



"Learning never exhausts the mind."  
— Leonardo da Vinci

### The Shillong Times

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## NEP: Hanging Fire

IT would be wrong to believe that all colleges have complied with the call given by the Meghalaya College Teachers' Association (MCTA) not to implement the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 from this academic year. Several colleges in other districts of Meghalaya have started implementing the NEP because their principals see merit in it, but, more importantly because they do not want to leave the students in the lurch. After all, they argue that there is a major shift in the NEP where the 5+3+3+4 will replace the existing 10+2 structure. Besides, the Government wants to make schooling available to everyone and this should be an incentive for Meghalaya where the dropout rate is very high. Government envisages that nearly two crore school students will be able to come back to educational institutes through this new approach.

The NEP focuses on student's formative years of learning. The 5+3+3+4 structure corresponds to ages from 3 to 8, 8 to 11, 11 to 14 and 14 to 18 which means 12 years of schooling with 3 years of Anganwadi and pre-schooling being included in this structure. For children up to 8 years a National Curricular and Pedagogical Framework for Early Childhood Care and Education will be designed and developed by NCERT. According to the NEP the Education Ministry is to set up a National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy. The responsibility for successful implementation for achieving the foundation numeracy and literacy for all students till class three would devolve to the states and is scheduled to be done by 2025. One of the merits of NEP 2020 is the formation of the National Book Promotion Policy in India. Also appropriate authorities will conduct the school examinations for grades 3-5 and 8. The board exams for grades 10 and 12 will continue but the NEP 2020 aims to re-design the structure with holistic development.

This new plan focuses on setting up a Gender Inclusion Fund and Special Education Zones for disadvantaged regions and groups. The NEP will also see the setting up of multi-disciplinary Education and Research Universities at par with the IITs and IIMs to introduce multidisciplinary academics. The same yardsticks will be used for accreditation and regulations to guide both the public and private academic bodies. Phase wise college affiliation and autonomy will be granted to colleges. By 2030, it will be mandatory to have at least a 4-year B. Ed degree for joining the occupation of teaching. Also the Policy looks at more online classes so that students are prepared for future emergencies.

Some drawbacks of the NEP is the use of the mother tongue as a teaching method which will deprive the classrooms of diversity. Ironically students of private schools would be introduced to English early on. This will create a chasm between those communicating in English and others who don't and it might affect the chances of the latter when entering the job market. Also since there is a choice between a full graduation and a diploma many students might opt for the latter. These drawbacks may need to be remedied. However, since the new education policy comes after 30 years and its aim is to make the academic system at par with international standards it cannot be rejected lock, stock and barrel.

### Letters to the Editor

## Data confirms that festivals add to tourism footfalls

Editor,  
This is in response to the article titled, "Do Festivals Add to Tourism Vibrancy?" by Professor Benjamin Lyngdoh, published in the Shillong Times on August 23, 2023. As an organizer of events and festivals for over 15 years, I feel compelled to address the assumptions made by the professor and provide a different perspective based on our data-driven approach.

The professor suggests that festivals may not contribute significantly to tourism vibrancy, but I beg to differ based on our experiences. We have meticulously collected data over the years for some of the events and festivals we execute, which shows that a majority of our ticket purchases, especially for the Cherry Blossom Festival last year were made by tourists (non-residents of Meghalaya). I have to emphasise on this Festival because the professor took a dig at it in the said article. This data supports the idea that festivals can indeed attract tourists and add vibrancy to the tourism industry. We also have inputs from our friends in the hospitality and hotel industry services based out of Shillong that most of these tourists who attend festivals in Meghalaya stay for an average of 5-7 days which indicates that they also visit other places of interest. We

did post festival assessment of drop in tourist footfall last year immediately after the cancellation of the Cherry Blossom Festival supported by evidence from a majority of the accommodation establishments and in connection to festival packages they offer. A solid to their guests. The conclusion was that the State of Meghalaya lost anywhere from 50 to 100 Crores worth of revenue which would ensure that their articles are in the field of Hospitality, Logistics, F&B and other ventures related to Tourism.

At Rockski, we have adopted a proactive and data-driven approach in curating and planning our festivals. By using our own booking portal and organizing these events well in advance, we allow people to plan their attendance and make necessary arrangements. This approach has yielded positive results, as we have been able to track and have seen an increase in tourist footfall year after year.

While the professor may have theoretical points, I believe it would have been beneficial for him to reach out and consult stakeholders like us, who have first-hand experience in the field. By doing so, he could have strengthened his article with concrete facts and figures, ensuring a more accurate representation of the impact of festivals on tourism vibrancy.

It is essential to recognize the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing between academia and industry professionals. By working together, we can enhance the understanding

# Three Medical Colleges in Meghalaya? Mountains to Climb

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

From page news items in the Shillong Times, Aug 26, 2023 indicates that the state cabinet has approved the setting up of three medical colleges in the state. The commitment of the state government is quite admirable. In the last couple of decades, there have seemingly been sincere efforts to begin medical education in the state, but these attempts have been fraught with delays and failures.

There is good intent and political will power, but medical education is a specialized and demanding discipline and the creation of a medical college needs highly technical and human resource inputs and a detailed and nuanced approach. In other words, experience and expertise in setting up a medical college is indispensable. But such know-how is in short supply, and the government will need to obtain this expertise. Land and local approvals are the easy part. Money and good intentions alone will not achieve the desired result.

Expertise from outside the government can certainly be called upon. There are many self-styled consultants who claim expertise, but they are mostly corporate honchos for whom consultancy fees are the main priority. It is admirable that a few states in the Northeast have set up medical colleges, but there have been some noteworthy failures such as the ill-fated PPP medical college in Tripura.

These are the major hurdles. A Detailed Project Report. This may be the easiest part. A combination of insider inputs and external expertise would be able to put a DPR together. This would have to be a multi-dimensional document with at least ten years of operational and financial projections, with future plans for postgraduate medical, allied health and nursing. The two main components: medical college and clinical teaching hospital would present different levels of difficulty in forging the DPR. The medical college portion is straightforward because the National Medical Commission norms and guidelines are explicitly stipulated. The teaching hospital projections would be a more complex task. The most difficult projection would be a plausible hospital occupancy and the feasible sufficiency of a wide variety of patients for undergraduate and postgraduate students to learn from.

Patients for the teaching hospital. Meghalaya has a small population to draw from and the state would not be able to easily attract patients from outside NEGRHIMS has achieved this to some extent, but over the years it has established some strong departments that bring in patients from elsewhere. Faculty shortages and equipment maintenance are frequent bugbears, but even so NEGRHIMS has laudable achievements. But this has taken over a quarter of a century to accomplish. A state medical college hospital will find it difficult to duplicate this feat. For three state medical colleges to draw enough patients is probably an unrealistic expectation.

The numbers of patients in government hospitals in Shillong may provide an adequate occupancy for the medical college in Shillong, but the numbers of patients in the civil hospital in Tura may not be enough. A private medical college situated near the Assam border will attract patients from there, but the teaching hospital will not benefit many patients from Meghalaya. A private medical college will keep most of the seats for itself, so it is uncertain how many local students will benefit. There are several mission and private hospitals in the state and many families take patients to hospitals in Assam and elsewhere in the country. These trends and practices will not change easily. Even in densely-populated states, health-seeking behaviours are habituated. Some private medical colleges in the country arrange fleets of buses, pickup from stations and bus stands, and free treatment at their hospitals but continue to struggle to attract enough patients.

Faculty and staff. This mountain would be almost insurmountable. The number of medical faculty, with the right qualifications and teaching experience, simply do not exist in the country. Even the highly-valued NAIMS institutions (19 have been opened, five more are planned for

consider locally possible innovations. The MLCU School of Allied Health Sciences provides classroom teaching and basic labs. The hands-on trainings provided by local hospitals in Shillong and the capstone skills are polished by one-year internships, six months of which has to be outside the state at leading private and mission hospitals. These hospitals routinely offer jobs to our graduates after internship. While medical education is, of course, more demanding in its set-up, a convergence of local institutions, resources, and efforts may be one way of climbing the mountain.

Yes, we should set up a medical college in Meghalaya and we can do this in tandem with other training priorities. But some of the statements in the Shillong Times news report and the "push for medical colleges" on page 3 by the BJP, are mostly wishful thinking.

Medical education is largely a private good, as its benefits mostly accrue to the graduate doctor. However, the hospital services and the ancillary local development are a public good. This justifies its governmental priority. It is also true that the country needs more doctors, though when one takes foreign medical graduates such as from China or east European countries, AYUSH and traditional herbs into the equation, this need is diminished. The data shows that even though medical colleges have mushroomed in south India, rural regions do not benefit much. The best medical graduates practice in the cities or go abroad.

For someone who has been a career academician and administrator in a medical college, insider insights and directions are clear. A deep dive into the complexities is a necessary exercise. When we go public with our plans and interact with outside players and local stakeholders, we should look credible, not just enthusiastic.

The author is a former professor of pediatrics at Kasturba Medical College, Director of Planning and Development at Manipal University, and previous senior vice-president of the Manipal Education and Medical Group. He is also the author of 'Manipal and Beyond' (Penguin Books, 2016)

## Uttar Pradesh politics signals a significant change Seat sharing among India alliance partners now crucial

By Dr Gyan Pathak

Ghosi assembly bypoll has signalled a significant change in Uttar Pradesh politics. Congress joined Samajwadi Party's election campaign, the first of its kind after the formation of INDIA opposition alliance. The election is scheduled for September 5, and it is the first one-on-one electoral battle in the state between the opposition INDIA alliance and the NDA.

Since INDIA alliance was formed for Lok Sabha election 2024, and not for the Vidhan Sabha election, and therefore such a joint election campaign by INDIA alliance partners for a Vidhan Sabha seat is an important

for one-on-one contests for BJP and NDA candidates in all 80 seats in the state. Seat sharing arrangement between the INDIA alliance partners is therefore of paramount importance, and that too in the shortest possible time, with an open mind to be ready with a plan to make seat sharing arrangement at Vidhan Sabha level too, considering the latest "one nation, one election" move of PM Modi.

The INDIA alliance has already decided to make seat sharing arrangements at the state level. This will be a major say in the state since it is the strongest political party in opposition against the

"BJP at present is neither with NDA nor with INDIA alliance. Its vote share has been declining fast, not came down to 12.88 per cent in 2022 Vidhan Sabha election from 19.43 per cent in 2019 when it was part of Mahagathabandhan deriving benefit from the alliance. The real picture on ground is that it had even forfeited deposits in 287 Vidhan Sabha constituencies while winning only one seat. Even though it has considerable presence in 116 Vidhan Sabha constituencies which the INDIA alliance would need to take into consideration."

portant development. Such a political gesture at state level has become all the more significant in the light of BJP's latest move for "one nation, one election" aiming at disrupting the opposition move of unity at national level by indirectly fuelling regional aspirations of the political parties in opposition that makes them somewhat hesitant in joining hands at state level. If elections are held together at the Centre and States, BJP leadership hopes, opposition unity would become almost impossible.

What we have been seeing in the Ghosi Vidhan Sabha bypoll might be very disconcerting to the BJP and NDA partners. "The country wants change. The INDIA alliance is going to defeat the BJP. The Samajwadi Party and its allies are fully prepared for the elections," said Samajwadi Party (SP) president Akhilesh Yadav, and this statement seems to have some truth. Unity can be seen in the Ghosi bypoll at the state level, while INDIA alliance is likely to finalise their seat sharing arrangement for the Lok Sabha election 2024 by September 30.

Uttar Pradesh has always been the most important state for Lok Sabha elections since it sends the largest number of seats in the Lok Sabha. Out of 80 seats in the state, BJP had won 62 in 2019 Lok Sabha election while 2 seats were won by ally Apna Dal (S), that made the NDA tally from Uttar Pradesh to 64. BJP had won 303 seats in the entire country, while 272 seats were required to form government in New Delhi. Uttar Pradesh alliance has chiefly three parties in Uttar Pradesh - SP, Congress, and RLD. As per the current strength in the Vidhan Sabha SP had won 111 seats, Congress 2, and RLD 8 seats in 2022 N.P. RID, SBSP, PSP (Lohiya) and AADJK were part of SP+ alliance. With emergence of INDIA alliance AAP, Congress, Left and other political parties would be returning for the third term if his party loses in Uttar Pradesh.

It is in this backdrop the political stake of PM Modi or BJP is the biggest in Uttar Pradesh. It makes the stake of INDIA alliance proportionately the biggest, and hence, it requires to of-

## When will peace return to Manipur?

Editor,  
It is reported that a noted songwriter was among 5 killed in Manipur on August 30, 2023. After violence erupted in Manipur around 174 people died and over 67,000 were displaced. The violence continues despite the fact that the central government had sent about 40,000 central armed personnel from the army and Assam Rifles to contain the violence. Peace will not return to Manipur without recovering 6000 weapons and 6 lakh rounds of ammunition that were looted from security forces as alleged by Congress MP, Gauhati (Gau). So what will be the fate of the tribals of Manipur who have become targets? jaie up! What next is the question.

Yours etc,  
Mofidul Islam,  
Via email

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Shillong Times, displaying the stark reality of pedestrians forced onto the roads due to obstructed motorable lanes, posing a grim picture of the dangers we face daily. The consequences are dire, with surge in accidents and looming health hazards.

The photograph in question depicted the chaotic scene where footpaths and motorable roads, meant to be safe havens for pedestrians, were being dominated by an army of street hawkers and their makeshift stalls. This infringement has turned our once serene walkways into hazardous zones, compelling pedestrians to walk precariously on the roads, weaving through traffic, and putting their lives at risk. The issue has escalated to such an extent that accidents have become all too common.

Yours etc,  
Jason Manners  
Rockski ENGR

## Hawkers on footpaths: A perilous menace for Laitumkhrar residents

Editor,  
As a concerned resident of Laitumkhrar, it deeply troubles me to witness the ever-worsening state of our neighbourhood's footpaths due to rampant encroachment by hawkers. Their spillover into the walkways, creating an environment ripe for

breeding pests and bacteria. Not only are these unsanitary conditions a breeding ground for disease, but the narrow lanes, cluttered with the vehicles of ill-fated traffic due to the limited walking space.

The photograph in question depicted the chaotic scene where footpaths and motorable roads, meant to be safe havens for pedestrians, were being dominated by an army of street hawkers and their makeshift stalls. This infringement has turned our once serene walkways into hazardous zones, compelling pedestrians to walk precariously on the roads, weaving through traffic, and putting their lives at risk. The issue has escalated to such an extent that accidents have become all too common.

The perils of this encroachment hit home when my own daughter, a school student, almost became a victim of this menace. While crossing the road, an ambulance, heavily laden with an ambulance on route to the hospital had to swerve to avoid a hawker's cart obstructing its path. The lack of space forced the ambulance dangerously close to the sidewalk where my daughter was walking, and tragically, a scooter nearly careened into her. This could have been prevented if not for the hawker's illegal occupation of the portion of the motorable road.

The dangers of this situation extend beyond accidents. The health hazards posed by these encroachments are numerous and concerning. The hawkers' stalls often spill into the walkways, creating an environment ripe for

# Biological clocks: How does our body know that time goes by?

In April of this year, Spanish athlete Beatriz Flamini emerged into the light after a 500-day stay in a cave. Her descent underground is probably the longest undertaken by a long stretch. Flamini says she lost all sense of time on the 65th day. But can she really be sure it was the 65th day? By way of comparison, in 1962 France's Michel Siffre surfaced from the Scirasen chasm in Italy after spending what he thought was 33 days there. In fact, he spent 58 days underground.

**The tick of life's clocks**  
How can isolated human beings keep regular track of time, even when they're disconnected from their surrounding environment? Quite simply, because biological rhythms are at the heart of life, regulating it all the way from the molecular level up to that of the entire body. These include not only our sleep/wake cycles, but also body temperature, hormones, metabolism and the cardiovascular system, to name but a few.

And these rhythms have many repercussions, not least in terms of public health. Indeed, a number of diseases are episodic – for example, asthma is more severe at night, while cardiovascular accidents are more frequent in the morning. Another example is shift work, which disconnects people from their environment. It may be associated with an increased risk of cancers in workers, prompting the WHO to label it as a probable carcinogen.

Rhythms also impact how we interact with other species. For example, African trypanosomiasis, also called sleeping sickness, is a disorder of our daily rhythm caused by the parasite *Trypanosoma brucei*, whose metabolism is also daily – just like our immunity.

## Genes: the great clockmakers

The rotations of the Earth, Moon and Sun generate environmental cycles that have favoured the selection of biological clocks.

A biological clock is a mechanism internal to organisms that, in the absence of an environmental signal, operates at its own frequency. The regular alternation of day and night has, for example, favoured the evolution of the circadian clock (circa, meaning "approximately", and diem, "day").

The circadian clock mechanism was first discovered in the fruit fly, also known as *Drosophila*, in the 1970s. It is based on feedback loops in the transcription and translation of several genes – gene A promotes the expression of gene B, which in turn inhibits the expression of gene A – creating an oscillation. During the day, light induces the diminution of specific factors of the loop via a photoreceptor called cryptochrome. Interestingly, the key factors in the mechanism essentially only comprise a few genes named period, timeless, clock and cycle. However, the fine-tuning and regulation of the clock is based on a complex molecular and neuronal network that ensures its timing and precision.

There is no single, overarching circadian clock that would organise all of life, as the clock genes vary from species to species. But the principle remains the same: genes whose expression oscillates. Biological rhythms have been described in all the taxa (groups of organisms) studied so far, which comprise cyanobacteria (a type of bacteria that obtain energy via photosynthesis), fungi, plants, and animals, including humans.

In addition, various time givers (zeitgebers) synchronise the organism with its environment: light (the most studied to date), temperature and food, in particular.

## An internal clock synchronised by the environment

One very concrete implication of this circadian



clock concerns jet lag. This is the deviation of an individual's internal rhythm from the time of the time zone they are in. Environmental signals in general, and light in particular, help to re-synchronise the individual: light perceived at the end of the night moves the clock forward, while light perceived at the beginning of the night delays it. Light perceived during the day has no effect. In humans, light is not perceived directly by the molecular clock, but is captured in the retina and then transmitted via the retino-hypothalamic pathway to a central

clock, where it modulates the synthesis of clock proteins. The system is not infinitely scalable, however: it takes the human body approximately one day to adapt to a one-hour time difference. With *Homo sapiens'* intrinsic circadian period spanning an average 24.2 hours, it is easier for us to travel west and lengthen our days than to travel east and shorten them. This is also why athletes and researchers who isolate themselves in the depths of the Earth end up being out of sync with time on the surface, and ultimately perceive fewer days than 24-hour

solar days.

## Other times, other clocks

The circadian clock is not the only clock mechanism that exists in nature. Many biological processes are seasonal, such as the migration of a host of birds and insects, the reproduction and hibernation of many animal species and the flowering of plants. This seasonality is generally dictated by several factors, including by what is known as a circannual clock in the case of many species. The mechanism of this clock has not yet been determined.

The clock mechanisms in marine species are also unknown, partly because of the oceans' complex temporal structure. Marine organisms are exposed to the solar cycle of alternating day and night, which is superimposed on a series of lunar cycles, the most prominent of which is the tidal cycle (with a period of 12.4 hours or 24.8 hours). The semi-lunar and lunar cycles (14.8 days/29.5 days), linked to the phases of the moon, also strongly modulate the marine environment, via light and tides. The seasons also affect these ecosystems.

While complex, the temporal structure of marine environments is predictable, and biological rhythms linked to all these cycles have been described in marine species. For example, many corals synchronise their reproduction, laying eggs once a year over a very short period of time. Some marine worms swarm precisely once a month, in the darkest hours of the night, to initiate their reproductive dance before spawning and dying.

Interestingly, in 2020, our team of scientists revealed that biological rhythms are not limited to the coastal environment. We indeed showed rhythms in behaviour and gene expression at a depth of 1,700 metres, in a mussel living in the hydrothermal vents of the mid-Atlantic ridge. Our work underlines that the temporal coordination in physiology is likely critical, even in the most extreme life environments such as the deep ocean. (*The Conversation*)

# 'Eco-friendly' straws: Not a friend of the environment!



Drinking straws that are made from materials like paper and bamboo are often promoted as more eco-friendly than their plastic counterparts. However, a new study has found that these supposedly sustainable straws contain potentially toxic chemicals called polyfluoroalkyl and perfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

These substances, commonly known as "forever chemicals", are a large group of over 4,000 synthetic chemicals that are used in a wide range of products due to their water- and fat-repellent properties. They can be found in everyday items such as non-stick cooking pans and fast-food packaging.

PFAS can linger in the environment for thousands of years, and exposure to certain levels of PFAS has been linked to ill health both in people and in animals.

The study, conducted by researchers in Belgium, analysed commercially available drinking straws of various types and recorded PFAS concentrations in 39 separate brands. PFAS were discovered in almost all of the paper and bamboo straws tested. They were detected in plastic and glass straws too, but at a lower frequency.

Perfluorooctanoic acid was the most common PFAS detected

in the straws. The manufacture of perfluorooctanoic acid has been banned in the European Union since 2020 on safety grounds. However, it can be found in old or recycled consumer products and persists in the environment.

The presence of PFAS in plant-based straws could be due to factors like unintentional contamination from plants grown in soil polluted by PFAS and from the use of recycled paper containing PFAS in the production of straws.

Detecting forever chemicals  
The researchers used two methods to detect PFAS in the straws. First, they measured whether 29 types of common PFAS were present and quantified their amounts in the straws using a sensitive method called liquid chromatography with tandem mass spectrometry. They found 16 of the 29 target PFAS at detectable concentrations.

A screening approach was then used to detect any other PFAS compounds in the straws. This revealed the presence of two additional PFAS compounds – trifluoroacetic acid (TFA) and trifluoromethanesulfonic acid (TFMS).

TFA occurred in five of the eight paper-based straw brands tested and TFMS in six of them.

Both compounds were measured in one bamboo straw.

Given TFA's limited industrial applications, the researchers suggest that its presence in straws potentially stems from the breakdown of halogenated hydrocarbons. These hydrocarbons are commonly used as industrial solvents, intermediates in synthesis and even as dry cleaning agents.

In contrast, the sources of the TFMS in straws are uncertain. However, they are known to be associated with sites where fire-fighting foams have been used.

## Should we be concerned?

People could be directly exposed to PFAS in straws as they leach into our drinks during use. Discarded or recycled straws could also result in indirect exposure through contaminated soils, water, plants and other consumer products derived from recycled materials.

This is concerning. PFAS exposure poses considerable health risks to people, wildlife and the environment.

Research indicates that pregnant women who are exposed to these substances may experience reduced fertility and heightened blood pressure. Their children could face developmental effects like low birth weight, early puberty and even an increased

risk of some cancers. PFAS exposure has even been shown to compromise the immune system's ability to fight infections. In 2020, research from Denmark found that the severity of COVID infections seemed to be aggravated by exposure to some PFAS.

Exposure to PFAS has also been linked to a reduced reproductive ability in birds, and the development of tumours and disrupted immune and kidney function in other species of animal.

For example, research on the Cape Fear river in North Carolina in 2022 revealed that all 75 American alligators (a protected species) tested had PFAS in their blood serum. The levels of PFAS in the alligators' serum were associated with disrupted immune functions and autoimmune-type diseases.

These chemicals are now so widespread in the environment that it is almost impossible for humans and wildlife to avoid exposure to them. Exposure to PFAS can occur in various ways, including breathing in contaminated air, to consuming tainted food and water, and even through skin contact with dust and particles.

Perhaps the best thing we can do is to avoid using straws altogether. (*The Conversation*)

# How caste is compounding Malana's garbage crisis

By Rachna Verma

Nestled amid the picturesque landscape of the Himalayas, Malana village is well-known for many reasons — as 'untouchable' and unapproachable, as the only village in Himachal Pradesh that produces heroin, nicknamed 'Malana Cream'.

It is also famous for its indigenous democratic system and rather infamous for how the natives perceive outsiders — as 'untouchable' and unapproachable. In the social fabric, Malana draws around 15,000 to 20,000 tourists every year during the peak season in April-June and September-October.

This mountain village is now grappling with a mounting garbage crisis which is marred by the natural beauty. Piles of garbage welcome you as you enter the village, and along the way, the shiny wrappers of crisps and chocolates are littered until even the remotest parts of the village.

Experts say that the surging influx of tourists coupled with the village's unique social and cultural practices have hindered effective waste management initiatives.

According to Pradeep Sangwan, founder of Healing Himalayas — which conducted a clean-up drive in the village in 2019 — the social fabric of the village impeded their campaign since the locals of the area identify themselves as descendants of Aryans, upper caste and refused to participate.

The village is overwhelmingly homogeneous with only 28 out of the 1,722 people in the village identifying as Schedule Caste, according to the 2011 Census.

Sangwan tells of his experience in other villages while conducting a cleanliness drive.

"In other areas like Kaza town and Chitkul village, we always received strong support from the local panchayat and the community — especially from the younger generation and educational institutions. In many villages, residents themselves also volunteered to collect the trash," he says.

This is in stark contrast to how the population reacted to the drive in Malana.

"Residents were not willing to clean their surroundings. We even obtained permission from the temple committee but they refused to participate due to their high social status. Some even said that they were willing to pay as much as required but they would not participate in any cleanliness drive. This was very discouraging for the volunteers," Sangwan told I01 Reporters, adding that the organisation has not organised any other cleanliness drives in the village since then.

Traditional beliefs not aligned with modern waste management methods.

"The villagers consider themselves special and sacred, leading them to believe that they cannot fully integrate with the general population. The local customs dictate that outsiders cannot touch Malana, their temple or sacred platform,"



explains Vijay Kumar (42), who piles his taxi between Jari to Malana village entry point.

"The people of Malana believe that participating in such communal efforts may potentially expose them to individuals from lower castes — and fear that this could incur the wrath of their deity Jamlu Devta. This fear, in turn, reinforces the practice of untouchability, further segregating them from others and isolating the village from participating in broader initiatives aimed at maintaining cleanliness and hygiene," Vijay says.

Raju Thakur (55), the Malana sarpanch agrees that the "upper caste status" of the residents makes them hesitant to pick up garbage.

"If outsiders are not allowed to touch us, how can we touch their garbage?" he wonders.

When asked about whether the panchayat has initiated any community-led cleanup drive in the past, he evaded the question citing lack of funds as an excuse.

Swaraj Thakur (82), one of the oldest residents of the village, blames "outsiders" for dirtying their surroundings, saying that the tourists bring their trash and dump it in the village area.

## MISCOMMUNICATION LEADING TO PLASTIC PILEUP

Thakur's statement is not without merit. A spot near a water stream cutting across the village has a mound of plastic bottles, courtesy of the tourists.

According to Sharwan, a cafe owner, all of this is due to a misunderstanding.

"The locals have a belief that water flowing through this stream is sacred to Jamlu Devta. No outsider has to be allowed to cross the stream with 'outside' water, and therefore the tourists are asked to empty their water bottles before proceeding further. However, due to a language barrier tourists often misinterpret the villagers' intention thinking that they should discard their bottles, which is leading to a significant buildup of plastic waste there," he tells I01 Reporters.

"The villagers hold the belief that any negative energy or evil brought by tourists will be washed away when they drink from the stream," he adds.

No attempt has been made by the residents or panchayat to find an alternative to check the miscommunication.

According to the sarpanch, sometimes the locals get together to hire a ragpicker from the Jari hamlet who collects some of the plastic bottles in the area, while some are washed away in the river flow.

A few years ago, dustbins were installed along the tracks of the village by the officials from the Malana hydro project. However, soon after some of them were stolen and others broken," he adds.

The villagers also say that their households don't generate as much waste.

"Whatever little is generated is burnt in landfills that are present in every house. Sometimes children litter the surroundings with chips, toffee wrappers," the sarpanch says.

It is important to note that the practice of open burning of waste is harmful to the environment and public health, as it releases toxic pollutants and contributes to air pollution.

Many Indian cities and states have regulations and guidelines in place that prohibit or restrict the burning of waste, including kitchen waste, says KJWai Singh of Waste Warriors, an organisation that helps set up waste management systems in the Himalayan Region.

Gupta explains that over the years as villages like these opened themselves little by little to outsiders the residents' consumption patterns also changed.

"They are also consuming packaged goods which are disposed of carelessly. The problems are the same in other villages, which may be compounded by the unique social traditions of this village. But it remains that there is a lack of awareness among the locals and long-term interventions at the local level," he adds.

Also, interestingly, the village has fines for several petty offences — like touching a person, their religious spaces and temples, their water bodies or homes. The fines range from Rs 500 to Rs 50,000, depending on the severity of the offence however, there is no fine for littering.

## SPILLING OUT

The unsegregated solid waste is not only hampering the beauty of the village but also polluting its only water source. Most of the garbage is dumped at the entrance of the village near Malana Nala.

"In certain areas, the river has completely changed its flow due to the garbage heaps," says the sole ASHA worker of the village Nirmal Devi.

No official study or testing has been done regarding the contamination of water in the area.

The deputy commissioner of Kullu Ashutosh Garg expressed concern over the garbage crisis in the Malana village.

"The administration has attempted numerous clean-up drives with NGOs and school children in the past but received no support from the village. No one came forward to participate."

The official adds that there is a glimmer of hope as some of the youth of the village have started leaving to pursue higher education, signalling a gradual shift in mindset and possible progress in future.

(Rachna Verma is a Himachal Pradesh-based freelance journalist and a member of I01 Reporters, a pan-India network of grassroots reporters)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajal Bhambi      Sunday, SEPTEMBER 3, 2023

**'Birthday Forecast'**

Moon conjunct Rahu on your self-renewal chart and will give excellent results. It is going to be a wonderful year. The star will be profitable. The work which was uncompleted, will now get fully done. You will be successful in your work. The time is favourable. You will have no shortage of money. You will also get funds for new projects of yours. You will remain confident and will meet all challenges in style. Emotionally, you will be capable and experienced person. Love affairs will be successful. You will get married to a person of your choice. Your family will help you take serious decisions. Moon and Mars will be harmful in many matters. You will have no shortage of lawsuits in your life. You will plan expansion in your business.

**'This week for you'**

**Aries : (March 21 - April 20)** is going to be a great week. You will be getting good results for the effort that you have put in. You will get mental peace. You will get cooperation from your colleagues and boss. You will be remaining busy with your work and business. You will spend your time with your family members. A person may leave his obligations against you. He may try to irritate you. But you will come out of this sticky situation. You will be involved in money related activities. You will spend your money wisely, but you will also be investing items for long-term purposes. You will desire from returning into the arms of other person.

**Taurus : (April 21 - May 21)** This week will begin on a bright note for you. You will feel energetic. You will enjoy the good news related to your work or business. You will also receive a very big contract or order. You will also get a loan with your own terms and conditions. You will get to meet inspiring and wealthy people. You will be successful in your work. You will also get a loan from your friends or colleagues. It is a great week for you. You will feel inspired. You will bring about an increase in your respect and prestige. People will acknowledge your contribution.

**Gemini : (May 22 - June 21)** The good news will be in your favour. You will feel yourself to be full of energy and vigor. You will be fully active. You will have no health worries. You will be busy in many fields: business, work, travel, meeting people etc. You will be able to succeed in establishing a direct contact with people. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done.

**Cancer : (June 22 - July 22)** This is a favorable week in the offering. You can get a marriage proposal. The results will be good. You will have no shortage of money. You will also get a loan from your friends or colleagues. You will look after your family members very well. Your efforts will be successful. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done.

**Leo : (July 23 - August 22)** August 23 is a day of effort in order to get success in the course. We shall be able to get our work done. However, the result will be good. Your health related problems will not bother you. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done.

**Virgo : (August 23 - September 22)** You will have a lot of successful days, which will prove to be wealth giving. Your honor and prestige will increase. You will also enhance your knowledge. Your outlook towards life will be broad and you will be creative, active and imaginative. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done.

**Libra : (September 23 - October 23)** You will overcome all obstacles in your work and determination. You will appear to be on the higher side, but still you will manage the things. You will also enjoy the success of your family members, and friends. Your confidence will enhance. You will remain positive towards your colleagues. You will also make contacts with people. You're likely to save things and will be better as your deal and targets are achieved. This will make you feel happy. You will get unexpected support from people near you. You will have no shortage of money. You will also complete your work with the cooperation of your colleagues.

**Scorpio : (October 24 - November 23)** Your financial concerns will be removed. Mental satisfaction will see you gain supremacy in your work. Your government related work will also get done. Your contacts will prove to be beneficial. All your money making efforts will be crowned with success. You will do something audacious and noble during this period. Those who are single will plan to get married. This is going to be a wonderful week for you. With the support of your colleagues, you will complete a long called job. Your name and fame will rise. Your honest and regularity will get a boost. You will remain popular among your workmates. During this time, you will get an important person in your circle. You will be mostly peaceful and at ease.

**Sagittarius : (November 24 - December 24)** You will meet a lot of strangers who will get you inspired. Your dreams will be a reality. You will get success in all government related cases. You will get good results in your education. You will be successful in your work. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done. You will be able to get your work done.

**Capricorn : (December 25 - January 24)** Things will improve. All your financial concerns will get removed. Property will give you reason for cheer. Your money related problems will also get solved. You will see work done in financial matters. You will also take care of your health. You will eat healthy food. With your talent, you will be able to show a distinct rise in your workplace. Your seniors will be quite cooperative with you. You will also enjoy good bonding with your seniors. Court cases will be decided in your favour. You will feel quite happy in the company of your family members. You will be prepared to face any challenge. Love affairs will be successful. Love birds will have a great time.

**Aquarius : (January 25 - February 19)** is going to be wonderful week. There are days that will bring wealth. You will also receive a commission to your work. You will get new and business ideas. It is the time to make your dreams. You may take part in entertainment activities. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your life partner. You will do some important work related to land and property. There will be an increase in your income. You could also get promoted in your job. There will be various proposals to get good business contracts. You will enjoy a new relationship with your partner. There will be a long-term investment in your business. You will improve your level of performance. You will receive and opportunities will get fulfilled.

**Pisces : (February 20 - March 20)** Financial problems will get resolved one by one. Conflicts at work will be positive. You will get opportunities for progress. You will see all your goals fulfilled. You will also get a loan. There will be a mutual love between husband and wife. You will enjoy a lot of fun and games in your life. There will be no success. You will find a solution to the problems in office in a very intelligent manner. Your problems will also get resolved. You will also have health issues. Your financial position is going to be good. You will keep your expenses under control. You will balance out the things perfectly.

## Embracing the mattress tech revolution



Imagine a sleep experience that transcends the act of closing your eyes and dives into a world of advanced technologies that enhance rest and comfort. We're now entering an era where we bid adieu to the nostalgic embrace of traditional gaddas (mattresses) and wholeheartedly welcome the groundbreaking mattress tech revolution. As we embark on this transition, let's explore how these innovative mattresses are reshaping our sleep patterns, elevating our well-being, and promising a rejuvenated start to each morning.

In a world where innovation takes center stage, the evolution of sleep technology is keeping pace. We've moved from basic sleeping surfaces to enhanced mattresses tech — they've transformed into advanced sleep solutions designed to nurture our physical and mental health. With a focus on optimizing sleep quality, maintaining spinal health, and eliminating discomfort, mattresses have evolved into our allies in the pursuit of restful slumber.

Physiotherapist Dr. Aakash Malwani from Madhya Pradesh sheds light on the health implications of mattress technology. "Through my profession, I've witnessed numerous individuals grappling with back and joint pain due to poor sleep posture. The shift from traditional gaddas to ergonomic mattresses has been truly transformative. These contemporary mattresses offer tailored support for various body parts, aligning the spine and relieving pressure points. This transition not only alleviates pain but also serves as a proactive measure against future musculoskeletal issues."

Dharna Durga, a renowned Content Creator, shares her experience, "I've discovered my perfect sleep sanctuary with the Sleepyhead Sense BodyIQ Orthopedic Memory Foam Mattress featuring Cooling Tech — a brilliant fusion of innovation and comfort. The magic of BodyIQ Orthopedic memory foam lies in its ability to smartly contour itself to mirror your body shape, weight, and preferred sleep position. Its personalized support and the calming effect of Cooling Technology bids farewell to restless nights, ensuring you wake up each morning truly revitalized and ready to create more content for everyone."

(ANS/ST)

**"Knowledge is an unending adventure at the edge of uncertainty."**

—Jacob Bronowski

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No. 1581 No. 27 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 4, 2023

**Bombast, not realism**

A safe assumption could now be that the Modi government is in a mind to advance the parliament polls, as is evident from the summoning of the special session of parliament and the term-end photo-shoot being arranged much in advance. This, for Modi, is the most opportune time to seek a fresh mandate as the Opposition remains fragmented despite the cobbling of a new alliance, that too with the old guards in the forefront. The revival of the plan to hold simultaneous parliament and assembly polls, as had been promised in the 2014 BJP-NDA manifesto, adds a new twist to the approaching Lok Sabha poll scenario. When a promise is made in the manifesto, a ruling alliance is duty-bound to implement it. But, as is its wont, the Modi establishment dragged its feet on this for two terms of parliament but revived the plan with the appointment of the nine-member Kovind-panel. The panel would chart out the modalities for such a sweeping change in the nation's electoral landscape. Published opinion polls show there is overwhelming support from the masses for this push, though the still disjointed Opposition is not enthused at this. Fact is, the Opposition is still not prepared to face the polls. Their mood remains as sunk as ever, amply reflected also in their forced misdeeds and lack of energy for the photo-shoot at the end of the latest round of their confabulations in the western metropolis.

Bombast is no substitute to a hard sense of realism, as is evident also in the characteristic assertion from CPI-M leader Sitaram Yechury. His claim at the end of the conclave was that a "shaky Modi government has reduced the price of cooking gas by 200 rupees by the time the 'India' alliance reached Mumbai." This shows how these leaders live in a fool's paradise. It is quite likely that Modi has begun sending olive branches to the electorate in the context of his plans to hold early parliament polls. But, nothing goes to show the BJP and Modi reckoned this alliance as a threat to them. Not yet. The NDA's relevance today is more due to the lack of cohesion and strength of the 'India' alliance, at whose head are discredited politicians, not a young blood or an inspiring leadership. Rahul Gandhi could still be the best bet to lead the alliance but the rest of the greedy folk would rather keep him on the sidelines. Even the huge success of Rahul Gandhi's Bharat Jodo Mareh failed to drill some sense into the heads of the old guard that he stands head and shoulders above them. Old is not necessarily gold.

**3C's: The Enemies of Narpuh**

By H.H. Mohmen

In the past weeks so much has been written about Narpuh, in fact in the recent news but for all the wrong reasons. Narpuh is the last tropical forest in Jaintia Hills. It is also a source of clean and clear water for the area around the forest. But now it has become polluted. Narpuh is the extension of Boraila range on the Assam side of the border is also home to more than 400 types of butterflies and it is a natural habitat for the hulkoo gibbons. Till the late seventies and the early eighties, much of the Narpuh forest was classified by the District Council as an unclassified reserved forest which was then converted to private ownership thanks to the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC).

**The Arrival of Cement Plants in the Narpuh area**  
The first cement plant to operate from the area is Star Cement which was incorporated in the year 2001 and commenced operation from its unit in Lumshong in the year 2005 with a capacity of 1 million tons per annum. The website of the company also states that it now sits on 200 hectares of land at Lumshong, Meghalaya and the integrated cement plant at Lumshong produces 1.67 million tonnes of cement per annum (MTPA). In addition to the plant at Lumshong the company also has two grinding units, one at MTPA cement unit at Sonapur near Guwahati and another cement unit at Mahanagar near Silguri in West Bengal with a capacity of 2 MTPA. For the entire requirement to produce more than 5 million tonnes of cement per annum, the company relies solely on Lumshong, in Meghalaya. Lumshong ensures easy availability of high-grade limestone for use by the company in its cement production. Now there are many cement plants in the area and the major players are Star Cement, Usha, Dalmia, previously Adhunik Cement, J.D. Hill Cement, Gold Stone, and others. All these cement plants are located in an area which is within a 5-kilometre radius.

**Public Hearings are shams**  
In the past, violence during public hearings was unheard of but of late there have been reports of skirmish and violence almost every time a public hearing is conducted by the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board. From Brichynori to Thangskai is the same story of people protesting against

the proposed expansion of cement plant activities in the area. The question that one should ask is why is there always violence during public hearings organised by MSPCB? The irony today is that it looks like a public hearing is designed to help cement plants easily obtain environment clearance. The hearings are just a facade for the company to facilitate easy environment clearance.

**The impending threat to Narpuh area**  
In the entire Narpuh block, most of the land in the area now belongs to the cement companies. Only Star Cement owns more than 200 hectares of land in the Lumshong area. The situation is that native people only own the land on which the house is located and maybe a small stretch of land here and there, but the large tracts of land are now owned by the companies. We are starting at now is the case of land alienation where locals are stripped of their land in their area. Narpuh forest is also under threat not only from

**The fact is air quality in the area will be visible even to the naked eye during the lean season from January to April when trees and leaves take the colour of cement or fly ash. Therefore for the cement companies to say that they adhere to all regulations is like saying, "I have passed the examination without having to undergo any kind of test at all."**

proliferating cement plant but encroachment by local farmers to extend their plantations too. There are many pending cases in the local courts of alleged encroachment into the forest areas. For planting area must be left out or part left planter.

**Narpuh, the Cement Companies, and Caves**  
Narpuh is very popular with the babu Bhanu Karjee. Narpuh's name was mentioned by the Prime Minister in his Mann Ki Baat broadcast, but the question is what has happened to the caves in the Narpuh area? If my memory serves me right, the first cave expedition organized by the Meghalaya Adventurers Association (MAA) was to survey and map Koro Koro Umlawar cave system. Unfortunately now "Koro Koro Umlawar" and "Kren list Han" which is in the list of the longest caves in India are under threat due to limestone mining using explosives. Ask Bhanu if he would recommend anybody visiting the caves in the Narpuh area and his answer will be in the

negative because it is no longer safe to enter these caves. Limestone mining in the area has destroyed the exotic cave system there.

**Monitoring of air quality**  
The cement companies claim that they follow and adhere to all regulations prescribed as per environmental laws but what about monitoring air quality in the area. MSPCB website claims that 10 (ten) units of Ambient Air Quality Monitoring stations in the State were installed by the Board as part of the air quality network under the National Air Monitoring Programme (NAMP), a Centrally Sponsored Programme, but unfortunately, none was installed in the Narpuh area. One would think that Narpuh with the caves is the best location for operating in the area and with their captive power plants would be the best candidates for installing Ambient Air Quality Monitoring stations. The pertinent question is why is there no Ambient Air Quality Monitoring station installed by the MSPCB in

**The Crux of the matter**  
At the heart of the entire problem is the companies' unwillingness to expand the production of cement plants in the region. The cement industry in India also needs to install captive power plants but the major threat is the production of clinkers.

If one takes the example of Star Cement, the total cement production of the company is more than 5 million MTPA of this only 1.67 (MTPA) is produced from Lumshong and the other 4 MTPA is produced from two grinding units, one at Sonapur near Guwahati and another at Mahanagar near Silguri in West Bengal. Effectively, Lumshong only produces clinkers to feed the cement plants in Assam and West Bengal and does not produce cement. So how is the state going to economically benefit from this kind of arrangement. Lumshong and Narpuh are stripped bare of their minerals and are fast becoming dumping grounds of dust and waste which pollutes both air and water. What we are starting at is the process of desertification of the area as it happens.

ity in the area will be visible even to the naked eye during the lean season from January to April when trees and leaves take the colour of cement or fly ash. Therefore for the cement companies to say that they adhere to all regulations is like saying, "I have passed the examination without having to undergo any kind of test at all."

**The Land of the Dead**  
Narpuh in general and Lukha in particular is the illustration of the kind of water that is available in the area. Lukha is becoming poisonous and recently there was an effort to reclaim the river, but it has to be seen if the effort is effective and also if it is sustainable. When Adhunik Cement planned to set up its plant in the area upstream of the source of water supply for the Lumshong village, the plan was rejected. We are invited by the community to protest against the plan to construct the Adhunik cement plant at the proposed location. But later the community came to an agreement with the company when it promised to provide their water tanks to supply the water to the village.

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**Sudden calling of special session of Parliament another gimmick of PM**

**Indians are reconciled to Modi's occasional shocks**

By Sushil Kuttu

Prime Minister Narendra Modi loves to keep people guessing. In fact, he thoroughly enjoys the experience whether all the people like it or not; for there is always a comfortable majority which votes for him and the quirks of electoral democracy ensure he remains in power. Three decades of never-giving-up opposition benches smother separation him from other politicians. The Opposition has come to learn that this man is special without being special in a comfortable manner.

The Prime Minister of India for nearly a decade, Narendra Modi has surprised everyone again by calling a special session of Parliament which is a rarity. Since then, there is speculation and people cannot get around guessing what he must be his intentions. It cannot be helped that half of India does not trust the Prime Minister from pulling something unexpected and unlikely from his hat and Modi has a collection of scores of hats.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is often considered dangerous by his protagonists. He is not the amiable Atal Behari Vajpayee who has happened to be the only other BJP Prime Minister not even news that India's GDP grew at 7.8 per cent in the last quarter has impressed people. The feeling mounts that Narendra Modi should go.

That said, what could be this special session of Parliament all about? Like said Prime Minister Narendra Modi is keeping everybody from the CEO to the charpai, guessing and loving it thoroughly. Modi's Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pralhad Joshi is another man who enjoying the suspense, repeatedly questioned but repeatedly stone-walling — the final gasp of a dying phenomenon kept breathing with suspense.

What is the special session's agenda? Killing millions upon millions of people waiting for the collapse of a dictatorship. For them, this special session is a case of intimidation naming itself. If Prime Minister Narendra Modi could get to the heads of the electorate, he would be unpleasantly surprised. The BJP IT Cell has in recent days lost its bubbling spirit, failing in its primary duty — protecting the Prime Minister from wild speculation that has happened to be the only other BJP Prime Minister.

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The agenda of the special session is shrouded in mystery. What will it be? One nation, one election? Women's reservation; perhaps freeing the Hindus from the clutches of the Walf Bards? Could be the repeal of the Places of Worship Act... The Narendra Modi dispensation has come to the realization Pasmada Muslims aren't going to deliver on promises. The confusion on the agenda is driving the media of all genre nuts.

What is Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah's worst nightmares come true? Certainly, there are things called anti-incumbency and there is voter fatigue. But Modi is facing what looks like electorate allergy. Forget "Amra Kaal", forget (25) the kind of the assembly elections and defat stalling in the face. The five-day special session of Parliament is being seen as the unlikely saviour of a falling regime. That is how desperate Prime Minister Narendra Modi is at the end of years of luring over a billion plus Indians (IPA Service)

**Letters to the Editor**

**One nation, one election**

The news heading "One Nation, One Election" is not a new concept. Belgium, Sweden, South Africa and Nepal are countries that follow this concept. The idea behind this is to reduce the cost of conducting separate elections and ensure continuity in the policies and programs of the central and state governments.

There are several challenges associated with this concept. Some of them are:

1. Constitutional Amendments: Conducting simultaneous elections would require constitutional amendments to sync up the terms of the state legislative assemblies with that of the Lok Sabha. Further, the Representation of the People Act as well as other parliamentary procedures will also need to be amended.
2. Logistics: Conducting simultaneous elections would require a massive logistical exercise, including deployment of security forces, polling personnel and electronic voting machines (EVMs).
3. Political Opposition: Regional parties have expressed concerns that they would not be able to raise their local issues strongly as national issues take centre stage.
4. Financial Constraints: Conducting simultaneous elections would require a significant amount of funds, which could be a challenge for some states.
5. Administrative Challenges: The Law Commission said holding simultaneous elections will boost voter turnout as it will be more convenient for them to cast votes at once.
6. Alienation of strain on Government and Security

Simultaneous elections also known as "One Nation, One Election" is not a new concept. Belgium, Sweden, South Africa and Nepal are countries that follow this concept. The idea behind this is to reduce the cost of conducting separate elections and ensure continuity in the policies and programs of the central and state governments.

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6. Alienation of strain on Government and Security

Simultaneous elections would alleviate the strain on administration and security forces, who are currently deployed for extended periods during separate state and national polls.

5. Focus on Development Efforts: Holding simultaneous elections would allow political parties to focus on development efforts rather than being preoccupied with election campaigns.

It is important to note that there are several benefits associated with simultaneous elections, there are also several challenges that need to be addressed before implementing this concept. The Law Commission of India introduced the draft recommendations in 2018 proposing that conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies could be the solution to alleviate the country's perpetual election cycle. The Government of India has on Friday night constituted a committee headed by former President of India Ram Nath Kovind to explore the feasibility of "One Nation, One Election".

Yours etc  
VK Lyngdoh  
Via email

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to understand how the government pulls the wool over our eyes. The fancy terms, glamorous and scientific statements and acronyms used by both politicians and officers of the government at gatherings, have hit me hard. I am no scholar, but I do have adequate education. The picturesque sounding strategies and imaginative operational plans bandied about so eloquently and with conviction from the podiums, to haul the state out of the dumps have hoodwinked us.

This mouthful, "Promotion of Ease of Living through Good Governance and the use of Technology in Schooling," at a symposium in Garo Hills (ST August 22, 2023) and "Aic of residential schools in M'laya worries the education department and government servants' hearts must beat as one with the sufferings of the common people. Only then will they be moved with a conscience to be Doers and not false Speakers!"

"Let integrity and uprightness preserve our leaders!" (Psalm 25: 20-21).

Yours etc,  
Kevin Phillips  
Shillong - 19

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

**Be does not false speakers**  
Editor,  
It suddenly dawned on me, what a slow learner I've been

"The smallest world on earth is that which is created by a closed mind."

— Michael Bassey Johnson

The Shillong Times

Vol No. 15, No. 26 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 5, 2023

FIR Against EGI

A First Information Report (FIR) was filed against the Editors' Guild of India (EGI) on after it came up with a report following the visit of a 3-member fact finding team comprising senior journalists to Manipur. The comprehensive 24 page report was a sincere attempt by the EGI team to find out the ground realities obtaining both in the Imphal valley and the Kuki-Zo inhabited hills districts. But for any group that's new to the situation in Manipur and its embedded ethnic pressures and pulls and with the short time available to gather information there's bound to be some discrepancies and these have, as expected been pointed out by Meitei intellectuals/academics. The EGI has no vested interest in creating a narrative of its own. It spoke to a cross section of media personnel both from the Imphal valley and also from the hills and reported what the media had been observing which is that the "division along ethnic lines was not only in terms of peoples' consciousness, but a physical division or geographical separation has also taken place between the Meitei and Kuki-Zo inhabited areas observed what they saw on the ground, visited trying to look for the truth.

The EGI observers also noted what sections of the media had been reporting which is that there is a 'buffer zone' that divides the two communities with women protestors on each side. They found women protestors everywhere, checking vehicles, stopping trucks but not stopping cars carrying the media. Perhaps what did not go down well with the Meiteis was the EGI observation that Manipur police and commando units of the state were raided and allegedly openly sided with civilians and partitioned Kuki villages in the outskirts of Imphal. What has been stated by different individuals in discussions on TV channels that the weapons from police armouries were allowed to be taken since there was no attempt on the part of those guarding the armoury to stop the loot, also formed part of the EGI report but they were careful to cite the Indigenous Tribal Leaders Forum (ITLF).

The person filing an FIR against the three members of the EGI accuses them of misreporting certain facts. Even if this were to be true should the person not just counter this in and through the media instead of using sections of the now defunct IT Act? Separate FIRs were also filed with Chief Minister Biren Singh also throwing his weight behind the complainants. The Editors' Guild of Manipur has also supported the FIR filed by a social worker. To wade into troubled waters at this juncture is fraught and although the EGI has given a statement correcting some editorial errors, that has not found acceptance and the reasons are clear for those that have been following the conflict in Manipur.

Meanwhile in a show of solidarity all the journalists' union of the country have condemned the FIR and called it unwarranted. It remains to be seen how this issue pans out in the coming days. The judicial enquiry by a retired judge of the Guwahati High Court and two other former civil servants is still pending although the trio were given a timeline of three months.

Letters to the Editor

NEHU's inordinate delay in giving marksheets

The BE Ed results were declared by NEHU on August 23 but the marksheets have not yet been given to the graduating students. This is unacceptable because BE Ed is a professional course and these graduating and have applied for a teaching post in several institutions in the state and outside it are facing a difficult ordeal. Many have lost the opportunity to others who have passed their BE Ed from other states. Why does NEHU always fail its students? Why are NEHU authorities unable to keep up with technology? If the results have been announced over a week ago it stands to reason that the marks of the students too are available with the University. So why the delay in doing what is an imperative? Clearly the Controller of Examinations is at fault here. Will the VC take immediate action?

Yours etc.,  
KL Nongthum,  
Via email

Much ado about nothing

Another ritualistic, short duration Assembly session that will extend for a mere 5 days from September 15 has been fixed. As had happened with several previous Assembly sessions, we can expect no positive outcome from this session too. I have in the past written about the futility of these short duration Assembly sessions. I'm sure these short sessions are not called to carry out any important work but merely to fulfill a constitutional requirement that a session must be held every six months. Looking back, short duration Assembly sessions started to become the norm about 25 years ago and they are characterised by an almost total lack of legislative activity. In contrast, prior to the above period more than half of the time of the Assembly was spent on debating policy and legislation. About 30% to 40% of the bills used to be sent to Select Committees for in depth studies before they are tabled in subsequent Assembly sessions for further debate and passage. It may

The question of the relationship between the KHADC and women's constitutional rights has been raised in the article, 'KHADC: Why trample on women's constitutional rights?' by Patricia Mukhim. The institution in question, the KHADC, is the legislative body when it comes to protecting Khasi culture and tradition, including marriage and Khasi status. In this regard, the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997, is the legislation that has protected and codified the matrilineal system, which is the pride of our women folk.

In my view, to say that the KHADC is trampling on women's rights when it raises the question of mixed marriages between Khasi women and non-tribals, is a myopic statement. Does anyone believe that the KHADC is anti-women, or has a history of being anti-women, or is driven by any beliefs that are anti-women? The answer should be resounding "No". Rather, we should understand the perceived danger from mixed marriages owing to the matrilineal nature of our community. Why this is so is a subject of another article, but perhaps, it has to do with the dilution of the traditional matrilineal system due to the disappearance of the Khasi-ship, due to the emergence of private ownership of land, and due to the growing exposure to, and presence of, other communities amongst us.

Moreover, the KHADC, vide the Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997, has actually restricted certain fundamental rights of men. In clause 10(c) of the Act, children born to a Khasi father or both Khasi parents, will be deprived of their Khasi status if they are no longer governed by the matrilineal system. This Act has not only codified the matrilineal system, but even adds an arbitrary clause that seeks to deprive Khasi status to children of a Khasi man if they take his clan name. However, the Allahabad High Court has ruled that to keep one's name of choice or change one's name is a Fundamental Right covered by Articles 19(1)(a) and 21. i.e. Right to Freedom of Expression and Right to Personal Liberty.

So, the question is, would it tantamount to trampling on women's constitutional rights for the KHADC to mitigate any perceived dangers from mixed marriages? The answer would be no, to the extent that depriving Khasi children, who take their father's clan name, of Khasi status, does not amount to

be noted that in the previous and present Legislative Assemblies these practices have dropped to almost zero rendering our so-called representative democracy meaningless.

The function of the Legislature as an institution of accountability and oversight over policy, legislation, proper articulation of constituency grievances has also been rendered meaningless and as if all this is not enough, in March this year, we had the shortest 7-day Budget Session on record and the same Budget was passed without discussion. This implies that the Opposition had given the government tacit approval to spend the entire budget of 15,000 crores as if please!

Moreover, the Opposition did not find it important to ask for a review of the financial and physical achievements of the last Budget (2022-23). So, where is the principle of checks and balances which is supposed to be one of the hallmarks of representative democracy?

It may be mentioned that there is a Business Advisory Committee that fixes the number of days of an Assembly session. I wonder how the leader of the Opposition (who is also a member of

trampling on their constitutional rights. The answer would be yes, to the extent that depriving Khasi children, who take their father's name but hold the Khasi status, amounts to trampling on their constitutional rights. If no, then accusing the KHADC of trampling on women's rights is redundant. If yes, then clause 10(c) of the Act must be unconstitutional for violating Articles 19(1)(a) and 21, and hence must be subjected to invalidation or amendments. But if the Act is invalidated or amended, then so does the codification of matrilineal system. If the Act or the said clause is invalidated, then matrimony would not have the force of law, but would remain as a mere customary practice, having no bearing on anyone. In this case, following a matrilineal or patrilineal system would be irrelevant to our identity as a Jaintia-tribe. But that is the crux of the issue. What Mukhim is saying, in effect, is that mixed marriages should not affect the Khasi identity of the children. But that is an arguable issue. If that is so, then neither should matrimony or patriliney have any bearing on the Khasi identity of children.

I would argue that barring any woman from marrying outside the community is in violation of the Fundamental Rights, just as barring any man and his children from keeping a name of their choice is in violation of their Fundamental Rights. But the issue here is not about barring women to marry whom they want or men to take a name of their choice. Qualifying the Khasi status of a person is a different issue, that restricting the life choices of that person. The question then is whether or not the KHADC can qualify the Khasi status of children by their name or descent. If we look at the Fundamental Rights enshrined in Articles 15(1)(2), 16, 19(1)(d)(e)(g), 29(2), 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 103, 104, 105, 106, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 119, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147, 148, 149, 150, 151, 152, 153, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 175, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 181, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 190, 191, 192, 193, 194, 195, 196, 197, 198, 199, 200, 201, 202, 203, 204, 205, 206, 207, 208, 209, 210, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216, 217, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 224, 225, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 231, 232, 233, 234, 235, 236, 237, 238, 239, 240, 241, 242, 243, 244, 245, 246, 247, 248, 249, 250, 251, 252, 253, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271, 272, 273, 274, 275, 276, 277, 278, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, 285, 286, 287, 288, 289, 290, 291, 292, 293, 294, 295, 296, 297, 298, 299, 300, 301, 302, 303, 304, 305, 306, 307, 308, 309, 310, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 316, 317, 318, 319, 320, 321, 322, 323, 324, 325, 326, 327, 328, 329, 330, 331, 332, 333, 334, 335, 336, 337, 338, 339, 340, 341, 342, 343, 344, 345, 346, 347, 348, 349, 350, 351, 352, 353, 354, 355, 356, 357, 358, 359, 360, 361, 362, 363, 364, 365, 366, 367, 368, 369, 370, 371, 372, 373, 374, 375, 376, 377, 378, 379, 380, 381, 382, 383, 384, 385, 386, 387, 388, 389, 390, 391, 392, 393, 394, 395, 396, 397, 398, 399, 400, 401, 402, 403, 404, 405, 406, 407, 408, 409, 410, 411, 412, 413, 414, 415, 416, 417, 418, 419, 420, 421, 422, 423, 424, 425, 426, 427, 428, 429, 430, 431, 432, 433, 434, 435, 436, 437, 438, 439, 440, 441, 442, 443, 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 450, 451, 452, 453, 454, 455, 456, 457, 458, 459, 460, 461, 462, 463, 464, 465, 466, 467, 468, 469, 470, 471, 472, 473, 474, 475, 476, 477, 478, 479, 480, 481, 482, 483, 484, 485, 486, 487, 488, 489, 490, 491, 492, 493, 494, 495, 496, 497, 498, 499, 500, 501, 502, 503, 504, 505, 506, 507, 508, 509, 510, 511, 512, 513, 514, 515, 516, 517, 518, 519, 520, 521, 522, 523, 524, 525, 526, 527, 528, 529, 530, 531, 532, 533, 534, 535, 536, 537, 538, 539, 540, 541, 542, 543, 544, 545, 546, 547, 548, 549, 550, 551, 552, 553, 554, 555, 556, 557, 558, 559, 560, 561, 562, 563, 564, 565, 566, 567, 568, 569, 570, 571, 572, 573, 574, 575, 576, 577, 578, 579, 580, 581, 582, 583, 584, 585, 586, 587, 588, 589, 590, 591, 592, 593, 594, 595, 596, 597, 598, 599, 600, 601, 602, 603, 604, 605, 606, 607, 608, 609, 610, 611, 612, 613, 614, 615, 616, 617, 618, 619, 620, 621, 622, 623, 624, 625, 626, 627, 628, 629, 630, 631, 632, 633, 634, 635, 636, 637, 638, 639, 640, 641, 642, 643, 644, 645, 646, 647, 648, 649, 650, 651, 652, 653, 654, 655, 656, 657, 658, 659, 660, 661, 662, 663, 664, 665, 666, 667, 668, 669, 670, 671, 672, 673, 674, 675, 676, 677, 678, 679, 680, 681, 682, 683, 684, 685, 686, 687, 688, 689, 690, 691, 692, 693, 694, 695, 696, 697, 698, 699, 700, 701, 702, 703, 704, 705, 706, 707, 708, 709, 710, 711, 712, 713, 714, 715, 716, 717, 718, 719, 720, 721, 722, 723, 724, 725, 726, 727, 728, 729, 730, 731, 732, 733, 734, 735, 736, 737, 738, 739, 740, 741, 742, 743, 744, 745, 746, 747, 748, 749, 750, 751, 752, 753, 754, 755, 756, 757, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 763, 764, 765, 766, 767, 768, 769, 770, 771, 772, 773, 774, 775, 776, 777, 778, 779, 780, 781, 782, 783, 784, 785, 786, 787, 788, 789, 790, 791, 792, 793, 794, 795, 796, 797, 798, 799, 800, 801, 802, 803, 804, 805, 806, 807, 808, 809, 810, 811, 812, 813, 814, 815, 816, 817, 818, 819, 820, 821, 822, 823, 824, 825, 826, 827, 828, 829, 830, 831, 832, 833, 834, 835, 836, 837, 838, 839, 840, 841, 842, 843, 844, 845, 846, 847, 848, 849, 850, 851, 852, 853, 854, 855, 856, 857, 858, 859, 860, 861, 862, 863, 864, 865, 866, 867, 868, 869, 870, 871, 872, 873, 874, 875, 876, 877, 878, 879, 880, 881, 882, 883, 884, 885, 886, 887, 888, 889, 890, 891, 892, 893, 894, 895, 896, 897, 898, 899, 900, 901, 902, 903, 904, 905, 906, 907, 908, 909, 910, 911, 912, 913, 914, 915, 916, 917, 918, 919, 920, 921, 922, 923, 924, 925, 926, 927, 928, 929, 930, 931, 932, 933, 934, 935, 936, 937, 938, 939, 940, 941, 942, 943, 944, 945, 946, 947, 948, 949, 950, 951, 952, 953, 954, 955, 956, 957, 958, 959, 960, 961, 962, 963, 964, 965, 966, 967, 968, 969, 970, 971, 972, 973, 974, 975, 976, 977, 978, 979, 980, 981, 982, 983, 984, 985, 986, 987, 988, 989, 990, 991, 992, 993, 994, 995, 996, 997, 998, 999, 1000.

which are not subject to any such qualifications. Therefore, clause 10(c) of the Lineage Act, qualifying Khasi identity by matrilineal nomenclature, is in violation of Articles 19(1)(a) and 21, without qualifications. Arguably, the right to marry a person of choice also falls under Article 21. So, if we follow this train of thought, then the KHADC may not be able to qualify Khasi identity by either name or descent. However, despite the above mentioned articles and their qualifications, or lack thereof, non-tribals have Article 46 as a Directive Principle of State Policy, which states that the State shall promote the educational and economic interests of the Scheduled Tribes, and protect them from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. So, it is here, perhaps, that the constitutionality of the KHADC, mitigating any perceived dangers from mixed marriages is affirmed, because the perceived danger of mixed marriages is the loss of Scheduled Tribes status, and protection them from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. So, it is here, perhaps, that the constitutionality of the KHADC, mitigating any perceived dangers from mixed marriages is affirmed, because the perceived danger of mixed marriages is the loss of Scheduled Tribes status, and protection them from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. So, it is here, perhaps, that the constitutionality of the KHADC, mitigating any perceived dangers from mixed marriages is affirmed, because the perceived danger of mixed marriages is the loss of Scheduled Tribes status, and protection them from all forms of social injustice and exploitation. 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*"The past always looks better than it was. It's only pleasant because it isn't here."*  
—Finley Peter Dunne

The Shillong Times  
Vol No LXV No 2 SHILLONG THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 7, 2023

### Despondent Teachers

A day before the Teachers' Day observation on September 5 this year a section of teachers were seen protesting the delay in salary payment by the Government of Meghalaya. This is nothing new but attempts to set this debilitating problem right seem to evade the mandarins at the State Secretariat. Teachers serving under the Deficit System of grants-in-aid used to be paid salaries once every quarter, leaving them to rely heavily on the goodwill of their house owners who also have to willy-nilly agree to be paid rent once in three months. Teachers avail their rations too on credit much to their embarrassment. There are other categories of teachers too such as those under Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan who have been demanding enhanced pay. To be fair to teachers they are the backbone of not just the education system of the state but also its socio-economic progress and the ability of youth to cope with a very competitive system.

A lot of rhetoric is peddled every Teachers' Day that teachers play a crucial role in shaping the future of our society by educating and guiding the next generation. But the fact also remains that teachers are underpaid particularly in the private educational institutions and face significant financial challenges as a result. As far as teachers paid by government funds are concerned the reality is that there is not enough state investment in education apart from the sector also suffering budget cuts. There's a huge gap between what the government pronounces via its various policies and what it actually does for them. Yet we expect teachers to give their best when they are in a distressed lot. Governments are always struggling to balance their budgets in the face of rising costs and declining revenues. But that education should suffer the consequences of such budget cuts is unpardonable. As a result, teachers are bearing the brunt of lower salaries. In some cases they even had to take pay cuts or accept reductions in benefits, such as healthcare and retirement benefits, in order to help balance the budget. In a country with a major baggage of poor educational outcomes how can there be such huge allocations to defence for instance?

Poor educational budgets also mean lack of investment in teacher training and development, which reduces a teachers' capacity to perform to her/his optimal. Teachers need ongoing training and professional development in order to keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date, and to be able to effectively support their students. Has the Government of Meghalaya paid attention to this aspect? Teachers' underpayment has far-reaching consequences for education and society as a whole. It can lead to retention challenges, as talented individuals may be discouraged from pursuing teaching careers or may leave the profession for better-paying opportunities. The attrition rate among teachers under contract is indeed high. Is the Government of Meghalaya listening?

### Letters to the Editor

#### Morality and Worldview

Editor,  
One of the readers of the article, KHAAD & Women's Rights, Ambrose Kharkongor, has addressed it wide his letter *Teague* took for Kharmen. (ST Sep 6, 2023). I believe that not all who read the above article will understand it as Ambrose did. But it behoves me to address his rejoinder lest the article is muddled.

The article was not intended to find an escape route for men who have abused their wives, as misunderstood by the reader. My argument was that the position of the young husband may contribute to situations where he lacks the moral resolve to take the responsibility as is warranted. However, I did write that this was not a generalisation of all cases. I also stated that this was not an absolution of their moral lapse. In fact, I wrote that the moral sense transcends culture. My point in writing the article and my argument was simply that the issue is a moral one, and should not be conflated with other issues like traditionalness and mixed marriages. This would be a categorical error.

I also did not say that the KHAAD is expected to come up with strategies to regulate individual behaviour. In fact, I stated that while moral

lapses can be addressed by legislature (such as laws relating to alimony) yet morally itself cannot be divorced from the worldview that one holds. The argument is that once we talk of morality, we must address it by looking at the worldview, and not just the legislature (in this case the KHAAD). We must always look at the worldview of the individual and how it informs his ethics. In this regard, every individual has blind spots as his moral sense can be dulled or sharpened by the worldview he espouses. People can be morally exemplary or deplorable, both because of and in spite of their worldview. But the relationship between worldview and morality deserves public debate, as it is a subject that requires deep-diving.

Yours etc.,  
Kidar H. Hlah, Shillong

#### Salary delay brings tears on Teachers' Day

Editor,  
Not another Teachers' Day passes with appreciation being heaped on the teaching community. But ask the teachers what their feelings are. Their hearts are heavy with a unique blend of emotions - pride, dedication, but also the anguish of not receiving their monthly salaries on time. While they continue to mould the future, their own lives remain in financial turmoil.

Teacher's Day is a day of immense significance, a day when the nation collectively recognises the tireless efforts of educators in shaping young minds. However, this year, the celebrations are laced with bitter-sweet feelings as teachers across this state are burdened by the persistent issue of delayed salary payment.

# Job reservation in the private sector: Is it the solution?

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

The recently rallied opinion in Shillong demanding reservation in the private sector was a welcome one. Similar demands had been raised in other parts of the country as well, with laws also being passed on the issue. However, these state laws were challenged in court, which will also be the fate of any law that the Government of Meghalaya might bring up for reservation in the private sector. That notwithstanding, the problem plaguing the job sector in the state has to be acknowledged. But here it is important to disentangle the difference between unemployment and under-employment, something that appears to have been conflated and treated as being the same.

According to the Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE), a leading independent economic think tank, as of July 2023, the unemployment rate in India was around 7.95%. This was higher than the 6.1% during 2017-2018, as reported by the Labour Ministry of the Government of India, which was the highest in 45 years. This means that the current figures are the highest in the last 50 years. At the same time, the unemployment figures for Meghalaya of 2.7% as of December 2022, as reported by CMIE, are much lower than the national average. The figures may have gone up in the last few months, but it is highly unlikely that they have breached the national average. So basically, the problem of employment is not so much unemployment as underemployment, i.e., a situation where people are working in low-paying jobs because they cannot get employment that is suitable for their qualifications and/or experience.

According to the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation, Government of India, the 2022-2023 Per Capita Net State Domestic Product of the state was Rs. 98,572, which was the lowest among all the states for which data was available. This means that the amount of money that would be available to every resident of Meghalaya if the total amount of money generated in the economy is distributed equally is just over Rs. 8,000 per month. But it has now been widely accepted, as recently admitted by former Chief Minister Bhogtaram Rajan at the IMF-World Bank annual meet in 2022, that India is a major problem affecting not just India but the whole world. The 'State of Inequality in India Report' released by

The first is the one proposed by the Government of Meghalaya, the promise of doubling the state's GDP by 2028 and transforming the state into a 10-billion-dollar economy. If that can be achieved, it will definitely raise the Per Capita Net State Domestic Product and, with

it, the amount of money that will be available in the economy. This in turn will translate to higher wages, thus raising the ability of workers to support their families without exploiting themselves. However, this line of reasoning is dependent on the fulfillment of certain conditions. The most important condition is that the government is able to not just control inequality but ultimately reduce it. If this is not done, any gains made in increasing the GDP will not translate to increasing the wellbeing of the population. A very good example of this is the support of the H-led NDA government to Adam and Ambani, which, according to Arvind Subramanian, the former Chief Economic Advisor to the Government of India, will result in an extraordinary concentration of economic power... (this) could create an oligopolistic economy that will stifle innovation and growth. In fact, as the fortunes of the two industrialists have risen, the unemployment rate has also increased. More worryingly, since such gains are ill-gotten, they can be used to fund illegal activities like the burgeoning drug trade in the long run.

One thing that, however, could ruin this process are the illegal taxes collected by non-state actors. Whether it's from illegally operated toll gates or 'donations' collected in the name of certain organisations, such taxes take away the profit, which could be reinvested back into the businesses. More worryingly, since such gains are ill-gotten, they can be used to fund illegal activities like the burgeoning drug trade in the long run. Something under which businesses do not thrive, at least the legitimate ones, is uncertainty. If there's no peace and harmony in the state, the economy will be adversely affected, and we can forget the job reservation issue and the provision of decent jobs for the people. If things are bad now, they will only get worse in the future.

Reservation of jobs in the private sector may seem like an attractive solution to address the problem of unemployment (actually underemployment) in the short and long run, providing decent jobs—a well-paid job with good social security benefits—is a much more important struggle. This requires a more structural transformation and orientation of the way the economic policies of the state are being envisaged. Will that happen? It's up to the citizens of the state. It's always was and always will be their choice.

*(The views expressed in the article are personal and do not reflect any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)*

in opportunities is inherently unjust, depriving those who have the ability to meet the needs of affirmative action policies. It is imperative that the authorities at the DC's office and the concerned Minister take immediate action to redress this situation and ensure equitable treatment for all genuine citizens.

Yours etc.,  
Krisna Chetin Shillong-2

#### Non-issuance of OBC certificates

Editor,  
I am writing to express my profound concern regarding the ongoing discontinuation of OBC (Other Backward Class) certificates in the state of Meghalaya, which has severely impacted the community. During my recent visit to the Deputy Commissioner's office, it was dismayed to discover that OBC certificates continue to remain unissued. This situation has had severe repercussions on the authentic residents of Meghalaya who were born and raised in our state.

The non-availability of OBC certificates has created a substantial barrier for eligible Meghalayan residents to apply for OBC reserved positions in central competitions. This glaring disparity

# A different approach to Family Planning is needed

By Sanjana Mohan & Lekha Rattanani

The government's family planning initiative 'Mission Parivar Vikas' (MPV), now in its seventh year, has achieved some success in 146 districts which were originally identified as 'high fertility' areas with a Total Fertility Rate (TFR) of more than three. The districts are spread across seven states, namely Rajasthan, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Jharkhand. MPV hopes to reduce the TFR in these high-fertility areas to 2.1 by 2025.

The focused efforts are yielding results that can be seen in the numbers, but they come with hidden problems that the numbers do not or cannot capture. For example, contraceptive use has picked up in these areas following the government's efforts to increase access to family planning services. That the most popular method of contraception is the irreversible method of family planning involving surgery. This is good from the point of view of illegals but not always good from the point of view of the women. The popularity of the permanent method mirrors the national preference, where 36.3% (NFHS-5 numbers) of currently married women took the option — making it the most popular of all choices. Across States with the MPV districts, many more women opted for the permanent method. But because the MPV was essentially in districts with an overall higher level of backwardness, signalling weaker communication and poorer delivery of healthcare, the downsides of female sterilisation have been more pronounced here.

A permanent method like female sterilisation is usually adopted when the couple have had the number of children they wanted and opt to have no more. But in rural India, the death of children and young adults is not uncommon. In some communities where many unexpected incidents happen, including snake bites and gonorrhoea, falls from a tree, drowning in the village pond, and many caused by preventable or treatable diseases. Not having timely access to care often leads to death of the child. There have been cases where women who opted for the permanent method after two or three children find themselves suddenly with fewer children, or without a son, after mishaps in the family. In such cases, reversal of surgery is very difficult, if not impossible, and the trauma of the family is onerous. These are the unfortunate consequences of the growing acceptance of female sterilisation in rural India. They also highlight the antiquated Indian practice of irreversible methods of contraception, given the poor health infrastructure that leads to preventable complications and even deaths during the surgery and a bigger trauma if the woman survives surgery, then goes on to lose her children and can't have any more.

A total of 35K deaths in the years 2014-2017 were reported after sterilisation, the minister of State for Health & Welfare Ms. Anupriya Patel told the Lok Sabha in March 2018. The minister told the Lok Sabha that 'prescribed norms have been laid down in the Standards & Quality Assurance in Sterilisation Services, 2014, published by the Government of India and made available to all states and services providers in order to ensure quality standards in service provision while performing sterilisation procedures.

In terms of women, female sterilisation in rural areas (as a percentage of currently married women) grew from 32.2% to 44.8% in Rajasthan 22.6% to 35.3% in Bihar, 39.8% to 47.6% in Chhattisgarh, 19.8% to 37.4% in Jharkhand, and 46.9% to 55.7% in Madhya Pradesh in the period from NFHS-3 to NFHS-5.

How has this change happened? Three recent developments have possibly contributed to the steady increase in sterilisation numbers. First, the presence of ASHAs (Accredited Social Health Activists) in every village has given a human face to the system, built credibility and trust, and has taken system-driven persuasion to the last households of the village. Second, the arrival of smartphones, and high connectivity in villages has opened aspirations. DIs at rural marriages, birthday celebrations, the changing attire of rural girls, are also in rural families. Rural families are also noting the small family size and lifestyle in cities and are ready to adopt it for themselves as well. The third factor contributing to increasing tubectomy numbers is the growing trend of male migration from rural areas to cities for work: in southern Rajasthan itself, some 70% of the households have at least one male member migrating to cities in Gujarat, or Maharashtra, or elsewhere for their livelihood. When the husband, it becomes doubly difficult for the women to bring up children. An operation then seems a win-win for everyone.

*(Sanjana Mohan is a doctor and co-founder of Basic Healthcare Services, Bajaj Institute, a non-profit that runs primary healthcare centres. Lekha Rattanani is the Managing Editor of The Shillong Times. Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionspress.org)*

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Yours etc.,  
Kidar H. Hlah, Shillong

in opportunities is inherently unjust, depriving those who have the ability to meet the needs of affirmative action policies. It is imperative that the authorities at the DC's office and the concerned Minister take immediate action to redress this situation and ensure equitable treatment for all genuine citizens.

Yours etc.,  
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"Remember upon the conduct of each depends the fate of all."  
— Alexander the Great

The Shillong Times

Vol No. LV, No. 29 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2023

Issues before polls

WHILE a safe guess is that Parliament elections could take place sooner than later, issues are being raised in a flurry to sway the public mood in favour of, or against, some political parties. In the forefront of these attempts is, obviously, the ruling BJP itself. After cold-shouldering an issue for nine years, the Modi establishment is now reviving its promise for the 'one nation, one poll' system. It is also in a mood to rename India as Bharat, a sure shot to boost the morale of the Hindi belt. Alongside, it is catching on a statement from DMK minister Udayanidhi Stalin that Sanatana Dharma has no relevance in today's world, as his tenets are used to "perpetrate caste-based and other discriminations against disadvantaged segments of the population like Dalits, tribals etc." The BJP energetically turned this into a national issue and is seeking the governor's permission to prosecute the minister. In a democratic nation, a minister should have the freedom to express his views without fear or favour. But, the BJP's overdrive now is to whip up sentiments and win more votes from the Hindi belt. All these, over and above the recent push to introduce a Uniform Civil Code (UCC).

These issues have their merits and positive action is welcome. But a point to stress is, should the nation face the parliament elections with these as the central agenda with grave exclusion of the matters of urgent importance. For one, the failure of the Modi establishment to check free-wheeling corruption! To argue that the Prime Minister is not corrupt means little when he presides over an empire of corruption and does not show the nerve to check such tendencies through hard-edged actions. Vigilance sleuths catching an official or two, here or there, meant little. By doing so, the department is only proving its relevance to exist, while its ranks too are seen to be largely corrupt, as also the entire police, revenue and other sectors in state after state.

Administrative and other reforms on multiple fronts have either not been attempted at or left half done or were undone under pressure as was the case with the farm reform legislation. Judicial reforms are not even attempted at. The government lacks the courage to bell the cat while the Supreme Court mandarins put spokes into the wheel. Cases are piling up in courts and justice is delayed as cases are investigated and argued for decades in gap abandon. What this government did and did not do must be reviewed before the polls. The election must be fought on such issues. The nation cannot afford to miss the wood for the trees.

Letters to the Editor

Need a good plan for family planning in Meghalaya

The article titled, "A different approach to family planning is needed" (ST Sep 7, 2023) says all the right things. Unfortunately, while the authors provide data for a number of states, Meghalaya is not included in their list. They mention seven states in which there is an urgent need to reduce the fertility rate by 2025. But Meghalaya, while not mentioned, has the highest fertility rate in the country of 2.9, while the national average is 2.0. Meghalaya has the highest proportion of pre-school children in the country, surely a factor for the high child malnutrition in the state. The article mentions several states in which female sterilization has increased markedly. In India female sterilization increased from 36.0 - 37.9% between the National Family Health Survey 4 (2015-16) to NFHS5 (2019-21). However, the already low rate in Meghalaya fell even further from 6.2 - 5.6% between NFHS 4 & 5. Actually it was highest way back in NFHS3 (2005-6), at 9.5%.

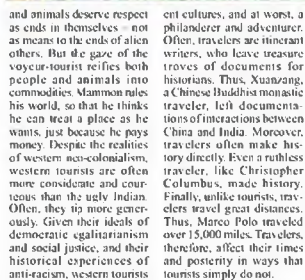
Incidentally male sterilization in Meghalaya which was 0.1% in 2005-06 has firmly remained at zero since then. Perhaps there is no parallel to this kind of male refusal in the rest of the country. Male attitudes are a significant factor for low family planning stats in our state. The authors rightly say that we need to look beyond permanent methods but don't offer much by way of a solution. The use of contraceptives in Meghalaya of any kind, is the lowest in the country and has remained static between the last two NH surveys at 24.3%, while the national average has improved from 53.5 - 66.7%. Even among tribals as a whole in India, contraceptive use is at 48.6%, exactly double of Meghalaya. A recent survey found that most of the women respondents were against contraceptives, even some village and church leaders. These are some typical responses: "I'm very strict for my own daughter, if she is in a relationship, she should not use any method, if she does then there is spiritual punishment", and "There are many awareness programs on using family planning, but I feel it's a sin". The biggest and hardest obstacle are deeply-en-

The Tourist, a quintessential Nomad of Modernity

By Deepa Majumdar

This world has always had its share of nomads, who stand in stark contrast to settled communities. Whether pastoral or peripatetic, some are traditionally nomadic. Others are so for spiritual reasons—like the mendicant monks and nuns who refuse to stay more than three days in any one place, for fear of attachment. But the most impoverished of all nomads, perhaps, is the tourist—a strange phenomenon of modernity. Anything but a traveler, he is often a dilettante and voyeur, who visits different places to acquire his extreme emptiness of soul. Materialism, the deracinating passions, plus the rootlessness endemic to modernity, make him roam restlessly, seeking vicariously and in vain for roots in a rooted community. Often, his first prey are indigenous communities, given their relative rootlessness, and resistance to modernity.

To blame also are capitalism and the sexual revolution—given the havoc they have wreaked on the ancient virtues of hospitality. Up to my pre-teenage generation and in vain for roots in a rooted community. Often, his first prey are indigenous communities, given their relative rootlessness, and resistance to modernity. To blame also are capitalism and the sexual revolution—given the havoc they have wreaked on the ancient virtues of hospitality. Up to my pre-teenage generation and in vain for roots in a rooted community. Often, his first prey are indigenous communities, given their relative rootlessness, and resistance to modernity.



and animals deserve respect as ends in themselves—not as means to the ends of other others. But the gaze of the voyeur-tourist reifies both people and animals into commodities. Mammon rules his world, so that he thinks, he can treat a place as he wants, just because he pays money. Despite the realities of western neo-colonialism, western tourists are often more considerate and courteous than the ugly Indian. Often, they tip more generously. Given their ideals of democratic egalitarianism and social justice, and their historical experiences of anti-racism, western tourists can be more courteous to indigenous communities and impoverished Indians.

The modern tourist, therefore, is an entirely different species from the traveler. Even conservative tourists are caught in the maelstrom of commercialism. In an existential sense, every section being is a metaphysical traveler because his very existence entails transcending time and transience. But in a physical sense, the traveler is unique among his fellow humans. This world has always had its share of wanderers.

Distinct from the traditional nomad, the wanderer travels for serious reasons that range from self-discovery to discovery of the world. To the wanderer, traveling is a mode of education and an art. He travels in order to learn from different people and cultures. Not because he is empty and a voyeur, but because he wants to add to his inner wealth of wisdom. Today travelers are utilitarian and comic. They go to outer space to pave the way for space tourism.

Yet not all travelers are virtuous. Like others they cover the range between good and evil. Always in tropical and rarely a dilettante or voyeur, the traveler is, at best, an ambassador and diplomat who bridges different cultures, and at worst, a philanthropist and a motor. Often, travelers are itinerant writers, who leave treasure troves of documents for historians. Thus, Xuanzang, a Chinese Buddhist monastic traveler, left documentation of interactions between China and India. Moreover, travelers often make history directly. Even a humble traveler, like Christopher Columbus, made history. Finally, unlike tourists, travelers travel great distances. Thus, Marco Polo traveled over 15,000 miles. Travelers, therefore, affect their times and posterity in ways that tourists simply do not.

But what is traveling, in essence? In the words of Ibn Battuta, "Traveling is to leave you speechless, then turns you into a storyteller." In the words of the Buddha, "It is better to travel well than to arrive." This last quote, supposedly from the Buddha, I am sure, was meant metaphorically. Yet it applies to physical travel as well. Unlike the tourist, who consumes the objects of tourism, thus experiencing nothing—the traveler revels more in the experience of traveling than in that of arrival. A dilettante and voyeur who turns tourism into a spectacle, the tourist neither learns nor contributes to learning. Peeking at this place and the other, rather than savouring and experiencing, he returns as homeless and empty as before.

The man challenge of the modern reified hospitality industry lies in its demand that we practice this precious form of love, not in the sanctity of a home—but in the wilderness of the market-driven world. It therefore calls for practicing love and generating a new form of the market economy. As a result, it demands proper legislation to safeguard both tourists and their local hosts. A system of checks and balances should foster a hospitality industry, even as it protects all who partake of it.

This type of legislation matters all the more in a place like Meghalaya, given its frail economy and natural wonders. The beauty of Meghalaya is, as yet, pristine. Unlike the manufactured beauty of many natural spots in the developed economies, Meghalaya is still relatively untouched by the footprints of man. Such rare beauty, which makes the region a nationally conspicuous and God-conscious, deserves protection and homage. At the very least, tourism in Meghalaya should be sustained as the main thrust of hermitic, "Maggie Noodles Tourism killing Meghalaya" (TST, Aug 18, 2023). Poor villagers are being in Meghalaya need the tourism industry, because it is, as Ms. Mukhim says, the only "clean, green, non-polluting, non-invasive and employment-generating industry." Tourism helps not only economically, but also morally and spiritually, by diffusing the xenophobia inherent in a densely populated and isolated society. Indeed, tourism can be a powerful antidote against xenophobia. Surely there is a way to protect local people, through proper legislation, without encouraging the ethnocentrism that mars hospitality? Surely there is a way, through rules and regulations, to educate tourists to respect the sanctity of the places they visit? Surely, YouTuber tourists who visit Meghalaya villages, should be forced, by law, to share their profits with the people they film? For all this to happen, both tourists and their hosts must respect each other. Moreover, all rules and laws must be enforced by the proper authorities, without corruption.

knowledge and suggested talking to the doctor. This unprofessional behaviour left my mother feeling confused and frustrated. When my mother spoke with the doctor, the experience turned even more distressing. The doctor, without any valid reason, aggressively counted seven slips and threw them in front of my mother, stating that it will take her 2 PM to treat those seven patients. However, to her disbelief, the doctor managed to attend to these seven patients in just 30 minutes. This inconsistency in the doctor's actions raises serious questions about her professionalism and ethics. Furthermore, my mother was treated disrespectfully during this encounter. The doctor's attitude and demeanour were completely unbecoming of a medical professional, the even went as far as telling my mother to leave the hospital premises. Additionally, while my mother was present, another lady arrived at around 11:15 AM, seeking treatment for her child, who was in pain. The doctor callously informed this lady that the time was over and that she should return on Monday. Despite the child's obvious discomfort and the fact that she was a school-going student who would have to miss school to come back, the doctor displayed a shocking lack of empathy and refused to provide any assistance. Another eight patients were also present, and within the time span that my mother was present there. Such unprofessional conduct by the dentist and staff at Jiban Ram Goenka Hospital is not only unacceptable but also a disservice to the community. Patients deserve to be treated with respect and empathy, and medical professionals should adhere to ethical standards of care. I am writing to draw the attention of the authorities of Jiban Ram Goenka Hospital and kindly request that the ethics and quality of service of the Hospital be investigated thoroughly, and appropriate action be taken to address the unprofessional behaviour and attitude of the dentist and the staff at the hospital. Patients should not have to endure such distressing experiences when seeking medical care. Yours etc, Name withheld on request. Via email

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'One nation, one election' proposal an attack on democracy and federalism

Opposition parties and civil society must campaign on the danger

By P. Sudhir

The Narendra Modi regime is out to launch a twin assault on parliamentary democracy and federalism by implementing the slogan of 'One Nation, One Election' (ONOE). The government has announced the setting up of an eight-member committee headed by former president, Ram Nath Kovind. The terms of reference make it clear that the committee's job is to recommend how to proceed to implement simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies, the legal and constitutional steps to be taken. The committee can be expected to do what the government wants, as it has been hand-picked for the purpose and includes home minister Amit Shah.

Ever since the BJP came to power in 2014, Narendra Modi has been periodically announcing the need for one nation, one election. He had declared in 2020 that this is not a matter of debate but a necessity for India. BJP leaders have been trotting out the well-worn arguments on the need for simultaneous elections that will save a lot of expenditure incurred due to frequent elections; repeated elections bring the model code of

for the state assemblies. Fixity of tenure would mean that a ruling party, which has a stable majority in the house, cannot recommend for dissolution of the house to have early elections. It is also proposed by the Law Commission report that if a no-confidence motion is moved in the Lok Sabha, it must be accompanied by a resolution naming the new leader to run the alternative government. This is termed as "constructive vote of no confidence". What this means is that even if a government is voted out by a majority of the house, there has to be some alternative government to take over. It is representative of the people's choice. Primacy is given to stability through fixity of tenure and the electoral choice becomes irrelevant. This will work in favour of the ruling party. The implications of enforcing ONOE are centralisation and concentration of powers at the centre and destroying, in essence, federalism. The authority given to the president of India, i.e., the central government, to curtail or extend life of state legislatures will completely undermine the right of the states and its elected

conduct into play which hampers development work and so on. There have been three committees which have gone into the issue of holding simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state assemblies after Modi came to power. In 2015, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Personnel, Public Grievances, Law and Justice submitted a report on the matter. In 2017, the NITI Aayog made a set of proposals in its discussion paper on 'Analysis of Simultaneous Election' and in August 2018, the Law Commission published its draft report on simultaneous elections. All these proposals have been shelved. We are seeing how government are behaving in the opposition-ruled states violating the rights of the state governments and the state legislatures. With the changes brought about in the name of simultaneous elections, centralised control will mean governments acting as viceroys for the centre."

legislators. After simultaneous elections are achieved, thereafter the principle of "constructive vote of no confidence" to the state legislatures and the right of the people to have the government of their choice will be restricted. We are seeing how government are behaving in the opposition-ruled states violating the rights of the state governments and the state legislatures. With the changes brought about in the name of simultaneous elections, centralised control will mean governments acting as viceroys for the centre.

India has 28 states with widely varying political and social conditions (excluding Jammu and Kashmir which was dismantled as a state). The attempt to enforce an undemocratic system of simultaneous elections, centralised control will mean governments acting as viceroys for the centre. India has 28 states with widely varying political and social conditions (excluding Jammu and Kashmir which was dismantled as a state). The attempt to enforce an undemocratic system of simultaneous elections, centralised control will mean governments acting as viceroys for the centre.

To bring about simultaneous elections to parliament and state assemblies, there will have to be a major constitutional overhaul. There will have to be amendments to the constitution in alignment with the Lok Sabha proposals. Article 83 (duration of house), Article 85 (dissolution of the Lok Sabha), Article 172 (duration of state legislatures), Article 174 (dissolution of state legislatures), Article 356 (failure of constitutional machinery) apart from amendments to the Representation of the People Act and other Rules.

It is evident that whatever the Ram Nath Kovind-led committee recommends, the implementation of these constitutional and legal steps will take time and they cannot be implemented in time for the coming Lok Sabha elections. It is regarding that the government is going to begin the process. A special session of parliament convened from September 18 to 22 may see some announcement in this regard.

The opposition parties should be vigilant and prepare for the Modi government's next move. They should immediately go to the people with a big campaign on how the ONOE is dangerous for democracy and federalism. (IPA Service)



# Kissing your pet? Risk of disease is small but real

Our relationship with pets has changed drastically in recent decades. Pet ownership is at an all-time high, with a recent survey finding 69% of Australian households have at least one pet. We spend an estimated \$20 billion every year on caring for our fur babies.

While owning a pet is linked to numerous mental and physical health benefits, our pets can also harbour infectious diseases that can sometimes be passed on to us. For most people, the risk is low.

But some, such as pregnant people and those with weakened immune systems, are at greater risk of getting sick from animals. So, it's important to know the risks and take necessary precautions to prevent infections.

## WHAT DISEASES CAN PETS CARRY?

Infectious diseases that move from animals to humans are called zoonotic diseases or zoonoses. More than 70 pathogens of companion animals are known to be transmissible to people.

Sometimes, a pet that has a zoonotic pathogen may look sick. But often there may be no visible symptoms, making it easier for you to catch it, because you don't suspect your pet of harbouring germs.

Zoonoses can be transmitted directly from pets to humans, such as through contact with saliva, bodily fluids and faeces, or indirectly, such as through contact with contaminated bedding, soil, food or water.

Studies suggest the prevalence of pet-associated zoonoses is low. However, the true number of infections is likely underestimated since many zoonoses are not "notifiable", or may have multiple exposure pathways or generic symptoms.

Dogs and cats are major reservoirs of zoonotic infections (meaning the pathogens naturally live in their population) caused by viruses, bacteria, fungi and parasites. In endemic regions in Africa and Asia, dogs are the main source of rabies, which is transmitted through



saliva. Dogs also commonly carry *Capnocytophaga* bacteria in their mouths and saliva, which can be transmitted to people through close contact or bites. The vast majority of people won't get sick, but these bacteria can occasionally cause infections in people with weakened immune systems, resulting in severe illness and sometimes death. Just last week, such a death was reported in Western Australia.

Cat-associated zoonoses include a number of illnesses spread by the faecal-oral route, such as giardiasis, campylobacteriosis, salmonellosis and toxoplasmosis. This means it's especially important to wash your hands or use gloves whenever

handling your cat's litter tray.

Cats can also sometimes transmit infections through bites and scratches, including the aptly named cat scratch disease, which is caused by the bacterium *Bartonella henselae*.

Both dogs and cats are also reservoirs for methicillin-resistant bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* (MRSA), with close contact with pets identified as an important risk factor for zoonotic transmission.

## BIRDS, TURTLES & FISH CAN ALSO TRANSMIT DISEASE

But it's not just dogs and cats that can spread diseases to humans. Pet birds can occasionally transmit psittacosis, a bacterial

infection which causes pneumonia. Contact with pet turtles has been linked to *Salmonella* infections in humans, particularly in young children. Even pet fish have been linked to a range of bacterial infections in humans, including vibriosis, mycobacteriosis and salmonellosis.

Close contact with animals – and some behaviours in particular – increase the risk of zoonotic transmission. A study from the Netherlands found half of owners allowed pets to lick their faces, and 18% allowed dogs to share their bed. (Sharing a bed increases the duration of exposure to pathogens carried by pets.) The same study found 45% of cat owners allowed their cat to jump onto the kitchen sink. Kissing pets has also been

linked to occasional zoonotic infections in pet owners. In one case, a woman in Japan developed meningitis due to *Pasteurella multocida* infection, after regularly kissing her dog's face. These bacteria are often found in the oral cavities of dogs and cats.

Young children are also more likely to engage in behaviours which increase their risk of getting sick from animal-borne diseases – such as putting their hands in their mouth after touching pets. Children are also less likely to wash their hands properly after handling pets.

Although anybody who comes into contact with a zoonotic pathogen via their pet can become sick, certain people are more likely to suffer from seri-

ous illness. These people include the young, old, pregnant and immunosuppressed.

For example, while most people infected with the toxoplasmosis parasite will experience only mild illness, it can be life-threatening or cause birth defects in foetuses.

## WHAT IF I'M WORRIED ABOUT CATCHING A DISEASE FROM MY PET?

It is especially important for those who are at a higher risk of illness to take precautions to reduce their exposure to zoonotic pathogens. And if you're thinking about getting a pet, ask your vet which type of animal would best suit your personal circumstances. *(The Conversation)*

South Africa is renowned for having one of the world's biggest populations of great white sharks (*Carcharodon carcharias*). Substantial declines have been observed, however, in places where the sharks normally gather on the coast of the Western Cape province. Sharks congregate at these locations to feed, interact socially, or rest.

In Cape Town, skilled "shark spotters" documented a peak of over 300 great white shark sightings across eight beaches in 2011, but have recorded no sightings since 2019. These declines have sparked concerns about the overall conservation status of the species.

Conserving great white sharks is vital because they have a pivotal role in marine ecosystems. As top predators, they help maintain the health and balance of marine food webs. Their presence influences the behaviour of other marine animals, affecting the entire ecosystem's structure and stability.

Marine biologists like us needed to know whether the decline in shark numbers in the Western Cape indicated changes in the whole South African population or whether the sharks had moved to a different location.

To investigate this problem, we undertook an extensive study using data collected by scientists, tour operators and shore anglers. We examined the trends over time in abundance and shifts in distribution across the sharks' South African range.

Our investigation revealed significant differences in the abundance at primary gathering sites. There were declines at some locations; others showed increases or stability. Overall, there appears to be a stable trend. This suggests that white shark numbers have remained constant since they were given protection in 1991.

Looking at the potential change in the distribution of sharks between locations, we discovered a shift in human-shark interactions from the Western Cape to the Eastern Cape. More research is required to be sure whether the sharks that vanished from the Western Cape are the same sharks documented along the Eastern Cape.

The stable population of white sharks is reassuring, but the distribution shift introduces its own challenges, such as the risk posed by fisheries, and the need for beach management. So there is a need for better monitoring of where the sharks are.

## Factors influencing shark movements

We recorded the biggest changes between 2015 and 2020. For example, at Seal Island, False Bay (Western Cape), shark sightings declined from 2.5 sightings per hour in 2005 to 0.6 in 2017. Shifting eastward to Algoa Bay, in 2013, shore anglers caught only six individual sharks. By 2019, this figure had risen to 59.

The changes at each site are complex, however. Understanding the patterns remains challenging.

These predators can live for more than 70 years. Each life stage comes with distinct behaviours; juveniles, especially males, tend to stay close to

# The great white migration in the Rainbow Nation



the coastline, while sub-adults and adults, particularly females, venture offshore.

Environmental factors like water temperature, lunar phase, season and food availability further influence their movement patterns.

Changes in the climate and ocean over extended periods might also come into play.

As adaptable predators, they target a wide range of prey and thrive in a broad range of temperatures, with a preference for 14–24°C. Their migra-

tory nature allows them to seek optimal conditions when faced with unfavourable environments.

## Predation of sharks by killer whales

The movement complexity deepens with the involvement of specialist killer whales with a taste for shark livers. Recently, these apex predators have been observed preying on white, sevengill and bronze whaler sharks.

## Tips for good hygiene

- Washing your hands after playing with your pet and after handling their bedding, toys, or cleaning up faeces
- Not allowing your pets to lick your face or open wounds
- Supervising young children when they are playing with pets and when washing their hands after playing with pets
- Wearing gloves when changing litter trays or cleaning aquariums
- Wetting bird cage surfaces when cleaning to minimise aerosols
- Keeping pets out of the kitchen (especially cats who can jump onto food preparation surfaces)
- Keeping up to date with preventative veterinary care, including vaccinations and worm and tick treatments
- Seeking veterinary care if you think your pet is unwell.

Cases were first documented in 2015 along the South African coast, coinciding with significant behavioural shifts in white sharks within Gansbaai and False Bay.

Although a direct cause-and-effect link is not firmly established, observations and tracking data support the notion of a distinct flight response among white sharks following confirmed predation incidents.

More recently, it was clear that in Mossel Bay, when a killer whale pod killed at least three white sharks, the remaining sharks were prompted to leave the area.

## Survival and conservation of sharks

The risk landscape for white sharks is complex. A study published in 2022 showed a notable overlap of white sharks with longline and gillnet fisheries, extending across 25% of South Africa's Exclusive Economic Zone. The sharks spent 15% of their time exposed to these fisheries.

The highest white shark catches were reported in KwaZulu-Natal, averaging around 32 per year. This emphasised the need to combine shark movement with reliable catch records to assess risks to shark populations.

As shark movement patterns shift eastward, the potential change in risk must be considered. Increased overlap between white sharks, shark nets, driftnets (baited hooks) and gillnets might increase the likelihood of captures.

## Beach safety and management adaptation

Although shark bites remain a low risk, changing shark movements could also influence beach safety. The presence of sharks can influence human activities, particularly in popular swimming and water sports areas. Adjusting existing shark management strategies might be necessary as distributions change.

Increased signage, temporary beach closures, or improved education about shark behaviour might be needed.

In Cape Town, for example, shark spotters have adjusted their efforts on specific beaches. Following two fatal shark incidents in 2022, their programme expanded to Plettenberg Bay. Anecdotal evidence highlights additional Eastern Cape locations where surfers and divers encounter more white sharks than before.

## Enhanced monitoring and long-term programmes

Further research is required to understand the factors behind the movements of sharks and their impact on distribution over space and time. Our study underscores the importance of standardising data collection methods to generate reliable abundance statistics across their entire range. Other countries suffer from the same problem.

Additionally, we propose establishing long-term monitoring programmes along the Eastern Cape and continuing work to reduce the number of shark deaths. *(The Conversation)*

By Sudhansu K. Pandey

Nestled within the vast expanse of Eurasia lies a land of remarkable diversity, where history, culture, and natural beauty converge to create a tapestry of wonders, and Russia's capital Moscow is home to some iconic landmarks.

St. Basil Cathedral on the Red Square is probably the most recognisable building in Moscow. It's breath-taking at night when buildings are illuminated.

Adjacent to it is the Kremlin, the seat of the Russian government; then there is Bolshoi Theatre, renowned classical ballet and opera performances; the Gorky Park, a stunning urban landscape with walking paths - these along with parade of floats and brightly lit boats floating along the river Moskva can be perfect sites for Indians who think of planning a holiday in Europe.

The Moscow City Tourism Committee has launched a series of measures to woo Indian tourists who were reluctant to go to the city in the wake of the Ukraine conflict. After introducing e-visas, Russia is now pushing for an e-payment system which will allow Indians to apply remotely for a bank card for mirror payments in Russia and transfer money from India to Russia.

The weakening of the ruble due to recent political events removes the exchange rate difference for Indians.

Moscow is a city where past and present co-exists harmoniously. Wander through the meticulously adorned Metro stations, each station a work of art with intricate wall sculptures telling stories of centuries of change. Yes, there can be a language barrier for Indians visiting Moscow, but English proficiency has been on the rise, especially among younger generations of these workers in the travel industry.

The head of the International Cooperation Division of Moscow City Tourism Committee, Belut Nurmukhanov said: "There are 6-7 tourist centres in Moscow, a call centre in Moscow to help with information in English as well as download links in English. Most decent restaurants

# Unique Moscow may be new go-to European destination for Indians



have menus in English, and are encouraging them to translate into Arabic and Chinese as well."

Apart from this, travellers can use language translation apps to bridge the language gap. Smartphones apps like Google Translate can also help.

Going further, Indian Embassy's Economic Wing deputy head Rajnish Patidar said, the Indian Embassy will be organising several round table meetings in Moscow from September 12 to 16 with tour operators from

both the countries to facilitate tie-ups. There will be social media influencers and a delegation from the Kerala government also.

Yana Lyubina, an accredited guide working with DS Tours Travel Agency, said: "Russia offers a unique vacation option that is diverse in impressions and fits perfectly into the standard 7-10 days for which annual vacations in India are traditionally planned. In a week, a tourist can visit two completely different capitals - Moscow and

St. Petersburg and noteworthy satellite cities."

A city of contrasts and surprises, Moscow has several skyscrapers co-existing with ancient churches, and Soviet era structures where tradition and innovation blend and culture and entertainment abound.

"Lots of Arabs, Chinese are already visiting Moscow, and we hope to pass on the message to Indians that Moscow is a very attractive destination for foreigners and it is warm and welcoming to everyone," Nur-

mukhanov said. Moscow's culinary scene is as diverse as the city. One can savour traditional Russian dishes like borscht (beetroot soup) and blini (traditional pancakes), or indulge in international cuisine at world-class restaurants.

"There are some Indian restaurants, which provide traditional Indian food and some more are coming, even vegetarian restaurants. Our businesses are proactive in responding to market demand," Nurmukhanov added.

Indian tourists normally visit Moscow in summer, but the city wears a magical cloak in winter, which is called white winter, when snow blankets the city, creating a winter wonderland straight from the pages of a fairy tale.

"As you bid farewell to Moscow, take home the memories of every cobblestone you saw, the hidden secret of every dome you came across, but don't forget to leave your own mark on its vibrant and ever-changing landscape. (IANS)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajaal Bhambhani Sunday, SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

**'Birthdate Forecast'**

Moon Square Rahu on your solar return chart and will give excellent results. You will improve your working style. You will finish all important events. All the workplace officials/guests will be happy with you. You could be promoted (your job). You will show your interest in new projects, the time will be the best. You will have opportunities to move ahead in your career. And will get success in job interview. You will get attracted to your boss. You will be started a very fulfilling and pleasant relationship. You will plan to get married, in the office your colleagues will be with you and support you. You will finish your work on time. You will get equal share in your house. You will buy with the preparation of some festival. The marriage of a family member will get finalized. Your focus will be on your family. You will attract people to yourself. You will have a great year ahead.

**'This week your you'**

**Aries (March 21 - April 20)** is going to be a wonderful week. You will get orders from abroad. You will have no shortage of money. You will be satisfied with your efforts. You will take steps with caution in money matters. You will have lot of profitable deals. You will have profit from all over. You will have gains in business and professions. You will do every work with good thinking and will get the results accordingly. Love matters will have a great week. They will enjoy the company of each other. Your expenses might increase but you will take care of the things. You will do well in your job. You could be promoted too.

**Taurus (April 21 - May 21)** is going to be a bearable week. You will be busy in your business and job. You can buy property purchasing or selling related work. You will have gains in business. It will be a good period for you. You will plan for the future and take care of the present. You will do new super matters in business. Your persistence will give you. You will enjoy the company of your family members. Husband and wife will share wonderful bonding. The home atmosphere will be pleasant. Your siblings will give you full respect. You will also inspire others with your efforts.

**Gemini (May 22 - June 21)** is going to be a best week for you. You will remain busy in business and work related matters. You will have financial profits. You will be meeting lot of persons and will have some very nice people. You will have lot of gains. Your meetings will prove to be fruitful. The couples in your family relating to property will get resolved. You will also sign new business contracts. Your performance will be best everywhere. People will recognize your talent and will value it. Your image will improve in the eyes of people. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your life partner.

**Cancer (June 22 - July 22)** You will share wonderful bonding with your life partner. Or you will get your support. Students will do well in exams and interview. You will make progress in your life. You will make programs to go with your family. You can also go on a pilgrimage with your elder family members. You will do some good things for your family. There will be money inflow. You will have no shortage of money. You will invest your money wisely at some place. You will have assets of subsidiaries in your job and business. There will be new relation at hand. Love affairs will be successful. There will be some single will get married. Your dreams will come true.

**Leo (July 23 - August 23)** Business proposals will be finalized. There will be no shortage of money in your life. You will get attention in people everywhere and you will enjoy the spotlight. You will have a great time. Your image will enhance. You will have lot of auspicious days. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. Money will flow. You will take care of your expenses. You will also socialize a lot. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. You will be involved in charitable and other activities. There will be something new and prominent in life. There will be business improvement. Your image will enhance. You can also enter into new or low relations with your person.

**Virgo (August 24 - September 23)** You will be happy and enjoying the company of your family. You will be filled with energy and enthusiasm. Children will obey you. Students will get success in exams and interviews. You will have a great time. You will enjoy good working relations with your boss. In the workplace there will be compatibility between colleagues. You will make crucial business related decision in a haste. You will take your time to arrive at a conclusion. Your experience will hold value and will prove fruitful for you. You will not regret about your every step. Your contacts abroad will prove to be fruitful.

**Libra (September 24 - October 23)** You will be able to impress a new person. You will remain busy in multiple activities. You will start disputes with your colleagues. You will have sudden gains in business. There will be huge monetary gains. You can also give some additional responsibility at your workplace. Platonic relations are a desirable, so you will take full advantage of a financial position will be stronger. You will plan to go abroad for job or business. The time will be of great result. The students will get success in exams and interviews. They will be getting the desired results and will be happy with their performance.

**Scorpio (October 24 - November 23)** It is the best time for people in the business life. You will find a new way to relate to your work. There will be an increase in money and salary hike. Those who are looking for job for a long time now will get success. You will receive your big job problem at the time. You will also get lot of fame and fame. You can go out somewhere with your family to enjoy your time. You will enjoy the company of your family members and friends. Lawyers will go on drafting. Those who are single will get good marriage proposals. Your official work will speed up. You will enjoy dominating position at your workplace.

**Sagittarius (November 24 - December 23)** It is an amazing week. You will do some profitable deals. There will be pleasant news coming from somewhere. You will have gains in your business. Your money will remain with you. You will also meet high officials and will be able to get your work done. You should make your work to get done at a later date. You will finish your work on time. Fame and glory will be growing. You will use good oratory skills to impress people to get your work done. You will share in work with luck favouring you. Those who are single will plan to get married.

**Capricorn (December 24 - January 23)** There will be contact with new people. You will do some profitable deals. There will be pleasant news coming from somewhere. You will have gains in your business. Your money will remain with you. You will also meet high officials and will be able to get your work done. You should make your work to get done at a later date. You will finish your work on time. Fame and glory will be growing. You will use good oratory skills to impress people to get your work done. You will share in work with luck favouring you. Those who are single will plan to get married.

**Aquarius (January 24 - February 13)** There are more money gains due. Your courage will grow. You will have loving relations with your life partner. You will also enjoy good bonding with your siblings. You will take care of your elders. Your emotions will be unable to harm you. You will feel happy and peaceful at home. The students will get success in exams and interviews. You will remain cheerful while preparing so that you do not hurt the sentiments of other people. Some guests may arrive at your place, which will make you happy. You will also achieve something big in your life. It will make you proud. You will move ahead in your life. Your contacts will prove to be fruitful.

**Pisces (February 14 - March 13)** You will do some special things for a person working in your office. You will handle the new session quite well. You will also share some birthday party or marriage function. You will enjoy the best time. You will be able to get the sentiments of other people. Some guests may arrive at your place, which will make you happy. You will also achieve something big in your life. It will make you proud. You will move ahead in your life. Your contacts will prove to be fruitful.

# Behavioural hacks for mindful eating

Are you tired of the never-ending cycle of overeating and dieting? Food is frequently reduced to ingredient lists, calorie counts, or transient visuals on social media platforms today. Images of supposedly perfect bodies, diets that promise quick results, and the unrelenting pursuit of physical ideals surround us. However, if you're prepared to adopt a different strategy that draws on the knowledge of our forefathers, mindful eating is a route worth taking. This age-old method offers a unique path of transformation.



Mindful eating strengthens the relationship with food, realising how it affects physical and mental health; it is a transformative journey that simply comes with practice. Fietolo solves one of the biggest problems associated with obesity, which is obesity bounce-back. With roots in physiology, psychology, and technology, Fietolo focuses on habit formation and lifestyle correction with an integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Human Intelligence (HI). We encourage mindful eating and analyse each customer's unique nutrition and fitness requirements while providing them with customised diet charts for weight loss. Sahil Bansal, co-founder, and CEO of Fietolo shares with IANS life ten behavioural hacks for mindful eating. Eat slowly and control your food portion: When we eat quickly, we end up eating more than required and don't have control over food intake. On the other hand, chewing slowly allows the body to break down the food, thereby preventing digestive problems. This technique will help you to reduce your caloric intake by up to 10 per cent. Small plates big impact: Your brain takes 15-20 minutes to understand if your stomach is full. A bigger plate has more space to adjust a few extra

dishes and you will end up eating more. Replacing it with a small plate can prevent you from overloading your plate and help you maintain a healthy weight. Stay away from sugar: A sugary pitfall is hidden in every meal. From morning breakfast to mid-day lassi. We must be cautious about "what we eat/drink" because some foods might be high in sugar and low in nutrients, making the weight loss journey difficult. While a glass of lassi might be considered healthy and tempting you to take a few sips, a single serving can contain up to 30 gm of added sugar, which is more than the recommended daily intake. Packaged fruit juices are not as healthy as they may appear: Fruit juices might appear healthy but are a hidden source of sugar and artificial sweeteners. A single cup of ready-made packaged fruit juice can contain up to 20 gm of sugar, nearly reaching the daily intake limit. Some individuals might also consider cereal as a convenient breakfast, but they can also be a sugary trap. One bowl of breakfast cereal can contain as much as 12 gm of sugar. Excess Sodium can also make you fat and cause multiple health issues: Packaged snacks offer convenience but at a nutritional cost. A small INR 20 packet of chips can contain up to 300-400 mg of sodium. An individual is recommended to limit the intake of sodium up to 1500 mg per day, as per guidelines issued by the American College of Cardiology and physicians worldwide. Consume more seasonal grains: With superior taste, cost savings, and environment-friendliness, seasonal produce shines brightly. By incorporating fresh flavours, your plate becomes a reflection of the changing seasons, promoting wellness within. Don't eat food on high flame: Treat your food with care. To retain healthy nutrients, avoid high flames. Selecting mellow cooking methods will help in retaining the nutrients in food and improve overall wellbeing. Plate over Bag: The best way to conquer the snack attack: Eating from a plate is always better than eating from a packet bag when enjoying chips, popcorn, or nachos. When eating from a bag, we tend to overeat as we do not have a visual cue of food intake. Whereas, plate usage allows us to monitor consumption and indicate when to slow down. Avoid Fad diets: When on a weight-loss journey, long-term permanent results should always be your ultimate goal. Fad diets have their own set of restrictions and can lead to nutrient deficiencies. These diets not only hamper the physical but also the mental health of an individual. Focus on changing your dietary patterns and make habit transformations to achieve long-term results in your weight loss journey. (IANS/Info)

**"We have to talk about liberating minds as well as liberating society."**  
—Angela Davis

**The Shillong Times**  
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**G20 and corridor**

THE two-day G20 Summit ended in New Delhi on Sunday after the release of a joint declaration as usual and the handover of the term-linked presidency from India to Brazil, at the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Brazilian President Lula Da Silva. No earth-shaking decisions were expected nor were attempted at this time too. The over 10,000 word-strong declaration is full with the usual affirmations, re-affirmations, commitments, re-emphases and more, many of which might hopefully be pursued to their logical ends. The officials engaged in the drafting of such resolutions had a way with words and the end results might not always be as shining as one might expect. Yet, the assertions at such global jamborees might form the basis for the evolution of a better world. In this context, the announcement of a new economic corridor linking South Asia, the Middle East and Europe came as a pleasant surprise.

At the start of the meeting, all eyes were on what the grouping would say on the present escalated phase of Russia-Ukraine conflict from February last year. The 18-month-old war has seen the death of over 62,000 persons and displacement of over 1.7 crore people. While the US and the European nations are strongly backing Ukraine, India avoided taking sides. India helped hammer out a 'consensus', meaning the matter was, at least, left to where it stood. The meeting "underscored" that all states must act in a manner consistent with the purposes and principles of the UN charter, refrain from threat or use of force to seek territorial acquisition, and emphasized that the "use of nuclear weapons is inadmissible." The meeting "reaffirmed" that G20 is the premier forum for international economic cooperation and not a platform to resolve geopolitical and security issues. Notably, Russian president Vladimir Putin and Chinese president Xi Jinping stayed away from the meet and sent only their representatives to Delhi — Putin because of the Ukraine war and Xi due to China's strained ties with the US and India on multiple fronts.

The plan for a new economic corridor, revealed on the first day of the meet, drew global attention, though the announcement was made on the sidelines of the G20 meet. An economic corridor between India and the Gulf region for smooth movement of goods and their transportation from the Gulf to Europe via rail, involves also the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, France, Germany, Italy and EU. This would link South Asia, the Middle East and Europe — and could be a counter to China's Belt and Road initiative in which Pakistan is also closely involved. Xi's absence at the meet is now better understood.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Strange statements by KHADC**

Editor,  
Recently the KHADC made a statement — "Can't prevent Khasi women from marrying outside community." And that from no less than the CEM is shocking. I sometimes it sounds like the Taliban sort of rule. Why must we tinker with the matrimonial system which is well established and identifies us as Khasis. It's an intimate social custom and any changes would result in a social upheaval.

The report goes on to say that the KHADC will come up with provisions to ensure that a Khasi woman is stripped of the Scheduled Tribe (ST) status and deprived of other privileges if she marries non-Khasi. Now this is outrageous to me. If the Khasi are a non-tribal society, then how is this possible? How can a child of a Khasi woman, not be a Khasi regardless of who she marries? The constitutional rationale of the KHADC as per her website is to safeguard their traditional heritage, customs, practices, usages and economic security of the Khasis.

The manner in which the KHADC is fulfilling this mandate is baffling.

Yours etc,  
G Shabbar,  
Via email

**Non-labelling of packaged food items**

Editor,

As we are aware, the "Food Safety and Standards (Packaging and Labelling) Regulations, 2011" specified that in addition to general labelling of pre-packaged foods, every package of food, inter alia, shall carry the information on date of manufacture of the product. Separately, the regulation also provides that in case any package contains commodity which has a short shelf-life of less than three months, the date, month and year in which the commodity is manufactured or prepared or pre-packed shall be mentioned on the label. It further lays down the manner and style of how such information shall be printed so that it is legible to the consumer to enable him or her to make a reasonable choice at the time of purchase. The "Food Safety and Standards (Labelling and Display) Regulations, 2020", inter alia, provides that the date, month and year using the DD, MM, YY format for products with a short shelf life of up to 3 months shall be declared in a particular manner.

However, in our state it is often observed that no such information is printed on the package of some of our locally manufactured daily consumerables like bread, biscuits, snacks and even milk, to mention a few. Even when such information is printed it is not legible and the consumer is unable to decipher the information provided. When the shelf life of the product is not known, the advantage is being taken by both the sellers and manufacturers of such products. Not only it is an act of violation of the laid down regulations, it has serious health implications

on the persons consuming such items.  
The lack of consumer awareness is palpable given the fact that there has hardly been any reinforcement on the part of the consumers. It is also bewildering that such situations have persistently been allowed to continue under the watchful eyes of the concerned authorities. We are left wondering whether the Food Safety Officers have ever taken any action(s) or initiated sanctions against such erring manufacturers as provided in the Food Safety and Standards regulations?  
Hope this joins the concerned authorities into taking swift and appropriate action.

D L Wankhar,  
Via email

**MDA: Audacity of normalizing corruption**

By H H Mohrmen

Antonio Guterres, the ninth Secretary-General of the United Nations said, "Corruption is criminal, immoral, and the ultimate betrayal of public trust." Every politician or government that indulges in corruption betrays the public who has put their trust in them. And of course, corruption can be in many ways or forms. Corruption is not new in Meghalaya and has happened in the past but the scale of corruption in the last six or seven years has grown at an alarming rate and corruption is being executed blatantly.

**NPP-led MDA in its earlier incarnation**  
The illegal transportation of coal despite the ban has put the previous government in a bad light and the current administration has added more weight to the allegation against it. In its earlier incarnation, the NPP-led MDA government was blamed for patronizing a certain section of the population which enjoys undue advantage from the illegal activities. The public even gave the group of people that benefited from the illegal transportation and they were known as the infamous "high-level" group. The illegal transportation of coal in the state in the last five years could only have happened with support from the authorities.

The collapse of the dome of the Assembly building and the sub-standard construction of the Inerzhat Terminal are two other incidents that only justify the allegations of corruption against the government. The NPP has not even come up with a public statement on the allegations that the contractor who constructed the Assembly building and the party's permanent office is the same as the contractor who constructed the dome of the Assembly building. The illegal transportation of coal in the state in the last five years could only have happened with support from the authorities.

**Political Appointments**  
This Government is making political appointments in the left right and centre and every post comes with a cost. These appointments were made to accommodate party leaders who have lost the elections and recently there were defeated MLAs from other parties who had defected to NPP in expectation of the benefits. Sadly, even supporters who had rendered service to the party were provided with political posts, even though they neither had the qualifications nor the experience to take on those responsibilities. The question that the public needs to ask is, whether these appointments are necessary and how

much have these political appointments contributed to the welfare of the public and the development of the state?

The public expected the new party which has just appeared in the political landscape of the state to do something to curb this very dangerous trend. Sadly, even NPP which is supposed to take the bull by the horns and clean corruption and malpractice in the state is still keeping mum on the issue till date.

**Temporary appointments at government's offices**  
Temporary appointment in the different departments in the state is another illegal activity that is going on in broad daylight in the state now. The respective department heads purportedly do not inform the District Selection Committees or the Meghalaya Public Service Commission in the case may be of the vacancies. In a clear case of officer-politician nexus, the posts were instead filled with supporters of the MLA of the respective areas only. The modus operandi is that the officer makes these appointments in the name of recommendations of the MLA and this has happened even though there was an earlier order which prohibited appointment to any government post except by the DSC and MPSC. Insofar as illegal appointments are concerned, no other government can beat the NPP-led MDA in this.

**Road and Infrastructure**  
The construction of roads and other government infrastructure leaves much to be desired. The poor and shoddy work is evident in the condition of the Jowai bypass road. It may be mentioned that the road was repaired last year before the elections but with the onset of summer and monsoons, the roads have caved in. The question is why the state have to be repaired every year and after every monsoon season? The road from Jowai to Shillong especially the section from Makhliu to Naryangmari was also repaired last year but it is now in a dilapidated condition. What kind of repair is being done that the roads do not even last for a year?

Who do we blame for the bad roads that we have? Do we blame the contractors or the engineers? In private, the engineer will always confide that they have no other option but to follow the order of the politicians. If the engineer and the other ground staff do not see the line then they are

threatened with transfer to distant places.

**The businessmen and women politicians**  
The main cause of the substandard construction of the different projects in the state is the contractor-politicians nexus. The nexus has benefited the politicians and the contractors but at the expense of the public at the receiving end of development. Engineers or sectional staff who are supposed to monitor the quality of work can do nothing because the nexus renders them useless.

The momentum created in the state is not just the politician-businessmen nexus but in the case of Meghalaya the fact that the contractors are businessmen or women and they don't see that to be a problem. Businessman and woman politicians have no qualms in identifying themselves as businessmen or women. Almost all the MLAs are also contractors and are engaged in construction and government support work through the benami route. The contractor-politician nexus means that they do not use their names per se for any contract work because that would be a conflict of interest. But they use the names of their near and dear ones to execute government contract works in their constituencies. The question is how they don't see this as a conflict of interest.

Hence politicians becoming businessmen is the sole reason that roads in the rural areas are in a dilapidated condition. Roads which were repaired last year are a mess every next year.

**Police and road side collection**  
The rampant corruption that is being committed by law enforcement agencies is another illegal activity that has become a part of the state and surely with the support of the government. Both Shillong and Jowai Bypass roads are full of road side collection points and as soon as the sun goes down, these highways have now become lawless. The rampant corruption in the state is turning its Nelson's eye to what is happening in the police and the transport department are engaging in the activities of collecting money from the trucks, almost daily and yet the transport department has all. Unfortunately, every passerby on the road sees

what is happening and even the children traveling on these roads witness this blatant misuse of power. The police should be advised of their actions, but it looks like they no longer consider it illegal. In the state of Meghalaya even weigh bridges on the transport department are being run by private parties and the collection of money from the trucks without weighing them is becoming a norm.

**Height of nepotism**  
The Shillong Times report questioned the decision of the state government to appoint three members to assist in the process of hiring for government jobs in North Garo Hills. The decision is questionable because it is a case of nepotism as two of the appointed members are the sons of the sitting minister. The third appointee is a close aide of another sitting legislator. Pangshu G Momin, son of Reshobpala MLA, Timothy D. Shiru has been named as vice chairman while Algere D Shiru, son of Mendi pathar MLA Marbun J Sarang, and Henry Momin, said to be a close aide of Kharkuta MLA Rupert W Momin, have been named as members of the district selection committee that is headed by Deputy Commissioner, Mitali Chandra as chairman and Additional DC, Jude Rawangkhu R. Mark as judge secretary.

The audacity of the MLA to justify the decision to appoint his own sons in a case of an MDA abusing his power and the height of corruption.

The MDA government under the leadership of the NPP has moved the bar much higher by normalizing corruption. Corruption is not only being tolerated but it is being encouraged by this government. Nepotism also happened in the case when the government tried to sack the contractor of the Meghalaya House, Kolkata and the government does not see it as a clash of interest. The resignation of the Deputy Chief Minister is involved in the case.

**Footling people**  
"Vandalism is something sometimes but you can't fool all the people all the time," says the adage credited to Abraham Lincoln and made famous by Robert Nesta Marley or Bob Marley. How long and how many more times will the NPP-led MDA government lie to the public which has put its trust in the MLAs?

crowd goes up to 5000. It's a beautiful place but it has started resembling a rubbish dump. A local environment group known as the Waste Warriors has started to collect and carry down the rubbish to be disposed of properly.

Apam from this we have young people from Delhi, Haryana, Jammu and Punjab, travelling in their cars and making a nuisance of themselves. We get a lot of tourists from Europe and the Americas so does people come here to feast their eyes on them.

About four years ago, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) came and ordered almost all chat shops and all permanent tents to be removed from Trind. Then they put some guards where the climb begins to check what bikers are taking up and to caution them to bring back empty water bottles, wrappers, etc. When it seems like it is going to be a good job you can take your own car to Ladakh but once you reach there, you have to hire a local car to take you around. I have visited Meghalaya and it has a lot to offer by way of tourism. I hope the Tourism Department will be able to do something there. Local people set up tents and chat shops there and during the peak summer season, i.e. May and June, more than 2000 people reach up every day. Sometimes the

necessity for obtaining OBC certificates.  
Addressing these concerns will not only serve to uphold the constitutional rights of the OBC community but also contribute to greater transparency and efficiency in government services.  
R Sarki  
Via email

**When tourism backfires!**  
Editor,  
I came across the article "Major Noodles Tourism Killing Meghalaya" while I was scrolling through the news feed on my phone. I read it with interest because we face similar problems here in our town Melloidganj/Dharamshala in HP.

Leisurism is important for Himachal Pradesh and thousands of people depend on it for a livelihood. So, governments, past and present, have done what they can to boost tourism and construction has been going on in a haphazard way in many parts of HP. The Himalayas have a fragile ecosystem and this mountain we saw houses toppling down in Shimla, roads breaking near Manali, roads falling off the hillside and damaging property, etc. There is a popular trekking destination called Trulid in the mountains above Shimla. It is a beautiful place like Uspall, you can only walk there. Local people set up tents and chat shops there and during the peak summer season, i.e. May and June, more than 2000 people reach up every day. Sometimes the

**Sanatan Dharma and Western Intellectuals**

By Satil Gewali

A person who does not properly know (a-b) and perpendicular should not speak about integral calculus and Matrix Algebra. Unlearned political leaders with self-centered ambitions can hardly define Sanatan Dharma. Sadly, such immature people often hold sway over huge, unsuspecting masses in society. Such fanatic leaders, as in Europe's post-molotov period, usually lead crowds into the darkness of ignorance.

Unlike the West, "Dharma" (religion) in the ancient scriptures refers to a far deeper meaning. If you go into it deeply, you will be amazed to find that carries under its wing the intellectual wisdom of the highest order.

Some ascetic said if anyone truly wants to know the depth of Sanatan Dharma, as enshrined in ancient texts, then he must go into solitude. Learning to swim in the "stillness" within the practice of meditation alone helps prepare one to feel

**"Some ascetic said if anyone truly wants to know the depth of Sanatan Dharma, as enshrined in ancient texts, then he must go into solitude. Learning to swim in the "stillness" within the practice of meditation alone helps prepare one to feel what exactly Dharma is. As per the ancient scriptures, "Sanatan Dharma" literally means "eternal and universal laws or principles" that govern everything and everyone, irrespective of culture, race, religion, belief, and practice."**

what exactly Dharma is. As per the ancient scriptures, "Sanatan Dharma" literally means "eternal and universal laws or principles" that govern everything and everyone, irrespective of culture, race, religion, belief, and practice. Dharma (spiritual practice) should not be touched by the blemishes of the material world. One has to transcend the mundane world and take flight to a higher dimension through self-practice. There is no question of hatred for others in Dharma.

A great American thinker, Henry David Thoreau, writes in his masterpiece Walden: "In the Indian ancient scriptures, the idea of man is quite timeless and abtime. He is at length lost in the supreme

entity himself." Therefore, there is a great mantra (mahavakya) in one of the Upanishads: "Tat Tvam Asi" meaning "Thou Art That" — unity of an individual soul with "Brahman" — universal consciousness, we also call it God.

Of course, the scriptures of "dharma" not only speak of ethics, duty, the laws of karma, life, the after-life and reincarnation, but also expound with absolute precision the cosmic speed and infinite timeline. What is truly intriguing is that those ancient sages who talked about mysticism also talked about subtle and fundamental principles that govern everything from any atomic particles to giant celestial bodies and their functioning and existential phenomena.

This very grand concept of Dharma and is allied intel-

lectual wisdom bowled over scientists like Schrödinger and Oppenheimer almost a century ago. Schrödinger, in his deeper studies of "particles" and "wave function", concluded: "The unity and continuity of Vedanta are reflected in the unity and continuity of wave mechanics."

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**"Here is another mind-blowing opinion by a prodigious American scholar, Huston Smith, who says: "While the West was still thinking, perhaps, of the 6,000-year-old universe — India was already envisioning ages and eons and galaxies as numerous as the sands of the Ganges. The Universe is so vast that modern astronomy slips into its folds without a ripple." One of the most read scholars, Huston Smith's "The Religions of Man", sold over 3 million copies as of 2017."**

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*"Tough times never last, but tough people do."*  
— Robert H. Schuller

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**Needed comprehensive social auditing**  
IN 2017 Meghalaya was the first state to pass the Meghalaya Community Participation and Public Services Social Audit Act, 2017. This led to the formation of the Meghalaya Society for Social Audit and Transparency (MSSAT). Social audit was to have been conducted across 11 departments and 21 schemes. However, this social audit was restricted to the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MNRREGA) and it functioned under the aegis of the Community and Rural Development Department. Social audit was to be conducted across 11 departments and 21 schemes. The passage of the Act was widely reported across the national media with Meghalaya being seen as a progressive state and an example to other states.

The purpose of the Act was to engage citizens in the planning, implementation and monitoring of all schemes and programmes implemented across rural Meghalaya. The Scheme drew heavily from the model developed by the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) Project in its North East Region Community Resource Development Project (NERCORP) which was implemented in the late 1990s across two of the most backward districts in the states of Assam, Manipur and Meghalaya. The audits are meant for villages to become aware and have easy access to government schemes and also for them to be able to take their grievances to the respective platforms. The purpose of the Social Audit Society was to identify the handicaps in implementation of schemes and to effect course correction and also policy changes.

It may be noted that the Act was passed in November 2017 during the fag end of the Congress-led Meghalaya United Alliance (MUA) government. Elections were scheduled in March 2018. Soon after the NPP-led Conrad Sangma government (Meghalaya Democratic Alliance) took over the Act given short shrift. Nothing is heard of the Act today. Meghalaya suffers from serious infirmities in that the only information that the public are able to access about progress in implementation of various roads construction and water supply schemes is when legislators question the Government during the Assembly sessions. The media does its own investigation but is limited by the nature of its work which is to report day to day events. Investigation is deep diving and requires investment in human resources that are tuned to investigative journalism which is an art in itself. The reads in Meghalaya need urgent auditing. Why do roads cave in or develop potholes within a year or less of being constructed? Why does road construction not include drainage for stormwater? The fact that water runs over roads is one reason why the already poor road quality deteriorates so quickly. The other question is whether the people of Meghalaya are getting value for money insofar as roads are concerned. Does the public know the total cost of a road project; who the contractor is and whether the policy of Security Deposit or Retention Money has been paid by a contractor who has done a shoddy job? The people of Meghalaya need to find out why the Social Audit Act has been quietly buried and ask that it be resurrected.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Extending the age limit: A beacon of hope for Meghalaya's youth**

Editor,  
In the realm of employment and career aspirations, the age factor can be a decisive game-changer. In the vibrant state of Meghalaya, where the young minds are eager to contribute their energy and talent to the progress of the state, there has been a noteworthy development that deserves commendation and further consideration.  
First and foremost, we would like to express our gratitude to Mr. Adelbert Nongram, whose unwavering support for the youth of our state has ignited a significant discussion on an important matter - the age limit for job applicants. Mr. Nongram's initiative, pushing for an increase in the age limit, has garnered attention and support, aimed to create more opportunities for our talented youth.  
In light of the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and the sluggish progress of the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) in conducting recruitment processes, the students and job seekers of the state have faced significant hurdles in securing government jobs. It is, in times like these, that we realize the importance of adapting

policies to meet the evolving needs and concerns of our citizens.  
Recently, the Khairi Hills Autonomous District Council Service Amendment Rules, 2023, set a precedent by increasing the upper age limit for individuals applying for jobs in the KIAADC to 37 years. This progressive move reflects the forward-thinking attitude of the council, ensuring that aspirants have a broader window of opportunity to secure employment.  
Taking inspiration from such positive steps, it's heartening to note that other states are also recognizing the significance of adjusting age limits for government job aspirants. The Arunachal Pradesh Cabinet, for instance, has approved an increase in the upper age limit for state civil service examinations, extending it to 35 for general candidates and 40 for scheduled tribes. Similarly, the Assam government has increased the upper age limit for certain government job categories, recognizing the changing dynamics of the workforce.  
In light of these encouraging developments, it is only fitting to urge the authorities in Meghalaya to consider extending the age limits further. Currently set at 32 years for the general category and 37 years for SC/ST candidates, there is a strong case for raising these limits to 37 and 42 years, respectively.  
This move would not only align Meghalaya with the age limit standards adopted by several other states but also demonstrate a genuine commitment to the welfare and future of our youth. It is

**Manipur crisis: Failure of the state makes political solution inevitable**

By **Bhogtaram Mawroh**

The recent upsurge of violence in Manipur is a grim reminder to all who thought that the worst was over and that the process of reconciliation, slow and difficult though it may be, can at least begin. Again, it is a reminder that the status quo is over and a political solution is the only way forward. This can be in the form of a complete separation of the Kuki-Zomi from Manipur or a much greater autonomy within Manipur that will in actuality be akin to a complete separation without stating it as such. This is because it is not just the Kuki-Zomi who don't want to stay together with the Meitei, but the Meitei themselves are also in the same. The sustained attack on the Kuki-Zomi areas, whether uprooted or not, need that along with the continued denigration of the community as illegal immigrants and narcotics traffickers.

This process of delegitimization of the Kuki-Zomi was started by none other than the Chief Minister of Manipur, Biren Singh, an ethnic Meitei who had got into a spat with Kuki-Zomi media users accusing them of being from Myanmar. That was not a spur-of-the-moment comment but gave insight into his feelings towards the Kuki-Zomi community. He also blamed the community for being engaged in poppy cultivation and drug trade, declaring the crisis a war on 'narco-terrorists'. Such claims are ironic considering that the former Assistant Superintendent of Police, Thounampan Bimda, had accused Biren Singh of himself being engaged in the drug trade. If this is indeed a war on drugs and against 'narco-terrorists', as Bimda claims, he himself is part of the same problem. So, is this crisis being manufactured so that his group (whichever they may be) can oust the Kuki-Zomi and take control of the drug trade in the state? If that's not the case, how can someone who has been accused by a former top cop of being involved in the drug trade fight against the very same drug trade? That's an oxymoronic situation, to say the least.

The conduct of the Chief Minister is not limited to making damaging claims against a certain community; he has also been accused of using the state machinery to perpetrate violence against them. While that claim has to be investigated, it is very clear from ground reports that the Manipur police has played a pertinent role in the

conflict. Whether it is their inability to protect Kuki-Zomi lives or taking part in the violence as seen in the siege of Khanolok and other locations, the state police has patently been a very communal force. This is also where a political solution is becoming inevitable.  
In ordinary situations, rioting occurs when non-state actors commit acts of violence against a group of citizens. Here the state then enters the fray to control the situation by taking steps to ensure no harm comes to the common citizens while at the same time initiating actions to punish the non-state actors to stop the violence. During all this the state gives assurances to the beleaguered citizens that it will protect the life and property of all concerned. The miscreants are punished or brought under control giving rise to confidence among the citizens that the state is doing its duty; slowly but surely the crisis subsides and it is not the case with Manipur. The continued violence on that ground is proof that the citizens do not feel safe with those in charge of the state machinery. Add the fact that it is dominated by an ethnic community which has been accused of using the state machinery to attack the other community, anything short of a political solution is a death sentence for the latter.

Let's take the example of the return of people displaced by violence to their original locations. Recently, there was a news report that displaced Meitei from Charachandpur were seeking to return home. Biren Singh had stated that the government was working on a plan for the resettlement of displaced individuals on their respective lands. Unusually, this should happen, but the process has to happen in both directions. The Meitei, who have been displaced from the hills, should be allowed to return to the hills, while the Kuki-Zomi, who have been chased away from the valley, should be allowed to return to the valley. But with the recent forced removal of the last remaining Kuki-Zomi from the valley, it is difficult to see how the Meitei or not, this can only be done as an unmitigated sign that the Meitei do not want to stay together with the Kuki-Zomi as well. Thus, given that both communities are making it crystal clear that the divide is now

irreversible, what option is left except for a political solution?  
There will be an argument from the Meitei side that they are not against all Kuki-Zomi but only against a certain section that are illegal immigrants and engaged in narco-terrorism. The indiscriminate violence, which includes the rape of the wife of a Kargil man, does not support such arguments. Also, how will one determine who is an illegal immigrant? One solution advocated by the Meitei and supported by the Naga is to conduct an NRC (National Register of Citizens). Recently, there was an exercise conducted for a similar purpose in Assam, with the target this time being another minority, the Bengali Muslims. The exercise did find a large number of illegal immigrants who could not produce the relevant documents, but it also found many Bengali Hindus, Assamese Hindus, Bihari Muslims, Manipuri and many others like the Ikkoo (20,000 of them), Kahi and Rabha as well, who were subsequently excluded from the final NRC list. So, does this mean that the Bodo (which include groups like the Garo, Tripuri, and Khasi) who actually speak a Kok-Borak language and not a Kuki-Zomi language, which the other Naga groups speak) are illegal immigrants despite being one of the oldest indigenous communities in the North East? Based on the experience in Assam, what if the proposed NRC produces a list that does not include many Meitei and Naga as well? Will the Meitei and Naga dream stunts demolished, strays locked up and the poor forced behind closed doors, to sanitise the area for a global glory.  
Nevertheless, the G20 summit became notable for both the presence as well as the conspicuous absence. US President Joe Biden, clearly the most anticipated guest, flew in and rubbed shoulders with Modi and other world leaders in several choreographed and photographed events, such as the one at Rajghat paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Other world leaders like US Prime Minister Rishi Sunak walked in the aisle to rise above its communal trappings, make a political statement and shake hands with the Meitei and Naga. If the violence will continue unabated for a very long time, it will have severe security repercussions for the entire region.

*(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way the views of any organization or institution)*

On the other hand, Brazil's Lula da Silva, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and others tried to make up for the crucial absence — that of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin — both of whom were represented by their respective foreign ministers. The African Union became a permanent member of the G20 grouping, a significant development in sync with the current times of the middle continent asserting itself in global forums.  
The Delhi Declaration, which was announced on September 8, turned out to be a laudable diplomatic coup, pleasing everyone in the room, including the presidents of Russia and China. By omitting any reference to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the declaration was a clear message to the world that India is not taking sides in the war in Ukraine. It is totally unsuitable for a diverse, federal, parliamentary democracy like ours. India's two language formula and recognition of 22 languages as official languages discarded the divisive idea of one-nation-one-language which helped solidify our unity. Likewise India also adopted secularism cancelling regressive one-nation-one-religion majoritarianism. We need to banish such one-one formula to safeguard our unity in diversity and to protect our parliamentary democracy, secularism and federalism as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Sometimes a tree has been pruned in a bad way turning it into a sorry state of affairs. Such a tree loses its balance and more often than not falls flat causing grave accidents in the process.  
Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

**One nation, one election**

The only argument in favour of the idea behind one-nation-one-election is its cost effectiveness. But as a matter of fact, it would actually become more costly. In the meantime, pending the passage of the bill, the deaths of some elected legislators in order to club them under the umbrella of one election. Second, the one-nation-one-election parliamentary democracy that all elected legislatures be it some of the Vichan Sabhas or the Lok Sabha will not go to the polls before completing five years

**India's G20 summit a big success for Modi's electoral prospects**

**Delhi declaration manages to please both Russia-China, US-led West**

By **Annie Domini**

On hindsight, the New Delhi summit of G20 countries under India's presidency, from September 8 to 10, could be seen as a one-size-fits-all type of clothing, which wrapped around deep differences of rival geopolitical blocs, primarily led by the United States on the one hand, and China, Russia on the other. India is increasingly situating itself as a bridge country that is a conciliatory link nation between choppy waters of international relations, and it has indeed managed to give the otherwise moribund G20 grouping a decent facelift under its aegis.

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, with his penchant for extravagant event management, the rotational G20 presidency had been turned into a vehicle for the ruling party's swag propaganda, an excuse to project him as the "Vishwaguru". The G20 logo carrying the lotus symbol, so many times with his party, the BJP, as well as Narendra Modi's face on massive loadings and billboards doing every street in Delhi and other Indian cities, were already preparing the average Indian for a blitzkrieg of G20 advertising. Eventually, chief delusion had been banished and forced into a quasi-lockdown, its homeless ex-cited, stuns demolished, strays locked up and the poor forced behind closed doors, to sanitise the area for a global glory.

Nevertheless, the G20 summit became notable for both the presence as well as the conspicuous absence. US President Joe Biden, clearly the most anticipated guest, flew in and rubbed shoulders with Modi and other world leaders in several choreographed and photographed events, such as the one at Rajghat paying homage to Mahatma Gandhi. Other world leaders like US Prime Minister Rishi Sunak walked in the aisle to rise above its communal trappings, make a political statement and shake hands with the Meitei and Naga. If the violence will continue unabated for a very long time, it will have severe security repercussions for the entire region.

*(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way the views of any organization or institution)*

On the other hand, Brazil's Lula da Silva, South Africa's Cyril Ramaphosa, Saudi Arabia's crown prince Mohammed bin Salman and others tried to make up for the crucial absence — that of Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin — both of whom were represented by their respective foreign ministers. The African Union became a permanent member of the G20 grouping, a significant development in sync with the current times of the middle continent asserting itself in global forums.  
The Delhi Declaration, which was announced on September 8, turned out to be a laudable diplomatic coup, pleasing everyone in the room, including the presidents of Russia and China. By omitting any reference to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the declaration was a clear message to the world that India is not taking sides in the war in Ukraine. It is totally unsuitable for a diverse, federal, parliamentary democracy like ours. India's two language formula and recognition of 22 languages as official languages discarded the divisive idea of one-nation-one-language which helped solidify our unity. Likewise India also adopted secularism cancelling regressive one-nation-one-religion majoritarianism. We need to banish such one-one formula to safeguard our unity in diversity and to protect our parliamentary democracy, secularism and federalism as enshrined in the Constitution of India.

Sometimes a tree has been pruned in a bad way turning it into a sorry state of affairs. Such a tree loses its balance and more often than not falls flat causing grave accidents in the process.  
Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

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

**Worth noting that many states have already recognized the merit of an extended age limit of up to 42 years.**

The Assam government will be willing to adapt and respond to the aspirations of its youth is a testament to its vision for a brighter and more prosperous future for its young people. Extending the age limit is a concrete step in this direction, demonstrating genuine concern for the wellbeing and aspirations of our young population.  
In conclusion, we urge the authorities to consider and implement this critical change. It is an investment in the potential, dreams, and aspirations of the youth of Meghalaya, ensuring that they have ample opportunities to contribute to the growth and development of our beautiful state.  
The future of our youth is, after all, the future of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
Shillong

**Minimum salary for teachers: Call for legislative action**

Editor,  
The editorial "Dependent Teachers" (ST September 7, 2023), rightly highlights the pressing concerns underpaid teachers, particularly those employed in private schools. It is indeed a matter of grave concern that some longstanding private schools continue to offer paltry salaries to their teaching staff, despite their dedication and years of service.  
To tackle issues like these within the labour sector, we have the Minimum Wage Act in place. Under this Act, which is designed to protect the interests of labourers exploited by capitalist enterprises, workers are assigned to semi-skilled (SS), skilled (SK), and highly skilled (HS) grades. Our state government, in accordance with this legislation, has mandated minimum wage rates: INR 340 for SS, INR 380 for SK, and INR 420 for HS per day excluding DA. Astonishingly, in some private schools, experienced teachers are paid significantly lower than those prescribed for semi-skilled workers. This predicament reveals a stark contradiction within our education system, whereby highly educated teachers in the private sector find themselves subject to exploitation, much to the chagrin of their colleagues in the public sector.  
Our state government consider the implementation of appropriate minimum wage or salary standards for primary, secondary, and higher secondary teachers, akin to the principles outlined in the Minimum Wage Act. Furthermore, any such proposed legislation should explicitly cover the payment of wages or salaries to teachers employed in private schools. Such a legislative measure would serve as a pivotal step towards rectifying the prevailing disparities

"Trust is built with consistency."

— Lincoln Chafee

The Shillong Times

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Corruption and immunity

A Supreme Court order this week, clarifying its removal in 2014 of the "immunity" to senior central government officials from probe in corruption cases, is significant. The apex court made it clear that its 2014 order, that investigating agencies need not seek prior central government permission for arrest of -- or probe into actions of -- errant officials, will apply retrospectively. The court order would apply to such cases registered before 2014 too. Notably, the present case had been filed by a chief district medical officer in Delhi, who was arrested in 2014 while allegedly accepting a bribe. His argument, inter alia, was that the CBI had not taken prior permission from the Centre before his arrest. The case kept dragging.

It is common knowledge that cases in Indian courts go round in circles. The ultimate beneficiaries are the law violators who get a long rope to defend themselves and ultimately escape the arms of law. Investigations go on and on, arguments and counter-arguments are done with neither sell nor brake, spokes are put into the wheels of justice, and final judgments are delivered after decades. Only the well-heeled can afford such expensive exercises in the name of justice-dispensation. Successive governments did not show the nerve to rectify the system flaws. The Modi government, which completes two terms in office shortly, did too little in such respects. As a result, the system is getting increasingly corrupt and the bureaucracy is wallowing in corruption; and so are the politicians. They are, rather, hand-in-gloves. The arrests of a few officials here or there, or a top politician like Chandrababu Naidu in AP, are simply cosmetic acts when seen from a wider angle. These actions hardly ever served any purpose other than lamely justifying the relevance of the investigation agencies.

It must also be noted that the "protection" to senior government employees against arrest was granted by a BJP-led NDA government in 2003 and this provision continued till its removal by the Supreme Court in 2014. The Delhi officer's arrest happened when this law was in force. The apex court now made it clear that its 2014 order has retrospective effect. Clearly, this officer could not claim immunity from arrest. The NDA government in 2003 apparently exceeded its brief. This unwarranted grant of "protection" to senior officials emboldened them to indulge in corruption. Notably, the corruption graphs vis-a-vis the bureaucracy and the political establishments have registered a sharp rise in the past 20 years. This is not to blame all the officials or politicians. The number of the corrupt bureaucrats or politicians today is more than the number of the upright in these ranks.

Letters to the Editor

India at the epicentre of international developments

Editor, A 37 page joint declaration was issued at the conclusion of G20 after the efforts of India. After Nehru, Modi's supremacy in foreign affairs is well known. Nehru founded the Non-Aligned Movement along with Marshal Tito and Awarar Saldan and about hundred countries joined this Alliance. Just as Nehru was at the epicentre of all international developments, Prime Minister Modi is now at that place. Previously we initiated for Nehru and now we have the same feeling about Modi. Even in Pakistan where he is the ruling party or the opposition both are speaking in praise of Modi due to the successful foreign policy of India.

India, which played a key role in getting Africa admitted to the G20, can also use this achievement to position itself as the leader of the Global South, a tag which China aspires to. For the first time after the Group of 20's large economies was founded in 1999, its members have agreed to admit another member: The African Union or AU. When the block that accounts for 80 percent of production delivers a new member for the first time since 1999, it speaks for itself about its importance in global geopolitics. Africa has natural resources which are spread over 55 countries, and by admitting the AU as its member, the G-20 is treating AU at par with the European Union, the only inter-governmental forum to have the membership of G20. Africa has another set of goals have been documented and signed which is a big achievement of the G20 conference.

Three parties in less than two years

By Albert Thyrnang

In November 2021 along with Mukul Sangma and 10 other Congress MLAs, he left the Congress for the All India Trinamool Congress (AITC). In December 2022 he quit the Trinamool to pledge his allegiance to the saffron flag. By the time you read this article he would have donned the NPP colours. So three parties in less than two years! The person in question is Himalya Mukhar Shrangliang.

The retired MCS officer and nominated IAS officer benefited from the Mukul-Pe Symbion fund and was given the Congress ticket to contest from Mawsynram constituency in 2019. Quite sensationally, he emerged victorious against a System who had formed the now defunct, People's Democratic Front (PDF). Probably his proximity to the then chief minister, Mukul Sangma did the trick.

When the former chief minister was sidelined from the Congress he obliged his "boss" so that the required two-thirds rule was acquired for merging with the AITC. Even political novices knew that it was a political blunder. Everyone knew that Trinamool in Mawsynram would be a no contest. Yet he went ahead following his followers who claimed that political parties are mere "football uniforms". Realising his slip-up he found a new hero in Prime Minister, Narendra Modi lofly lauding him for his "development oriented agenda". Left with no alternative he thought that "the communal" party might give him a better chance to retain his seat. To justify his actions he even announced that it was the "Rangbuh Halang" and "Tymmen Basin" (local Church leaders) who prompted him to embrace the "anti-Christian" party.

He didn't fare badly. He was the runner-up to the state candidate by 53 votes. Entry to the Assembly was denied, nevertheless. So, almost immediately he had issues with the state leadership. On the way out his target is Ernest Mawere, who for the 'young BJP' member, did nothing much to strengthen the BJP in Meghalaya. He even accused Mawere of nepotism, that is, getting himself recommended by MLA, A.L. Heik for political appointment while ignoring his "jobless ex-legislator". The state's Mahila Marcha is right when they lashed out at their former leader for his "never ending search for posterity matters". They saw his brief leadership as a set for the party.

The reason for his joining the NPP handwagon is because the BJP spokesperson was appointed Adverser to the Government of Meghalaya's Education Department by the NPP government. He himself revealed that chief minister, Conrad Sangma and his deputy, Prestioso Tysung directly contacted him for the job to compensate for

his absence in the Assembly. An understanding might have been arrived at to allot the NPP ticket to him in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. As it being stated the "short duration" BJP man turned to the NPP because he was not assured by the present leadership of being the BJP MP candidate. So the exit was logical, for apart from surety of party ticket, he fancied the NPP a better bet than "unacceptable BJP in Meghalaya".

We bluntly and directly ask this politician, "What is your ideology?" "I am aware you are able to quickly adapt to diametrically different ideologies?" "Do you have an ideology at all?" Less than two years ago, as a Congressman, he was anti BJP and anti-NPP for aligning with the Congress' enemy no. 1. A little after he declared that only the TMC could fight the BJP, Shrangliang but true, in a year's time he joined the very BJP itself. Now, six months later he is a NPP leader.

The NPP and others partners of the MDA-1 and 11 ang Nongbah College, also in Jowai, invited the VPP MLAs to grace the graduation day. It was a slap on the face of the government and the local MLA. The pan-still persists.

The head teacher has already apologised to the government in her reply. Perhaps, in schools, not only election songs should be permitted but politics itself should be taught therein. Ideology and its importance should be part of the curriculum. Questions like - what do different political parties stand for and what are their social, economic and religious stance are valid questions. In Meghalaya, "What is the Congress here for? What is the BJP's core belief? What is actually the ideology of the NPP? What about the BJP and other regional parties? These and more should be part of the conversation in schools and certainly in colleges. Then only will a more conscious society may emerge.

The NPP and others partners of the MDA-1 and 11 ing school hours while bad ones are imparted during elections? The NPP has the right to expand itself but not at the cost of propriety and the state's exchequer. It looks like the party grants favours to anyone provided he or she joins the party. Marlin Dango was given the Ranker Civil Sub-Division but he was asked to dump the ranker. If five crosses were promised before election the citizens of the state are intelligent enough to guess the amount after winning.

"The government issued a show case notice to the principal of Jowai Government Girls School for 'willfully permitting' students to play the unofficial VPP election song during Teachers' day celebrations. More than being concerned with educational institutions turning into political fields the government is worried about the increasing popularity of the VPP. Two weeks ago Kiang Nongbah College, also in Jowai, invited the VPP MLAs to grace the graduation day."

These sort of habitual party changes must be rejected. Zero ideology politicians must be shunned. Personal benefit seekers should not be given space in public life. Convenience talks should have no room. Opportunists benefit of any ideology should be condemned. This is the sentiment of the voters. In the last elections, except for a couple of them, turncoats were soundly taught a lesson.

It may well turn out that the latest NPP acquisition will end up fighting against his former colleagues. Vincent Pala and George Lyngdoh in the next MP elections. Should we say that anything is bizarre in politics?

The government issued a show case notice to the principal of Jowai Government Girls School for "willfully permitting" students to play the unofficial VPP election song during Teachers' day celebrations. More than being concerned with educational institutions turning into political fields the government is worried about the increasing popularity of the VPP. Two weeks ago Kiang Nongbah College, also in Jowai, invited the VPP MLAs to grace the graduation day."

have no issue when students participate in elections rallies and other electioneering activities. No political parties have expressed concern at the sight of many young people singing, dancing and engaging in joyrides in inter-collegiate events. This writer has reliable information that in the last elections first time voters were given money and liquor. Is this not worse than playing a song in a school campus? Political parties engage college students to distribute money to voters much older than them during elections. Or is it wrong in the election arena while it is wrong in the school premises? Why is the government so perturbed when a song is played during a school celebration while it is indifferent to the use of money power before young people during elections? IAS officers and other government servants also accept election invitations. They show-caused a principal because their students innocently played a song in a school party but close their eyes when malpractices take place during elections. Should good values be taught dur-

ing school hours while bad ones are imparted during elections? The NPP has the right to expand itself but not at the cost of propriety and the state's exchequer. It looks like the party grants favours to anyone provided he or she joins the party. Marlin Dango was given the Ranker Civil Sub-Division but he was asked to dump the ranker. If five crosses were promised before election the citizens of the state are intelligent enough to guess the amount after winning.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

"Those Who Didn't Believe In Us!" There were smiles on her face and tears of joy, as Coco Gauff won the US Open. She was given the mike as is the custom, and without a moment's hesitation thanked God for giving her strength to do her best and beat the mighty opponent who she'd won against.

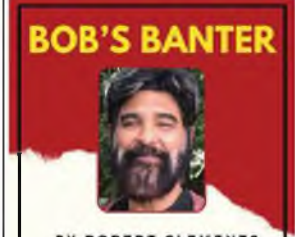
adherents to let results go. "Many have taken small injuries much more seriously to heart than they need," wrote the Sicic philosopher Seneca. "The best revenge" advised fellow Stoic and Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, "is to be unlike him who performed the injury."

In a few moments she was given a cheque for 3 million dollars but not before she also thanked all the people who did not believe in her!

One day, a bus driver went to the bus garage, started his bus, and drove off along the route. No problems for the first few stops - a few people got on, a few got off, and things went generally well. At the next stop, however, a big hulk of a guy got on. Six feet eight, built like a wrestler, arms hanging down to the ground. He glared at the driver and said, "Big John doesn't pay!" and sat down at the back.

Strange statement coming from a face without any hate, anger or rancour, because such is normally based on struggle, suppression and colour oppression.

Did I mention that the driver was just five feet three, thin, and basically naked? Well, he was. Naturally, he didn't argue with Big John, but he wasn't happy about it.



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

It's the face I'm going to concentrate on right now, because all around me as our country takes baby steps and bigger steps into the world arena, we have leaders with faces full of anger and hate. They also talk of those who tried to stop them, those who stood in our path as a country, those who threw insults at us for many centuries, but instead of acknowledging that this is how we developed muscle,

the next day the same thing happened - Big John got on again, made a show of refusing to pay, and sat down. A Big John replied, and the one after that, and so forth. This grated on the bus driver, who started losing sleep over the way Big John was taking advantage of him. Finally he could no longer stand it. He signed up for body building courses,

When we don't show unthinking eyes with no trace of a smile, we don't show strength but the baggage of the past we carry, which is a huge sign of weakness.

So on the next Monday, when Big John once again got on the bus and said, "Big John doesn't pay!" the driver stood up, glared back at the passenger, and screamed, "And why not?"

It is time we learnt to do just that. When we don't show unthinking eyes with no trace of a smile, we don't show strength but the baggage of the past we carry, which is a huge sign of weakness.

What's so funny?" we finally ask. "Nothing," they say puzzled. "Then why are you laughing at me?" "But we're not laughing at you, we're smiling at a good clean happy day!"

Well, it was a smiling face that won the US Open, and one, which had faced hats and taunts of those who stood in her way but had them as fuel for victory!

But I'd like to go further on this same subject. To be able to use insults as fuel, we need to also learn how to handle them, when they are thrown at us.

In ancient Greece and Rome, the Stoics, a group of philosophers who preached the value of emotional resilience -- and whose traditions have plenty of modern-day devotees -- urged

karate, judo, and all that good stuff. By the end of the summer, he had become quite strong; what's more, he felt ready to take on Big John.

With a surprised look on his face, Big John replied, "Big John has a bus pass."

How like the driver we are. We think every statement is an insult. We look at ourselves and instead of seeing in ourselves a good person, we feel ourselves to be a mere five feet three and everybody around six feet tall and taking advantage. We scowl at our neighbor. Yell at colleagues and think the world laughs at us.

We get into karate, learn karate, buy a bigger car, larger house, and still wonder why they laugh.

"Attitude determines the altitude of life"

— Edwin Louis Cole

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**Wanted progressive MLAs**

MLAs are expected to be broad-minded, futuristic and progressive and that is exactly what Nongpho M.L.A. Mayralbom Syiem of the UDP has proven to be. Meghalaya has crossed its 50th year yet the enemies of progress have kept it behind the times by creating a fear psychosis over every development plan. The Khasi Students' Union (KSU) has opposed the railways coming up to Bymbat for over 40 years now and politicians of all shades have not had the moral courage or the political nerve and the vision to break through this logjam although a goods train would have lowered the price of most essentials coming into the state and also made Meghalaya less dependent on Assam for everything. In the early days of the resistance against the railways the alibi trotted out was that there the railways would bring in more influx. This claim needs to be buttressed by facts and figures. In fact, henceforth any group that opposes any development plan has to compulsorily give the government a white paper showing the cost-benefit analysis of a project. In this case the parties resisting the railways project should be able to give a cogent explanation on the plus and minuses of the project and prove their point not by oral claims but by a study they have conducted.

It was alleged in the past that the truck lobby was the one flexing its muscles against railways and that they used pressure groups to further their plans. This may not be far from the truth. That successive governments failed to deal with such self-seekers also points to the weak governance in Meghalaya for the past five decades. MLAs are supposed to be leaders not to be led by populist opinions. The MDA Government now into its second term and with a comfortable majority should be able to break through this logjam.

The rest of India, including states of the North East have all welcomed the railways. They include states like Mizoram, Nagaland, Tripura, Arunachal Pradesh and now even Sikkim is sought to be connected to the railways. Why should Meghalaya alone remain in the backwoods? As it is, Meghalaya is still heavily dependent on Assam for air travel. With flights only connected to Kolkata and the twice a week flight to Delhi we are far behind all the other states. The present government with a business and finance expert at the head has to ensure that Meghalaya takes off on the development trajectory pronto because that alone can ensure employment for the burgeoning number of employable but unemployed youth. Besides, not everyone is cut out to be an entrepreneur!

**Letters to the Editor**

**Education Minister's vacuous claims**

This letter is written in response to the Education Minister's press statement to a section of the media on September 11, 2023 where he mentioned the proactive steps taken by the government to improve the education sector especially in government aided colleges. Firstly, I would like to seek clarification from the Education Minister who has recently taken charge regarding his statement vis a vis the sanctioned teaching posts in the deficit and ad-hoc colleges in the state. Can he categorically state how many of the total number of posts have been sanctioned in the last decade in each of these aided colleges? As far as I am aware the number of sanctioned posts for teaching staff has not increased much in these colleges for the last two decades introduced new departments have done so by recruiting teachers in the college posts (while a few through recruitment in sanctioned posts which are transferred posts that were earlier allocated to other existing departments). If one carries out a study in the colleges both ad-hoc and deficit, especially those under the Shillong one will find that there is an increase in the number of posts of college

appointed teachers in these colleges. Further the study carried out by me shows that many of these teachers are paid a consolidated pay while a few receive regular scale of pay. This lack of uniformity in pay structure has caused their pay is determined by the respective Governing Bodies of these institutions and based on the financial condition of the institution. Sadly for these categories of teachers, although they are paid a consolidated pay as sanctioned post college teachers the very right of "equal pay for equal work" is violated and till date it remains a far cry. In the private colleges which have mushroomed over the years the plight of these teachers is even worse where they are paid a pittance for their service of nation building. To add to this the government which claims it is proactive has till date not taken any steps to ensure that the services of teachers in 'aided posts' are protected. This means the government has not done anything to ensure that these colleges which are aided by the government adopt uniform service rules for the category of college post teachers. The plight of these teachers is not protected. It is high time for this Management Rules in 2013 to govern the Governing Bodies of these institutions it has sadly not mentioned any rules or regulations that will safeguard the interests of these college post teachers who are under the direct control of the Governing Body/Management.

Thirdly, the introduction of the NEP 2020 and the FYUAP programme which are new and additional courses like Skill Enhancement and Multi-Disciplinary Courses etc. The Government has not even sanctioned new posts. Had the government been committed to improving the education sector and to unemployable youth they had planned the implementation of NEP by sanctioning additional posts at least for these courses. Sadly, it may be pointed out that even a college run by the government is recruiting teachers for these new courses on an hourly basis. As a matter of fact when the Supreme Court had passed a judgement on introducing Environmental Education (M.C. Mehta vs Union of India case in 1991) as a subject in colleges, the Government has till date not created sanctioned posts for the deficit and aided colleges as a subject in colleges. It is high time for this Management Rules in 2013 to govern the Governing Bodies of these institutions it has sadly not mentioned any rules or regulations that will safeguard the interests of these college post teachers who are under the direct control of the Governing Body/Management.

**The Khasi National Dorbar @ 100 and the two Christian Reverends**

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

In spite of not being active in the political sphere and also not able to convene the regular annual Dorbar as laid down in the foundational rule, the Khasi National Dorbar managed to commemorate its centenary year and the one-day affair was held with fanfare on the September 4, 2023 at the Khasi National Dorbar Hall, Shillong.

On the other hand, the Shillong Records Collection Centre (SRCC) also published and distributed the booklet entitled, 'Ka Khwas National Dorbar-Ka Dap Shi Spah Snem 1923-2023.' The Centenary Year of Khasi National Dorbar 1923-2023. This concise booklet is the testament to the works of the Dorbar in the past hundred years.

With the sole objective of preparing the Khasi tribal community to face and embrace the foreseeable changes and to lay down the foundation of self-rule, the Khasi National Dorbar was formulated during its first sessions which were held from September 4-6, 1923, at the residence hall of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy in Quafapaty, Shillong.

To understand the Khasi tribal (political) context then, it is essential to look at the developments in the pan-India movement for independence. In 1918, the first world war had ended and the British crown granted India the Government of India Act 1919, instead of the Constitution and independence. As a result, the non-cooperation movement was started and in the first two decades of the 20th century the struggle for independence took a formidable shape. Sensing the impending policies of de-stigmatising which were to ensue, the Khasi leadership, namely, Kmuin Manik Syiem or ruler of Mylliem State, Indar Singh, Syiem or ruler of Nongkhlam State, J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, Wilson Reade and three others shot off a notice to the length and breadth of the region inviting all the nobles, rulers and commoners of the various Khasi States and entire community to gather for the Dorbar on September 4-6, 1923. In the notice dated July 27, 1923 these leaders made it clear the objective and the necessity of the Dorbar in these words: "You are all aware that the people of India had started a great movement for self-rule and independence. Since 1921 the British rulers had initiated certain reforms to facilitate participation of native Indians in Government... therefore it is imperative upon

the native tribes of the Khasi Hills to wake up and to think for the good and future of the Khasi Nation in relation to the ensuing governmental and legislative reforms... to prepare ourselves... and to build the community in the sphere of education, self-rule and in every aspect of life.

The first proceedings of the Khasi National Dorbar, dated September 4-6, 1923, listed the names of 54 male members, who were present at the Dorbar and also recorded the participation of nearly 300 other attendees. They included the Systems (Rulers) of various Khasi Native States, nobles and commoners. Amongst the hundreds of attendees, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy and Rev. Mon Lyngdoh were also present. Priorities, the objectives of the Khasi National Dorbar were political in nature, but the two Reverends had made their mark beyond the ecclesiastical walls. They were socio-religious leaders of repute whose paucal ideology was shaped by the politics of the day and the backdrop to the call of the struggling community. On the first day, the Khasi National Dorbar elected Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy as the Chairman and Hajom Kisor Singh as the Secretary respectively. Further, the resolution was adopted to constitute the Dorbar and the members were allowed to deliberate, debate and introduce motions/bills, etc. Notably, between 1924 and 1928 three important legislations, viz. Ka Ain Long Kham Hima Ha Ki Khasi States (Citizenship Act in Khasi States), Ka Ain Bri Khyedew Ha Ki Hima Khasi (Land Law in Khasi States) and Ka Ain Hiar had loh Paster Ha Ki Hima Khasi (Inheritance and Succession Law in Khasi States) were introduced and debated through in the consecutive sessions over the period of four years before they were enacted. In the sessions held in the December, 1923, the Khasi National Dorbar also debated and sent the other two critical issues pertaining to question who is a Khasi and the participation of women. Subsequently, the Khasi National Dorbar passed the amendment allowing full membership to women.

On perusing the records available and analysing the issues which were debated at the initial year of the Khasi National Dorbar, it can be inferred that both

Rev. Mon Lyngdoh and Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy had played a critical role and contributed immensely with their in-depth knowledge on culture, history, tradition and their core beliefs on justice and equality.

The two Reverends had their roots in Christian Methodism, but both ended in separation from the dominant Welsh Methodist Presbyterian Church and formed their own indigenous Christian Churches. The Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy established the Church of God or Balang U Bhai in 1902, while Rev. Mon Lyngdoh started the Christ National Church or Ka Balang Trai U Khrist in 1924.

It is evident that before 1887 Rev. Mon Lyngdoh had resided in Lum Maivae at Lamunhamb and according to Professor D.I. Wargi, "Khabu Mon Lyngdoh was the son of Riang Iahch and was married to Shanani Maivae. He was a student with immense knowledge and reason. He was respected for his kindness and deep moral values. He was a student whose faith and commitment was rooted in the gospel value of love thy neighbour and lived by it in his personal and public life."

Babu Mon Lyngdoh was ordained as the Pastor of the Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Presbyterian Church at the Assembly meeting which was held in Shanggung in 1913. His grasp of the Khasi indigenous culture and history was profound and he had written two articles in Khasi entitled, "Ka rukom Khein jait ki Khasi had Synting (The System of Inheritance and Succession Law in Khasi States) ki kur had ki khun na ka kama u kpa ha in Khasi had Synting." (The custom and right of inheritance of the clan members and children from the self-acquired property of the father) which were published in the Khasi Christian in 1912 and 1913 respectively.

Babu Mon Lyngdoh's understanding of his knowledge of justice and role of women in politics and governance were reflected in his first article. He also expounded the concept of fipkur ipkha vis a vis the right of inheritance by the children and the participation of women. It is to be noted here, the Khasi concept of Ka Tip Kur Tip Kha is to know and respect the traditional market has paternal kinship. This is the fundamental feature

of Khasi life and it governs every walk of life, their religion, beliefs and all social laws and customs. Though the line of descent is taken from the mother, yet the father is the pivot around which the whole family revolves. According to Babu Mon, the biblical value of love thy parents and neighbour is also embedded in the concept of fipkur ipkha.

On the other hand, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy was one among the six children born to U Khab Than Roy and Ka Rimal Syiemkhi. He was born in Mawsiarvat, Shella in 1884 and later became the communicant member of the Welsh Presbyterian Church at Shella in 1899. After completing his primary education, Joy Mohan (Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy) was sent out to continue the high school education at Shillong Government High School. Later he went as far as Calcutta to further his education in high studies and the cosmopolitan environment of the city challenged his inquisitiveness. However, the opportunity was expected to and engage with the wider society shaped his inquisitive mind and pilgrimage.

Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy's political journey began when he was first elected to the Legislative Council of Assam Province in 1920 and he was also instrumental in the formulation of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India and the formation of Autonomous District Councils in the United Khasi & Jaintia Hills District since 1952.

During the sessions held from August 11-13, 1924, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy spoke about the danger of assimilation of the minuscule Khasi tribe with the Hindu and Muslim majority communities. He firmly believed that the Khasi idea of freedom, democracy and self-governance had stood in sharp contrast with people of other regions. He was also critical of the Systems or Native Rulers of Khasi States who failed to foresee the impending dangers and challenges that would befall the Khasi tribe in Independent India. The assembly members and children from the self-acquired property of the father) which were published in the Khasi Christian in 1912 and 1913 respectively.

Babu Mon Lyngdoh's understanding of his knowledge of justice and role of women in politics and governance were reflected in his first article. He also expounded the concept of fipkur ipkha vis a vis the right of inheritance by the children and the participation of women. It is to be noted here, the Khasi concept of Ka Tip Kur Tip Kha is to know and respect the traditional market has paternal kinship. This is the fundamental feature of the democratic process.

While the film serves as a compelling mirror reflecting society's issues, it doesn't stop there. "Jawan" also offers a glimmer of hope, pointing towards the possibility of speaking out against injustice and advocating for change. It sends a powerful message that ordinary citizens have the power to make a difference, especially through their votes.

In a time when voter apathy and disillusionment with the political system are prevalent, "Jawan" serves as a wake-up call. It encourages audiences not only to appreciate the cinematic experience but also to introspect and take action. The film reminds us that being a responsible citizen is not limited to casting a vote every few years; it involves actively participating in the democratic process, holding leaders accountable, and working towards positive change in our communities.

In summary, "Jawan" is not just a film; it's a powerful call to action. It demonstrates the potential of cinema to engage, inform, and inspire. It challenges us to be educated and responsible citizens who can shape a brighter future for our nation. "Jawan" is indeed a must-watch movie that offers both entertainment and enlightenment.

Yours etc.,  
R Sanki,  
Via email

**Supreme Court must decide early about repealing Section 124A of IPC**

**Centre is confusing its stand on Sedition Law through its proposed bill**

By Shushil Khaty

For its unimpeachable in amplex years, Section 124A or what is called the Sedition law could end up finding the guillotine though the Centre wants the process halted with the Supreme Court clearly not willing to acquiesce. The Modi government is no different from other governments. When in the opposition, all parties clamour for the complete striking down of Section 24A but it is an

integrity of India" to spell out the offence. With the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, sedition got a longer name, which senior advocate Kapil Sibal said was more "draconian" and "much worse".

"Prosecutions will go on", Sibal warned. Other problems with Section 124A include that it does not distinguish between "state" and "government", and "state" cannot always be



governments. The fact of the matter is the colonial era sedition law should have gone with the British Raj but it did not and continues to be used indiscriminately by successive governments of independent India to curb dissent.

The moment a government resorts to Section 124A that government turns authoritarian and by that reckoning almost every Indian regime since Independence has been authoritarian and the Modi government has had its share of authoritarian streaks. But then nothing came as surprising as Section 124A was a British Raj law to suppress opposition to foreign colonial rule; target Indian nationalists.

The pity is, all governments since Independence have been giving the colonial general R Venkateswaram and solicitor general Tushar Mehta a cue to realize. The top court refused the Centre's request to defer the hearing. Note that Section 124A is still in the Constitution, but there is also the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita. The proposed 'new law' in a penal statute will have only prospective and not retrospective effect". CJI DY Chandrachud made it clear that as long as Section 124A remained in the statute book, the "challenges need to be assessed accordingly" and no new law will change the status of the thousands of criminal cases still to be prosecuted under Section 124A.

The five-judge Constitution bench will look at the decision of the five-judge Constitution bench that had in 2022 upheld the validity of Section 124A. The popular sentiment today is to strike down Section 124A altogether and be done with it. The 1962 judgment (Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar) only tested Section 124A against Article 19(1)(a) of the Constitution and not against Article 14 (equality before law).

The proposed Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita Bill, which is before the Parliament Standing Committee, does not have a matching provision like Section 124A, but Section 130 of the 'Sanhita' while giving the stick to "sedition" resorts to the words "endangering sovereignty,

**Jawan: A powerful cinematic experience**

implying that it is as much the responsibility of the centre as it is of the state. The NEP 2020 is a policy of the centre and currently is being run in all colleges under government auspices. The government which is concerned about our youth but where and what are the steps taken so far by this proactive Government towards ensuring quality? The answer is that in the last three decades the government's preparedness has not been visible. It has hardly created a substantial number of sanctioned posts. Rather the Government has shrugged off its responsibility towards the colleges of which the majority are aided and private. If the Minister claims otherwise can he publicly share how many posts have been created in the aided colleges - college wise. The fact of the matter is that just on a step the Government has taken so far is the constitution of the State Education Commission in July 2023.

Yours etc,  
A Basawatwoti,  
Via email

**Jawan: A powerful cinematic experience**

In a society where political discourse often wears a back seat to entertainment and sensationalism, the recently released film "Jawan" has emerged as a powerful reminder of the critical role informed and engaged citizens play in shaping the future of their country. Directed by Atul Kohli and featuring the iconic Shah Rukh Khan, "Jawan" boldly addresses various pressing

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

*"There's nothing like desperation to sharpen your sense of focus."*  
— Thomas Newman

**The Shillong Times**

VOL-133 No.36 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2023

**Agenda for 'India'**  
THE INDIA alliance is far from a cohesive entity. The chinks in its armour are there for all to see and fathom. Yet, the leaders of the alliance are mindful of the fact that the only way to face the BJP-led NDA is to stand united and face the coming parliament polls. With the alliance of the Opposition demonstrating its relevance, if not might, by winning a set of assembly bye-elections in various states a week ago, there is increasing frenzy in their ranks about a possibility of ousting the BJP from power through a united push. However, at state levels, a similar unity is unlikely to materialize. Even in the Lok Sabha polls, INDIA alliance can work out a seat-sharing arrangement in several states, but not all states. Fact is that they have nothing much in common other than a goal to defeat the BJP and share power at the Centre. AAP chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has made it clear that the opposition alliance would be irrelevant if the Congress decides to go it alone in Delhi for the Lok Sabha polls. Unity in the opposition ranks is still a far cry.

However, differences are not holding back the opposition leaders from taking the push forward. They have decided to hold public meetings across the country to demonstrate their collective might. The first such meeting would be held in the first week of October in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, where assembly polls are round the corner. The first INDIA coordination committee meeting held in Delhi has also decided to immediately start the seat-sharing talks. A sense of urgency is gripping them amid speculations of the Modi government pushing the One Nation, One Poll agenda and the likelihood of an advancement of parliament polls. It was with this in mind that the opposition alliance has also decided to zero in on the caste-census issue. This could turn out to be a counter to the BJP's Hinduva-based push to polarize Hindu votes. Large sections of Hindus being in the lower castes, the opposition alliance is aiming at dividing the Hindu votes and get the numerically stronger segments of the population from among the backward castes to the anti-BJP fold. It is more or less certain that this could form the basis for the INDIA alliance's campaign strategy for the coming parliament polls. The SP in Uttar Pradesh, the RJD and other non-BJP parties in Bihar could be depended upon to lead the anti-BJP charge in these states. So would the DMK in Tamil Nadu. Clearly, the INDIA alliance's strategy is to effectively neutralize the BJP-led NDA in the coming polls.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Frank talk by the CM and Education Minister**

Editor,  
We welcome the frank statement of the Chief Minister "Keep policies away from educational institutes" as reported on the main page of the Shillong Times, Sep 14, 2023. In seconding this statement, the Education Minister also called for the separation of politics from education.  
The CM also recounted his conversation with the former Education Minister, Manas Choudhuri who urged the implementation of the National Education Policy 2020. Manas Choudhuri was the first education minister to conceive a state education policy. Being a member of that group, I can vouch for the commendable commitment that ultimately resulted in the first education policy for the state.  
It is regrettable that the various bodies that create and implement education policy for higher education in the state seem to have reached an impasse. It is always easy to find faults, deficiencies and loopholes in the system, if that is what one is looking for. At the same time, if all parties take a constructive stance, a good beginning can definitely be made. Ultimately it is a

positive attitude, and well-meaning leadership that can win the day for a good cause.  
NEP 2020 is a good cause. It is futile to claim that it is an "imported" product from the USA. So what? If it will bring about development and livelihoods, surely that is a good thing. It is fashionable for left-leaning academicians to decry liberal arts education as being a tool of capitalism. Has this ideology brought prosperity and jobs for our youth? Maybe such ideologies would like Meghalaya to continue to be poor. We have to be more pragmatic in solving our social problems.  
While NEP 2020 promotes a liberal arts approach to higher education, it has noteworthy components of vocational, skill-oriented and interdisciplinary education. Interdisciplinary education specifically calls for a multipronged approach to solving a social problem, such as the Sustainability Development Goals. It is true that NEP 2020 has certain inbuilt challenges, which have been rightly talked about. But college teachers are knowledgeable and well-rounded persons. Surely individuals with a post-graduate or doctoral degree can teach beyond their subject. Some of the subjects like "Understanding India" can surely be taught by any teacher. We need not be restricted to the rigid silos of our discipline.  
The pioneers of Mentes-

**Are tribal students incapable of learning Mathematics & Science?**

Over a decade ago those running the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBSE) and the State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT) decided in their wisdom that Mathematics should no longer be made compulsory for passing the High School Leaving Certificate (HSLC) Exam later called the Senior School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Exam. The reason for this brainwave was because too many students were failing in Mathematics. Instead of coming out a detailed survey on the reasons for the poor performance of students in the SSLC exams the educational experts took a unilateral decision to make Mathematics non-compulsory. Hence students scoring even single digit marks in Mathematics would pass their SSLC exams. This decision is deeply flawed because it deprives the students of analytical skills. Mathematics helps students to break down a complicated problem into a series of tractable steps. This requires logical thinking.

*By Patricia Mukhim*

we don't seek out those that can motivate our younger generation to break new paths and scale new heights. It is interesting to note that amongst the scientists that worked with the Chandrayaan team were quite a number from the North East Regional Institute of Technology (NERIST) in Aunachal Pradesh and a few of those were from Manipur and Assam. As can be expected there were more from Meghalaya. One of the reasons why we perhaps don't see too many passing the elite civil services is also because most of these students who are in these post few years are from the engineering or medical streams. I have hardly met IAS probationers who have

*A study on the MBSEO results 2020 revealed that only 12 per cent of students in Meghalaya opted for the Science stream while 7 per cent opted for Commerce and a whopping 81 per cent students took up Arts. Can we imagine the dis-equilibrium in this system? Where will the 81% of students find jobs within the state or even outside it with an unimaginative educational curriculum that does not impart life skills such as communication skills, questioning skills, the skill to problematize issues that cause anxieties in our society?*

come from the pure Arts stream in a long time.  
A study on the MBSEO results 2020 revealed that only 12 per cent of students in Meghalaya opted for the Science stream while 7 per cent opted for Commerce and a whopping 81 per cent students took up Arts. Can we imagine the dis-equilibrium in this system? Where will the 81% of students find jobs within the state or even outside it with an unimaginative educational curriculum that does not impart life skills such as communication skills, questioning skills, the skill to problematize issues that cause anxieties in our society?  
What is today clubbed as Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) is a big part of what students are meant to do themselves a fair chance in the job market since this is a technology driven world. One of the reasons why we are so flustered in our arguments is because we lack mathematical skills. Hours students learn early in life to implement mathematical logic, and to read texts analytically. If they learn to argue logically

**The dynamics of unemployment solutions**

*By Benjamin Lyngdoh*

Our classrooms must be redesigned to do away with the top-down approach. There has to be enough time for discussions and clarifying doubts. A student should not just sit in the class with doubts in his/her mind. Asking questions is not impugning of impertinence. It means the student is curious. A good teacher should instead welcome questions because it shows that the student's curiosity is piqued and that he/she has an interest in the subject.  
It is good to know that the present Education Minister is thinking of revisiting the present education system and that will only come when we have more curious and enquiring minds as legislators and bureaucrats. Meghalaya must work at democratizing access to the STEM subjects and give everyone an equal opportunity to innovate. Educational modelling is much needed as it makes difficult subject much easier to understand.

What must also be understood here is that while engaging teachers we should be looking for the best and the most skilled in teaching. It is here that "Resortation" becomes a minus point. From experience I know for a fact that some people are just not cut out for teaching but they are there because of the quota system. I know this is a sore point but we have to make a choice. Should we give a go by to a good and well experienced teacher only because that person is not a tribal? There are several students who have passed the 10th and 12th but they are not in the 1900's and 1980's and were taught Mathematics by the best teachers in their colleges (irrespective of caste). Plus there are checks upon their management courses in the best institutions in the country. Isn't this also one of the prime reasons why some students who are so good, now opt to send their kids to schools in Chennai, Bangalore, Mumbai, Delhi etc? So the only kids that are deprived of good mathematics and science education are those whose parents cannot afford better.  
As a state we are doing a great disservice to our students! This has to change!

In June-August, 2023 Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma made significant statements on unemployment, stating upfront that the government cannot provide jobs to all while encouraging the youth to work abroad, etc. This is in contrast to the 5 lakh jobs promised by the NPP during the MLA elections in February, 2023. TMC promised 3 lakh employment opportunities. By now voters must connect the dots and realise that these are nothing but election gimmicks. It will be fruitful if this learning is used as terms of references in future elections. But then again, unemployment should not be viewed only from the government's perspective. A holistic picture of its dynamics is needed. If the people do not engage in solutions to unemployment, there is no light at the end of the tunnel.  
In developing economies like Meghalaya, politics influences growth. This dynamic is known as 'political economy'. It is the study of business and its development in relation to government. It analyses the ways in which governments allocate scarce resources in society through regulations. It is based on the premise that regulations/schemes lead to progress and development. However, this is only true if the government is aware of the needs of the people and their capabilities. Else the regulations and schemes will not fit the intended target. Political economy is an age-old concept. Today there are studies which question if politics should dictate the economy (example Proudhon's economic paper 1934 and others). They underline that it has to be the other way round, i.e. the state of the economy should direct the policies, regulations and schemes. For example, government schemes require collateral guarantee in one form or the other. Plus there are checks upon the credit-worthiness of the applicant. Now, how would budding entrepreneurs with little or no financial backing qualify for these interventions? Further, there are some somnolent administrators who are not considered on account of their location (example Shillong). If such regressive guidelines are followed then it defeats the goal of creating employment through self-employment. This is where the reversal of political economy becomes significant.

There are many youths who are already well-trained with multiple capabilities. Some of them went through a formal programme of education but there are also those who are self-taught. In the age of ed-tech and applications, self-learning is extensive amongst the young. The problem lies with putting their skills into a gainful employment. An interaction with them will tell us that the major hurdle is finance. A when it comes to money limitation, all skills and dreams are shattered. The other hurdle is market size. The cities and towns of Meghalaya do not have the capacity to provide more employment unless new interventions happen at the micro level. Present there is an imbalance between labour demand and labour supply. The demand is limited whereas the supply is excessive. The automation of many tasks has also contributed to the shrinking of demand. It has also changed the supply-side skill sets that one needs to possess. These imbalances will continue unless there is an injection of vibrancy in the economy. The way out is to focus on hard infrastructure such as roads, airports, railways, special economic zones, agricultural hubs, etc. This will expand the economy and provide more jobs. Even a simple study will provide valuable insights on the imbalance between labour demand and supply and accordingly interventions can be designed.  
Even today, the strength of Meghalaya's rural sector

is being eroded. The degree of migration of the youth from rural to urban areas is perplexing. Clearly something is not happening right in the villages. Agriculture and tourism are double engines that would drive growth, but the engines are running at half capacity. Harold Godwin has researched extensively on the area of responsible tourism. He correctly notes that for tourism to be called "responsible" two things have to happen. One, local products/services must be used at the rural destination. Two, the economic benefits of using such products/services must go to the local community. These are the two pointers that explain why the demand for local products/services are not used, and even if used, the benefits do not percolate down to the deserving local community. Imagine if it was to the contrary, rural tourism would then create employment for the many who are rural returns. This would also mean a much-needed push for agricultural practices and produce. Before the ban on agri-tourism is not so and hence we can say that Meghalaya tourism is not responsible.  
Let us take the case of plastics. Shillong city has been grappling with this problem for quite some time. Every notification banning plastic use has been ineffective. The reason is simple - non-availability of alternatives. The government comes out to reduce consistently. It would have been better before the ban on plastics, some youths are empowered to set up an alternative to plastic producing enterprise. The demand for various varieties of carry bags is enormous. That way it has the potential to create a number of business enterprises and employ thousands of people.  
Joseph Schumpeter in his theory of economic development talks about "creative destruction". It may sound negative but in truth it has a positive spin to it. According to Schumpeter, for development to happen, some destruction must happen (which is creative). This opens up possibilities for employment and growth. In the process, the old is replaced by the new. Sustainable and environment friendly carry bags against plastics is a creative destruction. Further, as we moved from cathode ray tube (CRT) TVs to smart TVs and when airports and railways would change, the transportation and economic landscape in Meghalaya. These too are examples of creative destruction.  
Now, this solution may be controversial for some. Venture capital and angel finance is a western concept. They entail quick and targeted financing without collateral/guarantee to budding entrepreneurs who have new and innovative ideas. The ideas are mostly tech-oriented. Facebook (now Meta) and Apple are good examples of business conglomerates that started through venture capital financing. A venture capitalist uses his own funds to finance enterprises (hence the word angel). These are basically people with huge wealth. Meghalaya has business people who have amassed wealth but with no avenues to invest in them. If such wealth can be channelised to finance innovative businesses, the potential positive outcomes are many. Meaning, Meghalaya has the potential to produce many angels. What is needed is a platform to bring these high net-worth individuals together in a form of society or funding agency or foundation (like Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation). A proper strategy and roadmap to this effect can help solve the unemployment problem to a large extent. (Email - [benjamin@shillongtimes.com](mailto:benjamin@shillongtimes.com))

surian education in India, Kabir Prasad Tagore and Gijabhai Badheka, spoke firstly of kindness to children. The welfare and future of our students must be our priority.

Perhaps the various groups in the mix of things can organize an academic conference to see how we can make small beginnings and take graded steps to achieving the goals of NEP 2020. We owe it to the youth of our state, who so often have been buffeted by forces beyond their control, and are forced to study in a broken system.

Yours etc,  
Glenn C. Kharkhorop,  
Via email

**Educators left to fend for themselves**

Editor,  
Yesterday's news headlines screamed: "Keep politics away from our sacred educational institutions." It struck me as profoundly perplexing, given that this plea came from a teacher-turned-politician. Equally intriguing is our Chief Minister's penchant for conjuring arbitrary figures, such as 100-500 crores, to fund the implementation of the NEP. I long for the day when the public demands a meticulous breakdown of these numbers, seeking to uncover whether they fall woefully short, extravagantly exceed, or harmoniously matching the requirements. Such transparency would shine a light on the depth of consideration and devotion to resolving the financial intricacies of the NEP implementation.  
What stings the most is witnessing politicians cry foul when their agendas are challenged. In contrast, the valour of teachers, bravely defending their principles, raises alarm bells for a state accustomed to seeking substantial handouts from the central government, ranging from essential provisions like water and seeds for farmers to lavish luxury cars, helicopters, and opulent cruises for the ruling elite. The web of falsehoods spun in an era of carnal culture, is laid out squarely at the steadfast teaching community, and it serves as a stark reminder of society's tendency to follow without giving thought.  
Yet, what catches my attention is the recent statement by the Education Minister regarding the advertised positions in government institutions, St. Anthony's College and St. Mary's College. With close ties to both the teaching and non-teaching staff within these hallowed halls of learning, I've come to discern that even if, by some miracle, burst of fame, all the positions were to be vacated overnight, their collective count would still fall significantly short of the

lofty numbers proclaimed by the minister. The true purpose behind his statement remains veiled in mystery, yet one certainty emerges: he may have been a lack-lustre educator seeking his intellectual fulfillment (read financial gain) solely within the realm of politics.

The conclusion that appears before me is that advocates must champion their own rights and their own rights alone. It's a sad truth that a substantial segment of the general populace, and regrettably, even some within the teaching fraternity, stumble in the shadows of ignorance, grappling with the most rudimentary concepts even when elucidated with the clarity of a diagram. It pains me to admit that, in the end, we face a stark choice: submission to the prevailing powers or face the ominous prospect of oblivion. This reality paints a dystopian panorama, sombre and undeniably real, marking the edge of an era's precipice.  
Yours etc,  
I. Kharkhorop,  
Via email

**Atrocious road conditions**

Editor,  
I wish to draw the attention of the present government to the Khehriat road in East Jaintia Hills which is now in a much worse situation than in the previ-

ous year. I have been posted in Meghalaya rural bank, Khehriat Branch since the past two years and travel to Shillong every weekend and on government holidays as my home is in Shillong. As can be imagined I face a horrific time travelling on this road due to the large craters on the road which can often prove dangerous and this starts right from the National Highway near Jowai to Khehriat and being such a busy market area heavy vehicles are stuck in these craters in the middle of the road. This in turn creates heavy traffic jams thereby creating unnecessary delay for us in reaching our workplace.

The Government should pay attention to this problem which might appear small but for us who use the road on a daily basis life is being affected also because I stay in a rented accommodation near the market. I have to use this road regularly.  
The reason I bring this to the attention of the media is because you are the fourth pillar of democracy and you must actively be highlighting these problems on behalf of the public.  
Yours etc,  
Mukesh Sharma,  
Via email

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*"The true identity theft is not financial. It's not in cyberspace. It's spiritual. It's been taken."*

— Stephen Covey

### The Shillong Times

Vol No. 5437 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2023

**Pedestrianised Assembly Sessions**  
THE 5-day Meghalaya Legislative Assembly session that began on Friday is yet again an exercise in futility. Assembly sessions have become mere formalities to fulfil constitutional demands. Nothing much gets done in the Assembly. Those in the Government ensure they are not put through the wringer for their acts of omission and commission by reducing the number of days given to discussing a plethora of issues. In fact, the Government forgets that there are four pillars that sustain democracy and the Legislature is a key pillar. As of today, in Meghalaya it appears that the Executive is seeking to steamroll the Legislature by ensuring that the sessions are cut short. Only three days have been allocated to government business and two days for private members' bills.

What is easily forgotten is that the State Legislature is vested with powers to seek accountability from the government (executive). The Council of Ministers is responsible to the Legislature collectively. It remains in office for as long as it enjoys the confidence of the House. The Council of Ministers is removed if the Legislature adopts a motion of no-confidence against it. The State Legislature can keep checks on the government by asking questions and supplementaries moving adjournment motions and calling attention notices. This requires much homework by the legislators. In many states, MLAs appoint researchers to move around in their constituencies and feed them with key information on governance gaps. In fact, it is to buttress the role of legislators in Meghalaya that the MDA Government had signed a deal with the Indian School of Business in Mohali to train legislators. Several batches including the present batch have received training. Whether that training is of any use must be watched keenly on the deliberations during this short assembly session.

The Legislature actually exercises real political power in the state but they are now reduced to insignificance and not given the respect and dignity they deserve. Each MLA irrespective of whether he/she is from the ruling party or the opposition represents the aspirations and grievances of lakhs of constituents whose voices are only represented in these assembly sessions. By short-circuiting the legislative proceedings the government is muting the voices of the people of Meghalaya who have elected them in the first place. Leaving just two days for private members' bill which is essentially a bill introduced by a non-minister or opposition member is doing injustice to parliamentary democracy and flexing of executive muscle merely because of the numbers game. The present Executive has a comfortable majority which allows it to ride roughshod over a disparate Opposition. Evidently the Opposition led by the Congress has not put forward a common agenda since no meeting was called to discuss those common issues. These are the shortcomings of the Opposition which need to be remedied because they are actually letting down the people.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Of political opportunists

Editor,  
Once again Albert Thyrning in his article, "Three parties in less than two years" (ST, September 13, 2023) draws me into responding, and in this case, to Shangpiang's Jumping Jack Flash moves, (tooting to do with Mick Jagger's steps) and the government's pettiness of an "unofficial" political song that was sung on Teacher's Day in a government college.  
The question, "Or do you have an ideology at all?" will find no answer. Opportunists have "Strategies!" Just like milking a yak in the high Himalayas to extract the maximum milk from the low producing animal! The "Zero political motives should be shunned," has to now be translated into action by the voters. In fact such politicians should be shunned! They will always be unpredictable, unproductive and unpalatable no matter

what office they are given! However, what shocks me is the Cloud 9 demagogue of Shangpiang with total disrespect and disregard to not just the parties he represented, but to the electorate. It's as if he's mocking their intelligence, their trust and their loyalty!  
When he was appointed Advisor to the Education Department, (despite having no knowledge, experience and expertise in the field), I sensed that the guy was feeling his moves to join the NPP. I did share my opinion on the matter and a friend educated me saying, "Well! This is politics!" Now the voters must send such politicians into obscurity!  
Regarding the show cause notice to the Principal of the Government College, it reeks of political pomposity, haughtiness and jealousy. The song is "unofficial," so why be offensively intrusive? Yes, Albert Thyrning rightly points out how political parties so readily and unashamedly in their

# The Rise of Hacktivism in Meghalaya

By Joseph M. Kharkongor

Are public disclosures necessary for transparency? Should hackers be allowed to penetrate computer systems to uncover the truth? Should publishing leaked documents be a crime? What should be considered 'right' and what 'should be considered 'ethical'?' These are gigantic philosophical questions going decades into history.

For some, hackers are real perpetrators of cyber-terrorism and a sinister threat to cyber security structures. For others, they're explorers with substantial computer skills who serve as advocates for public good. Here in Meghalaya, one in particular has been the talk of the town and constantly on the police radar for various hacking crimes. But it wasn't long before his pranks took on a larger and more meaningful significance. From breaking into the MHA's "foolproof" computer systems to steal secrets, to taking over social media accounts to expose shameless preachers and politicians; this digital outlaw has disclosed evidence of wrongdoings of great substance. Three of such disclosures are mentioned in this article.

**Police Abuse of Power:** In March this year, the Meghalaya Police department was left red-faced after this Shillong-based computer hacker exposed them for committing various IT crimes such as scaling of personal photos from social media accounts of people including those of a man from Cambodia (name withheld) and using them without the consent or knowledge of the owner's) to create fake

hijacking their web browsers, monitoring their social media accounts, viewing their phone gallery, remotely accessing their phone cameras and much more.

*"Here in Meghalaya, one in particular has been the talk of the town and constantly on the police radar for various hacking crimes. But it wasn't long before his pranks took on a larger and more meaningful significance."*

*"From breaking into the MHA's 'foolproof' computer systems to steal secrets, to taking over social media accounts to expose shameless preachers and politicians; this digital outlaw has disclosed evidence of wrongdoings of great substance."*

Thou shalt not tempt the hacker. In mid-June, screenshots of obscene chats between pastors of the KIP Synod Sepring with sex workers were published on the same forum; spelling out the shocking reality of churches in Meghalaya. This shocking disclosure compelled us to question, how can our pastors fall so low? When is it ever ok to commit adultery?



accounts on platforms like Telegram. This came to light after the hacker had dumped redacted portions of the evidence in a dark web forum; including these: 47.29.48.193, 47.29.18.166, 47.29.61.231, 47.29.37.146, 47.29.44.92, 47.29.96.156, 47.29.58.86, 47.29.10.242, 47.29.52.181 and 47.29.61.15.

No, the codes aren't combinations of personal hacker ner belong to a nuclear bunker; these string of numbers separated by periods are actually IP addresses used by the MHA cyber cell teams from Lantimukrah, Nongthlyngmai and Tara to covertly spy on innocent civilians' internet activities. Yes, the MLP is now poking its incredibly large nose into innocent civilians' private lives too;

I am not writing on this painful subject as an expert but as someone who has repeatedly been exposed to

images, I cannot help but wonder, how safe are we in our own land when violence knows no borders? Violence is a severe problem in the border

*"This shocking disclosure compelled us to question, how can our pastors fall so low? When is it ever ok to commit adultery? And how can one be so stupid, rather daring to exchange nude photos and personal sex videos on unencrypted social media platforms?"*

**Critical issues to be discussed in the ongoing Assembly session**  
Editor,  
I am writing to draw attention to the pressing issues that continue to afflict our beloved state of Meghalaya. As conscientious citizens, it is our duty to voice our concerns and seek solutions from our elected representatives during the forthcoming assembly session.

Firstly, I urge the assembly members to engage in a comprehensive discussion about the recent events affecting our state. The implementation of the National Education Policy 2020 (NEP) in Meghalaya is a matter of great importance. It is essential to evaluate its impact on our educational institutions and identify areas that require immediate attention and improvement.

forces are seriously lacking. Those living in the borders of Meghalaya live in fear and are vulnerable to the many perils that plague the unfenced lands; however the problem is utterly neglected by authorities. Why is the NPP-led government not paying heed to the plight of border residents? The shock of seeing all these human skeletons remains, literally on our doorstep, should prompt policymakers to do some soul searching about the issue and not sweep the issue under the carpet like they have been doing all these years.

The magnitude of this issue demands immediate action. The state as well as the central government should take all necessary measures to ensure that lives and human dignity, which lie at the core of human rights, are respected. The time has come to put an end to border violence and killings. It is also time to uphold the human rights of those who are missing, the dignity of those who are presumed dead, and the rights of their families who deserve to find closure.

Disclosures like these are imperative and would have never been possible without hackers, as such type of data has always been hidden from the public eye. Let's face it: the RTI is just not enough. When existing channels of acquiring information fail, it is often through hacking and stealing that democratic accountability can be ensured. In the attempt to balance the democratic need for transparency against existential threats

to security, hacktivism should become the new standard for accountability. Regardless of one's view on the matter, the fact remains that hackers have the potential to bring significant changes in a world increasingly reliant on technology.

As Meghalaya moves closer to elections and digitalization, hackers are figures that embody both peril and promise. And if technology is to revolutionize democratic practice here in the state, Meghalayans must begin to use it in revolutionary ways and seriously consider digital disobedience as the new civil disobedience.

*"The author is a private teacher and skill trainer. He resides at Mansuli Nongstuar, Shillong - 8."*

who have faced immense challenges due to the ongoing pandemic. Providing them with extended opportunities will help mitigate the adverse effects of these trying times.

Lastly, addressing the issue of ration card distribution to those in need and implementing central schemes on a larger scale are critical steps in alleviating poverty and ensuring social welfare.

In conclusion, I implore our elected representatives to use the forthcoming assembly session as an opportunity to address these critical issues comprehensively. Our state's progress and the well-being of its people depend on the proactive and constructive actions taken by our lawmakers.

Yours etc,  
R. Sarki,  
Via email

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

# Sedition Law Case referred to larger bench

By Yash Pal Ralhan

The judgment of the Allahabad High Court needs to be examined before any comment on the sedition law is made. It says, "India's unity is not made of bamboo rods which will bend to passing winds of empty slogans." These remarks were made by the Allahabad High Court while granting bail to three Kashmiri students who raised slogans and were booked under Section 124A. The Court also quoted three lines from poet Alama Iqbal's song, "Saare jahan se accha, Hindustan hamara" to stress the "constancy of Indian values and perpetuity of the Indian people."

The sedition law case is now being taken up by the Supreme Court. CJI Chandrachud said the Constitution Bench would consider whether the issue needed to be further referred to a seven-judge Constitution Bench in view of the fact that a five-judge Bench, had, in the Kedar Nath Singh versus State of Bihar 1962 upheld the validity of Section 124A. Being a smaller Bench of three judges it may not be appropriate for it to doubt or overrule the ruling of a five-judge Bench in Kedar Nath Singh case, the CJI Bench said.

Interestingly, Pakistan had abolished section 124A whereas in India, which calls itself the Mother of Democracy it has been kept in abeyance. The Court also noted a submission that until 1973 sedition was not a cognizable offence but became so thereafter. This was stated by senior counsel Kabil Sibal to the bench. Sibal stated that section was anti-people.

Referring the challenge of the validity of Section 124A to a five-judge Constitution Bench, the Bench said that it was not inclined to accept the submission of Attorney General R Venkataramani and Solicitor General Tushar Mehta to keep in abeyance the adjudication of the challenge to Section 124A till the new law, that was currently before the parliamentary standing committee (PSC), was deliberated upon and scope of law Venkataramani said that the pronouncement of the top court on the validity of Section 124A of the IPC, would have a bearing on the new law.

Giving a political twist to the argument by Sibal that the proposed new law was "more draconian" than its present version, Mehta countered, "Earlier, the government could have changed the draconian law, but it missed the opportunity." This was essentially to take a dig at former Congress governments which did nothing to read down Section 124A, but Justice Chandrachud did not miss the sarcasm in the Solicitor General's statement and said as much.

Referring to the submission of the Attorney General and the Solicitor general to defer the reference to a five-judge constitution bench on the validity of Section 124A, Chief Justice Chandrachud said that the pendency of the bill relating to the new law would "not obviate the need to adjudicate the validity of Section 124A" as the new law would be effective prospectively and not retrospectively. The constitutional point of validity of Section 124A has to be decided," the CJI said.

On May 11, 2022, the Supreme Court had brushed aside the Centre's opposition to putting the sedition law on hold. The top court was hearing a batch of petitions by several NGOs and individuals challenging the constitutionality of IPC Section 124A. The petitioners include several NGOs, the Editors Guild of India, Peoples Union for Civil Liberties, Journalists Union of Assam, former Union Minister Anurag Shourie, the TMC's Lok Sabha member Mahua Moitra, senior editor Patricia Mukherjee, senior editor Anuragha Dhanu, former army Major General SG Vombakere, Anil Chandra, Upendra Nath Dalal,

Suresh Kumar alias Suresh Drazid, and Abhijit Kumar Chatteropadhyay.

Besides NGOs and individuals, two Andhra Pradesh broadcasting companies, Ananda Broadcasting Company Private Limited and Shreya Broadcasting Pvt Ltd — are also petitioners. They made the Andhra Pradesh government a respondent.

The apex court had in 2022 ordered that the sedition law be put on hold and asked all agencies of the Union government to stress the "constancy of Indian values and perpetuity of the Indian people."

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Being a smaller Bench of three judges it may not be appropriate for it to doubt or overrule the ruling of a five-judge Bench in Kedar Nath Singh case, the CJI Bench said. Interestingly, Pakistan had abolished section 124A whereas in India, which calls itself the Mother of Democracy it has been kept in abeyance. The Court also noted a submission that until 1973 sedition was not a cognizable offence but became so thereafter. This was stated by senior counsel Kabil Sibal to the bench. Sibal stated that section was anti-people.

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A person who criticises a system of governance in the country can be hauled up for sedition mainly because the government is required to maintain a system of governance in the country. As recommended by the Law Commission, the draft, while retaining life imprisonment, has enhanced the maximum punishment from three years to seven years. It has also done away with the discretion that was available to the court to release an accused on a fine. Democratic constitutions put the citizens and not the state at their core. Any law that curtails the freedom of speech and expression of the citizen against the government or the state turns the very idea of democracy on its head. It is important that the apex court examines the contours of the sedition law in whatever form it makes its opinion known so that the government can take the cue and act before finalising the new law. As in the Shah Bano case, Parliament reversed the decision of the Supreme Court. It is expected that the same will not happen here too. Whatever decision will be delivered by the Supreme Court should be implemented by the government even if it goes against it.

India is known for preserving democratic values. But recently USA President Joe Biden had criticised the Indian government in Vietnam for violations of human rights and freedom of the press. The democratic values of the country should be maintained and sedition law has to place in a democracy. Even while attending the G20 meeting, 70 MPs of the BJP led by Prime Minister Sanku to raise the issue of violations of human rights in India.

Hence in case of any guidelines by the Supreme Court the present Government should implement the same meticulously, without any ifs and buts.

# Invest in jewellery, for good times and bad

In today's uncertain world, the spotlight is once again shining on the wisdom of investing in jewellery as a valuable asset. Unlike gold and silver coins or bars that often sit idle in safes, jewellery is a mobile investment that you can wear proudly, or pass down through generations. It allows you to derive pleasure from your investment while retaining its value.

Investing in gold jewellery acts as a shield during inflation because of its liquidity. Unlike paper money, gold doesn't lose its value. It's highly immune to the ups and downs of stock markets and is a reliable asset that remains steady even when stock markets are unpredictable. Plus, you can easily turn it into cash, making it a valuable resource during economic challenges or civil unrest.

Jewellery has a fantastic benefit beyond making money. It's super easy to turn into cash when you need it. Unlike some investments that you can't touch for a long time, jewellery gives you the freedom to sell it whenever you want. Plus, if you choose top-quality, genuine jewellery, you're not just protecting your wealth; you're also setting yourself up for big profits in the future.

Moreover, jewellery possesses sentimental value and can attain collector status, especially when it features rare gemstones or bears the mark of a renowned designer.

Before you invest in jewellery, here are some important factors to consider according to Shikha Aggarwal, Founder, of Aten Jewellers:

**Shop at Specialized Stores:** Always buy from reputable jewellers, goldsmiths, or designers. These professionals have a wealth of experience and expertise, ensuring that your investment is built on a solid foundation. Inquire about the jewellery's background, its historical significance, and how its value is calculated. By engaging in this dialogue, you not only make an informed choice but also establish a relationship built on trust and knowledge.

**Embrace Emotion:** When you invest in jewellery, you're not just safeguarding your wealth; you're collecting treasures that bring joy and emotions. Invest in jewellery that you genuinely like and

would wear or gift. Prioritize individual beauty and stability in value. This emotional connection with your jewellery adds an extra layer of significance to your investment. It transforms your collection into a personal story.

**Opt for High Quality:** Choose real jewellery with significant precious metal content, such as gold and platinum.

**Value of Gemstones:** Consider gemstone quality, especially rare ones like Padparadscha sapphires or natural diamonds, which are in the market makes them particularly valuable. The rarity and quality of a gemstone, including factors like its colour, clarity, and cut, also significantly influence its value.

worth is often influenced by factors like rarity, quality, and demand, rather than the broader economic climate.

**Certificates as Security:** Obtain detailed invoices with information such as the fineness of the metals used, intricate details about gemstones, and any treatments or enhancements that have been applied. These invoices act as a

proof of your investment's worth.

**Ask Questions:** Inquire about the jewellery's origin, quality, and gemstone treatments, and always request certificates or documentation that provide a clear and verifiable record of the jewellery's characteristics. If the circumstances allow, don't hesitate to negotiate for discounts or additional services. While this may not always be possible, it's a proactive approach to securing the best value for your investment.

**What are the kinds of jewellery you can invest in?**

**Investment-Grade Jewellery:** When we talk about investment-grade jewellery, we're referring to pieces that have a significant amount of pure gold in them. The "karat" rating is the key here—the higher the number, the more gold in the jewellery. If you're looking to make a profit through gold jewellery investments, it's a smart move to opt for either 24-karat gold (pure gold) or 18-karat gold, which is 75% gold. These options have a softer gold content, which is particularly advantageous if you're purchasing items like necklaces, earrings, or bracelets. The higher gold helps protect these pieces from potential damage caused by accidental knocks against hard surfaces.

**Designer Gold Jewellery:** Designer gold jewellery is an excellent choice in this context. What makes this kind of jewellery special is how it combines precious metals with the designer's creative brilliance. Designer gold jewellery can be a great investment, whether you prefer classic or modern styles.

Many trust gold jewellery as a secure financial investment, but not all pieces may prove profitable. Understanding investment-grade jewellery and its market value is crucial. Gold jewellery offers a means to preserve wealth, acquire heritage pieces, and enjoy lasting beauty. As an investment, it safeguards against inflation and economic uncertainties. Investing wisely involves choosing jewellery with a higher percentage of pure gold, such as 24 karats or 18 karats, and considering designer or antique pieces for added value. *(ANSWER)*



**Brand, Custom, or Antique:** Investing in jewellery you genuinely love ensures that your collection is not just about financial gain, but also about personal satisfaction. The joy you derive from wearing or owning these pieces is an investment in itself. These options offer varying investment potential.

**Precious Metal Price Fluctuations:** Remember that the selling price of jewellery is influenced by precious metal prices, which can fluctuate. This volatility in metal prices can directly impact the overall value of your jewellery collection. Gemstones provide stability against such fluctuations. Their

value is often influenced by factors like rarity, quality, and demand, rather than the broader economic climate.

**Seek Second Opinions:** Getting a second opinion and comparing options is advisable, especially for custom or gemstone jewellery as it ensures that you have a well-rounded understanding of your collection's value and potential. Visit multiple jewellers or goldsmiths to ensure informed decisions. They can assess the craftsmanship, quality of gemstones, and overall value, helping you gain a comprehensive understand-

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, SEPTEMBER 17, 2023

**Birthday Forecast**

**Month forming an angle of 150 degrees with Jupiter your solar return chart and it is going to give wonderful results. You might receive some auspicious news. You will be able to resolve your business problems. You will get attention to your work and business. You will also be interested in doing something new. You will get the help and assistance of your boss and colleagues. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you.**

**This week for you!**

**Monday (March 13):** April 23 is going to be a profitable week for you. You will have a lot of money coming in. There is a possibility of purchasing some new household items. You will also get good job and business offers. You will work towards making your life much better. You will have a wonderful time with your family members and friends. You will be spending money on luxuries, hobbies, and entertainment. Physically and mentally, this period will be the best result. There will be regular income from the different sources. However, you will face some financial and business matters. Things will turn out in your favor.

**Tuesday (April 21):** May 31 is going to be the best time for you to do some good deeds in your children and families. You will do some charitable work. You will also get the support of your family members. There will be persons who will help you. You will have a happy time with your family members. You will also have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you.

**Wednesday (May 22):** June 23 is going to be a progressive phase. It will be difficult to succeed. You will have a lot of money coming in. You will be busy with financial activities like banking, insurance fund, investment in shares, etc. You will be able to complete your work. You will also get the results of your completed work. Gains and profits in your business are increased. You could also be promoted in your job. You will have to take crucial decisions in your business. Your work will be very busy but you will manage the things. Your position and influence in your organization will be more important.

**Thursday (June 23):** July 22 is going to be an exciting week. The conditions that you have at your workplace will remain favorable for you. You have a lot of colleagues who will help you at every stage. You will receive an understanding with friends and colleagues. You will also get a lot of financial support. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you. You will have a successful project. You will also meet such persons who will help you.

**Friday (July 23):** August 23 is the beginning of the week to go to be wonderful. You will have a lot of money coming in. You will be busy with financial activities like banking, insurance fund, investment in shares, etc. You will be able to complete your work. You will also get the results of your completed work. Gains and profits in your business are increased. You could also be promoted in your job. You will have to take crucial decisions in your business. Your work will be very busy but you will manage the things. Your position and influence in your organization will be more important.

**Saturday (August 24):** September 24 is going to be a happy. There will be the right opportunity. You will have a lot of money coming in. You will be busy with financial activities like banking, insurance fund, investment in shares, etc. You will be able to complete your work. You will also get the results of your completed work. Gains and profits in your business are increased. You could also be promoted in your job. You will have to take crucial decisions in your business. Your work will be very busy but you will manage the things. Your position and influence in your organization will be more important.

**Sunday (September 24):** October 24 is going to be a profitable week for you. You will have a lot of money coming in. There is a possibility of purchasing some new household items. You will also get good job and business offers. You will work towards making your life much better. You will have a wonderful time with your family members and friends. You will be spending money on luxuries, hobbies, and entertainment. Physically and mentally, this period will be the best result. There will be regular income from the different sources. However, you will face some financial and business matters. Things will turn out in your favor.

**Monday (October 23):** November 23 is going to be a profitable week for you. You will have a lot of money coming in. There is a possibility of purchasing some new household items. You will also get good job and business offers. You will work towards making your life much better. You will have a wonderful time with your family members and friends. You will be spending money on luxuries, hobbies, and entertainment. Physically and mentally, this period will be the best result. There will be regular income from the different sources. However, you will face some financial and business matters. Things will turn out in your favor.

**Tuesday (November 21):** December 21 is the time to be careful. You will feel mentally better. You're really nice and happy. You will do best and will be enjoying whatever you have achieved. You will be cheerful. Business activities will pick up. You will enjoy your relations with your family members. Students will get success in exams and in interviews. The things which you were longing for will be over. You will have a lot of courage and will power to get your work done. You will also focus on your relationship and will work to make things better. You will also think about a change of job. These who are unemployed for a long time will get good job offers. You and have monetary gains. The argument that was causing tension in your personal life will get resolved.

**Wednesday (December 22):** January 22 is going to be a very busy week for you. You can participate in some business or management functions. You will be busy with financial activities like banking, insurance fund, investment in shares, etc. You will be able to complete your work. You will also get the results of your completed work. Gains and profits in your business are increased. You could also be promoted in your job. You will have to take crucial decisions in your business. Your work will be very busy but you will manage the things. Your position and influence in your organization will be more important.

**Thursday (January 21):** February 21 is the time to be careful. You will feel mentally better. You're really nice and happy. You will do best and will be enjoying whatever you have achieved. You will be cheerful. Business activities will pick up. You will enjoy your relations with your family members. Students will get success in exams and in interviews. The things which you were longing for will be over. You will have a lot of courage and will power to get your work done. You will also focus on your relationship and will work to make things better. You will also think about a change of job. These who are unemployed for a long time will get good job offers. You and have monetary gains. The argument that was causing tension in your personal life will get resolved.

**Friday (February 18):** March 28 is going to be a very busy week for you. You can participate in some business or management functions. You will be busy with financial activities like banking, insurance fund, investment in shares, etc. You will be able to complete your work. You will also get the results of your completed work. Gains and profits in your business are increased. You could also be promoted in your job. You will have to take crucial decisions in your business. Your work will be very busy but you will manage the things. Your position and influence in your organization will be more important.

## Cynosure of all eyes: Meghalaya Pavilion a hit during G20 Summit

By CK Navak

Many crafts melas are organised every year in the national capital like all other cities and metropolises during national and international events and even otherwise. However, the Indian Crafts Bazaar at Bharat Mandap in Pragati Maidan, venue of the recently concluded G20 meeting was one of its kind. Arts and crafts of all states and union territories including Meghalaya showcased their unique products with national award-winning artists and craftsmen displaying their unique skillful work. Besides the states and UTs central agencies like the Khadi Village and Industries Commission, TRIFED, and Saras Aajeevika also took part. Thousands of delegates, organisers and the foreign guests of the grand meeting thronged the bazaar whenever they used to get a chance.

In the large bazaar Meghalaya had a pavilion put up by Meghalaya Arts, the famous store of arts and crafts which has a permanent display in Delhi's biggest upmarket Connaught Place. This pavilion for the Crafts Bazaar focussed on bringing unique indigenous skills rooted in sustainability, women led initiatives and spirited women entrepreneurs. Along with the Tourism Department and Meghalayan Arts and Department of State Tourism and Textiles, the highlights of the pavilion were the Ryndia, Jaintia Black Clay Pottery, Lakadong Turmeric and items crafted from Bamboo and Cane.

Meghalaya is home to some of the finest bamboo and cane varieties and master craftsmen whose traditional knowledge and skill have been passed on through generations. Owing to its ease of use and sustainability, bamboo and cane occupy an important place in the economy of the state, next only to agriculture. Ryndia (Eri Silk) is also known as the Peace Silk or Ahimsa Silk since it uses a 'non-violent' way of extracting silk from the cocoons of the silkworm without harming or killing them.

The whole process from extraction to weaving is completely done in the state by women weavers. The Jaintia Black clay Pottery uses the black unique clay found in Sung Valley, which is completely handcrafted by women potters using traditional methods without the use of a potter's wheel. This lends to the finished product's distinct look and feel. Lakadong Turmeric is one of the most well-known products from Meghalaya and this too is mostly cultivated and processed by women farmers which was on display.

These age-old traditions in Meghalaya are deeply rooted to the land and the belief that in order to progress one needs to do so in tandem with nature and the environment. The few Sus-

tainable Development Goals that were especially highlighted through the state's products were Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Reduced Inequalities and Sustainable Cities and Communities which resonated very well with the international delegates and members of the media.

But the proud moment for the state came when Prime Minister, Mr Narendra Modi not only stopped at the store but also interacted with the artisans. He conversed with Rida Garphoh who is the chief curator of Meghalayan Arts. The State and the Founder of DAKTI, a Social Enterprise based in Shillong. Being a women entrepreneur herself and having received the National Entrepreneurship Award (NEA) 2019 from the



Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship (MSDE), she informed the Prime Minister regarding the progress made by Meghalaya in the sphere of Women Empowerment, Gender equality and Sustainability.

"The Prime Minister was impressed to see that Meghalaya is working towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals through encouraging time-worn methods of craft production that too empowering tribal women," Rida Garphoh told The Shillong Times after the visit. "It was a wonderful Sunday surprise for all of us," she exclaimed in joy.

This works with nature instead of against it, by uplifting women entrepreneurs throughout the state, and showcasing the rich culture of the state at an international platform. Modi also made time to visit the 'Focus North East' stall, where he observed and appreciated the handicrafts from the eight North Eastern states. The stall was established to showcase exceptional handcraft and handloom items from the region.



"The most dangerous thing in the world is to try to leap a chasm in two jumps." — David Lloyd George

The Shillong Times

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Congress's precocious comment on VPP CONGRESS MLA and leader of the Opposition in the present Meghalaya Assembly RV Lyngdoh has taken a swipe at the Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP) and predicted that it has a short shelf life and will go down the way of other regional political parties that have disappeared into the sands of time...

The VPP is currently on a membership drive wooing voters across the length and breadth of the Khasi-Jaintia hills as a counterpoint to the national political parties. Different states in this country have shown time and again that regional parties have their own unique selling point (USP)...

Such statesmen have been replaced by avaricious politicians serving their private interests. If there is some semblance of development in Meghalaya today it comes from the crumbs that fall off the high table. It is said that prudence is antithetical to excitement...

Letters to the Editor

Allotment of prime government land to a private party

Editor, As reported in your esteemed daily (ST) on the 4th & 5th August 2023, it is understood that the Government is planning to allocate a big plot of land from the Farm of Animal Husbandry and Veterinary Department in Upper Shillong to the owner of the Anjele petrol pump in exchange for the land that the Government is acquiring at Anjele Point Shillong to widen the road...

the benefit and upliftment of the Farming Community and ensure food security in the country. Since Meghalaya has no Agriculture policy of its own, it is automatically governed by the Agricultural Policy of India. This Policy clearly mentions that Agricultural land cannot be used for non-agricultural purposes...

The NEP 2020 talks about making India a 'Vishwa Guru'. We have been reminded time and again that in ancient India we had several premier universities and lakhs of 'gurukul's spread across the length and breadth of the country, imparting education to the natives and foreigners...

By H Srikanth

Privatizing the Public Education

Background: For the great majority of people, public education continues to be the only option for pursuing education. But what is the status of public universities today? The central government talks so much about transforming the face of education. The NEP 2020 seeks to bring education in the country by updating curriculum, introducing relevant syllabus, recruiting teachers, and use of technologies...

"After independence, the Indian government took the lead in laying the foundations for public education in the country. The government established educational institutions—schools, colleges, universities, IITs and IIMs. The reservation policy was implemented to ensure the access to the SCs, STs and OBCs who were denied access to education earlier."

which was less than 200 in the 1990s, increased to over one thousand in the year 2023. Around half of them are now private universities. They are free to award degrees, start any courses and charge any amount of fee in the name of recovering the cost. Just have a look at the fee structure of some of the premier private universities operating in India. They charge several lakhs of rupees as an annual fee, even for ordinary degree and PG courses...

PM's bid to rouse passions on Sanatan Dharma failing in poll bound states

Congress takes mature position by not falling into Modi's trap

By Dr. Gyan Pathak

Hinduva brand politics seems to be in trouble in all the five poll bound states—Telangana, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, and Mizoram—for which election schedules are by and large announced within few weeks from now...

No wonder, Congress seems to be the biggest beneficiary, not only on account of the continued infighting in the BJP and its rank and file across the state, but for other reasons too, chiefly the human predicaments brought by ever worsening economic hardships...

It may be noted that all BJP leaders are actually dependent on PM Modi's strength in the five poll bound states this time, and hence in a sense PM Modi is contesting all seats on behalf of BJP candidates. The weakness of the state BJP leadership and the contesting candidates are obvious, and hence the party does not rely on them to win these elections which are considered as semi-finals for the Lok Sabha election in 2024...

This situation explains the reason as to why PM Modi has shifted his campaign strategy—from anti-minority Hinduva slant, opposition of minority phobias, and jingoism to spread of Hindutva ideology, to a more balanced approach telling Hindu majority that the INDI Alliance is not to destroy their 'Sanatan Dharma' (The Religion Eternal)...

Which party will Meghalaya vote for in 2024?

Editor, Recently there was a narrative in the media by the political parties in Meghalaya regarding their strength based on the number of votes that they secured out of 100% of the share in votes in the last Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election 2023. A few days ago a State Party claimed that they garnered 34% of the votes in the 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency but as per the Index Cards data made available by the concerned Returning Officers on the basis of the Statutory data the Election Commission of India says about the score of different National Parties, State Parties and Registered (unrecognized) Parties and how they fared in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Election 2023 particularly in 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency and the position of the parties after the merger of PDF of May 6, 2023 with the NPP...

As for the Independents the FD Rate is 89 percent. The total FD rate in the last Assembly Election was 59 percent out of the total Congress vote in the Assembly Election of Meghalaya 2023. Now let us see the strike rate of the parties in the last Assembly Election. The strike rate of National Parties like AITC was 9%, BJP 3%, INC 8% and NPP 46% while that of the State Parties such as HSPDP, PDI and UDP was 20, 22 and 24 percent respectively. The strike rate of registered (unrecognized) Parties like VPP was 22 percent while that of the Independents was 5%.

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

"Liberty is the right of every man to be honest, to think and to speak without hypocrisy."

— Jose Marti

The Shillong Times

Vol. No. 15, No. 41 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2023

Power for women

DEMOCRACY as a system of people's representation in governance is a half-baked idea even in its most-effectively practised nations like the US or India. The way forward is to refine the system in ways that all sections of the people get due representation in governance, rather than influential sections being allowed to scurrilously hijack the system to their advantage. The introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill in Parliament on Tuesday in a major push by Prime Minister Narendra Modi is only one step forward in correcting the flaws in the system. The idea here is to provide women, who form half the population, at least 33 per cent of the seats in Parliament and state legislatures. Such an attempt had been made repeatedly since 1996, but it could not overcome the hurdles in Parliament. The present plan, based on demands in the past too, is to reserve one-third of the seats within this one-third quota to the weakest segments like the Dalits and Tribals. Likely to be passed this time, this legislation is planned to be implemented from 2026 after the constituency delimitation exercise is completed — for which the prerequisites like a new parliament house to accommodate the larger number of MPs were already addressed. Expectations are that the women's reservation law would be in force for the 2029 parliament polls.

If the main hurdle to the passage of the bill in the past was the obstructions caused by some regional parties that insisted on reservations for SCs, STs and BCs, this issue is largely addressed in the present bill. Inclusion of BCs is likely at a later stage of the discussions on the bill. Large numbers of women from various segments of the population are already well-equipped to run the administrative systems. That a tribal like Droupadi Murmu has equipped herself with the necessary qualifications to be the President of the nation is a testimony to this fact. What they lacked were the opportunities due to the domination of more influential segments of the society that usurped the weaker segments' rights too. It is in such situations that reforms should be introduced periodically to clean up and improve the functioning of the systems. Governments are usually slack or reticent in this respect. Collecting taxes, paying salaries and building bridges or highways are by themselves not the yardsticks to measure the effectiveness of a government. A sense of dynamism to overhaul the decadent systems and reinventorise them with new blood is integral to the concept of good governance. It's well appreciated that the introduction of his bill signalled the start of the first session of the parliament in the new building.

Letters to the Editor

Inspiring MBA Pursuits and Expanding Horizons in Shillong

As the September 20th deadline for CAT registration draws near, I find myself pondering how many aspiring students from Shillong have contemplated pursuing an MBA for their career advancement or have taken the initiative to fill out the registration forms.

In case there are any doubts among potential candidates, I would like to encourage them to register and consider embarking on a three-month self-study crash course aimed at strengthening their skills in verbal ability, reading comprehension, quantitative aptitude, data interpretation, and logical reasoning. Here are some suggestions for a 90-day CAT preparation plan:

First 30 days: Establish a well-structured study schedule. Focus on grasping key concepts. Allocate dedicated time to each section, including verbal ability, reading comprehension, quantitative aptitude, data interpretation, and logical reasoning. Incorporate regular mock tests into your routine, with a minimum of 2 tests per week. Each mock test should span 2 hours, followed by a 1-hour session for self-

evaluation and analysis. Next 30 days: Set a target percentile of 80+. Concentrate on refining your skills to achieve this target. Last 30 days: Raise your target to 90-95+ percentile. Fine-tune your preparation to meet this higher benchmark.

Throughout your preparation journey, you will come across numerous blogs and posts offering valuable insights into effective study strategies. I strongly encourage prospective candidates to leverage this content to customize their preparation to their specific needs. Additionally, I recommend utilizing CAT coaching institute materials, standard reference books, and the last ten years' solved CAT papers as valuable resources to enhance your readiness for the CAT exam.

It is imperative for students in Shillong to recognize the abundant opportunities that pursuing an MBA can provide for career growth and development. With dedication, a well-structured study plan, and access to the right resources, success in the CAT exam can be attainable for many.

Furthermore, as an alumnus of IIM Bangalore, I am deeply committed to helping students achieve their dreams. I firmly believe in the importance of exploring opportunities beyond an MBA. Therefore, I encourage students to consider a broader range of academic studies, which can open doors to diverse and promising career pathways.

The YouTube episode 'Campus Talk Ep-2: Freedom of Expression in Education' is an online show-cause notice issued to the principal of a school for playing the election song of VPP during Teachers' Day celebrations made for an interesting viewing. It was an eclectic panel with academicians as well as practitioners and political representatives present to debate the justification and rationale of the government's action. It was quite curious that the Law Minister, Dr. Amarendra Singhoh, was among the participants under which the show-cause notice had been sent. After all, there is rule number 20 of the Meghalaya Service (Conduct) Rules 2019, which states that, "No Government employee shall... (take) part in politics, or in those activities which have political bearing, nor shall he (she) take part in a bid of, or assist in any other manner, any political movement or activity." It was expected that the principal, being in the public forum, especially a matter of rules (law), would attract the attention of the Law Minister.

Nevertheless, a cursory reading of the rule, for me, does support the rationale behind the show-cause notice. Though the VPP may have contested its force of being there's no doubt it is a song connected to a certain political party. Not accepting that is disingenuous. Although, as it has been claimed, there was a demand from the students for the song, as the head of an educational institution, it is expected that ethics (if not rules) should have alerted the principal that this could be interpreted as showing favouritism to a certain political organization. Not just children, but fully mature adults look to authority for validation of their biases. And if the head of an institution is giving the impression that they have no problem allowing their position to, what appears to neutral observers, canvass for a certain group, then it's a matter of concern. What such actions do is reinforce the support for the particular group among some while kindling it among others since the sanction has come from someone in authority. So, it can be argued that the principal should have been more careful.

However, that is not the only impression that can be derived from the issue. As argued by others on the panel, the action of issuing the show-cause notice de-

Assault on freedom of expression: Let's not be hypocrites

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

crosses the scope of freedom of expression in the state. In the name of keeping politics out of educational institutions, what else is going to be censored in the future? The law minister gave a list of things that included, among other things, the possibility of censoring something that is blasphemous. The topic was especially much debated, with the example of satanic songs being constantly mentioned, with one panellist even stating that it will be a problem with people playing satanic songs as long as it does not encourage them to engage in violence. This is an old argument against a certain kind of music, which also includes a certain genre of video game that, it is claimed, exerts its especially young people to violence. I really don't know if there's any peer-reviewed literature that supports such an argument. If it comes from WhatsApp University, where you have amateur political scientists, historians, and philosophers who give their own views on such things, I don't know if that violence was not invented by heavy metal music or video games. If that was the case, then why do we explain the prevalence of violence in the past when these two things had not yet been invented? Or we're claiming that there was a golden age where everyone was dancing around fire, singing songs, and hugging each other?

Also, the idea of blasphemy or insult to a certain religion itself has been used as a justification for many atrocities in the past. For example, the inquisition of the Catholic Church throughout Europe and the Americas is infamous for its sometimes anti-semitic persecution of minorities, especially Jews and Muslims. Thousands died in the bid to preserve the sanctity of the faith. In recent times, a Pakistani Christian woman, Aasia Noor, also known as Aasia Bibi, was convicted of blasphemy by a Pakistani court and sentenced to death by hanging. Later, she was acquitted, but she had to leave the country to save her life. The whole emphasis on blasphemy was a very disturbing portent towards such persecutions. I remember some time ago attending a queer programme in Shillong at an institute connected to a religious denomination. Later, it was told that there was holy

water sprinkled in the room where the performance took place to sanctify the space. In the future, when blasphemy becomes a very serious matter, it will not be just holy water but petrol action that will be administered to the occupants of the space. Am I blowing things out of proportion? But how else would one enforce the rule if there's no punishment? What will be the incentive? It's just logical.

But there was one point that Tarun Bhartiya's one of the panellists brought to attention that was very pertinent to the debate. He stated that, "We defend freedom of expression with different agendas. One among the majority agrees, that is a hypocrisy that exists here also. Freedom of expression, much more than anything else, is used by the community." The example of heavy metal music being blasphemous emerged from that conversation. One could sense others becoming uncomfortable being put on the docks since they had hoped that it would be the government who would be the one answering and not them. There was an attempt by some to show acceptance of the freedom of expression to play any music, but once notice? Personally, I feel that since, as per the newspaper report, the principal has already apologized, the matter should be dropped. A message has been sent (whether we agree with that or not), and that will act as a deterrent for others as well. But if the government is to extend and punish the principal, they will create a martyr and this will be used by their political opponents to galvanise support for their cause. Showing that an argument made that any leniency will project weakness. I disagree. I think it will project magnanimity, the secret ballot. Showing that you care and are willing to give someone a chance to correct a mistake is a much better way of ensuring loyalty. Maybe this whole episode will start a genuine conversation about freedom of expression in our society. One can only hope.

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.

Yours etc., Grace Joe Kharmwung, IIM-Bangalore Alumnus

Are we defending public disruptions and civilian disturbances?

I write to express my deep concern regarding the recent arguments made by the VPP legislators during the Autumn Session on the subject of law enforcement in our state, Meghalaya. While the freedom to protest and gather is an integral part of our democratic fabric, it is essential to strike a balance between the exercise of these rights and the preservation of the peace and order.

The VPP, which has so far stood and testily spoken for the rights of the people, has somehow missed out on the nerve of the public in this very matter. In the Assembly session on Tuesday, September 19, the legislators spoke extensively about the perceived failures of our state police, arguing that they "cannot handle the slightest provocation." They have raised questions about the police response to public disruptions and civilian disturbances, particularly in the context of "peaceful protests." While it is important

to scrutinize the actions of our law enforcement agencies, it is equally crucial to consider the broader implications of defending activities that disrupt the lives of ordinary citizens.

In recent times, we have witnessed what are labelled as "peaceful protests" in Meghalaya, which have resulted in traffic disruptions, businesses being forced to pull down their shutters, and in some cases, innocent civilians being subjected to violence. It raises the fundamental question: What are the police supposed to do in such scenarios? Is it reasonable to expect them to stand by idly while public order is disrupted, businesses suffer, and citizens are placed at risk?

The Indian Constitution indeed guarantees the freedom to protest and gather peacefully, but it does so with the understanding that these rights come with reasonable restrictions. The imposition of such restrictions is not an affront to democracy but a necessary safeguard to ensure that public peace and the rights of all citizens are respected. When so-called peaceful protests cross the line and disrupt the peace of the public, it is the duty and responsibility of the police to take appropriate action to restore order. Hence in such circumstances, playing to the gallery does not always work.

While advocating for the rights of NGOs and protesters, the VPP must realise that businesses — primarily small ones — and livelihoods of people have suffered due to such activities in recent years and this to be seen in the light of Meghalaya currently facing particularly well with regards to ease-of-doing-business. Hence economic stability is at stake in the long-term.

It is my hope that our VPP legislators, who have so far been vehement for the people of all the right reasons, will engage in constructive dialogue to strike the right balance between the exercise of democratic rights and the maintenance of public order, ensuring that Meghalaya continues to be a place where peaceful coexistence and progress thrive.

Yours etc., Patrick Kurbah, Via email

Self-serving legislators!

The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly has proposed to reduce the qualifying years of 2 years and 6 months as contained in the proviso to section 3(1) of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly Act, 1977 in order to enable MLAs who fail to fulfil the qualifying years to receive pension. Isn't this ridiculous? The government had done away with pensions for government employees who joined regular services after 2010. Why must pension be given to MLAs who must probably have amassed

enough wealth and made the best use of their position for personal gains and for their families during their tenure, be it half term, one term, two terms and so on. Particularly, it is said that the Assembly Session should on the very first day be discussing their pension when there are many critical issues that are serious and crucial? Why not for a change act like public servants and serve the people who have voted for them rather than try to stabilise themselves and secure their future?

While glaring truths about school teachers who fail to be given their hard earned monthly salary to fend for themselves and their families, traffic congestion that has become a frustrating daily affair, bad roads and connectivity, poor health care and sanitation, unemployment, education etc., stare us in the face our legislators find them as problems too old to tackle in all earnestness. Here too there will be lukewarm references to serious matters if at all. As for the pension issue, even the Opposition will agree and stand united with the government. After all, they too stand to gain. Ahs! Hypocrisy!

Yours etc., Jennifer Dikar, Via email

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Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Choosing and Being a Good Father.!

Many single women the world over are adopting children and rearing them without a father. But at some stage they realize the child needs a dad in their lives, and in my imagination, they troop off in search of a dad. Here I am going to place such an imaginary scene where an actress goes over to the Institute of Dads and says, "Principal sir, I need a father for my kids!"

The Principal looks at her, wishes he were younger, but hastily puts aside such naughty thoughts and says, "You may choose! Here's the first one: a bit domineering though!"

"Domineering!" says the actress, "That means he'll bring my kids up with authority!"

"Also," says the principal sadly, "he'll think he's always right! Your kids may feel crushed by his dominance, my love, interest, want to be 18 to get away from the house!"

"Duch!" shouts the actress and looks for the next man. "Who's this? He looks charming and determined!"

"Will make you rich quickly," says the Principal of the second dad, "he'll see your kids have enough and more, but is deceiving and dishonest!"

"And my little ones will become the same!" murmurs the actress, then hears a noise in the next room where her children are, she walks over to see a man standing in front of the TV they are watching.

"If you don't eat dinner you don't watch TV!" shouts the tall fellow.

"What's he doing?" whispers the actress as she looks at her perplexed children.

"Ah! That's the threatening type, he's always threatening to lock them up, throw away their TV or ground them!"

"It could be good discipline for them, what?" "But with no communication whatsoever!" says the Principal sadly, "he won't threaten his actions; it's threats, threats and threats!"

They go outside where she's in time to see a man leave, he's a good looking, wishes his children goodbye and smiles at her as he hurries off. "Wait!" she shouts the actress. "You seem like a good father!" The man smiles and rushes on. "Too busy!" says the principal, "he's a workaholic, a good man, with a good income, but whom your children will never see!"

The actress looks at the principal and bursts into tears. "Aren't there men who make good fathers?" she cries.

"Oh yes, there is!" sighs the principal. "A wise father! A man who works hard, but has time for his kids, who is there to teach them to ride a bike, is there to lift them when they fall, and laughs with them when they get up on their own!"

"Am so glad this institute makes such a man!" says the actress, smiling.

"No," smiles the Principal, "the institute doesn't, but a good wife does, she moulds such a man to become a great father, just as a loving husband makes a good mother of his wife!"

knows how good he is, when he sees the kind of love his children have for him later, and the prayers they pray for him. I remember my thoughts and feelings many years ago, when I heard my dad in the US was diagnosed with cancer.

"Dear God," I prayed, "don't do this to a man who has so bravely endured pain to others. A man who taught me to be brave in the face of adversity. To laugh when troubles assailed me, and yet to cry with others in sadness."

I remembered days when even as a father with immense knowledge, he sat with me and listened to my half-baked theories, but laughing them away, but shaking his head and sometimes agreeing and sometimes disagreeing, but allowing me to grow as a thinker, and not a narrow-voiced, untested formula.

"Dear God," I whispered, "just put your strong arm around him and let him feel your strength. Let him put his head against that omnipotent muscle, and feel



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

his pain disappear, just as he in my days of childhood held me tight when cuts and bruises and later emotional hurts racked my body and my soul!"

"Let your heavenly friendship envelop him oh God, just as he became more friend than father as the years went by."

Two friends, who walked in the cold impersonal streets of a foreign shore, watched the pigeons at Rockefeller Center and the waters of the Hudson. Friends who respected each other for what they were and a friend who did not try to forge me in his mould but let me blossom into my own form."

"Dear God," I shout, "why do good men have to suffer so? Why can't you pick the cruel, the ruthless, the tyrants of the world, why rick a man for whom wonder was childlike, and for whom gentleness was a way of life? Why God, why?" I asked in despair.

I felt an arm around my shoulder. It was his, my father's. I sobbed, unashamed, and then I felt his hand wiping away my tears. I leaned against his arms, and slowly felt a peace. Somewhere far away, I knew my Dad had felt my pain, he had his own.....

"Dear God," I had whispered that day, "be a Father to him, just as he is still a father to me!"

I end with this thought, that there's a big role fathers have to play, and huge role mothers play, but together they can develop and mould children, who will grow up with character and courage, and finally pray to the Father above, as we as we enter old age, to give us the same comfort and strength, we gave them earlier..!

The Author conducts an Online Writers and Speakers Course. For more details send a thumbs-up to him on WhatsApp 9892572883. Email: bobbanter@gmail.com

"You have to dream before your dreams can come true."

—A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

The Shillong Times

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Tackling mob violence

POLICE action in Meghalaya has been vilified without an impartial assessment of the situation on the ground. Calling Meghalaya a police state can win political brownie points for politicians sitting in the Opposition and always looking to rake up issues with an eye on pandering to a certain constituency. But what do police do when a mob is on a rampage? Do they move back and allow the mob to have its way simply because it is assumed that the mob is always right? The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) should have known that there would be resistance to the idea of expanding the acreage for limestone mining in an area that is within the precincts of the Narnph Wildlife Sanctuary which harbours the last of the hoolock gibbons. In the first place, is it ecologically feasible to have seven or eight cement companies in one District of the State? How did the cement companies manage to get their clearances from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and (MoEF) and who actually conducted the environmental impact assessment (EIA) which qualified these companies to set up shop so close to a wildlife sanctuary? These companies all came up during the Congress-led ministry under DD Lapang.

In 2007 March, the late JD Rymbai who was then Chief Minister had to step down and was replaced by DD Lapang according to the diktat of the Congress High Command in Delhi. The reason for the replacement was because Rymbai was not granting permission to the cement companies to start their businesses. The moment DD Lapang held the reins in Meghalaya all the cement companies kick-started their businesses. What is surprising is that there was no resistance to the setting up of these companies by the local people then. Did they not know of the long-term consequences of having polluting industries so close to the villages? Even at the last public hearing at Thangkai it was not as if all the people of the area were against the mining expansion plans of a certain cement company. There was a division and part of the menace was also created by the two rival groups.

The cement companies know how things work in Meghalaya hence they appoint local tribals as directors who will be their frontline supporters. Hence there is Phone Syih a Jaintia from the area who is a director of four cement companies and three mining companies among others. In all these tussles provoked by internal rivalries the police are caught in a bind. They have to control the situation and if people are injured they are accused of brutality. In the procession carried out by the FKJGP through the city of Shillong in October 2022, there was large-scale violence on the streets of Shillong. The police refrained from taking strong action and were accused of not doing their duty. The police have to do their job. They cannot appease any politician or political party or the Government of the day. The mob cannot be allowed to run amok.

Letters to the Editor

Demanding Urgent Government Accountability & Reform in KHADC

I write to you with an urgent and seething frustration over the ongoing governance and trade-related catastrophes plaguing the Khair Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC). It is nothing short of infuriating to witness the same old face of government instability, changing like clockwork every six months, with no end in sight since 1973. This chronic instability is the root cause of a litany of problems, chief among them being the absolute shambles that is the policy framework.

Let's talk about the Kafkascque nightmare in obtaining a trading license in this region. The utter lack of infrastructure and competent manpower to efficiently process these licenses has resulted in months of excruciating harassment for those who dare to seek a legitimate path to trade. The citizens of KHADC are burdened and belittled at every turn, and frankly, it's beyond intolerable. What's equally abhorrent is the reprehensible scapegoating of local women for allegedly supporting so-called "outsiders". To peddle the offensive narrative while clearly chasing political gain, especially with elections looming, is an act of sheer contempt for the genuine citizens of the state. The National People's Party (NPP) seems hell-bent on appealing to the lowest common denominator with divisive tactics that only further

tarnish their integrity. Moreover, the deafening silence of the Chief Minister on these issues is nothing short of a dereliction of duty. Instead of addressing the critical problems at hand, the government's response is to arbitrarily shut down shops, as evidenced by the recent closure of 46 establishments in Bishnath and its environs. Such rash actions won't win votes or solve the underlying issues. What's needed is a systematic overhaul, streamlined policies, and an efficient licensing process, not a third-party labyrinth.

The Chief Executive Member's (CEM) claim that notices were sent but ignored by shop owners doesn't warrant the summary execution of businesses. The focus should be on simplifying the licensing process, ensuring timely issuance, and providing clear notifications in newspapers, to inform labourers and shop owners about the requirements. The notorious shutting down businesses without due process is an affront to justice. Let's end the fiasco of the Khair Hills Jaintia District Council (KHADC) by Non-Tribal Regulations, which emphasize the importance of trading licenses in regulating non-tribal establishments. However, these regulations show complete non-interest in the safety of motorists and pedestrians but also have a direct impact on our vehicles' maintenance and the overall image of our community, apart from other health problems.

The current state of our roads is full of various consequences, including safety. Safety Concerns: Potholes have the potential to cause

New Parliament House: Modi, a larger than life legacy?

By Albert Thyriang

We had bid farewell to the old parliament house. The historic first session of the special Session was in new Sansad Bhavan on 19 September 2021. The 96-year-old building will now be an archaeological site. The house where Jawaharlal Nehru made the famous "midnight hour" speech and the Constituent assembly will serve as a nostalgic memory. Apart from being the seat of the imperial Legislative Council, the Constituent Assembly of India it will also be the Parliament of India between 26 January 1950 and 13 September 2023. Considered inadequate for the modern needs, the British circular architecture will give way to the triangular structure. Setting aside criticisms of whether a new parliament house was required, the BJP pushed through this project whose construction commenced on 10 December 2020.

The Prime Minister personally took pride in seeing this three storey building that occupies 64,500 sqm, a reality. His name is recorded in history as the person who laid the foundation stone, inaugurated it and led the MPs to the grand session. He will be in the annals of history. He may be remembered as the one who finally shook off the colonial past. He will not want anyone to forget that in his second term of office the special session of parliament was convened to commission the new law makers house.

On 18 September, the last session in the old building the prime minister gave his farewell speech. He sounded a statesman's note. He acknowledged the past prime ministers from Pandit Nehru to Manmohan Singh and their achievements. He even recalled the prime minister he dislikes the most, Nehru's immortal "at stroke of midnight" speech. He paid special tribute to HR Ambedkar. He complimented the 7,500 members of whom 600 were women. However, he could not resist condemning the Emergency and the "cash for vote scam".

On September 19 after the photo sessions we saw glimpses of members stepping into the building replete with national symbols. The prime minister walked barefoot. In the function to mark the occasion, the prime minister led a procession to re-name the old parliament building "Santivanan Sadan" (Constitution House). Subsequently he made his maiden address at the Lok Sabha and

and cleanliness issues with the urgency they deserve. In conclusion, I implore upon the authorities in KHADC to jettison their complacency and prioritize genuine governance, accountability, and equitable policies that uplift all citizens. The people deserve better, and the government's dereliction of duty must be met with outrage and a resolute demand for immediate change. Swift and resolute action is not just required; it's long overdue.

Urgent need for addressing pot-holes on roads

I am writing to draw attention to a critical issue that has been affecting our roads. As a resident who traverses our city's roads on a daily basis, it has become increasingly concerning to witness the growing number of potholes that seem to be expanding unchecked. These potholes not only pose a significant threat to the safety of motorists and pedestrians but also have a direct impact on our vehicles' maintenance and the overall image of our community, apart from other health problems.

The current state of our roads is full of various consequences, including safety. Safety Concerns: Potholes have the potential to cause accidents, especially when drivers swerve unexpectedly to avoid them, leading to collisions with other vehicles or pedestrians.

Vehicle Damage: Potholes cause substantial damage to our vehicles' tires, wheels, suspension systems, and alignments. This translates to increased repair costs for residents already facing economic challenges.

minister and the new national property. Notably the day was the birth anniversary of V.D. Savarkar, the Hindutva founder. The prime minister who inaugurated the new parliament building did not mention confidence in the minorities. Government functions on Sundays are now normal. Recently it was informed that the minorities at the centre insisted that the convocation for IIT graduates should be held on a Sunday. The statement of the Christian minority does not matter for this government. The pride of the majority is all that counts. India is a secular country that the parliament is answerable to the public - a symbol of its 'infallibility'.

Then instead of portraying the parliament as a modern institution, the government indulges in a regressive to the days of superstitious. On the day of unveiling the icon of India's democracy, the prime minister actually marked by saffron symbolism. Both the Sengol and priests are from Tamil Nadu. The BJP likes to claim that it would gain politically in the Southern state. But the voters there are smart to see through the attempts and schemes of the BJP to gain from party at bay. The prime minister himself, and not the President, inaugurating the new parliament building that he is the most important person in the country.

What about the government's commitment to the president's office? Before shifting to the new building members recalled that in the last session the government was on occasions undermined. Important bills were pushed through by the brute majority of the ruling party. From 2014 till date only one of ten bills were sent to the parliamentary committee for scrutiny. The BJP likes to claim that it would gain politically in the Southern state. But the voters there are smart to see through the attempts and schemes of the BJP to gain from party at bay. The prime minister himself, and not the President, inaugurating the new parliament building that he is the most important person in the country.

The present composition is marked by conflict of interests. The NPP, the senior party is supported by the UDDP and BJP in the legislative Assembly. The Congress is the main opposition but it is a partner of the NPP in KHADC. The stark reality is that three of the five MLAs of the Congress are also MDKs. The UDDP rules with the NPP in the state but in the KHADC it is the major opposition. One of the UDDP ministers in the state is also an MDK. These individuals must be super humans to be able to do justice to their roles.

The role of the opposition is taken by the VPP and the TMC. So far, important issues in the state have been pushed through by the brute majority of the ruling party. From 2014 till date only one of ten bills were sent to the parliamentary committee for scrutiny. The BJP likes to claim that it would gain politically in the Southern state. But the voters there are smart to see through the attempts and schemes of the BJP to gain from party at bay. The prime minister himself, and not the President, inaugurating the new parliament building that he is the most important person in the country.

One Nation; One Election

Transparency and Accountability: Establish transparent communication channels to update residents about ongoing road maintenance efforts and progress.

One nation, one election. The current state of our roads, marred by the proliferation of potholes, requires urgent attention and increased repair costs for residents already facing economic challenges.

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Battling Pollution in Shillong - A Call to Action

By Rishobashkem Kharlyngdoh

I pen these words with a deep sense of concern and a burning desire for change. Shillong, our picturesque abode, is gradually losing its lustre as litter and dust continue to blanket our city. This predicament demands our immediate attention and collective action if we are to reclaim the pristine beauty that Shillong has long been renowned for.

The Shillong of yesteryears was celebrated not only for its breathtaking landscapes and vibrant culture but also for its impeccable cleanliness. A stroll down the streets was a refreshing experience, and the air was crisp with the fragrance of pine and rhododendron. Sadly, that image is fading, replaced by a landscape marred by litter and air laden with dust particles.

Let us first address the issue of litter, which is visible in every nook and cranny of our city. The streets are strewn with plastic bags, wrappers, jiseaned bottles, and various forms of debris. It is disheartening to witness the degradation of our environment as garbage piles up along our roadways.

"Public Awareness and Education: Education is the cornerstone of any effective change. We must launch an extensive public awareness campaign that not only highlights the problems associated with litter and dust but also provides practical solutions. This campaign should encompass schools, community centers, social media, and local news outlets. Workshops, seminars, and interactive programs can engage residents of all ages, imparting the knowledge and motivation needed for meaningful change."

residents, schools, and local businesses can achieve this. These events not only install a sense of pride but also foster a spirit of responsibility among the people of Shillong.

The Dust Dilemma: Accompanying this litter epidemic is the perpetual dustiness that engulfs Shillong. Dust particles hang in the air, creating a haze that obscures our once-pristine views. This dust has adverse effects on respiratory health, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children and the elderly. It also accumulates on buildings, vehicles, and vegetation, causing long-term damage.

Solutions for Shillong: It is imperative that we confront these challenges head-on. To this end, I propose a multifaceted approach that combines public awareness, policy initiatives, and community involvement to combat litter and dust pollution in Shillong.

1. Public Awareness and Education: Education is the cornerstone of any effective change. We must launch an extensive public awareness campaign that not only highlights the problems associated with litter and dust but also provides practical solutions. This campaign should encompass schools, community centers, social media, and local news outlets. Workshops, seminars, and interactive programs can engage residents of all ages, imparting the knowledge and motivation needed for meaningful change.

2. Strengthening Anti-Littering Laws: Laws alone cannot eliminate litter, but they play a vital role in enforcing it. Municipal authorities should rigorously enforce anti-littering laws. Increased patrols, surveillance cameras, and fines for offenders should be implemented. Furthermore, we should consider innovative approaches, such as community service for litterbugs, where offenders actively participate in clean-

ing efforts.

3. Improving Waste Collection and Recycling: One of the fundamental aspects of curbing litter is efficient waste management. Shillong should invest in modern waste collection infrastructure that ensures regular and reliable pick-up services. Additionally, the establishment of easily accessible recycling centers, equipped to handle various types of waste like paper, plastic, and glass, can divert significant amounts of refuse from landfills.

4. Green Initiatives: To mitigate dust pollution, we should embark on green initiatives that enhance the city's natural defenses. Promoting tree planting and expanding green spaces will not only beautify Shillong but also act as natural dust filters. Public-private partnerships can be forged to fund tree-planting campaigns and the maintenance of these green areas.

5. Community Clean-up Drives: Creating a sense of ownership and responsibility is crucial in maintaining cleanliness in our city. Organising regular community clean-up drives involving

"Opinion is the medium between knowledge and ignorance" — Plato

The Shillong Times

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Challenge from Canada
DIPLOMATIC relations between Canada and India are worsening. The fly in the ointment is principally the Khalistani movement or its activities on Canadian soil with suspected political support or a sense of 'tolerance' from the ruling Liberal Party of Canada led by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Trudeau's political instincts are, however, not different from that of the Indian politicians. His attempt is to play vote bank politics by retaining or increasing support for him through steps to woo the eight lakh strong Sikhs there - immigrants from India - who form around two per cent of Canada's population.

Relations between Canada and India were additionally strained now with Canada expelling an Indian diplomatic mission staff following allegations that the envoy played a role in the liquidation of a Khalistani separatist leader in Canada.

Letters to the Editor

Overwhelmed by vehicles; pedestrians ignored

Twish in express my deep concern about the increasing menace of vehicles occupying almost every inch of the road in our beautiful city of Shillong. As a resident who has witnessed the rapid growth of traffic, I feel compelled to draw attention to the pressing issue of pedestrian safety and convenience.

In recent times, the number of cars, scooters, and other vehicles has risen significantly, leading to severe congestion on our streets. It has become an everyday struggle for pedestrians to find a safe space to walk on the sidewalks, let alone cross the roads.

What the public wants to hear from the legislators

By Patricia Mukhim

Our Assembly sessions are getting truncated by the year. On an average the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly sits for not more than 20-25 days a year. In these 25 days much time is taken up by legislators that are unable to communicate their points cogently or have not braced themselves adequately to be able to make a meaningful speech without appearing apologetic.

We the people would like to know the timeline for the Shillong-Dawki road. Do we remember when the foundation stone was laid for the road? Meghalaya is infamous for time and cost overruns in several projects including centrally funded ones.

Is anyone ever held accountable? We the people would like to know the timeline for the Shillong-Dawki road. Do we remember when the foundation stone was laid for the road?

Our dependence on water tanks for their water needs. However, this is not to be Shillong-centric. Travelling to distant villages in Meghalaya informs us that water supply to every home is still work in progress and one wonders if the Jal Jeevan Mission in Meghalaya can be completed before December 2023 because by then the central government will be breathing down the neck of the State Government.

NEGRHIMS is not-existent. If one were to fall ill beyond the OPD hours and if one is not a VIP then one has to stand in a queue for a long time. Some of these complaints are not being taken up by the Director and is in our view we don't pursue these matters in their logical end.

The Meghalaya High Court has been out using its powers to take up these matters within the realm of the executive such as the horrendous traffic jams in this blessed city and the anxious roads in East Jaintia Hills which connect to the Bark Valley in Assam.

Chief Minister travels to Delhi every weekend which does not bring this matter to the Surface Transport Minister, Nivin Gaidarkar? In Nagaland when RN Ravivar? Governor, he would regularly supervise the Dimapur-Kohima highway and sort out matters related to delays due to land acquisition with Gaidarkar. And Gaidarkar always responded positively.

It is a valiant commentary on our legislators but most of them are very constituency-centre. Very few rise above their constituencies to be state legislators. Recall the Late PG Marbaniang who as Speaker brought a few of his MLA colleagues for raising issues only pertaining to their constituencies.

What is most disheartening is the plight of residents of Mawbhab (Barapathar) and Nongsholgh Upper Mawprey trying to escort their children to school and those government employees driving to their offices.

Bank saying that one key landmark initiative is Meghalaya Integrated Project (MeghEA) which apparently is the first of its kind in any state. MeghEA allows for an open-proposal system which won an award at the UN-WSIS. In a democracy it is important for the last person in the village to know what all this means.

The case of NEGRHIMS is pretty much the same. While NEGRHIMS covers the entire region, it is located in Meghalaya and therefore the onus is on the Chief Minister of Meghalaya to push the bill to the legislature. It is an improvement into an institution of excellence.

It is a valiant commentary on our legislators but most of them are very constituency-centre. Very few rise above their constituencies to be state legislators.

Indigenous Tribal Students of Meghalaya can excel in Maths & Science, provided...

By Dominick Danni Raising Rymbai

The heading of the column, "Are tribal students incapable of learning Mathematics & Science?" by Patricia Mukhim (ST September 15, 2023) is his real hard at the heart and the mind. Just reading the caption of the article makes one question if our indigenous tribal students suffer from a major deficiency in the Arts or Maths & Science.

In the early 1990s, the Maths teacher Kilihehri at High School was Ithau (Late) Louis Swar, fondly addressed as Hu-Loa by his students. Books were written in English but most explanations were in their English, with its grammar and multiple meanings of the same word, can be one difficult language. One memory that remains of the teacher was when he would depite some of his more advanced students to help struggling ones, in the post-class hours.

He was humble enough to understand that perhaps peer-to-peer learning, without the fear of 'stupid' humiliation, was better for the weaker students. The student would eagerly find the rational-mind Science teacher, Sr (pronounced as saar) Shatin, whose Science classes were always full to the brim. To his annoyance and also his happiness at the feedback, his asking questions or game replies in his classes, some of the students would often mimic his thick South-Indian accented Pnar and English.

Finishing off high school in Kiddies' Corner, Shillong, the writer has fond memories of the amazing Maths & Science teacher Late Mrs (Sunita) Basu. At 10+2 (Science) in St. Anthony's College (SAC) Shillong, one recalls respect fully the recently deceased Physics Professor, Bah James Bhab. He was a minor in Physics, Economics from SAC. Due credit to the late Professor for helping me secure distinction marks in Physics, and college-supplying marks, at the HISSSL examination 2000.

The first criterion is for students themselves to develop an interest in Maths & Science (M&S); this can happen at the foundations of learning the 'R's of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Next is for teachers to nurture the intellectual development of the students. It only goes to say good teachers can actually kindle the students' interest in the subjects and also perform well academically. Sadly, today teachers are under intense pressure to complete the syllabus within the academic calendar. The end result is that students have just a basic idea of most concepts without in-depth understanding of the subjects. Ultimately, the application of those concepts at the National-level competitive exams, becomes very difficult. Of course, it's another story for those who can afford the fees of the coaching facilities and for-profit educational consultants.

Patricia Mukhim got it very right when she mentioned that our problem is not that we don't seek out those who can motivate our younger generation to break new paths and scale new heights in M&S. One person that comes to mind is Bah Lemak Marbaniang. In 1980-81, he topped his course in the deemed university Inter-annual Institute of Population Studies (IIPS), Mumbai - one of its kind institution in the world, with distinctions to the United Nations and other top world universities. His professors at IIPS called him for an oral interview to verify his written marks. They were genuinely shocked at a tribal student, born and raised in Mawngap, Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, could top the examination in spite of the presence of brilliant students from other well-known colleges and universities of the country. As a Mathematics Professor at St. Anthony's College, Shillong, I had known ZHEU, he had a reputation of zero failure among his students. After a stint in our state's doctoral programs and at 60-plus years of age he finally earned his Ph.D. from IIPS in 2004.

As a society, it is important to inculcate the importance of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) as not just subjects for the needs of the labor or for job-oriented professional courses. In St. Anthony's College of the 2000s, the 'cool' students were those who were into English Literature with the help of Mass Communications Department rivalling them for attention. The Physics and Mathematics were at the other end of the cool spectrum. And Commerce and the Social Sciences were in the middle. No doubt at liberal Arts education is important. However, in this era of the inter-declared approach of the National Education Policy 2020, STEM subjects with a tinge of Liberal Arts would enable a holistic education.

Our former President and missile scientist Dr APJ Abdul Kalam loved playing the veena. And Maths & Science and Music do have a connection. In school, the tuning of a fork is used as an example to measure the frequency of sound. There's a table of Pythagoras, of an isosceles triangle theorem who discovered a simple mathematical relationship between a black and white square. The harmonious sounds of harmony and discord. The hammers that produce harmony were those of the amazing Maths & Science ratios of one another. The forgotten Transcendentalist Margaret Fuller asserted that "All music is mathematics and mathematics is music and mathematics is music."

The recent success of the paise vasool Chandrayaan-3 Mission that landed in the south polar region of the moon was being widely celebrated. We achieved what other very high-income countries failed to do. The success of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), their passion and love of Space Technology, should be given the same status and celebration as bestowed on other rockstars in the fields of sports, performing and fine arts, literature and dance. Perhaps, one day we will have an annual chakra towards the STEM subjects. The world's richest men themselves to develop an interest in Maths & Science (M&S); this can happen at the foundations of learning the 'R's of Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Next is for teachers to nurture the intellectual development of the students. It only goes to say good teachers can actually kindle the students' interest in the subjects and also perform well academically. Sadly, today teachers are under intense pressure to complete the syllabus within the academic calendar. The end result is that students have just a basic idea of most concepts without in-depth understanding of the subjects. Ultimately, the application of those concepts at the National-level competitive exams, becomes very difficult. Of course, it's another story for those who can afford the fees of the coaching facilities and for-profit educational consultants.

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Letters to the Editor

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In recent times, the number of cars, scooters, and other vehicles has risen significantly, leading to severe congestion on our streets. It has become an everyday struggle for pedestrians to find a safe space to walk on the sidewalks, let alone cross the roads. This issue poses a serious threat to the safety of the elderly, children, and physically challenged individuals who often find themselves stranded amidst a sea of vehicles.

Letters to the Editor

Restrict entry of heavy vehicles in residential areas

The traffic situation during school hours. The lack of designated parking spaces and unregulated parking by vehicle owners further exacerbates the problem. This not only obstructs smooth traffic flow but also discourages people from choosing sustainable means of transport such as walking or cycling.

Just recently, on the morning of August 24, 2023, near Anton Hall, a tragic collision involving a two-wheeler occurred, underscoring the gravity of this concern. It is sad to note that the Shillong Traffic Police seem to be over-regulating schools, yet it could not prevent incidents like this. It is important for the Shillong Traffic Police to re-evaluate and re-regulate

Letters to the Editor

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progress towards becoming a more pedestrian-friendly environment. I urge the concerned authorities to take immediate measures to address this issue. Implementing strict parking regulations, promoting public transportation, and better management, community engagement, and creating dedicated pedestrian zones are some crucial steps that could alleviate the problem. Furthermore, encouraging citizens to adopt eco-friendly modes of transport like cycling and carpooling can significantly reduce traffic congestion and pollution.

As responsible citizens, we must all contribute to making Shillong a safer, cleaner, and more pedestrian-friendly city. Collective efforts will lead to positive changes and help preserve the essence of Shillong for future generations to cherish.

Letters to the Editor

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in multiple ways. This problem arises from the unregulated entry and parking of heavy trucks, turning this peaceful thoroughfare into a cacophonous barrage of inconvenience. For the locals, this problem has become a daily ordeal, particularly in the morning when residents with their vehicles find themselves grappling with the road blockades caused by the 'back and forth' pacing of the noisy and polluting trucks. Frankly speaking, the road, once a peaceful route, has now become a bewildering maze of disorder.

What is most disheartening is the plight of residents of Mawbhab (Barapathar) and Nongsholgh Upper Mawprey trying to escort their children to school and those government employees driving to their offices. The residents are regularly held up on the Trenching Round Road by the traffic snarl to half an hour, sometimes even a full hour. Many parents regularly express their distress at missing school and returning home in disappointment. It is the education of our children less important than collecting revenue from polluting truck parking?

Letters to the Editor

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the immediate removal of truck parking facilities at the entry of the heavy vehicles in residential areas is a must. It is the root cause of all the troubles plaguing the lives of the residents of the area. Moreover, no child should be allowed to blame their parents between 8pm and 7am. Ensuring the safety of the residents and preserving a peaceful environment in the 'residential areas' must be the government's top priority. The future of the younger generation should not be 'entangled' with the greed of some irresponsible adults.

On behalf of the aggrieved residents of these neighborhoods, I sincerely trust the urgent attention of the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police of East Khasi Hills, and au-

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thorities of the Cantonment Board to treat this concern with the utmost urgency. No children or youths should be "exposed to a noisy environment." It only goes to say adversely pollute their minds, sets. Concerned parents often worry about their children falling into the wrong company as peer influence significantly impacts a young person's behavior and choices. Will it not be a major "liability" of the state if our youth get into wrong habits in such an unhealthy environment?

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"Anyone you suffer a setback or disappointment, put your head down and plow ahead."

— Les Brown

The Shillong Times

Case of the landless tribal

THE issue of land evokes different emotions in different people. For the affluent land is an investment and a surety for the future. They gift land to their off-springs who in turn will acquire more land for their children. And this practice continues and has continued for as long as we can remember. The Khasi-Jaintia community has never given any thought to the possibility that land as a finite resource would one day create an angst and would be the cause of a divide between those owning hectares of land and the growing number of landless who today live in rented accommodation despite being indigenous to the state. The sense of community has given way to cross individualism.

One of the few statements that Meghalaya has seen was BB Lyngdoh, who during his chief ministership had proposed a cadastral survey that would bring all land under the modern revenue system. Above all, a cadastral survey would inform as to who owned how much land and possibly lead to land reforms that would ensure a land ceiling beyond which a person would not be able to buy more land. This might have brought in an ecosystem of justice and equity in a tribal community where a large number of families no longer have access to community land because those have, over time, been converted to private land. It is instructive that the VPP MLA, Ardent Basiaimvot should raise this issue now. He could have raised it when he was an MDC. Frankly the ADCs have a greater onus of curtailing the land greed of a few and ensuring equitable distribution of land amongst the community members. But alienation of land has happened under the watch of the Councils which raises the question as to whether they are fulfilling their constitutional duties of safeguarding the land rights of the tribal community, especially the poor who should have access to community and. Over decades the refrain trotted when it comes to acquiring land for any institution or for roads and highways is that land belongs to the 'people'. Who those people are is not known. Land-owning people today are the affluent among tribals. About 76% of the indigenous tribals of Meghalaya are landless.

Unfortunately the concerns raised by many today is a one-point agenda of land alienation to non-tribal entities. What the rich tribal is taking away from his/her fellow tribal seems to be of no concern. Why does the VPP not demand a cadastral survey now and stick to their guns until that goal is met? That would be the greatest favour they can do for the poor who they claim to represent.

Of Hypocrites and the Satanic

By Kyrsohor Pyruuh

With the eagerness to learn more about the idea of freedom, I also watched the Campus Talk on freedom of expression, hosted by a local media person. The campus talk centered around the recent show cause notice against the particular Head of Government School in West Jaintia Hills District, for allegedly allowing the students to play and dance to the tune of an election song "Ia U Pruh". Taking for granted that the Head of the Institution had violated certain government norms, perhaps it is highly unlikely that action will be initiated against the person for fear of public outrage due to the popularity of the song.

It will be hypocritical on the part of the Government not to take any action if rules are violated. Nonetheless, in the recent past in Meghalaya rules are blatantly flouted and law and order violated by both State and non-state actors and in many instances the Government had failed the citizens and was not able to maintain the rule of law for the fear of reprisal by the majority. However, the fundamental premise of freedom is to let everyone live in peace and prosperity. At the same time we must not succumb to a popular and completely wrong notion that law and order or for peace to prevail we have to depend on the happiness of the majority. Popularity is not divine, and that a strong government and progressive society is marked by will to act against the unfounded opinion of the majority. To the extent of refusing to act at the dictat of the popular majority and the recent research had brought to light that even in Nazi Germany, there were German people from Hamburg City under the Reserve Police Battalion 101 who refused to follow the orders of their superiors to kill the Jews.

Learning and debating on freedom, censorship, societal and religious norms that are small matters and it is important that we continue the discourse as these matters shape and mould our world views and guide us in our day to day dealings. Curtailing freedom of expression, artistic or otherwise and behaviour control are not anathema in Meghalaya. There had been orders issued by the State with the intention to stop and even ban art expressions, movies, music etc. Recently both the Government and society found the following artistic expressions to be threats to both and hence the ban was pronounced. These are: (i) In 2006 the Meghalaya Cabinet banned the movie 'The Doves' Code and ironically no film critic was present in the Cabinet. (ii) In 2013 Tarun Bhartiya and Sanjay Kak's Red Ant Dream was inhibited by the City Police and was not screened during the India 8 film festival at Anbhor, Shillong. (iii) In the 2015 edition of NH 7 Weekender some religious group (s) objected to Megadeh performing at the music festival (iv) In Shillong, there exists this loud noise which is made of objects to thrash metal music and people who are associated with it are sometimes considered and condemned as satanic.

In 2014 there was public discourse on the effects of thrash metal bands on society and it was painful to listen to the stories of some talented musicians who played metal songs as they had to go underground out of fear. Even rappers were forced to stop midway during their performance and ridiculed by government officials in the music event held in the outskirts of the city. Once I was preacher when I heard a preacher who preached against the one, Herb California of the Band Eshes, as being satanic and during the 1980s there was this satanic panic about the pernicious impact of rock music on the youth, especially in America, where evangelical preachers went overboard in denounce rock music for causing havoc to the youths. Also, John Lennon was condemned as anti-Christ for his off-hand remark that the Beatles are more popular than Jesus. In fact, it is to protest and death threats. Such panic and demonising opinions against some of the renowned performing artists of the Universe also reverberated across the Khasi Hills during the post-independence. Herb California in fact John Lennon was anti-war and strongly opposed violence and his songs bore testimony to that.

prosecute those who went against God's laws. Therefore, the accuser is a job description rather than a proper noun and the accuser's job is to confront and challenge the unworthiness of humankind. The accuser is essentially the prosecutor before the Court of Yahweh. The concept of Satan has evolved over the millennia since the post Biblical Judaism and in modern world it has also reared its racial underpinning that everything which is black is evil and more so red, brown, tribal or primitive and the global south were characterised as heathen and godless region.

Freedom is crucial for our civilization and one must not condone violence, hatred or any act which will lead to destruction of socio-political fabric. On the other hand the society must also move with the times and adapt to the changes, lest the society will be doing violence by its rigidity and regressiveness. Let me recall a conversation with the group of musicians in town. This group belongs to the genre of thrash metal and had their music video shot in a cemetery. This music video was objected to by a section of conservatives who also admonished the group as satanic worshippers. But their story is just the opposite, they are not satanic followers and neither the songs nor the video contained any satanic elements. In fact, they pen and sing songs which are reliable to politics and society. Through the music video they wanted to share their idea with the society at large that the graveyard is another space which is present among human habitation and is a space which represents serenity amidst the din of city life.

Now that the Voice of People Party has issued a disclaimer that the Prah song is not the official song of the party, it can well be opined that the show-cause is ridiculous. But even as it may be the question still remains as to whether we are a tolerant society. Hence, we need to ask whoever comes to power if they are committed to defend freedom without prejudice? Or will they continue the policies of disallowing freedom of expression and hate opinion (s) which they dislike and which offend the majority?

In Hebraic epistemology, Satan is the accuser and recurs several times throughout the Hebrew Bible. In his Khasi Bible commentary, Rev. Father Sngi Lyngdoh defines Satan as one of the servants of God and is not an evil being, who worked for God or rather he was a tool which God uses to test and

trial conductive and bulk density were also noticed near the cement plants. The lower values of water holding capacity, soil moisture content, soil organic carbon and total nitrogen content were found compared to the control sites.

The effect of cement dust deposition on soil is more in areas nearer to the cement plants. All present the changes may not be so serious but if this trend continues, soil properties of a vast area around the cement plants are likely to change leading to multiple effects on flora, fauna and socio-economy of the area. The area has the maximum limestone deposits in the state of Meghalaya followed by Khasi Hills and Garo Hills. Extensive exploitation of limestone in the area started in 2004 after establishment of several cement manufacturing plants. At present, there are eleven cement plants already established. Currently, these are predominantly the major consumers of limestone resources in Meghalaya. All these cement plants were found to be located within an area of less than 10 sq km which is equivalent to 17% of the area of Naphum Wildlife Sanctuary.

It is strange that the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, the custodian and keeper of land and its resources under Sixth Schedule converted the area into open property. Equally strange is how Star Cement owns more than 200 hectares (25.6 km) and how 10 sq km

of land where these cement factories are located can be owned by non-indigenous people defying the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act. It is ironic that value addition of Meghalaya limestone is the mining place elsewhere in Sonapur in Assam and Mohiniagar in Jalpaiguri District (near Siliguri) in West Bengal.

As we grapple with mob violence, the less said the better. But it is important to point out as a civilised citizen that when a mob is on a rampage, the police are responsible for maintaining law and order and ensuring public safety. The primary objective is to protect lives and property, prevent violence and restore peace in affected areas rather than to be in a bind because of the tussles provoked by internal rivalries. It is the job of the police to deploy additional force, use non-lethal force, arrest and detention, imposition of curfew and coordination with other agencies of the Central Armed Police Forces as and when the situation arises. The editorial has rightly pointed out that they cannot appease any political or political parties or the government of the day. The mob cannot be allowed to run amok."

— Yours etc.,  
By VJ Lyngdoh  
Shillong

Wearing patriotism on our sleeves

By Anirban Bhattacharyya

India just pulled off the ultimate magic trick: landing on the dark side of the moon. But, Pink Floyd didn't roll out the psychedelic red carpet as promised. We did it, and at a price tag so low, it makes you wonder if we borrowed some spending tips from the state of Kerala where in the first 9 days of Onam the people of Kerala spent 665 crore on just alcohol alone. Come to think of it Kerala could have funded our Moon Mission! Take a bow, India: we've reached the pinnacle of civilisation the grandfather! The crowd loved it, naturally.

Oh, and in case you thought our education system was safe, think again. Tripta Tyagi, a teacher in Muzaffarnagar, encouraged Hindu boys to give Muslim students a lesson in violence. She claimed she couldn't do it herself because of a self-proclaimed handicap. Go figure.

And the cherry on top of nothing has changed story? "The Kashmir Files" winning a National Award for Best Film on National International. It's almost like they meant "National Dismigration." Good one, Jun? Meanwhile, Manipur's been burning for four states, religious differences, languages and gathered around, our Indian chests puffed with pride, and threw a nation-wide party. But let's cut to the chase, has anything really changed in India since we got over our space euphoria?

Well, in the past week, it seems we've had a surge



in vigilante attacks on minorities and hate incidents off the opposition have united celebrated our moon landing by taking a giant leap backward. Or Nothing has changed after all.

In Rishikesh, Uttarakhand, the Hindutva Devbhoomi Raksha Abhiyan declared a holy war against the Christian religion, saying if you meet a Father, remind them who is the grandfather! The crowd loved it, naturally."

Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge says they aim to protect democracy, promote welfare, and counter whatever ideology they think is threatening the idea of India. Fingers crossed, folks!

In the end, let's ponder a cosmic conundrum: why do we measure our patriotism by random events, ignoring our religious and social differences? Perhaps it's time we maintained this National identity and camaraderie in our everyday lives. Or maybe, just maybe, it is just the old moon and a new shuttle. Beam us up, Scooty!

In the nation's capital, Hindutva singer Kanhaiya Mittal declared a holy war against the Christian religion, saying if you meet a Father, remind them who is

Letters to the Editor

Whither Conservation in Meghalaya?

Editor, The editorial "Tackling mob violence" (S1 September 21, 2023) raises many other issues. The British were intelligent enough to create and conserve biodiversity. A key biodiversity area of 259.29 sq km of Reserved Forest in Naphum Block I and Block II is the primary forest remaining in Meghalaya and was established in June 1909 and March 1918 respectively. Both the blocks of Naphum are part of the Reserved Forest in Jaintia Hills and the Working Plan for this forest was approved for a period of ten years from 2013-14 to 2022-23 by the Ministry of Environment and Forests and Climate Change, North East Regional Office, Government of India, Shillong. During the mid-term revision of the approved working plan initiated in July 2018, the area of Naphum Block II got reduced by 59.90 sq km as Naphum Wildlife Sanctuary was notified on 10th June 2014.

The editorial has raised a very pertinent question, "Is it ecologically feasible to have seven to eight cement companies in one district of the State? How did the cement companies manage to get their licences from the Union Ministry of Environment and Forests and who actually conducted

the environmental impact assessment which qualified these companies to set up shop so close to a wildlife sanctuary?" When money talks there will be no resistance and in fact guileful and greedy people have nothing to lose but are contented with crumbs not knowing what degradation of environment and its consequences. The main threat to Naphum forest is 2004 was encroachment (settlement and agriculture), hunting, poaching, jhum cultivation, illegal felling of trees, speeding vehicles, pollution from motor vehicles on National Highway 6 formerly NH 44 that connects Assam, Mizoram and Tripura with the rest of India. A number of animals are crushed to death by speeding vehicles. Earlier, some forest areas were destroyed mainly due to betel nut plantation, far jhum cultivation, orchards (mainly oranges), and firewood collection.

The Naphum Wildlife Sanctuary (59.90 Sq Km), East Jaintia Hills District was notified on June 10, 2014 is the only large tract of pristine forest left in Jaintia Hills as well as the eastern part of Meghalaya. This area has some of the tallest evergreen and semi-evergreen forests left in Meghalaya. The Sanctuary is also home to many Schedules I species such as Hooleek gibbon, Snowy plover, Giant hornbilled Leopard etc. The favourable climate with rich vegetation offers a good habitation of

the area to support a wide variety of wild, endangered flora and fauna. The Sanctuary is endowed with a rich diversity and abundance of wildlife. Until recently only few studies have been conducted to explore the fauna diversity in the Sanctuary. In the year 1996-98, a study was conducted by the Zoological Survey of India, the first at such survey for the district, as per the report there are 25 species of birds, 61 species of mammals, 16 species of Reptiles, 74 species of fishes and 15 species of Amphibians. In 1999, Dr. Anwaruddin Choudhury submitted the interim report of wildlife survey in Jaintia Hills, according to which there are more than 120 species of mammals. In 2016-2017, the Department with Dr. Rajkamal Goswami from Ashoka Trust for Research in Ecology & Environment (ATREE) had carried out fauna survey in the sanctuary using camera trap, as per the study 92 species of birds, 35 species of mammals and 189 species of butterflies were recorded. About 92 species or birds had been recorded so far. Among the noteworthy species recorded so far includes, Oriental Pied Hornbill, Giant hornbilled Hornbill, Spangled Drongou, Rufous-throated Partridge etc.

The sanctuary has a number of small nullas, streams etc. which host a rich variety of butterflies. Dr. Rajkamal Goswami during his studies in the sancu-

ary has recorded around 91 species of butterflies. Some of the butterflies are very rare which can be located only in the sanctuary. It can be stated that the sanctuary is exceptionally rich in butterfly diversity.

The Asian Leaf Toad (epilem's dentate), a reptile known as Tundines were recorded in Pang and Lakha rivers. The copper headed Trilled Snake, Red-necked Keelback, monitor lizard and species of frog (Kaloula spp.) have been recorded from the region. The Common Varanus bengalensis, water monitors, Rock Python, King Cobra, Common Cobra, Banded Krait, Common krait, Common vine snake, green pit viper and reticulated python have also been recorded.

According to the study conducted by R. Eugene Lamare and O.F. Singh Department of Environmental Studies, North-Eastern Hill University and Department of Environment and Traditional Ecosystems, Martin Luther Christian University, Shillong in 2013 titled, "Comparison of various soil physico-chemical parameters," revealed that cement dust emanating from cement plants has changed the soil quality in its surrounding areas of cement plants. The normal soil pH in the area is generally acidic. However, due to the continuous deposition of cement dust soil pH was found slightly alkaline near the cement plants. The higher values of soil parameters such as elec-

trical conductivity and bulk density were also noticed near the cement plants. The lower values of water holding capacity, soil moisture content, soil organic carbon and total nitrogen content were found compared to the control sites.

The effect of cement dust deposition on soil is more in areas nearer to the cement plants. All present the changes may not be so serious but if this trend continues, soil properties of a vast area around the cement plants are likely to change leading to multiple effects on flora, fauna and socio-economy of the area. The area has the maximum limestone deposits in the state of Meghalaya followed by Khasi Hills and Garo Hills. Extensive exploitation of limestone in the area started in 2004 after establishment of several cement manufacturing plants. At present, there are eleven cement plants already established. Currently, these are predominantly the major consumers of limestone resources in Meghalaya. All these cement plants were found to be located within an area of less than 10 sq km which is equivalent to 17% of the area of Naphum Wildlife Sanctuary.

It is strange that the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council, the custodian and keeper of land and its resources under Sixth Schedule converted the area into open property. Equally strange is how Star Cement owns more than 200 hectares (25.6 km) and how 10 sq km

of land where these cement factories are located can be owned by non-indigenous people defying the Meghalaya Land Transfer Act. It is ironic that value addition of Meghalaya limestone is the mining place elsewhere in Sonapur in Assam and Mohiniagar in Jalpaiguri District (near Siliguri) in West Bengal.

As we grapple with mob violence, the less said the better. But it is important to point out as a civilised citizen that when a mob is on a rampage, the police are responsible for maintaining law and order and ensuring public safety. The primary objective is to protect lives and property, prevent violence and restore peace in affected areas rather than to be in a bind because of the tussles provoked by internal rivalries. It is the job of the police to deploy additional force, use non-lethal force, arrest and detention, imposition of curfew and coordination with other agencies of the Central Armed Police Forces as and when the situation arises. The editorial has rightly pointed out that they cannot appease any political or political parties or the government of the day. The mob cannot be allowed to run amok."

— Yours etc.,  
By VJ Lyngdoh  
Shillong

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

# Fashion with a purpose!

By Mukesh Kwatra

**E**co-friendly fashion implies making sustainable choices in a world driven by fast-paced trends and disposable clothing. But then the term "sustainable fashion" itself is an oxymoron.

As defined in Cambridge Dictionary, 'fashion' means a style that is popular at a particular time, and on the other hand, 'sustainable' means able to continue over a period of time. Despite this contradiction, the notion of being fashionable while embracing sustainability is not only possible but also increasingly essential in our modern society.

## Impact on Environment

The fashion industry has long been associated with a significant ecological footprint. It's a leading contributor to pollution, water consumption, and greenhouse gas emissions. Following are some of the industry's most pressing issues:

### Fast Fashion

The rise of fast fashion has led to an accelerated production cycle, where clothing is designed, produced, and discarded rapidly. This contributes to massive amounts of textile waste.

### Resource Intensive

Traditional textile production relies heavily on water, energy, and chemicals. Huge amounts of electricity and heat are required for cloth and garments manufacturing. Most of the factories operate in areas that are largely dependent on coal for producing energy, causing huge gas emissions.

### Pollution

Dyeing and finishing textiles release harmful chemicals into waterways, polluting ecosystems and endangering human health.

### Waste

The fashion industry generates vast amounts of waste, from unsold inventory to discarded clothing, much of which ends up in landfills.

Given these environmental challenges, the fashion industry is under increasing pressure to become eco-friendly and embrace sustainability.

### Rise of Eco-friendly Fashion

In recent years, eco-friendly fashion has gained traction as a response to the industry's environmental and ethical concerns. Eco-friendly and sustainable fashion focuses on minimizing harm to the environment and improving social condi-



tions throughout the supply chain. Here are some of the key aspects:

### Eco-friendly Materials

Sustainable fashion prioritizes the use of eco-friendly materials such as organic cotton, hemp, Tencel, and recycled fibers. These materials are produced with lower environmental impact.

### Ethical Production

By prioritising sustainability, brands engage and support the local communities and provide safe, healthy, and fair working conditions for the labor.

### Transparency

Sustainable brands aim to be transparent about their supply chains, making it easier for consumers to trace the origin of their clothing.

### Circular Fashion

It promotes the idea of reducing, reusing, and recycling or upcycling clothing. This includes repair services, resale platforms, and clothing rental services.

Fortunately, consumers are also becoming more conscious of these issues and demanding green alternatives. By adopting some of the following eco-friendly practices, individuals can reduce their carbon footprint and make a positive difference.

### Choose Sustainable Fabrics

Opt for clothing made from sustainable materials like organic cotton, hemp, bamboo, Tencel, or recycled fibers. These fabrics are produced with less environmental impact compared to

conventional ones.

### Buy Second-Hand

Thrifting and shopping at vintage stores not only reduces waste but also gives clothing a second life. You can find unique, pre-loved items that contribute to a more sustainable fashion cycle.

### Support Sustainable Brands

There is an increasing trend of brands that prioritize sustainability. One should opt for them and support. Look for certifications like Fair Trade, GOTS (Global Organic Textile Standard), or B Corp to ensure ethical and eco-friendly practices.

### Quality Over Quantity

Invest in high-quality, timeless pieces that will last longer instead of fast fashion trends. Quality clothing often withstands wear and tear better, reducing the need for frequent replacements.

### Repair and Upcycle

Instead of discarding damaged clothing, learn basic sewing skills to repair or upcycle them into something new. This can prolong the life of your garments and reduce waste said Dr Mukesh Kwatra, founder of Smiling Tree .

### Minimise Washing

Overwashing clothes can wear them out faster and consume more water and energy. Only wash your clothes when necessary, and opt for cold water to save energy.

### Energy-Efficient Laundry

When you do wash your clothes, use energy-efficient appliances and eco-friendly detergents. Line drying your laundry or using a drying rack can also save energy.

### Capsule Wardrobe

Create a capsule wardrobe with a limited number of versatile pieces that mix and match well. This reduces the need for excess clothing and streamlines your style choices.

### Support Local Designers

Support local fashion designers and artisans who often produce on a smaller scale and may use eco-friendly materials and practices.

### Rent or Borrow for Special Occasions

Instead of buying formal or occasional wear that you'll rarely use, consider renting or borrowing these items. This reduces the demand for single-use garments.

### Eco-Friendly Accessories

Choose sustainable accessories made from recycled or eco-friendly materials, such as cork, reclaimed wood, or upcycled metals.

### Educate Yourself

Stay informed about sustainable fashion trends and practices. Attend workshops, read books and articles, and follow influencers and brands that promote eco-friendly fashion.

Beyond being fashionable and sustainable is about making mindful choices that align with your personal style while considering the environmental and ethical impact of your clothing. (IANShife)

## Use back-to-school mindset to help you stick to your goals

Even if it's been many years since you were last in school, you might still associate this time of year with that "back-to-school" mindset — that feeling of a page turning, a new phase beginning and the chance to start anew and reinvent yourself.

While you won't find any research on the "back-to-school mindset" itself, this feeling is very similar to what science calls the "fresh start effect". This is a boost in motivation for change that comes with a shift from one time in your life to another — called a temporal landmark. The beginning of a new school year, birthdays, anniversaries and even Monday mornings are all temporal landmarks.

Temporal landmarks support our belief that we can reinvent ourselves, acting as a threshold to a new start and the chance to leave old habits behind. These landmarks open our minds up to novelty and the possibility of seeing the bigger picture — rather than being mired in our daily slog.

New Year's Eve is our most well-known marker for fresh starts. But as many of us know, new year's resolutions often don't work when it comes to making lasting lifestyle changes.

This is because resolutions tend to lack specificity, are too ambitious, last too long, or people don't make necessary changes in their environment to support behaviour change (such as finding new hobbies to do on weekends instead of going to the pub if you're trying to drink less). Feeling you have to make a new year's resolution can also lead to failure.

But other temporal landmarks tend to better support changes, not just in ourselves but in our environment too. The new school year, for example, often means a change of routine, but also a change in the clothes we wear and the people we socialise with. All these subtle changes may work together to support your motivation when making a new start.

Our brains love novelty and there's nothing better than a chance to leave behind the

"treadmill of the predictable everyday flow" of our lives and have a new period to look forward to. This makes motivation easier to come by as it offers a chance to change our circumstances.

While this change in routine can be nerve-wracking, it might be the kind of interruption needed to shift how we think and visualise how we can achieve our goals.

The back-to-school period offers the perfect chance to kick-start any life changes you've been meaning to make. Here are a few ways to make sure your goals don't fail:



1. **Write to your future self:** Set timers to send yourself aspirational reminders of your goals to gently nudge yourself towards achieving your goals. If you're trying to save more money, for example, setting a reminder to set aside some cash via an email that appears in your inbox on payday may help give you this much-needed nudge.

2. **Don't worry if you falter:** It can be hard to make big changes and build new habits. Even if you don't succeed in sticking with your changes at first, there are plenty of other temporal landmarks you can find throughout the year that offer a chance for a fresh start (such as your birthday or returning to work after a holiday). Even the smallest period of change offers a chance to make positive lifestyle changes.

3. **Quick wins:** The motivation and energy provided by a fresh start can often be short-lived. But having quick-win goals that require only small boosts in motivation are

the perfect ones to set for yourself during these transition periods. This can include things such as decluttering your room or deleting your most addictive social media app.

4. **Put your imperfections behind you:** Instead of focusing on who you are and put your attention on the person you want to be — and use this as motivation to make change. Focusing on who you want to be in the future may also help you leave your imperfections in the past.

5. **Set a deadline:** Temporal landmarks are great because they provide natural structure and flow to our lives. Not only can you use temporal landmarks to start working towards a goal, upcoming temporal landmarks can also act as a way of bringing a natural urgency to accomplishing our goals.

6. **Avoid the slump:** Motivation fluctuates over time. We usually have high motivation when we first set a goal, and high motivation as we get close to achieving it. But the period in the middle tends to be low in motivation — and the longer the period, the harder it is to maintain our resolve. If you want to make the best of the back-to-school mindset, shorten the period of time you want to achieve your goal. This can even be as short as one week or even just one day at a time.

7. **Pair the good with the bad:** "Templating bundling" is the practise of pairing something you love with something you're less enthusiastic about (but know you should do). By pairing these behaviours together, it wires them together in your brain — motivating you to keep working on the thing you may not enjoy as much in the future.

Making any lifestyle change is hard — but the back-to-school mindset that accompanies the transition from summer into autumn offers a great opportunity to make these changes. (The Conversation)

## Love Behind Bars

### How Tihar nurtures children in jail with their mothers

It is said that love transcends all boundaries and this is being proven true in the national capital's dreaded Tihar Jail where children born to incarcerated mothers are being given the kind of upbringing and care that one can never expect in a place that houses hardened criminals.

Currently, 37 children aged between 0-6 years that still Central Jail Number Six their home for now, are receiving remarkable care, education, and medical attention within the confines of the high walls of the prison.

Special care of these children begins at the prenatal stage and continues through their birth till they start their schooling and eventually leave the prison after reaching the age of six.

A dedicated gynecologist regularly visits the prison, providing essential checkups and medical support to the expectant mothers.

Once a woman gives birth, she stays under observation with her newborn in an eight-bed ward housed in a separate barrack meant for inmates with children. The focus is on ensuring the well-being of both mother and child in the crucial early days of the confinement.

The special care does not stop at childbirth and the young ones are provided with comprehensive medical care as they grow up.

"A certified vaccination centre within the prison ensures they receive the jobs necessary for the baby's well-being and survival. The prison's immunisation programme covers vital

vaccines like BCG, Polio, Hepatitis, DPT, and Tetanus," said another official.

Beyond essential healthcare, these children are offered a unique opportunity for learning. A dedicated creche operates within the prison, offering pre-primary education. It also boasts of a variety of activities like games, drawing, and singing. This early educational foundation prepares them for school, setting the stage for a brighter future beyond the prison walls.

Tihar's commitment to the welfare of these children extends to their nutritional needs as well. A separate kitchen that caters to the children ensures that they get daily servings of milk and fruits, so vital for their early development. Not just this, the prison staff takes care of the children's Emotional Quotient as well and their birthdays are celebrated by jail officials and NGOs. The children receive toys, storybooks, clothes, and essential hygiene products like soap, cream, powder, and oil as gifts.

Yet, the road ahead isn't forgotten. Once the children near the age of six and no family member comes forward to take them home, or if the relatives are not financially equipped to support them, the prison authorities take charge. Taking a proactive approach, the prison authorities collaborate with the Juvenile Justice Board (JJB) to secure a place for these young ones in child-care institutions, ensuring their continued care and development. (IAN5)

# Lightning connector vs USB-C: The great Apple debate



After many years of designing and selling a variety of different cables to power and charge its devices, Apple has slowly switched to USB-C chargers for all of its products.

The last device to swap is the iPhone, and it happened against Apple's will. In October last year, the European Commission requested all phones and laptop producers switch to the USB-C connector (which had earlier been agreed on as a common standard).

Apple could have chosen to ignore the request and stop selling in the EU, or to produce versions with USB-C for the European single market only. Instead, it chose to comply and follow the EU rules everywhere. The common charger for all devices is thus becoming a reality, at least until the world moves completely to wireless charging.

### A BETTER STANDARD

The Lightning charger was introduced by Apple in 2012 and first featured on the iPhone 5. It was the successor to the 30-pin dock connector introduced in 2003 for the first iPhone and iPhones. Arguably, the key visible innovation of the Lightning cable, however, one notable feature was that it borrowed the Lightning connector's reversibility.

USB-C is just the name of the connector, not the cable. The cable and connector are part of a bigger technical specification called USB-4. USB-4 outperforms Lightning in every

technical dimension conceivable. It can transfer data much more quickly: up to 40Gbps (gigabits per second) for USB-4 versus 480Mbps (megabits per second) for Lightning. It also charges devices more swiftly, to the point that Apple started selling Lightning to USB-C adaptors.

The main difference between the two, however, is that USB-C is not proprietary. It was developed by a consortium called the USB Implementers Forum. This consortium is composed of companies such as Intel and Microsoft — and also Apple.

All of the USB standards can be used by any business. Apple, on the other hand, does not allow anyone else to use its pro-

prietary accessories, unless they agree on a license. This means that USB-C is compatible with many more devices, including all recent Apple products, but not previously with the iPhone.

So what's so special about the Lightning connection that made Apple stick with it for so long, despite repeated promises to join its competitors on a common standard? Why would Apple sabotage one of its own products by keeping a substandard charging connection?

One possibility is that consumers are inattentive when they buy a phone, and do not directly factor in the cost of accessories

such as chargers. If this is true, Apple would have needed these add-ons to remain proprietary and make sure no competitor could start offering them for a lower price. If so, forcing Apple to offer the better standard benefits all consumers.

The alternative explanation is that some consumers actually value the Lightning connection more. After all, the look is different, and Apple fans argue that it may be harder-wearing than other standards. It is also a signal of status and exclusivity.

We seem to have reached a stage in the market for smartphones where people who only care about everyday usage replace their devices much less often. This is probably because

technology is not evolving at the same pace it did in the past. Yet it's also the case that demand for high-end phones continues to increase.

This could be because they cater to a subset of consumers who either greatly value a marginally higher quality of camera or slightly bigger storage. But mostly, expensive phones are a way to signal social status.

People buy the latest phone not only because they want to own it, but also to be seen as owning one. This is certainly a factor that has helped Apple thrive because the company offers products that are visibly different from the cheaper alternative. And another sign of status for Apple users is having different accessories, including the proprietary chargers.

Apple has not always been so keen to reject common standards. Not only is it one of the participants in the USB consortium, but it is also the company that helped USB become the global standard by offering it on its first generation of iMacs.

At the time, however, Apple was the underdog in the market for personal computers, facing off against the tech giant Microsoft. And a big reason why many people did not buy Apple computers at the time was their fear they would not be compatible with Microsoft products.

At one point, Apple even went as far as developing tools to help users run Windows on their devices. At the time, it made sense to try to make your products as compatible as possible with those of the market leader.

In today's smartphone market, Apple is a leader, and may gain from not being compatible with other standards and products. The big question, however, is whether consumers benefit. If exclusivity is a way to block competition, then they probably don't. If consumers value exclusivity, or if it encourages Apple to innovate, then perhaps forced standardisation is not such a great idea. (The Conversation)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi Sunday, SEPTEMBER 24, 2023

**'Birthday Forecasts'**

Moon seems square Saturn on your solar return chart and will give wonderful results. This is going to be an important year. You will receive an invaluable inheritance. Your work will be completed very successfully. You will have no shortage of money. The work you used to think very difficult would seem to be small. You will get the cooperation of your colleagues and subordinates. Your bosses will also have faith in you and will support you fully. There will be a happiness and peace in the family. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your family members. You will come closer to your partner. You will also get a lot of names and fame. Those who are in politics, business, media or an entertainment industry will do so very well. You can also go on business trips which will prove to be fruitful later on. Auspicious functions will take place.

**'This week for you'**

If April 21st the time will be beneficial. You will be able to complete your work. Your bosses will support you fully. Your financial position is also going to get better. You will not unnecessarily argue with others. Your enemies and opponents will be jealous of your progress. But you will not pay much attention to them. You will stop yourself according to the circumstances. Don't let them arrive at your place and you will look after them well. You will feel it is more comfortable if your work gets done well. All times you may be empty from inside. You need to become more a few words and interacted a lot with people. Your full concentration will be on learning some new things.

**Aries | April 21 |** May 12 | Something will bother you. There may not be going on as you have planned. But this is the way it goes on. All things do not happen as we want them to be. The time will be beneficial. Luck is in your favour. You will receive valuable success. Your daily routine will be good. You will have a lot of self-confidence. And it will take you far ahead on the path of progress. The people who are in need of money will be helped and you will spend the time peacefully and happily. You will understand the every aspect very well. You will get good results in your job and business. You will work together as a team with your juniors and seniors. And we'll have better compatibility.

**Gemini | June 21 |** May 21 | You will get good results. You will also invest your money in multiple schemes. You will also take wise decisions. In your professional matters you will also take wise decisions. You will move ahead with your car and won't let go any opportunity, only empty. There are indications of more or less peace and happiness in the family. You will take care of your parents well. You will not argue with your elders. You will care about their sentiments. You will have success in property matters. Whatever work you have taken upon your hands will be successful. You will be generous towards your family and friends when you need their support.

**Cancer | June 22 |** July 27 | You will enjoy your love life. You will come closer to your life partner. You will also get the support of your bosses. You will have a lot of mental satisfaction. You will resolve your professional matters. You will also finish every work in time and in a systematic manner. You will first set your goals and then finish your work. There are going to be a lot of money getting days. You will get new achievements. You will spend an illustrious time with your life partner. You will take full advantage of the time to change your working style and lifestyle. You will also pay attention to your health. You will also celebrate your success with your family members. Your time will be spent in peace and fun.

**Leo | July 23 |** August 23 | The time is favourable. Your focus will shift to your work. You will concentrate on new plans. New opportunities will come in job and business. There will be mental peace. There will be a lot of energy. And you will be inspired from inside. Peace and harmony will prevail at your time. You will also make good progress in your love and business. You will have all the opportunities to do what you want. You will be successful. You will also make good progress in your work. You will get ready and prepare yourself for any situation. Your property will get on. You will take care of your health. You will take all decisions wisely. You will have your family and friends support in the business.

**Virgo | August 24 |** September 23 | This is an important time in your life. You will move ahead in every field. You will get a lot of support from your work partners. Your health will remain in perfect. You will have a victory and you will achieve lot. You will do well in your career.

You will inspire other persons. You will be a great runner and will achieve lot. You will lead from the front. You would also share your knowledge and skills with others. It is time for money flow. You will become a member of some club or institution or join a group of successful persons. You will get success in a new love affair. You will have close relations with family and loved ones. You will be building money earning activities. You will be careful in property matters.

**Libra | September 23 |** October 23 | You will get serious results in your business and profession. You will be able to get your work done with ease. Time will be benefited by a stable. And you will gain. You will feel mostly peaceful and relaxed. You will have best results of the work done by you. You will have a lot of respect and your name and fame will also grow. You will be successful in your job and business. Your husband and wife will have wonderful relations. There will be feeling of stability in your work. There will be an increase in your property. You will have to maintain your marital relations. Marriage of a family member will get into force. You will get a lot of love and respect from your own people.

**Scorpio | October 24 |** November 23 | Your travels related to work and business will be successful. You will get a lot of success. You will also take your ahead of your life. You will be full of body. Your planning work will get completed. Your business travels will be successful. You will participate in various activities. You will pay attention to your savings and will be successful up to some extent. You will have profits, your earnings will grow. Time will be spent happily. The person who support business will have more success. You will feel relaxed and peaceful. The time is for progress. And moving ahead in your life. Just for will give you lot of success. Your travels will be pleasant.

**Sagittarius | November 23 |** December 21 | You will receive a good news about your progress in your job and business. You will have a stronger support for some work. You will also have a full faith in your own ability. You will manage every task well. You will have monetary gains. Financially, you will be in a much stronger position. Auspicious functions will take place. Love birds will have a great time. There are in politics, business, sports and entertainment line will do well. Time will be suitable. You will be full of courage and will power. You will give full time to your family and work. You will also have time for entertainment and fun. You will also take care of your health. And will keep your life and flow. You will also take to sports, exercise or just yoga.

**Capricorn | December 22 |** January 20 | You will receive a lot of success in your job and business. You will feel confident in going to remain strong. You will take care of even work with your life partner and wisdom. You will also get a good of well-wishers. You will take care of your health. You will feel happiness and joy at personal matters. In property matters you will have gain. You will be positive about lot of things in your life. The time will be beneficial. Your work will get done with ease. You will also start some new work. The atmosphere at home will be peaceful. Your financial position will also get better. It is a lot of money.

**Aquarius | January 21 |** February 18 | There are possibility of some positive and pleasant work taking place. You may find a lot in the financial matters. The argument between husband and wife will get resolved. You will take part actively in business activities. You will prefer to spend some time with your family. You will get more work and calls. You will receive the blessing of the elders. You will fulfill your business and professional commitment. You will also take care of your health. You will be energetic and enthusiastically carry out your job well. Meeting with an important person will open the doors of destiny for you. You will receive a good news related to progress in your job.

**Pisces | February 19 |** March 20 | The time will be pleasant. You will have money gains. You will get a chance to go for a business meeting or conference. You will have good relations with people who matter. As a result of good work you will have gain and opportunity will be more out of it. You will not be good unless you will work with your partner/spouse. There will be many happy occasions. You will also plan to go to a party or the movie. There will be more work on professional front. The results will be in your favor. You will take interest in legal and spiritual activities. You will get success in your job progress. Money and wealth will keep coming. Health will keep you busy. Regular income will be there. You will have no worries.

## Paparazzi's favourite star kids



**By Olkha Sarkar**

**Abram Khan**

Bollywood's escalating paparazzi culture has not even spared the children of superstars. In order to acquire the best shots of famous kids, cameramen are constantly pursuing them. The star babies haven't even reached adulthood, but they've already surpassed the fame of their renowned parents as a result of public curiosity. There is a baby boom in the movie business.

**Taimur Ali Khan and Jeh Ali Khan**

The birth of Saif Ali Khan and Kareena Kapoor's first child swept the internet. He first made headlines for the debate over his choice of name. And when photographers caught sight of him, the internet melted. Taimur was the standout child who garnered the most interest. When he was just a few months old, he suddenly became famous. The younger and most popular social media celebrity is now following in the footsteps of his older sibling. Like Taimur, Jeh Ali Khan has become fairly well-liked.

**Aaradhya Bachchan**

Aishwarya Rai took tremendous pains to keep her daughter hidden from the media. Instagram-friendly is still very uncommon. Babies are still uncommon. The youngest member of the Bachchan family frequently accompanied her parents, particularly her mother, to events from Cannes to Antilla. The daughter of Aishwarya and Abhishek began to move wading to the photographers at the age of five or six.

**Misha Kapoor**

When Shahid Kapoor wed Mira Rajput, he already shocked everyone by choosing an arranged marriage. The couple welcomed their first daughter, whom they affectionately called Misha (Mira + Shahid = Misha), a combination of their names. Although Misha has largely been able to avoid the spotlight, given the fame of her parents, paparazzi can't help but follow the youngster. (HANSIJE)

The third Pataudi, the celebrity child, has completely embraced the media craze. The daughter of Soha Ali Khan and Kunal Kemmu has all the hallmarks of text-book attractiveness, just like his cousin Taimur. The family has become the Indian counterpart of the British Royals thanks to the children.

*"Quality means doing it right when no one is looking."*

—Henry Ford

**The Shillong Times**

Vol No-1581 No. 41 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2023

**Nijjar and the West**

THE concern of the West over India's suspected role in the killing of separatist Khalistani militant leader Fardeep Singh Nijjar in Canada in June 2023 is understandable. However, a question is whether the West that hailed the liquidation of Osama bin Laden in Pakistan by the Americans in 2011 adopted a double standard. The US has often set the standards for international dealings. Americans dictate to the UN that acts as a referee to nations in war, trade, climate control and much else. When the US acts, the world takes note. Even several nations of the Islamic world look up to the US for guidance. There was not even a whimper of protest when the US task force, the Navy Seal under direct guidance from then president Barack Obama, swooped down on Abbottabad, close to the military headquarters of Rawalpindi, and shot down Laden, airlifted the body and laughed their way to glory.

India has not admitted yet that it liquidated the Khalistan leader. Canada keeps repeating that it has evidence to show the Indian government played a role in the killing and forwarded "evidence" to New Delhi. India says it got no "substantial" evidence yet from Canada. The Joe Biden administration has suggested that India must cooperate with Canada in getting at the truth. India responded to the call with a deafening silence. The Modi government perhaps believes it couldn't care less. Self-styled opinion-makers including some Nobel Laureates have come forward to say the Western nations are not doing enough to fix the blame on India as they were somewhat mesmerized by the influence that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has on them or that they were being mindful of the growing stature of India in global affairs. This might have an element of truth, but the more important factor that weighs down the responses of the Western nations to the present Canada-India impasse is that they have no locus standi to apply pressure on India to "accept guilt," if any. For their collective euphoria to what the US did in Abbottabad 12 years ago gives other nations the licence to take similar retaliatory steps.

The Nijjar murder, as such, cannot be seen in isolation. Notably, the surgical strikes India did by intruding into Pakistani territory twice, the first in Puk along the border region and the second time deep inside, reaching up close to Rawalpindi, the Pakistani military headquarters, and doing a bombardment on what was believed to be terrorist hideouts, followed a pattern. It happened with Myanmar too. That pattern, which went unquestioned so far, was built on the premise that India followed a path shown by the US in Abbottabad.

**Letters to the Editor**

**"The unfortunate batches"**

Editor,  
I am writing this with a sense of frustration and concern for those highly educated unemployed youths who are in their late thirties. I know many of them personally and I am aware that they have completed their doctorates and are also NET qualified, but are in total despair and completely lost, with little hope and direction about their future career and livelihood.

These are groups of people who have invested the prime of their life to prepare themselves to become college professors and lecturers. But, at about the time when they are in their thirties and ready with all their certificates and qualified to be employed for such posts, applications and advertisements for all such posts were suspended because of Covid and also because of the roster system that had been entangled with some serious legal issues. By the time things were getting back to normal, many vacancies had become available in different colleges all over the state, as many teachers have retired and left their posts vacant for fresh appointments. This, together with the

setting up of many Model Degree Colleges all over the state and the coming up of new streams to single stream colleges, as per the requirement of NEP and also the fact that many faculties of different colleges are joining NHU, as the university is filling up more than 100 faculty posts, the number of vacancies have piled up and will be advertised in the near future. With so many vacancies, the chances of getting selected are very high for each candidate, particularly those with doctorate degrees. Unfortunately, these are exactly the people who now realise that they have wasted too much time in getting all these extra degrees, which seem to only make them over-qualified.

I believe the Government does have a valid ground to grant these groups of candidates some sort of condonement so as to allow them to apply and appear for the interviews, and it should certainly do so, as it definitely was not their fault that the advertisement and recruitment process was postponed and halted for about two years. This even as I fear that we may be losing some very good, promising and quality people in the field of higher education in the state.

Yours etc.,  
Wanshan R Khanlousw  
Via email

**Agroecology Learning Circle and the future of food systems**

By H H Mohrmen

The Indigenous food system is not only unique but more importantly, it has also survived the test of time and continues to exist till date. Despite the popularity of conventional agriculture made popular by the Green Revolution, indigenous farming practices in the state are still being patronized by farmers in different parts of the state. Anybody having experience in sowing what the farmers in Meghalaya will testify to the fact that the indigenous farming practice is alive and kicking. Recognizing the strength of the existing farming practice, the North East Slow Food and Agrobiodiversity Society (NESFAS) with the support of the Meghalaya Basin Management Agency (MBMA), introduced the Agroecology Learning Circle which is also an innovation component in the Community-Led Landscape Management project of the Agency.

The objective of the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) defines Agroecology as a holistic and integrated approach that simultaneously applies ecological and social concepts and principles to the design and management of sustainable agriculture and food systems. The system seeks to make the best use of the natural interaction between plants, animals, humans, and the environment. It also recognises that people can enhance their choice on the kind of food they eat and where it is produced. Agroecology is now considered a science that has expanded from something that is only on the field and farm to that which encompasses the whole of agriculture and the food system. It is now trans-disciplinary system that includes an ecological, socio-cultural, technological, economic, and political dimension of the food system and draws lessons from production to consumption.

It addresses the complex and interdependent challenges of livelihoods, health, and the management of natural resources through holistic approaches. It is looking at the fundamental connection between people and the planet, with sustainable agriculture and food systems. It is the focal point of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which stresses the urgent need to take determined action and pursue policies that will lead to transformational change. It is attempting to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs) for example ending poverty and

achieving zero hunger, while ensuring inclusive growth and sustainably managing the planet's natural resources. It also focuses on the ecological aspects of climate change and biodiversity loss, and recognizes the fact that achieving these goals is possible through holistic and integrated approaches that respect human rights. Agroecology is also not conventional agriculture that is being made popular in the west.

**The 10 Principles of Agroecology**

Agroecology operates on ten principles which include: (a) Diversity which recognizes that ensuring food security and nutrition diversity as well as conserving, protecting, and enhancing natural resources is key to agroecological transitions. (b) Co-creation and sharing of knowledge is another important principle of Agroecology and this means that agricultural innovations respond better to local challenges when they are co-created by farmers through participatory processes. (c) Synergies which mean building synergies that enhance key functions across food systems, supporting production and multiple ecosystem services is an important Agroecology principle. (d) Another important Agroecology principle is Efficiency which includes innovative agroecological practices that produce more using less external resources. (e) The Recycling principle in Agroecology means more recycling of agricultural production which will help lower economic and environmental costs. (f) Resilience means enhancing the resilience of people, communities, and ecosystems to ensure the sustainability of food and agricultural systems (g) Human and social values in Agroecology mean for sustainable food and agricultural systems protecting and improving rural livelihoods, equity, and social justice. (h) Agroecology contributes to food security and nutrition while maintaining the health of ecosystems (i) Sustainable food and agricultural systems require an effective governance mechanism which are responsible governance at different scales starting from local to national to global. (j) The last principle is the Circular and solidarity economy which is

an economy that reconnects producers and consumers and provides innovative solutions for living within our planetary boundaries while ensuring the social foundation for inclusive and sustainable development.

**Why the Agroecology Learning Circle?**

The project that NESFAS works on with MBMA is called "Empowering Indigenous Communities through Agroecology Learning Circle (ALC) for resilient, integrated and innovative natural resource management." Agroecology Learning Circle is designed for community engagement and innovation that helps to bring our knowledge from knowledge holders which will also help co-ordinate and test new solutions. The 18-month long project also tries to document and disseminate the learning among the farmers. It aims at empowering indigenous communities by combining agroecology with participatory research. This will in turn help indigenous communities recognize, revise, practice, and develop traditional agroecology technologies and practices which will also help stimulate local innovation for a sustainable local food system.

It is a platform for farmers to discuss and plan their farming activities. It is also a space in which community members, government officials and scientists meet to co-create and learn new skills and capacities. It is where new tools and processes were introduced to help enhance the agroecology practices of the locals and ensure food sovereignty and social transformation through local food initiatives.

**ALC is one more institution in an already crowded space**

To help enhance the income of the farmers and improve the economy of the state, the government set up Village Extension and Producers Groups and to encourage thrift for easy access to funds, the state government introduced the Integrated Village Extension and Producers Groups (IVESG). For Natural Resource Management the state already has the Village Natural Resource Management Committee, and a national Biodiversity Management Committee.

It may be mentioned that the CM while launching the IVESG informed that 40,000 IVESGs were created in the last

5 years, with a total funding of Rs 500 crore distributed to the groups. Another 400 crore was spent by the government on 20,000 farmers' groups. Perhaps he meant the Producers' Group promoted under FOKUS. The government has spent a substantial amount of money on these projects so the pertinent question is why do we need another group when we already have so many in the villages.

**ALC Vehicle towards making IPFS the Game Changer in the food system**

It is true villages already have many of these groups but ALC is different because ALC works to build on the existing strength of the farmers. It is hoped that the ALC will also help coordinate with the government and its agencies to conduct training at their respective villages. The ALC also seeks to get scientific validation of indigenous practices for the benefit of the farmers. It is a platform at the village level that provides an opportunity for the farmers to interact with each other, create, co-create, and co-learn lessons for improving farming in their villages.

NESFAS recognizes the invaluable role of women as custodians of biodiversity, food, land, nutrition, and more and takes the initiative to ensure that they are included in the process. The organization's work is deeply rooted in the values of Indigenous Peoples, emphasizing sharing, caring, and consensus building. All these values are included in the functions of the ALC. Through ALC, NESFAS hopes to address various issues related to food security and sovereignty, local nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, and green energy.

By championing the cause of Indigenous Peoples, NESFAS strives to ensure their rights to cultural identity, food sovereignty, and nutritional security is kept intact.

It may be mentioned that unlike SHGs and PGs, the ALC were not provided funding except for the experiment that they conducted, yet they are very active and conduct their experiments and other activities without any grant. It may be concluded that ALC is the right platform for developing and promoting good and sustainable farming practices and Agroecology Learning Circle is a platform for the promotion of the state of Agriculture that needs to be promoted in a state like Meghalaya. ALC can be a vehicle for making indigenous people more active in the state of Agriculture that needs to be promoted in a state like Meghalaya. ALC can be a vehicle for making indigenous people more active in the state of Agriculture that needs to be promoted in a state like Meghalaya.

It may be mentioned that the CM while launching the IVESG informed that 40,000 IVESGs were created in the last

(CPC) and all Pujar organizations in Meghalaya not to host entertainment programmes during Durga Puja and other important festivals like Dharma. Many people from other communities have started believing that vulgarity is part of Hinduism, which is wrong.

The Bhagavad Gita clearly states that seeking external pleasure for sense gratification is irreligious. They are like complete opposites, just as "devil and God" are. That's why Hindu scriptures prescribe that during any pujas or auspicious days, devotees should observe strict fasting, only consuming fruits and water and remain away from material indulgence.

So, I kindly request all Durga Puja organizers to include various spiritual activities such as Bhajans and Kirtans in their programs. We should uphold the dignity of Sanatan Dharma and not let people from other religions look down upon it. I humbly request the members of the CPC and Pujar organizers to consider these suggestions. We must set good examples for our younger generation.

Yours etc.,  
Suraj Biswa,  
Via email

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

**Disastrous road conditions taking a toll on our spine health**

By Dr. Th Cynthia M Fawcett

The decaying roads in Meghalaya have been an endless issue which seems to have no solution up till the present time. Roads which essentially provide connectivity to different parts of the state to increase trade, promote tourism, boost the rural incomes, access to markets, schools and hospitals, and have only degraded.

These poor roads deprive people from meeting their needs. For instance, children avoid going to schools, patients are unable to reach the hospitals, earning members are not able to bring any income or food to the house because of the risks of meeting with a terrible accident while

travelling through these dangerous roads outweighs the risks of the injury to meet their needs. In addition to the complications that have been cited above, these poorly maintained roads which have more of potholes and less of roads have a serious negative impact on the health and wellness of people. The potholes in the highways and local roads contribute to many medical problems in people, like slipped disc, lumbago, neck and back pain, spinal pain, cervical spondylitis, etc. even the roads in many parts of the city like the Polo

giddness frequently and are undergoing treatment. Physiotherapists have also claimed there has been a huge rise in the number of patients seeking treatment for back pain which originates from driving in roads with potholes. The people of Meghalaya are suffering because of poor planning and infrastructure and may continue to suffer because of their silence. The worst affected roads in Meghalaya are the Shillong to Dawki highway, South Garo Hills district roads, Shillong-Jowai road, etc. even the roads in many parts of the city like the Polo

**"Travelling in vehicles over large potholes can lead to serious spinal injuries. Sudden braking of vehicles due to potholes may cause a whiplash injury to the spine (forceful, rapid back and forth movement of the neck), and when the passenger already suffers from spinal stenosis (pressure on spinal cord and nerves), it may result in paraplegia—the loss of sensation in both hands and lower limbs. Such injuries may require surgery and sometimes patients may never recover and become bedridden."**

It is the spine that holds the neck and torso upright and allows flexibility and mobility to the body. Back pain is endemic among office goers particularly those travelling long distances daily with less physical activity. Rough roads send vibrations and jerks through the body and can cause stress fractures (tiny cracks in the bone that are caused by repetitive force, usually from overuse) and permanent damage to the spine. Two-wheeler riders and drivers over the age of 40 years are among the worst affected with two-wheeler riders being more affected. They usually suffer from chronic pain syndrome due to underlying spondylitis issues in the neck and back which flare up due to persistent driving on roads full of potholes. It may even cause lumbago (back pain, dizziness and numbness).

Travelling in vehicles over large potholes can lead to serious spinal injuries. Sudden braking of vehicles due to potholes may cause a whiplash injury to the spine (forceful, rapid back and forth movement of the neck), and when the passenger al-

ready suffers from spinal stenosis (pressure on spinal cord and nerves), it may result in paraplegia—the loss of sensation in both hands and lower limbs. Such injuries may require surgery and sometimes patients may never recover and become bedridden. I have personally encountered victims of this condition who have been enduring the pain of slipped disc for many years which restrains them from driving to distant places, also sometimes have to live through the adverse effects of cervical spondylitis. They are to be supported with a neck collar, unable to drive, have

The writer is currently with IPHS Shillong

**Deplorable road conditions in Shillong city**

Editor,  
I am writing to draw your attention to a growing concern that affects every resident and visitor to our beautiful city—the deplorable condition of roads in Shillong. The state of our roads has deteriorated to a point where it not only hampers daily life but also poses serious safety risks to everyone using them. The roads of Shillong, once known for their scenic beauty and smooth surfaces, have now become a nightmare to navigate. Potholes and uneven surfaces have become commonplace, leading to frequent accidents, damage to vehicles, and unnecessary delays. Pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists alike are at risk due to the hazardous conditions of these roads. Furthermore, the lack of proper maintenance has resulted in drainage issues during monsoons, causing flooding and waterlogging. This not only inconveniences residents but also affects businesses, schools, and healthcare facilities, disrupting normal life and leading to catastrophe. It is disheartening to see the state of our roads deteriorate while other aspects of our city progress. We implore

the concerned authorities to take immediate action to address this pressing issue. Prompt road maintenance, timely repairs, and a long-term plan for road infrastructure development are essential to restore the safety and convenience for the citizens of Shillong. I urge the municipal authorities and government to allocate sufficient funds and resources to fix the road conditions and improve our city's overall infrastructure. Moreover, I appeal to fellow citizens to come forward and demand the attention that this issue deserves, by raising their voices collectively. Shillong has always been a city of pride, culture, and heritage. Let's work together to ensure that our roads match up to the high standards we hold for our city. It is time for action, and the time is now.

Yours etc.,  
Mehnarup Kapur Majaw,  
Via email

**No vulgar entertainment during Durga Puja**

Editor,  
I would like to remind our readers through this dilly that a lot of criticism was expressed against inappropriate entertainment (including the cases of eve-teasing and violence) during Durga Puja and other important spiritual days like Saraswati Puja, Chhat Puja etc. Since Durga Puja is just round the corner, I urge the Central Puja Committee

of Vishwa Bharati is unfortunately more interested in creating walls, fences and security arrangements than the vision of Tagore. Tagore created Vishwa Bharati as a residential place of learning. "Where the world has not been broken up into fragments. By narrow domestic walls." Moreover, the present Vishwa Bharati administration also tried to undermine another landmark of Shantiniketan, Patanchi by raising deafening noise over a small piece of its land. Patanchi is another place of pilgrimage in Shantiniketan because it is Nobel laureate Amartya Sen's ancestral home where he had been with his family for eight decades.

Yours etc.,  
Shantiniketan as UNESCO World Heritage

The listing of Shantiniketan as a UNESCO World Heritage site is indeed a matter of satisfaction. However, the present condition of Vishwa Bharati, Shantiniketan is far from satisfactory. The admin-

The Shillong Times

"Courage is the price that life exacts for granting peace."

—Amelia Earhart

The Shillong Times

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Whither Saubhagya Scam!

A preliminary report on the implementation of the Pradhan Mantri Sahaj Bijli Har Ghar Yojna - SAUBHAGYA scheme launched in 2017, the Comptroller and Auditor General's (CAG) Report had earlier cited excess payment of Rs 149 crore to the contractor. The MDA Government in an attempt to whitewash this scam appointed a retired judge and two retired civil servants to inquire into the scam and as expected they gave the State Government a clean chit. In the latest report of the CAG for the year ending March 2022 it is stated that despite the advisory issued by the Cabinet Secretary, the injudicious decision of the MePDCI for awarding contracts to contractors at their quoted rates resulted in avoidable expenditure of Rupees 156.14 crore. The SAUBHAGYA scheme was meant to ensure universal electrification in urban and rural areas by providing last mile connectivity through financial assistance to the Distribution companies or the State Power Department. SAUBHAGYA envisages providing power to households either through the grid or through stand-alone photovoltaic systems in remote inaccessible areas where grid connection is not feasible.

The funding pattern for the scheme was in the ratio of 85:15 between the Government of India and Government of Meghalaya. A Letter of Intent for participating in the scheme was submitted to Government of India in February 2018 and a DPR worth Rs 1876.15 crore for electrification of 1,49,826 households was submitted for approval in May 2018. Government of India sanctioned Rs 657.06 crore and released Rs 525.30 crore for electrification of the un-electrified households. Government of Meghalaya provided an additional Rs 148.67 crore between November 2019 and March 2022. The completion date for SAUBHAGYA was fixed for December 2018. It was extended to December 2020 due to delay in awarding of contracts by MePDCI.

The Union Cabinet Secretary in a video conference with the then Chief Secretary had suggested that the tendering for SAUBHAGYA be cancelled and the work be taken up by the Department since the rates quoted by the Turnkey Contractors (TKCs) were above the estimated cost and re-tendering would lead to delay. But despite assuring the Cabinet Secretary that SAUBHAGYA would be executed by the Department, the MePDCI went ahead with the tender and awarded the contract to the TKCs in February-March 2019. Why did MePDCI extend undue benefits to the contractors thereby resulting in avoidable expenditure? Item-wise audit of prevailing rates found that 86.09 of 95 items under Supply component and 44 out of 54 items under "Erection component" were common but the rates quoted by contractors were much higher than the Departmental rates thereby resulting in avoidable expenditure of Rs 156.14 crore. The inquiry report into the SAUBHAGYA scam was never made public and neither was it tabled in the Assembly. But the Opposition then and the Opposition now seem to have forgotten this scam and have moved on. Corruption in Meghalaya is normalised because the guilty are never punished.

Essence of Durga Puja observance

I am writing to offer my thoughts in response to a letter penned by Mr. Suraj Biswa, which was featured in the September 24th, 2023 edition of The Shillong Times. While Mr. Biswa's words were candid and thought-provoking, I believe his sentiments resonate with a broader global context, and I wish to share my perspective on this matter.

Mr. Biswa's astutely highlighted the trans-formation of certain religious committees, irrespective of their religious affiliations, into commercial entities or conduits for short-sighted promotional endeavors or behalf of their leaders. These organizations, once dedicated to spiritual devotion and community service, seem to have ventured into profit-driven initiatives and public relations endeavours like beauty competitions or Bollywood style vulgar and commercial entertainment that, at times, lack the authenticity and so-

lennity, which ideally should define religious institutions. In addition to Mr. Biswa's observations, it is worth noting that some Christian churches and Sikh Gurudwaras have successfully maintained the sanctity of their religious activities. These institutions, in their commitment to preserving the core tenets of their faith, organize competitions and events centered on hymns, sacred music, and religious activities. Their steadfastness in adhering to their religious principles is commendable and serves as a testament to their unwavering dedication.

As we navigate the complex intersection of spirituality, tradition, and modernity, it is imperative that we remain vigilant and discerning. Our religious institutions should hold the potential to serve as bastions of genuine faith, enlightenment, and benevolence. Therefore, it is our collective responsibility to ensure that they continue to inspire and uplift individuals, fostering a deeper connection to their spiritual journey. In closing, I would like to express my gratitude to The

The problem of land acquisition and land alienation is not new but has arisen since the time Meghalaya attained its statehood and continues to persist even to date. There are plenty of incidences that indicate that the customary land-holding system of the Khasi is currently in danger and it is this concern that prompted the Voice of the People Party (VPP) MLA, Ardent M. Basaiwmoi to submit a Resolution in the Autumn Session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly by 2023 to strengthen the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Act (Regulation) 1971 and to stop its rampant violation.

In his resolution, Ardent points out that the insertion of Section 4 (1) (c) & (f) in the 1971 Act, brought by the 1991 Amendment, enabled religious societies to transfer land in their name and the land can be used as burial or cremation ground by any community and hence they provide the opportunity for non-tribals to purchase land in Meghalaya, which is a departure from the inherent character of the Act. Such alienation of land by the government cannot be stopped by the locals since it operates under the above sections. It is clear that the Act of 1971 and its subsequent amendments could not seal the leakage of land in the hands of non-tribals and hence it became high-ered inadequate to protect the property, identity and interest of the indigenous people of the state. Hence it needed to be strengthened.

In addition, the Resolution talks about the illegality that exists in the transfer of land and complete violation of the Act of 1971 such as the allotment of land to professionals, bureaucrats, etc. at the rate of one rupee per square foot and the lease of government land in New Shillong Township to the Civil Services Officers Housing Cooperative Society Limited. Furthermore, he also spoke about the significance of the land which in addition to its value, the minerals underneath its surface also belonged to the same ownership.

The people of the state must be thankful to the VPP and its MLAs who have brought these crucial matters to the House on behalf of the indigenous people in general and the fate of the landless individuals and families in particular. Despite this effort, an editorial of one daily newspaper in Shillong questions the move of the MLA and points a doubtful picture of the intention and motive of the Party. Unfortunately, when it tried to bring out the name of former Chief Minister Biju Singh to conduct a cadastral survey of the state without giving its report or

Shillong Times for providing a platform for such meaningful and insightful discussions. I trust that our shared reflections will contribute to a broader dialogue on the evolving role of religious institutions in today's world.

Thank you for your attention and consideration. Yours etc., Anshuk Kurkalang Founder & chief Mentor @ Kurkalang Skillling & Learning Centre Via email

Women's Reservation Bill

The Women's Reservation Bill is welcome. But the problem is this Bill has two strings attached to it. The first one says it will wait for the census conducted after 2026. Then comes the second string in the form of delimitation. It says that on the basis of that census report, delimitation will be undertaken to reserve seats for women. Given that the Lok Sabha election is due next year, this would be

the job for the next elected government. The women of our country may even have to wait for two Lok Sabha elections if the next government also fails to conduct a census like the present one for one reason or another. In this sense this Bill is really historical in nature. I do not know if there is any previous record of issuance of a Bill in the Lok Sabha which looks like a travel in a time machine. Unfortunately, this particular Bill will serve as a bad precedent. It will encourage central and state government to come up with more such Bills which are to stay in the deep freeze for 5 or even 10 years.

By Dr Rusievan Shuangpiang

The unemployment problem, economic hardships and many other issues compelled the primary landowners to sell their land for a throwaway price only to regret it later. Aren't these practical problems that require practical solutions? According to Khasi customs, the Dorbar of the Syiem, the Dorbar of the Shong has no right to either create Ri Kynri or to convert the Ri Raid to Ri Kynri or sell it. This is practice in theory while in reality both Ri Raid and Ri Kynri are being converted into registered private ownership, and if customs are being trampled and disregarded by the modern political administration then we are bound to have more landless tribals.

to this matter or question his post as the MDC in the Autonomous District Council. Instead, we should appreciate and encourage him to take the matter to the people and seek their full support in resolving the issue which has a deep sense of cultural and historical connection. It would be reasonable if one would also question why the Resolution brought by him was defeated in the Assembly when the cries of sections of the middle and below middle class are very much aloud these days since the cost of land is more than their earnings in two or three lifetimes. Perhaps this question should be directed to the rest of the 56 members of the Legislative Assembly who have decided that they do not want to partake in safeguarding the primary and most important rights of the people of the state by refusing to support the resolution of Ardent and also to the majority of the MDC's who have been consistently failing to highlight and discuss this vital issue in the Council. The accusation that Ar-

dent overlooked the case of the landless tribals is a scallied for. Since it is an indigenous lawmaker it is his duty and it becomes his priority to put the protection of his people from land alienation by non-tribals first and deal with the merciless accumulation of landed property by the rich locals later. Therefore, according to the Resolution that he brought, he proposes a land ceiling which is required to reduce economic disparities, to ensure that wealth is not concentrated in few individuals and to guarantee that tribals are not

left behind but should have access to available means of subsistence and an adequate piece of land. Before any one jumps to conclusions, we must first find out what causes land alienation. I must agree with the editor of the same newspaper who rightly mentioned in one of the published articles that poverty is the main cause of land alienation. But what causes this poverty and how do we measure it? Why are certain groups of people (both local and non-local) accumulating enormous amounts of wealth enough to buy ten or hundred acres of land while others cannot even afford to pay regular rent? Isn't this visible especially among the ones who are hand in glove with the government ministers and front party workers? Isn't it obvious that a government servant is able to buy land worth crores of rupees within a short span of service? Isn't it corruption and money-laundering and daylight robbery of the state treasury before our very eyes? The unemployment prob-

lem, economic hardships and many other issues compelled the primary landowners to sell their land for a throwaway price only to regret it later. Aren't these practical problems that require practical solutions? According to Khasi customs, the Dorbar of the Syiem, the Dorbar of the Shong has no right to either create Ri Kynri or to convert the Ri Raid to Ri Kynri or sell it. This is practice in theory while in reality both Ri Raid and Ri Kynri are being converted into registered private ownership, and if customs are being trampled and disregarded by the modern political administration then we are bound to have more landless tribals.

It should be placed on record that most of the land in Meghalaya is privately owned. Out of the 4,85,913 households, there are only 11.6,72,354 percent households with land. This is alarming and highly sensitive since the population is growing and the overall performance of the state is not in a condition to help the landless to acquire land for their necessity. The District Council has the right to exercise its powers conferred by the provisions of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India, and rules and regulations have to be made to safeguard the rights of the people in all aspects. This is not a one-man job but the members of the Council have to jointly agree without a doubt to come up with stringent laws to strengthen the Land Acts vis-a-vis the rights of the tribals in the state. Time will tell whether the District Council will see an administration that will provide justice to the landless and curb the power of the landed ones. And as to which party will lead that kind of administration, the indigenous voters will decide.

We must remember that the VPP stands firmly on the ground of clean politics and clean governance. Corruption is a disease that most people and those at the helm of affairs have considered and casually accepted as a normal practice and this is a dangerous precedent especially for our state. It is also not illogical to say that as one of the factors of economic stagnation, corruption or the misuse and misappropriation of public funds has also led to the state of under-development, rural economic deprivation and shoddy constructions of certain vital physical infrastructure (assets). Again, we must also consider that there are certain classes of people who through their ill-gotten wealth have amassed and accumulated more land in the urban and rural hinterlands, which is also one of the main factors of land alienation.

the job for the next elected government. The women of our country may even have to wait for two Lok Sabha elections if the next government also fails to conduct a census like the present one for one reason or another. In this sense this Bill is really historical in nature. I do not know if there is any previous record of issuance of a Bill in the Lok Sabha which looks like a travel in a time machine. Unfortunately, this particular Bill will serve as a bad precedent. It will encourage central and state government to come up with more such Bills which are to stay in the deep freeze for 5 or even 10 years.

By Dr Rusievan Shuangpiang

The unemployment problem, economic hardships and many other issues compelled the primary landowners to sell their land for a throwaway price only to regret it later. Aren't these practical problems that require practical solutions? According to Khasi customs, the Dorbar of the Syiem, the Dorbar of the Shong has no right to either create Ri Kynri or to convert the Ri Raid to Ri Kynri or sell it. This is practice in theory while in reality both Ri Raid and Ri Kynri are being converted into registered private ownership, and if customs are being trampled and disregarded by the modern political administration then we are bound to have more landless tribals.

A race to the bottom

By Jagdish Rattanani

The abusive and communal epithets hurled by the BJP MP from South Delhi Ramesh Bihari against the BSP MP Kunwar Danish Ali represent a race to the bottom, a steep if inevitable fall as language that should be banned on the streets is spoken in Parliament from the treasury benches. At this stage, the BJP is trapped by the disease of competitive communitarianism and attention-seeking, some of its ambitious members trying to grab the stage in desperate ways with displays even worse than the other. The lack of timing and civil action against Bihari legitimates such abuse, and indeed messages others that it is okay to play on this muck and contribute to a rising crescendo of communal hatred as we prepare for the 2024 elections. An immediate example is the claim by another BJP MP that Bidhuri was provoked, but that statement, too, is an attempt to inject more communitarianism into the picture.

That Bidhuri's unappealing and violent words came while he appeared to be defending the Prime Minister should ideally and in normal circumstances be seen as an affront to the Prime Minister. There are other ways to respond to the charge, which essentially was, on a different topic, that the Prime Minister grabbed attention and took credit for the moon mission instead of leaving ISRO to bask in the glory. That the rebuttal to the accusation is abuse actually makes the accusation stick, and discredits the Prime Minister and the party (never mind the merits or demerits of the accusation) and should shock the leadership. Further, Bidhuri defiled Parliament in the very first session it met there in the new building marks another hijacking of what will be billed as an important achievement by the BJP. The Prime Minister himself has called the new edifice "not just a new building but the symbol of a new beginning." Bidhuri got to give that "new beginning" its very ominous meaning. And he also ended by diverting attention away from the Nir Nari Shakti Vandana Adhiniyam, the women reservations bill which the Prime Minister has called "a historic legislation which will further boost women empowerment...". This should be enough to attract attention. That this is not was not forthcoming of Sunday night beyond the issuance of a show-cause notice raises many questions.

The key of these should be the nature and character of the new BJP as it prepares to fight 2024, overtly confident that it will be returned to power but not exactly unconcerned about the "surprise" that Rahul Gandhi says awaits the party. The coming together of the Opposition, even though derided by some as a patchwork solution rather than a unified presence, has without doubt worried the BJP. There is also a strong anti-incumbency undercurrent at play, not to add the vigour with which the Opposition is taking its story to the people and responding on social media. In it, it has rich material on the communitarianism of the BJP, the pet industrialists (and one "friendly monopolist"), to quote Rahul (Gandhi) that the leadership has consistently favoured, the pro-rich and the anti-poor approaches that have run the spectrum from demagoguery to high fuel and gas cylinder prices to tumblers that recently sold for Rs.1000 a kilo. Under these circumstances, and particularly since there are reports that the India alliance of the Opposition appears to be picking up, the easiest approach would be to fall back on the

staple of communitarianism. If this is considered a sure-shot winner, as many in the BJP tend to think, then the nation must brace for a rather horrible campaign as individual candidates race ahead of the national narrative, and land up in spaces like the one Bidhuri occupied in Parliament.

The nature of the rogue speech, the silence of the BJP leadership, the obvious pain displayed by Danish Ali who said he couldn't sleep the night the remarks were made is the exact way the cycle of abuse and violence has played out outside of Parliament. The question that was thought to be outside on the streets for those addressed: "Where do ordinary people go for justice?" has now resounded in Parliament. The question that was thought to be outside on the streets for those addressed: "Where do ordinary people go for justice?" has now resounded in Parliament. The question that was thought to be outside on the streets for those addressed: "Where do ordinary people go for justice?" has now resounded in Parliament.

At the end of this fall is the belief among the BJP that assertion means aggression, that hitting out is the best form of defence, that violence is in our grain and must be met with the same violence, that the "other" must be put down, that the grammar of leadership is masculine in form, shape and action. This is the old language of power and control, a spent force positioning in the world of today. It represents a poor projection of this nation as a fresh and desolate landscape of possibility, and creating a Bharat without its ideas of grace, love and togetherness. In the absence of these, India cannot advance as a nation, however or through the infrastructure and economic or other tools of modernity.

Some of these ideas will come up during the election campaign to challenge the BJP. It is a language that the Congress has spoken of often in recent times. There is no doubt that the BJP campaign this time will be even more slick, well oiled, properly aimed and luxuriously funded. Samples of the campaign have been emerging on social media over the last month or so. Expect a kind of carpet bombing of the nation with the BJP messages. Select sections of the media will be in its pocket. The Opposition will be no match in money power. Yet, there are no guarantees. As we saw very former Prime Minister Vishwanath Pratap Singh once said: "In India, you can lose an election for want of money but you can never win an election if you have money!" However, a huge mismatch of resources with the BJP loaded with money flows will still hurt the Opposition.

While we await the formal blowing of the campaign bugles, there is an easy way out of the situation created in Parliament. The BJP leadership as a whole can apologise, its senior leaders including the Prime Minister can meet up with Danish Ali and assure him and the nation that this won't happen again, suitably punting the anti-incumbency case and walk away from the ugly and costly to the high ground. Just how many from those among the BJP ranks and those ranged against the party think such a path is possible, desirable, even profitable? And thereby hangs the tale of a nation that can break barriers to reach the moon while it builds new barriers in the hearts and minds of the people.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Biltan Press - news editor@thebiltanpress.org)

Letters to the Editor must have the full name, address and phone number of the writer. We reserve the right to edit any letters that are too long or do not fit our needs. Only letters with the required data will be published.

"If everything seems under control, you're just not going fast enough."

— Mario Andretti

The Shillong Times

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States set for polls

THE coming round of assembly polls will be crucial for the two national parties - the Congress and the BJP. The BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh, Congress-ruled Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, the MNF fiefdom of Mizoram and the BRS-run Telangana are edging closer to polls even as uncertainty continues over the Modi dispensation's move to hold polls simultaneously to both the Lok Sabha and state assemblies. Major focus would be on Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan for the reason that they are politically more prominent. The results of the five assembly polls would, undoubtedly, set the pace for the upcoming parliament polls. While a safe prediction about the outcome of these assembly polls is impossible, emerging hints are that the BJP might have a hard task ahead if it has to retain Madhya Pradesh. So too with Rajasthan, where a divided state Congress establishment will have to struggle hard to retain power.

Notably, the BJP could not win a majority in Madhya Pradesh in the last assembly polls but managed to oust the Kamalath-led Congress government from power later and virtually seize power there. The BJP ran government there for over 18 years and, for most part, the chief minister was Shivraj Singh Chouhan. The BJP is clearly in a mind to keep him aside after the present polls if the party retains power. This is evident from the fact that several stalwarts including some senior Union ministers figure in the lists of candidates. The lists are incomplete yet, but so far Chauhan's name does not figure in the list. The last assembly polls had also seen a tussle between the central party leadership and Chauhan, which was later cited as a reason for the party's failure to muster a majority in the assembly in 2018. Though the Centre has pumped in a lot of money into Madhya Pradesh to modernize the highways etc. this by itself would not help the party retain power. An anti-incumbency mood is evident there.

In Rajasthan, the Congress establishment is deeply divided between chief minister Ashok Gehlot and Sachin Pilot, both formidable leaders. This has the potential to upset the Congress apparatus there. Rahul Gandhi knows as much, and hence stressed rather on the party's possible successes in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and "possibly" Telangana too. The fight in Telangana would be between the ruling BRS and the Congress, as the B.P. remains organisationally weak. The saffron party is groping in the dark also amid feelings that it does not want to confront the chief minister in anticipation of a future alliance with KCR. The South will remain mostly a "no-go" area for the BJP as its leaders there are easy-going and mostly specimens of a kind.

Letters to the Editor

Urgent need for sustainable roads infrastructure in Meghalaya

I write to express my profound concern over the deteriorating state of road infrastructure in the stunning landscapes of Meghalaya. The roads that wind through this picturesque region, which should be a source of pride, are instead emblematic of an ongoing crisis. Regrettably, the government's response to this issue has often been limited to what can only be described as "cosmetic paint jobs." These superficial, short-term fixes, while momentarily improving conditions, prove shockingly inadequate. The unforgiving climate and challenging terrain swiftly conspire to undo these efforts, perpetuating a cycle of degradation and renewal. What adds to our collective dismay is the revelation that road repairs often appear to coincide with VIP visits, presumably to secure funding. This erratic approach not only raises questions about the allocation of re-

sources but also jeopardizes the safety of those who travel these roads. It leads to increased travel times, heightened transportation costs, and a stifling of economic progress, all of which have a profound impact on the region's residents and businesses. In the light of this distressing situation, I urge the government to transition from this stop-gap approach to adopting a comprehensive, sustainable strategy to address the road infrastructure crisis in Meghalaya. This strategy must carefully consider the unique challenges presented by the region's terrain and climate. Equally vital is the recognition that the voices and needs of the local community must be at the forefront of any solution. In conclusion, Meghalaya demands lasting, holistic solutions for their road network. The current cycle of "cosmetic fixes" perpetuates hardship for residents and hinders economic growth. It is high time for meaningful change, characterized by sustained government action, community engagement, and a resolute commitment to quality and durability. Yours etc., Wandi Keme P. Shymrang, Via email

Agricultural policy for Meghalaya

By Bhagoram Mawroh

During the recently concluded assembly session, UDP MLA Mayralbom Syiem from the constituency of Nongshoh drew the attention of the House to the need for a state agricultural policy. During the discussion, he also mentioned the 2023 Meghalaya State Organic and Natural Farming Policy, which has an allocation of Rs 25 crore. With Agriculture Minister Amarendra Singh stating that farming in the state is still natural and organic in nature, the Meghalaya State Organic and Natural Farming policy is by default the agricultural policy of the state. However, if that is the case, the amount allocated for the policy is too low. How can 25 crore be enough for a sector that, according to the State Department of Agriculture and Farmer's Welfare, engages 5% of the population of the state? The policy itself, though, is quite progressive. However, it sets a few assumptions in the document that, if rectified, will help in case a general agricultural policy is formulated in the future.

The 2023 Policy enumerates certain challenges plaguing natural and organic farming in the state. These are limited knowledge of the potential and benefits of organic and natural farming; a lack of knowledge amongst farmers on the process of transitioning from conventional to organic and natural farming; limited access to quality organic input materials such as organic seeds and fertilisers; and a high cost of certification and low number of certifying agencies makes certification of organic produce challenging for small and marginal farmers. There are a few problems with these statements.

Since the 1960s, the emphasis among policymakers has been on increasing the productivity of cereals in the country by introducing Green Revolution technology consisting of the use of HYV seeds and chemical fertilisers. These are in the form of seeds provided by government agencies and subsidies for chemicals, which were available until such support was discontinued by the Naluk Sangma government in 2014. However, on the eve of the last assembly election, the MIA government lifted the ban on chemical fertilisers. In order to accommodate this contradiction (use of chemicals with the need to promote organic farming), section 5.3 titled "Harmonizing usage

of chemical fertilisers with organic farming" the 2023 Policy document, talks about the prioritisation of "organic cultivation while recognizing the time and effort needed to change long-standing agricultural practices which have involved use of chemical fertilisers in farming habits of farmers". This conformed to the sectoral challenge listed in the 2023 Policy, viz., lack of knowledge amongst farmers on the process of transitioning from conventional to organic and natural farming.

In order to support the transition, Section 5.3.4, states that the government will provide "necessary support that balances the imperative for environmental protection as well as for improved incomes for farmers". The statement itself is very vague and doesn't enumerate any concrete steps to support the farmers in transition. For one has to refer to Section 5.2, titled "Conversion from Inorganic to Organic Farming" which mentions "training and capacity building of farmers to enable production of plant nutrient, Jiva Amrit, biofertilisers, intercropping, or projects pertaining to be taken up under the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) ... (and) convergence of the state's Mission Organic, MGNREGA, Mahila Kisan Sahakikaran Parayojana (MKSP), Mission Organic Value Chain Development for Northeast Regions (MOVCDNER) and any other relevant schemes, to enable farmers to leverage on multiple resources simultaneously for conversion and operation".

Conversion from inorganic to organic means a loss of productivity and income for the intervening period. There is no mention on the measure of loss of income support for the financial loss that such farmers will face during the transition. In this, it is disappointing that PM-KISAN (Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi) - Promotion of Alternate Nutrients for Agriculture (Management) is not mentioned, that actually incentivizes states to use lesser amounts of chemical fertilisers by providing incentive grants for the use of 50% of the total amount of subsidy saved by using less fertilizer. The government should stop, in fact, giving subsidies for fertilisers and the incentive under the scheme to provide support to the farmers during the transition. Unless that happens, the intervening period of transition will be a painful one for the farmers, which will prevent some from making the transition.

The third challenge talks about "limited access to quality organic input material such as organic seeds and fertilisers". This is not completely accurate. Though farmers in

Meghalaya never completely accepted the Green Revolution, which itself was a testament to the fiascofulness of the farmers who chose to hold on to their traditional farming methods. This includes numerous traditional seeds of which have a high potential for resilience to climate change, and the various soil improvement measures, which include local methods of making compost, mulching, crop rotation, and the use of leguminous plants in association with other crops to improve soil fertility. The problem is therefore not of limited access but that traditional knowledge has been marginalised over the years.

Section 5.3.3, in fact, does talk about the creation of platforms "in collaboration with the local community and institutions for scientific validation of Indigenous Traditional Knowledge and innovations made by farmers pertaining to Agricultural organic plant production, disease and climate resilient organic seeds, and organic seed production and propagation, including soil fertility, and other aspects to be done". Section 5.8.1 also talks about "a participatory and collaborative approach to organic farming to strengthen the processes of collaboration, production, value, and benefits". However, it appears this will take place in parallel with the development of "Package of Practices" rather than being the preparatory step in the process. How much participation from the local community and institutions of local natural farming practices are actually going to take place? Or is it again a top-down approach with methodological development outside the state introduced without making an attempt to leverage local strengths?

Section 5.3 and 5.8.1 are highly empowering and should be instrumental in giving due recognition and affirming the value of local indigenous communities for generations. But the fact that it is not being looked at in strength and the continuation of the narrative that has been persisted from the past, i.e., indigenous communities cannot feed themselves despite having done so for the last 10,000 years.

Finally, the last challenge talks about the "high cost of certification and low number of certifying agencies make certification of organic produce challenging for small and marginal farmers" which is a valid concern. Under Section 5.9, titled "Certification and product labelling" three types of certification processes are mentioned: (i) Participatory Guarantee System of India

(PGI-India), the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP-Third Party Certification), and Trust Organic. The problem, however, is that such certification will have to follow the 2022 Guidelines of the National Mission on Natural Farming, which, under Section 10.1(d), state that "States in consultation with local Gram Panchayat (Dorbar Shong) shall identify natural farming practitioners which are full-time successful natural farmers with their entire land holding under natural farming since the last 2-3 years". The assessment of whether a system is following natural farming principles will involve soil testing and tracking of soil health for a period of over three to four years. However, two of the most important traditional farming systems practiced in India are rotational in nature and involve multiple crops at a certain period. This means that under the current policy, such farmers will be excluded and lose the benefits of the certification system.

The Agriculture Minister also talked about creating "setback and sustainable farming" which gives the impression that the government will try to get people to leave Jhum and Ban and transition to a more settled system. The financial and social implications (especially on the land revenue system) of this going to be huge. Also, the fact that despite government efforts in the past to eradicate especially Jhum, the farming system still exists should inform the government that instead of being antagonistic to a farming system that has a higher degree of biodiversity, the hallmark of a resilient system crucial for combating climate change, they should look to include it in their programs. The same goes for Ban as well.

In general, the 2023 policy is very progressive, and we must congratulate the MDA government for introducing the policy. The emphasis on "Linking organic produce to Health and Nutrition Schemes" (section 5.12) has the potential to be a game-changing perspective that will allow the state to not just aim at food security but also towards achieving food sovereignty, a much more pertinent goal for the indigenous communities of the state. It is unfortunate that it is the MLA from Ri Bhoi, a district which has tremendous potential to be a forerunner in terms of sustainable agriculture in the state, who raised the issue of the need to have a state agricultural policy. It is, therefore, hoped that the Dayangm Syiem will follow up with his demand and ensure that it comes to fruition. That will be a great gift not just to his district but to the entire state as well.

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

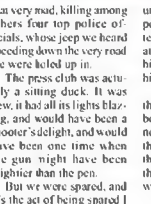
Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Absolute Surrender. I Read the headlines this morning, in one of the dailies, that one of those who had masterminded the 26-11 terrorist attack in Mumbai, and who is now in a prison in the US, has had a chargesheet filed against him by the Indian government. Hearing this, my mind immediately went back to that terrible night, when the attacks were organised at different places which the terrorists had chosen, or randomly decided to strike. Two of the places they assaulted were the CST Station and a little farther, the Madam Cama hospital.

Between both these places where hundreds lost their lives, as the terrorists sprayed tear gases with machine gunfire, was the Press Club, and in the press club, I was having dinner with the editor of Chennai newspaper, where we were discussing terms for my column in his newspaper. And suddenly terrified reporters were running in with the electrifying and terrifying news that hundreds were being shot dead on either side of us, just a few metres away.

Oh dear, I have no idea how these shooters didn't enter the press club and kill all of us, which I am sure would have been the biggest achievement for them, as the club at that moment was crowded with journalists, supposed y mouthpieces for the nation. But it was not to be. We could not go out of the premises, because the killers used



that very rod, killing among others four top police officials, whose jeep we heard speeding down the very road we were killed up in.

The press club was actually a sitting duck. It was new, it had all its lights blazing, and it was being blown by a shooter's salad, and would have been one time when the gun might have pierced their hearts, and their bows will be broken.

The little that is right today person has is her tenacity. Look at that, just look at that, surrendering here does not end with submission and annihilation of oneself, but surrendering means the giving up of oneself to a stronger person who takes over your life and battles. I mean subservency to be a conquering slave, but on the contrary it means someone stronger than we are fighting our banks. "Now let me remember king in history," says a God above and with that comes an unending stream of victories! After that night when terror came knocking nearby and even before that when in a hospital bed I was told I wouldn't last the night, I've found that the easiest way to live is through 'absolute surrender', and certainly 'surrender' still the passport. That we who have discovered, whether it be a bullet or an accident, surrender our lives and actions from that day on to the One who saved us! Think about it, and you'll find a purpose for living appearing, with the knowledge

of what the One who saved you, wants you to do from now onwards. I thought deeply about that word 'surrender' this morning and since I spend my time also with the scriptures even as I spend time with the newspapers, I decided to see what others who had escaped with their lives, like King David of yore, had to say about surrender. David, as you know, spent a lot of his life escaping, often by a hair's breadth from the attacks of King Saul. One King Saul, with no reason, except that he was jealous of the popularity of David, threw his spear at David, which would have impaled him to the wall, but missed him by an inch. And it was David who had something to say about surrendering oneself to the One who saves us from death of a major disaster.

King David says, 'Surrender yourself to the LORD, and wait patiently for him. Do not be preoccupied with an evildoer who succeeds in his way when he carries out his schemes. Let go of anger and leave rage behind. Do not be preoccupied. It only leads to evil. Evildoers will be cut off from their inheritance, but those who wait with hope for the LORD will inherit the land. In a little while a wicked person will be cut off, and his inheritance will be given to the righteous. You can carefully examine where he was, but there will be no trace of him. Oppressed people will inherit the land and will enjoy



unlimited peace. The wicked person plots against a righteous one and gets his teeth at him. The LORD laughs at him because he has seen that their own swords will pierce their hearts, and their bows will be broken.

The arms of wicked people will be broken, but the LORD continues to support righteous people! Look at that, just look at that, surrendering here does not end with submission and annihilation of oneself, but surrendering means the giving up of oneself to a stronger person who takes over your life and battles. I mean subservency to be a conquering slave, but on the contrary it means someone stronger than we are fighting our banks. "Now let me remember king in history," says a God above and with that comes an unending stream of victories!

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"Personalities: everything in art and poetry." Johann Wolfgang von Goethe The Shillong Times

The Manipur Conundrum

IT'S exactly 149 days today that the violence in Manipur has erupted and there is no sign of it abating anytime soon. Lives and livelihoods both in the Kuki-Zo inhabited hill areas and the Meitei inhabited valleys have been severely disrupted. Internet shutdown which was lifted for two days was again reimposed on September 26 for the next five days. This happened after a picture of two young people, a girl aged 17 years and the boy aged 20 who had gone missing since July this year surfaced after the internet was restored. The duo were last seen on CCTV camera riding off on a two wheeler into an area that is apparently Kuki dominated. What begs the question is why at the height of the conflict when tension was at its height would two Meiteis go into a Kuki dominated area. This incident has been taken so seriously by the Manipur CM Biren Singh that the Special Director (CI) was flown in to take over the investigation.

In the meantime the students in Imphal protested the death of the duo but their protest march was disrupted by security personnel. Internet shutdown is a major faultline in this country since this technology is today used for online banking and several other purposes such as online education, online meetings and for conducting all kinds of businesses and online purchases as well. For over 5 months now the Kuki-Zo people have had to stay away from Imphal valley for fear of being killed. The living spaces of the two communities are now divided by bunkers which resemble a war zone. The reasons for the outbreak of the conflict are still not yet out in the public domain because the three-member fact-finding team headed by a retired High Court Judge is pending. There are claims and counter-claims from both sides as to the reasons for the violence that has now claimed over 170 lives and displaced at least 70,000 people.

What has caused consternation is that violence has been allowed to continue for so long under a Chief Minister who from all accounts failed to handle the situation. If the Constitution was followed to the letter then a breakdown of law and order in any state for over 3 days should have been followed by President's Rule which means that the central government would take over the reins of governance and restore order without fear or favour. This was not done in the present case and the situation is such that travelling out of Manipur from the hills requires a tortuous road journey via Nagaland or Mizoram. Such is the divide that even volunteers wanting to travel to the hills for relief work are subjected to strict scrutiny at several points and sometimes held up at the Imphal airport for hours. This situation is unprecedented and requires adept handling. The question is why is the Centre turning a blind eye to the sufferings of people in Manipur? And why is the Prime Minister of the country so insensitive as to not visit the troubled state which is in need of healing? It's a curious situation and a political game that smacks of unconcern for what happens in India's North East, except during elections.

1 letters to the Editor

Disruptions in power supply in Meghalaya

6061 crores of pious under MeCL, which could be utilized for solar energy generation. This move could put an end to the ongoing issue of load shedding in Meghalaya. We are fortunate to have both abundant rainfall and sunlight, making it possible to generate electricity from both water and the sun. If the Government prioritizes this, MeCL can also work towards repaying its loans, which were taken for electricity production. These observations are based on the daily conditions in Shillong, and it's time for the Government to take action. Yours etc., Nanghulphang Kharyana, Via email

Theft cases in city on the rise

Editor Even as the Meghalaya Police deserve kudos for their crusade against illicit drug abuse in the State, sporadic cases of theft and burglary are like a ticking time bomb which endanger public property and safety as well as bring discredit to the most efficient state police force. In what may raise many people's eyebrows, an incident of burglary in broad daylight was reported in the posh suburb of Shillong township on Tuesday, just a walking distance from the heart of the city Khyabatlal aka Police Bazar. Dunoon Compound Oxford Hills which sits on a picturesque hilltop overlooking the famous Shillong Peak which could be utilized for solar energy generation. This move could put an end to the ongoing issue of load shedding in Meghalaya. We are fortunate to have both abundant rainfall and sunlight, making it possible to generate electricity from both water and the sun. If the Government prioritizes this, MeCL can also work towards repaying its loans, which were taken for electricity production. These observations are based on the daily conditions in Shillong, and it's time for the Government to take action. Yours etc., Nanghulphang Kharyana, Via email

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On Inflation in Meghalaya

Editor Apropos of the editorial "Meghalaya's high inflation rate" (ST September 28, 2023), universally there is no single answer as to what causes inflation but like so much of macroeconomics it comes down to a mix of output, money, and expectations. Supply shocks can lower an economy's potential output, driving up prices. An increase in the money supply can hike demand, driving up prices. And the expectation of inflation can become a self-fulfilling cycle as workers and companies demand higher wages and higher prices. Since the fi-

Palm oil: The good, the bad and the ugly

By Mohammad Imtiyaz Khan

In biochemistry, the terms fat and oil are used interchangeably. The same material, with a slight difference in their meaning: fat is more commonly used for the solid form in room temperature while oil is preferred for the liquid form. Edible oils are biochemically triglycerides. Fatty acids are building blocks of triglycerides. Palm oil is edible with a unique physicochemical property: it is a fat in room temperature (melting point is 39 °C as per the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India or FSSAI) because of its palmitin and stearin, which are triglycerides consisting of three palmitic acid and stearic acid molecules on a glycerol backbone, respectively. Both palmitic acid and stearic acid are long chain saturated fatty acids, meaning they are high in caloric value and comparatively unhealthy.

Palm oil can be used for preparation of hand and soaps. It is used in the food industry for palm oil called palm stearin liquefies completely above 60 °C. It contains more solid fat with triglycerides of a single saturated fatty acid (e.g. palmitin and stearin). The soft fraction called palmitic acid is liquid above 18 °C (as per the FSSAI), contains more nutrients (carotenoids, tocopherols, etc.), more unsaturated fatty acids (e.g. palmitoleic acid, oleic acid, linoleic acid, etc.) and hence relatively healthier. Palm stearin is usually used for physical blending or interconversion to lipase enzyme-catalyzed reaction of blending oils (their fractions) with other oils to improve the melting point, whereas palmitoleic acid is a source of nutraceuticals in blending and interconversion.

Most oils available today for bakery, confectionery and other such applications are blended or inter-converted. Apart from its use in blending or interconversion, as such palm oil is also required for consumption as edible oil. According to the EAT-Lancet commission report released in 2019, 25-30% of our diet should be oils/fats consisting of palm oil (for other oils) up to 6.8 grams per day and unsaturated fatty acids up to 40 grams per day. These requirements can also be obtained from traditional edible oils like mustard oil,

groundnut oil, soybean oil, coconut oil, sunflower oil, and others. Most of these edible oils comprise majorly unsaturated fatty acids. What is bad about palm oil? Because of high levels of saturated fatty acids, palm oil and coconut oil are bad for health as they increase the level of bad cholesterol i.e., low-density lipoprotein. As a consequence, blood vessels may thicken and subsequently affect the blood flow causing serious problems. Portions of palm oil like stearin and palmitin are difficult to digest in the alimentary canal as the high temperature for complete melting of these hard fats is above the body temperature. These undigested fats get deposited along the intestine and block the absorption of other nutrients through the lining. These health problems are worsened by the sedentary lifestyle and junk food eating habit.

Palm oil being cheaper, many enteries use it or palm-molcin for fast frying of poori, samosa, and other fast food items, which are popular Indian snacks. This habit in combination with the increasing non-vegetarian food consumption was observed among women and children in India, as reported in NFHS 4(b): the 15-48 age group is substantially increasing the saturated fat intake of Indians. Sedentary workers' consumption of higher saturated fats from either oil (like palm oil) or non-veg items is bad for health.

What is ugly about palm oil is the politics around it. As palm oil is not a preferred edible oil in India, its production in India in the crude form (2.88 lakh tonnes in 2020-21 as reported in the Royal Sabha against the world production of 7.9 crore metric tonnes in 2022-23, of which 85-90% were contributed by Indonesia and Malaysia, according to the US Department of Agriculture) should be sufficient for its various applications, including industrial uses as raw materials for different products. However, 59% of the total vegetable oil imports of India were palm oil, to the tune of 3.39 lakh tonnes in 2022-23, accord-

ing to the Solvent Extractors' Association. If the production and import are indicators of India's palm oil demand, India needs not more than 6 lakh tonnes of the oil per year. At present, palm oil is relatively cheaper than most of the edible oils consumed traditionally in India. In respect of this, the central government is pushing for the National Mission for Edible Oils, Oil Palm to increase the crude palm oil production five-fold, i.e. 11 lakh tonnes, by 2025-26.

To achieve this target, an order was issued in Pradakh which has more than 83% contribution to India's palm oil production, new areas will be covered for oil palm plantation. The oil palm in Myanmar mega biodiversity hotspot covering the entire northeast India. This move will require clearing of forests and shifting of tribal populations. Farmers, activists and some political parties have protested against the oil palm plantation in Assam. According to the National Food Security Legislative Assembly given by the Agriculture Minister, Anil Bora, on September 12, the total area identified for oil palm cultivation in the State is 3.75 lakh hectare.

As per the Oil Palm Mission Manipur (OPMM), the oil palm plantation drive in 2019, an olive tree for six districts and a total area of 66,652 hectares, including 11,662 hectares in Churachandpur, which is the epicentre of the oil palm cultivation since May 3. Manipur is expected to witness an increase in the temperature by 1.7 °C by the end of the 21st century, according to projections by the Manipur State Action Plan on Climate Change in 2013. Moreover, a research paper in Current Science published in 2019 on olive tree cultivation in Manipur concluded from an analysis of various climate parameters from 1954 to 2019, an increase in rainfall in Manipur would rise, causing a decrease of 10% in crop yields by 2030.

These scientific studies suggest that any major changes in the land use and agronomy practices will further worsen the impacts of climate change. However, the oil palm plantation in June 2023, the consultant of

OPMM was reported to have defended the oil palm plantation mission by claiming that the plantation would be done in the abandoned shifting cultivation lands, fallow lands and foothills.

The Kukis of Manipur have been practising jhum or shifting cultivation as part of their sustenance and it is intimately linked to their existence. Once a cultivation land is not productive enough, they move on to another area and clear the forest for cultivation. In the scheme of cultivation, there is nothing called abandoned jhum land as the farmers leave the land uncultivated for the natural rejuvenation of the soil. After a certain period of time, they come back to the same land for cultivation again. If such temporarily uncultivated lands are used for other purposes, there is obviously a conflict with the farmers when they return to cultivate the land.

Even though jhum cultivation is a traditional practice of some tribes in northeast India, increasing population, decreasing land area for cultivation and decrease in soil quality owing to deforestation in jhum cultivation cycle from more than 20 years in the past to merely 3-5 years more recently, have made it unworkable and detrimental to the environment. The situation is further worsened by the effects of global warming. Several attempts have been made in the past to find commercial crops as alternatives to jhum cultivation like pineapple, passion fruit and others, but a registered limited success in terms of sustainability of the farmers.

Therefore, planting oil palm will not be in the interests of local farmers and their sustenance. In view of this, one of the causes of the ongoing clashes in Manipur between the Meiteis and the Kukis is possibly because the Manipur government's push for evicting them from forest land, while striving to cultivate oil palm in some of the jhum lands. The government's drive to clear poppy cultivation, on the one hand, while pushing for oil palm plantation, on the other hand, appears to be a Faustian bargain.

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A Clinic with a Doctor is not Primary Care

By Nachiket Mor

Health services have traditionally been understood to be about patients reaching a clinic, hospital or a defined place of diagnosis, treatment, or care. However, unless we feel very ill or unless that we have evolved over millennia and were necessary for the survival of our species: we predispose us to think that we are perfectly healthy. This includes those of us who have a mild discomfort from what we might think of as minor ailments and all those who suffer silent diseases that become unmanageable health burdens over time.

As a direct result, even in States with relatively good health systems, such as Kerala and Tamil Nadu, the proportion of men who have diabetes but are not on treatment has doubled over the last five years. It has gone from 6 to 12% in 2015-16 to 12-14% in 2019-21 and continues to rise rapidly. In the districts of Thiruvananthapuram and Pathanamthitta in Kerala, it has already crossed 20%. Such high levels of diabetes, if not urgently managed, can trigger epidemic of blindness, strokes, and amputations in these regions.

In our Northern, less prosperous States, despite the best efforts by their governments spanning over decades, more than 60% of women and children continue to be anaemic. In the Jammu district of Bihar, Dakshin Dinajpur district of West Bengal and Chhota Udaipur district of Gujarat, these proportions are more than 75%. Such high levels of anaemia are associated with, among other things, extreme tiredness, low weight gain, and most worryingly, poor mental development in children across the entire region.

Fortunately, with the advancement in our understanding of medicine, many high burden illnesses, such as anaemia, high blood pressure, diabetes, and several infectious diseases, are now relatively easy to diagnose with low-cost instruments and treat with readily available medicines. The medical challenges for these high burden diseases are no longer such that we need to depend solely on highly trained physicians to examine us in person and all that we do. With well-defined protocols and a direct phone consultation between the patient and the physician, a reasonably trained health worker can help figure out what is needed in most cases. However, our steadfast refusal to recognise that something may be wrong and to follow medical advice faithfully remains an insurmountable obstacle.

To address this, countries like Iran and a highly rural state like Alaska in the US have, over the last 50 years, entirely transformed the way they provide primary care to their populations. Recognising that protocols and diagnostic instruments in non-physicians' hands can do an adequate job some 80% of the time, they have moved physicians to the periphery and requested them to play a supportive role. Instead, they have assigned a defined category of health worker or an equipped health worker as required them to take responsibility for every group member's complete health and well-being.

In Iran, these health workers (called Behavar in Farsi - a person with 'beh', good, 'var', skills) are identified by the local community. The government employs them to serve the community full-time after giving them two years of training. With the help of these Behavar's, Iran has kept its disease burden low even in its most remote regions. The Alaskans similarly identify a Community Health Aide (CHA), train the Aide over four-week modules, and require the Aide to strictly adhere to a Community Health Aide Manual, a book of detailed protocols. The CHAs have effectively brought comprehensive primary care even to their remotest com-

munities. To discharge their responsibility, these workers first thoroughly study the families assigned to them and figure out what each person needs by way of medical treatment and lifestyle change. They then track, costs, and capex each person to do what is required. The greater the risk exposure of the person, the more visits they make. With this "denominator" oriented approach, i.e. the entire population assigned to them and not just those who happen to show up at the clinic (the "numerator"), they have successfully dealt with these common but debilitating (if left unattended) conditions.

Even in India, there are examples of organisations that have shown durable hypertension control with hyper-tension control using a set of protocols. An organisation that has rolled this model out in, among others, the Satara district of Maharashtra, is working with the community, identified and trained a group of local health workers. Each local health worker, having been assigned a set of families to serve, goes to every home at a frequency dictated by the family's risk levels. In a cohort of 3900 individuals, its field visits totalled 1,400 (2.4%) to have stage II hypertension, of whom 100 (2.4%) were in a hypertensive crisis. This medical emergency can lead to a heart attack or stroke. Using established protocols, each local health worker, working with the community, responded as needed with the result that, at the end of four months, risk levels came down for 40% of those in stage II and 70% of those in stage I.

It is becoming increasingly clear that the doctor-led clinic model is nothing but a reduced-form hospital providing outpatient services, can no longer be considered as primary care. Good primary care instead involves well-trained and technologically equipped non-physician health workers. A physician consults a physician when a prescription is needed but are otherwise fully responsible for ensuring, using any means necessary, that the population under their care remains well. This approach is equally required for young women with anaemia who refuse to take iron tablets because they feel nauseous, for middle-aged men who refuse to take metformin for their diabetes and walk every day for at least 30 minutes because they do not feel sick, and for women over 40 who are too frightened to have their breasts examined for early signs of cancer. What needs to be done medically in each case is relatively easy to determine, but the real challenge is to get it done and completing the loop with the individual being served.

India has no shortage of young people with high school diplomas willing to serve populations assigned to them within even tiny tribal communities, as the experiences of Swasthya Swaraj in Kalahandi in Odisha, a predominantly forested district with a high tribal population, have revealed. Training and offering them a "Community Health Practitioner" diploma, as Swasthya Swaraj has done in partnership with a local university, is the first step in converting these available human resources into powerful agents of good health and well-being for our communities. It also offers these young people a job that they so urgently need in which they can serve their communities and even get a good salary. (Dr. Nachiket Mor is a Visiting Scientist at the Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health, Chennai. He can be contacted at nachiket@banyan.academy.org)

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