they turn into phobias and degenerate into paranoia. Fear clouds our ability to face life. Many of us fear to disagree with pressure groups. Hence pressure groups create conspiracy theories that our jobs will be taken away if the railways come when instead they should be encouraging our youth to equip themselves with the necessary skills so that they are the best in the trade and no one can steal their jobs.

Sadly, fear has been used for decades as a tool of control; control of the mind, control of our thoughts and our reactions. As a tool for control, fear can be used to manipulate, to coerce, to bend people’s will. People and governments have been weaponizing fear for centuries, because they understand something most of us don’t – that sustained levels of

fear do devastating things to us physiologically. We have all realised what fear does to us. It paralyses us and we stop breathing normally. Our breath becomes shallow and restricted and our brains register this as oxygen deprivation and respond with the fight or flight instinct. Most of us tend to take the flight mode which is to react to the fear by getting into a shell. Since we don’t want to come out of the shell we can’t face challenges. This in turn weakens our endeavour and makes us take the easy way out which is to want something without working for it. And if we don’t get that something we blame someone else who is ready to work hard to earn good money.

I watch our young people in the labour market. Many of them spend quality time with their mobile phones. If there is a supervisor then they work; once he turns his back they are up to mischief again. Why would anyone employ such a person who does not bring value for money? It’s time someone drills these facts into our youth. It’s also high time that the Khasi-Jaintia people start speaking for themselves instead of expecting the pressure groups to fight their battles for them. Remember, no one fights for us without a cost. There is a cost. The cost is that we are told railways are bad and should not come here and we bow our heads in deference to them. As a result we pay more per kilogram of rice than we would if trains were our mode of transport.

The advantages of railways coming to the Khasi-Jaintia Hills is that we would not have to depend on Assam for our essential goods. They would come straight into our state and at a cost that’s much lesser than road transportation. It’s also a shame that while other states that were created after us have functioning airports, Meghalayans still have to rely on Guwahati airport for their onward journeys. Why does it take so long to create any infrastructure in Meghalaya? Why the time and cost overruns? And why are we the public not questioning all this? Our silence emboldens those who play games to delay all projects because they look for profits over public interest. Having seen Gen Z protesting and bringing down a government in Nepal one wonders when our youth are going to have the courage to call out corruption and nepotism in what is rightfully named as the land of clouds.

(ST, Sept 14, 2025). They tied her hands and continued pouring boiling water over her body, and then threw her alive into a river. My question is: where are we truly heading as a society? We boast of being modern, yet we are no better than savages. We must ask ourselves what kind of society we are now building when children are unsafe not just in the streets or schools but in their own homes. More precisely, when the sanctity of motherhood and fatherhood is defiled by brutal hatred, carnal obsession, and delusion. Paul Lyngdoh, former Arts and Culture Minister, has remarked, “There are monsters in our midst.” He is absolutely right. Given the situation, I would go further and say that there are monsters growing inside our minds. They literally feed on our loss of values. Despite having all modern resources and education, we have completely failed to understand why love, empathy, and compassion in us are being replaced by greed, unhealed lust, and delusion. With every passing day, we watch society sink deeper and deeper into the mire of depravity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

Shillong’s Judgemental Citizens: 99 Right Actions but 1 Wrongdoing and You’re Fried

By MS Nengnong

Not everyone will acknowledge this article and it may also not align with every reader’s perspective, but it aims to provide an honest look at the realities of the situation. If it causes offense, I must stress that it is not intended to be inflammatory or hurtful. *

Different strokes for different folks. People will always have different views and opinions. Some will fall into the category of, “You can silence 50 scholars with 1 fact,” while some will fall into, “You can’t silence 1 fool with 50 facts.” That is what our city has become, it seems. The former will never take hasty actions, while the latter are quick to bark without waiting for facts.

The same people who would praise the police department for doing their job, catching criminals, cracking the nation’s sensational case, are the same people who give a dog a bad name to them.

From: “Great job @meghalayapolice more power to you all”, “Meghalaya police – the true heroes”, “We the people of Meghalaya are really proud of our police department.”

To: “We don’t need the Meghalaya police,” “They are faking news because they couldn’t catch the culprit,” “The Meghalaya police are well stuffed with cash.” This disparity highlights a deeper issue, that people would ignore the 99 right actions by them but imprint “THAT” 1 wrong doing.

When the police follow law and order, they’re often criticized for being too strict. Yet, when they don’t take action, they’re criticized for being ineffective. It’s a no-win situation. Do they know that mandatory steps are to be taken in doing their job? You want to be protected by the law, doing things according to the law, and when the police do it, you are all criticizing them and instead, want to take things into your own hands. When they don’t take things into account, you’re criticizing them for being useless and when they do, they’re still being criticized. A recent incident involving physical assault of drug addicts illustrates this. You were told to refrain from such acts because you would then be the one breaking the law. Yet, some say the police are biased towards addicts, when in reality, they’re trying to maintain law and order. People with such a mindset don’t know what it’s like to be in their shoes and do their work. You think it is a piece of cake? If so, what is stopping you from joining the police department? Instead of barking and criticizing, you could be the heroes that you all try to act, and fight all crimes within a day.

I’m not trying to be biased here, but these are facts. Have you ever wondered that they too have rules and regulations to abide by? They can’t just do whatever they want whenever they want? I’m sure they hear the public’s cries, anger and frustration, but at times they are left with no choice but to follow the protocol that’s been assigned to them. Hence, this makes them an enemy to the ordinary person. They are trained to not let emotions get in the way of work and remain impartial, but that doesn’t make them less of a human, or that they don’t care about the community; just because they don’t show it doesn’t mean it isn’t there.

Not everyone has it easy, our jobs differ one from the other. We all have our own hardships in our workplace. We all work in different fields, we are not aware of the hardships faced by an officer, a lawyer, a teacher, a business owner, a sales person, a content writer, a construction worker, a cleaner, and vice versa... except our own, hence, making it easier to judge others just by the outward job description.

An Officer, faces high stress, long hours, decision making process, and accountability. A Lawyer, faces long hours of study, and court appearances, high stakes in cases; and dealing with complex legal issues. A Teacher, managing classroom dynamics, meeting diverse student needs, grading, and dealing with curriculum changes and parental expectations. A Business owner, faces early morning shifts, physical labour, meeting customer demands, and maintaining quality.

A Salesperson, meeting sales target, dealing with rejection, building and maintaining customer relationship. A Content writer, meeting deadlines, researching topics, creating engaging content, and adapting different styles. A Construction worker, faces physical labour, working in challenging weather conditions, safety, risk, and meeting project deadlines.

A Cleaner, faces physical labour, working in various environments, dealing with dirt and hazardous materials, and maintaining cleanliness standards. Each profession comes with its unique set of challenges, whether physical, emotional, or mental and also with its own set of rules and protocols to follow. As we navigate the complexities of law enforcement, let us strive for empathy and understanding. Instead of consistently nitpicking the police department, perhaps we should try to understand the challenges they too face and try to appreciate their efforts and recognize that their job isn’t always rainbows and roses. Instead of throwing stones at them we can instead work together and build trust to create a safer community. Rather than focusing on one wrongdoing, let’s recognize the 99 right actions. Together, we can foster a more supportive environment for those who serve to protect us.

child who reads becomes a thoughtful, creative, and compassionate citizen tomorrow. I humbly request all schools in and around Shillong to encourage their students to participate in this meaningful programme. A simple visit could open the doors of imagination for many young learners and remind them that books are not a burden but a joy. I also sincerely wish that students in other towns of our state get the same opportunity shortly, with the timing planned so as not to coincide with examination periods. Such programmes should not only reach Shillong but also smaller towns and rural areas, for they not only nurture the habit of reading but also bring children closer to culture, creativity, and the power of ideas. Let us join hands to make reading fashionable again, and in doing so, give our children the gift of a brighter and more imaginative future.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Via email

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

Letters to the Editor

Women’s exclusion from Meghalaya’s Cabinet

Editor,
Meghalaya’s governance has long been criticized for its lack of women representation. The recent cabinet reshuffle, which appointed eight ‘male’ ministers, has reignited this debate. This exclusion raises questions about the system’s impartiality and the growing influence of patriarchal norms. Meghalaya is known for its matrilineal society, where women have historically held significant social and cultural power. However, their absence in the cabinet suggests a shift towards patriarchal dominance, undermining the state’s unique cultural context.

The exclusion of women from leadership positions has far-reaching implications, including the lack of diverse perspectives and experiences in policy-making. Women’s participation in decision-making is crucial for addressing the unique challenges face by women and other marginalised communities.

The perpetuation of patriarchal norms in Meghalaya’s

governance not only undermines the state’s matrilineal legacy but also perpetuates the marginalisation of women. Henceforth, the exclusion of women from Meghalaya’s cabinet reshuffle is a stark reminder of the persistent gender disparities that pervade our society. As a state renowned for its matrilineal heritage, it is ironic that women continue to be marginalised from leadership positions. To truly uphold the principles of equality and justice, it is imperative that women receive the support and recognition they deserve.

We must work towards creating a more inclusive and equitable society where women are empowered to take on leadership roles and contribute their unique perspective and experience. Only then can we hope to build a brighter future for all, where every individual has an equal opportunity to thrive and succeed.

Yours etc.,
Lakhamti Mary Kharmujai,
Via email

Tourism Needs Peace, Not Protests

Editor,
Recently, the All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi As-

sociation (AKMTTA) protested against taxis from Assam taking tourists to places in Meghalaya. This situation brings up some important issues about how states relate to each other, people’s rights to earn a living, and what the Constitution of India stands for.

Under the Indian Constitution, Article 19(1)(g) guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to pursue any profession, occupation, trade, or business. Further, Article 301 enshrines the principle of free trade and commerce throughout the territory of India. Any attempt to restrict entry of vehicles or service providers from another state, without legal backing or legitimate regulatory purpose, contravenes these constitutional guarantees.

It is true that local taxi drivers in Meghalaya are worried about their jobs and fair competition. These concerns are real and should be taken seriously. But using regional sentiment to block others from working is not acceptable.

If taxis from Assam are operating without permits or breaking local rules, then the answer is to enforce those laws properly, not to ban all Vehicles from outside the state through protests or force.

The governments of Meghalaya and Assam, along with their transport and tourism departments, should come together to solve this issue peacefully. Tourism grows when travel is hassle-free and peaceful. Protests that block movement or create tension between states end up hurting the tourism industry itself. Instead of disruption, we need discussion guided by the values of the Constitution and the common goal of growth that benefits everyone.

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

How to fix a society when humanity is lost

Editor,
A shocking incident in Shillong, where a four-year-old girl was found dead, has once again forced society to ask a slew of uncomfortable questions. What sort of world have we built where the first instinct of many is not to grieve but to sensationalize it recklessly, as a noted writer – VK Lyngdoh rightly pointed out in his letter, “Stop sensationalising murder.” Instead of offering prayers and expressing

compassion, many of us rushed to upload the victim’s photograph even though she was already deceased. How easily we forget the unbearable trauma this inflicts on the grieving family. I think this is our misplaced instinct, similar to people who rush to take pictures with a mobile phone when they see someone being swept away by floodwaters, instead of trying to save the person.

Given the rapid rise of horrifying incidents like brutal sexual attacks, kidnapping, and drugging, I totally agree with Jennifer Dkhar who says in her letter “A gruesome murder” (ST, Sept. 17, 2025) that the world has become so cruel that no sane person can think straight. Faith, trust, empathy, compassion are empty words that have no relevance in today’s world. Still more shocking incidents here:

This July in Kheda, Gujarat, a seven-year-old girl who should have been cradled in the loving arms of her parents was thrown into the Narmada canal by her father. Why? Because he longed for a son. Just imagine the thought process of such a man. A few days ago in Karnataka, a woman and her lover inhumanly tortured a five-year-old girl for two days, “Woman booked for killing 5-year-old daughter”

(ST, Sept 14, 2025). They tied her hands and continued pouring boiling water over her body, and then threw her alive into a river. My question is: where are we truly heading as a society?

We boast of being modern, yet we are no better than savages. We must ask ourselves what kind of society we are now building when children are unsafe not just in the streets or schools but in their own homes. More precisely, when the sanctity of motherhood and fatherhood is defiled by brutal hatred, carnal obsession, and delusion.

Paul Lyngdoh, former Arts and Culture Minister, has remarked, “There are monsters in our midst.” He is absolutely right. Given the situation, I would go further and say that there are monsters growing inside our minds. They literally feed on our loss of values. Despite having all modern resources and education, we have completely failed to understand why love, empathy, and compassion in us are being replaced by greed, unhealed lust, and delusion. With every passing day, we watch society sink deeper and deeper into the mire of depravity.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

"The beginning is the most important part of the work."

— Plato

The Shillong Times

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Importance of Conflict Resolution

WHILE the demand by the All Meghalaya Khasi Tourist Taxi Association (AMKTTA) can be appreciated in view of the scarce livelihood opportunities, the method of pressing for their demands leaves much to be desired. Meghalaya is today a favoured tourism destination with a growing number of foot-falls per annum. Considering that what the AMKTTA did directly impacts tourism which in turn affects the livelihoods of many others, particularly the hundreds of homestays and resorts across the Khasi-Jaintia Hills, they should have adopted other more tactical methods. In the first place, tourist taxis have the license to operate inter-state hence the entry of Assam tourist cabs into Meghalaya is perfectly legal and vice versa. So, the demand that Assam tourist cabs should not enter Meghalaya to ferry tourists is violative of their rights. Sikkim is the only state that does not permit any other vehicle other than a Sikkim registered one to enter the state. But this has come under flak from the Union Ministry for Tourism because the local taxis finding no competition tended to overcharge tourists. Many taxis also operate on All India Tourist permits and legally cannot be stopped from operating anywhere in India. This is the second time that the AMKTTA has raised the flag of revolt. In October 2024 tourism came to a standstill when the AMKTTA stopped Assam registered vehicles at Mawmluh and insisted that tourists should take local taxis to different destinations such as Sohra, Dawki etc.

At the time the Meghalaya Rural Tourism Forum (MRTF) took serious note of this issue and warned the AMKTTA not to repeat such actions which had caused immense hardships to a number of tourists. This is a negative signal to tourists visiting Meghalaya because word of mouth travels fast especially in the age of social media. At the time the problem was shelved but never resolved. Hence it reappeared as expected because of the simple reason – employment. Quite a few people have benefitted from the State Government scheme which allows a person to purchase a tourist vehicle under easy repayment terms. Quite a number of these vehicles are now plying in Meghalaya but they need enough passengers to be able to earn and repay their loans. While this is understandable they have to devise methods by which tourists wanting to enter Meghalaya are picked up from the airport by Meghalaya tourist cabs. A system of online booking should have been in place so that there is no quarrel with the Assam drivers.

The problem is that we have not learnt to negotiate and to resolve conflicts through dialogue. The Meghalaya Tourism Policy too should have taken cognisance of these issues and come up with a comprehensive point to point transportation policy that would not inconvenience tourists and also not tread on the toes of the Assam taxi drivers. What is sorely needed in Meghalaya is conflict resolution training for different target groups through scenario setting and techniques that allow for conversation instead of confrontation. Stand-offs such as had happened on Thursday September 18 at Jorabat are unwarranted. They expose the chinks in our armour and label us as an unfriendly state and people.

South Asia on the Boil: Stocktaking Time for India

By Jaideep Saikia

If the proverbial eye of the storm, post American withdrawal, had been South Asia's western extremity, increasing insecurity has begun to spread eastwards. The return of the Taliban to power following the "failure" of Operation Inherent Resolve saw an expansion of Salafist terrorist networks towards the other end of the subcontinent.

Pakistan, based on its objective of "bleeding India with a thousand cuts," have let loose its "bottled-up" Islamist terrorists into India. India, waged a "limited war" by way of Operation Sindoor targeting terror camps that Pakistan had been harbouring.

Unfortunately, the "dissuasion strategy" that Operation Sindoor had hoped to infuse on the failed state of Pakistan does not seem to have been successful, and the "experts" that are hoping that it would deter those in Pakistan that continue to view terrorism as a tool of statecraft are mistaken. Enmity towards India is the fundamental raison d'être of the security establishment of the country. The need for additional military action in the future including what has been spoken about as Op Sindoor-II may have to be resorted to. In fact, the latest Saudi Arabia-Pakistan defence deal is part of Pakistan's strategem to deter India from another expeditionary mission against it, even as it plans its next novel subterfuge via an increasingly Islamist Bangladesh. The move, was a crafty one, albeit one that suddenly came to the fore as a result of Benjamin Netanyahu's rash action against the Hamas leadership billeted in Qatar. Rawalpindi grabbed the opportunity and was able to kill two birds with one stone.

The defence pact between a traditionally pro-India Saudi Arabia and Pakistan must be seen not only in light of continuing tense relationship between India and Pakistan, but the atmospherics in the Middle East particularly the manner in which Israel acted against Qatar. This has set the cat among the pigeons with even Trump distancing himself from Netanyahu's impetuous action to take on the Hamas leadership in Doha. It has also brought the entire Arab people together in a resolve to "punish" Israel. Pakistan seized the opportunity as a nuclear nation and quickly took advantage of the situation. It showcased to India that it has been able to sway away old allies such as Saudi Arabia from India's orbit, and at the same time bandwagon itself into the growing nexus against pro-India Israel. Observers might view the recent development

as Israel-centric in view of the Qatar attack. But the fact of the matter is that Rawalpindi has succeeded in bringing the defence deal with the Saudis as an "anti-India" act. This is alarming to say the least because one of the clauses in the pact informs that "aggression against either Pakistan or Saudi Arabia would be taken as belligerence against the other." This clearly puts India into a military-diplomatic quandary. What if Netanyahu attacks Saudi Arabia as it did against Qatar? How would India react then? After all, the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council, which includes Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE, met in the aftermath of the Doha strike and agreed to take steps "to activate the mechanisms of joint defence and the Gulf deterrence capabilities". Indeed, what would Saudi Arabia do if India were to operationalise the "paused" Op Sindoor onto its second and perhaps more ferocious phase against Pakistan? If India failed to dissuade Pakistan by way of Op Sindoor-I, then it would itself be faced with a real dissuasion strategy if it countenances an Op Sindoor-II against a neighbour which is not only whipping up anti-India sentiments in Bangladesh, but is currently "aligned" with an anti-Israel Saudi Arabia. The great Indian ambivalence is being put to the fire-test!

It seems that the Indian internal intelligence set up has become a chamber of confusion. Its leadership just does not have the competence to either sniff out the multiple subterfuges that are being engendered against India, nor are they capable of thwarting them. They are at best smug with a few apprehensions/neutralisations of "Islamists" and are busy flaunting them in front of a gullible Indian electorate as victory. But the truth is that the present internal intelligence system of India has not been able to pre-empt a single threat, whether it is Manipur, Bangladesh, Baisaran or Nepal. Incidentally, India's near-abroad comprising abutting nations like Bangladesh and Nepal are within the ambit of India's internal intelligence apparatus, and India's external intelligence agency is only a part of the counter intelligence grid that comprise the country's neighbourhood.

The present, therefore, is an extremely shaping moment for India. Unfortunately, the present crop of people advising Modi do not seem equipped in finding the right median that would secure India's interests. Also, it has

been witnessed that a section of the partisan Indian milieu is attempting to browbeat the government. Instead, even as it points out the dangers, this constituency must strengthen the hands of the dispensation. Modi must seek counsel from domain specialists who know best. The creaking old bureaucratic machine, primarily the internal intelligence set-up, has come to a geriatric halt. It is time to shelve a few who are pushing India into a cleft of peril.

Myanmar is in the throes of a brutal civil war and ethnic divide and the continuing impasse in Manipur seems to, notwithstanding Modi's belated visit, indicate a larger design. Status quo with a greater vehemence and articulation has come to the fore after Modi's visit. Was this not pre-empted?

Following the changes of regime in Bangladesh and Nepal the threat focus has shifted towards both these countries that about India. The upheaval in Bangladesh is certainly an American attempt to offset the growing influence of India, and the "revolution" in Nepal by Gen Z is far from over. If course correction exercises are not undertaken by New Delhi, the situation in both Nepal and Bangladesh could witness a "domino effect" in certain parts of India which about the Terai (Madhesi) region of Nepal. This could include Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal. Although the primary reason for an extra-regional power fishing in muddled waters in Nepal and Bangladesh seems to be to principally thwart Chinese "suzerainty" in the Himalayan and the Bay nations; a band-wagoning effect that hurts India cannot be ruled out, especially as crucial states like Bihar go to the polls in November 2025.

Furthermore, the relationship that was reset between India and China post Tianjin 31 August 2025 has been perceived unfavourably by the US. Significant challenges remain in the India-China relationship, especially as it pertains to the resolution of the 3,488-km-long boundary that stretches from Ladakh to Arunachal Pradesh. However, there are indications that both countries are beginning to understand that a border settlement is crucial to develop their relationship. The "Line of Amity" theory must be studied carefully by a high-powered task force. After all, the "détente-in-construction" that has come into the firmament is a one-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Unfortunately, there are hawks aplenty in India, especially in the Indian

army and they have taken the maxim that "deception is a sole Chinese preserve" a bit too seriously. Sun Tzu is being studied and practiced globally and it would be folly to superimpose ancient aphorisms onto a people that are extending hands of amity. Now that India has agreed on a piecemeal working of the border issue, the least it can do (even as it continues to exercise caution) is to at least "war-game" the "Line of Amity" concept and see how far it takes both the countries. Would a real time agreement on the border be achieved in the end? It is important to give it a "go".

However, the most important threat is the manner in which radical Islamism has gripped the region. Currently, one is witnessing not only the potential destruction of the last vestiges of democracy in Bangladesh, but also the risk of an unopposed expansion of the scourge within the region and beyond. The victory of the Jamaat-e-Islami's student wing, the Islami Chhatra Shibir in the Dhaka University (known as the second parliament of Bangladesh) elections did not augur well. Gholam Azam's successors would have certainly been funded by the ISI in its unprecedented win of 9 out of 12 seats. Indeed, the irony is that it is the same extremist-terrorist ideology against which the international coalition had waged a global campaign not so long ago seems to be turning a blind eye to the construction of a neo-caliphate in Chittagong and thereabouts. It is clear that under the current US administration the main emphasis is the protection of its own homeland and that the fact that the many regions of the world such as South Asia could experience a resurgence of terrorist violence and territorial control and could become the epicentre of Islamist terrorism is not being viewed with the same sense of urgency as in the past.

The mandarins in New Delhi, on the other hand, seem to be in a state of stupor. The incompetence of the Indian internal intelligence agency has destroyed the victories achieved by the Indian military in 1971. It was Sam Bahadur's men who had ably aided in the formation of Bangladesh, a nation that the Jamaat-e-Islami had transformed itself into (a monster during Op Searchlight) in order to stop the eastern wing from severing itself away from a reprehensible Pakistan. There is no excuse for repeated failures.

Jaideep Saikia is India's foremost strategist and best-selling author. His 16th book *Point of Impact* was published on 15 August 2025.

Repercussions of the Israeli attack on Doha

By Vappala Balachandran

There are indications that the Israeli attack on the Hamas office in Doha on 09 September 2025 is heavily recoiling on the Netanyahu government. Wes Streeting, United Kingdom's (UK) Health Secretary warned on September 09 that the "Netanyahu government's handling of the Gaza war is leading Israel to pariah status."

This was on the eve of Israeli President Herzog's visit to the UK to express solidarity with the British Jewish community, which, Herzog's office alleged, "is under severe attack and facing a wave of antisemitism." However, Streeting insisted that Herzog "needs to answer the allegations of war crimes, of ethnic cleansing and of genocide that are being levelled at the government of Israel."

"972 Magazine", an Israeli left-wing periodical, said in a survey in December 2014 that over 70 percent of Israelis were worried about international isolation. Israel, which is heavily reliant on foreign trade and investment, always wishes to be part of the Western democracies as it has less resilience; unlike Iran and Russia, to "cope economically, militarily, and psychologically with sanctions and global disapprobation", as the magazine "Foreign Policy" said recently.

Significantly on September 8 British Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosted Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas at 10 Downing Street. The PM is reported to have promised "to recognise a Palestinian State ahead of the U.N. General Assembly later this month unless Israel changes course". Spain, Ireland and Norway have already announced recognition while Belgium, Australia, Portugal, Canada and Malta have stated plans to go with Britain and France in recognising Palestinian statehood joining more than 140 other countries.

Los Angeles Times (11 September) said that American credibility in the Gulf States was the first casualty when Israel attacked the Hamas office in Doha on the 9th as these States thought that their security was assured with "tens of billions of their petrodollars and agreements that allowed the U.S. to dot the Middle East with some of its largest military facilities". As a result, the US joined other members at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) in condemning the attack, an unprecedented action, as America always vetoes anti-Israel resolutions. During the UNSC meeting Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman al-Thani alleged that the Israeli government was "led by blusterous extremists."

Personally, Trump exhibited his exasperation by saying that the raid did not "advance Israel or America's goals" as Qatar was hosting Hamas leaders since 2012 for "indirect negotiations" with Israel, as desired by America. Also, the "Abraham Accords" initiated by Trump in September 2020 towards normalisation of Israel – Arab States relations lay in tatters as United Arab Emirates (UAE), one of the important signatories, slammed the "blatant and cowardly Israeli attack that targeted the State of Qatar."

Abu Dhabi also summoned the Israeli ambassador to convey that any aggression against a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) member State was considered "an attack on the collective Gulf security framework". The attack marked the first direct strike by Israel on one of the member States of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Even before this, relations between Abu Dhabi and Israel had begun to deteriorate after the Netanyahu government's open threat over a planned discussion on the West Bank annexation, which the UAE had said would constitute a "red line."

"Politico" reported on September 9 that Trump and his top aides had come to question whether Netanyahu, who authorised the strike, "was trying to sabotage the talks". It quoted a White House insider: "Every time they're making progress, it seems like he bombs someone, the person said. That's why the President and his aides are so frustrated with Netanyahu."

The Israeli newspaper "Haaretz" reported on September 13 that U.S. President Trump had dinner with the Qatari prime minister in New York, days after Israel attacked Hamas leaders in Doha. They were joined by U.S. special envoy Steve Witkoff.

Netanyahu had alleged that Qatar was the chief financier of Hamas terrorists besides hosting them in their country. This was contested by independent observers who quoted an op-ed piece in The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) in 2023, by the Qatari ambassador to the US, Sheikh Meshal bin Hamad Al Thani that Washington wanted Qatar "to establish indirect lines of communication with Hamas".

Al Thani had added: "The presence of the Hamas office shouldn't be confused with endorsement but rather establishes an important channel for indirect communication". The New York Times on December 10, 2023 confirmed that Benjamin Netanyahu had secretly approved this contact through Doha.

In a video address on the 9/11 anniversary, Benjamin Netanyahu had invoked Israel's right to attack the "terrorists" base in Doha just as the US had invaded Afghanistan on 07 October 2001 for sending terrorists to attack America on 9/11. This argument has not impressed anybody as the US had first moved UNSC which had passed Resolution No. 1368 that condemned the "horrifying terrorist attacks which took place on 11 Sept. 2001" and called on "all States to work together urgently to bring to justice the perpetrators, organisers and sponsors of these terrorist attacks". The US had taken this as UN authorisation and invaded Afghanistan which had given shelter to Osama bin Laden.

As against this, Israel had continuously been attacking and killing UN personnel extending humanitarian assistance to the Gaza civilians, including women and children. US Democrats senators Chris Van Hollen and Jeff Merkley confirmed this during their visit (August 24 to September 1) that Israel was doing "ethnic cleansing" of the local population and starving them of food, using hunger as a weapon.

On September 12, Trump predicted that Zohran Mamdani would win the New York City Mayor elections on 4 November. The next day Mamdani told the media that he would honour the International Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant against Netanyahu and take him into custody if he visits New York.

(The writer is a former Special Secretary, Cabinet Secretariat) (Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Restrictions on Tourist Taxis

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I would like to draw attention to the recent restrictions imposed on tourist taxis in Meghalaya and Assam. Several incidents have highlighted the growing difficulties faced by drivers and travellers alike due to such measures.

The All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association (AKMTTA) seems to be inspired by the Sikkim model, and now attempts are being made to replicate the same system in Meghalaya. If this practice spreads, other states may also follow, creating widespread problems for interstate transport. This will not only hamper tourism but also disturb harmony among states.

It is important to remember the principle — Divide we fall, united we stand. Tourist taxis already operate with valid permits issued against proper payments. Imposing further restrictions goes against the Motor Vehicles Act and violates constitutional rights of free movement and trade.

Authorities must act ur-

gently to safeguard the livelihood of drivers and ensure smooth travel for tourists. Meghalaya, being a tourism-dependent state, should not adopt policies that discourage visitors.

Yours etc.,
Suresh Rana,
Siliguri

Insaphira's family deserves to have all questions answered

Editor,
The police/SIT has released its first statement regarding the death of young Insaphira Lyngdoh Mawnai. While the narrative provided is that a 13 year old boy had accidentally caused the girl child to drown and had lied about the circumstances out of fear, yet what is strange is that neither the boy's mother nor the girl's parents are convinced by this narrative. And we cannot simply dismiss their disbelief. After all, it stems from legitimate questions surrounding the whole affair.

No. 1. We still have no answer as to who opened the

lock of the gate to Insaphira's home in the morning. As initially stated by the mother of the girl, the gate was locked by 12 midnight, but the lock was found open in the morning, despite no one having woken up.

No. 2. How could a 13 year old boy be able to carry or pull the girl child over the wall which must be at least 6 feet high, and yet not be able to save her from drowning in a pit that is half as deep? And surprisingly he was able to pull her up and place a boulder over her body. This part just seems strange. The boy's strength seems to be inconsistent.

No. 3. The search team as well as the girl's father are still insisting they had searched the very site where the body was found, even though the police narrative says the girl died on that very site and her body was not carried from somewhere else. Could the search team be wrong? Are we demanding too much from them, to deny their own experience, and that too, not just of one individual but of a whole crowd of adult, sensible, men? The post mortem report stated how and when she died, but we also need to know the post mortem

report on whether there was any sign that the body was moved in the time between her death and her lifeless body being found.

No. 4. If the boy concocted the story of a black Scorpio, then what are the odds that a similar vehicle would be involved in an attempt to kidnap another boy just 1 or 2 days after, at Lad Mawreng? Isn't this other incident relevant to the present case, considering such coincidences? Or is this another case of childhood imagination?

No. 5. The mother of the boy insists that the boy was not wet nor had he changed his clothes, which does not fit the narrative that he had fallen into the pit of water.

On the other hand, if the police narrative is indeed true and conclusive, then the composure of the boy to misdirect and lie, is indeed extraordinary.

Judging by social media comments, and the statements released by both the girl's and boy's families, no one seems convinced by this narrative. If there are other parties involved, we hope they will soon be nabbed and brought to justice. If not, then we hope that the families involved would have

all their questions answered so that they can rest with a meaningful and factual explanation to this tragedy.

Yours etc.,
Kitor H. Blah,
Shillong

Tourist Taxi Imbroglio

Editor,
The decision taken by the All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association (AKMTTA) to prohibit all tourist vehicles with Assam registration to enter tourist spots in Meghalaya, has adversely affected the movement of people from both the states. The ripple effect was felt when the Tourist Taxi Association from Assam started stopping vehicles coming from Meghalaya and travelling towards Assam. This action is creating tremendous hardship and suffering to hundred of commuters from both states especially those who are in need of urgent medical treatment or assistance. This issue needs to be addressed right away by both the state governments in a reciprocal manner so that this issue does not further escalate. As we all know

the Transport Sector is a subsidiary of tourism and the local stakeholders like the drivers' association deserve a stake or are entitled for a fair share from this thriving industry. We need a solution at this juncture and the government of the day needs to come up with a policy level intervention so that both parties are content with any future arrangement.

My other concern is that I am sensing that there is more to the situation than what is visible from the outside. My theory is that we cannot rule out a political angle to this "Shenanigan." Perhaps some political groups are instigating this whole agitation in order to further their political objectives in the state. If my theory is correct then this is a very dangerous trend because at the end it is the general public who will have to take the hit or suffer the negative consequences for the actions of some over ambitious individuals.

Yours etc.,
K. Warjri,
Via email

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

Here's what SPF50+ sunscreen does to your vitamin D levels

What does wearing SPF50+ sunscreen every day do to your vitamin D levels?

A study, recently published in the *British Journal of Dermatology*, provides some answers.

It found using SPF50+ every day, on all days when the ultraviolet index is forecast to reach three or more, can increase the risk of being vitamin D deficient. The benefits of sunscreen are well known, so our findings do not mean we should abandon SPF50+.

Rather, it means people who use SPF50+ every day might need to start taking vitamin D supplements.

Why did we run our trial?

Sunscreen is designed to reduce the amount of ultraviolet (UV) radiation reaching the skin's cells.

However, exposing the skin to UV rays from the sun produces vitamin D, so it is reasonable to think that sunscreen would block vitamin D production. Previous studies found using low SPF sunscreen daily did not cause vitamin D deficiency.

However, nobody had assessed the effect of routinely using high SPF sunscreens in everyday life, so in the Sun-D Trial we tested the effect of using SPF50+ every day.

What did we do?

Researchers recruited 639 adults living in one of the four eastern states of Australia (and the Australian Capital Territory) who were not using sunscreen as part of their daily routine.

They put them randomly into one of two groups. They gave the "sunscreen" group SPF50+ sunscreen and asked them to apply it every day (to all areas of the skin not covered by clothes) when the UV index was forecast to reach three or more for a year. They asked the "control" group to continue with their usual sun protection. We measured vitamin D levels at the beginning (late winter/early spring), middle (late summer), and end (late winter) of the study in both groups.

What did we find?

The average vitamin D level increased in both groups from late



winter to late summer. However, the increase was significantly lower in the sunscreen group than in the control group.

At the end of the study, vitamin D deficiency was more common in the sunscreen group than in the control group (46 per cent versus 37 per cent). This is the first study worldwide to test the effect of daily SPF50+ sunscreen use in people as they go about their everyday lives.

What does this mean? Keep using sunscreen

Using sunscreen daily reduces the risk of skin cancer and sunspots. Therefore it is very important Australians continue to use sunscreen every day when the UV index is forecast to reach three or more as part of their daily routine.

For people with deeply pigmented skin, daily sunscreen is not needed because the risk of skin cancers caused by the sun is very low.

It is still important, though, to protect the skin if outdoors when the UV index is high.

Using sunscreen should be as routine as brushing your teeth.

Continue to use sunscreen with a high SPF (ideally 50+, but 30+ is also OK if you can't find a 50+ that

you like). Don't rely on sunscreen in makeup, which doesn't offer enough protection.

If you spend time outdoors for recreation or work when the UV index is three or more, you should cover as much skin as you can with clothing, wear a hat and sunglasses, stay in the shade if you can, and reapply sunscreen every two hours.

Consider taking vitamin D

People who use sunscreen daily should consider taking a vitamin D supplement. These are relatively cheap (as little as 5c per day), safe (if used as directed), and effective for preventing vitamin D deficiency.

It is more important to take supplements over winter, as that is when vitamin D deficiency becomes more common.

Vitamin D deficiency is also more common in southern states. In Australia's National Health Measures Survey, 26 per cent of people in Tasmania were vitamin D deficient (46 per cent in winter) compared to 12 per cent in Queensland (16 per cent in winter).

Is regular sunscreen use the only cause of vitamin D deficiency? A total of 30 per cent of participants were vitamin D deficient at the start of the study, even though they were

not regular sunscreen users.

And 37 per cent of the control group (who did not use sunscreen every day) were vitamin D deficient at the end of the study.

This shows regular sunscreen use is not the only reason for being vitamin D deficient.

People who rarely go outdoors between 8am and 4pm, or who always cover most of their skin with clothing when they are outside, are at increased risk of being vitamin D deficient.

Should I have my vitamin D levels tested first?

The Australian government only funds vitamin D tests in people where there is a specific clinical reason for testing. Also, it is not always easy for everybody to see a doctor, and not everybody can see a doctor for free.

If you think you might be at risk of being vitamin D deficient because you are careful to protect your skin from the sun - or have other reasons you don't expose your skin to the sun - you can start taking vitamin D supplements without having your vitamin D tested first. Perhaps discuss this with your doctor when you get a chance.

This is safe, so long as you follow the instructions on the label. (*The Conversation*)

Is it okay to sit on public toilet seats?

If you're a parent or have a chronic health condition that needs quick or frequent trips to the bathroom, you've probably mapped out the half-decent public toilets in your area.

But sometimes, you don't have a choice and have to use a toilet that looks like it hasn't been cleaned in weeks.

Do you brave it and sit on the seat? What if it looks relatively clean: do you still worry that sitting on the seat could make you sick? What's in a public toilet? Healthy adults produce more than a litre of urine and more than 100 grams of poo daily. Everybody sheds bacteria and viruses in faeces (poo) and urine, and some of this ends up in the toilet.

Some people, especially those with diarrhoea, may shed more harmful microbes (bacteria and viruses) when they use the toilet. Public toilets can be a "microbial soup", especially when many people use them and cleaning isn't frequent as it should be.

What germs are found on toilet seats?

Many types of microbes have been found on toilet seats and surrounding areas. These include: bacteria from the gut, such as *E. coli*, *Klebsiella*, *Enterococcus*, and viruses such as norovirus and rotavirus. These can cause gastroenteritis, with bouts of vomiting and diarrhoea bacteria from the skin, including *Staphylococcus aureus* and even multi-drug resistant *S. aureus* and other bacteria such as *Pseudomonas* and *Acinetobacter*. These can cause infections eggs from parasites (worms) that are carried in poo, and single-celled organisms such as protozoa. These can cause abdominal pain. There's also something called biofilm, a mix of germs that builds up under toilet rims and on surfaces.

Are toilet seats the dirtiest part?

No. A recent study showed public toilet seats often have fewer microbes than other locations in public toilets, such as door handles, faucet knobs and toilet flush levers. These parts are touched a lot and often with unwashed hands. Public toilets in busy places are used hundreds or even thousands of times each week. Some are cleaned of-

ten, but others (such as those in parks or bus stops) may only be cleaned once a day or much less, so germs can build up quickly. The red flags that a toilet hasn't been cleaned are the smell of urine, soiled floors and what is obvious to your eyes. However, the biggest problem isn't just sitting - it's what happens when toilets are flushed.

When you flush without a lid, a "toilet plume" shoots tiny droplets into the air. These droplets can contain bacteria and viruses from the toilet bowl and travel up to 2 metres.

Hand dryers blowing air can also spread germs if people don't wash properly. As well as drying your hands, you might be blowing germs all over yourself, others and the bathroom.

How can germs spread?

You can pick up germs from public toilets in several ways:

1. Skin contact: Sitting on a dirty seat or touching handles spreads bacteria. Healthy skin is a good barrier, but cuts or scrapes can allow germs to enter.

2. Touching your face: After using the toilet, if you touch your eyes, mouth, or food before washing your hands, germs can get inside your body.

3. Breathing them in: In small or crowded bathrooms, you can breathe in tiny particles from toilet plumes or hand dryers.

4. Toilet water splash: Germs can stay in the water even after several flushes.

What can you do to stay safe?

Use toilet seat covers or place toilet paper on the seat before sitting. If the toilet has a lid, wipe it before use with an alcohol wipe and close it before flushing to limit toilet plume exposure. (But note, this doesn't fully stop the spread.)

Wash your hands properly for at least 20 seconds using soap and water. Carry hand sanitiser or antibacterial wipes to clean your hands afterwards if there isn't any soap. Avoid hand dryers, if you can, as they can spread germs. Use paper towels instead. Sanitise your phone regularly and don't use it in toilet. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 21, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon opposite Rahu on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. You may face a situation in life where you will have to make a tough decision. It will not come at a easy cost and you will have to pay a heavy price for it. But still, you need not lose hope. Ultimately destiny has something good for you. In the process, your faith in God will increase. Trails do not come to destroy us but only make us strong. Your financial position will remain stable. There are going to be no major health worries. Your family members will support you in all tough situations. Even your peers and bosses will have faith in your abilities. Students will be successful in exams / interviews. New job/business offers will keep coming. Your noble deeds and acts will bring you good name and fame in society. Auspicious functions will keep taking place.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) There would be a lot of travel, communication and conversation to keep you busy. Arguments with a lover may be blown out of proportion far too easily. Both you and your lover should avoid harping on the words used and try to get to the meaning behind the words instead. Professionally it might seem like stagnation, but it's actually a period of review and rest. Speculation and gambling are not advised right now. It would be wise to be especially clear when it comes to communicating with romantic partners, and children; or take this time to re-examine issues rather than communicating prematurely.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) Your work status will change for the better. There could be a promotion or new job opportunity that enables you to come into the limelight in a positive way. Authority figures, elders, parents in your life tend to support and respect you. They are more willing to help you move ahead on your road to success. 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 dealing with the assignment at hand. You need to keep your eyes open for opportunities.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) You would admire and adapt new styles, unconventional ideas, and unfamiliar situations. It is a good time to expand your circle of influence. You take an interest in organizing your working environment - and this is an excellent time to do so. You are especially objective and intelligent when it comes to getting a handle on your daily affairs and all the little things that contribute to a feeling of efficiency and competency. Laying down a strategy would keep you on track. Some travels are imminent and will be beneficial.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This can be a time of achievement, career advancement, and success in business. Work-related travel or the reaching of a wider audience is possible during this period. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider your priorities. Re-thinking the suitability of your romantic relationships is possible now, but you should avoid jumping to any premature decisions. There may be the need to revisit old issues with your children or lovers, else there could be some communication problems with them.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) Communication becomes especially important to you. Smoothing out your close personal relationships is what makes you happy. You are adaptable when it comes to your affections - very willing to compromise, negotiate, and make peace. A new set-up in existing jobs or a new job altogether may be formed in the coming months. There will be a sense of renewal and reinvigoration with regard to your daily activities, health routines, and attention to practical matters. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of your health.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) Your professional skills, wisdom and craft are appreciated and fresh opportunities for expansion are made available to you. Personal relationships gain an exciting quality. Tackle sensitive subjects and difficult people and get

your point across. You can trust your intuition about people and situations when called upon to mediate in conflicts and collaborations. Surprises surrounding the compassionate care and attention you give others, as well as the work and service you render, may be in store. This could manifest into finding a balance between practical concerns and spiritual or non-material matters.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) It's easier for you to approach sensitive, intimate, and personal matters with rationality and logic in this period. As such, this is a great time to open conversations about topics that normally might cause waves, such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. You know how to relate to others, and you do so with warmth and affection. You will seek out the company of close friends who stimulate your thoughts and ideas. You may attract a younger person into your life.



Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) Essentially, you are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for higher studies, travel, or simply new subjects during this period. Negative potentials include being excessively opinionated or getting easily fired up over differences in points of view, or legal fights. You may be drawn into some form of service that will bring deep personal satisfaction. You seek perfection and distinction in your work, and this quality brings you a more responsible position.



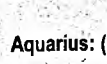
Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) People see you as a responsible, sincere, loving and lovable person, and as someone who is aware of their needs and feelings, which can benefit you at this time. Others are willing to help and cooperate with you in working towards your goals and ambitions. It would be better to go for long-term investments and speculations for financial gains. It would be wiser to face turbulent matters and issues in professional ventures rather than seeing them under the carpet. Don't take the one you love for granted but show your love and appreciation.



Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20) A new work opportunity can change the way you work and relate with people professionally. You are bold and adventurous, and you cannot tolerate delays that could hold up your work. You succeed by adopting a new approach and exhibiting a willingness to take risks. You would achieve a lot in business and professional aspects by combining creativity and practicality. Your maturity and objectivity places you in the role of the dependable and someone your family and friends can turn to for advice and guidance. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused.



Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18) Financial transactions and professional projects go ahead smoothly with goodwill, and they would be profitable. This is a good time to be with a friend or a group who shares your own ideas and thoughts. You would attach yourself to more spiritual friends. Communications from overseas are hopeful and exciting as business opportunities come your way. This is an excellent period for starting new regimens to better your health and well-being, such as a structured exercise program and more structured and productive use of your time.



Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) This is an excellent time in which you do some financial planning and strategizing. A financial boost is possible, or you may gain financially through your business partner. Research uncovers new material that allows you to develop a better overall picture of the period's events. This is a phase when you have an increased awareness of the need for someone significant to rely on. You would find a balance between autonomy and dependence in personal relationships. You can expect superiors to support you and stand up for you in tough situations at work.



Does ASMR really help with anxiety? Psychology expert explains evidence

Most of us have experienced tingling or "goosebumps" at some point, especially when we feel a strong positive emotion such as awe or excitement.

But some people have this response when they listen to certain sounds. Online videos which feature sounds of people whispering, crackling packets, and brushing or combing a microphone are all geared towards making you feel this positive tingle - the autonomous sensory meridian response, or ASMR.

Not everyone responds to ASMR content. But many who do say it makes them less anxious and helps them sleep. What does the science say? What is ASMR?

ASMR is an involuntary emotional and physical response, typically to a sound, which causes a reflexive tingling sensation on the scalp and back of the neck.

This multi-sensory experience can make us feel euphoria and "psychological stability", meaning we experience less inner turmoil and feel calmer. However, we still don't have much evidence about what happens in the brain and the body when this occurs.

Some argue that ASMR is simply an example of frisson (French for "shiver"). This is when an intense emotional stimulus - such as a tender moment in a movie - triggers tingling or gives us "the chills". Research suggests these so-called "skin orgasms" are due to a sudden rush of the chemical dopamine in the brain's reward centres.

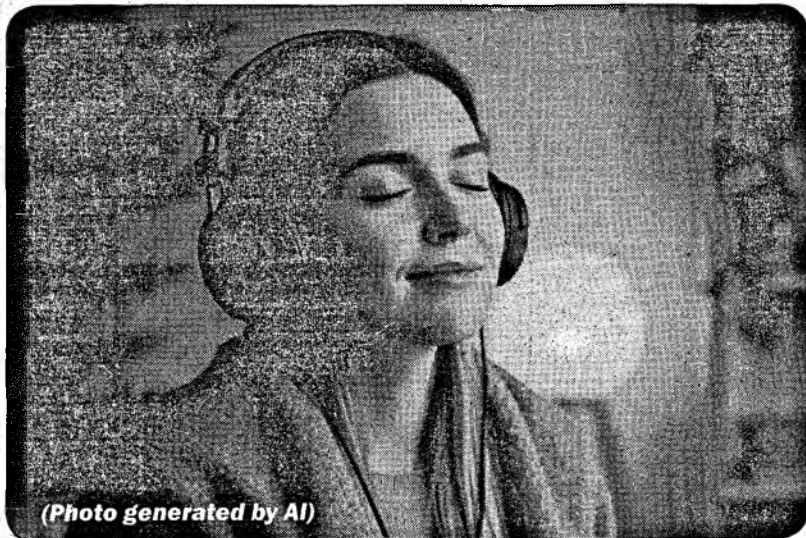
However, the sense of awe or inspiration felt during a frisson experience is brief (typically 4-5 seconds). In contrast, ASMR is usually described as inducing an enduring state of calm.

What triggers ASMR?

Almost everyone will jump out of their skin if they experience a sudden and loud sound. This is because we've evolved to fear what is unpleasant or unexpected, to keep us safe from danger.

When it comes to sounds that can make us feel good, it's not as easy to confirm whether there are universal triggers - that is, sounds that would make most people have the same positive reaction.

Research in ASMR has identified



some common triggers, including whispering, tapping and crackling sounds. But we can't say if these sounds would have the same effect on everyone. ASMR videos often combine these sounds with video and role play, known as "personal attention". This means treating the camera like it is the viewer, speaking and interacting directly with it, and even simulating activities such as brushing hair or applying makeup to the viewer.

Why doesn't it affect everyone?

Not everyone responds to ASMR triggers, with some estimates suggesting only one in five people can experience ASMR.

Whether or not you do is likely due to your personality type and your predisposition to susceptibility, meaning how easily others can influence you.

Studies have found that those who respond are typically younger, experience more negative emotions, and are more introverted and critical. But they also tend to be more open to trying new things.

Some research has suggested "expectancy effects" could play a role. This is like a placebo - people who are invested in ASMR's potential as a therapeutic tool may be more likely to feel its effects.

However, we still don't know precisely how ASMR works to induce positive emotions.

More than a dozen studies have reported on how the brain behaves during ASMR. But the findings

across them are inconsistent, and many have a very small number of participants or no comparison group, so we can't draw conclusions.

Studies looking at the body's response during ASMR experiences have had similarly mixed results. Some have found that people may experience both increased sweating (linked to the stress response) and decreased heart rate (linked to relaxation).

To describe this apparently contradictory state, some researchers have coined the term "arousing relaxation".

Another theory is that the social or erotic aspects of ASMR videos are a more important trigger than sounds or other stimuli - basically, that it is a kind of sexual arousal. But we would need more evidence on this.

The bottom line

Without being able to identify universal triggers, it's also difficult to apply ASMR as an evidence-based tool in therapy. To date, there are no clinical trials that link ASMR with short- or long-term therapeutic effects.

Nevertheless, many people in the "whisper community" - those who produce and consume ASMR content online - claim ASMR helps them to relax, sleep better and reduce stress. So, there's no harm in ASMR if it helps you relax. But we would need more research to establish whether it's effective as a clinical intervention for anxiety, insomnia or other conditions. (*The Conversation*)

“Great works are performed by strength but by perseverance.”
—Samuel Johnson

The Shillong Times

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A Legend Passes On

ZUBEEN Garg's manner of passing sent a tremor not just across his home state of Assam but across the North East and his fans pan-India. While his passing was a shocker for his fans, Zubeen perhaps had a premonition that he would leave this world sooner than later. It was perhaps how he would have liked to pass on to the other world. His song “Moi Morim Jidina Oi” (on the day that I die) is a presentiment of sorts. He says once he is dead four men would carry his body and cremate it. Humans, Zubeen reiterates, are sure of only ‘today’ and can never predict the future. In fact, he urges humans not to trust their frail physical bodies (dehor bhorokha nai, bujisa ne nai). A singer, songwriter and musician to boot, Zubeen represents the youth of his generation. He was impetuous and did not care too much about niceties; performed when called for and lived an ordinary person's life even while his fans worshipped him. The sea of humanity that thronged Sarusajai stadium where his mortal remains have been kept after the coffin was brought from Singapore on Sunday morning was a decisive mandate about Zubeen Garg's popularity across ages groups. He was an icon that was the emblem of Assamese pride and also that of the North East because whenever Zubeen was interviewed he spoke lovingly of Assam and the North East.

Its rare for a singer to be able to traverse from one language to another, but Zubeen did it effortlessly. Besides Assamese, Hindi and Bengali he sang in over 40 languages and dialects and also played 12 types of instruments. This versatility is what sets him apart. Another aspect of Zubeen Garg was his irreligious nature and derision for caste and class, so much so he adopted the title Garg from his gotra. That Zubeen also dabbled in film making and acting makes him stand apart as a versatile creative artist. Very few are imbued with such a range of artistic talent. Zubeen's life was not without its share of problems. During some Bihu festivals in Assam he was prevented from performing because he sang Bollywood music which was construed to be counter-cultural. On such occasions Zubeen chose to walk out rather than comply since according to him music bridges cultures and speaks in multiple languages. But the Bihu organisers often had to relent on the demand of Zubeen's fans.

A singer who believed in uniting hearts and minds across cultures and languages was much like the late Dr Bhupen Hazarika, a bridge that connected the people of the North East. Such souls are rare and their passing leaves a deep void in the creative-cultural cum musical space. A recipient of many honours, Zubeen was never affected by the adulation he enjoyed but lived a very grounded life and used his influence in the right direction – to better the lives of those in distress apart from being responsive to the needs of society. Zubeen Garg's deeds will live on and his life will remain a celebration.

Meghalaya Tourist Cabs –Environment concerns plus Etiquette

By Toki Blah

As this is being written, Meghalaya is facing a crisis relating to what can be called a revolt by its Tourist Taxi Association called the AK-MTTA. This body is basically calling for Government intervention to ban outside tourist vehicles from conveying passengers right up to tourist destination spots of Meghalaya, which incidentally are usually located in the interior. The AKMTTA stand is that unless their grievances are addressed, their livelihoods (bread and butter issues) will suffer, does seem genuine, but one is at a loss how our State Government can come up with any restrictions on vehicles with an All India Tourist Permit, as the permit is issued under Section 88(9) of the Motor Vehicles Act which is a Central Act. No one disputes that our cabbies need a helping hand. Question is how and in what way? A closer look at the problem will show that its doubtful whether challenging a Central Act or challenging the provisions of Art 19 of the Constitution can bring about a just and sustainable solution. A political row and standoff between Assam and Meghalaya is the last thing we need and will serve no one's interest but only hurt Meghalaya's and its budding tourism industry's own interests. So what do we do?

Lets first realistically accept that our tourist cabbies operate at a distinct disadvantage vis a vis their Assam counterparts. Tourists arrive at Guwahati which is well connected by road, rail and air to the rest of the country, amenities Meghalaya does not have. Its but natural, for tourists to then board Assam tourist cabs for their onward journey to their destinations in Meghalaya. Fact is Meghalaya tourist cabbies recognize and accept this fact. Their grouse arises however from the fact that they don't see their own equity in such a deal and they consider it unfair for others to hog the whole economic benefits from it. So how can they be helped? There is a way out which is non-confrontational but which will call for three critical components. (a) The willingness to work together (Public and Government) towards a common achievable goal and acceptance that the solution may require sacrifices and time. (b) the political vision and will to make it happen (c) the readiness of the AKMTTA to make sacrifices, invest and accept the changes being proposed. The writer however, sincerely believes that if these three above components can happen, Meghalaya will enjoy a profitable and sustainable tourist transport system. So let's see what can be done

* 99.5% of Meghalaya's tourist spots are located in the interior and rural areas,

a sector that is ecologically fragile, environmentally vulnerable and can only be approached by road. The last thing such an environment needs is carbon monoxide emissions from carbon fueled vehicles.

* The Deptt of Environment and Forests of Meghalaya takes cognizance of this fact and declares, that the plying of petrol and diesel vehicles in these environmentally susceptible areas should be strictly regulated. (SC has upheld wide powers of States/UTs to impose restrictions on vehicles for environmental reasons (e.g., MC Mehta v. Union of India on Delhi pollution; State of Tamil Nadu v. ITC Ltd).

* The Transport Department immediately takes note of the views of the Environment and Forest Ministry and takes immediate steps to enforce its Meghalaya Electric Vehicle Policy of 2021, especially in relation to the plying of CO2 emitting commercial vehicles in such popular tourism but ecologically sensitive areas of the state. Some amendments of the Policy will be necessary here and there.

* The main amendments shall apply to Government subsidies towards the purchase of EVs / Hybrid model 4 wheelers in accordance to their KWH capacity. These subsidies need to be substantially increased, especially for commercial vehicles, plying for the development of tourism. All help and assistance for conversion to EV/Hybrid models must be encouraged by the Govt with AKMTTA backing.

* Certification of Environmental Clearance for such vehicles will lie only with the Meghalaya Pollution Control Board.

* Perhaps the Tourism Department, because of the direct impact of such interventions on its stakeholders, should step in as the coordinating Department to ensure that all the above actions of different Departments occur simultaneously and smoothly so as to speed up movement of files. We have a new Tourism Minister. It is hoped he sees this crisis as an opportunity to usher in better quality, high end model of tourism into the state. We have had enough of those crass, uncivilised, non-spending type of tourists who come in hordes to dirty and litter our beautiful state with no benefit to the industry or the state.

So what happens if the above takes place? Only environmentally certified EV/Hybrid vehicles,

and that too only by the MSPCB can afford to ply in our rural tourist spots. Outside tourist vehicles, not possessing such environ-

mental certificates, entering Meghalaya will have to disembark their passengers at pre-designated points from where the tourists, if they wish, can further proceed in certified Meghalaya tourist EV/Hybrid vehicles. Meghalaya is only trying to protect its ecologically sensitive tourist spots. No one is seeking a confrontation with outside tourist vehicles but if they lack the necessary environmental certification, then it's their bad luck. It's doubtful if, outside tourist vehicles are EV/Hybrid capacitated. We win because we are technically superior. Who can challenge that?

The above has simply addressed the technical, environmental and somewhat economic advantages we should have over others. However the social aspects involved are as important, if not more so, if we seek for the introduction of a viable and sustainable Tourist Transport system. AKMTTA must turn professional and tourist taxi drivers must realize that they live in a competitive world where they will have to struggle to survive. AKMTTA members must show they are the best in the business. So I would request the AKMTTA to kindly keep in mind the following universal etiquette expected from tourist cabs and if needed ask the Tourism Department to provide the necessary training and guidance for them to improve.

* Be always professional and courteous to passengers. Greet passengers politely, use a friendly but respectful tone. Dress neatly; a clean, tidy appearance builds trust; a Hip Hop attire does not help. Maintain a pleasant attitude even during stressful situations. Learn how to say “Hello”, “Thank You” and “Have a nice day”. Remember the Khasi value system “Da ka Akot ka Buroh”.

* Safety of passengers and vehicles must always come first. Keep the vehicle roadworthy: brakes, tires, lights, seat belts. Drive at safe speeds. Never use a phone while driving. Passengers get nervous, especially on our narrow steep hill roads, if they don't see both hands on the steering wheel. Drivers should use earphones if it is really necessary to speak on the phone and avoid risky overtaking or harsh braking.

* Being knowledgeable, well versed and updated about local routes, landmarks and weather issues is an advantage of local drivers, hence they should suggest scenic routes or interesting stops and be knowledgeable about them. I remember what a friend travelling to Shillong for the first time told me. He was so impressed with the

Umiam lake that he asked the cab driver to stop. He asked him the name of the place to which the idiot replied “Damsite”. The interest of the passenger died then and there with this answer. It is only when he reached Shillong and was informed that the place was actually called Umiam or “The crying waters” that his interest was revived about the name, the history, the romance, the culture etc behind such a name. Tourists are usually curious about the cultural features of a place. My point is, knowledge about places of tourist interest adds to customer's satisfaction.

* Provide local guidance to passengers. Tourists love to share verified information about local attractions, restaurants, or shopping spots. Tourist drivers should be prepared but please respect passengers' privacy if they don't seem interested in conversation. Recommend only trustworthy services (guides, restaurants, shops) without forcing choices.

* Cleanliness and comfort of travel is important to passengers; an issue that most cab drivers tend to forget. Washing the cab regularly (inside and out) ensuring a fresh, pleasant smell inside is rewarding. There's nothing more revolting than to enter a car with the driver's night hangover stink in it (sma jawa) attacking our nostrils. Air-conditioning/heating should be in good condition and other accessories include drinking water, tissues, the day's newspaper or umbrellas (optional but appreciated). Handing over a clean and tastefully designed calling card at the end of a satisfying journey will enable the passenger to remember the driver next time he revisits.

* Drivers should be modern, up-to-date and show that they are civic minded and responsible. They should avoid littering and encourage passengers to do the same. In all destinations they should support local eco-tourism practices where possible. Like Rapido, two wheelers keep a reliable app where potential passengers can contact or book your services in future.

The whole point why I am focusing on social issues of etiquette and manners is that tourists love being treated with courtesy by well behaved people. But it's also a competitive world out there. So drivers have to make themselves the best in the market so that tourists favour them. Its simple human nature. Passengers cannot be treated like sacks of potatoes, a stupid mannerism of Shillong shared taxis. The idea is to make travelling in Meghalaya a pleasure with memories to carry. Let's make Meghalaya a destination for people to want to return.

America's Grand Strategy and its Recent Behaviour Towards India

By Venus Upadhayaya

How can a strategy take a drastic shift without a plan. The recent shift in America's behaviour towards India may not be just limited to Trump's personal behaviour but would actually come from the evolving American Grand Strategy characterised by a shift from Indo-Pacific focus to Eurasian pivot.

I started to think seriously about it after attending the 5th World Congress on Taiwan Studies at Taipei's Academia Sinica in May this year in which, in one panel discussion the analysts talked about the shift in Trump's Indo-Pacific to Eurasia strategy. It alarmed me because this shift meant a change in US' administration. India focus. It also made me think about why this should be discussed by Taiwanese analysts and how it serves the purpose of Taiwan.

The months that followed the Taipei conference are now actually witnessing this shift forcing me to reflect on the imperatives behind the American grand strategy; how it's shifting the India-China, India-Japan, India-US and also India-Taiwan ties. What does it mean for India's economic rise and for the world at large?

These obviously are too many questions—to begin with I'll try to address a few here and others will be discussed in the upcoming write-ups.

US' Indian Pivot: Shift from Positive Focus to Negative Focus

The American administration's Asia-Pacific Policy was renamed as the Indo-Pacific Policy by the Trump administration in 2017, and it came along with a major positive focus on India and a rejuvenated QUAD—done with a shared concern about China's rise. There was specific attention to focussing on partnership with democratic allies including Australia and Japan, all in the best interest of QUAD.

The recent shift is again pivoted on India but unlike last time it's framed negatively—from ‘uplifting the “Rise India” and “India as a strategic partner” narrative it has transformed or rather denigrated into “India is Russia's laundromat” and “India is feeding Russia's war against Ukraine.”

The context is obviously clear—there's a shift in the American Grand Strategy and it is about American interests shifting from the Indo-Pacific to Eurasia with Russia-Ukraine war at the backdrop. And in this scheme of things, China is more like a frenemy than an enemy—there are too many American economic interests complexly interwoven with China. Like in any frenemy equation there's constant friendly engagement but also an aggression that Trump's trade and tariff policies and negotiations have boldly defined. As Trump's former political ally and world's richest industrialist, Elon Musk wrote in a message on Twitter on Dec. 25, 2023: “Economic Strength is the Foundation of War.”

Trump has built that foundation and also kept his adversary engaged for trade benefits (seemingly in US interest while winning a narrative war) and that's what is also reinforced by his targeting of India. If there was any other country in the geopolitical and economic position as India is today—a rising economy, expected to rise in position next only to the US and China by 2030—Trump would target it the same way. That comes not only from the perspective of “America First” but also from the angle of “America being the sole, supreme power of the world.”

Incidentally this becomes a shield for Taiwan because an America and China that's engaging and trading (albeit with the loud noise of a tight-

ly contested trade match) keeps the Indo-Pacific more militarily disengaged. This ensures Taiwan's status-quo and safety more than a strengthening QUAD that is defined to counter the Chinese aggression while constantly building a warring posture.

It also highlights one more aspect and that's the Chinese footprint in Eurasia since 2017—when America started to increase its focus on the Indo-Pacific—has likely gone out of the US' hand. China's economic footprint in the Eurasian financial market continues to increase. More importantly in 2022 in the Winter Olympics, the governments of China and Russia issued a joint statement announcing a “no limits partnership.” Their joint statement said that China and Russia relationship “has no limits, [and] there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”

This posture majorly highlighted a fight against US-shaped and US-led global order—which haunted Trump in a way that has never concerned any US administration before.

Is India a Scapegoat?

After Trump doubled the India tariff to 50 percent including 25 percent for additional levy as penalty for purchasing Russian oil, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on August 19 that the punitive measures are to deter Russia from pursuing the Ukraine conflict. Thus a question obviously arises—Is India a scapegoat?

Indian Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar has repeatedly highlighted how India is not the only country purchasing Russia oil and how the imports were both in national and global interests. India-US trade deal which was expected to be worth \$500 billion of investments by 2030 had no breakthrough despite many rounds of talks. So obviously the question is why is the US targeting India and what's India's posture in its negotiations with the US?

While this attack on India could actually be complex and multi-pronged, it's very clear from the Trump administration's stand that it wants to define India's rise and that probably also comes from the American introspection on how its policies created the giant that China has become today. Would the US want to unconditionally support the rise of another giant, more so when it wouldn't be able to later strategically oppose its ideology like it can today counter the Chinese Communist Party? How will the US domestically counter the rise of a democratic India?

Thus what the US administration showcases today is the American grand strategy—there's a shift in global order—there are multiple players and multiple issues that the US aims at attending by targeting India. So India is immensely important for the US—in fact its core to the US grand strategy but in ways it wasn't earlier defined.

India should take a recourse—in fact in its march towards the mid-century it'll have to face similar situations multiple times and will be required to rethink again and again. There are no unconditional friendships or perfectly converging or absolutely diverging relations in geopolitics—it's all about engagement. It needs to be seen how India perceives it and how the shifting global order redefines the Indian grand strategy.

(Venus Upadhayaya is a MOFA 2025 Taiwan fellow and a visiting scholar at the College of Law and Politics at NCHU Taichung. This is first in a series on “Mid-2025 and a Global-Shift”).

Letters to the Editor

Concern Over Reappointment of Dropped Ministers with Cabinet Rank

Editor,
I am writing to express my deep concern regarding recent developments in the Conrad Sangma-led Meghalaya government following the latest cabinet reshuffle, in which as many as eight ministers were dropped from the Council of Ministers. While such reshuffles are a part of democratic governance and may be necessary for administrative efficiency or political realignment in a coalition led government, I am alarmed by growing speculation that these dropped ministers might be reappointed in some capacity with full cabinet rank with designations that carry equivalent status and privileges.

Such a move, if implemented, would not only undermine the spirit of accountability and performance-based governance but also directly contradict the intent behind the 91st Constitutional Amendment Act, 2003. This landmark amendment explicitly limits the total number of min-

isters including the Chief Minister to no more than 15 percent of the total strength of the Legislative Assembly, subject to the minimum of twelve Ministers including the Chief Minister. The rationale behind this restriction was clear. To prevent unwarranted expansion of the council of ministers, curb fiscal extravagance, and promote smaller, more efficient governments.

Meghalaya, like other states, is bound by this constitutional cap. Reappointing dropped ministers under alternative titles while granting them cabinet rank and associated perks would effectively circumvent the ceiling imposed by the 91st Amendment. It would be a mere exercise in evasion preserving numbers under different labels thereby defeating the very purpose of the Constitutional Amendment.

Moreover, each ministerial position entails substantial financial burden on the state exchequer: salaries, allowances, official vehicles, security, staff, and administrative support. Appointing additional people with cabinet status regardless of their titles or designations will place an unnecessary strain on public funds at a time when resources are urgently

needed for health-care, education, infrastructure, and rural development. Meanwhile, thousands of educated youth in Meghalaya sit at home, waiting endlessly for a job, their dreams gathering dust, while the state spends more on political positions instead of creating opportunities for the unemployed.

I urge the state government to uphold the principles of transparency, fiscal responsibility, and constitutional integrity. There should be no fresh or reappointed positions created after the cabinet reshuffle. Any attempt to bring back dropped ministers under new titles or designations violates both the spirit and letter of the Constitution. The size of the cabinet must not exceed the 15% cap mandated by the 91st Constitutional Amendment, and no post-reshuffle appointment should be made merely to pacify political allies or for political rehabilitation.

While the government is busy finding new ways to rehabilitate rich, dropped ministers with fancy titles and fat salaries, thousands of educated young people in Meghalaya are struggling to find even a single job interview. These youth, many of whom have degrees, dreams, and desperate hopes for a fu-

ture, are being ignored while the same privileged few are handed safety nets made of public money. Is this justice? Is this development? When will the government stop protecting the powerful and start empowering the powerless? The youth are not asking for privileges, they are begging for opportunity. Why are we so eager to bring back ministers who already have wealth and power, while our youth suffer in hunger, live without hope, and cannot even afford food or shelter? The people of Meghalaya deserve a lean, accountable, and effective government one that respects both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang Lyngdoh
Rymbai,
Via email

Tears in Heaven (And Earth)

Editor,
Eric Clapton wrote the initial lyrics of “Tears in Heaven,” which his co-writer Will Jennings improvised to finally give an immortal song that is deeply personal and ephemeral. Clapton, who was trying to heal from the untimely demise of his son, sings – “Would you know my name/If I saw you in Heaven?”

I must be strong and carry on/Cause I know I don't belong/here in heaven.” This song has gone on to become an eternal reminder that loss can happen to anyone and that we finally must come to terms with it by being ‘strong’ and ‘carrying on’.

It's such an irony that Zubeen Garg sang this song as perhaps his last song in Singapore, a day before his demise. Was there a message hidden by the Universe for all of us who have lived and breathed his songs that even Zubeen is finite, and the ultimate truth is after all death.

Zubeen has himself spoken of the unpredictability of life in an interview with NewsLive referring to the incident of his sister Jonkey's death in an accident. That he believed life is short and unpredictable reflected in the carefree manner in which he lived. Everyone who knows or heard of him, knows of his rebellious and carefree spirit. And that made him more endearing than many other artists of this era. Zubeen, perhaps knew that death would only take his physical presence. His soul was immortal. It is his soul that he leaves behind with millions of his fans in the music that he created. It will

rest in the lyrics and music of all the songs he has sung in multiple languages. In his own way, Zubeen for me was no less of a philosopher. A philosopher-poet who wrote songs that made up for our inadequacies of expression. A poet who rendered songs that have calmed our aching hearts, made us smile and kindled hope when there was none. Poets never die. They just pass on from one dimension to another much like Zubeen has. In his own poem titled “Water,” he writes: “I may go from river to the sea/ I can come back to the river/ Only my colour will change/ Only my taste will change/ Be Water Be Shapeless.” Zubeen left for the eternal cosmic ocean on Sep 19, 2025, but he left a message for all of us in poems and in his last song - only his ‘colour’ will change, only his ‘taste’ will change as we begin an era with him, without him. We must “carry on.”

Yours etc.,
Binodan K D Sarma,
Via email

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"Time moves in one direction, memory in another."

— William Gibson

The Shillong Times

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'Savings' festival, really?

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's claim, in his address to the nation on Sunday, is that he has handed down a "double bonanza" to the 1.4 billion population in a space of one year — the Income Tax exemption up to Rs 12 lakh per year and the present GST rate cuts — meaning a "savings" to the people of "as high as Rs 2.5 lakh crore." This is a presumptive figure. The PM's claim is that the season of the Navaratri festival starting now would turn out to be a "savings festival," but the rate cuts would work the other way, namely in a boost to spending. The benefits coming under the slogan of Nagrik Devo Bhava would be significant for the urban middle-class. The prices of several consumer goods have been reduced. As for the rural economy and the agriculture sector, the government has reduced GST on raw materials for fertilizers, which should reduce the prices of manure and production costs for farmers.

However, as in every such governmental step in the past, how much benefit would accrue to the people or the farmers, in the long term, in the real sense, needs to be measured sensibly and carefully ascertained to separate fact from propaganda. While the cuts in GST rates are appreciable, a question also arises as to why unreasonably heavy taxes were imposed in the past — following the rolling out of the GST regime in 2017. This is not to ignore the good sides of the market reforms. While making an exhortation to the people to buy only what's made in India, the Prime Minister has admitted that there has been a flooding of foreign goods into the country. This trend has not started with Modi, but the PM has done little to control this trend even as he introduced initiatives like Make In India and Aatmanibhar Bharat. While the Chinese sway over our markets continues, the impact of these initiatives is somewhat impressive in select sectors including in hi-tech fields like aviation and military ware. The share of manufacturing in India's GDP is still 12 per cent — against China's 27 per cent. This is less than the world average; and less than those of Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. For a nation like Vietnam, the share of manufacturing in its GDP is 25 per cent — double of India's. The share of agriculture in Pakistan's GDP, at 24 per cent, is higher than that of India's at 18 per cent. Both Manufacture and Agriculture are job-creating sectors, where governmental interventions should have boosted performance.

The PM spoke up for a boost to the MSME and small-scale industrial sectors — but must explain why these sectors failed to gain steam during his last 11 years. The flooding of Chinese goods in recent decades only added to the plight of these sectors here. The failure to raise the manufacturing output in significant ways was due mainly to the stranglehold of the corrupt bureaucracy encouraged by the unstoppable licence/clearance raj. Exhortations from the podium by themselves do not make much of a difference to the ground situations.

Letters to the Editor

Demise of Peoples' Artist - Zubeen Garg

Editor,
With the untimely death of musical icon Zubeen Garg in Singapore, the state of Assam and the nation as a whole has lost one of its greatest sons. The exact circumstances leading to his death remain murky at this moment and both the Singapore Police and the Assam Government have initiated probes into the incident. A musical prodigy who sang over 30 thousand songs in about 40 languages in a career spanning about three decades is an incredible feat. The youth of today's Assam and most of my generation too have grown up listening to his music. Among his fan following, he was no less than God. Through his poetic lyrics and a God gifted voice, he had etched such an indelible mark in everyone's heart.

However, the point I want to make here is his deep connection to the people. We may not have a dearth of talented artists in today's time, but the love and affection Zubeen Garg had for his people and his state is an extreme rarity. Throughout his illustrious career, he stood by the people at every difficult moment. His musical talent was enough for him to lead a glamorous life in Mumbai but he chose to return to Assam to be amongst his people. As a whimsical

person and one who always spoke his heart out, Zubeen was no stranger to controversies. But he always stood by his convictions and people always adored his childish behaviour and never took any offence against this pure soul. There are countless stories how he helped the needy, monetarily or otherwise without keeping anything for himself. One would be surprised to know that a star of his stature had to buy a personal car on a bank loan! A nature lover to the core, he was strongly associated with PETA and was vocal against ritualistic animal sacrifices.

Today the people of Assam are in a state of shock and despair. They have lost their dearest friend, guardian and a fearless voice. To pay their last respects or to catch a glimpse of his mortal remains, people are queuing on the streets with swollen eyes. Assam has come to a standstill; business establishments remain closed with only Zubeen's immortal songs in the air, reminiscent of the days when Bharat Ratna Dr. Bhupen Hazarika expired. The rare display of unconditional love and adulation from millions of his fans and followers is something that only a true people's artist can command. The Government of Assam is taking steps to preserve the legacy of the musical icon but without any doubt Zubeen Garg will remain immortal in the heart of every Assamese!

Yours etc,
Uttam Saikia,
Zoological Survey of India, Shillong

Zubeen — A Tsunami of Grief and Love

By Sanjoy Hazarika

roared not one but his many songs.

It was the same everywhere in Assam. In villages and towns, in cities and neighbourhoods. People marched in thousands on the streets to convey pain and grief, lit up the night with their mobile phone torches as songs poured out and filled the air. Motorcyclists filled the streets in remembrance.

His portraits sprang up everywhere, on flyovers and lamp posts, as bunting across streets, in halls and households, educational institutions, as people lit diyas in respect and laid flowers. Gatherings grew at street corners and shops, homes and offices, schools, colleges and universities across the country to sing his songs and hear his recordings, surging with the purity of passion, the warmth of love and tapping brilliantly into the angst of a generation unsure of itself and coming to grips with a swiftly changing society and world. To them, he was their voice, he sang their words and uncompromisingly he tossed out abuse and challenges at the political class and egoists.

He became a powerful equalizing force with followers across all divides in a struggling and fractured state. But why just Assam? Tributes flowed in from across the country and from neighbouring states. In Tura, where he was born in 1972, there were prayers and songs. In Shillong, the local Assamese community gathered to mourn and remember while Lou Majaw, the Bob Dylan of the region, spoke of his contribution to the world of music "not just for the people of Assam or the people of North-East or India... He has given himself through his songs and music". Chief Minister Conrad Sangma sent a mes-

sage as did Pema Khandu of Arunachal Pradesh who convened ruling party legislators. Arunachal Pradesh has a strong connect to Assamese culture and music especially the late Bhupen Hazarika, who was born there, and to Zubeen Garg.

To me, the throngs mourning Zubeen reminded me of November 2011 when a human sea engulfed Guwahati to receive Bhupen Hazarika.

There was a noticeable difference — the huge flow of people which had come to honour Zubeen has been overwhelmingly young. A young Zubeen burst onto the music scene like a breath of fresh air. With refreshing candour, he often recounted with self-deprecation (for unlike many other stars, he could laugh at himself, a quality that endeared him to millions of followers) how at his first public performance in the oil town of Dulaijan, he tripped over a wire and fell flat on his face upon entry onto the stage. He picked himself up and looked out at the audience. (He was to remark later that he had never seen such a large crowd.) Overcoming nerves, he burst into song — the rest was history and the audience, like all later, was mesmerized.

Born Zubeen Bordoloi (he later changed his surname to Garg), he kept picking up awards; his fame and following grew. He stunned Bollywood with his Ya Ali from the film Gangster which won him a Global Indian Film Award for best playback singer in 2006. Choosing to turn his back on Bollywood after a few years, he moved to Assam. He acted in Assamese films and even won a National Award for one. He not just directed and acted in movies but also produced them including Mission China where he

wrote the screenplay, scored the music, directed and created the story.

This piece is not purported to be a detailed biographical note on him; the space is too limited, the time too less and hence it is difficult to include everything about this super star who sang over 32,000 songs in 40 languages. What many struggle to achieve in many lifetimes, Zubeen achieved seamlessly in a bare 52 years. He was from Assam but belonged to the world, he carried his Assamese identity with him but soared effortlessly and timelessly above human-imposed barriers.

One of my cousins who knew and worked with him closely has described him as a "storm". "... Zubeen was uncompromising, a spirit so untamed that even the word 'freedom' seemed too small to house him. Where others calculated, he leapt. Where others hesitated, he spoke". With deep honesty and inner pain, D'Com Bhuyan wrote in The Thumbprint: "We lived wildly too, not just in art but in life. The long nights, the laughter that spilled into dawn, the bottles emptied as if they held some secret to the universe. For me, the road led to a reckoning, well I sought help, I learned to wrestle my demons. But Zubeen was different. He was the whirlwind and he was the STORM. Where I chose shelter, he chose the open skies. He lived in the storm because he WAS the storm, impossible to contain, impossible to still".

I have listened more to Zubeen's music and songs in the past three days and nights than at any other time in my life. I wish I had done so much earlier. Unlike many others, I never met him nor was I privileged to watch a live performance. Yet, these last days, his music has touched me and I feel a deep connect to him and his faithful followers. Not a song rings through the air without tears moistening my eyes.

As he came to Guwahati on his last journey, a rainbow formed in the sky. The next day, the heavens opened in a torrent of rain to mourn a beloved son. His followers sing Mayabini unceasingly everywhere, the magical song he said should be sung when he died. Roughly translated, some of the lines go like this:

In the heart of this magical night/I can see your face at a distance/You have quietly moved into a hidden corner of my heart/I have danced with the storm for years/I had befriended darkness a long time ago.

citizens.

Yours etc;
Jack Syiemlieh
Via email

Sign of political maturity

Editor,
Appropos of the headlines "Conrad defends removal of eight ministers amid muted discontent" (ST September 17, 2025) while exiting the cabinet led by Conrad Sangma, former Tourism Minister, Paul Lyngdoh's statement, "I believe every setback can be a setup for something greater," is a powerful reframing and one that resonates deeply with the ethos of symbolic resilience and participatory transformation. Despite losing key portfolios like Tourism and Social Welfare, where he has done a commendable job which nobody really cared for ages, he rightly described himself not as defeated, but as a "conveyor belt for change, growth and progress." That is not just political optimism but it is a narrative pivot that transforms institutional reshuffling into a symbolic reset.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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Zubeen Garg: The Irreverent Icon

By Jyotirmoy Prodhani

Zubeen Garg, is perhaps the most significant popular culture phenomenon Assam has ever produced. After Bhupen Hazarika, arguably Zubeen Garg has been the next greatest cultural icon of the state. If Bhupen Hazarika was the most dominant voice from the 60s till the early part of the twenty-first century, Zubeen's voice took off from the early 90s. Both their voices would continue to reverberate long after their deaths, as they would transcend the tangible contours of their lives, which essentially represented the anguish and angst, as well as the aspirations and longings, of the respective generations to which they belonged.

Dr. Bhupen Hazarika's emergence coincided with the historical juncture when India earned its freedom and embarked on a journey marked by hopes and delusions. A product of the intellectual and ideological climate of the time, his music emphatically exhorted change, propagated the idioms of protest, and infused courage to assert disagreement. By the late 1990s, after about half a century of independence, India entered a new phase of its political and economic era. With this, the sense of public morality, dimensions of aspirations, and the sense of music too began to change. The 90s marked a new era for Assam's contemporary history, too. It was an era of political settlement of sorts after the tumultuous phase of Assam agitation of the mid-80s, which came to an end with the Assam accord.

This was the juncture when Zubeen Garg emerged, a fresh young voice that could render romanticism with youthful vigour in an earthy and mellifluous voice. The songs did not have apparent ideological shades, nor were they typical musical manifestos. They were sheer music, melody, and poetry. When his first music album, Anamika, was released in the 90s, he was barely in his 20s. The songs might not have had the erudite ideological sophistication, but his music was impetuous, scintillatingly melodic, and also radically romantic.

He had defined the contours of the popular culture of Assam in his own terms; he had defied all norms of the conventional playbook to invent his own codes, which can be described as the Zubeen era. Born in Tura in Meghalaya when his father was posted there as a state civil servant, he did his matriculation from a school in Tamulpur, and his higher secondary from Karimganj, a district in the Barak valley of Assam. His life journey, even in the early part of his life, was exposed to ethnic and cultural diversities that had shaped his formative mind. He joined B. Barooah College of Guwahati to pursue his BSc with the subject combination Physics, Chemistry, and Mathematics, indicating his fairly firm academic grounding. In one of his interviews, Zubeen revealed how his principal at college was somewhat worried about him when he did not complete his examinations and coolly came out of the examination hall, submitting his incomplete answer scripts. The principal asked him why he did so. How could he be so reckless? He replied that he, in fact, did not require the degree; someone else might need it. Asked what he would do in life without a formal degree, his answer was, "I will sing." When asked, "Will you be able to earn a livelihood with your singing alone?" (which was almost an impossible prospect) Zubeen confidently answered, "Yes sir, I will."

He kept his promise and soon became Assam's highest-paid singer, who sang around thirty-eight thousand songs in forty languages, which is no minor feat. His songs also included numerous minor languages known for their folk songs.

From the early days of cassettes, when recording music became relatively easy, as it was no longer necessary to travel to Calcutta

or Bombay, unlike the days of HMV and vinyl records, music became available on cassette tapes, and with that, the music scene turned quite vibrant. Soon, Zubeen stormed in, setting the stage on fire with his electrifying bravado and irreverent flamboyance; he looked surreal against psychedelic lights, high decibel sounds, loud strumming of instruments, mostly western, and his flawless voice, he often still-houetted on stage with studied western outfits flowing from his waist, fancy hats, and the guitar in his grip. He was a superstar performing live. He was a Rock Star of dreams right in front of millions of eyes, night after night, in the season of songs and music, especially during the month-long Rongali Bihu celebrations. He would hit the nooks and corners of Assam. He became almost synonymous with music, crafting lyrics that wove metaphors of freedom and melodies of free souls. No wonder, in a number of his songs, he draws on the image of a flying bird in the sky as his central image, pakhi pakhi ai mon, pakhi loga mor mon (My mind flies with its wings), sila sila moi dur akaxore/uri uri phuro moi dawore pohore (I am flying kate of the distant sky/I fly glide along the clouds and light) quite like the radical romantic Shelley's images of the sky. Like his wild winds, Zubeen too danced for ages with the storm (dhuhmar xote mur bahu jugare naxon).

On stage, he broke rules, for he was not there to sing songs; he believed in performing them. He was the Elvis Presley of Assam, heralding a new age of music, which would eventually be named after him — the era of Zubeen. He was the only Rock Star of Assam in the true sense of the term, for he defied convention, deviated from the codes, and even threw challenges at unexpected quarters. He was a veritable bucking bronco on stage, an irreverent iconoclast. He knew his charisma; he was aware of his power as a singer, and he knew he was a legend. Else, how could one afford to come on stage beyond time habitually, and declare at times that one was too tired and needed sleep? And, he would literally sleep on stage, much to the dismay of the irate crowd who would be waiting for him for hours till early morning. Still, the concerned audience would let him sleep because they understood that their beloved singer truly needed rest and that he should care for his health as well, for he looked so exhausted. All this sounds mythic, like a fairy tale, but that was what Zubeen Garg was all about.

When social media platforms are loaded with images and videos of a twenty-five-kilometer-long human procession for the last journey of their beloved singer, there are also images of animals silently standing in front of the homage stands for Zubeen. He created a universe not only for human bonding but also a world of affection for all. Perhaps this was the core of his artistic ideology, which he often defined as 'social leftism.' His silent philanthropy, almost daily, for the needy, perhaps, was a part of his commitment to his ideology.

If one has to point out Zubeen's most important contribution, one might as well point out how he has shown the world the power of music. Apparently, he was a regional singer who had dedicated his entire life to his state, despite achieving equal success on much larger platforms, such as Bollywood, with iconic songs like 'Ya Ali'. He proved once again that music has the in-built power to transcend all boundaries. Even in death, his final act — he arrived in style and made us all feel how terrible it is to wake up in the morning and realize that life henceforth will be without Zubeen, because along with him a part of the soul of Assam too is gone.

(The author is Professor of English at North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong)

"The truest wisdom is a resolute determination."
— Napoleon Bonaparte

The Shillong Times

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Scare among techies

A scare has been caused by the Trump Administration among Indian techies there by an abrupt announcement of a sharp hike in visa fee for H-IB visa to the order of \$1 lakh. The worry has been dissipated to an extent by now with a clarification from the White House that this rule would be limited to new visas for techies—a one-time fee for new arrivals—and not for renewal of the existing visas. The original announcement by the US commerce secretary on Friday was that an annual fee of \$1 lakh would apply to new visas as well as for renewals—would have been a huge financial strain for the companies that hire staff largely from abroad. While the order applied to techies from all countries entering the US, its lethal impact would be on Indians as they form over 70 per cent of such visa holders there, while those from China etc., are much lesser in numbers.

The clarification by the White House, preceded by similar hints from the Trump administration a day ago, served to cool the minds of the techies and their families. The Trump administration now admits that the techies from abroad working in the US have brought significant gains to the US economy. While Indian techies who are already in the US might heave a sigh of relief, the order will have far-reaching implications. The rate of the present flow of techies from countries like India to the US would likely be curtailed in future in view of the hefty hike in the visa fee. On the other hand, for IT firms, their work in the US needs to be executed without interruption. If hiring faces odds, more outsourcing is the way out as the US has less local talent to fill the gap. This too could be an advantage for India, which has a strong IT sector. Recent entrants like China, Vietnam and the Philippines, and also their new army of techies, are also beneficiaries of the American IT boom. The US annually issues over two lakh H-IB visas.

What started in the 1990s in trickles - the flow of qualified IT professionals from here to the US with promises of good salaries and better life there, have over the next three decades grown into a huge opportunity for them. Simultaneously, India - specially the IT-savvy states - saw a huge growth of their IT sector. This benefited the nation by way of a swelling of foreign exchange reserves. States like Karnataka and Telangana are recording their main budgeted revenue from this sector, mostly linked to software exports to the US. While several states are now engaged in this pursuit, the sector as a whole is still gripped by a sense of fear over the vehemence of the Trump outreach. The visa fee hike may or may not have anything to do with the present strain in diplomatic and other relations between the Trump Administration and India. Indian techies in the US are temporarily relieved, but their sense of insecurity has heightened, what with Trump's impetuous decisions.

Letters to the Editor

Don't be crestfallen, Bah Paul!

Editor,

Over a decade ago, that's in 2013, following the Meghalaya State Assembly elections results, I had written a heartfelt letter in these columns under the caption 'Loss for Meghalaya' (ST March 15, 2013) bemoaning the unfortunate defeat of our incumbent Chief Minister as an NPP candidate to late Clement Marak of Congress party from Selsella constituency of West Garo Hills district, by more than 2000 votes. In the years from 2008 to 2013, I had the privilege to attend the Assembly sessions from time to time as a government official, in such legislative sessions, I was accordingly made wiser by the contesting debates of our learned representatives. However, what thrilled me the most from my near-drowsy state of mind to a fresh ambience was the flawless speeches of Conrad K Sangma! I reiterated that Meghalaya Assembly had lost an irreplaceable representative and without such an accomplished orator the august house had lost a rare personality!

In a parallel situation of the ongoing political scenario, I feel an inexplicable déjà-vu overwhelming me while comparing the uncanny co-incidence of that 2013 episode of Sangma's loss to the present removal of Paul Lyngdoh from the cabinet. I, for one, didn't

hear that amongst the UDP party there was an agreement post ministerial swearing-in ceremony in 2023 that there shall be a ministerial berth sharing after two and half years or thereabouts, unlike in the BJP and HSPDP. Even Lyngdoh himself had asserted the same. Nonetheless, it is really a heart-warming news that when media and official sources maintained that Lyngdoh has immensely benefited the State's exchequer as a Minister of Tourism, he himself minced no words to announce that from the last tourism festivals, Meghalaya has garnered benefits of over a 100% in terms of revenue. And this is by no means a stellar accomplishment.

Further, seeing his calibre, Conrad Sangma the Chief Minister had shouldered upon him the task of being the government spokesperson in crucial interactions with different media and other assorted organizations. As a Tourism Minister, he was more often than not, officially permitted to make itineraries to different countries famed for their unique tourist-landscapes so that the same can be replicated in our State; perhaps, his visit to Sikkim must have instilled in him to remove those deserving hawkers at Khyndai lad by conveniently shifting them to designated places. This attempt has unerringly demonstrated an achievement of sorts. Some of my friends have concluded that what Lyngdoh has done in removing an army of hardcore hawkers is similar to what Hercules had done to

In Love with the Train: A Journey Through Landscapes and Lives

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

When I was doing my PhD, every winter I would travel to different parts of the country to attend seminars and workshops organised by universities and research centres. It was an excellent opportunity to learn about the advances taking place in the discipline and to visit fresh places—places I would not have usually gone to on my own. In this way, I saw a lot of the country. Air travel was quite expensive back then, and I would take the train since there were some concessions in fares for students and those belonging to the ST community. Except for one time when I took the Rajdhani, I always travelled in the sleeper class, and I thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

For me, train journeys are the best way to go from one place to another. You meet a lot of different people, and there's no better way to experience the landscape one is travelling through than on a train. Air travel is about speed, and after a point in time, every airport looks and feels the same. The security checks can sometimes be quite stressful, and if the people at the ticket counter want to make your life miserable, there is nothing you can do about it. This will never happen on a train journey. You can buy your ticket and then enter your compartment with no aggravation. Later, a ticket collector (TC) will come; check your name and move on. It is a very convenient process with no hassle.

The thing that people don't like about train journeys is the time factor. One can reach Delhi within a few hours if one takes a flight, but it takes almost two days on a train. The one time I took the train to travel to Surat in Gujarat, it took me almost three days. For some, the time taken can feel like a burden, but for others (like me) it was a pleasant experience. You meet different people, and even if you don't make friends, just watching others and listening to what they are talking about can help one appreciate a lot about their lives.

During one such train journey to Delhi, I remember meeting an old man from Bihar who had come to Delhi for his court case. He was working at the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI),

but was unjustly removed. The old man filed a case, and for almost a decade he made regular trips to Delhi for the hearings. His clothes were simple, and he wore only slippers. Whenever people entered the compartment, he would look down at the floor, avoiding eye contact. Gentle and soft-spoken, I enjoyed talking to him, and when he departed, I wished him good luck in getting his job back. There were many other people, whose stories were less tragic, whom I met during my train journey, and it was a pleasure talking to all of them.

The one thing I enjoyed the most during the train journey was drinking tea the whole day. After every few minutes, a vendor would enter the compartment shouting 'chai, chai'. Most of them were older men, but once I came across a transgender person selling tea. Sipping tea near the window and watching the landscape change is the most memorable experience of a train journey. One could see mustard fields stretching for

a recent train journey from Dimapur to Guwahati. This is something I would love to do much more.

I love train journeys, but railways are being opposed in Meghalaya for fear that it would lead to large-scale immigration. With Mizoram also getting a railhead, Meghalaya is now the only state in the country that does not have a regular train service (I am ignoring Mendipathar because it is not a major railway line). While I was waiting at the Dimapur station for my train, my colleague from Nagaland told me that railway lines are being laid to take the train all the way to Zubza, which is a village close to Kohima in the hills. I asked him whether he was worried about immigration. He calmly told me that whoever comes through the train will have to get down at the station and the local community knows who is a local or an outsider.

This very simple logic somehow fails to impress many in Meghalaya. Migrants entering the state have to take up residence

was 83.99% and 80.58% in 1980. Today it is 86.48% and 86.15% respectively. Despite not having ILP, the ST population in Meghalaya has grown much faster than in Nagaland, which is accompanied by the out-migration of the non-ST or non-indigenous population from the state. Large-scale migration, legal or illegal, from the mainland or across the border is not happening, unless the Registrar General and Census Commissioner of India have hatched a conspiracy against Meghalaya and Nagaland to hide the real numbers.

Recently, the Assam taxi drivers retaliated against the attempts of certain taxi drivers from Meghalaya to stop their vehicles from going to the tourist destinations. In the last couple of weeks, I was travelling to Guwahati almost weekly, and it was fortunate that the agitation started after my return. Otherwise, I would have lost money that I had already spent on purchasing the tickets for my trip to Nagaland. It is difficult to see the Assam taxi drivers relenting when they are fighting for trips among themselves. The long-term solution has to be the introduction of railways that can drop tourists inside the territory of Meghalaya, where our taxis can have a monopoly over the trips. There will also be less extortion on the highway, and prices of commodities will reduce, benefiting everyone in the state. The recent fracas with the local taxis agitating against the Assam vehicles ferrying passengers into Meghalaya is an excellent opportunity to cut our dependence on Assam and make ourselves more independent.

For purely selfish reasons, I look forward to the time when we can travel the length and breadth of our state, sitting inside a train compartment. Kongs would come in with tea and jingbam every couple of hours. We could then sip our tea and watch the landscape change as it moves from one station to another. I hope that day arrives soon—when we can all fall in love with train journeys, just as I have.

(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)

dies that became memories, lyrics that felt like home. From Assamese folk songs to Bengali modern songs and Bollywood hits like "Ya Ali," his artistry spoke in many tongues but always with one heart.

Yours etc.,
Shibashish Rudra,
Gurgaon

Celebrating Bookaroo Shillong: A Gift for Our Children's Future

Editor,

In today's world, reading is slowly losing ground among children. Mobile phones, television, and above all, the constant pull of Instagram, Reels, Facebook, TikTok, and other social media platforms have replaced the simple joy of holding a book. Against this backdrop, the article "Children, Books and the Joy of Reading," by Aafaque Hussain, published in The Shillong Times (September 21, 2025), came as a breath of fresh air. It showed how the Bookaroo Shillong 2025 festival beautifully brought children back to the world of stories and imagination.

Bookaroo was not just an event—it was a reminder of what we are losing and what we can still save. To see children listening with rapt attention to storytellers, laughing over picture books,

A Life in Echoes

Editor,

Zubeen Garg was more than a voice. He was a bridge between tradition and modernity, between Assam and the wider world—a composer, singer, performer, storyteller. Born from the soil of Meghalaya, he breathed Assam and North East - his roots were deep; yet his wings reached far beyond every border that music ever tried to draw.

He gave us songs that healed and stirred—melo-

cleansed the nauseating Augan stables. But Bah Paul must remember the timeless adage: 'There is always a bright light at the end of a pitch dark tunnel!'

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

When music becomes identity

Editor,

The untimely demise of Zubeen Garg has left Assam, and indeed the entire Northeast, in collective mourning. To outsiders, the outpouring of grief might appear unusual. But for Assam and the wider Northeast, music is not entertainment—it is lifeblood. Zubeen was not just a singer or composer; he was a cultural institution, a bridge between generations, a symbol of regional pride.

His concerts drew audiences that could rival political rallies, and his songs were sung with the same fervour as hymns. The rest of India often struggles to grasp this phenomenon: how can a musician command the kind of devotion usually reserved for cinema superstars or political leaders? But in the Northeast, music is woven into the very fabric of life. From lullabies sung in villages, to community festivals where every gathering has a guitar or dhol, to urban youth who see music as their first language of expression—this land breathes melody. The extraordinary stardom of art-

Yours etc.,
Shekhar Singh,
Via email

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Visas, Tariffs and Doing Unto Others..!

This morning, over my cup of hot filter coffee, I stared at the newspaper. Not just one headline, but a dozen. And all of them, like those vendors, had the same pitch: India and Indians targeted abroad.

In America, new tariffs. Visas denied. Deportations ordered. In England, placards, lifted high with the bold words, "Send them back." In Australia and Ireland, fists raised, curses hurled, sometimes blows too—directed against Indians who, till yesterday, were welcomed as model immigrants.

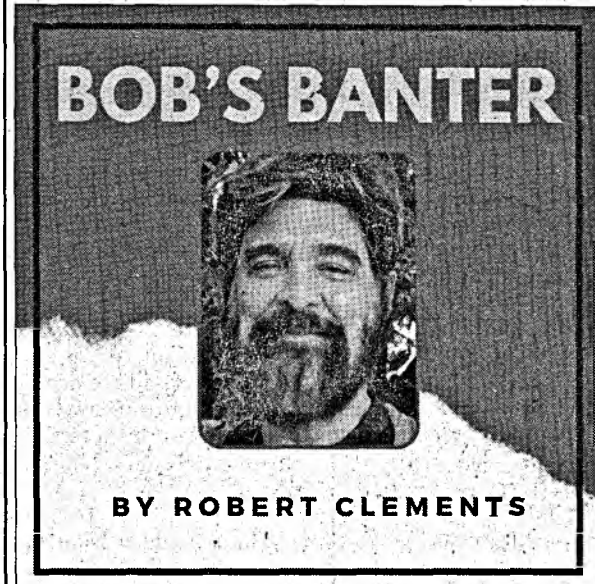
And as I sat there, my mind went not to embassies or trade deals, but to a single verse I'd read in the Holy Scriptures: "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." I looked around as if to ask someone in the room, "Who are these others?" Was the verse speak-

be treated, and suddenly you don't need armies of diplomats begging for respect. You won't need to send ministers to Washington or Brussels with begging bowls. Because the respect you give at home will echo abroad.

Let me say it plain: If you want justice for your children overseas, start by giving justice to your neighbour next door. If you want your traders spared unfair tariffs, stop boycotting your own citizens' shops. If you want your students safe in American dorms, ensure that no child here is unsafe because of his religion or caste.

This isn't just morality. It is mathematics. What you sow, you reap. What you dish out, comes back—sometimes with interest.

Now, before you accuse me of sermonising, let's look at the daily headlines again. That IT professional deported overnight from



ing of foreigners? Or was it speaking of my next-door neighbour, whose child goes to the same school as mine, but who prays differently? Was it speaking of that man across the street who eats differently, dresses differently, and is quietly made to feel like he doesn't quite belong?

Do we really need a theologian to answer this? No. The answer is as plain as the nose on our faces. The "others" are not far away. They are not sitting in American boardrooms or Irish pubs. They are right here—our own countrymen. The "others" are those who are, in whispers and shouts, told they don't belong. The Muslims, eyed with suspicion. The Christians, eyed with doubt. The Dalits, eyed with disdain.

And here's the cruel twist of irony: Just as we make some of our own people feel like outsiders, our sons and daughters are being told the exact same thing abroad. "You don't belong here." The circle, ladies and gentlemen, is complete.

Isn't it strange? When our bright-eyed IT students are deported, we shake our fists at foreign governments. When our traders are strangled by tariffs, we shout ourselves hoarse at the injustice. But when the shop down the road is boycotted simply because the owner has the "wrong" surname, we shrug. When a neighbour is denied housing because of his faith, we sip our tea. Do you see the hypocrisy? We cry foul when our children are sent packing from foreign lands, but we don't mind when our own fellow citizens are pushed into corners within our borders. We don't notice that the second-class treatment we grumble about abroad is the very same treatment we hand out at home.

Think of the irony: At international conferences, we beg for fair treatment. We plead for inclusion. Yet, back home, we craft laws and spread speeches that divide. Abroad, our leaders cry, "Give our people equality!" At home, the same leaders whisper, "But don't give it to them." And then we wonder why the world doesn't take us seriously. The lesson here isn't just moral or spiritual—it's practical politics. It's common sense. The Golden Rule is not some dusty verse to be framed and forgotten. It is the basis of survival. Treat others as you'd like to

Silicon Valley? His pain is no different from the small entrepreneur here whose license is denied because he belongs to the "wrong" community. That Indian student mocked in an Irish classroom? Her humiliation is the echo of the humiliation we allow when we make classmates here feel they don't belong.

And that trader in America reeling under tariffs? His plight mirrors the trader at home who is quietly boycotted by his neighbours.

The pain abroad is the echo of the pain the 'others' have tolerated here.

So, dear leaders, pause before your next divisive speech. Hold back that whisper of another law that separates instead of unites. Before you unleash the venom of hate, remember this: the sting will come back to bite your own kin abroad.

And to you, my fellow ordinary citizens, I say this: Let's not wait for politicians to practice the Golden Rule. Let us. Each of us. Let's make it more than a framed verse on a church wall or a line in a sermon. Let's stretch it like a canopy over every caste, creed, and community. Because today the evidence is undeniable: the way we treat "others" here is exactly the way the world treats us there. So the next time you see a headline of Indians being deported, don't just curse the foreigner. Look within. When you hear of tariffs strangling our exports, don't just grumble about trade wars. Ask if you are also part of a war against your own neighbour.

The Golden Rule is not advice. It is a prophecy.

Disobey it, and you will reap its consequences. Follow it, and you won't need embassies to plead your case. You will already have built a world where justice for one is justice for all.

So let's not just shout about being treated fairly abroad. Let's begin by treating each other fairly at home. Then maybe, just maybe, the next headlines will not scream of rejection and hatred, but of acceptance and respect.

And wouldn't that be something worth clipping, framing, and showing your grandchildren one day?

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

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

MPSC requires drastic reforms
WHY is the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) allowed to be run by a rag-tag group of non-professionals, mostly retired government officials whose knowledge is outdated? This is a Commission that is mandated to select the best brains to serve a public cause and not the government of the day. For too long the MPSC has chosen to dispel public allegations of nepotism, inefficiency, lack of transparency etc., by never acknowledging its incompetencies – such as question paper setting for certain professional exams that are rife with errors. It may not be wrong to state that the MPSC has lost the confidence of young professionals appearing for the exams advertised by the Commission from time to time.

As a constitutional body the MPSC should have instilled confidence in young job seekers by being seen as the cornerstone of merit-based recruitment in the state civil services. But repeated allegations that those well connected always make it to the merit list have debased this institution and cancelled the most important aspect of what a recruitment agency should be doing which is to maintain neutrality and fairness in the selection process for various government positions. Does a single Chairperson stand out for having conducted a free and fair recruitment process during their tenure? Or have political pressures and compulsions been the hallmark of the Commission? If the MPSC were truly fair and transparent in its selection process Meghalaya would, over the decades have seen state civil servants with outstanding performance and commitment to meet the needs of people at the grassroots and not ensconced in their ivory towers pushing files without examining if the work they do even impacts the so-called "beneficiaries" of the multifarious schemes they are supposed to implement.

Looking at the quality of road construction in Meghalaya, any visitor would wonder why in Shillong city, the state capital roads should be laden with potholes and riding on them is equivalent to riding on horseback and dangerous for pregnant women and those with back problems. A shining (?) example is the road in Nongrim Hills which goes to the office of the Meghalaya Basin Management Authority (MBMA). Obviously, the PWD minister has never visited that office because he does not need to. But that has become an arterial road after the Nongrim Hills Dorbar for inexplicable reasons decided to convert the road adjacent to the office of the North Eastern Council (NEC) into a one-way route, obviously to allow for roadside parking alongside the NEC. If engineers of the Public Works Department (PWD) were to be marked on the basis of the roads which they certified to have been completed and which in six months are already pot-holed, they would all have failed the test of integrity, efficiency and professional competence. But so far no PWD engineer has ever been penalised for constructing poor quality roads or buildings and certifying them to have complied with all the norms stated in the compliance certificate given to the contractors. Should the MPSC not be held accountable for selecting such engineers?

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya's Cabinet Reshuffle: From Renewal to Regression

Editor,
The recent cabinet reshuffle in Meghalaya has been hailed by the government as a mid-term "reset." But let us strip away the rhetoric: this reshuffle is not about renewal, it is about regression. It is not about governance, it is about power. It is not a reset, it is a calculated gambit—where democracy bends to dynasty and matriliney is reduced to hollow folklore.
Consider the facts. For the first time in years, Meghalaya now has no women in the cabinet. Not one. In a state that flaunts its matrilineal identity to the world, the exclusion is deafening. Out of 60 MLAs, only four are women—barely 6%, well below the already shameful national average of 9%. By removing Ampareen Lyngdoh, the lone woman minister, the government has silenced women's voices at the very moment when Meghalaya faces a surge in crimes against women and children, rising domestic violence, and a worsening drug crisis. When the crisis is most acute, the cabinet

has chosen to erase those most affected from the table of power.
But the betrayal does not stop with gender. Three seats in the cabinet now belong to a single family—the Dhar dynasty—which controls 25% of the council of ministers. This is not just unusual, it is unprecedented anywhere in the country, perhaps the world. The Dhar clan already dominates the state's road and infrastructure contracts; now, with cabinet power in hand, they are poised to consolidate business and governance into a single dynasty-run enterprise. What we are witnessing is not representative democracy but crony capitalism dressed up as coalition politics. This is a corporate takeover of government by what many already call the "Dhar Company."
So let us be clear: this reshuffle is not about injecting momentum into governance. It is about entrenching dynasty and deepening monopoly. It excludes half the population while enriching a few. While families struggle to put food on the table, fight addiction in their homes, and protect their daughters from violence, the government has chosen to protect only dynasties and contracts.
Meghalaya deserves better than this dangerous fusion of patriarchy, dynasty, and crony capitalism. A state that prides itself on matriliney

Are Meghalaya's Education Laws Enabling Schools Or Excusing Failure?

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

It is essential to explore the intricate legal framework that shapes our educational landscape. By examining this framework, we can identify areas for improvement and advocate for meaningful changes that will enhance education in our region.

The Meghalaya School Education Act of 1981 serves as a reminder of legislative shortcomings. Its provisions are filled with interpretative gaps, making it more of a bureaucratic hindrance than a regulatory framework. Section 7 of this outdated statute grants the State Government the discretionary power to "pay to the Director, for distribution of aid to recognized, private schools, such sum of money as the Government may consider necessary."

This vague wording opens the door to arbitrary administrative decisions rather than ensuring educational equity. The structure of this legal instrument highlights a systematic distortion of communicative action within our educational public sphere, as Jürgen Habermas might point out. When legal language becomes so obscure that it hides institutional responsibility rather than clarifying it, we see a decline in the democratic potential of rational discourse in public policy formation, as conceptualized by Habermas.

Nowhere is the legal manipulation more apparent than in the artificial fragmentation scandal that has distorted our educational statistics into elaborate fiction. The recent discussion paper from the State Education Mission Authority reveals that out of the 14,582 schools officially recorded in Meghalaya, 6,702 are phantom entities—essentially the same institutions operating under different administrative categories to exploit multiple grant schemes.

This statistical manipulation highlights a significant enforcement gap in our legal framework. The Meghalaya School Education Act, established in 1981, does not include provisions to tackle such systematic exploitation of the system. Section 30 empowers officers "not below the rank of a Deputy Inspector of Schools" to inspect educational institutions; however, this oversight mechanism has proven woefully inadequate in the face of sophisticated administrative manipulation.

The constitutional irony is striking. Article 21A, introduced through the 86th Amendment in 2002, guarantees education as a fun-

damental right for children aged 6 to 14 years. Yet, our state's legal system has evolved into a rights-negating machinery, where the existence of paper schools actively undermines genuine access to education.

Meghalaya's disappointing Grade Akanshi-3 ranking in the Ministry of Education's Performance Grading Index, with a score of only 41.7, signifies more than just a statistical embarrassment; it reflects a constitutional crisis. The Youth Congress's description of this situation as a "humiliating verdict" only begins to address the more profound legal implications involved.

The Right to Education Act of 2009 mandates specific infrastructure and quality parameters for education, yet our legal enforcement mechanisms have proven to be fundamentally incapable of ensuring compliance with 21.7% of secondary school students dropping out of the system and 38.4% of enrollments still confined to government schools while the quality of education declines, we are facing not just a policy failure but a breakdown of our legal system.

The existence of multiple Grant-in-Aid schemes operating under various legal frameworks has resulted in a situation often described as an administrative "Tower of Babel." Schools under the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA), ad hoc schools, deficit schools, and private aided institutions each adhere to different legal regimes, creating regulatory confusion that serves no educational purpose while consuming significant administrative resources.

This fragmentation undermines fundamental principles of legal coherence. With 29% of schools in Meghalaya being government-aided—far surpassing the national average of 5%—we observe the state's abdication of direct responsibility, masked as a diversified provision. The legal framework allows for this evasion by failing to establish unified accountability standards across the various categories of schools.

India's educational jurisprudence has evolved significantly since 1950, when Article 45 of the Directive Principles promised free and compulsory education within ten years. This evolution reached a crucial milestone in 2002 when education was granted fundamental right

status under Article 21A. Over these seven decades, expectations about education have transitioned from aspirations to entitlements, which should have led to strong legal implementation mechanisms.

However, Meghalaya's legal framework remains outdated, rooted in pre-constitutional ideas. The Meghalaya School Education Act of 1981 was enacted nearly three decades before the Right to Education (RTE) Act came into effect. This earlier act reflects governance concepts that do not align with our current understanding of education as a justiciable right. The state's failure to thoroughly revise this foundational statute is a significant constitutional oversight.

Habermas's concept of the public sphere, where critical public debate shapes democratic opinion, stands in stark contrast to educational governance. The State Education Commission, established in 2023, functions with such a lack of transparency that the Youth Congress has called for complete transparency regarding its operations.

This breakdown in communication is evident in several ways. Nearly 500 unrecognized schools operate in a state of legal uncertainty, lacking proper accountability measures. Parents face a phenomenon that the Education Minister himself has termed "parental flight," as families are opting to send their children to institutions outside the state due to a collapse in local credibility of educational institutions.

The controversy surrounding the CM IMPACT guidebook involves allegations that SSLC examination questions were derived from materials distributed by the government. This situation highlights the normalization of academic fraud, where the state apparatus becomes complicit in what critics call "legalized cheating." As a result, we see a complete breakdown of educational integrity within the current legal framework.

This incident sheds light on a deeper structural issue: our legal system lacks strong quality assurance mechanisms. The sudden increase in SSLC examination pass rates to 87.10%, achieved through questionable methods, demonstrates how legal loopholes allow for administrative manipulation of educational outcomes.

The proposed Meghalaya Education Grant (MEG) framework, which emphasizes performance-based funding and institutional autonomy, represents a significant advancement toward what Habermas would identify as more communicatively rational governance. However, the effectiveness of this framework is contingent upon addressing the legal gaps that have permitted decades of systematic dysfunction within the education system.

Immediate legal interventions must encompass a comprehensive revision of the 1981 Act to ensure alignment with constitutional obligations; the establishment of a unified regulatory framework to eliminate arbitrary categorization of schools; the implementation of mandatory transparency mechanisms for all educational decision-making processes; and the development of enforceable quality standards accompanied by an opportunity for sight capabilities.

The invitation for public feedback regarding the MEG proposal, with a submission deadline set for May 31, 2025, offers a valuable opportunity for authentic democratic deliberation concerning educational governance. Nevertheless, the realization of this opportunity relies on legal frameworks that actively promote, rather than inhibit, communicative action.

As committed stakeholders, we must resolutely advocate for Meghalaya's legal framework that prioritizes learning above all else, rejecting bureaucratic convenience. We demand transparency that cuts through the fog of administrative opacity and assert democratic accountability that holds institutions responsible for their actions.

Through a decisive and communicative reconstruction of our legal foundations, we will transform the educational landscape of Meghalaya from its current state of dysfunction into a realm distinguished by constitutional integrity and exceptional pedagogy.

The fog may be dense, but we will dispel it. By shining a powerful light on the legal shadows that currently obstruct our children's educational futures, we will bring clarity and hope to their journeys. Together, we are poised to forge a brighter path forward!

(The writer is Advocate, Trade Unionist Ethicist and The Humanist Architect)

Formula 1: The World's Greatest Science Fair

By Mauryan Jaiswal

"But here comes Sebastian Vettel! He is neck and neck with Lewis Hamilton... Vettel is alongside and ahead!" roared commentator David Croft during the 2018 Belgian Grand Prix. In a fraction of a second, Vettel sped past four rivals at over 300 km/h. It looked like pure adrenaline, but behind the drama lies a world of science. Formula 1 is far more than cars speeding in circles – it's a massive innovation hub where physics, chemistry, data, and human nature intersect. Every race weekend, engineers and drivers push the limits of what's possible, and in doing so, they create technologies that shape the cars we drive, the buses we board, and even the fuels we may one day depend on.

At first glance, Formula 1 might seem like a simple car race: drive the fastest, finish first. But it is far more complex: Twenty drivers, split across ten teams, line up on the grid after a weekend of practice sessions and qualifying laps that set starting positions. Each race, or Grand Prix, lasts 90 minutes and covers more than 300 kilometres of track. Drivers must balance speed with strategy: managing tyres, fuel, and energy systems while battling rivals wheel-to-wheel. Teams can call drivers into the pits for fresh tyres or repairs, and the timing of these stops often decides whether a driver finishes first or last! Race incidents and weather changes add more variables. But how will all of this happen if not for the engineering going on behind the scenes?

In Formula 1, air is not an obstacle – it's a tool. Cars are designed so that airflow presses them into the track due to a force called downforce (the downward push generated by air moving over the car's wings and body). Imagine holding your hand out of a moving car window: tilt it slightly, and you feel the air push it downward. F1 cars do this on a massive scale. At top speed, they generate enough downforce to drive upside down in a tunnel!

For drivers, this invisible force has very visible effects. In fast corners, they experience up to 6G of force. That's six times their body weight pressing them into their seats! A driver weighing 70 kilograms suddenly feels like 420 kilograms! Over a race, drivers can lose two to three kilograms of their body weight! To drive even faster, drivers can activate the Drag Reduction System (DRS) on certain sections of the track. It is a flap on the rear wing that, upon opening, reduces drag and gives the car a burst of speed for overtaking. It will be renamed to Manual Override Mode (MOM) from the 2026 season.

Thus, aerodynamics doesn't just keep the car fast. It turns the cockpit into a high-gravity machine where every turn and increase in speed both push the limits of physics and test human endurance.

Now for a little history: from the 1950s to the early 2000s, Formula 1 cars consumed a lot of fuel. Fast forward to today, and they're some of the most advanced hybrid machines on the planet! At the heart of each car is a relatively small 1.6-litre turbocharged engine—about the size you'd find in an ordinary family car. What makes F1 power units so special is the electrical system that works with the engine.

These cars can capture energy that would normally be wasted and released as harmful emissions and store some of that energy in a battery upon braking. In past seasons, even the heat from the exhaust was turned into extra power. Drivers can then tap into this stored energy for a quick burst of speed.

The result? F1 engines are among the most efficient in the world, converting half of their fuel into usable power! By comparison, most road cars manage much less. And the innovations first proven on

F1 tracks, such as regenerative braking (using energy from braking to recharge batteries), are now found in hybrid cars, electric cars, and even city buses we use every day, for example, in BMW's recent vehicles like the iX.

At over 300 km/h, safety is always top priority. Formula 1 cars are built around a carbon fibre

monocoque, a single-shell protective structure around the driver. It's so strong that it can withstand massive crashes while weighing less than a passenger door. The use of carbon fibre in F1 since the 1980s has transformed safety, making cars both lighter and more protective. The halo, a titanium frame placed above the cockpit, was introduced in 2018. It adds even more security around the driver's head and has already saved more lives than an earler.

Behind the scenes, Formula 1 is as much about computers as cars. Each car has numerous sensors, transmitting thousands of data points every second: tyre temperatures, fuel levels, steering inputs, wind direction, and even the driver's heartbeat! This high volume of data is sent back to engineers on the pit wall and at team headquarters, which is miles away. Advanced simulations, computational fluid dynamics (CFD) (computer models of airflow over the car), and even artificial intelligence are being

used to guide strategy. AI can predict when a rival might pit or whether it will rain mid-race, allowing teams to react in seconds. Even fans benefit from this technology. Television broadcasts now feature "ghost cars", digital overlays comparing drivers' laps in real time. In Formula 1, data isn't just numbers; it's the difference between winning and losing.

If aerodynamics keeps cars glued to the track and engines provide power, tyres translate it into motion.

They look simple but are complex chemical compounds. Supplied by Pirelli, each tyre type behaves differently. Soft tyres are like sprinting shoes: very grippy but wear quickly. Medium tyres balance performance and durability. Hard tyres last longest but offer less grip. On wet days, teams use

intermediates (light rain) or full wets (deep grooves for standing water). Tyre management is tricky: too cold, they slide; too hot, the rubber tears. Drivers and engineers must gamble on timing, sometimes deciding races with a single pit stop.

For all its excitement, Formula 1 has faced criticism for its environmental impact. In response, the sport has committed to achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2030. A major step is the introduction of

100% sustainable fuels in 2026, which could reshape not only racing but also the broader transport sector. Formula 1 recognises it cannot remain relevant by ignoring the climate challenge. Instead, it aims to prove that even the fastest and most robust sport in the world can be sustainable by developing technology that can be used to create cleaner everyday vehicles in the future.

Formula 1 is often cited as pure entertainment. But peel back the layers, and it becomes something more profound: a proving ground for science and engineering under extreme pressure. Every car is an experiment, every lap a test, every race a showcase of human ingenuity. Aerodynamics keeps cars on track, hybrid systems recycle energy, data predicts strategy, and materials save lives – all with real world impacts beyond racing. Formula 1 may crown champions in champagne ceremonies, but its true prize is innovation. It is, and always will be, the world's biggest and greatest science fair.

(The author- Mauryan Jaiswal is First Year B.Tech student at Plaksha University, Mohali)

cannot silence women. A democracy cannot afford to hand over a quarter of its cabinet to one family. And a people struggling with unemployment, addiction, and insecurity cannot survive under a government that puts family before fairness, and contracts before citizens.

This reshuffle will not be remembered as renewal—it will be remembered as betrayal. Meghalaya deserves leaders, not landlords of power.

Yours etc.,

Khlor Basan,

Shillong – 5

Concerns Over Quality of MPSC SDO/ Assistant Engineer Examination

Editor,
Recently, the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) conducted a written examination for recruitment to the post of Sub-Divisional Officer/Assistant Engineer in the Public Health Engineering and Public Works Departments. However, the examination has raised serious concerns among candidates and stakeholders alike regarding its quality and fairness.

Several issues have come to light. Firstly, one of the questions was found to be repeated twice in the same paper, reflecting a lack of proper scrutiny in question-setting. Moreover, the standard of the questions was observed to be below the expected level for such a competitive examination. Candidates reported that no numerical or problem-solving questions were included (not to forget that MPSC recently published a notification that for such examinations, candidates are allowed to bring scientific calculators), thereby failing to assess the analytical skills and technical proficiency that are crucial for engineers in these departments.

Adding to these concerns, certain questions were reportedly found to be outside the prescribed syllabus (Docks and Harbor Engineering, Airport Engineering, etc.), further undermining the credibility of the test. For an examination meant to recruit officers to key technical positions, such shortcomings raise doubts about the evaluation process and its ability to identify deserving candidates. It can also be viewed that multiple questions were asked from the tiniest portion of the syllabus (3 questions just on meta-centric height, 5 questions on super-elevation) in spite of having ample options to select or make questions out of. Additionally, one of

the questions was found to be wrong wherein, correct answer was not given in the options (Q.133 of Series I – The value of Reynold's number for Laminar flow through soil is (correct answer should be Less Than 1). But the given options were (a. less than 20000, b. less than 2000, c. less than 200, d. less than 20)

If such a trend continues, there is a genuine risk that the departments may fail to recruit engineers of the highest calibre. The PHE and PWD deal with critical infrastructure, water supply, and public works that directly affect the lives of citizens. Without a fair and rigorous selection process, the departments may not be able to attract and appoint the kind of competent engineers needed to ensure quality service delivery and long-term development.

In light of these issues, there is an urgent demand for the MPSC to initiate an expert review of the examination. Senior officers from the PHE and PWD, along with respected academicians, should be involved in assessing the quality and relevance of the question paper. If lapses are confirmed, the Commission must consider re-conducting the examination with improved standards that truly reflect the knowledge and capabilities required for the posts.

Ensuring transparency

and fairness in recruitment is vital to uphold public confidence in the system. Aspiring engineers deserve to be tested through a rigorous, fair, and meaningful examination that matches the high responsibilities of the post.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,

Via email

MBoSE why this!!

Editor,
Last month the personal Interview for the posts of Lower Divisional Assistant-cum-Computer Operator scheduled to be held on the 25th, 26th and 27th of August-2025, was suddenly postponed without giving any specific reasons. Till date there's no news as to when the same will be held. Why this delay? Cannot MBoSE conduct the interview for only 100+ candidates? Why keep the candidates in a dilemma or is there no qualified interviewer(s). Whatever the case, let's hope this delay will not give space for manipulation.

Yours etc.,

R.G. Phankon,

Via email

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

**"Courageous people do not fear
forgiving, for the sake of peace."
—Nelson Mandela**

The Shillong Times

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Polls as barometer

WITH the BJP announcing its election in-charges for Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, the stage is set for the assembly polls in the above states — starting with Bihar in November, followed by polls in Assam, West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry next year. While there's no sign yet of implementing the 'one-nation, one election' plan of Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, several more rounds of assembly polls would take place in each of the coming years until 2029 when the next parliament polls are scheduled. Assembly elections in the main battleground state of Uttar Pradesh would take place in 2027, alongside Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Gujarat, Manipur and Goa. These would form the initial build-up for the next parliamentary polls.

The drag in the plan to hold elections nationwide in one go, so as to save precious funds for the exchequer means that such a decision is not easy to implement, considering the huge preparations involved in the exercise. But, where there's a will, there's a way. The will, however, is lacking. The panel on unified polls, formed by the central government in September 2023 and headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind, submitted its report in March 2024. This was not followed through to its logical conclusion. In a way, however, periodic election exercises across states at different times have their advantages. For one, the results are a barometer to gauge public mood vis-à-vis national and regional politics. This is all the more important now, as there are perceptions that the stocks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi — the central figure that boosts the election prospects of the BJP — are falling. Two recent opinion polls on the PM's popularity showed Modi has not been able to sustain his approval levels. The last parliament polls had seen a substantial fall in the NDA seats in the Lok Sabha. With the BJP-led alliance failing to get a majority, Modi had to draw in the parties of his past enemies — Bihar's Nitish Kumar and AP's Chandrababu Naidu — to cobble a majority for his national alliance to form the next government. It was a touch-and-go situation, but the PM extricated himself from the critical situation by ensuring the support of the JDU and Telugu Desam and by giving them prime portfolios.

The coming assembly elections would show how the BJP, the Congress, and their allies would perform in state polls. By swiftly announcing poll in-charges for states like TN that would have elections next year, the BJP makes it clear that it cannot afford to be complacent anymore. However, its failure to fill the top slots in the party, including that of the national chief, who's on extension, shows all's not well within the saffron edifice. On the other hand, a down-and-out Congress party is keen on giving a good fight to the BJP as is evident from Rahul Gandhi's campaign against the ECI's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar and elsewhere. The Congress is allying with regional heavyweights in both UP and Bihar.

"Boom in the Hills, Windfall at the Border"

By Lalkholen Kipgen

Meghalaya — renowned for its picturesque landscapes and distinctive social and topographical set up has become a magnet for adventure enthusiasts from across India and beyond. Often called the "Abode of Clouds," the state offers enthralling vistas, countless caves, lofty waterfalls and peaks, and unique tabletop plateaus cloaked in thick forest canopies that shelter a rich diversity of flora and fauna. It is also home to distinct tribes such as the Khasis, Garos, and Jaintias, the only matrilineal society in the region, an aspect that adds a unique cultural dimension for visitors.

Dotted with more than 100 tourist destinations, Meghalaya caters to niche interests ranging from adventure activities to immersive rural experiences. Its signature draws include Mawlynnong the "cleanest village," the living root bridges, Nongkhnum Island, and the Meghalaya Age Cave, which features on UNESCO's World Heritage Tentative List.

Tourism as a Growth Driver

Tourism drive in Meghalaya has surged over the years. In 2024, the state recorded about 16 lakh visitors, a 33 percent jump from the pre-COVID figure of 12 lakh. The government expects footfall to touch 20 lakhs in 2025, buoyed by an ambitious year-long calendar of music and adventure events. Tourism is now considered a key economic driver and the state's second-largest employer, providing direct jobs to more than 50,000 people.

A major catalyst of this spike is Meghalaya's flagship "festival tourism." Events such as the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival have become national (even international) attractions. In November 2024, the Cherry Blossom Music Festival drew more than 50,000 attendees each day, a staggering footfall for a two-day event. By leveraging cultural assets such as music, art, cuisine and natural beauty, the state's "concert economy" is paying off. Recent figures indicate that a public investment of ₹23.5 crore in events generated ₹133.5 crore in economic impact, with festivals contributing nearly 5 percent of annual tourist footfall. The spillover benefits were captured by communities and hospitality providers during the festive season. Meghalaya's soft power i.e. its music and cultural festivals are clearly driving hard economics, lifting arrivals and lengthening stays.

The Cross-Border Windfall

Amid this celebratory upswing, a curious anomaly has emerged: a significant slice of tourism revenue is spilling across the border and enriching Meghalaya's immediate neighbour. The reason lies in persistent connectivity bottlenecks that savvy op-

erators next door have been quick to exploit.

The Connectivity Conundrum: Despite its enormous potential, Meghalaya lacks robust air and no rail connectivity, forcing most visitors to enter via Assam. Shillong's lone airport at Umroi has limited direct flights. There is no railway line to Shillong; the nearest major railhead and the nearest international airport are in Guwahati. In effect, Guwahati is Meghalaya's gateway. Tourists typically fly into Lokpriya Gopinath Bordoloi Airport or arrive at Guwahati Junction, then continue by road into the hills. This default route shows Meghalaya's record footfall first lands in Assam and therein lies the rub.

Once travellers disembark in Assam, immediate logistics, taxis, tour arrangements are often handled by Assam-based operators. Improved highways have eased the onward journey, but the absence of direct links into Meghalaya gives Assam an outsized advantage as the transit hub. The result is economic leakage: a large share of tourist spending on transport and transit accommodation accrues to Assam rather than Meghalaya. A typical family flying into Guwahati will hire an Assam-registered taxi for the airport-to-Shillong trip and back, paying substantial fares that never reach Meghalaya's drivers. With 16-20 lakh tourists expected annually, this translates into crores of rupees flowing to Assam's transport sector. Meanwhile, Meghalaya's transport infrastructure has not kept pace with tourism growth. New homestays and hotels are coming up but getting visitors into the state still depends heavily on Assam's facilities.

Plugging the Leaks

How can Meghalaya retain more of the value created by its tourism boom? A holistic, pragmatic approach is needed — one that improves connectivity while empowering local transport services. The following measures would help:

- * Enhance interstate transport cooperation. In the interim, negotiate arrangements at entry points to share tourist traffic more fairly. For example, set up official Meghalaya Tourism taxi counters at Guwahati Airport and railway station so visitors can opt for Meghalaya-registered cabs or shuttle buses. Coordination with Assam authorities and taxi unions will be essential but would ensure a fairer share for Meghalaya's drivers even on Assam soil.
- * Accelerate direct connectivity. Fast-track the expansion of Shillong (Umroi) Airport and explore a greenfield airport within the state. Longer runways and more direct flights from major metro cities would let tourists fly straight into Shillong. Like-

wise, resolve the long-pending rail link from Guwahati to Shillong (via Bymohat). Concerns about migration can be addressed through protective regulations; improved physical connectivity is non-negotiable if Meghalaya wants to capture the full value of its tourist traffic.

- * Increase local transport capacity. Incentivize more locals to operate tourist transport. Offer subsidies or easy loans for premium tourist taxis and vans, and organize the fleet through an official booking website to enable advance reservations. A steady addition of 50-100 taxis a year, backed by entrepreneurial support, would gradually reduce reliance on outside vehicles.
- * Leverage technology and integration. Partner with travel portals so visitors heading to Shillong can pre-book Meghalaya-based cabs and tours. A government-endorsed app or website that allows a traveller in Delhi to book a Shillong operator for pickup at Guwahati Airport would keep more business local. Ensure Meghalaya operators are present on major aggregators.

None of these steps should foster hostility toward out-of-state taxis. The goal is to empower Meghalaya's workforce to participate fully in the boom. Tourism can be a rising tide for the Northeast but so far Meghalaya's tide is lifting more of its neighbour's boats. The solution is not to sink those boats, but to launch more Meghalaya boats.

Conclusion

Meghalaya's tourism surge shows that even remote states can become major destinations with the right vision. But booming footfall does not automatically translate into optimal local benefit. Without supportive infrastructure and policies, economic gains can slip to the nearest transit hub. As the state gears up for even higher arrivals, it must urgently address the gaps that allow its "hills of plenty" to be tapped sub-optimally.

Recent moves such as increasing homestay subsidies and training "tourist buddies" are commendable. Equally crucial, however, are the less glamorous investments: airports, rail lines, bus terminals, taxi stands, and better inter-departmental coordination and regulation. These will facilitate inflow, prevent economic spillage, and generate employment for local communities.

Ultimately, tourism should be a tool for sustainable development of the host community. Meghalaya's aim should be that every visitor who marvels at its waterfalls, living root bridges or music festivals leaves behind more than footprints a tangible economic footprint in the state itself. With pragmatic connectivity upgrades and

cooperative regional policies, the Northeast can turn a tourist boom into a boon for local livelihoods. Meghalaya's hills are alive with opportunity; it's time to ensure prosperity echoes through its own valleys, not just across the border.

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CAA Protests not Communal — Unpacking Umar Khalid's Bail Rejection Order

By Vedant Chaudhury

Earlier this month, Umar Khalid and Sharjeel Imam, the prime accused in orchestrating the Delhi Riots of 2020 were denied bail by the Hon'ble Delhi High Court. In its elaborate common judgment the Delhi High Court decided on the bail application of a number of other student leaders co-accused in the Delhi Riots. Bail to the accused was denied primarily since in the view of the court, from the chargesheet it was apparent that the accused had participated in exciting communal tensions, which finally culminated in communal violence. This piece breaks down the context of the word "communal" and argues that raising awareness amongst Muslims against the CAA should not be regarded as an act intended to spread communal tensions.

While recording its reasons for denying bail the court has referred to section 43D(5) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 (UAPA); which provides that any person accused of an offence under the UAPA would be denied bail where the chargesheet shows a prima facie case against the accused. In simpler words, if the chargesheet of filed by the prosecution makes out a case against the accused, and to the Court it appears apparent that the accused has committed an offence, then bail shall not be granted.

The case made out against both Umar Khalid and Khalid is that they were involved in the creation of "communal groups" on WhatsApp, and engaged in mobilizing of Muslims across the country. The prosecution has sought to establish before the court a chain of events showing that Umar Khalid and Umar were actively involved in reaching out to student communities, specifically student bodies at universities.

The prosecution has pointed out that Umar had visited the Jamia Millia Islamia University and the Aligarh Muslim University, both minority institutions for Muslims to mobilize the support of Muslim students, thus clearly establish communal motive on part of the accused. Further, the accused distributed pamphlets and gave speeches in Muslim majority localities across Delhi. Accused also visited cities with Muslim majority population where the gave speeches to mobilize Muslims.

The prosecution also alleges that the accused were instrumental in creating a number of communal groups, for example on 04.12.2019, a group by the name "Muslim Students of Jamia" was created by the accused, a similar WhatsApp group was created by the name "Muslim Stu-

dents of JNU 1", to mobilize Muslim students to protest. The prosecution presents this evidence to establish that the present case is one with a strong "communal" undertone, which the court cannot fail to consider.

All the evidence alleged above is yet to be established by the prosecution before the Trial Court. However even if all the evidence of the prosecution is accepted, their case suffers from two fatal flaws.

The Delhi Riots were a culmination of the peaceful protests that had been ongoing in Delhi since the passing of the Citizenship Amendment Bill, 2019 by the Parliament. The Bill, (now an Act) in effected granted accelerated citizenship to Hindu, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis, Jains and Buddhists who had entered India from Afghanistan, Pakistan, or Bangladesh on or before 31 December, 2014.

The act, although apparently benign, was fundamentally discriminatory towards Muslims. Thus evidently, the act had a disproportionate impact on Muslims, instantly relegating them to the position of a "second-class citizen". Since Muslims had been singularly impacted by the law, it was only logical to expect that Muslims would be the most proactive, to protest against the same. In this context, the accused making specific groups for Muslims students to participate in protests, or the accused reaching out to Muslim population across India must not be seen as an act to divide the country on the lines of religion, but rather as an act to consolidate raise awareness of an unjust law within that segment of society that would be most impacted by it.

The Delhi Riots took place in 2020, the accused in the case have been in detention for nearly five years, without any hopes of being released soon.

The riots will remain etched as one of the most cruel and violent days in the history of independent India. It is difficult to erase the memories of the riot from the minds of people who watched the violence transpire. In such an event, it becomes easy to direct public anguish on a few scapegoats, and parade them as an emblem of the riots, as their mastermind, or orchestrators. There can be no denying that prima facie it appears that the accused called for peaceful protest against a law, but it would be unfair to blame the accused for violence that ensued as a consequence of many other factors.

Letters to the Editor

Mental Illness Is Not Madness

Editor,

Cinema, literature, and even public policy in the West remind us again and again that mental illness is real, human, and treatable. In the United States and Europe, despite gaps and stigma, there exists at least a framework of care—insurance covers therapy and psychiatric medication, assertive community treatment teams provide long-term support, and individual placement and support helps patients find jobs rather than remain sidelined on disability pensions. In Italy, the Basaglia Law abolished asylums entirely, ensuring no one is locked away for life. Contrast this with India, where mental illness is still a nameless curse. Here, a patient is too often branded simply as "mad"—a word that erases their identity and

denies them treatment.

Consider the reality of these disorders. Schizophrenia is not "madness"; it is distorted thoughts, hallucinations, and delusions, demanding medical care. Borderline Personality Disorder is not "drama," but an exhausting instability of mood and identity. Eating disorders are perhaps most invisible in India: anorexia nervosa is not "dieting," but starving the body to escape imagined flaws; bulimia is not "overeating," but a cycle of bingeing and purging that wrecks both body and mind; pica is not "fussiness," but the compulsion to eat substances that are not food. Catatonia—when a person freezes into silence or immobility—is not laziness. Depression is not weakness. OCD is not perfectionism. PTSD is not an overreaction. And yet, what makes this worse is how lightly these words are thrown around today—content creators' joke about being "so OCD" because

they like neatness, or "so depressed" because of a bad day, or "traumatized" after a trivial event. These casual misuses trivialize the very real suffering of patients who fight these disorders every single day.

This is not only ignorance but a "collective failure" of emotional intelligence. In India, the poor and middle class are left stranded—no consistent therapy, no psychiatric follow-ups, no social support. The wealthy may afford medication or private counseling, but even then, families hide the diagnosis in shame. The result is silence, abandonment, or exile to the streets.

As a medical student and as someone who believes empathy is as important as knowledge, I feel the government of India must step forward. If the West can integrate mental health into everyday systems of care, why can't we? Psychiatric treatment and therapy should be covered by insurance the same way heart disease or

cancer is. We need mobile community treatment teams that reach villages and small towns, not just metro hospitals. Patients should be supported to find work, to build dignity and independence, rather than being left to survive on scraps or pity. General hospitals must have strong psychiatric wings but never prisons in the name of care. And above all, our schools, colleges, and workplaces must talk openly about mental health—because stigma can only be broken when knowledge becomes common.

Mental illness is not rare, not foreign, and not shameful. It lives in every city, every village, every home. Until we replace stigma with science, and silence with support, India's mentally ill will remain unseen, unheard, and uncared for. A nation that prides itself on progress cannot leave its most vulnerable behind.

Yours etc.,
Akhil Dwivedi,
Via email

What Zubeen's departure teaches us about life

Editor,

When the news of Zubeen Garg's sudden death reached us, it felt as if the sky over Assam, nay the Northeast, had lost its light. The man who sang in forty languages, who gave us more than thirty-eight thousand songs, who can play a dozen instruments, was suddenly gone. No warning, no encore!

The crowd that gathered to say goodbye was unprecedented, believed to be the fourth-largest public funeral gathering. Of course, it was a tide of grief, roar of emotion, a chorus of hearts once lifted by his musical talent. It was living proof that one's true wealth lies not in possessions, but in love, it inspires!

Well, Zubeen was in Singapore, not for leisurely fun, but for a purpose — very

momentous event, representing the Northeast as Cultural Brand Ambassador. It was a mission filled with pride, joy and festivity, of course with great expectation. Yet fate interrupted. The sea of uncertainty claimed him with a cruel jolt. Yes, life never asks before it snatches a breath. It moves on its own rhythm, its own principles untouched by our narrow plans and ambitions! Didn't Meghalayans bid farewell to our beloved DD Lapang about a fortnight ago? How can we forget Meghalaya's musical maestro, Neil Nongkynrih, who departed far too soon, leaving behind only a silence that still echoes?

What an irony indeed and it's almost laughable that we live in this world as if we're immortal. We plan, we hoard, we argue over petty issues with the air of arrogance. But the great truth is, we all came here with a return ticket. No one knows when it's due. It could be today, it could be tomorrow, or in a hundred years — though that's very rare. Yet we behave as if it's all in our

control. Even the food we painstakingly prepare and enjoy with our tiny two-inch taste buds slips beyond our control the moment we swallow it. Just think, what if the liver forgets to secrete its enzymes, or the heart misses a beat? Some enigmatic forces are at work. We breathe, we blink, we digest — all without command. This inner machinery runs, but who really holds the remote? Sorry for this digression.

In my eyes, Zubeen's last journey was more than a farewell. It was a reminder, a solemn whisper. A lesson delivered directly from existence itself — that none can negate death. Despite his fame, his genius, his wealth, he left empty-handed, as all must. At the end of the day what truly endures is not what we accumulate, but what we radiate — the love we sow, the joy and compassion we scatter, and the legacy we leave behind.

Hence, if we understand this impermanence of our existence, would we still cling to envy, anger, arrogance, or

greed? Or would we learn to choose kindness over ego, forgiveness over pride? Would we not pause and ask — what are we really fighting for, when all battles end at the same shore?

So let us not mourn him with emotion today only to forget him tomorrow. Show respect to him, and to all our beloved ones who have left us, by choosing to live better lives and by remembering that life is a gifted breath from some uncanny power. We can offer each moment as a quiet tribute to the eternal rhythm that moves us all. Therefore, strive to awaken before the mysterious force of time drowns us without notice. Make a sincere effort to correct our course while the compass of conscience still responds.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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"Action springs not from thought, but from a readiness for responsibility."

— G. M. Trevelyan

The Shillong Times

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Of Ethnocentric Biases

THE Hynniewtrep Integrated Territorial Organisation (HITO), another pressure group claiming to fight for the rights of the Hynniewtrep people in a state of many ethnic communities that have co-existed in the State of Meghalaya is presumptuous to say: the least. The word Hynniewtrep is essentially used to play mind games with ordinary people who don't stop to think about the consequences of such divisive politics. The latest demand by HITO is that the recent cabinet reshuffle should have seen the exit of Chief Minister Conrad Sangma and he being replaced by a Khäsi or Jaintia MLA. In a world that's turning global and relationships are built over continents, courtesy the digital technology it is ridiculous to suggest that even the chief ministerial post should be rotated. The question is whether this is HITO's own agenda or that of forces working behind the scenes.

Political observers will agree that the MDA 1&2 government has taken several initiatives in the area of Health, Tourism, Industry and that the Government has engaged with the issues plaguing education in the state. Education comes with a huge backlog since the problems have been allowed to simmer instead of being tackled head on. Ghost schools were allowed to function due to political pressure. The condition of several schools in the State but more so in Garo Hills is pathetic. The MDA-2 Government has at least publicly acknowledged the existence of such schools and will be pushed to take action. The Opposition should have rightly demanded that such schools be closed down at once but such discussions did not feature during the Assembly sessions. The three tribes agreed to jointly fight for statehood and on certain agreed terms. Hence the job Reservation Policy with 40:40:20 ratio came up and is still working. The idea was to allow a space where the three tribes would arrive at a point where they are equally competent. Just as the Constitution mandates that the Reservation Policy at the national level should be revisited every ten years, the leaders of Meghalaya then should have agreed on a similar agreement. But revising the Policy requires evidence-based research to establish if the Garo community has come at par with the Khasi-Jaintia people.

To drag the Reservation Policy into the realm of politics is an overreach that is better disregarded. The NPP is today in the majority with 33 MLAs and does not really need parties with 2 MLAs to support the Government, but keeping in mind the fluid coalition politics of Meghalaya, CM Conrad Sangma has tread cautiously so as not to offend the coalition partners. Politics has its constraints and only those in the rough and tumble of it can grasp its pitfalls. Politics means having to accommodate the whims of those who manage the Party's finances. This is certainly not an ideal arrangement and it happens because elections cost money. If the influence of money power is reduced, carpetbaggers will have no place in politics. Ideally the most competent, no matter from which tribe should run the government. Its time to free our minds of ethnocentric biases.

Where are the Women at the Table?

By Warimeki Lyngwa

Yesterday over tea, a friend and I were proudly talking about how lucky we are to live in Meghalaya, a state where women are respected, where lineage runs through mothers, where daughters also inherit property, and where clan names are passed down through women. And then my friend asked the one question that pulled the rug from under my pride: "If women are so central here, why are they not in politics?"

I froze. Because the answer was as obvious as it was embarrassing: nowhere near the cabinet table. That simple question sent me looking back into our own history.

It is not as if women here never led. Women from the Northeast joined the Non-Cooperation, Civil Disobedience, and Quit India movements alongside men during the freedom struggle. In 1937, Shillong's own Mavis Dunn (Lyngdoh) made history as the first woman elected to the Assam Assembly. By 1939, she entered the Assam Cabinet and is widely described as the first woman cabinet minister in India. Yet today, 86 years after Dunn broke that ceiling, the state of Meghalaya boasts a cabinet with not one woman in it. Clearly, it does seem women have not been given enough opportunities since.

Whenever someone raises this question, the response is consistently the same: coalition politics are complex. Regional balance, party equations, stability: all of it gets cited. But it leaves one uneasy thought hanging... are women somehow seen as a destabilizing factor?

After the latest reshuffle, what was cited was that changes were about balancing districts, honouring coalition partners, and making what is called a "midterm course correction." That is fair enough, I feel. However, it is important to acknowledge that the induction of new faces inevitably leads to on-the-job learning. Some of the new ministers are stepping into responsibilities they have never held before. Which begs the obvious question: if the system can accommodate newcomers who will inevitably learn governance as they go, why not extend the same opportunity to a woman legislator? After all, we have had women in politics here who have proven themselves more than capable.

And yet the numbers tell a sobering story. Since 1972, women's representation has never crossed single digits in the Assembly. Even in 2023, just three women were elected out of 60 MLAs. A later by-election raised the

number to four, still only 6.7 percent. Contrast that with the voter rolls: women consistently outnumber men in Meghalaya's electorate. The latest rolls list 1,028 women for every 1,000 men. Therefore, it begs us to question... women vote more, they turn out more, so why are they being excluded from positions of power?

It does not help when defenders of the status quo add insult to injury. A recent write-up defending the cabinet reshuffle was headlined, "No Seats at the Table, But Plenty in the Field." It argued that as long as women benefit from schemes, SHGs, and welfare initiatives, their absence in the cabinet is not a crisis but a temporary phase. Such an argument is almost laughable. That is equivalent to stating: "Do not be concerned if women are prohibited from entering the kitchen; at least they

as 'Kong Kei', showed how women in leadership can truly reshape institutions. She strengthened police infrastructure in far-flung districts, brought more women into the force, took on drug abuse and youth crime, and always balanced tough decisions with a humane touch. So, the evidence is overwhelming: once women enter the room, they do not sit quietly as tokens, but they legislate, they negotiate, and they deliver.

The lesson running through all these examples is unmistakable. When women enter decision-making, the agenda shifts. Health, education, and welfare, which men sometimes dismiss as "soft issues", reveal themselves as the hard spine of real development.

So no, it is not enough to say women "get enough from the field." They must also decide what the field

"Welfare is not power. Self-help groups are not ministries. Access to schemes is not the same as access to decision-making. Cabinet seats matter because they decide the size of those schemes, the scale of budgets, and the direction of policy."

are provided for outside the door." And if food is a metaphor, dear gentleman 'Jack', then you should know this: when women finally sit at the table, they do not just take what is served. They change the menu.

And here is why it matters. Research by Chattopadhyay & Duflo (2004) shows that Panchayats led by women invested more in water, sanitation, and in some cases education. In Bihar, women once dismissed as "proxies" grew into formidable leaders who reshaped village politics. Globally, Rwanda rose from genocide to having the highest percentage of women MPs in the world, and with it came transformative laws on inheritance and gender violence. Bangladesh, once considered socially conservative, has produced women prime ministers. Mexico just elected its first woman president, Claudia Sheinbaum, thanks to systematic quotas that required parties to field equal numbers of male and female candidates. In Europe, France mandates zipper rules for some elections, while parties in Sweden and Spain have long adopted "zipped" lists to ensure male and female candidates alternate on ballots. If we look no further than our own state, Roshan Warjri fondly known

looks like. Welfare is not power. Self-help groups are not ministries. Access to schemes is not the same as access to decision-making. Cabinet seats matter because they decide the size of those schemes, the scale of budgets, and the direction of policy. Keeping women out of that room means their empowerment will always remain conditional, filtered through someone else's priorities. Call that "stability" if you like. But let us be honest that it is stability for the men who still keep the keys to the cabinet.

And it is not as though the leadership has been blind to this truth. Our chief minister, known to be just and wise, once said, "Women leadership implies creation of agency for women that will enable them to take decisions and participate in the developmental process..." These words ring in my head today. If we agree, then a cabinet seat, one of the highest agencies of power, is exactly where women should be. This is why many of us will deeply miss seeing a woman leader in the cabinet today.

So what are the fixes? Honestly, in my opinion, they are not out of reach or drastic. Start by giving tickets.

Women cannot possibly win elections if parties do not even put them on the EVM panel in the first place. Yes, some studies point out that women seem reluctant to contest elections. But let us be honest about why. It is not that women do not care about politics. It is that they are weighed down by household responsibilities or raised in the belief that politics is a man's world. This mindset has prevented many women in Meghalaya from being considered serious decision-makers.

However, the solution does not lie in simply dismissing their lack of interest. The answer is to create the same kind of support system men receive. Mentor them. Train them. Push them forward. Encourage them to step into leadership with the same energy parties use for their male candidates.

Most importantly I feel, the government needs to set an example by giving women today more space and power, as leaders who shape decisions. Because when young people, whether Gen Z or even us millennial (if it is not too late for some of us), see women standing tall in politics, it sparks something. It tells a girl somewhere that it is not too late to dream bigger, and it reminds a boy that leadership is not just a man's world. That is how examples are set, and that is how change begins.

When you do all these, we will see women rise. Because opportunity does not just reveal talent, it builds it. And until we build that pathway, all the talk about "agency" will just be chatter.

In the end, women of Meghalaya are everywhere, be it in our markets, our homes, our offices, and on the voter rolls. They have been freedom fighters, legislators, and even ministers (once upon a time). What they lack is not capability but opportunity. We call ourselves matrilineal, but until women sit at the cabinet table, it is nothing more than a slogan: a tourism tagline with no political teeth.

If we can gamble with coalition experiments every two and a half years, surely, we can dare to experiment with inclusivity once. Naveen Patnaik showed courage in Odisha by fielding 33% women candidates, including housewives, and proved that women win when given a fair chance. Meghalaya can do the same and make cabinet berths reflect the diversity of the state's electorate.

Because if women are everywhere in the field, why are they still missing from the main table?

Time for re-ruralization

By Barnes Mawrie

It is said that about 92% of Japan's population lives in cities leaving the rural areas deserted and uninhabited. In fact, the government is offering financial incentives to push the population back to the rural areas. This phenomenon is very much observed in Northeast India especially in the tribal states. In Mizoram almost 60% of the population is located in Aizawl city alone. The 2011 census shows that the rural population of Meghalaya stands at 79.9% while the urban population is over 20%. However, considering the fact that Meghalaya like most tribal states in the region, has only one actual metropolitan city, Shillong, this urban percentage is a matter of concern. Besides this, the migration from the rural areas to the city of Shillong is gaining momentum from year to year. The census of East Khasi Hills district indicates 55.6% of rural population and 44.4% urban population. This proves that our city of Shillong is overpopulated. This is the reason why we experience so much of adverse impact in the city.

Extreme urbanization has led to deforestation of large areas. It is enough to drive along the New Shillong area and one can witness the fast disappearance of forests due to the construction of new residences. We will not be surprised to see this area devoid of green cover in the course of a few years. How unfortunate, when we see Bhutan which is already a minus zero CO2 emitting country, is still planting thousands of tree saplings, we in Meghalaya who are experiencing rising temperature and CO2 increase, we still continue to deplete our forests. We all know that trees give out oxygen and absorb CO2 and so by cutting down trees we are deprived of the double benefit. Unchecked urbanization also leads to overpopulation which consequently increases traffic congestion.

Shillong is witnessing a very fast growth of automobiles while our roads remain the same. As a matter of fact, today there is no corner of the city which is not busy and there is no by-road which is traffic free. Shillong has reached a point of traffic saturation and if urbanization continues, we may need to go back to perambulation and park our vehicles at home. The growing migration of rural youth to the city is another factor that contributes to congestion. Many of them are drawn either by a pursuit of better education, by quick buck or by the glamour of city life itself. Many of these youths who are unable to

find jobs finally end up in anti-social activities. Some of them become drug addicts or alcoholics, others become thieves and robbers while not a few of them are engaged in prostitution.

It is time for the government to think seriously on the policy of re-ruralization. In Japan the government offers financial incentives to people to repopulate the rural areas. Our rural youth must be motivated to go back to their villages and pursue the noble profession of agriculture, horticulture, pisciculture and cattle rearing. There is so much wealth and prospects in the rural areas that are being wasted or overlooked. With attractive financial incentives from the government, perhaps these youths would be drawn back to their villages. Agriculture and other allied activities should evolve from being merely work for sustenance as it is being done now, to commercialization. This can be done if the government provides the farmers with modern technology and since our youth are educated, they can take these activities to a higher level. This approach will be a great blessing to our state, since we are still dependent on other states for our food supply.

Considering the fact that our state is itself a God-given natural beauty, ecotourism in the rural areas can be a great economic boost. This can also be another way of luring the youth to their villages from the city life. Our state should stop its centripetal policy of development and adopt a centrifugal policy. It is a shame that after more than half a century of our statehood, we have only one metropolitan city. Other states in our country each have a number of big cities which helps in equal distribution of the state's population and prevents rushing to the capitals. Even our neighbouring state of Assam, has got at least nine major cities (Guwahati, Tezpur, Dibrugarh, Jorhat, Silchar, Tinsukia, Bongaigaon, Dhubri and Barpeta). In Meghalaya, Tura, Nongstoin and Jowai are still considered towns and they have not yet developed into cities. This is the reason why all roads still lead to Shillong thereby resulting in overpopulation, traffic congestion and pollution.

The present government seems to be a very proactive one and a lot has already been done towards improving the situation. I hope that this government will go a step further as to adopt a centrifugal development policy in the state for that is the only permanent solution to overcrowding and degradation of our city.

Letters to the Editor

Another Year, Another Rigged Shillong Club Election

Editor,

I write this not merely as a member of Shillong Club but as a deeply concerned stakeholder in one of the oldest, most prestigious, and historically important institutions in our State. The Shillong Club, once regarded as a bastion of fellowship, culture, and civic leadership, has, over the years, been reduced to a cautionary tale of manipulation, exclusion, and systemic abuse of process. What is unfolding in the name of elections, governance, and administration within the Club is nothing short of a democratic farce — one that demands immediate public scrutiny, investigative reporting, and journalistic intervention.

The Hollow Ritual of Elections: Every two years, members of Shillong Club are summoned to participate in elections to the governing body. In theory, this should be a process embodying fairness, transparency, and the democratic voice of the 800+ members. In practice,

however, these elections have degenerated into a carefully orchestrated charade. The same set of individuals, shuffling among themselves, reappear on the governing board — masquerading continuity as renewal, and presenting collusion as consensus.

The introduction of e-voting in place of the earlier physical proxy voting has only cemented this cycle of manipulation. Where once members could rely on the tangible verifiability of proxy votes, the digital system has created a black box — one that is neither independently audited nor subject to checks and balances. The lack of third-party oversight has allowed the entrenched group of directors to engineer outcomes that always fall in their favour, thus converting what should be a transparent process into a sophisticated scam dressed up as democracy.

Members have long whispered their suspicions, but the pattern is now undeniable: each cycle produces identical results, with the same clique retaining power under the guise of legitimacy. This is not coincidence; it is control.

Economics of Control: It is important to understand that the manipulation of

elections is not an end in itself. Rather, it is a means to perpetuate financial and administrative control over the vast assets, revenues, and opportunities available within the Shillong Club. Recently, a well-circulated dossier has come to light among members, documenting in detail the misappropriations, irregularities, and questionable practices of the directors.

This dossier, corroborated by internal records, illustrates how the same office-bearers have:

Misused Club funds for personal benefit under the cover of sanctioned expenditures.

Awarded contracts and tenders to favoured entities, often with conflicts of interest.

Manipulated membership admissions to favour associates, while keeping deserving applicants waiting indefinitely.

Diverted resources meant for community and member welfare into projects serving narrow private interests.

Suppressed dissent by monopolising information flow, restricting access to financial records, and intimidating those who question irregularities.

It is no hyperbole to say that the Shillong Club, instead of being a beacon of community leadership, has been reduced to the private fiefdom of a few individuals who use the Club's reputation as a shield while exploiting its members as pawns.

Legal and Ethical Dimensions: At this juncture, it is vital to frame the matter not simply as a club's internal squabble, but as an issue that carries broader legal, ethical, and societal implications.

Violation of the Right to Fair Participation: By manipulating the electoral process, the directors are effectively disenfranchising hundreds of members who are entitled to a genuine say in the governance of the institution.

Deficiency of Service under the Consumer Protection Act (2019): Members who pay subscriptions, fees, and levies are legally "consumers" entitled to transparency, fairness, and honest administration. The deliberate distortion of elections and finances constitutes a classic case of deficiency in service and unfair trade practice.

Potential Criminal Liability: Misappropriation of funds, diversion of assets, and fraudulent misrepresentation of electoral results could invite action under various sections of the Indian Penal Code, including cheat-

ing (Section 420), criminal breach of trust (Section 406), and criminal conspiracy (Section 120B).

Breach of Fiduciary Duty: Directors of any registered society or company owe fiduciary duties of care, loyalty, and accountability. The wilful breach of these obligations is not only unethical but actionable under law.

Impact on Public Confidence: Shillong Club is not just any private body; it is a civic landmark, a symbol of Shillong's heritage. Its capture by vested interests undermines public confidence in institutions and sets a dangerous precedent of unaccountable governance.

Why This Concerns the Public at Large: One may argue that this is an "internal matter" of the Shillong Club. I submit, respectfully, that it is much more than that. The Shillong Club is an institution whose actions ripple across Shillong's social, cultural, and economic life. Its governance affects not only its members but also the city's reputation, tourism, hospitality, and business networks.

When elections are rigged, when transparency is sacrificed, and when financial misappropriation becomes institutionalised, the damage is not confined within

Club walls — it erodes the values of fairness and accountability in our broader civic life.

Role of the Press

The press exists to shine the light in places where those in power would prefer darkness. The Shillong Times has, for decades, stood as a sentinel of democracy and public interest in Meghalaya. Today, the Shillong Club represents a story waiting — indeed demanding — to be told. This is a subject of serious investigative reporting. This is not about sensationalism but about restoring credibility to one of our city's oldest institutions. By highlighting the systemic electoral manipulation, the financial misappropriations, and the democratic deficit within the Club, the press can serve as the conscience-keeper of our community.

Suggested Investigative Angles: In the interest of public service journalism, may I respectfully suggest a few starting points for your reporters:

Audit the e-voting mechanism: Who manages it? Is there an independent third-party auditor? Can results be verified transparently?

Review the financial statements: Compare declared expenditures against

the irregularities flagged in the dossier.

Examine conflict of interest patterns in awarding contracts, tenders, or services.

Interview members (including dissenters) to gauge the extent of dissatisfaction with the current regime.

Investigate the history of electoral results to demonstrate the statistical improbability of the same clique winning repeatedly without manipulation.

Contextualise the Shillong Club's governance against best practices in democratic societies and member-run institutions.

Call for Accountability The Shillong Club cannot be allowed to remain a closed loop of recycled leadership, sham elections, and financial opacity. Its 800+ members deserve better; the city of Shillong deserves better. It is time that sunlight — the best disinfectant — is allowed to penetrate its opaque structures.

We, the members, are not asking for favours. We are demanding what is rightfully ours: a transparent, fair, and democratic institution that serves its members rather than exploiting them.

Editor, I appeal to you in the strongest possible terms to investigate, report, and editorialise on this issue with

the seriousness it merits. A great many of us, though individually powerless against entrenched directors, still believe in the collective power of truth and public accountability.

If The Shillong Times can lend its voice to this cause, it would not only serve justice within the Club but also reaffirm its own historic role as the protector of democratic values in Meghalaya.

We members remain available, to share evidence, records, and testimonies that may aid your investigation. The dossier mentioned above is already in circulation and can serve as a foundational document for further inquiry.

This is an opportunity for the press to remind those who abuse their power that no manipulation, however sophisticated, can withstand the scrutiny of truth when it is courageously told.

Thank you for your time, attention, and commitment to journalism in the public interest.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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

Warn, hide or stand out? How colour in animal world is battle for survival

The animal world is incredibly colourful, and behind this colour palette is a constant game of survival.

Most animals use camouflage, covering themselves in stealthy patterns to hide from predators. Others display bright and bold colours to warn potential predators they are not a good meal.

This second strategy is known as aposematism or warning colouration. Although less common than camouflage, it has evolved hundreds of times in butterflies, beetles, bugs, sea slugs, poison frogs and even birds.

One long-standing question is why species use one of these strategies over the other. Is one of these strategies usually more successful? Under which specific circumstances does one strategy beat the other?

Our new study, published today in *Science*, helps answer these questions.

Testing multiple theories

Both camouflage and aposematism can co-exist in the same region.

In Australia, for example, there are many examples of camouflaged insects such as the spotted predatory katydids and the lichen spiders.

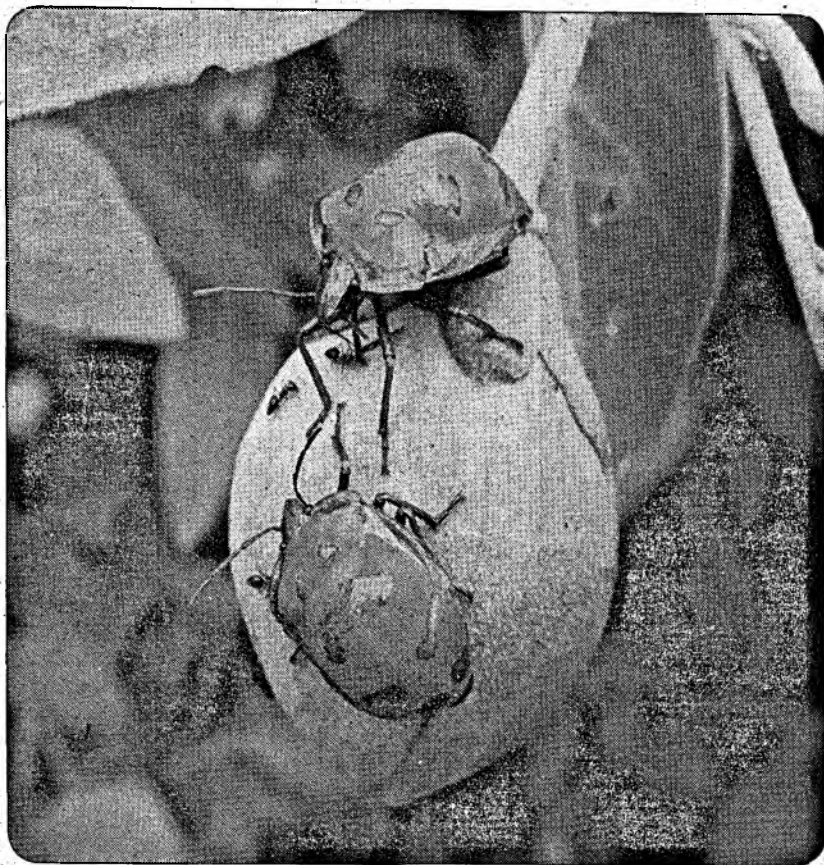
On the other hand, species such as the cotton harlequin bug - a common stink bug found in urban areas - and the handmaiden moth display bright orange and red colours to advertise to predators they are not a pleasant meal.

Some animals (but fewer) such as mountain katydids even use both strategies by changing colour, or hiding and revealing colourful patches.

There are dozens of theories about why some species are camouflaged instead of warningly coloured, and it is a challenge to pull these ideas apart.

Small localised studies have independently tried to test the effect of different factors separately. For example, we know light levels are important in the success of camouflage strategies.

We also know the success of warning colouration often relies on predators having experienced the prey before, and having learned to avoid



warning signals.

But is lighting or predator learning ability more important? Results from a single place tell us about that place, but we see the same strategies all over the world.

Do strategies perform the same way everywhere? To solve this mystery, our large team of collaborators ran the same experiment in 16 different countries around the world, in different forests with different levels of light, and different prey and predator communities.

15,000 paper moths

Together we deployed more than 15,000 artificial prey - paper moths - with three different colours: a classic warning pattern of orange-and-black, a sneaky brown that blends in, and an uncommon bright blue-and-black.

Each paper target was baited with a mealworm, which allowed us to

measure the survival of each type of colouration. If the bait was taken, we assumed a predator decided to consume that target.

The typical warning colour represented the widely distributed orange-and-black combination we see in many toxic animals, such as the monarch butterfly and poison frogs.

The uncommon warning colour corresponded to a less used warning pattern that is still highly visible, similar to the Ulysses butterfly.

Having these two warning colourations allowed us to test whether predators avoid the orange-and-black signal because it is familiar or simply because it is highly visible.

We found there is no single "best" strategy. Instead, the local predators, local prey, and the forest light all contributed to whether camouflage or warning colours were most protective.

The predators present in the community - and how intensely they attacked prey - had the biggest impact on which prey colour was most successful at avoiding attack.

We found that in places where there were lots of predator attacks - where competition for food is probably intense - predators are more likely to attack prey that looks dangerous or distasteful.

This means camouflage was most protective in areas with lots of predation.

But the camouflaged prey couldn't hide as well in every environment. For example, in well-lit environments, the benefits of camouflage were lost, while light conditions did not affect how the orange-and-black prey performed.

Familiarity with prey was also important. In places where camouflaged prey is abundant, hiding was less effective, as predators likely learn how to find camouflaged prey.

On the other hand, in places where warning colours were common, predators were better at avoiding the typical warning signal, but not the atypical one.

This suggests predators learn to avoid familiar warning signals, which helps to explain why so many animals share similar colour combinations.

Predicting future changes

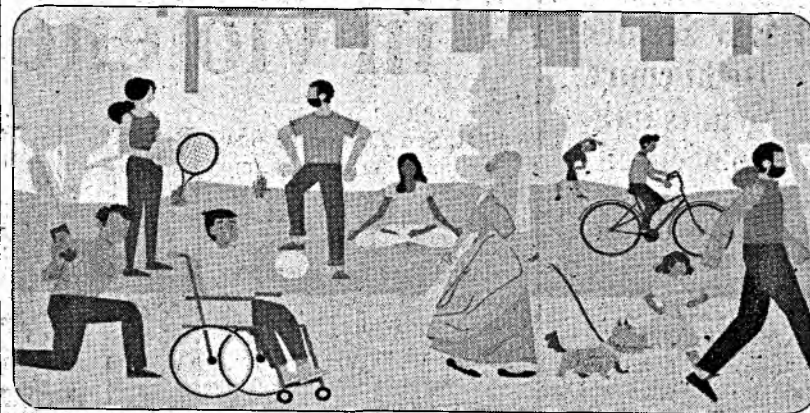
Our study shows how multiple features of the environment determine which strategy is more protective.

It also shows the success of camouflage strategies might be more dependent on ecological context than that of warning signals.

As climate change transforms habitats, conditions that are vital to the success of different antipredator strategies can also change. For example, camouflage strategies could fare worse in transformed habitats that have little vegetation cover and high levels of light.

Our findings can help better predict the effect these changes might have on animals that use different colour strategies against predators and mitigate against them. (*The Conversation*)

Mental well-being central to avoiding rising heart disease



Mental well-being is central to preventing chronic and non-communicable diseases, especially heart disease, experts said on Friday.

India has recently seen a significant rise in the number of heart diseases, especially among young adults and even children.

"If we want to address India's heart health crisis, we need to shift from a curative mindset to cultivating genuine health-seeking behaviour across our families, schools, and communities," said Rajesh Bhushan, former Secretary, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, at a city-based event held ahead of the World Heart Day on September 29.

The expert urged the need for integrating mental health into the healthcare regimen.

He also urged schools to foster mental well-being in children.

"Alongside regular exercise and stress management, nurturing mental health early in families and reinforcing it in schools is critical.

Life is not a sprint but a marathon, and young people need guidance to build patience, resilience, and balance rather than being pushed into early burnout.

Schools can play a transformative role by replacing unhealthy practices with healthier alternatives, fostering mental wellness, and encouraging physical activity," Bhushan said.

Experts also shared the impact of mental stress, pollution, and poor lifestyle choices, and the critical importance of timely preventive screenings.

They highlighted how digital health, wearable technology, and ar-

tificial intelligence are transforming cardiac care delivery across India, bridging the urban-rural divide.

"Cardiovascular disease is no longer a problem of the elderly - India is witnessing heart attacks striking far earlier, with nearly 60 per cent of cases occurring below the age of 55.

Prevention is the most cost-effective strategy; it costs only a fraction - about one-sixth - of what treatment demands.

To achieve real progress, we must strengthen hypertension control, integrate mental health into heart care, and raise awareness right from schools.

Addressing heart disease requires collective effort - strong government policies, private sector participation, and societal acceptance of healthier choices," said Dr Sandeep Bansal, Director, Vardhman Mahavir Medical College & Safdarjung Hospital.

Anil Rajput, Chairperson, Advisory Council, Illness to Wellness Foundation, lauded the government's range of initiatives addressing heart health - from the National Programme for Prevention and Control of Cancer, Diabetes, Cardiovascular Diseases and Stroke (NPCDCS) to Ayushman Arogya Mandirs and PM-JAY - which provided preventive care, early detection, and financial protection for treatment.

Other experts have emphasised the importance of routine screenings, emotional well-being, balanced living, and holistic lifestyle interventions.

They called for a national movement on heart health - rooted in awareness, preventive screening, mental well-being, emergency preparedness (including CPR education), and community participation. (*IANS*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 28, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results. You will get good financial gains in your business. You also need to take some tough business decisions. You will also get loan for your business/projects. Your relations with bosses will remain perfect. But you will face tough competition from business rivals. Your relatives will also cooperate with you. Both husband and wife will take care of each other, and they will have proper coordination. You will also get moral and emotional support from life partner and family. Those who are single will get married. Students will get admission in courses/institutes of their choice. You will be concerned with the education, marriage and career of your child. Everyone will respect you for your cooperative and supportive nature. Elders will keep giving blessings.

'This week for you'

Aries: (March 21 - April 20) Your endeavors, confidence and courage bring success in monetary gains; and your energy increases for work projects, and your job environment is lively. This is a time for self-expression when you have lots of energy, but not necessarily self-discipline to match. You express yourself creatively, through activities with children, romantic hobbies, or sports, short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly. It is easier than usual to be sensible about your diet, health, hygiene, and fitness needs.

Taurus: (April 21 - May 21) This phase brings love, harmony and entertainment into professional and personal relations. Your mind is often distracted, particularly when required to stick to a routine. You might spend a lot of time travelling and visiting friends and relatives. You are slightly more defensive and certainly more protective than usual. You might engage in arguments with, or on behalf of, those closest to you. Focus and a centering of thoughts are called for to achieve a balance. Your attention to the logical world of reason is a focus.

Gemini: (May 22 - June 21) 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. This enables you to make headway on the professional front. You will be considerably more productive, healthy, and focused. Extra care should be exercised when it comes to writing letters, emails, making phone calls i.e. with communications in general. It would also be wise to double-check your communications before sending them off. Your mind is especially inquisitive when learning, short trips, and other forms of communication and making connections, appeal strongly.

Cancer: (June 22 - July 22) This is favorable week for hobbies, sports and competitive exams. You display great skills that win you appreciation and bring about an opportunity to travel. Beware of a covetous and suspicious person around you who could cause misunderstanding in your personal relationships. You would be able to maintain peace and harmony at home. You try to be just and fair when making decisions, as you do your best to see both sides of an issue and be objective. Artistic self-expression is important, possibly through music, fashion and writing. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality.

Leo: (July 23 - August 23) There will be an increase in confidence, courage and effort at the workplace. It's a great time to do something entirely new and pioneering. Discussions and ideas about finances and material security figures strongly. You may spend extra money on things that will make your life more comfortable and pleasant. Work that needs to be done in and around the home becomes a priority. You may seek opportunities to boost your feeling of security and comfort. Although you like the good things of life and may spend quite a bit 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 placement you can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits.

Virgo: (August 24 - September 22) There will be cordial relations between family and relatives. Friends and loved ones take priority. People at work might be surprised by your ability to assert yourself and your needs. 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 and feeling towards religion is enhanced. 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 expend energy without results.

Libra: (September 23 - October 23) This period brings success, responsibility and maturity. Loyalty and sensitivity in your relationships are more important to you. You are especially fond of domestic life and look at home and family. You are more receptive and gentler on a romantic level and tend to be sentimental or nostalgic now. You may particularly value the aesthetics in and around your home during this period. If things are chaotic on the home front, you will do whatever you can to create a peaceful and stable atmosphere. You might explore various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain this week.

Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22) This phase is good for money, family, status and happiness. More loving relationships with your children may also be figured now. Your magnetism skyrockets. Yet, you are not aggressive in your approach to love. Instead, you are attracted more if you allow yourself to be pursued. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. At this time, you instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Any love affair begun now will be characterized by good cheer, having fun, and a fair share of emotions.

Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21) Public relations work, promotion and other such endeavors are highlighted. You are looking to expand your activities, and you may find that you have a lot of energy for travel, or brand-new subjects to broaden your mind. Diplomacy, correctness in manner, finesse, and charm will be a big plus in aiding financial gains, especially in areas requiring public contact. You feel attracted to intelligent people with whom you can communicate well and exchange ideas during the week. You know how to relate to others, and you do it in a natural and warm manner. Your mind is especially inquisitive when learning or establishing communications. You use information and data, add the weight of knowledge and experience and utilize it judiciously.

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. Spending time with someone special is a focus. Smoothing out your close personal relationships and creating stronger bonds is what makes you happy now. 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 receive pleasure from anything that expands your horizons, both physically and mentally. 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) Conflicts with a partner over values or personal possessions are likely to occur. There may be the need to revisit old, pending issues regarding personal finances. Take this time to re-budget instead of making premature purchases. Hold off on decision-making regarding money. Instead, take the time to re-think your sources of income and how you spend your cash during this period. Put off finalizing anything important for the time being. In fact, some money-making ideas or ventures may be put on hold due to circumstances beyond your control.

Pisces: (February 19 - March 20) It's a generous, pleasantly emotional and creative time. You will enjoy artistic, musical, or cultural events and activities. This is a good time to promote harmony and goodwill on the job. You have good team spirit right now, and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers. You need the energies, companionship, and support of other people, and they may also seek out your support and companionship. You have an increased interest in your own possessions. You are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort, status and luxury.

What is the rapture, and why does TikTok believe the end is coming?

If you believe that the end of the world is at hand, then you really need to know what the rapture is. Simply put, the rapture is the belief that, at any moment, Jesus Christ will descend from heaven to the sky and "rapture" all those who truly believe in Him into heaven.

Those among the faithful who have already died will rise from the dead and also be translated into heaven.

Evangelical Christians on TikTok have been predicting the rapture will come this week. When the rapture happens, believers think the rest of us will be left behind, not knowing where many of those we know have gone. For this reason, it is often known as "Left Behind theology".

For the followers of Left Behind theology within conservative Evangelical Protestantism, significant parts of the Bible - the books of Revelation and Daniel in particular - refer to events that are yet to happen at the end of the world.

These are the return of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and God's final judgement of all humanity into the saved and the damned.

But for the rapture in particular, the First Book of Thessalonians (4.16-17) in the New Testament is the crucial text: For the Lord himself, with a cry of command, with the archangel's call and with the sound of God's trumpet, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up [raptured] in the clouds together with them to meet the Lord in the air; and so we will be with the Lord forever.

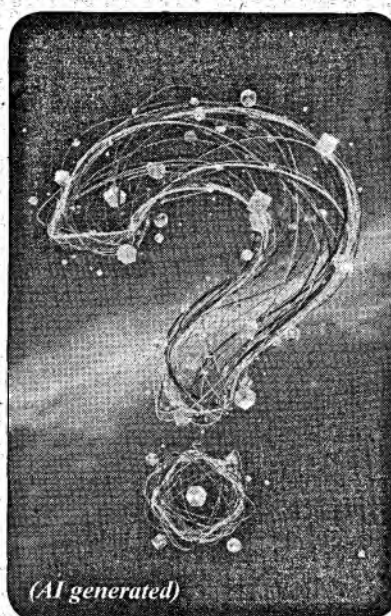
Tribulation

The rapture is the first of two ideas that Left Behind theology has added to the traditional Christian story of the end of the world. The second is the Tribulation.

According to most Left Behind theologians, the rapture will be followed by a period of seven years of Tribulation on earth, based on some complicated calculations around the text of Daniel 9.24-27.

This is the age of the Antichrist, the son of Satan - a human figure soon to reveal himself.

He will be a global earthly ruler opposed to Christ and pretending to be him. He is who is called in the



Bible "the beast rising out of the sea with ten horns and seven heads" (Revelation 13.1), "the little horn" (Daniel 7.8), and "the lawless one" (2 Thessalonians 2.3) whose number is 666 (Revelation 13.18).

Christians who have been raptured into heaven are immune from these seven years of natural disasters, wars, famine and the persecutions of the Antichrist.

The kingdom upon earth

After the seven years of the Tribulation, Christ will return with his saints to fight and defeat Satan, the Antichrist, and his forces at the battle of Armageddon.

Most followers of Left Behind theology believe that Christ will then set up his kingdom upon earth and reign from Jerusalem for a millennium or a thousand years. He will govern the earth with his Christian followers, along with those Jews who have recognised Christ as the Messiah during the time of the Tribulation.

The eventual conversion of the Jews during this time explains, in part at least, the commitment to and support of many Evangelical Protestant Christians to the continuation of the State of Israel until the time of Tribulation when the Jews convert to Christianity.

At the end of the thousand years, Satan will be released and there will be a final but short rebellion

against God, after which Satan will be defeated. Then God will judge everyone for eternal happiness in heaven or eternal misery in hell.

Relatively recent innovation

In the history of Christian thought, the idea of the rapture before the Tribulation is a relatively recent innovation.

We can date it to the 1830s and the theology of the Anglican John Nelson Darby (1800-82), a member of the Protestant Plymouth Brethren, and the founder of the group still known as the Exclusive Brethren. But it was popularised in Protestant circles in the United States by its inclusion in the notes of the Scofield Reference Bible in 1909.

The Bible of C I Scofield (1843-1921) was the main source for the idea of the rapture until The Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey (1929-2024) in 1970, a work that has sold over 28 million copies and has been translated into 54 languages. "Someday," declared Lindsey; A day that only God knows is coming to take away all those who believe in Him. He is coming to meet all true believers in the air. Without benefit of science, space suits, or interplanetary rockets, there will be those who will be transported into a glorious place more beautiful, more awesome, than we can possibly comprehend.

But it was the series of Left Behind books (1995-2007) by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B Jenkins, with over 65 million books sold, along with its movie franchise, that has most popularised the idea of the rapture and the Tribulation that follows it.

To many of us, the world appears a place of tribulation. 'Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone," as John Donne (1572-1631) eloquently put it.

The idea of the rapture seems to reflect the utopian dream of many that they may be translated from this Earth to a better place until they can return to a world of justice, compassion and decency that seems so absent from the present one. (*The Conversation*)

(Authored by Philip C'Almond, Emeritus Professor in the History of Religious Thought, The University of Queensland)

“Any mind that is capable of real sorrow is capable of good.”
—Harriet Beecher Stowe

The Shillong Times

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Population as strength

A nation that bewailed of a population explosion is now faced with a worry over the steady fall in fertility rate that has dropped to “below the critical replacement level.” Official figures now available show the country’s total fertility rate has fallen to 1.9 in 2023 – while it remained constant at the borderline of 2 in the previous two years. The population growth rate is declining as well, this being much less than one per cent in 2025. This is a sign of the times. India is the most-populous country, surpassing China, according to UN’s global population estimates released two years ago. One-sixth of the world population lives here. Without any coercion, sans any persuasion, the country’s population – steadily growing for decades-- is showing signs of decline. By all means, this trend is bound to intensify as the general mood in every family today is to restrict child births and care more for a maximum of two children. This spirit is evident even among educated Muslims, a community that has been in the forefront of procreation worldwide. Notably, an Indians’ life expectancy is at around 72 years, thanks to steady improvements in the healthcare sector – both private and public. This has brought down the infant mortality rate too over the years, to around 2 per cent. Curiously, due to lifestyle related matters, larger numbers of women are unable to conceive today and are approaching infertility clinics for induced pregnancy. Put together, it’s natural that the trend of population growth would be arrested in the long run.

India’s strength, of late, was its demographic dividend. The energy of its 1.4 billion population is to our advantage in pushing the economic growth to higher levels. However, there have been no serious governmental efforts to tap their energies to the maximum. Instead, through free/subsidized ration to the BPL families, the urge for work is diminishing across societies. The poor who had toiled to make a living are now happily relaxing for the most part. The rich are “wasting” their energies through workouts in gymnasiums. This is unlike China that had introduced governmental programmes to make use of the energy of its people while it remained as the world’s most-populous state – a record that it yielded to its ‘Hindu’ neighbour of late.

Hinduism, as a religion, famously maintained a passive approach to life, set against the aggressive pursuit of goals by religions like Christianity and Islam. The effective utilization of the people’s energy made China a global Superpower, next only to that of the US. The US itself, a society consisting largely of immigrants from Europe, the natives, and slaves brought from Africa, toiled hard to reach the top position. The Great Depression of 1929 was a turning point. Hard work helped the Americans overcome the odds. An opportunity is at hand for the Indian government to put the present demographic advantages to best use. Else, the future would be bleak because a heavy burden would await the nation to feed its large bulk of the ageing

The Recent Meghalaya Cabinet Rejig and the Message it Conveys

By Toki Blah

The recent Meghalaya Government Cabinet rejig happened on September 17, 2025. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma had dropped 8, very senior political figures, from his cabinet. The reshuffling caused some minor ripples of heartburn but apparently things are back to normal. Politicians in general, both in the ruling coalition and the opposition, appear to have accepted it as a fait accompli; the usual prerogatives of a Chief Minister. The reasons given for such drastic changes was the apparent need to ensure regional balance by giving fair representation from different districts. (difficult to understand, because one was always led to believe that Cabinet Ministers were there to ensure the development of their respective Departments in the state as a whole and not for the specific interest of any particular district or constituency. That’s how the common man interprets “regional balance” and “fair representation”). Party loyalty; and long party association were also added for good measure. Politically valid reasons perhaps, but with governance apparently in the doldrums, this midstream change of guard is something hard for the common person to digest. One is yet to hear how the above changes are supposed to lift Meghalaya and its people from the pits we are in. People are skeptical! They are again suspicious of some high level trickery. So from a purely secular, non-partisan viewpoint of the ordinary citizen, I believe We The People have the right to question such changes. So shall we start?

Lets start, with what the electorate expect from the people they have elected? People generally expect good governance to deliver value in several key sectors, namely (A) Provide Quality Public Services, to the State as a whole and not only to their respective constituencies and districts. These Public Services cover a wide range of subjects namely (i) Quality and reliable education for all (ii) Accessible and affordable health care especially to the poor and marginalized (iii) Effortless and cheap transport (iv) 24 x 7 power and energy (v) Safe and clean drinking water (vi) Last but not least, viable livelihood and employment. Everyone is entitled- not just selected districts

(B) Provide, create, maintain and improve basic infrastructure such as roads, bridges, sanitation and internet services. Again

for everyone not only to a selected few. Now in the 21st century, economically driven world order, Government and the whole political establishment (meaning the Legislative Assembly too as a whole) is expected to work collectively (Ruling as well as Opposition) to bring about viable Economic Legislation where people can work, trade, innovate, and invest. Cabinet Ministers are expected to responsibly manage development so as to usher in employment, fair wages, and sustainable growth throughout the entire state, irrespective of their personal dependability on the district or constituency they represent. My point is, does the rationale behind the recent Cabinet reshuffle reflect these basic qualities for Good Governance? I think not. Therefore the Cabinet Rejig exercise is fair game to be critiqued.

The dismissed Minister Education, people believe, deserved to be dropped. He was a disaster for the Department he was in charge of, so he had to go. What is not understood is why then replace him with the present incumbent, who in his former avatar as Education Minister, had proved to be equally incompetent? He has now been reincarnated plus reinstated in his old avatar! Strange but true, our Education has been under tremendous pressure for its dismal performance. We were the lowest in the latest PGI ratings. Government was in a fix as to how to redeem the situation. Political gimmicks were resorted to ensure dramatic pass percentages, but on a serious note, the Government did also set up a Commission to go in depth into the reasons for education’s fall from grace. Now it seems the Report of the Commission is ready. In all this frenzy of anxious activities, one is yet to come across any expression of anxiety; concern; advice or offer of inputs by way of experience or knowledge by the newly installed Minister for this godforsaken department. Just because he wanted to represent his district? Is that fair to the rest of the state? At best this can be called the Joke of the Year! Then there is an equally non-performing Minister, yet he was not dropped. I refer to the Minister for Urban Affairs and Transport. Both the departments he is in charge of are in shambles. Things are getting from bad to worse. Another non-per-

forming asset of the Cabinet. Another proven zero. Yet he is retained. Instead it seems he has been rewarded for his failures by providing him with more clout within the Cabinet. Shocking if not outright scandalous! Government needs to explain the above two mysteries to the public. I know, “Explanation for High Level tomfoolery,” is an unheard of expression in the corridors of power, but we simple folks call it Public Accountability. Can we have it please?

As if the above were not enough, the public was presented with another governing mystery to resolve. The public as mentioned above are more concerned with delivery and performance and there were at least three Departments that did show a glimmer of hope in performance. There was Tourism, Power and Health that as departments were exhibiting some form of animation and vibrancy. One of the reasons perhaps for movement and signs of life within these departments was the fact that all three were headed by ministers who were educated. They perhaps could apply their minds to what they were expected to do, not simply “Approved as proposed” LTI any files put up before them.

Yes, friends Education does count! The mystery mentioned above was that these performing ministers were dropped to be replaced by, let’s say, less educated and yet to be proven , political personalities. Again why was the Chairman State Planning Board moved to the Cabinet? The Planning Board has a very important role to play in shaping the vision and planning of the state. More I would say than any ministerial posting. We still all remember when PA Sangma held this chair (2008-2012) that ranked equal with the CM) and the enthusiasm, dynamism and sense of vitality he brought into the Government of the day through his efforts as SPB Chairman to (a) prepare an inventory of available and potential resources of the State- both capital and human resources and investigate the possibilities of augmenting and improving such resources. (b) to prepare a perspective plan for the State for the next 15-20 years for the optimum and balanced utilization of the State’s resources and indicate plan priorities. The present CM was Finance Minister then, he should remember.

These are issues Meghalaya critically requires if it is to move ahead and progress. Now if a Chairman of the SPB, equivalent in rank with the CM, is unable to deliver there, then what is the rationale and belief that he would perform better as a Minister? Again the public I think needs an explanation.

I wish to conclude with the following remarks. Firstly, I am absolutely apolitical i.e. I do not belong nor support any political party and it is my personal belief that Meghalaya does not have any political party that is really sincere nor capable of serving the people and in providing the state with the Good Governance it desperately needs. Secondly, it is my experience from contacts with the so called “High Level” wallahs, that people contest elections simply to win; to be in power; but when handed that power , begin to gasp like fish out of water, because they are thoroughly unacquainted on how to use power for improving the lives of people. So they simply end up using that power to enrich themselves and it ends there. Thirdly, I have a growing suspicion that it is a well thought out, planned political conspiracy to keep the people as uneducated as possible. That is why most elections are contested based entirely on who can distribute the maximum amount of money or raise the maximum amount of emotional frenzy in an illiterate electorate. Manifestos are 11th hour afterthoughts that mean nothing. An illiterate electorate falls for this trick every time and thus each new Government begins with the actual dismantling of governance.

Fourthly, based on the above observations, I view the recent Cabinet Reshuffle not as a political necessity but more as a need to convert the Cabinet into a Business Cartel with the hope that it will pass public scrutiny. This is being said because most of the present Cabinet is composed of High End business men. Those that don’t belong to this “High Level” business class have been eased out. For those interested in knowing more as to what is meant by the term Business Cartel, please open your Google network, type in “Business Cartel” and then click the search button. The description is too horrible, shocking and repulsive to describe here. Yet when one analyses the rejig under discussion it fits in exactly as per that Google description. So who is to blame for the mess we find ourselves in? Take a look in the mirror to get the correct answer.

America’s Grand Strategy and its Recent Behaviour Towards India

By Venus Upadhayaya

How can a strategy take a drastic shift without a plan. The recent shift in America’s behaviour towards India may not be just limited to Trump’s personal behaviour but would actually come from the evolving American Grand Strategy characterised by a shift from Indo-Pacific focus to Eurasian pivot.

I started to think seriously about it after attending the 5th World Congress on Taiwan Studies at Taipei’s Academia Sinica in May this year in which in one panel discussion the analysts talked about the shift in Trump’s Indo-Pacific to Eurasia strategy. It alarmed me because this shift meant a change in US’ administration India focus. It also made me think about why this should be discussed by Taiwanese analysts and how it serves the purpose of Taiwan.

The months that followed the Taipei conference are now actually witnessing this shift forcing me to reflect on the imperatives behind the American grand strategy; how it’s shifting the India-China, India-Japan, India-US and also India-Taiwan ties..What does it mean for India’s economic rise and for the world at large?

These obviously are too many questions–to begin with I’ll try to address a few here and others will be discussed in the upcoming write-ups.

US’ Indian Pivot: Shift from Positive Focus to Negative Focus

The American administration’s Asia-Pacific Policy was renamed as the Indo-Pacific Policy by the Trump administration in 2017 and it came along with a major positive focus on India and a rejuvenated QUAD–done with a shared concern about China’s rise. There was specific attention to focusing on partnership with democratic allies including Australia and Japan; all in the best interest of QUAD.

The recent shift is again pivoted on India but unlike last time it’s framed negatively—from uplifting the “Rise India” and “India as a strategic partner” narrative it has transformed or rather denigrated into “India is Russia’s laundromat” and “India is feeding Russia’s war against Ukraine.”

The context is obviously clear—there’s a shift in the American Grand Strategy and it is about American interests shifting from the Indo-Pacific to Eurasia with Russia-Ukraine war at the backdrop. And in this scheme of things, China is more like a freemasonry than an enemy—there are too many American economic interests complexly interwoven with China. Like in any freemasonry equation there’s constant friendly engagement but also an aggression that Trump’s trade and tariff policies and negotiations have boldly defined. As Trump’s former political ally and world’s richest industrialist, Elon Musk wrote in a message on Twitter on Dec. 25, 2023: “Economic Strength is the Foundation of War.”

Trump has built that foundation and also kept his adversary engaged for trade benefits (seemingly in US interest while winning a narrative war) and that’s what is also reinforced by his targeting of India. If there was any other country in the geopolitical and economic position as India is today—a rising economy, expected to rise in position next only to the US and China by 2030—Trump would target it the same way. That comes not only from the perspective of “America First” but also from the angle of “America being the sole, supreme power of the world.”

Incidentally this becomes a shield for Taiwan because an America and China that’s engaging and trading (albeit with the loud

noise of a tightly contested trade match) keeps the Indo-Pacific more militarily disengaged. This ensures Taiwan’s status-quo and safety more than a strengthening QUAD that is defined to counter the Chinese aggression while constantly building a warring posture.

It also highlights one more aspect and that’s the Chinese footprint in Eurasia since 2017—when America started to increase its focus on the Indo-Pacific—has likely gone out of the US’ hand. China’s economic footprint in the Eurasian financial market continues to increase. More importantly in 2022 in the Winter Olympics, the governments of China and Russia issued a joint statement announcing a “no limits partnership.” Their joint statement said that China and Russia relationship “has no limits, [and] there are no ‘forbidden’ areas of cooperation.”

This posture majorly highlighted a fight against US-shaped and US-led global order—which haunted Trump in a way that has never concerned any US administration before.

Is India a Scapegoat? After Trump doubled the India tariff to 50 percent including 25 percent for additional levy as penalty for purchasing Russian oil, White House Press Secretary Karoline Leavitt said on August 19 that the punitive measures are to deter Russia from pursuing the Ukraine conflict. Thus a question obviously arises—Is India a scapegoat?

Indian Foreign Minister, S. Jaishankar has repeatedly highlighted how India is not the only country purchasing Russia oil and how the imports were both in national and global interests. India-US trade deal which was expected to be worth \$500 billion of investments by 2030 had no breakthrough despite many rounds of talks. So obviously the question is why is the US targeting India and what’s India’s posture in its negotiations with the US?

While this attack on India could actually be complex and multi-pronged, it’s very clear from the Trump administration’s stand that it wants to define India’s rise and that probably also comes from the American introspection on how its policies created the giant that China has become today. Would the US want to unconditionally support the rise of another giant, more, so when it wouldn’t be able to later strategically oppose its ideology like it can today counter the Chinese Communist Party? How will the US domestically counter the rise of a democratic India?

Thus what the US administration showcases today is the American grand strategy—there’s a shift in global order—there are multiple players and multiple issues that the US aims at attending by targeting India. So India is immensely important for the US—in fact its core to the US grand strategy but in ways it wasn’t earlier defined.

India should take a recourse—in fact in its march towards the mid-century it’ll have to face similar situations multiple times and will be required to rethink again and again. There are no unconditional friendships or perfectly converging or absolutely diverging relations in geopolitics—it’s all about engagement. It needs to be seen how India perceives it and how the shifting global order redefines the Indian grand strategy.

Venus Upadhayaya is a MOFA 2025 Taiwan fellow and a visiting scholar at the College of Law and Politics at NCHU Taichung. This is first in a series on “Mid-2025 and a Global Shift”.

A Message to the Meghalaya Public Service Commission

Editor,
It’s really frustrating to see that the Meghalaya Public Service Commission which is a Commission that is supposed to give hope to job seekers of our state is instead becoming the very reason so many are losing hope. Apart from recruiting candidates, is MPSC also trying to loot aspirants indirectly? Are the people setting the question papers and releasing the answer keys unqualified, or are these just careless mistakes? The mistakes in question papers and the inconsistencies in answer keys are too frequent to be ignored.
As someone who has written many MPSC exams, I can’t even trust the question paper itself. Sometimes I sit there wondering “Am I just confused, or is the question itself wrong?” When correct options are not given, it wastes so much of our precious time. We end up solving the same problem three, four times, only to realize the question itself is flawed.
And let’s talk about the answer keys; it almost feels like the question setters themselves don’t know the answers and just copy-paste the answers. The answer keys often raise more doubts than they clear. For example, in the LDA under the Me-

ghalaya (C) Secretariat (May 2025) exam, some English questions were straight repeats from old papers. But some questions had different answers in the old keys compared to the new ones. How does that even happen? How can the same question be correct before but suddenly incorrect now? Is it just a careless mistake, or is it a tactic to make money from aspirants filing representations?

But calling it a “mistake” feels too generous, because this has happened more than once. If the Commission really wants to make money, then just increase the application fee openly. If the problem lies with question setters, then it’s high time they replaced the question setters. And if it really is just a mistake, then please at least cross-check everything properly before conducting exams and releasing answer keys. And I suggest that the cut offs marks and the final answer keys be released before conducting the personal interview to ensure transparency.

And cheating in government recruitment exams is no longer a whispered rumour in Meghalaya but it is happening in plain sight. Some candidates still manage to sneak electronic gadgets into exam halls. This is unacceptable. In some places (especially in Jaintia Hills), we’ve already heard of candidates using phones during various exams. Now that more centres across the state are included for MPSC exams,

how is it fair that hardworking students have to compete against people who are literally Googling answers during the exam?

And what are the invigilators doing? Many of them just sit on a chair after signing the attendance, instead of walking around the room. They close their eyes to the malpractice happening right in front of them. This is not just carelessness. It is giving cheaters a free license to destroy fairness.

MPSC please ban the internet during exam hours, or make sure invigilators actually do their job by ensuring they actively monitor the rooms. And if someone is caught, don’t just take away their paper and reward them with a fresh answer sheet. Ban them from writing exams for 2-3 years; that’s the only real way to stop this nonsense.

So yes, I’m frustrated. And I know I’m not the only one. MPSC, we are not asking for miracles. We’re genuinely requesting transparency, fairness and accountability. We, the aspirants, should never have to doubt whether we failed because we didn’t study hard enough and truly didn’t deserve the job, or because someone else carelessly, or deliberately, snatched away what was rightfully ours by following unfair practices beyond our control. By

Yours etc.,
An Aspirant.
Name withheld on request
Via email

Humble Plea for Justice and Compassion

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw attention to the tragic plight of the family of the late Madhusudhan Adhikari, who served sincerely as a peon at Gorkha Deficit U.P. School, Tura. After retiring on 31st May 2025, he complied with official procedures and deposited his entire CPF amount into the government account, fully trusting that his pension and retirement benefits would soon reach him. Sadly, before these could materialize, he breathed his last on 16th July 2025 at GNRC Hospital, Guwahati.

What makes this tragedy more unbearable is the helpless condition in which his widow now finds herself. During his illness, with no savings or financial cushion, she had to borrow heavily for his treatment. Today, while still mourning her husband, she struggles under the crushing burden of debt and the daily hardships of survival.

This is not an isolated case but a systemic issue that can affect any retiring employee. The period between retirement and the release of benefits often becomes a time of uncertainty and suffering. Families, instead of enjoying security after decades of service, are left in distress—facing medical emergencies, financial ruin, and emotional

trauma. Retirement benefits are not a luxury but a right—ful due earned through years of hard and honest work. When delayed, they defeat the very purpose for which they exist.

Late Mr. Adhikari served with quiet dedication, like countless other employees whose contributions may not make headlines but keep the system running. To allow his family to suffer in this manner is not just an administrative lapse—it is a moral failure. Compassion and justice demand that his pension and dues be released without delay. Doing so would not only provide urgent relief to his widow but also send a strong message of reassurance to thousands of other employees nearing retirement: that their lifelong service will not be forgotten at their most vulnerable hour.

I therefore respectfully appeal to the concerned authorities to treat this case with urgency, fairness, and human sensitivity. Extending timely assistance to the late employee’s family would be a fitting tribute to his life of service and a step towards making governance truly people-centred and humane.

Yours etc.,
Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry
Tura

Politics of Division

Editor,
The recent statement

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.

Tourism Stakeholders' Meet

FOR the first time the Hima Sohra organised a meeting of stakeholders to take a holistic look at tourism not just from the scenic perspective but on how to manage the garbage that is generated on a daily basis from the scores of homestays, hotels and resorts and the viewpoints. This issue was never seriously discussed in the past. It's timely that the Dorbar Hima Sohra has taken up this critical issue, and is trying to work out ways on how to tackle the garbage conundrum. Beyond Shillong there is no waste management system; no landfill, no collection system. Most homestays are burning their non-biodegradable waste which includes in the main plastics. It is a known fact that the smoke emanating from burning plastics is toxic for the environment. Till date Meghalaya has not been able to implement the High Court order to ban non-biodegradable plastic carry bags. While a few departmental stores have been giving cloth bags on payment to their customers, vegetable, fish and meat vendors continue to dish out plastic bags including the black ones that are known to be carcinogenic.

Such meets are a necessary part of the tourism ecosystem because regular review meetings will bring out the problems and help find collective answers. What Meghalaya is selling as its tourism package is the environment which includes the greenery, the swift flowing rivers, waterfalls, the clean surroundings and above all a tourist friendly people who treat tourists with respect. This in turn results in better tourism outcomes because each pleasant experience is recorded on social media and the word spreads thereby enticing other tourists to visit and others to revisit the place. Sohra has since long been a tourist destination, much before it was sold via enticing advertisements. It has a culture that is genteel and placid. Its fog and mists and the incessant monsoon rains are what people come to experience. What has been lacking is a gentle nudge on tourists to practise responsible tourism which means not littering the places they visit and to make it a habit of taking their waste back with them in a carry bag and emptying that into a rubbish bin when they see one. Tourism is a like mutual benefit scheme. Homestay owners, hoteliers and those who offer their services as tour guides or sell food to visitors all earn their livelihoods from this trade. What the tourists look for are beautiful sights and sounds and a delightful experience which they carry back as fond memories and in turn narrate to their friends and families who then make their itineraries with Sohra as the destination of choice.

What the Hima Sohra has initiated for managing garbage should now become the model for other tourist destinations as well, for burning is not the solution. It's high time the Government exercises its mind on providing waste management facilities to all tourist destinations in the state. If the environment is the selling point then it's conservation is a prime duty of all tour operators and homestay owners. Only then will we have the much talked about “sustainable tourism” in Meghalaya.

Letters to the Editor

Read Them Heroes, Not Horrors

Editor,

It is true that today our newspapers, TV, and social media feeds are filled with bad news every day - murder, rape, drugs, suicide, violence. As adults, even we feel stressed and hopeless after hearing such news again and again. Our hearts are already heavy. And here is the thing... If such news impacts us this deeply, then imagine what it does to a young child. Their innocent minds will, without a doubt, be filled with negativity far too early in life.

Adults and parents in particular must understand that children don't need daily doses of tragedy. They need inspiration. Instead of reading to them the latest horrible news headlines at home, why not share stories of heroes from myths and legends - warriors who defeat monsters, protect the weak, and save kingdoms? Such tales teach courage, kindness, and hope. And if you think those stories are outdated, just remember how you yourself grew up into a decent human

being by listening to the stories your late parents and grandparents told you. Classical literature and old tales usually carry ideals of love, compassion, and friendship; they are always on the side of goodness. And these are the values, I suggest, that help children grow into decent individuals.

Therefore, parents and adults today have a choice to make - either fill your children's minds with fear, or fill them with light. But, I must say, leave the grim headlines aside. Tell them stories that inspire goodness, so tomorrow they may become heroes in their own way. Later on, they might even ease your old soul, just as the biblical Proverbs 29:17 says: “Discipline your children, and they will give you rest; they will give delight to your heart.”

Yours etc.,
Sunrise Poham, M.Th
Via email

Free Minds, End Ethnocentric Political Biases

Editor,

The editorial “Of ethnocentric Biases” (ST September 27, 2025) made in-

Recently, the Union Environment Ministry issued an office memorandum (OM) exempting the extraction of atomic, critical, and strategic minerals from public consultation. This order meant that now the Union Government could now go ahead with the extraction of minerals like uranium, which the people of Meghalaya have firmly opposed since the 1980s. Many cite the health dangers as a reason to oppose the extraction. In college, I remember watching a documentary ‘Buddha Weeps in Jadugoda’ which showed the horrifying ill-effects of uranium mining among the local community.

Jadugoda is the homeland of the Mundas and other indigenous communities closely related to the Khasis. In fact, the Khasis and Mundas had a common ancestor around 4000 years ago. This is also the time when archaeological evidence shows that the Khasis had already arrived in what is today Meghalaya. Genetic evidence suggests the Khasis arrived a thousand years earlier, i.e., 5000 years ago in what is today South Asia, making them the second oldest community in the region after the Dravidians. Some evidence suggests that the ancient Khasis, who became the Mundas, were actually one of the groups inhabiting the Indus Valley Civilization. Indo-European speakers, who came from Central Asia 3500 years ago, now occupy the region where the civilization existed, displacing the local population. But in Meghalaya, they Khasis have been able to resist any incursion into their territory for at least the last 4000 years. We know that because the Khasis still exist in Meghalaya today, speaking the language and following the matrilineal custom that they brought from South China 5000 years ago. There are no references in oral history of any outsiders coming into the Khasi territory and subjugating its people. History records only two instances of such an attempt, one being the Ahom invasion of Hima Jaintiapur at the beginning of the 18th century.

The Jaintia Buranji contains a more detailed account of the Ahom invasion of Hima Jaintiapur. But if readers want an abridged version, EA Gait, ‘A History of Assam’, is a good place to start. There is a chapter on Jaintia Kings which describes the dominion of Jaintia Syiems which “included two distinct tracts of the country, namely, the Jaintia Hills, which are inhabited by a Khasi tribe called, Synteng (Pnar), and the plains coun-

try, south of these hills and north of the Barak river, in the Sylhet district, now known as Jaintia parganas, the inhabitants of which are Bengali Hindus and Muham-madans.” According to Gait, Hima Jaintiapur was one of the main kingdoms among the Khasis, the other one being Hima Khyrim (Hima Shillong). Oral traditions reveal the antecedents of both the kingdoms connected with the story of mythical ‘Ka Li Dakha’ and ‘Ka Pah-syntiew’ which talks about the kingdoms being founded by children of divine women who married mortal men. The descendants of ‘Ka Li Dakha’ founded the kingdom of Hima Sutnga, which later became Hima Jaintiapur after the War Amwi conquered the Kingdom of Jaintiapur. It was this new kingdom that came into conflict with the Ahoms, resulting in the invasion of the Jaintia Hills.

In 1707, the Ahom king Rudra Singha invaded the kingdom of Kachari king Tamradhvaj, who then asked for help from the Syiem of Hima Jaintiapur, Ram Singh, who collected his army and planned to march to help fight against the Ahom.

In 1707, the Ahom king Rudra Singha invaded the kingdom of Kachari king Tamradhvaj, who then asked for help from the Syiem of Hima Jaintiapur, Ram Singh, who collected his army and planned to march to help fight against the Ahom. But Rudra Singha withdrew before Ram Singh could intervene, and the latter saw an opportunity to incorporate the Kachari kingdom into his domain. Tamradhvaj was kidnapped and kept as a prisoner. The nobles, Myntiris, had strongly advised against this act. Tamradhvaj then asked for help from Rudra Singha, and the latter invaded Hima Jaintiapur to free him.

The armies sent to invade Jaintiapur included one under Bar Barua, which approached through the Kachari area (i.e., from the plains), and the other under Bar Phukan, who was ordered to march over the Jaintia Hills direct to Jaintiapur. The first army met little resistance and could reach Jaintiapur. Ram Singh wanted to escape, but his nobles, who were always against the kidnapping of Tamradhvaj, did not allow him to escape and forced him to surrender to the Ahom. But it was the entry of the other army through the hills that enraged the Pnars, who rose to defend their homeland from invad-

ers in order to preserve their independence. They solicited the help of Bar Dalai, the Syiem of Khyrim/Shillong, to join them in repelling the invaders. Tradition suggests that a large number of archers from Hima Khyrim/Shillong offered support and fought against the Ahoms.

After a series of fights, the Pnars could force Bar Phukan and his troops (those who were lucky not to be captured and put to death) to retreat before another detachment of Ahom troops rescued him. Rudra Singha sent more forces, and they could drive the Pnars away but never completely defeat them. As the rainy season approached, the Ahoms, apprehensive about staying in hostile territory, decided to return. But before doing so, they committed a massacre in Jaintiapur. At the end of the expedition, almost 2500 Ahom soldiers died, while

Gait didn't bother to mention the exact number of casualties among the Pnars because they were so few. Rudra Singha was so enraged at the expedition's failure that he originally intended to punish the commanders, but the nobles prevented him. Ram Singh, the Syiem of Hima Jaintiapur, who had been taken prisoner at the beginning, died in 1708 of dysentery during his captivity. His heir, Jay Narayan, succeeded him after the Ahoms released and allowed him to return to his kingdom.

Those who are interested in reading about the resistance put up by the Pnars and how they could preserve their independence can do so by reading it in the Jaintia Buranji, which has detailed accounts of the Ahom invasion and the events that took place during it. Hima Jaintiapur was defeated by the Ahoms, who occupied its territory in the plains. This is the portion that was actually mostly inhabited by the Bangals (Bengali Hindus and Muslims). But when they decided to incorporate the hills, homeland of the Pnars, they suffered heavy casualties and retreated. This is the only time before the British that there is a record of outsiders attempting to enter the homeland of the Khasis in order to bring it under their

Why oppose Uranium Mining?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

subjugation. It did not end well for them. This is also the only instance we know of when the Khasis, living in different Hima—i.e., Hima Jaintiapur and Hima Khyrim/Shillong—came together to fight against a foreign invader. One wondered if all the Khasi Himas had been a joint confederate, what they could have achieved. The British had already conquered a large part of the world, so it was not surprising that they were the first and only one, according to oral tradition and recorded history, to occupy the homeland of the Khasis.

The resistance against uranium mining is not only about the health dangers but also about the attempt by non-Khasis to enter Khasi territory and take their resources without their consent. This is the homeland that the Khasis have defended for 5000 years, pre-dating the very concept of India (name given to the sub-continent by the ancient Greeks—around 2000 years ago) or Bharat (after the mythical emperor featured in Hindu mythology—also around 2000 years ago) that emerged much later. So, for many, the order of the Union Environment Ministry exempting public consultation on the extraction of minerals like uranium is an incursion into their homeland, which is not acceptable.

Of course, there are those among the Khasis who support the mining of uranium. One of my friends worked on a project in the area that contained uranium deposits. The head of the project, a Khasi, supported the mining, never visited the site but asked his staff to stay in the village for data collection. I would support uranium mining if this person or others like them consumed the soil from the area and asked their family to do the same to prove that mining poses no inherent danger. This is very important because non-Khasis who don't have a connection to the land will not care what happens to it or to the local Khasi community. But if the Khasis themselves are also as unconcerned as the outsiders, then all opposition is futile. Let the mining take place, let's make a lot of money and buy properties in Guwahati or elsewhere to settle down. Why resist? Isn't that a much more pleasing option? Anyway, we will find out soon. Who does this land belong to: the Khasis or the outsiders?

(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)

school hours in Shillong. Young children go out of the gate, then come back inside while waiting for their parents or guardians. Even while they are inside the school campus any known person to them may come to pick them up with wrong intentions.

I believe that when our children are inside the school, it should be an absolute safe place for them. I suggest an ID card system to be given to the authorised person picking up the child without which the child cannot be handed over to the person and to not let children move out of the school gate especially the young ones. School authorities should ensure that and parents should also advise their children about safety when they are outdoors alone or with friends.

In this tragic world, no one can be trusted with our children.

Yours etc.,
Monica Thangkiew,
Via email

Needed better security in schools

Editor,

I have been noticing and I'm concerned that schools do not have a safe system for pick-up of children after

Why Are Home Guards Managing Shillong's Traffic?

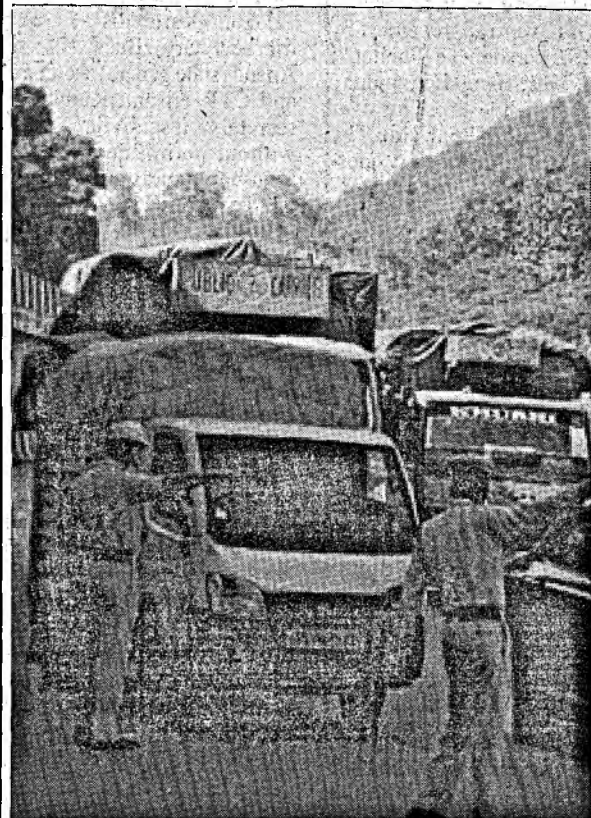
By Evangeline Dkhar

When temporary fixes replace permanent solutions, public trust and road safety both suffer.

Anyone who drives through Shillong knows the city's traffic jams are more than a nuisance—they are a daily ordeal. At busy junctions, one cannot miss the sight of Home Guard personnel signalling vehicles, often outnumbering the regular traffic police. They perform their duty with commitment, but their overwhelming presence raises a deeper question

insecure, underpaid auxiliaries.

The over-reliance on Home Guards also raises questions about state capacity. Strong states build permanent institutions that are trained, accountable, and capable of long-term planning. Weaker states, by contrast, rely on stop-gap arrangements and short-term fixes. Shillong's traffic control system reflects the latter tendency—managing through improvisation rather than preparing for the city's



as to why the state is relying on temporary Home Guards instead of appointing more trained traffic police.

At first glance, one might assume it is a problem of financial resources. But Meghalaya is not without funds,

growing urban challenges. Equally important is the question of public trust. Citizens judge governance not just by grand projects but by how well everyday problems are addressed. Smooth traffic management, road safety,

“The issue is not the absence of money, but how that money is managed and prioritized. Recruiting permanent traffic constables involves more than salary. It requires the state to provide pensions, promotions, allowances, and decades-long career support.”

The state receives significant central allocations and invests in ambitious projects across infrastructure, education, and health. The issue is not the absence of money, but how that money is managed and prioritized. Recruiting permanent traffic constables involves more than salary. It requires the state to provide pensions, promotions, allowances, and decades-long career support. By contrast, Home Guards receive only a small honorarium, with no job security or retirement benefits. They can be deployed flexibly during peak hours and withdrawn when no longer needed. For the government, they represent a low-cost and low-liability workforce.

While this approach may appear cost-effective, it comes at a price. Traffic police undergo professional training to not only regulate flow but also enforce road safety laws, respond to accidents, and handle emergencies. Home Guards, with their limited training, are largely confined to manual signalling. This weakens enforcement, allowing violations to go unchecked and leaving citizens frustrated with the disorder on Shillong's roads. The reliance on Home Guards highlights deeper governance patterns in Meghalaya. It reflects the growing dependence on contractual and auxiliary workers instead of investing in secure, permanent public employees.

Similar patterns are seen in schools with ad-hoc teachers/contractual teachers, in hospitals with temporary staff, and in other state services where the government prefers “cheap flexibility” over long-term institution-building. This creates a two-tiered labor system—a small group of permanent, well-protected employees and a much larger group of

and timely law enforcement are as crucial as flyovers or new schemes. When Home Guards, with limited authority, take over roles meant for trained traffic police, citizens rightly perceive the government as unwilling to invest in reliable solutions. This over-dependence also raises ethical concerns. Home Guards, despite working long hours in harsh conditions, remain underpaid and excluded from the dignity of secure employment. Their visibility on the streets is high, but their recognition and support from the state remain minimal. In this sense, traffic management in Shillong is also a story of labor inequality and how some forms of work are devalued by policy choices.

If the government is serious about addressing Shillong's traffic woes, it must move beyond temporary fixes. Home Guards can and should play a supportive role, but they cannot substitute for a professional traffic force. Expanding the sanctioned strength of traffic police, providing them with modern training, and integrating technology such as surveillance cameras and smart signals are essential steps. More importantly, the government must shift its mindset from short-term cost-saving to long-term institution-building.

The sight of Home Guards standing in the middle of Shillong's crowded roads tells us more than just a story of traffic. It reflects how governance in Meghalaya is practiced—through improvisation rather than planning, and through temporary labour rather than permanent investment. Ultimately, the question is not whether the state has money, but how wisely and fairly it chooses to use it.

(The writer is Assistant Professor : Sociology)

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