"The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference."
— Elie Wiesel

The Shillong Times
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Beyond opinion polls

WHEN it comes to winning or losing elections, opinion poll results have proven to be reliable at times and unreliable at others. Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his National Democratic Alliance have been placed on top, with Modi enjoying a 48 per cent mass support and the NDA having the upper hand in as many as 325 Lok Sabha constituencies as a new edition of a Mood of the Nation survey results unfolded. Undoubtedly, the overall scenario is still tipped in favour of Modi and his ruling alliance. But, some two years from now to the mid-2029 hustings, the electors have miles to trudge before they make up their minds. The PM's popularity has shrunk by seven per cent compared to the previous poll projection of 55 per cent in January. All these, however, are presumptive figures. The views of over a lakh of people, out of a nation of 1.4billion, formed the basis of the present survey.

Note the fact that three out of four opinion polls in Tamil Nadu before this year's assembly polls predicted a win for MK Stain/ his ruling DMK, while the other projected the AIADMK as the winner. Actor Joseph Vijay and his recently formed TVK came from behind and grabbed power. Exit polls in the last assembly polls in West Bengal almost in one voice predicted a rout for the ruling Trinamool Congress. Overall, opinion polls are reliable when these involve proper legwork. NDA is in power in 20 states and two Union Territories – out of 28 states and three UTs. There are signs of an anti-incumbency mood in states like Uttar Pradesh. This may also have to do with the "chori" in the Ayodhya Ram Temple by the agents of Hindutva, and with the youth upsurge in the national capital. Obviously, the PM is now on the other side of the Gen-Z. By the time the next parliament polls take place in 2029, Modi would be around age 80, and the divide between him and the new generations is bound to widen. The first-time voters are far removed from the old generations of anachronisms in the form of Netas.

The next vote in less than three years hence would likely see the big play of an anti-incumbency factor. This is where the INDIA bloc led by the Congress can pitch its hopes on. Even as this bloc's popularity is failing to significantly improve and the newly arrived Cockroach Janata Party is yet to dig its heels in, a Vote for Change might unseat the Modi dispensation from the Centre. The NDA, through its three consecutive terms, seems to have run out of ideas to capture the fancy of the nation. Its government has been a failure on many fronts while it ensured stability for the nation. In the last 12 years, the nation coursed through placid waters. There has been no earth-shaking reform, but only feeble attempts to change systems of governance; nothing more than a touch-and-go. Big reforms require the vision, brain, as also the will and the courage to confront vested interests.

Jaintia Hills at a Crossroads - The Shree Cement Questions

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

There are some development projects that deserve to be discussed not only in terms of the investment they bring, the jobs they promise or the revenue they may generate, but also in terms of what they may permanently change. The proposed Shree Cement project at Lum Syrman in East Jaintia Hills is one such matter. The issue has now gone beyond the simple question of whether a cement plant and limestone mine should come to Jaintia Hills. It is about how Meghalaya Government handles development in a Sixth Schedule area, how it protects the rights and interests of its people, and how seriously it takes public consultation when land, livelihood and the environment of local communities are involved.

The proposed project involves limestone mining over 217.394 hectares at Lum Syrman along with an integrated cement plant, with the proposed investment reportedly around Rs 1,800 crore. An investment of this scale will naturally be presented as an opportunity for employment, infrastructure and economic development for the Jaintias. There is nothing wrong with wanting investment. Jaintia Hills needs economic opportunities, our young people need jobs, our villages need better infrastructure like roads, lighting and power, water system, education and healthcare etc. and Meghalaya needs a stronger economic base. We cannot simply say no to every industrial project. But development cannot be measured only by the amount of money invested. The more important question is - development for whom, and at what cost?

This is where the concerns surrounding the Shree Cement proposal become important. Farmers and local organisations have raised questions about land ownership, cultivation, livelihood and the possibility of agricultural land being acquired for the project. There have also been concerns about whether affected people were adequately consulted before the public hearing. The Jaintia National Council has called for verification of revenue, registration, customary, possession and cultivation records and has sought protection for farmers whose livelihoods are connected with the area. These are not simply administrative questions. In Jaintia Hills, land is much more than a commodity with a monetary value. It is connected with livelihood, family, inheritance, community and identity. A farmer who loses agricultural land does not necessarily receive an equivalent replacement simply because compensation is paid. Before any irreversible decision is taken, therefore, every legitimate claim over the land must be properly examined. If there are competing claims, the facts must be established; if there are genuine landowners and cultivators, their rights must be recognised; and if customary rights are involved, they cannot simply be brushed aside because an industrial project has been proposed.

Another major concern relates to the Environmental Impact Assessment. Various organisations have alleged irregularities in the EIA submitted for the project, including questions about references to authorities outside Meghalaya and other environmental and procedural matters. These are allegations, and they should not automatically be treated as established violations. But that is precisely why they deserve proper examination. If there is nothing wrong with the EIA, independent scrutiny should establish that. If there are errors, omissions or inconsistencies, they should be corrected before the process moves further. An Environmental Impact Assessment should not become a paperwork exercise undertaken merely to obtain the next clearance. Its purpose is to give a credible picture of what a project may do to forests, rivers, wildlife, agricultural land, settlements and the people living around it. When an EIA is seriously questioned by people who may be directly affected, greater scrutiny should follow, not less.

The controversy surrounding the public hearing has made the matter even more sensitive. The first proposed hearing on May 22 was called off after protests and a serious breakdown of law and order, with reports of vandalism and arson at the venue. Violence cannot be justified. Those who destroy property, attack people or try to stop a lawful process through violence must be held accountable. Peaceful public opposition, however, is a legitimate part of democracy, particularly when people believe their land and livelihoods are at stake. The question that must therefore be asked is whether the subsequent public hearing provided genuine and meaningful participation to those most directly affected. A public hearing cannot simply be a meeting held because it is mandatory under the rules. The affected people must have a genuine opportunity to attend, raise objections, ask questions and place their views on record.

The second hearing held on July 31 has itself become controversial, with allegations that some affected landowners and farmers were prevented from attending and reports that the hearing lasted only 46 minutes. These allegations should be independently verified rather than accepted or dismissed. The important question is not simply whether a hearing technically took place, but whether the people who had the most to lose actually had a meaningful opportunity to be heard. There is a fundamental difference between conducting a public hearing and conducting a meaningful public consultation. This matters because people's participation in environmental decisions cannot be reduced to a formality. If a farmer travels from a remote village to attend a hearing concerning the possible loss of his agricultural land, he should not have to wonder whether he will even be allowed into the venue. If villagers have objections, they should be able to place them on record. If villagers have concerns about water, forests, wildlife or pollution, they should be given the opportunity to raise them. And if there are serious allegations concerning the process itself, the Government should be willing to examine them. The Government's decision deserves to be welcomed and appreciated. Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma has announced a fact-finding committee headed by a senior government official independent of the district administration to examine the complaints surrounding the Shree Cement public hearing. The decision to maintain status quo on work connected with the project until the inquiry is completed is a welcome step. It shows that the Government is willing to listen to the concerns being raised and allow the facts to be examined before taking the matter forward.

This should not be seen as an obstacle to development, but as an opportunity to restore public confidence. The inquiry must be genuinely independent, transparent and comprehensive. It should examine the entire sequence of events, including the preparation and submission of the EIA, the information provided to affected communities, the conduct of the public hearings, the allegations regarding access to the venue, the objections raised by landowners and farmers, and the documentary and video evidence available. Its findings should be made public. There should be no attempt to protect either the company or its opponents. The only thing that deserves protection is the truth.

The matter has now also reached the Meghalaya High Court. On August 24, the Jaintia Students' Union filed a Public Interest Litigation challenging the environmental public hearing held on July 31 for the proposed Shree Cement mining project at Lum Syrman. The JSU alleged that the 46-minute hearing became an exclusionary exercise in which indigenous stakeholders and local landowners were prevented from participating. The union also alleged that peaceful protesters were attacked and that its emergency ambulance was targeted, leaving its driver injured. These are allegations before the court and must be established through evidence and due process. But the decision of the JSU to seek judicial intervention shows how deeply the controversy has affected public confidence in the process. The High Court now has the opportunity to examine the allegations and determine whether the public hearing was conducted in accordance with the law and whether the rights of affected people were properly protected. Concerns surrounding the proposed project must also be understood against the environmental history of Jaintia Hills. The region has already experienced the consequences of poorly managed coal mining, including concerns over rivers, agricultural land, forests and the wellbeing of communities. This history explains why people are naturally cautious whenever another major limestone project is proposed. They are entitled to ask what will happen to their rivers, forests, agricultural land and villages, and what will remain after the limestone is extracted. These questions should not be dismissed as anti-development. They are the very questions that responsible development is supposed to answer.

Shree Cement may be a major and reputed company, and there is no reason to oppose a company simply because it wants to invest in Meghalaya. If the proposed project is environmentally sound, legally compliant and socially responsible, it should be given a fair opportunity to demonstrate that. But the reputation of a company cannot substitute for regulatory scrutiny, and the promise of investment cannot substitute for public confidence. A transparent examination will ultimately benefit everyone, including the company. If the project satisfies environmental, legal and social safeguards, the findings will strengthen its credibility. If deficiencies are found, they can be addressed before irreversible damage is done.

There is also a larger question that Meghalaya must confront. Too often, development planning looks at the Northeast as a region rich in natural resources but poor in industrialisation. Limestone, coal, forests, rivers and land are viewed mainly through their economic value. But these resources exist within living communities. There are farmers cultivating the land, villages surrounding proposed project areas and people who depend upon the environment. The land is not an empty space on a map waiting to be converted into an industrial project. It is a living landscape with people, history and culture.

Jaintia Hills therefore has every right to ask difficult questions about a project that could permanently alter its landscape. That does not make its people enemies of development. It makes them stakeholders. Development should not be imposed upon communities as though consultation were merely a hurdle to be crossed. People must be treated as partners in development, not as obstacles to it.

The Government's decision to maintain the status quo pending a fact-finding inquiry provides an opportunity to show that Meghalaya can pursue development without compromising fairness and responsibility. The inquiry should be thorough and impartial, giving the company, the affected people and the authorities a fair opportunity to present their side. The evidence must be examined without fear or favour, and the final decision should be transparent and worthy of the people's trust.

This should not become a battle between development and anti-development. The real choice is between irresponsible development and responsible development. Jaintia Hills needs investment, employment and economic opportunities, but it also needs clean rivers, productive agricultural land, healthy communities and a secure future for the generations who will inherit this land. Once a mountain is removed, a river polluted or agricultural land permanently transformed, no amount of compensation can bring yesterday back.

Jaintia Hills deserves development but it also deserves a future. The challenge before the Government, the company and the people is to ensure that the two are never placed on opposite sides of the table.

UP will be an acid test for Modi's caste mathematics

By S. N. M. ABDI

The Bareilly district president of Bharatiya Janata Party's Kisan Morcha, Shyamsudar Tripathi, suddenly put in his papers in January. What's more, he sent the resignation letter directly to Narendra Modi. In his missive, the Brahmin leader called the University Grant Commission's (Promotion of Equity in Higher Education Institutions) Regulations, 2026, framed to stop caste discrimination in higher education institutions, a "black law" for being anti-upper castes. His letter threw Uttar Pradesh politics into turmoil. Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath's supporters perceived the proposed regulations as a move by Modi-Amit Shah's to corner the CM by going after his upper caste constituency which was already unhappy with him.

The new UGC regulations were notified on January 13 but stayed by the Supreme Court on January 29. The provisions spelt out in 3 (1) (c) unleashed a political storm by defining caste-based discrimination as discrimination on the basis of caste or tribe against members of the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes. It essentially provided a shield for SCs, STs and OBCs students from Brahmins, Rajputs, Kayasths and Vaishyas. The protection was much needed but the upper castes, or the so-called general category, threw a fit. Tripathi's letter to Modi mirrored their outrage. They also challenged the very definition of "caste-based discrimination" in the apex court which quickly put the new regulations on hold, cannily observing that they could have "very sweeping consequences" and "divide society". And on August 21, clearly because of political-electoral calculations amid the pushback, the Centre told the Supreme Court that it is "reconsidering" the UGC regulations – which is nothing but capitulation.

The BJP dispensation's late realisation this fortnight is pregnant with meaning. On August 3, the BJP witnessed a crushing and humiliating defeat in Bankipore constituency – a seat which elected BJP president Nitin Nabin by a margin of 50,000 votes as recently as last year's Bihar assembly elections. But in less than a year, Nabin's handpicked BJP candidate lost the Bankipore by-election to Jan Suraj Party's Prashant Kishore by 20,00 votes. One of the main reasons for the BJP's rout in its pocket borough -- BJP won every election from Bankipore since 1995 including four times by Nabin himself – was the upper castes deserting the saffron party.

The problem is that the upper caste vote is simply not enough. To retain its grip on power, the BJP also needs the support of SCs, STs and OBCs. For instance, in UP where assembly elections will be fought in 2027, SCs, STs and OBCs badly outnumber the upper caste population. Hence the BJP has to walk the caste tightrope balancing the upper and lower caste competing interests without angering either side. Conducting a caste census along with the national census is therefore proving to be a political minefield for the BJP and the Modi government. SCs and STs are counted during each census. But the general category, or upper caste, and OBC are not counted. Yet, just like SCs and STs, OBCs are entitled to reservations. OBCs enjoy 27 percent reservations although their numbers have never been verified by a census! Hence, only a caste census will reveal the percentage of OBC population.

When Rahul Gandhi first demanded a caste census in 2023 to gauge the socio-economic status of OBCs, Modi branded him an "urban Naxal" and rejected the Congress Party's demand. But in mid-2025 Modi did a somersault and announced a caste census along with the 2027 national census.

Modi, importantly enough, is an OBC. The BJP never tires of claiming how much it has done for OBCs since 2014 with Modi – an OBC – at the helm. But Gandhi's strategy is to puncture these tall claims by unearthing the actual socio-economic condition of OBCs. The BJP will be in hot waters if the census validates the claims of some experts that OBCs account for more than 50 percent of India's population. That will result in OBCs demanding a bigger share of the reservation pie as per their numbers, infuriating the upper castes and triggering a repetition of the bedlam after the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recommendations.

The OBCs were given 27 percent reservations as per Mandal Commission's recommendations but that percentage was not calculated according to their numbers as OBCs were never counted like SCs and STs during the census. The Mandal Commission had estimated that Hindu and non-Hindu OBCs accounted for 52 percent of the population. But OBCs were granted only 27 percent of reservations. because the Supreme Court had ruled that not more than 50 percent of government jobs can be reserved. As 22.5 percent jobs were already reserved for SCs and STs, 27 percent was reserved for OBCs – totalling 49.5 percent reserved jobs.

While the BJP has given the go-ahead to the caste census, it is extremely worried about the backlash by upper castes. As things stand, for the caste census, respondents will be asked during the national census whether they belong to a SC or ST. If they don't belong to either, they will have to state their caste. But Gandhi and the Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav say that this approach will not help unearth the OBC population. They are demanding that as the Centre has a list of 2471 OBCs and various states and union territories have a list of 3150 OBCs, the enumerators must visit the respondents with all the listed OBCs and ask them to pick their caste. Without this the true number of OBCs cannot be ascertained. After ascertaining STs, STs and OBCs, the upper caste population too will come to the fore.

Yadav and Gandhi are accusing Modi of dithering after green lighting the caste census. But the BJP's and Modi's dilemma is perfectly understandable. Uttar Pradesh, which decides the fortunes of all political parties like no other state, is witnessing anti-reservations agitations. Similarly, anti-reservation demonstrations are being held in Delhi's Jantar Mantar. The sheer number of protestors in the fast-spreading demonstrations is giving the BJP goose bumps. The BJP has learnt from conversations with the agitators that they are seething with anger at the caste census. They fear a spike in reservations for OBCs post caste census; leaving even fewer government jobs and seats in state educational institutions for the upper castes.

The fear of alienating the upper castes has forced Modi-Shah to inform the Supreme Court this fortnight that the Centre is "reconsidering" the new UGC regulations. In effect, it's bowing before the higher castes. Modi-Shah wanted to kill two birds with one stone; they thought the new UGC regulations would hurt Yogi, and please the Dalit, Adivasis and OBCs. But it boomeranged. After the capitulation, UP's upper castes are happy. And to appease the OBCs of UP who had welcomed the new UGC regulations which have now been put on hold, OBC leader Pankaj Chaudhary has been appointed as state BJP president. Modi-Shah know that if the BJP loses UP in 2027, winning the Lok Sabha elections in 2029 will be an uphill task. Conversely, if Yogi leads the BJP to a third successive win, he will stake claim to succeed Modi at the Centre, setting the stage for a Yogi-Shah battle for Modi's mantle. So long, the BJP has harvested the upper caste vote along with the OBC vote due to Modi, making it virtually invincible. But with the BJP now trying to strike a balance between the two, who knows what the outcome will be? The UP election results will reveal the failure or success of the BJP's new caste mathematics. (END)

(S. N. M. Abdi is a distinguished journalist who writes on domestic politics and foreign policy.)

Letters to the Editor

Officials Threatening Players in MCA

Editor,

We the players of Meghalaya cricket are currently facing an environment of threat and coercion at the hands of certain Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA) officials, namely the now-suspended MCA Secretary, Rayonald Kharkamni, and the current President of Shillong Cricket Association (SCA), Peter Macdonald Kharsawian.

In a recent move, these two officials pressured players to sign blank sheets and later attached statements endorsing their agenda, including a statement backing a BCCI takeover of the MCA. Many of us who are very well aware of their corrupt track record, refused. In response, we have been threatened with exclusion from the Shillong League and denial of trial opportunities for the upcoming domestic season. Some players have been individually warned that their careers will be "finished" if they do not comply. We anticipate that both these officials will come out with denials and justifications once this letter is published, either on their own or through their accomplices. But no defence will change what players already know from years of experience that these officials have built a culture of intimidation that is actively harming the sport in our state.

Even as the current MCA staff and the new President are now working to conduct fair trials for the coming season, while certain matters remain in the court creating functional challenges, Kharkamni and Kharsawian have told players to boycott these trials and threatened us with consequences, denying us the selection opportunities we have worked hard for.

It is widely known in Meghalaya's cricketing circles that both these men have previously helped pass off outside players as Meghalaya domiciled, reportedly under undisclosed arrangements that merit scrutiny and investigation. Players who spoke up about money changing hands for team spots in the past were silenced publicly, and their careers deliberately ended. The same playbook is being used today again.

This is happening while Kharkamni remains suspended over allegations of covering up sexual harassment, with Kharsawian openly backing him despite knowing the facts. It is utterly shameful. The same Kharsawian, notably, filed a corruption complaint against Kharkamni just last December over MCA election malpractice. Whatever internal understanding has since developed between them, players want no part of it, and should not be made to pay the price for it.

Talented players are being silenced out of fear, and the credibility of the Association is being eroded. It appears both officials, unable to accept that their conduct is now public knowledge, are taking out their frustration on the very players they are meant to serve.

Through your esteemed daily, we urge the authorities concerned, including the BCCI, to act swiftly against those responsible for years of quiet damage to Meghalaya cricket. Players are the foundation of this Association, not the other way round, and it is time that it is reflected in how we are treated.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Changing Rhythm of Rain and Shillong's Forests

Editor,

The rain appears to be playing truant in Shillong this year. By August every year, the city would normally have experienced several spells of high-intensity, short-duration showers, interspersed with more frequent periods of low-intensity but prolonged rainfall. However, up to the last week of the month, neither pattern appears to have occurred with the frequency normally expected for reasons that are not immediately clear.

While this unusual rainfall pattern may have contributed to the present hot and uncomfortable weather conditions in the city, there are also signs of declining flows in some local water sources. These include those within the Laitkor Protected Forest, which regularly supply water to localities situated below the forest.

The springs within the forest continue to flow, largely because the forest naturally retains moisture in its soil, as healthy forests are expected to do. However, without adequate rainfall to replenish this natural reservoir, their discharge could decline considerably during the dry months. The Wahdienglieng stream within the same forest, which would normally be in fuller flow by now, has also appeared noticeably subdued, as observed during a recent walk through the forest.

Fortunately, the Laitkor Protected Forest has so far remained largely free from significant human interference. If it continues to be well managed, it will remain an important safeguard for the water sources within it. Its importance, however, cannot be viewed in isolation. Contiguous to it are the Riat Laban Reserve Forest and the Upper Shillong Protected Forest. All three forests lie close to Shillong and have a long history of protection and management extending over more than a century.

These natural forests provide ecological services that newly planted or regenerated forests may take decades to replicate if ever at all. Their value lies not only in their role as sources of water but also in their contribution to moderating the local environment. They are repositories of biodiversity, supporting a variety of native flora and fauna. They also provide opportunities for the simple pleasure of walking through a clean, peaceful and healthy natural environment. They are thus valuable assets for a growing urban population.

Any intervention in these forest areas should therefore be undertaken only after its necessity, ecological soundness and long-term benefits to the wider public have been clearly established. Such decisions must be guided by sound ecological understanding and a clear appreciation of what could be lost through unnecessary disturbance within these areas. Ultimately, how well these forests are protected and managed will be a measure not only of our commitment towards environmental protection, but also of the credibility and seriousness of environmental governance in the State.

Yours etc.,
K.L. Tariang,
Via email

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

"The supreme art of war is to subdue the enemy without fighting."

— Sun Tzu

The Shillong Times

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Revisiting Development in Meghalaya

CATASTROPHES are happening with frightening frequency but people and governments don't stop long enough to think of changing the contours of "development." In light of what happened in Nepal, it is important for the Government in Meghalaya to rethink its development agenda and its economic model. The questions: What do we mean by development, and development for whom? – are questions scientists and academics have asked for a long time but ignored. Are people even consulted when major roads and infrastructure projects are built in the New Shillong Township for instance? In the recent sudden rains, large chunks of mud and slush were carried down from the building sites uphill to the road leading to an institute of national importance – IIM Shillong.

The manner in which hills are cut and sand and debris are dumped into the rivers thereby obstructing their normal flow is the story of the New Shillong Township development model because construction seems to be the only important thing, the environment be damned. But at what cost? And for how long? With climate change now glaringly evident Meghalaya too must remain in a state of preparedness. For how long can the state extract its boulders often by blasting rocks and sell those to Bangladesh? When will the greed of a few end? When will extraction be the only economic model of Meghalaya? The lessons from Nepal and elsewhere should have prompted climate scientists (if there are any in the state) to review all construction projects, the latest one being the complete deforestation of an area leading to Shillong peak only to accommodate a ropeway project. The question is – how important is the ropeway project in our scheme of things? What are the cost-benefit analyses? Who decided to have the project and who cleared it? How does compensatory afforestation in distant West Khasi Hills help conserve the water sources in Shillong?

The devastating floods and glacier collapse in Nepal have destroyed villages, roads, bridges and hydropower infrastructure, while hundreds of people have been killed or remain missing. What is very concerning is the vulnerability of workers trapped in hydropower tunnels and communities living along fragile mountain valleys. The tragedy demonstrates how infrastructure meant to bring development can itself become vulnerable—or even dangerous—when ecological realities are ignored. While we can get away by saying that Meghalaya is not Nepal and we don't face the same glacial hazards but Meghalaya is a fragile mountain and high-rainfall ecosystem where nature can be unforgiving when its limits are ignored. Besides, 'development' is not just construction of roads, buildings and tourism projects. In Meghalaya, several buildings within Shillong city and elsewhere are built right on the river, ignoring all the building rules and there's no penalty for doing so. The Wah Umkhrah and Umshyrpi are the most visible examples. Hills are being flattened without any understanding of slope stability and forests are being cleared without even considering their role in absorbing rainfall and preventing erosion. For too long the so-called environmental impact assessments have been mere formalities designed to obtain clearance, not to secure the environment. When communities protest against a cement plant at a vulnerable ecological area they cannot be treated as obstacles to development. Their voices must be part of planning decisions. The Nepal tragedy is a Wake-Up Call. Meghalaya can ignore that call at its own peril.

When the Mountain Takes Back the Road

By Arun Banerjee

The failure of the road near Laitlyngkot raises a larger question: are we building roads in Meghalaya as roads, or as engineering systems that must coexist with water, geology and gravity?

The Dawki –Lailyngkot road reveals that a much deeper engineering question is involved. In Meghalaya, a road is not simply a layer of asphalt laid over soil. It is a structure imposed upon a mountain. This distinction matters because it changes the question we should be asking. Instead of simply asking, "Why did the road break?" we should ask "whether the road was properly designed, constructed and maintained for the mountain environment through which it passes?"

In Meghalaya, water is the real challenge. A road in the plains can often be thought of principally as a pavement designed to carry traffic. A mountain road is fundamentally different. The pavement itself may be perfectly capable of carrying vehicles and yet the road can still disappear if water is allowed to attack the material beneath it or the hillside supporting it. This is why drainage cannot be regarded as an accessory to a mountain road. It is one of its principal engineering systems.

An undersized culvert can cause water to overtop an embankment. A blocked drain can force water into the road formation. Poor cross-drainage can allow water to accumulate on one side and saturate the slope. Once water begins eroding the material supporting the pavement, a seemingly minor problem can develop into a major failure.

Therefore in Meghalaya a road does not necessarily fail because of traffic. Very often, it fails because of water.

What happens inside a wet hillside?

The most dangerous form of water is not always the water we can see. When heavy rain falls on a hillside, some of it flows rapidly over the surface. But some infiltrates into the soil and enters pores, cracks and fractures in the underlying material. As rainfall continues, the ground becomes progressively saturated. The water trapped within the soil generates what engineers call pore-water pressure. This has a direct bearing on the strength of a slope.

In simple terms, the soil particles in a stable hillside are held together by forces that allow the ground to resist movement. As pore-water pressure increases, the effective bond between the particles decreases.

The process can be thought of rather simply as: heavy rain → infiltration → rising pore-water pressure → falling effective bond → reduced shear strength → slope movement. Thus a hillside that appears stable during dry weather can become unstable during a prolonged period of intense rainfall due to invisible movement of groundwater.

Road cutting changes the natural balance

A natural hillside may have remained stable for hundreds or thousands of years. Its slope, rock structure, soil and groundwater pathways have reached a form of natural equilibrium. Road construction disturbs that equilibrium. When a road is cut into a hillside, material is removed. The support previously provided by the mountain is altered. Excavation may expose weathered rock, create new fractures and change the pathways through which groundwater moves.

The problem may not become apparent immediately. A slope can remain apparently stable for years and then fail during one exceptionally wet season. This is why the design of a mountain road must include not merely pavement engineering but geological investigation, geotechnical investigation, hydrological assessment and slope-stability analysis.

A road can fail in stages: A useful way of understanding a progressive failure is to imagine the sequence:

1.Small cracks appear.
2.Seepage becomes visible.
3. A retaining wall begins to bulge or move.
4.Cracks develop in the pavement.
5. A portion of the road disappears.

Hence, the important point is that a major collapse can be the final stage of a process that began much earlier. This raises an important question for Meghalaya: Are vulnerable road sections being monitored for these early warning signs?

The culvert problem

Suppose a culvert has been designed to discharge 10 cubic metres of water per second. During an exceptional storm, however, the actual runoff reaches 20 cubic metres per second. The additional water does not disappear because the 'drawing' says the culvert can carry only 10 cubic metres per second. It has to find another route. It may flow over the road. It may erode the shoulders and embankment. It may wash away fill material. It may undermine a retaining wall or attack the foundation of a structure. Once the supporting material is removed, settlement and cracking can begin, eventually leading to collapse. This illustrates why hydrological design is just as important as pavement design.

The critical question is not merely, "Can the road carry traffic?" It is also: "Can the mountain water be safely carried past the road?"

Can French drain help?

One possible engineering measure is the French drain. A French drain is essentially a subsurface drainage arrangement consisting of a trench containing coarse gravel or crushed stone, usually incorporating a perforated pipe and geotextile material to reduce clogging. Its purpose is to collect groundwater and carry it away before it builds up excessive pressure. Such drainage can be particularly useful behind retaining walls, along the uphill side of roads and beneath pavements. Horizontal drains can also be used in landslide-prone slopes to lower the groundwater level.

The principle is straightforward. If increasing groundwater raises pore-water pressure and weakens a slope, removing groundwater can reduce that pressure and improve stability. But a French drain is not a universal cure. It has to be part of a larger drainage and slope-protection system. That system may include catch drains above cut slopes, interceptor drains, lined surface drains, adequately sized culverts, retaining walls, gabions, soil nailing, rock bolts and vegetation-based protection.

The engineering principle is therefore not "build a French drain." It is: Give water a safe and controlled path through and around the mountain road.

Was the road designed for this mountain?

A proper mountain-road investigation should begin with the mountain—not with the asphalt. The geological investigation should examine the rock type, fractures, faults and previous landslide activity. The geotechnical investigation should examine soil strength, bearing capacity and groundwater conditions. The hydrological study should establish the catchment area, expected peak runoff and flood characteristics. And the slope must be analysed for stability.

These are not academic exercises. Each answers a practical question: What is this mountain likely to do when we cut a road through it and then it is subject to intense rainfall?

What rainfall was assumed?

Rainfall design deserves particular scrutiny: Do the rainfall assumptions used for a particular project adequately represent the extreme events that the road may actually encounter.

The relevant questions therefore include:

- What rainfall intensity was assumed in the design?
- What data were used?
- Were extreme rainfall events adequately considered?
- Were the culverts and side drains sized accordingly?
- Was climate variability considered?

How do we determine what actually failed?

If an embankment has been washed away while there is no evidence of a large mass movement from the hillside, the principal mechanism may be hydraulic failure—perhaps overtopping, inadequate drainage or an undersized culvert.

If a large mass of soil has moved, trees have been displaced and a scar is visible on the hill, the mechanism may instead be slope failure associated with saturation, geology or excessive cutting.

If a retaining wall has tilted and its foundation has become exposed, scour or hydrostatic pressure may be involved.

The distinction matters because different failures require different remedies.

Rebuilding the pavement without correcting the mechanism that caused the original failure merely reproduces the vulnerability.

Responsibility does not end with the contractor

When a road fails, the immediate temptation is to blame the contractor. But engineering responsibility is more complicated. A road project involves a chain which involves a client → consultant/designer → DPR and investigations → contractor → construction quality → maintenance. A perfectly conceived design can fail through poor construction. Equally, excellent construction cannot rescue a fundamentally inadequate design. The purpose should not be to find a convenient person to blame.

The purpose should be to determine what failed, why it failed, whether the failure could have been anticipated, and what must be done to prevent its recurrence.

The questions that deserve answers

Following a major road failure in a mountainous region, the public is entitled to ask whether the fundamental engineering questions were adequately addressed.

- Was a proper geological map prepared?
- Were faults, fractures and other geological discontinuities studied?
- Was the history of landslides in the area examined?
- Was a geotechnical investigation undertaken?
- Was slope-stability analysis carried out?
- What factor of safety was adopted?
- Were catch drains and interceptor drains provided?
- Were culverts adequate for the expected peak flows?
- Were sub –surface drainage measures provided where necessary?
- Were retaining structures constructed according to the drawings?
- Was earthwork properly compacted?
- Were drains inspected and cleaned before the monsoon?
- Was movement of vulnerable slopes monitored?

These questions do not assume that the answers are negative. They are simply the questions that a proper forensic investigation should answer.

We need a different philosophy for mountain roads. Perhaps the larger lesson extends beyond Laitlyngkot. For Meghalaya, the mountain has its geology. The rain has its intensity. The groundwater has its pathways. And water follows gravity regardless of what engineers have drawn on paper. When we cut a road across a hillside, we are interfering with a natural system that has existed for a very long time. We must understand the mountain sufficiently well to make the road part of a stable system. That is why, in a mountain road, the pavement may actually be the least interesting part. Asphalt carries the vehicles; water determines whether the road survives. And if we do not respect water, geology and gravity, the mountain will eventually reclaim what we have built.

(The author is a life member of the Indian Association of Physics and has been in the field of construction for about 3 decades working as a supervisor in various projects)

Five Days. Sixty Members. Two Thousand Six Hundred Sixty-Nine Questions & Almost Nothing Answered

By Napoleon S. Mawphniang

The Meghalaya Legislative Assembly's Autumn Session 2026 ran from August 24 to August 28. Five days. And then it was prorogued. Just like that — Governor Vijay Shankar's order, Article 174(2)(a) of the Constitution, formal words on formal paper, the House stands prorogued. Done. Gone.

Think about that for a moment. Wittgenstein once wrote that "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world." I'd extend that, carefully, to governance. The limits of your Assembly session mean the limits of your responsiveness. And in Meghalaya right now, those limits are very, very narrow.

The Business Advisory Committee, chaired by Speaker Thomas A. Sangma, approved this skeletal five-day calendar on July 31. Three days of Government Business. Two days of Private Members' Business. The Speaker himself — credit where it's due — acknowledged on record that "the allotment of time is always an important issue." He said he'd "make every effort." (Meghalaya Government Press Release, DIPR, July 31, 2026.) Admirable words....

But words alone do not feed a hungry constituent, do they? They do not address a muster-roll worker who hasn't been paid and is starving. They don't resolve the MRSSA implementation pending since 2024. They don't tell the KSU why a Cabinet-approved amendment still hasn't been implemented. Words, as Kafka might remind us, can construct the most elaborate corridors leading precisely nowhere.

Here is the cruelest part of this story. On August 21 — three days before the session even started — former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma was already calling the government's posture a "complete failure." He said, and I quote directly, that the government "had disregarded warnings from civil society groups, failed to assess the likely consequences" of rising tensions and "did not take sufficient preventive measures." (India Today NE, August 21, 2026.) Violence had broken out in Shillong. Civil society had warned. Nobody listened.

The KSU, meanwhile, submitted memorandums to all 36 MLAs from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills ahead of the session. Five demands. Specific. Documented. They even extended the memo to the 24 MLAs from Garo Hills. Sixty legislators total....

The Union's assistant general secretary Pynshai Rani said it plainly: "MLAs were elected by the people. It is their duty to raise issues of jobs and problems affecting the entire community." (Highland Post, August 21, 2026.) They announced sit-in demonstrations at the statue of U Kiang Nangbah on August 24. They held protests across all seven districts of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills on August 25. A student body had to protest outside the building while the elected representatives sat inside.

Does that not tell us something?

Let me invoke Ambedkar here — not ceremonially, but seriously. In his Annihilation of Caste, Ambedkar argued that the problem with Indian governance isn't merely structural, it's psychological. It is the psychology of those who hold power believing that problems below them will eventually dissolve on their own. The poor will adjust. The agitators will tire. The streets will empty. That psychology is alive and well in Shillong today.

Now. Let me be the Socratic voice in the room for a moment. Is five days enough to govern a state of approximately 3.6 million people? Is three days of Government Business — of which a significant chunk was consumed by procedural matters like supplementary demands, the Appropriation Bill, and the laying of ordinances — sufficient to answer 2,669 questions? When the Day 5 video clearly shows the Speaker declaring that "the remaining demands for grants will be disposed of by applying sub-rule three of Rule 144" — that is, disposed of mechanically, without debate — what does that tell us about the quality of democratic discourse? (Meghalaya Legislative Assembly, Day 5 Live, August 28, 2026.)

What does Rule 144(3) mean in practice? It means questions get "guillotined." They die without discussion. That's not metaphor. That's the technical parliamentary term. The guillotine. A device named for an instrument of execution. Fitting, isn't it?

Paulo Freire, in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, wrote about what he called the "culture of silence" — how the powerful maintain dominance not through loud suppression but through the quiet, procedural smothering of legitimate grievance. The culture of silence doesn't announce itself. It wears the robes of process. It speaks in the language of calendars, committee meetings, and sub-rules. It says: "We heard you. We just ran out of time."

That is precisely what happened here.

And Joost Meerloo, whose extraordinary The Rape of the Mind examined how institutions domesticate human protest into harmless ritual, would have seen in this five-day session an almost textbook example. The session existed. The government can say: "We sat. We debated. We passed the Appropriation Bill." The machinery moved. But did it serve the people it was built to serve? That is the question we must press.I'm from Ri Bhoi district. I know what it feels like when the Assembly session ends and your MLA comes home looking tired but quietly satisfied, and life in the village is exactly, precisely as it was before those five days in Shillong. The water supply scheme for Nongpoh — which was literally the first starred question of the Autumn Session, submitted by MLA Mayral Born Syiem — asks why the Nongpoh Combined Water Supply Scheme under the Jal Jeevan Mission is delayed. (Meghalaya Vidhan Sabha, Starred Questions, August 25, 2026.) That's Ri Bhoi. That's my district. That question was starred. Did it get a satisfying answer? Did anything move? Or did it, too, meet the guillotine? There's a report now — just days after the session ended — that nine UDP MLAs may be preparing to jump ship to the BJP. (Northeast Live, August 29, 2026.) Political defections. That's where the energy is going. Not into addressing the MRSSA. Not into fixing MPSC. Not into confronting unemployment, casual worker starvation, or the East Jaintia Hills mining grievances. The political class is busy rearranging deck chairs while the constituency burns.

George Orwell, in Animal Farm, gave a parable so precise it almost hurts: the pigs who led the revolution slowly became the farmers they had overthrown. Let's ask ourselves what has changed in Meghalaya's governance since 2018? Since 2023? Let's ask ourselves honestly.

Here, then, is where I land — and I want to say this carefully, because I am not a man who calls for chaos. The KSU warned of continued agitation until its demands are met. (East Mojo, August 22, 2026.)

They said they will not remain silent. The streets will fill again. And when they do, the government will call it a "law and order problem." It will deploy police....It will issue statements. And then, six months later, another short session will convene, and 2,669 more questions will be filed, and most of them will be guillotined under Rule 144(3).

Unless the people of Meghalaya — and I mean all of us, not just students, not just tribals, not just the opposition — decide that five days is not governance. That prorogation without resolution is not democracy. That a session which produces an Appropriation Bill but cannot find time to address MRSSA, MPSC, mining, unemployment, or casual worker starvation is a session that has failed in its most fundamental purpose.The Oracle at Delphi told Socrates he was the wisest man in Athens because he alone knew that he knew nothing. Our government, I'm afraid, has reversed this formula entirely. It seems to know everything — every procedure, every sub-rule, every prorogation clause — and yet it understands almost nothing about the lives of the people outside that Assembly building.

That's not wisdom. That's governance dressed as performance. And the people of Meghalaya, sooner or later, will stop applauding the performance.

(Napoleon S. Mawphniang is an advocate from Ri Bhoi district, Meghalaya. The views expressed here are personal and non-partisan)

Letters to the Editor

Glaciers Weep at Our Reckless Consumerism

Editor,

The catastrophic flash flood in Nepal left behind unimaginable destruction. Words cannot express the devastation — entire villages were wiped out, families torn apart, and lives lost in a matter of hours. Those who survived now carry the burden of trauma. They wonder how to rebuild their lives after everything they owned was swept away. Thank heavens, the flood struck in the morning, when people were able to flee! Had it occurred in the dead of night, when entire communities were asleep, the death toll could have run into lakhs.

The tragedy is believed to have been triggered by an avalanche of ice and rock high in the Himalayas. Although such events are not unknown in the Himalayan region, scientists warn that a "warming climate" can increase the instability of glaciers and mountain slopes. Rising temperatures can weaken glaciers and thaw the permafrost that helps hold rocks and soil together. In other words, the mountains are fast losing their "grip" and when they let go, the damage is massive! Is it not alarming that Himalayan glaciers melted about 65% faster during the 2010s than in the preceding decade?

Now when a large mass of ice and rock collapses into a river, it usually obstructs the flow of water, creating a temporary dam. If that fragile barrier suddenly breaks, the accumulated water can surge downstream with tremendous force, sweeping away homes, roads, bridges and everything else in its path. That's exactly what seems to have happened in Nepal -- nature built a dam, then tore it down in one violent sweep. Now what makes the situation even more worrying is China's aggressive push for dam construction and large infrastructure projects in Tibet. This "Dragon's misadventure" could easily become a recipe for disaster, affecting Nepal, India, and Bangladesh without warning.

Yet if we look deeper, we must acknowledge humanity's own contribution to the environmental crisis. Our compulsive greed for consumer goods solely contributes to global warming. The reckless extraction and consumption of natural resources to satisfy our insatiable needs is putting nature under tremendous strain. Nearly every manufactured product comes at an environmental cost, whether through the extraction of raw materials, industrial production, transportation, or disposal. One purchase of a cellophane may feel small, but when billions of us do it, the impact is tremendous.

Let's pause and think about our mounting desires in modern times. A person with a bicycle, dreams of a Maruti. The Maruti owner greedily eyes an i10. The i10 owner soon desires a Scorpio or Safari. And those already driving SUVs? Their eyes are set on BMWs and Mercedes. No one really thinks it's wrong? This is how all of us chase happiness --- by upgrading our material possessions. But at what cost? Our so-called success story comes at the cost of polluted air, vanishing forests, melting glaciers and an environment already under tremendous strain. The more we chase comfort and development, the more we push nature into agony!

Then honest question is: Are our world leaders listening to the roar of alarm from the Himalayan region? Will they take a firm resolution to slam a brake on this dreadful culture of excessive consumption? Will they restrict the setting up of new industries? Or will they simply allow the cycle to continue unchecked in the name of development? Given the track record, I am sceptical.

To me, COP29, COP30, and the upcoming COP31 are all "hogwash". Even the preparation for these grand conferences leaves behind a heavy carbon footprint, harming the very environment they claim to protect. The greatest tragedy in all this is "climate injustice". Nepal's carbon emissions are minuscule, less than 0.1% of the global total, compared with China's 30%, the USA's 12%, and India's 7%. Yet Nepal has received the harshest "blows of environmental fallout". The irony is painful. Those who pollute the most barely feel the heat. Those who pollute the least are left to suffer the worst. Is this not "cruel imbalance," where the innocent pay the price for the reckless capitalist countries?

How I wish COP31 would have the courage this time to book the largest emitters.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

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

"Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."
— George Washington Carver

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Judiciary On The Defensive

THE judicial system in the country is passing through curious and critical times. On the one hand, cases are dragging in courts for decades, making it a harrowing tale for litigants to seek and get justice. The justice dispensation system is bearing a series of hard shocks, the latest being the instance of a Supreme Court judge, Justice Sandeep Mehta, leveling a series of improprieties, corruption and misgovernance charges against acting chief justice of Rajasthan high court, Justice Sanjeev Prakash Sharma.

This is no small matter. Lawyers at the high court have launched a protest seeking the exit of Sharma; and, unable to face the heat, Sharma went on leave till September 5. He is due to retire in another 20 days' time, carrying with him the slur that he has earned at the fag end of his career. It was just a while ago that another high court judge ended up in a shameful scenario when bundles of unaccounted currency notes caught fire in his outhouse. The Modi government and the Law ministry took a casual view of the matter; and not even a proper police investigation could be conducted into the source of the palpably corrupt currency stocks. Several other cases of improprieties and corruption in the judicial system have cropped up in recent years, but these cases were not followed up with the seriousness they deserved. This is one reason, but by no means the only reason, why the judiciary—the last hope of the people in ensuring a fair deal to them – keeps landing in more and more embarrassing situations.

The way cases remain pending for many years is a huge issue in itself. As per official statements, over five crore cases are pending in various courts from the Supreme Court to lower courts. The scenario continued to worsen over the years, with the UPA and NDA governments doing precious little to change the scene for the better. Rather, the scenario is steadily worsening right under the nose of the central government -- a reflection of the incompetence of those who govern the nation at its apex. Justice delayed is justice denied. Hardly ten per cent of the 1.40 billion population can afford to keep fighting a case for decades. The rest of the people and their cases get caught in a vicious circle, starting with an investigation process that drags on for years, then passing through local, district, and high courts, with many cases even reaching the apex court for the final verdict. Judicial reforms are the way forward but the government lacks the courage and other attributes to do this. The government appears to be succumbing to the judiciary's whims, as seen when the Supreme Court vetoed a law introduced by the Manmohan Singh government to establish a judicial appointments commission to select the best candidates for judicial posts. The government should also have introduced systems to reduce the pendency of cases. The NDA government that makes big claims about infrastructure development is found wanting in most other sectors of governance.

The VPP, Khasi nationalism and the Hindutva Challenge

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The last few months have not gone well for the VPP, at least in terms of how it is being perceived among a large section of the Khasi community. While 'clean governance' was the official slogan of the party during the election campaign, it was 'jaidbynriew politics', or Khasi nationalism that won them the four seats, with close contests in some others as well. After the election, they took up the issue of the reservation policy, which played a big role in their Lok Sabha success. Soon after, they took control of the KHADC and became the main opposition in the JHADC. So, it appeared that the party was well in ascendancy and on the course to becoming the most important regional party in the Khasi region. However, the unexpected demise of Ricky Syngkon and its subsequent political decisions have soured feelings towards the party.

To begin with, their reluctance to take part in the discussion on the Reservation Policy report, which was the outcome of their protest, was a big blow to their image. Why not challenge the report and reveal the legal and constitutional flaws to the public? This is because the reality is that the Constitution does not provide for reservation based on population. This can only change if the Congress wins the next general election and Rahul Gandhi follows up on his promise to amend the Constitution to make reservation based on population. The problem, however, is that Meghalaya's next Assembly election is in 2028, while India's next general election is in 2029. So, even if the Constitution is changed to provide reservation based on population, the VPP will not be able to use it for the upcoming Assembly election.

Then there is the issue with the Hima, where the VPP-led KHADC has come into conflict with Hima Sohra and Hima Mylliem for differing reasons that share a commonality. In both cases, there is a perception that the KHADC is trying to change the tradition in these two Hima, which necessitates that the position of Syiem in the Hima must always be occupied by a Khasi of indigenous faith. If they succeed in these two Himas, they will then turn their attention to Hima Khyrim, which also has the same tradition. It appears that the KHADC would like to change this to make it possible for Christians to become Syiem in these three Hima.

The problem is that any attempt by the KHADC to alter these customary norms could face a serious legal challenge. The 2006 Supreme Court judgment in Ewanlangki-E-Rymbai vs Jaintia Hills District Council, upheld the exclusion of Christians from contesting for the traditional office of Dolloi in Elaka Jowai on the grounds that the customary practices, including the religious functions, associated with the position were integral to the preservation of tribal culture. Although the judgment concerned the office of Dolloi in Elaka Jowai, its recognition of the constitutional significance of customary practices of traditional tribal offices, like those of the Syiem in these three Himas, could make any attempt to alter similar customary qualifications legally contentious. Any attempt to change customary practices will face a legal challenge and confirm people's perception that, similar to the reservation issue, the party is clueless about constitutional provisions and the law.

Then there is the issue with the Hima, where the VPP-led KHADC has come into conflict with Hima Sohra and Hima Mylliem for differing reasons that share a commonality. In both cases, there is a perception that the KHADC is trying to change the tradition in these two Hima, which necessitates that the position of Syiem in the Hima must always be occupied by a Khasi of indigenous faith.

Then there is the latest issue: the deletion of Section 16 from the 2021 Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Regulation and Administration of Land) Act, which strips away the rights of traditional institutions like the Dorbar Shnong, Dorbar Raid, and Dorbar Hima in terms of land governance. The attempt by VPP president Ardent Basaiawmoit to defend the party against criticism from Conrad Sangma, the Chief Minister of the state, by claiming that the move was necessitated by the failure of traditional heads to come forward for discussion reeks of impatience and arrogance. What is most revealing is that while the KHADC has taken away the rights of the traditional institutions to determine land ceilings, it has nevertheless exempted the Union government, the state government, and itself from the provision. This has strengthened the critics' claim that the deletion of the consultation provision amounts to a land grab.

So, looking at the events of the last few months suggests that the VPP has been under immense pressure. They tried to relieve some of the pressure by organizing a rally to put forward their eight points of demand. The rally did not create much impact, and it appeared that the party was facing a slow decline. However, the news that multiple MLAs from the UDP and TMC might be joining the BJP will come as a blessing in disguise. This has the potential not only to revive the party's declining appeal but also to strengthen it and help it become a serious contender in the 2028 Meghalaya Assembly election.

The VPP has always claimed that the other political parties have failed the people because of corruption and dishonesty. It has also championed itself as the protector of the Khasi community, which will never betray the cause of Khasi nationalism. With the horse-trading that now appears likely to take place, their allegations will have been proven true. This will most certainly signal the demise of the UDP as a regional force, leaving a vacuum that will be filled by the VPP.

The violence that occurred on August 19 has been widely condemned, with many blaming the KSU. However, a video by a local news channel also revealed that the organisation still retains considerable support among the rural population, largely because of its advocacy of Khasi nationalism. This also includes many who belong to the indigenous faith. The KSU still has very strong support among educated urban dwellers, and despite the incident, it will continue to be relevant. There are more voices of public dissent but the increasing influence of the Hindutva agenda will only make groups like the KSU and others even more powerful. This is because, in the absence of an alternative rooted in left-based politics in the state, Khasi nationalism will remain the only bulwark against assimilation and marginalization.

The most recent example of more aggressive Hindutva politics is the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, which opponents criticize as potentially threatening minority institutions, including Christian organisations, because of its provisions concerning assets acquired through foreign contributions. Even senior BJP leader AL Hek has raised concerns about aspects of the FCRA regime and sought an exemption. Due to pressure from the opposition parties, the Bill was deferred during this Monsoon session, but it is certain that it will be introduced again. Recently, in Arunachal Pradesh, Christians protested against the enforcement of a decades-old anti-conversion act. There have been rallies organized by Hindutva groups demanding the removal of benefits to those tribals who have converted to Christianity, while conveniently ignoring similar conversions to Hinduism. And with the recent CJP protests adding to the political pressures facing the BJP-led Union Government, there is a strong possibility that the party will double down on its Hindutva politics. But in this age of social media, every reported incident of a Christian being tied to a tree and beaten for celebrating Christmas, every attack on a church, or every instance of a Christian religious gathering being harassed will be widely shared among the people. The assertion that indigenous peoples, such as Adivasis and tribal communities like the Khasis in the Northeast, are merely part of a broader Hindu identity – a position articulated by RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat during his 2022 visit to Shillong – will also not necessarily persuade all indigenous-faith Khasis to unite against their own 'blood'. It will, instead, only make 'jaidbynriew politics' even more potent.

The VPP is trying its own version of Hindutva politics by attempting to consolidate the Khasis under the banner of 'Khasi Christian Zionism'. But not all Khasis are Christians, not all Khasi Christians are Zionists, and not all Khasi Christian Zionists are opposed to traditional institutions. Such an attempt will only weaken Khasi nationalism by creating fissures within the community, which Hindutva forces will certainly exploit. So, the important question is: will the VPP give up on its project and instead embrace a more inclusive form of Khasi nationalism? At least in the near future, until another regional party arrives on the scene claiming that those before it have betrayed the cause of the 'jaidbynriew', the VPP's actions will determine what happens to Khasi nationalism at the electoral level. Khasi nationalism will survive in the long run, with or without the VPP. But if the party wants to remain relevant as the strongest advocate of this cause, it cannot afford to make any more mistakes.

(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)

Bob's Banter

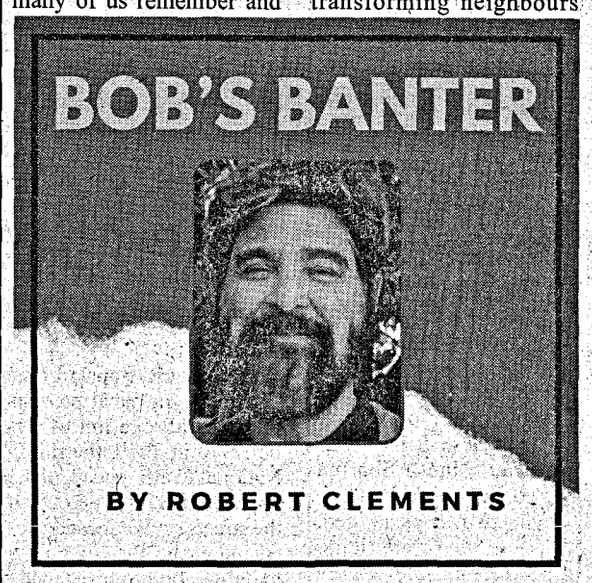
By Robert Clements

New York and the RSS Chief...!

I am in New York at the moment, and so is RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat. Now, New York is accustomed to visitors arriving with all kinds of luggage. Some bring clothes, some bring business proposals, some bring political ambitions, and some bring speeches carefully packed for an international audience.

Mr Bhagwat appears to have brought a particularly beautiful speech. Standing before an American audience, he spoke eloquently about unity through diversity. Different religions, he declared, might follow different paths, but humanity remained one. Diversity, he said, must be accepted, respected and preserved. He even added that while protecting our own identity, we must protect the identity of others.

I looked around carefully. Had I entered the wrong hall? Was I really in New York, or had I accidentally wandered into the India many of us remember and



desperately want back?

Perhaps, I thought, Mr Bhagwat had packed that India into his suitcase. Perhaps American immigration officials had opened his luggage, examined the contents and said, "Unity, respect, acceptance and religious freedom? Wonderful, sir. You may bring all of that in."

His words were magnificent. They sounded noble, generous and deeply spiritual. They described an India in which every faith had room to breathe, every citizen had space to belong, and every human being could approach God without first obtaining permission from a politician.

But one troubling question kept disturbing my admiration. Were those words meant only for export? Years ago, in an interview with one of America's largest Christian magazines, I explained that the Hinduism I had encountered went far beyond mere tolerance.

Tolerance says, "I disagree with you, but I shall somehow put up with your unfortunate presence."

Acceptance says, "You have your path to God, and I have mine. Let us walk together as friends. If one of us stumbles, the other will help."

That was the India I knew. I sent both my daughters to schools where most of their classmates belonged to other faiths. I wanted them to grow up knowing India, not merely one small religious corner of it. Today, both are deep believers in Christ, and many of their closest friends are not Christians.

Their faith was not weakened by friendship. It was strengthened by learning respect. The same is true of my life. Nearly ninety percent of my closest friends are not Christians.

We have eaten together, laughed together, argued together and stood beside one another during illness, grief, celebration and crisis. Occasionally we have even discussed religion without calling the police.

That may sound revolutionary today, but once upon a time it was simply called friendship. Then a group of politicians discovered something rather unfortunate. Friendship does not produce enough votes. Division does.

A happy neighbour is politically useless. But a frightened neighbour is electoral treasure. Convince him that the family next door is dangerous, and he may stop asking why the road is broken, why prices are rising, why jobs are disappearing and why the hospital has no doctor.

Suddenly religion became an election agent. Faith was issued a party membership card. God was placed on campaign duty, and hatred was appointed chief strategist.

The Almighty, who had managed the universe quite successfully for several billion years, was apparently informed that He now required political assistance.

Listening to Mr Bhagwat in New York, I realised something important. Hinduism is not the problem. Christianity is not the problem. Islam is not the problem. Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism are not the problem.

The problem is political religion. It is a synthetic faith manufactured in secret laboratories where devotion is mixed with fear, worship with suspicion and God with electoral arithmetic. Its holy book is the voter list. Its prayer meeting is the political rally. Its miracle is transforming neighbours into enemies overnight.

This political religion has no interest in bringing people closer to God. It merely wants to bring voters closer to the polling booth. Mr Bhagwat also said that politics had become a game of self-interest. Wonderful!

But please say it again in India, sir. Say it loudly where minorities are frightened. Say it where worship is viewed suspiciously, where prayer meetings are interrupted, and where ordinary friendships are examined as though affection itself were a criminal conspiracy.

Say it before leaders who enlarge their chests while shrinking the hearts of their followers.

Tell them that protecting one identity does not require destroying another. Tell them that loving one religion does not demand hatred for another. Tell them India is not strengthened when an Indian begins to fear another Indian.

And please do not whisper it at a private gathering. Do not hide it inside a philosophical lecture where those who need to hear it can pretend they missed the meaning. Stand before the cameras and repeat every word you said in New York.

Tell those who divide India in the name of Hinduism that they are not defending Hinduism. They are insulting its vastness. A faith that has survived thousands of years does not need protection from a Christian neighbour, a Muslim shopkeeper or a schoolchild saying a prayer. I shall soon return from New York. Please return too, Mr Bhagwat. When you do, bring that magnificent speech with you. Do not leave it behind at the airport with the duty free chocolates and American souvenirs. Gather those who have turned religion into an election weapon. Gather those who manufacture fear, question loyalties and divide citizens. Then deliver your New York sermon once again. Only this time, speak in India. Speak until every frightened minority hears you. Speak until every arrogant leader understands you. Speak until acceptance becomes Indian again. Because unity sounds splendid in New York. But India desperately needs to hear it at home...!

(Do you want to author a book? Under the guidance of Robert Clements? Send a thumbsup to whatsapp no 9892572883 for details. or a message to bobsbanter@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

PA Sangma: A Son of the Hills Who Shone on the National Stage

Editor,

September 1 marked the birth anniversary of Purno Agitok Sangma, one of the most remarkable political figures to emerge from India's Northeast. Born in 1947 in Chapahati, West Garo Hills, Sangma rose from a childhood of abject poverty to become a lawyer, journalist, parliamentarian, Union minister and, eventually, Speaker of the Lok Sabha. His journey was extraordinary not merely because of how far he travelled, but because of how firmly he remained rooted in the soil from which he sprang. Educated at St Anthony's College and Dibrugarh University, he also mastered Assamese and became a compelling voice for the aspirations of the Northeast in the national politics.

His early parliamentary interventions revealed both courage, humour and wit. During the debate on the Tyagi Bill, which sought to regulate religious conversions, Sangma challenged the very assumptions underlying the legislation, asking pointedly how "inducement" could be defined when education and the teaching of English could themselves transform lives. His own life was testimony to that transformative power: a Jesuit priest, Father Giovanni Battista Busolini, had helped lift him from cattle-herding to education.

Yet Sangma's politics never strayed from his tribal roots and his genuine connection with the people is a textbook example of how leaders from Northeast India have struggled to claim their place in the heart of Indian democracy. He repeatedly reminded the nation that the British had historically treated tribal areas as "Excluded" and "Partially Excluded" territories and had never administered them.

Purno Sangma rose from the margins to the heart of Indian democracy and, like the sun over the hills of Meghalaya, he burned brightly without forgetting where he had risen.

We can only hope that Sangma's unfinished dream of a stronger, more united political voice for the tribal peoples of the Northeast, with meaningful representation in the Lok Sabha, will one day be realised through his progeny and those who inherit his political legacy.

Yours etc.,
Shahin Yusuf,
Guwahati

Lessons From the Nepal Tragedy

Editor,

The story of Rajendra Dawadi, Principal of Tribhuvan Trishuli Secondary School in Nuwakot, Nepal, deserves our attention--not only because he saved 1,643 children, but because it reminds us how much can depend on one person's courage and presence of mind in a moment of crisis. When news reached him that a devastating flood was moving towards the area on 26 August, he did not wait to see what would happen. He immediately ordered the school to be evacuated and sent the children towards higher ground. He stayed behind to make sure that no child was left behind. Within minutes, the flood swept through the school and carried away the building where the children had been studying. But the 1,643 students were already out of harm's way. It is difficult to imagine what those few minutes must have been like. For the children, there was fear and confusion. For the principal, there was a decision to make--and there was no time to make a mistake. His decision saved 1,643 young lives.

His courage and presence of mind are now widely appreciated. What touches me most, however, is his humility. After doing something extraordinary, he is said to have simply asked, in effect, what else he could have done at that moment. That is the spirit of a true teacher.

But the tragedy in Nepal should not remain only a story of courage. For Meghalaya and the other hill states of Northeast India, it should also be a warning. We live in a beautiful but fragile landscape. Meghalaya experiences intense rainfall, landslides and flash floods. It is also situated in a highly earthquake-prone and seismically active region. Rapid construction, cutting of hill slopes, blocked drainage channels and development in vulnerable areas can make the consequences of natural hazards far worse.

The Nepal disaster also reminds us that the mountain environment is changing. Rising temperatures, melting ice and other changes in high-altitude ecosystems may increase the risk of certain landslides, debris flows and sudden floods. We may not face exactly the same hazards as the high Himalayas, but we cannot afford to ignore what is happening around us.

What, then, should we do? We need better monitoring of rainfall, rivers, unstable slopes and earthquakes, but technology alone is not enough. Warnings must reach the people who are actually in danger--and reach them in time. Schools, villages and communities in vulnerable areas should know where to go, whom to contact and which routes are safe when an emergency occurs.

We also need to think more carefully about how we build in our hills. Development is necessary, but it should not come at the cost of ignoring the character of the land. Hazard maps and scientific assessments should be taken seriously before roads, buildings and other major infrastructure are planned.

Most importantly, disaster management cannot begin only after disaster strikes. Government departments, district administrations, scientists, schools and local communities must work together beforehand.

The Nepal tragedy has shown us both sides of disaster preparedness: the terrible consequences of a sudden natural event, and the extraordinary difference that a timely decision can make. Rajendra Dawadi saved 1,643 children because he acted when there was still time. Meghalaya should learn that lesson now—not after we are confronted with our own tragedy.

Preparedness is our collective responsibility. And in our hills, it may one day be the difference between a warning and a tragedy.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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"Education is the key to unlock the golden door of freedom."
— George Washington Carver

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Follies of Opposition

THERE'S nothing yet to show that the standing of the ruling BJP at the Centre, the NDA or Prime Minister Narendra Modi has fallen in any significant way. The NDA is in power in 20 out of 28 states and two out of five UTs. Yet, perceptions suggest the ruling alliance, principally the BJP and the PM, will likely face a strong anti-incumbency factor at the 2029 hustings because of their long tenure ruling the nation. An anti-incumbency mood is evident when people lose interest in a government. This was slightly evident in the 2024 polls itself when the Prime Minister failed to muster a majority for the NDA and had to take in two more parties from outside of it to run his third consecutive term. Yet, the opposition is failing to build both trust and muscle midway through Modi's third term. Rather, some signals coming from it are disappointing to those who favour a change of government in Delhi.

For one, consider the chatter about INDIA bloc's PM aspirations. On one side, there's talk about Congress leader Rahul Gandhi having an image makeover recently, as he seized an opportunity arising from the student offensive against the government regarding the NEET fiasco and followed this up with a police station sit-in to seek and ensure justice for a victim of police highhandedness during the agitation. He did well as Opposition Leader and managed to bend the will of the government, which the newly formed Cockroach Janata Party could alone not have accomplished. Curiously, at this decisive phase, there's chatter in the opposition bloc also as to who would be their future prime minister – meaning Rahul Gandhi alone should not be projected as the PM choice of the opposition. A name that strongly cropped up in this respect was that of Tamil Nadu chief minister actor Vijay Thalapatty, who rode to victory by launching a new party, the Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam, on the state's political landscape in the recent assembly polls. He has been chief minister for just a few months, and has taken some popular steps in governance too. Yet, he's a novice in politics and governance. He's yet to build a national aura. *Projecting him as PM material at this juncture is* premature.

Such talks will not take the INDIA bloc anywhere other than demonstrating its internal weakness. The regional parties and the satraps leading them often demonstrated such shameless proclivities, through the likes of Mamata Banerjee and Nitish Kumar who undercut opposition unity in the past. Banerji is a tame figure now and Kumar is also in a struggle for survival. This is rather the time for the opposition to stand united and present before the people a credible alternative to the NDA and Narendra Modi. Opposition alliances have often let the nation down with their internal squabbles. Out of this sense of disappointment had sprung up a strong political force like the BJP sprang up to take on the traditional ruling entity, the Congress. It's time the opposition puts its house in order and speaks in one voice.

Governance Overdose

By Toki Blah

In a world plagued by drug addiction, the word "overdose" has more or less become a common enough word that needs no explanation. Excessive or immoderate usage of anything from the food we eat; to the amount of drinking we indulge in, is bad. This norm holds good as well for the amount of governance administered to any society or community. Having said that, one is therefore appalled by the overload of governance and governing systems plying, strata upon strata, over the citizens of Meghalaya. Never really got to counting them but suddenly realised that we have layers upon layers of these governing institutions, each one of them professing as the other, that they are an absolute necessity for the continued Tribal identity of the state; cultural health of its people and the general welfare of its public institutions. It starts from the Village Dorbar and the Rangbah Shnong, that busy individual tasked with almost everything, from ensuring that street lights are working; certifying my status as dead or alive or whether I am a non-documented immigrant or a genuine resident under his tutelage.

Then there is the Raid and Hima at Syiemship level, curious establishments that baffle one and all of their continued utility and contribution within the context of 21st century administration. Next is the ADC or (Autonomous District Council) level, where my identity as a Tribal; my cultural sensitivity to my matrilineal lineage and my loyalty to my clan and tribe , is put to-the-test and measured to be either ticked with a positive "Yes" or a dismissive gut - wrenching "No"! We next jump from there to the various departments of the state Government right from the DC's Office upto the CM's Office. Everyone has to run this gauntlet of governance some time or the other. None are spared. Gullible characters like me sincerely believe that this is where the "Buck Stops". But hold it right there! Hang on! A question arises. Does it really?

Lest we forget, the supreme institution in the state mandated with the task of delivering Good Governance , labelled with that most honourable title of them all, a name worthy of everyone's respect, is the State Legislative Assembly! This body is composed of 60 persons called MLAs, each chosen and elected, from a chunk of inhabited territory called a Constituency by sections of the public called the Electorate. MLAs are held in high esteem and much is expected of them. This perceived respect emerges from the fact that most of us believe that elections; the ability to peacefully conduct the same; tagged with the ability to form a Government are the be-all and end-all of Democracy. We sadly forget we are speaking of institutions by mortals; of mortals; and for mortals and find out, perhaps to our considerable dismay, that the institutions we speak of are quite capable of developing leaks. Massive, humongous financial leaks!

I hasten to clarify that the above does not in the least mean any impudent discourtesy to the August House. On the contrary it is with a certain amount of proud expectation that we , the electorate, attend the call of the polling booth for every Election. We come out voting for the supposedly crème-de-la-crème leaders of society. The expectation is for the birth of an honourable and revered human institutional edifice, called The Government , which is capable of delivering the type of good governance that we all thirst for. Apparently, we have all along, been dialing the wrong number! That topmost layer of the Governance structure we call the Government seldom performs as expected. One election after another for the last 54 years and we have simply managed to produce a surfeit of gasbags. God have mercy on our wretched souls, but the bitter truth is our political leaders have sadly lost their sublime cloak of respectability long time passing. Long time ago!

We turn back to that tier of Governance that the people of Meghalaya expect better Governance from. Yes, I am speaking about the three Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). ADCs are expected to (a) Safeguard Tribal identity and autonomy (b) Facilitate tribal self-rule, (c) Serve as a model of decentralization, stronger than Panchayati Raj institutions. Truth be told, our ADCs have always remained more loyal to the 6th Schedule than to the Constitution itself! ADC interpretation of the 6th Schedule has always conveyed the impression that custom, tradition, ritual and heritage are permanent, immutable aspects of Tribal life. If the Indian Constitution is flexible , set – in – stone rigidity is the watchword for the execution of its 6th Schedule. This has resulted in ADCs identifying Change as dangerous which must be resisted. In a World , where Change and Development are the only constants , resisting evolution can only result in chaotic stagnation. Is it therefore not at all surprising that for all the red-tape- ism that ADCs adhere by, the end product of all ADC Governance efforts has always been limited to that coveted paper chit known as an NOC (No Objection Certificate)! Big Deal!

As noted above Meghalaya's tryst with Constitutional bodies, such as the State Govt and the ADCs for implementing Good Governance, has not produced the desired results. The outcomes have been disappointing because of one single fact – the people just don't have confidence in either of the two! Don't ask me why, but the fact is, at the base of Meghalaya's Governance pyramid, the hum and bustle of everyday grassroot governance is carried out by traditionally elected local bodies. Yes I speak of the local Dorbar Shnongs of the Khasi and Jaintias as well as the Song of the Achiks – institutions of local self-government. Efficacious systems of village administration handed down from antiquity by our forefathers. Surprisingly these time-tested community structures at the village level, accepted as reliable and dependable by the communities they serve are yet to receive official legal recognition. Strangely they don't even find mention in the 6th Schedule. Why this official stepmotherly treatment for our traditional grassroot institutions, despite the 73rd amendment, is yet to be explained but there is a sneaking suspicion that the Dorbars themselves fight shy of being empowered. They withdraw with coy embarrassment from attempts to make them better, modern, proactive 21st-century grassroot institutions.

I think that there is an urgent need to examine and analyse a Meghalaya Tribal's dual vision of the two governing institutions, one Constitutional the other Traditional, that cover his Governance needs. He tenders unstinting loyalty and obedience to his grassroot governing system ; i.e., the traditional Village Dorbar. In the same breath, however, is this apathy and I-wouldn't-care-less attitude to a Govt he himself had voted for and elected. Both are elected bodies. Both are essentially democratic in character. One we trust. The other we are skeptical of. This socio-political dichotomy prevailing in these hills is something important to understand for they shape the power dynamics, cultural identity, and everyday interactions of Governance within Meghalaya. As a citizen when I reach out to Govt for assistance and help, I find I have to wade through a paraphernalia of rules, laws and regulations. All of them unintelligible , intimidating and totally alienating . I try to reason out why and am given to understand that in its attempt to assist, Govt is immensely cautious that my Rights as an individual are protected and not trifled with. Protecting my individual Rights is a Constitutional directive. Education teaches me that my Rights are imperative and unnegotiable. My Tribal upbringing, tradition and social affiliations whisper otherwise.

Growing up as a Tribal in a well-knit traditional governing structure called a Shnong , exposes one to many and varied concepts of social bonding and lasting interpersonal relationships through shared experiences, trust, and communication, with relatives, neighbours and friends. It begins from childhood and lasts a lifetime. We learn early in life that the unity and welfare of the entire community (read Shnong) outweighs the personal interest of the individual. It is quite a common sight to see eminent citizens, docilely submit and subject themselves to the collective decision of the Shnong at the expense of their individual Rights. Governance and administration within a Shnong is therefore determined and driven by the overall common good of the community. Dorbar governance and administration is based on the principle that the Interest of the Shnong supersedes the Rights of the individual! Accept it or not it is there; it is practiced in our Tribal communities and it is not likely to go away soon. People have a sense of ownership over the Dorbar Shnong. They feel they own it. It is theirs. Whereas the perception on Govt is that it is temporarily owned by some political party, perhaps even one they are utterly opposed to. It is not theirs. OK, ok we do seem to have a social paradox; a legal anomaly and a constitutional contradiction in our hands. It exists but with a wee bit of a wink we seem to have learnt how to live with it.

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Lessons From the Nepal Tragedy

By Barnes Mawrie SDB

Probably every person in the world has watched with horror the terrible flash floods that took Nepal by surprise on 26th August at around 9:00 am. Perhaps over a thousand people died in this natural disaster and hundreds of houses were destroyed and villages buried under the mud.

We all sympathize with the people of Nepal and with all the families of those who lost their loved ones in this tragedy. Watching this tragedy online was like watching a disaster movie like 2012 or The Day after Tomorrow. It seems so unrealistic like a movie technology or an AI creation, yet unfortunately it was a ground reality.

Reality check has shown that this disaster was caused by a glacial collapse in the Himalayas in the Tibetan region. It is said that a glacier as large as 18 football fields crumbled due to climate change, causing the immense volume of water and ice to race down the valleys and swallow everything in its way. Many foreign tourists and pilgrims also lost their lives in this tragic event.

In the midst of this immense tragedy, sad to say that a country like China blames the disaster entirely on poor Nepal. China has refused to own the cause of this tragedy although scientific analysis shows that the glacial collapse happened in their territory. No one can deny that this natural disaster is man-made to a great extent. It has been caused by climate change as we all know. Irresponsible human behavior has led to an unstoppable rise in temperature which consequently warms the planet. This warming process also affects the snow-capped mountains of the Himalayas. This phenomenon weakens the glaciers which gradually melt at the bases and then collapse into the valleys causing havoc like the one we just witnessed in Nepal. Such a disaster also happened in Switzerland a few years ago but no one died there because of their high-tech warning systems.

What I would like to draw the attention of all readers to is the fact that all of us are responsible for such natural disasters, whether in Nepal or elsewhere. We all know that the Earth is an organism, so what happens in any part of it affects the whole. Of course China is largely to blame, but all people in the world including us in Northeast India, are to blame for this, as we all contribute to global temperature rise and climate change.

Therefore, as we sympathize with the people of Nepal, we should beat our chest and say "mea culpa" because we are indirectly culpable for this tragedy. According to climatologists Northeast India will not be spared from similar natural calamities. Who knows if one day such a flash flood will sweep downstream the Brahmaputra and bring havoc to Assam. With the dwindling Monsoons that we are experiencing year after year, it is predicted that our region will soon run short of groundwater, and then we will face water shortage and drought on an unimaginable scale.

However, we do not seem to have learnt a lesson from such events all around the world for we continue to destroy our own habitat. Late Pope Francis used to say, "When you strike mother nature, she will strike you back." This is what we witness from time to time, even in our own region. Because we have depleted the green cover in the name of development, we have also seen a shortage of rain and an increasing temperature. Who can deny that even Shillong is becoming hotter every year?

The manner in which our people are mining the earth for coal, limestone, stone, or sand spells doom for our region. These activities destroy groundwater, and our survival itself is threatened. Look at New Shillong area: how barren it has become. Trees are being felled indiscriminately, hills are being levelled, streams are being polluted and made unusable and water bodies are being encroached upon by urbanization. These are a perfect recipe for disaster and tragedy. Concrete forests are on the rise while natural forests are fast disappearing.

We have become great contributors to the global natural disaster rather than reducing it. Will it take a hundred more Nepal-like disasters for us to learn a hard lesson? When will we stop destroying the very ground on which we live? Every tree that we cut down, every water body that we destroy, is a slow process that leads to our own extermination.

This generation is selfish because it thinks only of its own existence without consideration for the coming generations. What sort of country will our posterity inherit from us? Is it going to be a desert, a fallow land, a country where trees are gone and rivers are dead? Brothers and sisters, it is time to wake up from our sleep before we wake up to a nightmare. Let us save our planet, let us save our children.

(The writer is author of The Khasis and their Natural Environment)

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Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya Sounds Alarm Over Growing Ecological Damage

Editor,

Salil Gewali's poignant letter, "Glaciers Weep at Our Reckless Consumerism" (ST September 2, 2026), reminds us that the Bhotekoshi tragedy in Nepal was not merely a freak act of nature, but a warning written in ice and mud about the price of unchecked consumption. He is right to ask whether the world's biggest emitters are truly listening to the "roar of alarm" from the Himalaya. But even as we look outward at Tibet's dam-building and the world's chase for bigger cars, we in Meghalaya must also look inward — at our own hills.

We are blessed with rain, rivers, and rolling green slopes. Yet today, too many hills are being cut, too many trees felled, and too many springs silenced. What we call "development" often leaves behind scars that our land cannot heal easily.

As our elders say, "Ban Ri ia ka Khyndew ka Shyiap" — to nurture the soil is to nurture life itself. When we strip the slopes bare, monsoon rains turn into landslides. When we cut the forests, the ums (springs) dry up. And when sacred groves —" Law Kyntang" — vanish, so too does a part of our identity.

The truth is simple: "Thung ka wei, Shon ka wei" — what we sow today, we reap tomorrow. Reckless hill-cutting today means water scarcity tomorrow. Short-term gains from unchecked tourism and construction mean the long-term loss of the very beauty that draws people here in the first place. If a glacial collapse thousands of kilometres away in Nepal can unleash such devastation downstream, we should not need convincing that a denuded hillside above Shillong, soaked by our own record-breaking monsoon, carries the very same warning closer to home.

But there is another path. Integrated farming, terraced slopes, broom grass cultivation, and vermicomposting all show that livelihoods and conservation can go hand in hand. Protecting our forests at the hilltops secures water, soil, and future income at once — it is not a choice between development and ecology, but the only kind of development that will last.

Youth of Meghalaya, this is your call. To act with 'Kren Tip Blei, Tip Briew"— respect for God and humanity — is to protect the land that sustains us. Through music, art, digital storytelling, and community action, you can remind everyone that "U Dieng, u Bsei, ka Um, ka Wah" — tree, soil, water, and river are one and the same life.

Mr Gewali ends by saying humanity must make peace with ecology, not with reckless consumerism. Let that peace begin at home. Let us not sell our hills for concrete dreams. Let us guard them as living heritage — for if we lose them, we lose ourselves.

Awaken your mind. Protect your land. Shape your future.

Yours etc.,
Jethro G BC
Ghimire House, Dehradun

MCA Players Refuse to Be Silenced

Editor,

We firstly thank your esteemed daily for publishing our earlier letter on Sept 1, 2026, regarding the environment of threat and coercion faced by players of Meghalaya cricket at the hands of certain Meghalaya Cricket Association officials. That letter appears to have found its mark, for it did not take long for the very officials named in it, namely suspended MCA/Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni and Shillong Cricket Association President Peter Macdonald Kharsawian, to renew their pressure tactics against us. This was expected.

No sooner had our letter appeared than these officials once again reached out to us. This time, they demanded that we appear at a press conference on Tuesday, September 2, to publicly declare before the media that our letter to the editor was false.

We were further pressed to state that we had signed the letter of our own free will and not under coercion, failing which, we were warned once again, our cricketing careers would be finished. To their evident dismay, the majority of players refused to attend this press conference. Only a handful could be persuaded, or pressured, to appear before the media on their behalf. Even now, these officials continue to reach out to the rest of us, seeking to threaten and cajole us into vouching for them.

We wish to state, clearly and without ambiguity, that we stand by every word of our earlier letter. The matter is now in the open, and we shall not be intimidated into retracting the truth. The duo for too long now have perpetuated this environment of terror and threat in the MCA and SCA. It is for the public and the cricketing fraternity of Meghalaya to judge how Messrs Kharsawian and Kharkamni have sought to mislead the press and the public through these very tactics of coercion that our letter first brought to light.

The truth will no longer be hidden behind threats. We once again thank The *Shillong Times* for giving voice to players who have for too long been silenced. The cricketers of Meghalaya shall not be silenced any further.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Integrity and Professionalism

Editor,

The recent physical assault of innocent people on the road and the arson perpetrated by the student union during the bike rally in Shillong is a reminder that it is not done yet and shall return in the future with more vigour. The perpetual hate against some people is nothing new and seems to be growing stronger with time. Unable to reach the pedestal of growth and prosperity themselves, violence appears to be the best available option to take revenge.

The district civil and police administration must be congratulated for being unable to control and stop the violence. Almost no police patrol is seen on normal days in the city and so was on the day of violence. Most police personnel are attached with the security of the state VIPs with a bare minimum to spare for the public. The top district officials unable to responsibly and professionally discharge their duties for the security of the public should have been suspended by the government. Receiving the tag of IAS and IPS does not naturally make somebody professional and sensitive to administrative matters.

Yours etc.,
Dr. H S Ranhotra
Shillong

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"A crown is merely a hat that lets the rain in."

— **Frederick the Great**

The Shillong Times

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Resistance to MBOSE Calendar

Several parents of students in Class 10 who will be writing their final Senior School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Examination under the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE)are agitated by the announcement that this year the final exams will be held in the month of December. This resistance stems from the fact that this change affects the entire rhythm of the school year. Meghalaya includes many rural schools, not just Shillong, Jowai and Tura, which lack the academic resources of urban schools. The pace of learning is also different, and teachers often struggle to complete the syllabus. The Government's main argument for a December examination is to align the academic cycle with the calendar year. However, when the proposal was previously discussed, school associations, parents and MBOSE itself expressed reservations, leading to the 2026 examination being deferred to late January. But the Government still insisted that subsequent examinations should be held in December. It is learnt that some parents approached MBOSE and asked for rescheduling the SSLC exams to December because once the winter holidays arrive and with them the Christmas and other festivals, students tend to get into the festival mode and neglect their studies thereby leading to poor results. Most other parents, however, think differently. They feel that the winter holidays give students more time for revision and catching up with lessons they need to better understand.

But some critical points for the resistance is also that schools may not complete the syllabus in time and this remains the strongest objection from the side of school administrators and teachers. Many rural schools face teacher shortages, disruptions due to weather, poor connectivity and infrastructure, and other interruptions. If the examination is held in December, Class X students effectively lose several weeks of teaching and preparation compared with a February-March examination calendar. December examinations compress the academic year. Students who are already struggling academically may lose valuable time for revision, remedial classes and mock examinations which some schools conduct. Most schools have already restricted the co-curricular activities of Class 10 students on the plea that they need to only study and leave all other engagements. This is unfair to students who enjoy sports, arts, music etc. Besides, all schools don't have the same teaching conditions. Parents have also questioned the long gap between the completion of the MBOSE examination, the declaration of results and the beginning of the next academic calendar sometime in March the following year. Students have to wait several months before the higher-secondary admission calendar begins unless that too is changed.

Simply moving the SSLC examination to December while Class XI admissions, HSSLC examinations and other institutional calendars continue on their old schedule is not tenable. The reform must be system-wide. The timing of results, re-evaluation, supplementary examinations and Class XI admissions must be redesigned. MBOSE already has a supplementary examination system for SSLC candidates, so the new calendar must ensure that students who fail or need improvement are not left behind. What is uppermost in this debate is the lack of stakeholder consultation. Parents and teachers are most aggrieved by this. They feel the education system should adjust its calendar to the needs of learners, not expect learners to adjust to the convenience of the calendar.

A Backdoor in Shillong

By Tynshain K Lyngdoh

Something is clearly shifting in Meghalaya's political circles. By Saturday evening, talk had already spread across Shillong that as many as nine of the United Democratic Party's 12 MLAs were considering joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). There were also reports that another round of discussions could take place in New Delhi on Sunday, with BJP national president Nitin Nabin and Union Home Minister Amit Shah among the names mentioned. Interestingly, UDP president Metbah Lyngdoh, who is also the state Power Minister, quietly travelled to Delhi with some colleagues. When asked about the reports, he said he knew nothing about them. That gap between the party president's public denial and the very specific details circulating in political circles is what has made Shillong sit up and take notice. Twelve MLAs is not a small number, and nine of them would be a major political shift.

The numbers themselves tell the story. The UDP is the biggest regional partner in the NPP-led Meghalaya Democratic Alliance, which currently has 51 of the Assembly's 60 seats. The NPP alone has 33 seats, so the government would not fall even if nine UDP MLAs were to leave. But the balance within the ruling coalition could change dramatically. A party that currently has only two MLAs could suddenly become a much stronger force if nine UDP legislators joined it, while the UDP, a regional party that has represented Khasi and Jaintia political interests for decades, could be left badly weakened. And all this could happen just two years before the people of Meghalaya return to the poll That is what makes the reported move so significant. There may be no dramatic floor test or midnight coup. There may simply be meetings, resignations, paperwork and a group of MLAs crossing a legal threshold that changes the political balance of the state.

So why does the law allow it?

To understand this, we have to go back to 1985, when Parliament introduced the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, popularly known as the anti-defection law. It was meant to stop the old practice of "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" politics, when elected representatives frequently changed parties for political or personal advantage. The principle was straightforward. If voters elected you on one party's ticket, you should not be free to simply walk away from that party whenever it suited you. But the law also created an important exception. If two-thirds of the members of a legislature party agree to merge with another party, they can avoid disqualification. That is the provision everyone will be watching if the reports about the UDP prove to be true. The UDP has 12 MLAs, and two-thirds of 12 is eight. So, if nine were to move together, they would cross that threshold. One MLA changing sides can face disqualification, while a sufficiently large group can potentially move together without facing the same consequence. This raises a simple question. Does the anti-defection law really discourage defection, or does it encourage legislators to move in large groups? A provision created to prevent mass defections can, in certain circumstances, end up making mass defection legally possible.

But there is an even bigger question. What happens to the voter? Imagine a person voting in a UDP constituency. That voter may have supported the candidate personally, but the vote was also for the party, its policies, its regional character and the political promises made during the election. If the elected MLA changes political allegiance a year or two later, the voter does not get another opportunity to decide. The seat does not return to the people for a fresh election. Instead, the MLA simply takes the mandate to another political party. Of course, elected representatives are not prisoners of the parties on whose tickets they won. They can disagree with their leadership, change their political views and even conclude that another party can serve their constituents better. That is part of democratic politics. But there is a difference between one MLA changing allegiance and a large group of MLAs changing the political balance of an Assembly without asking the people who elected them. That is where the issue becomes uncomfortable. The voter may have chosen one political party, but the political reality after the election can be altered by the representatives themselves, without giving the electorate an opportunity to decide through a fresh election whether they still support that MLA under the new political banner.

There is also the question of who decides whether an MLA should be disqualified. Under the present system, such decisions generally rest with the Speaker of the Assembly. The difficulty is obvious: the Speaker is a political figure and normally comes from the ruling party. The Supreme Court examined this question in the Kihoto Hollohan case in 1992 and recognised the importance of judicial review in matters concerning disqualification. Another problem is the absence of a strict constitutional deadline for deciding defection petitions. We have seen cases in Karnataka, Maharashtra, Manipur and elsewhere where such matters remained pending for months or even years. By the time a decision finally comes, the political situation may have changed completely. The judgment may arrive, but politics does not wait. Once legislators have changed sides, governments have been formed and alliances have been reshaped, bringing a delayed decision often cannot restore the situation that existed when the complaint was first made.

Does the same law fit Meghalaya?

This question deserves particular attention in Meghalaya and the Northeast. Regional parties here are not simply smaller versions of national parties. They often represent local identities and regional aspirations and demands for greater autonomy. The UDP, whether one agrees with its politics or not, occupies a particular regional political space and has historically represented Khasi and Jaintia interests. The Constitution itself recognises that the Northeast has special circumstances, which is one reason the Sixth Schedule provides special protections for tribal areas. Yet the anti-defection law largely treats political movements in the same way across the country. An MLA moving from a regional party in Meghalaya to a national party is dealt with under the same broad constitutional framework as an MLA changing parties in a state such as Uttar Pradesh or Maharashtra. Perhaps it is time to ask whether this one-size-fits-all approach is adequate for the political realities of the Northeast, where regional parties often carry a meaning that goes beyond ordinary electoral competition.

This is also why the reports coming out of Shillong have caused concern beyond the question of which party gains or loses seats. The Northeast has repeatedly witnessed major political realignments in which parties that struggled to win large numbers of seats directly became powerful through the movement of elected legislators after elections. Arunachal Pradesh and Manipur have both seen such political shifts. That does not prove that the same thing is happening in Meghalaya, and we should be careful not to draw conclusions before anything is officially announced. But it does raise a legitimate democratic question.

The bigger question is even more disturbing: can a political party that has little or no presence in the Assembly enter through the backdoor and emerge as a major force in government simply by poaching legislators elected on another party's ticket? If the answer is yes, then what is the point of an election? A party that could not convince voters to give it enough seats at the ballot box could end up gaining power by poaching elected representatives after the election. That is not the mandate the people gave. The danger is that the ballot box becomes only the front door of democracy, while the real transfer of political power takes place through the backdoor. And when that happens, the people are not asked to vote again, not asked whether they approve of the new political arrangement, and not given an opportunity to renew or withdraw their mandate.

There is another concern that should not be ignored. The Northeast has a long tradition of regional political parties that give local aspirations a voice in state governments and in Delhi. When these parties lose their elected representatives to larger national parties, the change is not merely about the numbers in the Assembly. It also affects how strongly regional concerns are represented. At the same time, joining a national party is not, by itself, wrong. An MLA has every right to make a political choice within the law, and if an elected representative genuinely believes that another party can bring better development, more resources or greater attention to the constituency, that argument deserves to be heard. The BJP is certainly not the only party to have benefited from such political movements. Congress has done it, the Trinamool Congress has done it, and regional parties have attracted legislators from one another for decades. So, it would be unfair to condemn one party while pretending that others have never played the same game. The real question is whether a large-scale movement of elected representatives is simply a collection of individual political choices or whether it represents a fundamental change in the political mandate given by voters.

Nothing has been confirmed yet

All of this must be said with one important qualification: nothing is officially confirmed. No UDP MLA has publicly announced a move to the BJP, there has been no formal merger announcement, and the UDP president himself claims he knows nothing about the reported plan. Shillong is no stranger to political rumours. Some eventually become reality, while others disappear within a few days. Sunday's reported meeting in Delhi could produce a major announcement, a series of resignations, another round of denials or absolutely nothing. There may also be other political reasons behind the discussions-differences within the UDP, dissatisfaction with the leadership, ministerial ambitions, old political rivalries or disagreements over how the party should move forward. Until something is formally announced, the speculation remains.

But if nine UDP MLAs do eventually move together, Meghalaya will have to confront a much larger constitutional question. Can the political balance created by an election be substantially changed after the election without giving voters another says? The present law provides a route through the two-thirds merger provision. Perhaps that provision now needs another serious look. The anti-defection law was created with a good intention to bring stability to governments and prevent elected representatives from changing parties simply for personal or political gain. But nearly four decades later, it is clear that the law has weaknesses. There is a strong case for an independent mechanism to decide defection cases rather than leaving such politically sensitive matters primarily in the hands of the Speaker. There should also be a clear time limit for deciding disqualification petitions. Most importantly, Parliament should reconsider the two-thirds merger provision and ask whether a law meant to prevent mass defection should make it possible for a sufficiently large group of legislators to change political sides without returning to the voters.

For now, we wait to see what happens in Delhi. Maybe the reports will turn out to be exaggerated. Maybe Sunday will bring a major political announcement or nothing will happen. But if nine MLAs really do walk through that door, Meghalaya will have to ask a difficult question about the way democracy works: when the people choose a government through the front door - the ballot box should that choice be allowed to be changed through the backdoor?

Unearthing Ancestral Footprints

How Meghalaya's 'Tracing the Roots' Project is Preserving Indigenous Heritage

By Banker Lyngkhoi

In the highlands of Meghalaya, history has long been sustained through the spoken word rather than bound volumes. For generations, the origins, ancient migrations, and cultural evolutions of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo communities lived primarily in oral traditions passed down by elders. While these traditions provided a unique identity, the absence of comprehensive, evidence-based academic documentation left significant gaps in the global understanding of the state's indigenous heritage.

To address this historical void, the Department of Arts and Culture under the Government of Meghalaya instituted 'Tracing the Roots', a landmark interdisciplinary research initiative championed by Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma. Designed to build a definitive, scientific record of the state's cultural past, the project brings together historians, linguists, archaeologists, ethnographers, and geneticists. Rather than relying on a single academic discipline, 'Tracing the Roots' combines traditional Indigenous Knowledge Systems with cutting-edge scientific methodology, including genetic profiling where relevant, to reconstruct the historical trajectory of Meghalaya's tribes.

Far from being a mere retrospective exercise, this initiative represents a time-sensitive investment in the state's foundational knowledge and educational infrastructure. The valuable archival materials remain vulnerable, and unverified popular narratives continue to proliferate, making a responsible and durable documentation effort an immediate institutional necessity. By translating intangible heritage into a structured academic format, the project ensures that evidence-based recommendations will be directly integrated into future educational curricula. In doing so, the initiative bridges the gap between heritage preservation and structural academic development, proving that understanding the past is essential for shaping the minds of the future.

For the Khasi and Jaintia tribes, the 'Ki Dienjat' phase of the project seeks to validate long-held historical connections. Much of the existing historical foundation relies on early accounts written by British administrators, missionaries, and travellers during the 18th and 19th centuries. Linguistic studies have since revealed strong connections between the Khasi language and the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austroasiatic language family, suggesting deep-rooted links with regions of Southeast Asia. Ethnographic comparisons, particularly with Munda tribes, highlight similarities in cultural practices such as funeral rites and the preservation of sacred groves, pointing toward shared histories and migration patterns.

These scientific observations run parallel to profound oral traditions, such as the stories of the "Seven Huts and Seven Hearths" and the establishment of matrilineal clans, which continue to shape the indigenous worldview. While there is a growing consensus that these tribes may have migrated from regions like Cambodia and Laos, contemporary research has been hindered by a lack of funding for international fieldwork, logistical and other challenges, and the absence of structured academic collaborations. By deploying a dedicated Study Team under the Department of Arts and Culture to conduct interdisciplinary field research in Cambodia and Laos, the state is finally generating substantiated, evidence-based insights.

Equally integral to the state's research mandate is the dedicated initiative for the Garo Hills region, officially launch in Tura on September 1. The Garo component of the initiative has been developed with its own internal research architecture to address specific historical debates. One of the most frequently cited explanations regarding Garo origins is the theory that the ancestors of the Garos migrated from Tibet or related northern highland regions. This theory appears in colonial-era ethnography, later academic discussions, and indigenous narratives. Despite its persistence, it remains neither conclusively validated nor conclusively refuted due to a reliance on selective sources, limited comparative grounding, the absence of interdisciplinary corroboration, and a reliance on secondary interpretations.

Through field documentation, cross-cultural analyses, and archival study, the project seeks to establish how ancient trade networks, migratory routes, and social exchanges shaped the distinct identity of the region over centuries. Genetics forms a cornerstone of the initiative, where DNA mapping has identified distinct biological markers present amongst the groups.

The physical hub for research activities and public engagement is anchored at the Williamson Sangma State Museum in Shillong, where dedicated facilities support visiting ethnographers, domain experts, and institutional collaborators. High-level review meetings led by state leadership ensure continuous progress tracking, inter-departmental synergy, and active engagement with traditional village councils and tribal elders. By grounding scientific inquiry in community trust, the initiative ensures that local voices remain the primary custodians of their own narrative. The scope of 'Tracing the Roots' extends far beyond archival storage, aiming to actively weave indigenous history into contemporary civic life. Findings from the research are slated to inform school and university curricula, enrich local museum curation, and also provide authentic context for sustainable cultural tourism in the state. By validating ancient narratives through rigorous multi-disciplinary research, Meghalaya is setting a national model for how indigenous communities can bridge the past and the future, reclaiming their rightful place in world history.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of English. Shillong Commerce College, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

When a House Becomes a Story, Let Us Not Forget the Human Being

Editor,

I write this with sadness and humility after watching the interview of a Nepalese woman whose house miraculously survived the destruction caused by the recent floods.

The picture of the house, standing amid floodwater and destruction, naturally attracted the attention of people around the world. It became a symbol of hope and survival. During the interview, senior journalist Barkha Dutt reportedly asked the woman what she had to say to the world now that her house had become viral worldwide.

Perhaps the question was asked simply because the house had become an extraordinary news story. But as an ordinary viewer, I could not help wondering what was going through that woman's mind at that moment.

When someone has just survived a disaster, does it really matter that her house has become famous? Perhaps she was not thinking about the millions of people watching her house. Perhaps she was thinking about what the flood had taken away from her. Perhaps she was thinking about her family, her belongings, her livelihood and the memories that may have been lost—and about how she would begin her life again after the flood.

That is why the response attributed to her---"My house became viral after losing everything"---is so touching. Whether these were her exact words or simply a reflection of what she felt, they carry a truth that deserves our attention. For the world, it was a remarkable house. For her, it was home.

And there is a big difference between the two. I say this with no intention of criticising the journalist personally or questioning her motives. Journalism has an important duty to bring the suffering of people affected by disasters to the attention of the world.

But perhaps such moments also remind us of something very simple: we need to be humble and sensitive when speaking to people who have just suffered a tragedy.

A disaster victim is not simply a subject for a news story. She is a human being who has gone through fear and loss that many of us, watching from the safety of our homes, can hardly imagine.

Perhaps the first questions should be simple: Are you safe? Is your family safe? What have you lost? What do you need? How can we help you? Such questions may not make a story go viral but they make journalism humane.

Today, an image can travel around the world within seconds. A house can become famous overnight. A video can be watched by millions before the people in it have even had time to understand what has happened to them. That is why compassion matters even more today.

Let us admire the strength of the house. Let it remain a symbol of hope amid such terrible destruction. But let us not forget the woman behind that image—the human being who has had to live through the tragedy. A house may become viral. But a suffering human being should never become merely a viral story. Perhaps that is the small lesson this incident can teach us. When we stand before someone else's suffering, we do not always need to find a clever or dramatic question.

Sometimes, a little silence, a little humility and a little humanity are the best response.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Shillong

GSWSS Project: Will It Ever be Completed? When?

Editor,

I read with amazement the PHE Minister's statement appearing in this newspaper dated 15.8.2026 that 90% of the work on the GSWSS has been completed. It was sometime in the '70s that the project started, and now, after five decades, we are still being told that 90% has been completed. Many of the engineers who now work on the project may not even have been born when it started, yet the work is still ongoing. Maybe their grandchildren will see its completion.

A lot of water has flowed since the project was initiated. Many people's lives were made, some reached high positions, and many reached their graves, but the project is still 90% complete. It appears that this project is not likely to end anytime soon. After all, a project that is a milking cow for the Department cannot be allowed to end too quickly. If the third phase is completed on paper, perhaps a fourth phase will be added. It will go on and on while citizens look on helplessly.

There was a time when the pipe manufacturers associated with this project not only made the engineers of PHE into kings, but even made the top political bosses of the state dance to their tune in Pinewood. They had the entire department in their pocket.

But, as the saying goes, once you start digging, the skeletons start tumbling out. One such skeleton, in the form of a large-diameter blue pipe with no apparent connection, has appeared opposite the MBOSE office as digging was carried out for a roadside drain.

In fact, it appeared out of nowhere, demanding to be seen. One wonders why this line was laid and why the pipe ended abruptly halfway. Maybe it was meant to supply oxygen to the history buried underground. In fact, there could be countless blue pipes and pipelines laid earlier that carry no water but have surely been included in that 90% completion. If somebody were to conduct a survey using ground-penetrating radar, Shillong would probably have the richest underground deposits of water pipelines in the country, although the corresponding supply of water to its citizens would tell a very different story.

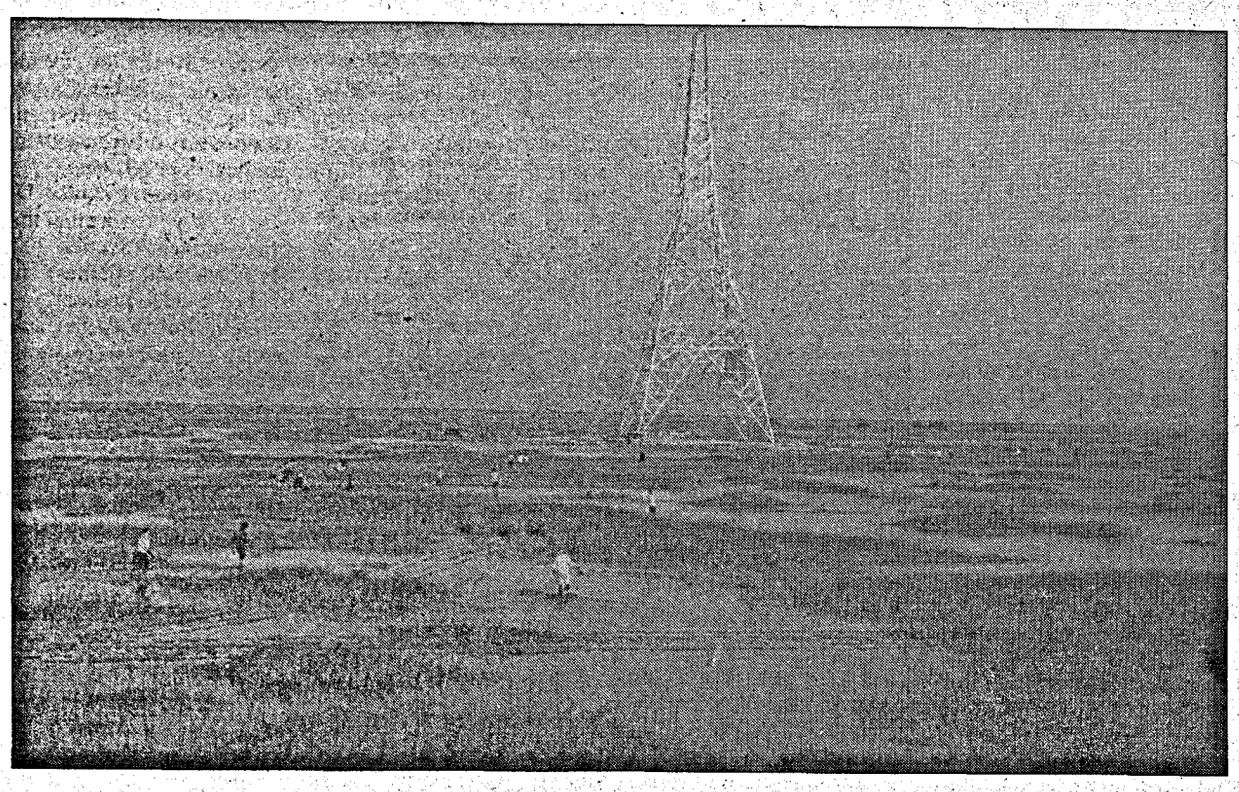
New Shillong has now become fertile ground for another fifty-year project. God knows how many skeletons will be buried there. But as a word of forewarning: carry on digging and continue laying the pipes, but make sure there is no digging afterwards—lest the skeletons be exposed too easily.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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

C M K

India wasting clean energy amid power demand surge



Workers walk through a swamp to install electric transmission towers for the Adani Renewable Energy Park near Khavda, Bhuj district, near the India-Pakistan border, in Gujarat. *(AP)*

When India's power demand surged at the height of summer, the country struggled to meet evening needs as air conditioners ran longer amid hotter nights. Despite this demand, some renewable energy providers were told to limit their output because the country had more clean electricity available than its grid could safely handle.

I spent time working with families there in September 20In the last 15 months, India curtailed nearly 11 terawatt-hours of solar generation — enough electricity to power about 10 million homes, according to government data and research by energy think tank Ember. That solar power went unused even as extreme heat and poor monsoon rains drove up demand for power in India for cooling and pumping groundwater for agriculture.

India, the world's most populous country and one of the largest emitters of climate-polluting gases, is rapidly adding clean energy, especially solar, to its power mix.

However, it can't use all the clean power it could generate because of insufficient transmission and storage capacity and the technical difficulty of shifting between fossil power and renewables

Energy experts say that contradiction points to the next big challenge for India's energy transition. Building solar and wind farms is no longer enough. India also needs more transmission lines to move electricity across the country, batteries to store renewable power until it is needed and a more flexible power system that can quickly adjust as wind and solar output rises or falls.

"We're in a stage where some of the biggest hurdles in renewables are starting to hit us," said Neshwin Rodrigues, an energy analyst at Ember.

Clean power gets switched off despite record demand

India has more than 300 gigawatts of clean power capacity, more than half its total installed electricity capacity. But coal still produces most of the country's electricity.

Experts said the main reason for this is curtailment — when a wind or solar plant could produce electricity but is ordered to reduce or stop generation as the grid cannot take the power.

Rodrigues said that when solar generation surges in the afternoon, it's difficult for coal units to reduce their output because they are relatively inflexible and cannot ramp down quickly without compromising efficiency, increasing costs or risking operational problems.

Trying to make thermal power plants flexible and adapt to increasing supply from clean energy sources "is like asking an elephant to dance," said Vinay Pabba, CEO of Hyderabad-based renewable energy company Vibrant Energy.

Pabba said curtailment results in losses for clean power developers. "We get paid only for what we put on the grid," he said.

The high concentration of renewable generation in western India has also meant that transmission lines in that part of the country get congested quickly. The western states of Gujarat and Rajasthan account for nearly 50% of India's solar power capacity.

"When solar peaks, usually in the afternoon, there is a limited pipe to evacuate it," said Pabba.

Another risk of not building storage quickly is that dirty fuels get used more. "Without enough storage, India risks keeping coal plants running even when cheap renewable power is available," said Vibhuti Garg, South Asia director at the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

While a solar or wind farm can sometimes be completed within two years, building new power lines can take a minimum of three years, according to energy experts.

India has achieved only about 80% of its annual transmission construction targets over the past five years, research by Ember has found.

Spreading more renewable development across other parts of the country, while adding more wind and smaller local solar projects, could reduce pressure on crowded transmission corridors and make the electricity supply more balanced throughout the day, said Disha Agarwal, an energy analyst at the New Delhi-based Council on Energy, Environment and Water.

Agarwal said the challenge is likely to become more difficult as renewable capacity keeps rising.

India is aiming for 500 gigawatts of clean electricity capacity by 2030. Also, Indian policymakers expect nearly 70% of India's installed power capacity to come from nonfossil sources by 2036.

Batteries could help save power for when it is needed

A study released earlier this month by the India Energy and Climate Center at the University of California, Berkeley, found that renewable power backed by batteries can provide electricity with reliability approaching that of conventional power plants at a price researchers said is lower than the price of power from new coal-fired plants.

Batteries make it possible to store solar electricity when it is abundant in the afternoon and discharge it after sunset, when demand remains high.

But India's storage sector remains far smaller than what planners said will eventually be required.

"If we try to increase the solar installations without solving for energy storage, it is only going to lead to curtailment," said Ankit Mittal, CEO of battery storage company Ingro Energy.

Mittal said India is trying to transform several parts of its electricity system simultaneously as power demand rises. "Things that were supposed to happen over decades" are now happening at once, he said.

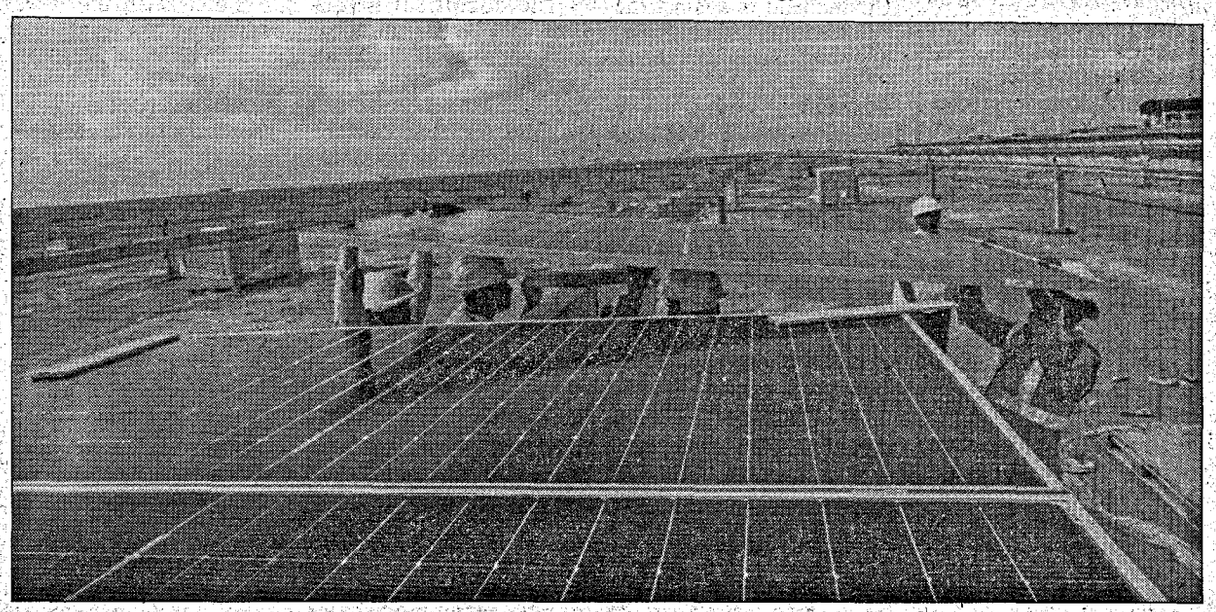
The government said in July that it had about 3 gigawatts of battery storage and 7.4 gigawatts of operational pumped-storage capacity. It expects India's storage needs to reach about 74 gigawatts by 2032.

"If high quality energy storage projects are not built, we could be adding an additional layer of risk to grid operations while also decelerating our nation's ability to achieve our energy transition targets," said Avinash Rao, CEO of Mahindra Susten, a leading renewable energy company in India.

Rodrigues, the energy analyst, said batteries can be built much more quickly than major transmission infrastructure, making them one of the fastest options for easing some immediate constraints.

Industry stakeholders said that few, if any, foresaw the incredible increase in demand happening as the country's transportation and other major sectors electrify and data centers are built.

"None of us saw it coming. If we had seen it coming, we would have probably planned our way around it," said Pabba of Vibrant Energy. *(AP)*



Workers install solar panels at the under-construction Adani Green Energy Limited's Renewable Energy Park in the salt desert of Karim Shahi village, near Khavda, Bhuj, Gujarat. *(AP)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, SEPTEMBER 6, 2026***

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Sun on your solar return chart and will give favourable results. It will be a good year for you. You will make new accomplishments, and this will enhance your personality. The time shows favourable results for students/professionals. You will get favour from your superiors. Whatever work you do will be successful and you will not rest till you achieve success. Your business will also prosper and flourish. Your interest in spiritual matters will increase. You will also get good job openings. Do not get into any arguments. Do not trust your juniors at work because they will be the ones to pull your leg. You will also fall in love with a person known to you leading to marriage. You will get penalty for opportunities to rise in your profession. You will be able to impress your bosses. You will be loved and liked by one and all.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a very favorable week for you. You will be financially rewarded for your efforts. The placements of planets will strengthen the way for fate betterment. You will have more opportunities to rise in your work. You will be blessed with good health, and your spirits will be high. Enemies and opponents will try to dominate but they will not be able to succeed in harming you or spoil your work. Your financial position will remain strong and stable. You will be making new investments which will give you good benefits. People will respect and acknowledge you as an influential person. A feeling of spirituality and inclination towards religious work and offering will flare in the heart. There will be joy and cheer in family relations.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is a very favorable time. You will receive financial opportunities and there are chances of progress in your job/work. You will take your work seriously and receive handsome rewards for it. You will use your capabilities and capacities to their fullest. You will also receive good news regarding progress of your children. You will also receive the blessings of the elderly people. Your respect and dignity will increase. You will also take initial steps in the expansion of your work. And achieve maximum level of success. Your colleagues will help you in your work. You will receive blessings from your elders. Religious activities will keep you involved. Money inflow will be continuous.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will be having lot of opportunities. You will rise fast in your work field. You will also have monetary gains and profits and with the help of your intelligence and work potential you will make a lot of money. There are chances of promotion or increment in your job. You will defeat your enemies with a lot of patience. Your business will improve day by day, the pressure to achieve your targets will be on your job and you will come closer to your targets too. You will enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. You will also receive good news related to the education, career or marriage of your child. You will take care of elders. Love birds will have a wonderful time. You may do some deeds because of which your fame and popularity will go far and wide.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will be feeling a lot better and will spend quality time with your closed ones. You will be flexible in your outlook and will win confidence and support of your family members. You will work selflessly and expand your circle of friends. People will listen to your views, and you will be able to get your work done with ease. You will be able to convince your officers with your intelligence and hard work everybody will admire your intelligence and capability. Do yoga and meditation. It will enhance your memory and make you feel good. You will get a chance to meet an influential person which will open the doors of progress for you. So, you should grebe this opportunity with both hands.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will be making best use of your talents and capabilities. You will shine in your work. You will also increase your profits. You will take tough decisions in business and trade, which will keep your influence and domination intact. You will be in a strong and stable position financially. You will find inspiration for new work. Your family members and friends will look forward to you for help. There will be journey regarding expansion of your business and their effort and results will come in your favor. You will enjoy good bonding with your mate/spouse. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. Your noble deeds will bring you good name and fame. Friendly relationships will be established with those in authority. Creative and productive thoughts will occupy your mind.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) There will be marked improvement in your health. You might take part in a function. There can be some minor altercations between partners, but matters will get resolved quickly. You will contact your near and dear ones. There will be happiness in married life. You will move towards your objective with concentration. You will also be successful in government related work. Your hard work and dedication will yield positive results. You will also do socially useful work whose results will be long-lasting. You will get positive and fruitful results if you use your intelligence and thinking power. There will be financial gains.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be sharing your feelings with your closed ones. Your chance of meeting an influential person will pave the way for success for you. You will do all your work with sincerity. You will be given a new responsibility at work. There will be monetary gains from somewhere. You will also reach new heights of success based on your creativity. The planetary positions will inspire you to undertake new plans. They will get completed. Your work will be completed soon due to your team efforts, long pending disputes and problems will be resolved. Your personality will grow and you will get credit for things. You will establish a good balance with your partner and businesspeople. You will try new practices in business.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The number of contacts will expand. It will prove beneficial for you. You will achieve your aims and objectives on time. You will be in strong and secure financial condition. There will be an inclination to do something new at every moment. There will be an inflow of money. The graph of your respect and prestige will go up and you will be successful in competitions and examinations. You will be energetic at work. You will also read new interesting literature. If you have given a loan to someone, you will be able to recover it with ease. Be prepared to search for solutions to your problems. You will be busy with prayers, meditation and religious work. Don't be careless at any cost.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It will turn out to be a fantastic week for you. All the ups and downs you are facing in your work will end and you will complete your work smoothly. You will also get support of your bosses and superiors. Your colleagues will also cooperate with you. You could also have some long business trips to make all of a sudden. It will turn out to be fruitful. According to your ability, you will get the money. Property related disputes will be resolved with mutual consent. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Husband and wife will also have amazing relationships and bonding. Students will get success by doing hard work. In exams/interviews success will be achieved. You could also get attracted to spiritual matters. Everyone will support you fully. You will be happy in all situations.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The time is very beneficial. You will make profits in your business. You will have joy and cheer in family relations. There will be new chances of livelihood. You will have nice bonding with your life partner/spouse. You need to remain alert from enemies and opponents. You will get new job / business offers. Everyone will be impressed with your oratory skills. You will also be balanced in your behaviour. A short business trip is also not ruled out. You will have good interactions with your colleagues, and your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will have additional sources of income and good monetary gains.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) The beginning of the week is going to be fantastic. These are the days for doing something good. Your efforts will be appreciated, and you will be rewarded suitably for your efforts. Whatever work you do will be done with full loyalty and dedication. You will continue to do brilliant work. You will also get gains from investments that you made in the past. You will be successful in love matters. Your relation will blossom into full-fledged romance. Newlywed couples can go on a tour. They will spend time understanding each other. Your entire attention will be on your house and family. You will feel relaxed. And enjoy time with loved ones.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) There will be lot to cheer for and enjoy this week. Physical health will be good. You will try and keep your family away from all problems. And will also finish your work with determination and courage. Luck will be on your side. You will get a new job opening. Time will be spent in happiness with your dear ones. You will be in top position in some interviews. And will be full of vigour and energy. Relations with siblings will be pleasant. Your opponents will try to dominate you but will not be able to succeed. You will feel a lot of love towards your dear ones, and relations with neighbors will also improve. The atmosphere at home will be wonderful.

Nepal floods: Khalte residents knew the river would come—then it did

Khalte, a settlement close to the bank of the Trishuli River in northern Nepal, was completely destroyed in the flash flooding of late August. Khalte housed around 257 families who had been displaced by a previous disaster, when Nepal was rocked by a 7.8-magnitude earthquake in 2015.

I spent time working with families there in September 2019, as part of a research project looking at how renewable energy might improve their lives. This community had spent years living in makeshift homes squeezed between the river and the road, on land that was known to be at risk of flooding.

Having lost almost everything in the earthquake, they were scraping together a living from a mixture of casual reconstruction work and agricultural labour. They supplemented this meagre income with rice and vegetables grown on small plots dotted along the river bank.

One thing people said they needed was lighting – particularly outside, where darkness made moving around the settlement difficult. Our research team worked with the community to install solar-powered streetlighting – even as giant pylons towered above the settlement, taking electricity from the Chinese-sponsored Upper Trishuli-3A Hydropower Project to the crowded streets of Nepal's capital Kathmandu, 60 miles downstream.

The river kept warning them

Khalte was never meant to be somewhere people should stay. An official geo-hazard assessment conducted by Nepal's National Reconstruction Authority in early 2018 declared it an unsafe place to live due to the risk of flooding, landslide and debris.

Residents understood this too. As families were moving into Khalte, they were warned by local residents that the Trishuli had previously flowed across the area where corrugated homes were being constructed, and could do so again. One resident told researcher Kerstin Rieger of the risks in 2018: "For me, Khalte is not safe. If the river level increases, then it can take the camp. Everyone can see this."

But attempts to move the residents stalled, even as the river kept reminding them of the danger. The swollen Trishuli repeatedly burst into the settlement itself, with one resident telling the *Kathmandu Post* in 2022: "We cannot sleep well during the monsoon season. We stay awake when it rains heavily."

Three years later, in July 2025, a sudden glacial lake outburst sent flash flooding into northern Nepal from across the border in Tibet. That flood killed at least nine people in the region, and caused people to run for higher ground as homes were washed away.

Yet still people stayed in Khalte.

Then, on August 26 2026, disaster struck. A mass of ice broke away from a glacier near the Nepal-Tibet border and dammed the Lhende River. When the dam gave way, a wall of water swept through through the valley, taking with it homes, roads, land and hundreds – if not thousands – of people. Many people remain buried under the mud.

Khalte no longer exists. All 257 houses were destroyed, and dozens of the people who lived there are still missing. Rescuers are frantically searching for survivors in nearby villages and hydropower tunnels.

Protracted displacement

Khalte was far from the only community devastated by these floods. But the fact the people living there had been unable to find a solution to their displacement more than a decade earlier carries lessons that governments and international organisations should learn from.

Resettlement plans were repeatedly stalled due to bureaucratic delays, financial constraints and inadequate resettlement alternatives, which ignored the community's cultural and livelihood needs.

Returning meant going back to villages still exposed to landslides. Life in Khalte was dangerous, but the alternative wasn't safe either.

Khalte is just one example of a much larger global problem. According to the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 83 million people were internally displaced within their own countries at the end of 2025, unable to return home or establish themselves somewhere else, sometimes for years or decades.

More than half – a staggering 45 million people – have been displaced by the effects of climate change. As the climate crisis worsens, many more people are likely to lose their homes due to extreme weather events, heat, fires, floods and other hazards.

Preventing another Khalte requires action on three fronts. First, governments need to ensure that people displaced by one disaster are not resettled into the path of another. That means planning for earthquakes and landslides as well as the growing risks associated with extreme rainfall, glacial retreat and flooding.

In remote rural areas, deaths can be reduced by establishing effective, community-based early-warning systems – but not if displaced communities are resettled directly in the path of the oncoming threat. In Khalte, local officials raced down to the settlement in an ambulance, using a loudspeaker to warn riverside residents to evacuate. However, they too were swept away.

Second, relocation needs to offer people a viable future, not just a safer house. The experience of Khalte shows why access to farmland, employment, schools, services and social networks matters. People will struggle to leave dangerous places if doing so means losing the means to support themselves.

But the responsibility cannot rest with Nepal alone. The climate crisis is a crisis of injustice. Those least responsible are often the first and worst affected, and all too often are the least equipped to recover. Nepal produces just 0.1% of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet it faces growing risks from floods, landslides and glacial hazards.

Wealthier countries and international institutions have a responsibility to provide sustained finance for adaptation, resilient infrastructure and planned relocation.

This is needed before communities are destroyed, rather than offering humanitarian assistance after disaster strikes.

Looking now at the photographs I took in Khalte seven years ago – families outside their homes, washing on the line, vegetables growing beside the river – it is difficult to reconcile the place I remember with the empty riverbed left behind by the flood, or to know how many of the people I met are still alive.

The lesson of Khalte is that surviving one disaster should not leave people more vulnerable to the next. *(The Conversation)*

[Authored by Heaven Crawley, Visiting Research Fellow at the Centre for Peace and Security, Coventry University]

"A healthy attitude is contagious but don't wait to catch it from others. Be a carrier."
—Tom Stoppard

The Shillong Times

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Offensive, Defensive

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi is getting more combative, training his guns at opponents of all hues – from the Congress, the opposition as a whole and the Dimagi Naxals -- a slight variation of the Urban Naxals or the activists seeking change in the corrupt, antiquated systems. An event he addressed on Saturday was the centenary celebrations of the Shri Ram College of Commerce in the national capital – the very spot from where, in 2013, he informally signalled his plan to enter national politics and lead the nation. This now could be the beginning of his downhill ride. For, being on the offensive is also equivalent to being defensive.

After nearly 13 years of holding power at the Centre, Modi has reasons to feel satisfied – but the satisfaction levels of the people have seen a spectacular erosion. This lack of majority to run the government for a third term in 2024 is also a consequence of this erosion. He outwitted the people by taking the support of his sworn enemies like Chandrababu Naidu from the South and Nitish Kumar from Bihar to continue as PM. From then on, there has been no significant improvement in Modi's performance graph. As per recent opinion polls, his acceptance rating has shrunk below the 50 per cent level. This is why the PM is increasingly bent on attacking his rivals and asserting his relevance from public platforms. Modi repeats his long-held claims that the nation continues to have an impressive GDP growth. Credible sources and informed segments of the public question the growth figures, which are based also on the number of car sales. More cars are sold because of the Modi government's failure to spread the rail network and lay out better mass transportation systems -- other than minor indulgences like the Vande Bharat, which runs at a speed of a little over a hundred km per hour. This is also a metaphor for Modi's failure to improve the system and people's lives in multiple sectors.

The GDP growth at 7.5 – still much below the growth figure during the Manmohan era -- may also be a sign of the well-being of a selective 20 per cent of the people in the upper income brackets. The nation's pulse is gauged by touching the pulse of the commoners, who form 80 per cent of the population. Their salaries/ daily wages have only marginally improved, if at all, during the last 13 years when Modi played flute from the podiums. Jobs are hard to come by. Systems have gone for a toss. The administrative system is increasingly corrupt and inept – as is also evident in the NEET fiasco and the corruption centring around courts. This is a tragedy of our times. The "Centre fails to hold." Talk is increasingly getting shriller about the RSS seeking a replacement in the PM's chair. The manner in which a rag-tag group of students and youths humbled the Modi establishment through the Jantar Mantar offensive was proof of the disenchantment on the ground. Modi's hands are full. Other than being on the defensive he has no other tried and tested strategy.

The VPP and its Critics: Much Ado about Nothing

By Airpeace W. Rani

Since its inception, the Voice of the People Party (VPP) has made its presence felt in the political life of Meghalaya. Definitely the Party has earned the love and affection of its supporters far and wide. Interestingly, it has attracted considerable attention from its opponents to the extent that some columnists and social media activists have become obsessed with it and a few of them seem to have sleepless nights in finding its next mistake, its crisis and ultimately its supposed decline.

Obviously, the VPP is not against this and welcomes criticisms. As a political party, we are prepared for scrutiny be it political or otherwise. The Party does not claim that it is infallible and believes in criticism as a democratic process for growth and improvement. That being said, we would like to remind that there is always a difference between criticism and wishful political obituary writing. With the untimely and unfortunate demise of Late Dr. Ricky A. J. Syngkon, some opponents of the VPP tend to interpret that the party is facing a downfall. This is not only insane but also gives the impression that they would like to conduct a post mortem when the person is still alive. Of course we do not begrudge their political anxieties but there is something uncomfortable when someone is apparently jubilant of his death whilst hypocritically expressing grief over his passing. Dr. Ricky's life and legacy deserves respect irrespective of his political affiliation and the VPP does not count his departure as a political bitterness nor will it allow anyone to convert it to a convenient narrative against the Party.

In fact this piece is a response to the article titled 'The VPP, Khasi Nationalism and Hindutva Challenge' that appeared in The Shillong Times on September 3, 2026. We cannot help but respond to this because while the article was presented as analysis, it contains a number of misrepresentations that have the potential to mislead the public about what the VPP stands for. For instance, it questioned the VPP for not challenging the Expert Committee Report on the Reservation Policy. The answer for this is rather simple. The fact is that the VPP took part in the political process that brought the Meghalaya reservation policy question to the forefront and got it ultimately reviewed. The Expert Committee subsequently submitted its report, and the matter has already been accepted by the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The party has made its position on the matter known both inside and outside the House. The subject is fundamentally a policy matter and the party does not see any logic in dragging it beyond the competence of the Legislative Assembly. The party has rather chosen to place the same before the people. Nevertheless, there is an important point that should not obscured by the argument of the author related to the population factor.

The VPP is of the opinion that population is an important basis for calculating any representation. However, this does not mean that population is the only factor in designing a reservation policy. There may be other factors and considerations but to suggest that population has no meaningful place whatsoever in assessing representation would be difficult to sustain as a matter of public policy analysis. It is definitely on the basis of population that the Government of India has arrived at the different percentages of reservation for different sections of the society. Adequacy/inadequacy of representation cannot be discussed in a demographic vacuum. This is precisely what Meghalaya's Reservation Policy says 'It has now been decided in pursuance of clause 4 of Art.16 of the Constitution and keeping in view the inadequacy of representation of these communities in the services under the autonomous State of Meghalaya in terms of their population.' The principle is not complicated: if we are asking whether representation is adequate or inadequate, we must first know the population against which that representation is being assessed.

Another allegation in the said article is that the VPP is clandestinely trying to get rid of the customary requirement that the Syiem of Hima Sohra and Hima Mylliem must belong to the Khasi indigenous faith. This is completely unfounded and points to an imaginative conspiracy theory born out of the author's political anxiety. The VPP has never campaigned to abolish the indigenous character of the traditional institutions of the Khasi people. What the VPP has consistently advocated is clean politics, accountable institutions and pro-people governance at every level. These principles do not become negotiable merely because the institution happens to be traditional. Tradition deserves respect; so does accountability. The two are not enemies.

Similarly, the controversy over Section 16 of the 2021 KHADC (Regulation and Administration of Land) suffers from a remarkable shortage of reading and an abundance of speculation. The provision concerns only the determination of land ceiling. It does not transfer the ultimate authority over land from the traditional institutions to the KHADC. The traditional institutions retain the decisive role in land governance. To portray the amendment as some grand scheme by the KHADC to seize Khasi land is therefore to manufacture a political drama where the actual provision does not say what the drama requires it to say.

With regard to the peaceful march surrounding the Meghalaya Secretariat conducted by the party in early August 2026, the author labelled it as a pressure valve to rescue itself from an alleged political decline. This is an interesting interpretation except that it has very little to do with why the rally was actually held. From the beginning, the VPP works closely with the people precisely because that is what politics is supposed to be. The rally was part of our continuing engagement with the people and our effort to place important public issues before the Government and the wider public. Such a protest is simply one instrument of democratic mobilisation and whether the rally has created an impact or not is beside the point. Political movements are not judged by the immediate volume of newspaper commentary surrounding them. Some rallies make noise for a day while some may take years to bear fruit. The rally was chosen as a means to express the concerns and not to impress anyone.

The speculation of the author regarding the MLAs from the UDP and TMC joining the BJP as an apparent reassurance to the VPP's performance is absolutely irrelevant. The VPP does not build its politics around keeping a daily register of who is joining which party, who is leaving which party, or who is negotiating with whom behind closed doors. Our logic is simple, let the politicians decide their course and let the people decide its worth. We neither rejoice in the political adversity of others nor depend upon it for our own survival. We have sufficient confidence in the people to let them make their own judgment. After all, the people are wiser than any political party and even wiser than those who think they are the wisest.

The allegation that VPP is trying to consolidate the Khasis under the banner 'Khasi Christian Zionism' is ridiculous, baseless and unfounded. It is an attempt to paint a communal colour against the VPP and the article is more of political labelling rather than an analysis. If voicing against Hindutva politics makes one a "Christian Zionist," then perhaps every critic should be given a new label for the convenience of commentators. The VPP has never or will ever argue that all Khasis must be Christians, nor that Khasi identity belongs to one religion. The VPP stands for indigenous rights, land, constitutional protection, political representation and the dignity of all the citizens within the framework of the Indian Constitution. It is unfortunate that while the author seems to condemn religious polarisation he conveniently created one of its own by portraying Khasi political assertion through a Christian versus non Christians lens. That is precisely the trap we reject. Khasi nationalism is bigger than the VPP, and it is certainly bigger than any religion. We neither need Hindutva to define us, nor Khasitva to replace it nor Bhogtotva to frighten us.

(The author is spokesperson of the VPP)

"Tracing the Roots: A Good Idea That Needs Real Answers."

By Thomas Jones Wahlang

The Tracing the Roots project is a good idea in principle. Meghalaya has waited a long time for real, systematic research into where its indigenous peoples came from and how they migrated over time. Now the Government has announced a big plan. Seventy-five scholars will travel to Vietnam, Cambodia and Tibet to study our roots. They will look at history, oral traditions, indigenous knowledge, linguistics, archaeology and other scientific methods. That's what we've been told, at least.

But here is the concern. The bigger the project, and the more public money involved, the more accountability it demands. If this is really meant to be scientific research, the Government owes us a simple answer. Who exactly is doing this research? And are they actually qualified to do it?

The numbers being reported are large. Around ₹20 crore in total. Roughly ₹9.5 crore for the Khasi-Jaintia part of the project, and ₹9.7 crore for the Garo, spread over eighteen months. This is a lot of money, and it should not be treated like an ordinary cultural event. Every rupee spent needs to produce something that actually lasts and something of real academic value.

So, the Government should tell us who these scholars are. What are their qualifications? What research have they done before? What have they published? What are they specialists in, and which institutions are they attached to? This matters because having a PhD does not automatically make someone an expert in everything. A person with a doctorate in one field is not necessarily qualified to speak on genetics, archaeology, anthropology, linguistics, population history or migration studies. These are all specialised areas. Each one takes years of specific training. A PhD comes with research on one specific topic. It doesn't make someone an expert in everything.

There's also something important we need to be honest about. Recording our traditions is one thing. Proving our history is another. Our oral traditions, our clan stories, and the beliefs passed down to us all matter, and they deserve to be written down properly. But putting a story into a research report doesn't make it a historical fact. Repackaging our heritage in academic language doesn't make it scientifically true either. If all this project does is gather what people already believe, and then give it a fancy academic finish, what have we really proven? Nothing new. Science isn't meant to confirm what we already want to believe. It's meant to help us find out what's actually true even when the truth is uncomfortable.

This becomes even more important if DNA and population studies are part of the plan, as they are expected to be. The public deserves to know who is running this genetic research. Where are the samples being tested? Which laboratories are involved? How are the samples being chosen? What methods are being used to analyse them? And how will the results be interpreted once they come in? The same level of transparency should apply to the archaeology, the linguistics, the anthropology and historical research too.

If Meghalaya does not currently have enough expertise in some of these areas, that is not something to be ashamed of. Nobody expects a state to have every kind of specialist of its own. The sensible thing to do would be to hand over specific parts of the research to established universities and research institutions, in India or abroad, that already have proven expertise in these fields. Bringing in independent academic institutions would add credibility, experience and a broader perspective to a project of this size.

Spending ₹20 crore is not a problem in itself. Spending ₹20 crore without proper safeguards is the problem. If this money results in research that holds up to international scrutiny, properly documented fieldwork, real scientific data, peer-reviewed papers, and a lasting body of knowledge for future generations, then it will have been money well spent. But if a large chunk of it simply goes toward travel, meetings, seminars and allowances, and the final reports cannot survive independent academic review, then the people of Meghalaya have every right to ask hard questions about where their money went.

"The Government also needs to make sure that this international fieldwork does not turn into a nice travel opportunity for a select few. Sending 75 scholars abroad may sound impressive on paper, but the number of people travelling says nothing about the quality of the research. What actually matters is what they bring back. Those include reliable evidence, properly collected data, archaeological findings, linguistic evidence, genetic results, and historical documents."

The Government also needs to make sure that this international fieldwork does not turn into a nice travel opportunity for a select few. Sending 75 scholars abroad may sound impressive on paper, but the number of people travelling says nothing about the quality of the research. What actually matters is what they bring back. Those include reliable evidence, properly collected data, archaeological findings, linguistic evidence, genetic results, and historical documents. Research that other scholars, anywhere in the world, can examine and challenge. If that does not happen, international travel stops serving the research and starts looking like a publicly funded holiday.

This is a genuine opportunity for the Government to do something historic. But history is not established by a government announcement, political enthusiasm, or a list of impressive academic titles. It is established through evidence, and evidence alone. The roots of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo peoples are far too important to be reduced to convenient narratives that simply confirm what we already believe. And ₹20 crore of public money is far too much to spend without complete transparency about who is doing the research, which accredited university or research body is involved, what methods are being used, and what results are expected.

If Tracing the Roots is truly about tracing our roots, then we need the courage to follow the evidence, wherever it leads. Even when it challenges the stories, we grew up hearing. Let the best scholars take on this work, independent institutions examine what they find, and let the evidence speak for itself. Our history deserves real science not storytelling dressed up to look like science.

Letters to the Editor

KSU and the Politics of Protection and Exclusion

Editor,

Recent KSU protests have put indigenous rights, migration, and Khasi identity in sharp focus. The KSU has every right to argue for stronger protection of Khasi land, culture, employment, and political interests. These are legitimate subjects for democratic debate. But a legitimate concern does not make every response to it legitimate.

Because KSU presents itself as a defender of the Khasi people, it is worth examining what happens when the politics of protection begins defining who belongs, who does not, and who should be regarded as a threat.

Humans naturally form groups. The danger begins when belonging becomes exclusion and difference becomes threat. There is a profound difference between saying, "We are Khasi, and we want to preserve Khasi identity," and saying, "You are not Khasi, therefore you can never truly belong here." The first is cultural preservation. The second is ethnic exclusion.

This is ethnic essentialism: the belief that ethnicity tells us something fundamental about a person's character, loyalty, or intentions. Ethnic consciousness is not the problem. The question is how far ethnicity is allowed to determine rights, moral standing, or belonging.

Meghalaya has every right to protect indigenous land and employment. However, when state institutions fail to address these concerns, groups like KSU can gain influence by projecting the decisiveness that institutions lack. But replacing systemic policy solutions with collective ethnic suspicion remains a dangerous shortcut.

The recent protests make this distinction vital. The five-point mandate concerned specific political and economic issues, including the Shree Cement public hearing, migrant-worker regulation, and recruitment reforms. These are legitimate matters for public debate. Yet the August 19 rally descended into violence, with civilians assaulted and vehicles vandalized.

KSU leaders blamed outside elements for the violence. Responsibility for individual acts must, of course, be established individually. But organizations must ultimately bear responsibility for the volatile environment their rhetoric creates. When an entire population is framed through threat and demographic displacement, mass rallies can lower the barrier for opportunistic harassment. When people are targeted because of identity rather than conduct, the target has shifted from policy to people.

Individual wrongdoing can become collective suspicion, shifting the focus from judging individuals by their actions to judging communities by their identity. Ethnic purity is not the same as cultural continuity. Every community wants its language spoken, customs practiced, and history remembered. It becomes dangerous when preserving culture shifts toward ethnic homogeneity, and another ethnicity is treated as contamination or threat. Protecting indigenous land and culture is about rights, institutions, and traditions—not controlling who may belong. If another ethnicity's presence is treated as demographic conquest, its people become the threat.

Persuasion asks people to agree. Coercion makes disagreement costly. It can be the shopkeeper who complies out of fear, the worker who stays silent, or the student who hides where he comes from. A society can become coercive long before it becomes openly violent.

KSU does not speak for every Khasi simply by invoking Khasi identity. Criticism of KSU is not criticism of Khasi identity itself. Khasi identity is far bigger than any organisation, political movement, or ideology that claims to represent it.

The question is where KSU draws the boundary between protecting a community and excluding others; between identifying unlawful conduct and assigning collective suspicion; and between political pressure and coercion.

That boundary matters.

Yours etc.,
Metis Whyborne Lyngdoh
Via email

SIR Documentation Punishes the Elderly

Editor,

I have identified a significant concern regarding the SIR hearing. My mother, an 80-year-old individual, recently encountered difficulties while attempting to verify her inclusion in the electoral rolls. Her initial visit to the Hearing Centre was hampered by adverse weather conditions. Subsequently, she was requested to provide her birth certificate, etc. Given her advanced age, which necessitates the presence of an attendant, is such a rigorous level of scrutiny truly warranted? We question the necessity of such a requirement for an individual of her age, particularly given her 30 years of service as a government teacher.

The scrutiny she is now facing from the Election Commission is perplexing. We are left to ponder the implications should she be unable to produce this document. She had voted during elections for more than 5 decades now. Our late father, who served in the army and participated in the Second World War, would have been 95. We respectfully inquire whether such rigorous scrutiny is appropriate for senior citizens and former government employees who were born prior to India's independence, have resided in this country their entire lives, and have dedicated themselves to the service of the state and the nation as a whole.

Yours etc.,
L.A. Sangma,
Tura

Saffronism Vs regionalism

Editor,

Ideology is said to be a set of beliefs that influence the way people think and behave. Whenever we speak of the term ideology, it refers more to the political characteristics of the definition, than the morality hidden in it. Because in every nation the ideology professed by the dominant political party shapes the social thinking of the society, both in a conscious and sub-conscious manner. The ideology accepted by the majority is believed to reveal the temperament of society. In fact a prevailing ideology manifests how the larger section of the populace wants others to behave, dress, eat and live within the nation. But the most important question at the present time is: does ideology exist in this post-ideological era? The answer is a definite "yes ". In every nation ideology survives in some form or the other .

In India the majoritarian political ideology has successfully been recalibrated under a "Saffron notion" which has fused historical grievances with culture and identity. Now the new ideology vociferously rejects the idea of secularism in support of a majoritarian agenda. It has normalised lynching in the name of protecting the customs giving approval to mobocracy under its spectrum of belief. While in a democracy, political and social ideologies often believe in the idea of inclusion, the new ideology reveals a sense intolerance by contending on the audibility of the loudspeakers hung on religious places.

But understanding the saffron ideology in the context of the North East is important. Since the North East is a region of diversity. From the Khasis and Garos of Meghalaya to Meities of Manipur, and from the Ahoms of Assam to Nyishi's of Arunachal Pradesh, each tribe has its own customs and norms . While saffronism has been able to reconcile the national and regional together, it is necessary to find whether a majoritarian project could paint the regional ethnic groups in one colour since inclination towards a political ideology may not mean surrendering of ethnic values. The future of saffronism in the North East will depend on how its people have understood regional and national politics by keeping ethnicity at the centre.

Yours etc.,
Kabir Ahmed Saikia,
Jorhat

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

"The future starts today, not tomorrow."
— Pope John Paul II

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FCRA before JPC: North-East MPs Excluded

THE Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 is now before a 31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). Twenty-one MPs are from the Lok Sabha and ten from the Rajya Sabha. The Committee is chaired by BJP MP Sanjay Jaiswal. The two Houses agreed to a JPC on August 12, and the Committee was constituted on September 3. Interestingly the 7 North Eastern states which have shown great concern about the FCRA Bill have been excluded from the JPC. The FCRA Bill seeks not only to tighten the accounting of foreign donations but also to seize an NGO's property and assets when its FCRA registration ends. According to the proposed Bill a new "Designated Authority" will be created to take control over assets created or acquired wholly or partly from foreign contributions when the organisation ceases to hold an FCRA certificate. This could include land, buildings, institutions and other property created with foreign money. This is the most offensive clause in the Bill.

Now an FCRA registration could cease in several ways such as the government cancelling an FCRA certificate for several reasons such as - the organisation surrendering its certificate; or the organisation fails to apply for renewal, or its renewal application is rejected. An organisation does not necessarily have to be accused of criminal wrongdoing for the asset-management provisions to become relevant. Once the provisions come into play the organisation would have to provide the Designated Authority with access to its accounts, records, properties, and assets. Those assets cannot be transferred or disposed of without the Authority's approval. They are maintained under the Authority's supervision. Since such seized assets become the property of the government there is a substantial increase in the government's potential control over property associated with foreign contributions. There is one saving grace concerning places of worship. If an asset vested with the Authority is a place of worship, the Authority is required to ensure that its religious character is maintained. This provision is particularly important for churches, religious institutions and other faith-based organisations that have constructed or acquired property using foreign contributions.

There is a right of appeal so an institution aggrieved by an order of the Designated Authority can appeal to the District Judge within 90 days. The JPC will therefore have to examine whether this provides an adequate safeguard against arbitrary or erroneous government action. The Central Government is empowered to exempt particular persons from the asset-vesting (taking permanent legal ownership of an asset) provisions where it considers this necessary or expedient in public interest. The question is: Who or which institution will be exempted? There is a need for very clear and transparent criteria for exemption, because if the criteria are not objective, concerns about unequal treatment could arise. Interestingly the Bill reduces the prison term for violating FCRA regulations from five years to just one year. Also, under the existing FCRA framework, the government can cancel an organisation's certificate if it has not undertaken 'reasonable activity' in its chosen field for the benefit of society for two consecutive years. Interestingly, the term "reasonable activity" is not defined in the Act. The 2026 FCRA Rules have now defined it as utilisation of at least Rupees 10 lakh of foreign contribution during the preceding two financial years. This is an issue that the JPC should carefully scrutinise.

The Pnar Tradition of Keeping Slaves

By H.H. Mohrmen

I first learned about the term 'chong-bro' from my father, to whom I owe much of my earliest knowledge about the stories and traditions of the Pnar of Jaiñtia Hills. Perhaps he also learned these stories during his visits to many places around the Jaiñtia and Karbi Hills. He could speak fluent Karbi because he grew up in Umwasoo village, which is now part of the disputed area. He spent the early part of his youth in the Karbi areas, which also helped him learn Nepali. I can say that the first training that sparked my interest in understanding the culture and traditions of our people came from him. The storytelling sessions we had when we were young were my first classroom, and I later came to know that he also continued these storytelling sessions with his nieces and nephews.

The Pnar from Jowai who settled in the Karbi areas were basically engaged in two livelihood activities, making alcohol through distillation and rice cultivation. In his early years, my father was quite well off because 'ki chong Bhoi', or people who lived in the Karbi areas, were considered better off than those who lived in Jowai. The very fact that they were willing to leave the comfort of their homes was perhaps because the grass was greener on the other side. Later in life, when he moved back to Jowai, he also engaged in 'khaï masi,' a business in which he visited villages to buy cows and then drove the cattle to sell them at the next traditional weekly market.

On August 28, at an exhibition organised by Che Stars Higher Secondary School, Chutwakhu, Jowai, there were two interesting exhibits. One was about slavery, and the other, surprisingly, was about the Iungblai. The Iungblai exhibit made me realise that the students were beginning to understand their roots and take pride in presenting their traditions to others. At the end of the presentation about slavery, I asked the students whose project was on the Iungblai to come closer to where the presentation on slavery was taking place. I asked them if they were aware that the Pnar also had a tradition of keeping slaves. They all shook their heads in the negative. Then I asked them if they had heard of 'ki chong-bro, ki chong-ban', and they all nodded their heads in affirmation.

When one mentions the term 'slave', the idea that conjures up in one's mind is the harrowing treatment of people considered slaves by their masters. Exploitation and inhuman treatment at the hands of masters immediately come to mind. The world became a better place when keeping slaves was made illegal. Others may conclude that it is not surprising that the Pnar kept slaves, because they also had Rajas who maintained diplomatic relationships with neighbouring countries and even issued coins. They may have borrowed the practice of slavery from their neighbours in the plains.

Yes, the Pnar had a tradition of keeping slaves, but not in the traditional sense of the term. Although they called the practice 'chong-bro', which literally means 'to live as a slave', those who lived as 'chong-bro' were not necessarily treated as slaves.

From Rags to Riches

My father, too, seems to have been deeply interested in the story of chong-bro. Perhaps he was also interested in keeping the legacy of his grandfather alive. In an effort to preserve the story of his grandfather, u Mar Sutnga, he wrote an account on a few pieces of paper that I later found among his files. It was only after reading the account that I realised how different this tradition was from the conventional understanding of slavery.

U Mar Sutnga, who later became one of the followers of Hajom Kissor Singh when he started the Unitarian Church in Jowai on September 18, 1887, was 'uwa chong-bro' during the earlier part of his life. U Mar Sutnga, my great-grandfather, was originally from the Sutnga area and belonged to the Pasleiñ clan. Sutnga is not his clan name. Instead, it was a tradition in Jowai in those days to identify people by the place they came from. They were called 'ki iong Sutnga' because they came from Sutnga, despite belonging to the Pasleiñ clan.

He came to Jowai, or was rather brought to Jowai, to 'chong-bro', or live as a slave, with the Bareh clan in Dulong, one of the oldest localities in Jowai. I am not sure whether money changed hands before the boy was taken as a 'bro'. However, at a time when the barter system was still popular, we heard stories of 'kylliang sumrit' or 'kylliang duma', in which a person was exchanged for a basket of chillies or a basket of tobacco.

A typical case of 'chong-bro' involved a young boy being taken into a family and employed as a cowherd. The family would provide him with food, clothing and a place to stay and, in fact, treat him as one of their own. As he grew older, the family would engage him in helping with agriculture or whatever kind of farming activities the family undertook.

U Mar Sutnga too went through this cycle of life. But when he reached the age at which he was ready to start his own family, the family that had kept him had to let him go. He was not only freed by the family; the family that had taken him in also had to give him capital to start his own family and even provide him with a plot of land on which to begin farming.

Herein also lies the difference between the Pnar idea of keeping slaves and the general notion of slavery. 'Slaves' were not treated as 'others' but as members of the family by those who kept them.

My great-grandfather married a woman who was also from the Sutnga area and belonged to the Lamare clan. I only know about my father's aunt, Ka Suna Lamare. My grandfather, U Howel Lamare, died before I was born. Through the dint of his hard work, U Mar Sutnga later became quite well off, while Ka Suna Lamare lived and died in a place called Kdoh Hati under the Dulong locality.

The Honour Given to the Chong-Bro

The aspect that makes it evident that the concept of the slave in the Pnar context is different from the general idea is the honour given to them after they had died. One would be surprised to learn that, whenever families in Jowai offered ancestral veneration, they would also include in their offerings those who had once been their 'slaves'.

When 'ka siang ka pha' was offered, because of the matrilineal family system and the fact that Niamtre is basically a clan-oriented religion, offerings were made only to ancestors who were members of the clan. The ancestors were also categorised into different groups of clan members, including 'ki poi tpep poi tbar, ki pynchong ngiah, ki dei kynsai, ki lai paruid, ki khon-lor' and 'ki ïap mynso'. The offerings were made on different plates or 'sla' leaves for the different categories.

The 'ki khon kha', the children whose fathers belonged to that particular clan, also offer 'ka siang pa siang men' in honour of their 'ki kha', relatives from their father's side. There is, however, one exception in which 'ka siang' is also offered to a non-member of the clan, and that plate is for none other than the 'ki chong-bro chong-ban'.

The status given to the 'chong-bro' was almost that of a family member because they were even given the honour of being included in ancestral veneration, which was otherwise a family affair (Mina Laloo). Plate number six is for ki chong-bro chong-ban, people, mostly men, who had worked with the family and whom the family had treated as one of their own (Wanmon Rngad).

The Pnar therefore have this unique concept: when a man works with a family for many years, he is almost considered a member of that family. He is not only treated as one; when he grows up and is ready to start his own family, the family provides him with land and whatever else is needed to establish his household.

The relationship is so strong that the only reason he is not included as a member of the family is that he belongs to another clan. The fact that 'ka siang ka pha' is offered on his behalf every time also demonstrates that he was not treated as a slave in the literal sense of the term, but almost as a member of the family.

They were given the last plate, or placed at a later stage in the order or hierarchy of the offerings, only because they did not belong to the clan (Wanmon Rngad). Yet, even though they were not from the same clan, they were treated as part of the family and were therefore honoured and remembered forever.

Shallow and Deep: An Ecological Inquiry into Developmental Paradoxes

By Maitphang Syiem

Let's begin with a question, and let's be truly honest in answering it. When we say we love our land, do we love it or do we love what it gives us? Between these two answers lies the entire distance between what philosophy calls Shallow Ecology and Deep Ecology, and dear readers, that distance may well decide the fate of our existence.

Such questions, when raised, can sometimes appear provocative, even unfair. We already speak often enough of conservation, forests, rivers, waste, heritage, and sustainable development so why should these questions need more room? Because it is precisely such ideas that deserve that space. They call us to look beyond the familiar vocabulary of "green," "eco-friendly," "sustainable," and "resilient," and to examine instead the depth of our relationship with what has sustained us until now. This takes us to a useful distinction Ecosophy, or Ecological Wisdom, which seeks harmony between human beings and the earth, and which asks what values, ethics, and choices can support a shared and balanced relationship between the two. Much of this thinking owes its foundations to the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, who first opened up this distinction between Shallow and Deep Ecology. At this juncture, it is worth pausing to ask ourselves how deep is our understanding, and what is the true depth of our relationship with the land? Consider a familiar paradox. We keep cleaning our rivers, and we keep fighting pollution and resource depletion and yet the paradox persists, our rivers continue to receive unnecessary waste, and our natural resources continue to bear the weight of induced anthropogenic pressure. This brings us to what may be called the "Developmental Paradox" a situation in which visible progress, whether in infrastructure, modernisation, or expansion, coexists with inequality, exclusion, environmental loss, and other forms of deprivation.

This calls upon our leaders and elders to deepen their thinking on the developmental paradox, and to ask how sound developmental planning might reduce, or even remove, such contradictions, so that the benefits of progress are shared equally and ecological harmony is preserved. Seen through this lens, Shallow Ecology asks what kind of development is wanted, and how we might develop with less pollution or less ecological imbalance. Deep Ecology asks a harder question still what kind of development is necessary, sufficient, just, and ecologically legitimate? To create space for introspection, let us bring this closer to home. If we overlay our own state onto this framework, we find a geographical setting that is as unique as it is deeply fragile and that fragility asks something of us in return: does it require a shallow understanding of us, or a deep one? The key interpretation is this: Shallow Ecology speaks of development first, and the reduction of environmental damage second, whereas Deep Ecology insists that ecological integrity, and the dignity of all life, must shape what counts as acceptable development from the very beginning. Understood this way, the Developmental Paradox exposes the limits of shallow solutions. It shows us why economic gains or physical infrastructure, on their own, cannot be called development if they simultaneously intensify inequality, ecological degradation, disaster vulnerability, or heritage and cultural loss.

None of this, it must be said, is an argument against development. Our state cannot remain frozen in time, and no reasonable person would wish that it should. The real question, then, is not whether development should happen, but whether it proceeds with ecological consciousness, or merely with ecological clearance.

It is worth dwelling a little longer on Shallow Ecology, because it only becomes a problem when it is treated as the final destination rather than the first step. It allows us to view the environment as a damaged machine identify the malfunction, repair it, continue with the same model, and wait for the next malfunction. It asks how much waste can be dumped, processed, or transported, without ever confronting the culture of disposability that produces the waste in the first place. This is where we need to pause and review our own thinking, because we may well be technically informed without being deeply transformed.

Deep Ecology, by contrast, asks something else of us entirely. As many scholars remind us of philosophy's quiet power to reshape the mind, Deep Ecology offers exactly such a nudge: nature is not a backdrop to human progress, nor merely an inventory of timber, coal, limestone, water, land, tourism views, carbon credits, or market opportunities. It is a web of life in which human existence is embedded and this is not so distant a view from our own indigenous understanding. Ka Mei-Ramew is not an abstraction; it is a life-giving relation. Under a deep ecological mindset, a forest is protected not for its use, but because it has a right to flourish, and because our own wellbeing is inseparable from its wellbeing. Rivers, too, have a life of their own why, then, should we take away what sustains it?

What, then, is the way forward? We return, in the end, to where we began: the question of whether we love our land, or merely what it gives us. By now, perhaps, that question feels a little less comfortable than it did at first. And that discomfort is precisely where Deep Ecology asks us to sit for a while, rather than hurry past.

The way forward does not lie in rejecting development, nor in romanticising the past. It lies in refusing to let ecological clearance masquerade as ecological consciousness. In practice, this asks at least three things of us. First, our policies must be measured not only by what they build, but by what they leave intact a road, a dam, or a mine should be judged as much by the forests, rivers, and communities it preserves as by the growth it promises. Second, our indigenous institutions of governance — our Hima, our Dorbar, the customary councils that have long mediated our relationship with the land call for renewed introspection, and deserve to be strengthened as living custodians of ecological wisdom, not reduced to administrative formality. Third, and perhaps most importantly, our schools and our elders must together teach the young not merely the vocabulary of sustainability, but the depth of Ka Mei-Ramew, so that ecological wisdom is inherited, and not only learned. A further truth follows from these three: our everyday habits of consumption and disposal must answer to the same ecological standard we expect of policy, for no law can outpace a culture of convenience. None of this will be easy, and none of it will be quick. But the alternative a Shallow Ecology that keeps repairing the same damaged machine guarantees only the next malfunction, and the one after that. Somewhere between the shallow question of what we can get away with, and the deep question of what we owe, lies the harder, more honest path, and it is the only path that leads anywhere worth going. So, let us ask, once more, and this time with clearer eyes: do we love our land, or do we love what it gives us? How we choose to answer in our policies, our institutions, and our daily lives will decide whether our hills and rivers inherit a wound that is repeatedly bandaged, or a wisdom that is repeatedly renewed. The choice, as always, is ours.

(The writer is a Geospatial Expert with domain knowledge in Environment, Urban Planning, and Disaster Management)

Letters to the Editor

Illusion of NE Leadership: Left out of FCRA JPC

Editor,

The recent report, 'NE MPs left out of FCRA parl panel' (ST Sept. 5, 2026), is a damning indictment of the complete lack of clout our regional politicians possess in New Delhi. For months, our Chief Ministers and MPs have made grand public statements, posturing as protectors of our local institutions, schools, and hospitals against the harsh clauses of the FCRA Amendment Bill. Yet, when the actual 31-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) was formed to shape this law, the entire Northeast was completely sidelined.

It is true that parliamentary seat allocation is mathematically stacked against small states. However, our leaders' inability to leverage alliances or secure even a single consultative slot shows a much deeper problem: a complete absence of strategic capability. This exposure reveals that our local politicians have plenty of rhetoric but zero analytical depth. They are routinely out-manoeuvred because they choose to follow national party dictates or personal financial convenience rather than driving solid policy.

If our leaders are so easily ignored on an issue that directly threatens the survival of grassroots welfare in scheduled tribe areas, we must ask ourselves what we are actually electing them for. It is time the citizens of Northeast demand real, intellectually formidable leadership instead of hollow political theatrics.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Via email

Urgent Need for Better Customer Grievance Redressal & ATM Reliability in Shillong

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to highlight a distressing experience regarding a malfunctioning ATM at the Lumdiengjri, Garikhana branch, and the subsequent lack of prompt assistance from the bank staff. Last Friday around 5:30 PM, I attempted to deposit cash via the ATM for an urgent medical emergency involving a friend. Due to a technical error, the cash got stuck in the machine, and the receipt instructed me to contact the nearest branch. Although I rushed inside before closing, the service manager dismissed my urgency and asked me to return. Trusting his assurance that the matter would be resolved on Saturday despite the holiday weekend, I completed all required paperwork at the branch the next day.

To my utter disappointment, the funds were not credited to my account, causing severe embarrassment as I had borrowed money from a third party to cover the emergency. Incidents like this highlight a troubling lack of accountability and slow grievance redressal. Automated teller machines and digital banking are meant to ease transactions, not create life-threatening hurdles during medical crises.

Banks function primarily because of their customers, and timely support during emergencies should be a fundamental priority. I urge the concerned banking authorities to upgrade their technical infrastructure, ensure swift resolution of failed ATM transactions, and sensitize staff to handle urgent customer grievances with empathy and professionalism.

Yours etc.,
Name Withheld on Request
Shillong

Are We Preparing Our Youth for the Future or A Disappearing World?

Editor,

For too long, our education system has encouraged young people to chase examinations, degrees, and government employment. We have placed too little emphasis on practical competence, problem-solving, entrepreneurship, and self-reliance. In doing so, we failed to prepare an entire generation for an increasingly cut-throat world. A competitive employer in a tier 1 city asks: What can you actually do? Can you solve problems, learn quickly, manage technology, sell, build, and take responsibility without supervision? These capabilities increasingly determine survival in a rapidly changing labour market. Being able to speak English is valuable, but English isn't good enough.

Government employment offers stability, but government jobs have reached saturation point. Yet when we place extraordinary social value on these positions, entrepreneurship looks daunting. This becomes particularly concerning alongside allegations of recruitment irregularities. Hence the Meghalaya Public Service Commission requires urgent reforms for bringing transparency and restoring public confidence.

Reservation and local protections serve legitimate social objectives but protection cannot become an excuse for abandoning merit, competence, or accountability. A system can protect local people but also demand exceptional performance from everyone within it.

Then there is migration. Thousands of young Meghalayans leave for major cities out of necessity. While we shouldn't romanticize this, those entering competitive workplaces receive what education alone cannot provide: exposure. They encounter environments where punctuality, productivity, initiative, and accountability are daily requirements. This raises an uncomfortable reality – that Meghalaya does not suffer from a shortage of capable people but lacks the environment that demands capability. Migration should be a choice, not an obligation forced by a lack of opportunities at home. We need an environment where a young person with an idea is encouraged to build it and failure is counted as experience, not humiliation, and where saying, "I want to start a company," yields mentorship and capital rather than advice to prepare for another exam. Initiatives like PRIME and the Chief Minister's Skills Mission are positive steps, but we must ask if they are moving fast enough.

Simultaneously, we face a growing youth drug-abuse crisis. This is not just a policing problem. A young person needs something to strive towards—meaningful work, ambition, purpose, and creative outlets. If we fail to provide those then drugs, idleness, and hopelessness will fill the vacuum.

The world our young people are entering is changing at extraordinary speed. Artificial intelligence will change the meaning of employability. People who rely only on routine skills may discover that those skills are increasingly replaceable. We need to build capable human beings, not merely employable applicants. We need schools that teach children to think, not simply what to remember. We need universities that produce problem-solvers. We need vocational education that leads directly to real careers. We need businesses that can grow without excessive barriers. We need an entrepreneurial culture that celebrates people who create employment rather than only those who get employed.

It's time to stop confusing protection with preparation. A protected environment can feel safe but a world that's not prepared for competition can be cruel. The rest of India and the world is moving at extraordinary speed. AI is accelerating that change. Our young people cannot afford to be complacent. They need skills, confidence, resilience, technical competence and entrepreneurial thinking. They need the ability to compete with someone from Bengaluru, Singapore, London, or anywhere else in the world. Most importantly, they need to believe that they can create their own future rather than wait for someone to give them one. Meghalaya's youth are not the problem. Our failure to prepare them for the world ahead is the problem. And if we genuinely love our young people, perhaps the most loving thing we can do now is stop molly-coddling them and start preparing them.

Yours etc.,
Metis Whyborne Lyngdoh,
Siliguri

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"Eighty percent of success is showing up."
— Woody Allen

The Shillong Times

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Good Roads a Public Right

RECENTLY the Government announced that Rs 794.80 crore is allocated for the maintenance of state roads in 2025-26 and 2026-27. The question to the Government is: Why do even newly constructed roads need repair within a year of their completion? Often the reason given by engineers and contractors is that roads in Meghalaya degenerate faster because of heavy rains. But the counter-question is: Don't engineering schools teach how roads should be built in areas of heavy rainfall? In 2023 the Meghalaya High Court stated that heavy rainfall cannot be used as a permanent excuse for bad roads; in one of the wettest places on earth, roads must be designed with materials and construction methods capable of enduring those conditions. Along the highways, rainwater flows through the middle of the road, causing erosion. This happens because there is no drainage or the drains are clogged due to being shallow. Across Shillong city there is a stark absence of storm drains. But where drains exist, they are blocked by garbage, allowing rainwater to enter the layers beneath the bitumen. Once the base is saturated the road begins to crack, sink and develop potholes. Also, in Meghalaya trucks carry loads beyond the permitted capacity and use narrow streets passing through residential areas to make a quick entry and exit by bypassing the highway.

A PWD environmental assessment for a Meghalaya road project specifically noted that poor drainage was seriously deteriorating the road surface, compounded by landslides during the monsoon. Road building is a specialised activity because the geology is complex and roads pass through steep slopes, unstable soil, landslide-prone areas, high-rainfall zones, areas with loose rock and soil. But at the root of poor road construction is the lack of accountability from the State Public Works Department (PWD) and the minister-engineer- contractor nexus. There is no civil society to take on the challenging task of auditing newly constructed roads.The CAG documented one case where a road was constructed through unstable terrain without adequate geological and soil investigation. Heavy rain then caused landslides and sections of the road, including culverts were washed away. This is just one example. There are hundreds of such roads that have collapsed within months of construction. Just because a road is black-topped does not mean it is built to last. In fact, it's almost as if the roads are poorly built to ensure a steady flow of funds towards repair work.

Roads in Meghalaya and Shillong city are built with inadequate thickness, poor-quality aggregates, improper compaction, insufficient base layers, poor bonding between layers, substandard drainage and inadequate slope protection etc. Quality control is weak and the defects become visible after rain and traffic expose them. The reason for all this is that no engineer in charge has ever been held accountable for poor quality roads and no contractor has ever been publicly blacklisted.On highways trucks carrying coal and limestone are overloaded. This puts pressure on roads that were not designed for such load and traffic intensity. Roads need continuous maintenance. Small cracks must be sealed early. Drains must be cleaned before the monsoon. Potholes must be repaired before water enters the road base. But if contractors are paid for only for completing construction and there is weak enforcement of defect-liability and maintenance obligations, there may be little incentive to ensure long-term durability.

The Slow Death of a Regional Party and Who's Killing It

By Mantre Hame Dkhar

Something is happening in Meghalaya right now, and it deserves to be called by its real name. Reports say a majority of UDP MLAs are talking to the BJP about switching sides. Nobody is calling it what it is. They call it "talks." And call it "discussions." Nice, safe words. But what is actually being decided here is whether Meghalaya keeps its own regional party at all.

Think about what the UDP was supposed to be. It wasn't just another party name on a ballot paper. It came out of a tradition that put the Khasi-Jaintia people and the Jaidbynriew first, ahead of any national party's interests. Some of its prominent leaders came up through the student movement. They stood on stage as young students, promised the Jaidbynriew they would never sell out Hynniewtrep interests for a chair in someone else's Cabinet. That promise is why people trusted these leaders for decades. And that is exactly the promise now being broken, one MLA at a time.

Let's not pretend this is about ideology. Nobody believes these legislators woke up one day and suddenly agreed with the BJP's vision for the Northeast. This is about numbers. Who gets a Cabinet seat. Who controls which department. Who survives the next reshuffle, and who gets left out in the cold. A man who once stood before students and elders and swore to protect Jaidbynriew interests is now, by most accounts, quietly working out how to save his own political career inside the very party he was elected to keep at a distance. That's not conviction. That's ambition wearing the mask of "development."

And here is what stings the most. Some of these very leaders came from the student movement -the KSU tradition : a movement built on one simple idea that our people need political leaders who answer to nobody but us. When a leader from that background now negotiates his way into a BJP ministership, he isn't just changing his party symbol. He's telling every student who ever marched on the street, every elder who ever believed in him, that the Jaidbynriew was just a stepping stone. A way up, not a cause worth staying loyal to.

There is an old story worth telling here, the kind elders tell around a fire, though this one is new. Once there was a young Torchbearer, elected president of the students, who stood before thousands and lit their spirit with five words: "Khasi by blood, Indian by accident." The crowd roared. Old men wept. Mothers pointed him out to their sons and said, this one will guard us. He carried that torch through marches, through arrests, through years when carrying it cost him something real.

Years passed. The Torchbearer became a legislator. Then, for a season, a Minister until a reshuffle came, as reshuffles do, and the chair was taken from him. And it is said that in the quiet after that loss, something in him changed. He went looking for the torch he once carried so high, and found that its oil had run dry, its flame gone out somewhere between the Cabinet room and the corridor. In its place he found a different fire lit by other hands, warmer to him now than the crowd that once loved him. And when he opened his mouth again, the old words came out reversed, though he did not seem to notice: "Indian by blood, Khasi by accident."

No one recorded whether the crowd that once wept for him was there to hear it. But somewhere, it is said, an old KSU banner still hangs in a forgotten hall, the paint of those first five words cracking, waiting for someone to ask why the man who wrote them no longer remembers what they meant.

And let's be clear about the scale of this. This isn't one MLA switching sides, which happens now and then in every state and barely makes news. This is reportedly a majority of the party's own legislators enough to finish off the UDP as a serious force in Meghalaya politics. That's not a coalition adjustment. That's a wipeout. And it isn't happening through an election, where voters would get their say. It's happening through backroom deals, where decades of regional identity get treated like an asset to be bought out, not a promise people voted for. Nobody who voted UDP thought they were voting for a future BJP legislator.

So here's a straight question for every MLA currently in these talks: what will you actually say to the people who voted for you as a regional candidate, when you take oath as a member of a national party's state unit? What will you say to the KSU workers who once called you one of their own? And beyond a ministerial car and a department to run, what exactly justifies tearing down the one political institution in this state whose whole job was to stop Delhi from simply swallowing up the Khasi-Jaintia political voice?

Maybe, for the individual MLA, this is a smart career move. A Cabinet berth under the BJP probably does look better than years sitting in opposition inside a shrinking party. That calculation might even make sense for him personally. But it isn't the MLA who pays for that choice - it's Meghalaya. The state is left without a real regional counterweight at exactly the moment big questions are still unresolved: ILP, Sixth Schedule autonomy, FCRA scrutiny of our churches, and a mining policy nobody has sorted out. A whole generation of student leaders once promised the Jaidbynriew a politics that could never be bought. What's happening right now looks a lot like that promise finally being cashed in.

Let's not pretend this is about ideology. Nobody believes these legislators woke up one day and suddenly agreed with the BJP's vision for the Northeast. This is about numbers. Who gets a Cabinet seat. Who controls which department. Who survives the next reshuffle, and who gets left out in the cold. A man who once stood before students and elders and swore to protect Jaidbynriew interests is now, by most accounts, quietly working out how to save his own political career inside the very party he was elected to keep at a distance. That's not conviction. That's ambition wearing the mask of "development."

When a leader from that background now negotiates his way into a BJP ministership, he isn't just changing his party symbol. He's telling every student who ever marched on the street, every elder who ever believed in him, that the Jaidbynriew was just a stepping stone. A way up, not a cause worth staying loyal to. There is an old story worth telling here, the kind elders tell around a fire, though this one is new. Once there was a young Torchbearer, elected president of the students, who stood before thousands and lit their spirit with five words: "Khasi by blood, Indian by accident." The crowd roared. Old men wept.

Sportsmanship, But Only for Sportsmen

By Alex Kharwanlang

Sport asks everything of the athlete: discipline, sacrifice, the willingness to accept an unfavourable decision without protest, and the knowledge that a single failed dope test can undo fifteen years of work built match by match, season by season. Yet the people who administer the institutions built to enforce this code frequently answer to no code at all. They chair federations that resemble sporting bodies on paper and political fiefdoms in practice, where authority is measured in votes cast at an Annual General Meeting rather than runs scored or matches won.

The Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA) offers a local case study precise enough for a governance classroom, and it is far from unique. In recent months, years of accumulated dysfunction have finally come into the open. Media reports have shown how audits uncovered failures that had little to do with cricket and everything to do with money: tax obligations left unmet, GST filings falling short of statutory requirement, procurement processes meant to secure competitive rates instead producing unusually inflated vendor bills that went unscrutinised, association funds flowing disproportionately toward the home district of one office bearer while other districts struggled for funds. Worse still, a sexual harassment complaint and its alleged cover up, and an attempt to challenge a Supreme Court backed dispute resolution mechanism meant to examine such matters, timed inconveniently close to when it began doing exactly that. Amid this pile up of discrepancies, one name recurs across nearly every thread: that of the now-suspended MCA Secretary, Rayonald Kharkamni.

In circumstances where accountability might have served far better through simple humility, the response was not contrition but litigation, a means of clinging to power rather than answering for its use. If these accounts are accurate, an institution built specifically to protect athletes found itself contested in court at almost the exact moment it had begun doing precisely the job it was created for. The irony is unsurprising, but it says something enduring about how unchecked power behaves when finally confronted with its own conduct, questions of morality aside.

What recent reporting makes clear is that this has become depressingly familiar across sporting bodies in India. The tragedy is that, in the face of needed change, the tyranny of the corrupt closes ranks against anyone who attempts reform. Tightening procurement, insisting on audits, and empowering dispute redressal mechanisms are rarely met with quiet acceptance. They are met instead with slow campaigns to recast the reformer as the aggressor, and with smear efforts designed to disengage stakeholders away from anyone trying to fix what is broken. The result, inevitably, is governance failure at the top translating directly into vulnerability for young athletes at the bottom, with protections arriving late, if they arrive at all, whenever leadership is more occupied contesting the legitimacy of oversight bodies than answering to them.

Meghalaya's cricket administration is, in this sense, a regional chapter of a national story repeated across nearly every sport India plays. The Board of Control for Cricket in India spent much of the last decade under the shadow of the 2013 Indian Premier League spot fixing scandal, in which the son in law of the Board's own president was found to have passed information to bookmakers, prompting the Supreme Court to install the Lodha Committee and force through reforms the Board had resisted for years: age and tenure limits, cooling off periods, and a genuine separation between team ownership and administrative power. The 2010 Commonwealth Games produced its own enduring symbol of the problem in organizing committee chairman Suresh Kalmadi, whose tenure became a byword for procurement fraud and cost overruns at a global event the country had hoped would serve as a showcase rather than a cautionary tale. Football fared no better: in 2022 the Supreme Court dissolved the All India Football Federation's executive committee after its president overstayed constitutional term limits.

Wrestling supplied the most searing recent example. Allegations by top women wrestlers against the Wrestling Federation of India's president led to sustained protests and a police chargesheet on charges including assault, sexual harassment and stalking, alongside a temporary suspension of the federation. A Delhi court acquitted him in the criminal case in August 2026, a reminder that a trial verdict and a governance failure are not the same inquiry. Whatever the criminal outcome, the episode had already exposed how thoroughly a national federation can be built around one man's authority rather than the athletes it exists to serve.

None of this squares easily with India's position in Asia. Japan rebuilt a sporting culture from the wreckage of war. South Korea industrialised out of poverty within a single generation and turned that same discipline into world class systems for football, archery, and shooting. China, whatever the fair criticisms of its state controlled model, kept its sports bureaucracy insulated from the kind of personal fiefdoms that plague Indian federations, treating national federations as instruments of policy rather than personal property. All three carry histories of colonial pressure, occupation, or hardship comparable to India's own, yet none allowed its federations to become patronage networks answerable to loyalty rather than performance. What distinguishes them is not resources but structure: administrators there are professionals answerable to results and to law, not powerbrokers answerable to networks built over decades of unopposed incumbency.

None of this is beyond fixing, and the outlines of a solution are not mysterious. Internal dispute resolution mechanisms, wherever the Supreme Court has already mandated them, need enforcement teeth rather than paper existence: fixed terms, guaranteed budgets, and protection from being litigated out of relevance by the very officials they are meant to police. Financial audits should be published as a matter of routine rather than extracted through investigative reporting years after the fact, and procurement above a modest threshold ought to run through open, competitive tender rather than discretionary approval. Term and tenure limits, of the kind the Lodha reforms eventually forced on the BCCI, deserve to be written into every state association's constitution rather than treated as a cricket specific accident of litigation. Athletes themselves, not only administrators, need a formal voice on the bodies that govern them, since it is their careers and safety that absorb the cost of institutional failure.

None of this requires reinventing the wheel. Every element already exists somewhere within Indian sport, waiting to be applied consistently rather than selectively. What is missing is the will, and perhaps the recognition that sportsmanship is not a virtue reserved for the field but a standard administrators owe the sport as much as its players do.

That question now sits squarely with Meghalaya. The litigation triggered by Kharkamni's suspension will, in time, produce an answer of its own, not merely to a legal dispute but to a far larger one — whether due process can still deliver reform when tyranny tries to resist it, or whether, as with wrestling's long and bruising reckoning, the institution simply outlasts the scrutiny and returns to business as usual. For now, the Meghalaya Cricket Association is still waiting to find out which of those two futures it will get - a ray of hope that litigation and accountability can repair a broken house, or a slow surrender to the very tyranny that has been rotting the system from within for years and has been eating sports across India in general.

(The author is a sports-enthusiast and a legal consultant)

Letters to the Editor

Acknowledge, Educate, Agitate, Organize

Editor,

The current police action against Khasi Students' Union (KSU) leaders is uncalled for. It is visibly clear that the top leaders of KSU have been arrested to take responsibility for the situation of August 19. However, equating them with the criminals who attacked innocent victims is unfair. Politics is never clean, and incidents do happen. It's not a justification, but this country has proved to us time and again that without a 'Halla', no one listens (reference the CJP Protest and the resignation of Dharmendra Pradhan). So, it's time that the police actually nab the real culprits. In fact, society in Meghalaya has been split between unidentified miscreants and the stateless, with no police action. The administration has always used the students' union as a scapegoat to justify its inaction and absence, and also to hide behind the banner of unidentified miscreants.

Luckily, this time the High Court of Meghalaya has taken cognisance of police complicity and hopefully will hold them accountable for years of inaction, not just regarding this rally. Let us remind ourselves of the fine work of the Meghalaya Police when they caught four tourists who ransacked a homestay and successfully arrested them in West Bengal. Yet, when it comes to state issues, especially rallies such as these, the police remain silent digital spectators. To remind you, the state has spent crores on surveillance machinery, high-grade equipment, and vehicles.

What we are witnessing is a larger problem, especially when people of the state, whether tribal or non-tribal, can clearly see that the students' union is raising genuine issues while the police keep escaping accountability. Are we witnessing some kind of politico-police alliance to achieve a larger agenda? To paint Meghalaya as a disturbed state for more funds and benefits? Or is it to advance a certain political ideology that seeks to erase the social fabric of Meghalaya?

As a permanent non-tribal resident of Meghalaya, I see the students' union coming out in the open for real causes. It's time to build alliances between permanent citizens for holistic and sustainable development. Politics of extreme views may not really help in this day and age, and hidden powers control the state. Years of wounds and hurt can always be healed through such alliances. Acknowledging history and recognizing the way forward is the need of the hour. There are always monkeys in catfights who will end up eating the bread, and we know how they exist on both sides.

Yours etc.,
Dhruv C,
Via email

A Dangerous Precedent

Editor

The recent Hon'ble Supreme Court's verdict to quash FIRs nationwide against protestors involved in the July CJP protests, while excluding the Delhi FIR concerning 2,873 individuals with criminal antecedents, has set a very dangerous precedent. The order, in its practical effect, has extended protection to first-time offenders who indulged in violence, vandalism or destruction of public property. Such acts, first-time or otherwise, attract criminal liability under the Prevention of Damage to Public Property Act, 1984. The larger concern, therefore, is the widening gap between criminal liability in law and immunity in practice.

The danger lies precisely in the combination of these failures. Administrative failure to control violence, unlawful and violent conduct by protestors and judicial relief that places peaceful dissent and violent criminality under the same protective umbrella. When these three elements converge, it represents a serious and potentially colossal collective failure of the institutions of a constitutional democracy. Democracy cannot survive by suppressing dissent. Equally, it cannot survive by equating lawlessness with dissent. If this dangerous trend continues, the nation surely risks sliding towards anarchism.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

Appeal for postponement of the MCS Preliminary Examination

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, we are making a sincere appeal to the Government and the concerned authorities to consider postponing the forthcoming Meghalaya Civil Services Preliminary Examination scheduled to be held in the last week of September, by a reasonable period.

The timing of the examination is troubling for many aspirants, especially teachers and other field-level functionaries who have been continuously engaged in Government duties over the past few months. Many were first assigned Census related work and, almost immediately after that, were allotted duties related to the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The present SIR is also not an ordinary exercise. It has come after nearly two decades since the previous intensive revision in the State and has involved extensive field work, verification, digitisation, scrutiny, notices and hearings. Several field functionaries who were involved in Census work have also been used for SIR duties.

For those assigned such work, these duties are not optional. When they are asked to attend training, go for field visits, verify records, attend hearings, complete data entry and meet deadlines, they have to do so, along with their regular school and office duties.

The difficulty, therefore, is not that some aspirants want more time to study. Many of them have spent the most important months before the MCS Preliminary Examination carrying out one Government assignment after another, with hardly any proper break in between.

It is also unfortunate that the Preliminary Examination has been scheduled so close to the ongoing SIR exercise. In Meghalaya, the SIR exercise will continue until October, with stages such as scrutiny, notices, claims, objections and hearings yet to be completed. For many, the work has actually not ended, at a time when serious preparation for an examination like the MCS should normally be at its peak.

When field functionaries are asked to work for the Government, they have to put those duties first. We only hope that when these same people need empathy from the Government, their difficulties will also be understood. We are also encouraged by the consideration shown earlier when the MTET examination was rescheduled in view of the difficulties faced by teachers engaged in Census and SIR duties. We sincerely hope that the same consideration is shown to MCS aspirants who have been affected by these duties.

We appeal to the Chief Minister and the concerned authorities to kindly consider postponing the Preliminary Examination by a reasonable period, so that those who have lost valuable preparation time because of government duties may also get a fair chance to prepare and compete.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Meghalaya Needs a Border and River Police Grid

Editor,

Meghalaya Government should rethink border security through a specialised Border Police and River Police system, supported by intelligence and technology. The State has 423 km of international boundary with Bangladesh and 566 km with Assam, nearly 989 km in total, but only 279 personnel are sanctioned under its Prevention of Infiltration Force.

The problem is real and needs to be tackled at the earliest. In January 2026, Meghalaya Police intercepted 18 Bangladeshi nationals and two Indian touts near Dawki, allegedly attempting illegal entry. In June, five Bangladeshi nationals were detained in West Garo Hills while three others fled during document verification; Bangladeshi SIM cards were reportedly recovered. The Meghalaya Government figures indicate that 658 Bangladeshi nationals were detected and legally prosecuted in Meghalaya between 2021 and 2026, with 194 subsequently deported.

Israel offers a useful conceptual lesson: layered border security, integrating specialised police, intelligence, surveillance, rapid response and command centres rather than relying on a barrier alone.

Meghalaya should transform its PIF into a Border Police Organisation and establish a dedicated River Police for vulnerable waterways. Drones, thermal cameras, sensors, GPS-enabled boats and an integrated intelligence centre could connect BSF, Border Police, River Police and district police.

The objective should be simple: BSF guards the international boundary; Meghalaya Police must act as a second layer of security with local intelligence network.

Yours etc.,
Shahin Yusuf,
Guwahati

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

"Mother Nature is the great equalizer. You can't get away from it."

—Christopher Heyerdahl

The Shillong Times

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Security threats

DESPITE the flaws of the Modi government on multiple fronts, it deserves commendation for the manner in which law and order is maintained in the country and divisive forces are kept under check. The three terms of the NDA government have seen the authorities keeping a close watch against terrorist activities and Left Wing Extremist offensives. Along the same lines, the security apparatus deserves praise for the timely detection of a suspected plot against the Prime Minister at the venue of an event he addressed on Tuesday. The preceding day, two persons moving suspiciously around the venue were detained and searched, only to find that one was carrying a fake identity card as a "PMO official" and the other his "bodyguard" hiding a gun in his overalls. Investigations would confirm whether there indeed was a plot on the PM himself.

India has a tragic history of top leaders having been assassinated while holding office or out of office. The Father of the Nation, Mahatma Gandhi, fell to the bullets of a Hindu fundamentalist while holding prayers in the national capital within months of India's Independence. What obviously angered the assassin or his group was the Mahatma's consent for partition and nod for grant of strong financial support to the newly formed Pakistan. Indira Gandhi was slain at the PM's official residence by her Sikh security guards, allegedly at the behest of Pakistan's ISI in the aftermath of the Operation Blue Star. Rajiv Gandhi, who succeeded her as PM, was slain while he was out of office and campaigning in Tamil Nadu for a parliament poll. All these despite the high security surrounding them wherever they went – at a scale higher than the security accorded to top national figures in several other countries. With such grim experiences in the past, the security for the PM and the President has been escalated to higher levels. Full alert is what can thwart any mischievous attempts.

Forces within the country and outside are likely to be targeting top political figures even now. The Islamic fundamentalism aided and abetted by Pakistan is on one side. The Khalistan force is still active abroad. The Naxalites/ Maoists are apparently down and out, yet they carry significant firepower by virtue of their training and shadowy connections. Separatists in Kashmir and the North-East are generally under strict surveillance but could cause trouble anytime. These apart, unknown forces could be at work within the country or abroad to create chaotic conditions here. How someone not connected with the PMO moved around with a fake ID at the venue of the PM's meeting – and with a so-called 'bodyguard' carrying a gun – needs to be thoroughly investigated. India cannot afford to cut a sorry figure again. Notably, there had been lapses in security, as in the Pahalgam massacres, where no security personnel were around to defend the hapless tourists in the vulnerable Kashmir Valley. As a result, many precious lives were lost and a brief war unfolded between India and Pakistan, with much loss of military resources on both sides. When it comes to security, there can be no lapses and no excuses should be tolerated.

Much Ado About Nothing? Questions The VPP is Yet To Answer

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Recently, Airpeace Rani, spokesperson for the VPP, responded to my previous article, 'The VPP, Khasi nationalism and the Hindutva Challenge,' (ST September 3, 2026) by bringing out his own article, 'The VPP and its critics: Much ado about nothing,' (ST September 7, 2026) in which he attempted to address the points I raised. So, I think it's fair that I respond to his arguments, which I feel are very unsatisfactory.

The issue of reservation has been a long-drawn-out one, and there is no doubt that it was instrumental in the VPP's Lok Sabha victory. However, after the government brought out the expert committee report, the party decided not to take part in the all-party meeting to discuss the report. They claimed, as Airpeace does, that the party has already put forward its point in the Assembly, which is correct. However, the party also took the issue to the streets, with the party president, Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit, staging a hunger strike. So, the issue is not limited only to the floor of the Assembly.

Most importantly, any change in the reservation policy will attract legal and constitutional scrutiny. So, why has the VPP not approached the court and asked it to dismantle the old policy and create a new one based on population? If the VPP is correct, the court will rule in their favour and give the Khasis a more enhanced share. The issue of reservation has been debated extensively in the courts, and there are enough precedents the court can use to make a quick judgment. If the judgment on Meghalaya's reservation policy goes in favour of the VPP before the Lok Sabha by-election, the party's victory would be all but assured. But even if the judgment takes a couple of years, a good performance in the 2028 Assembly election is guaranteed.

The VPP might respond to my suggestion by claiming that the issue is a political matter and, therefore, it will change the policy if it comes to power. However, if the VPP does not come to power in 2028, this will mean that deserving Khasis will have to wait another seven years to get justice. But by then, many would have already crossed their cut-off age, losing the chance to get a secure job for themselves and their families. The party can at least announce that it will approach the court to provide justice to the Khasis who have been deprived of their 'rightful' share and dispel the notion that it has lied to the people on the issue of reservation. So, when is the VPP going to court to seek justice for the Khasis on the issue of reservation?

Then there is the issue of the deletion of Section 16 from the 2021 Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Regulation and Administration of Land) Act, which strips away the rights of traditional institutions like the Dorbar Shnong, Dorbar Raid, and Dorbar Hima in terms of land governance. Airpeace tried to defend the decision by citing that the provision concerns only the delimitation of the land ceiling, and there is nothing more to it. However, in August this year, leaders of the Synjuk Ki Nongsynshar Shnong Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep (SKNSBH) and the Synjuk Ki Rangbah Kur Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep (SKRK) submitted a joint memorandum to the Governor, demanding that the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Regulation and Administration of Land) (Amendment) Bill, 2026 be returned without assent. They also sought the immediate withdrawal of the KHADC notification fixing land ceilings on Raid land. So, it's not just about the issue of delimitation of the land ceiling, but, more importantly, about the erosion of the authority of the traditional bodies that existed before the KHADC and before the British, whose system of administering the Khasi Himas is what the concept of the ADC is based upon.

But let's assume that the KHADC is correct in being concerned about some corrupt traditional leaders giving away Raid land for personal benefit, which is causing a great deal of hardship to the local community, especially poor households that need access to community land. And even though they have just taken office a year ago, they could not wait another year of deliberations to convince the traditional leaders not to misuse their power. Assuming the VPP had good intentions with the Bill, instead of deleting the need to consult traditional heads, the KHADC could have introduced grievance redressal provisions in the Bill so that anybody in the village, Raid or Hima who has been coerced, through threats or other forms of intimidation, into agreeing to the transfer of Raid land or is unhappy with their traditional bodies can lodge a complaint with them. Once a complaint is lodged, the transfer must immediately stop until the allegations have been verified. The complaint can be anonymous to protect the identity of the people affected so that they are not targeted by corrupt traditional heads. A whistleblower protection mechanism can also be incorporated into the Bill to give them legal protection.

Another way to stop the undue transfer of Raid land could be to increase the bureaucratic hurdles for giving assent to any transfer of land beyond a ceiling, making it cumbersome, time-consuming, and expensive. Of course, this might encourage corruption, but as long as the VPP is in power, they can ensure that 'clean governance' is maintained. But the fact that the KHADC exempted itself from the provisions creates a loophole that a non-righteous party in the future, unlike the VPP, can exploit if it comes to power. The exemption itself creates a possibility of corruption, and one wonders if that is not by design. Ultimately, the land belongs to the community, not the KHADC. However, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Regulation and Administration of Land) (Amendment) Bill, 2026 appears to seek a transfer of ownership and control of land to the KHADC, and that's why the traditional heads are up in arms against the Bill.

Lastly, regarding my argument that the VPP is trying to implement a Khasi Christian Zionism ideology, Airpeace's counterargument that "if voicing against Hindutva politics makes one a 'Christian Zionist,' then perhaps every critic should be given a new label for the convenience of commentators" is highly immature and childish. I am an atheist, and I don't support Hindutva politics, and I know many Hindus who also feel the same. This does not mean that we are "Christian Zionists". As for the VPP, the claim that it follows a Christian Zionist ideology is evidenced by its liberal use of biblical quotations in political meetings. One need only look at the videos of these meetings shared online. Albert Thyrniang, a respected Christian priest and columnist, even wrote an article in 2024 asking "Is the VPP the Christian version of BJP?" He writes that the party leaders "make no bones of their conviction that the VPP came into being because of (Christian) God's will". At the end of the article, he asks the important question: We brand the BJP as 'seng shongshit niam' (communal). But what about us? Are we not hypocrites?

On June 2, 2026, Seng Khasi, Seng Raij, and Seng Khihlang held a joint press conference where the Vice President of the Seng Khasi Kmie, PD Nongrum, questioned the appointment of a Christian as the acting Chief in Hima Sohra in place of Marremdor Syiem, despite the tradition, as in Hima Mylliem and Hima Khyrim, that the position of the Syiem has to be occupied by a person of indigenous faith. He also asked why the Syiem of Hima Mylliem, Ainam Manik Syiem was suspended right after the Meghalaya High Court passed the order allowing Niam Khasi adherents to complete the rituals in the Hima. All of this, according to Nongrum, along with events taking place since 2017, is bringing division among people on the basis of religion. This begs the question: Is the KHADC meant to strengthen traditional customs and norms, or to reinvent them to serve the VPP's ideological bent? I hope the party does not think that Albert Thyrniang, Seng Khasi, Seng Raij, and Seng Khihlang are in cahoots with the supposedly "corrupt" traditional heads. That would be an outrageous claim.

I am a common citizen, and I have every right to raise questions about those who are governing us or have intentions to govern us. And I am really glad that the VPP decided to address my arguments, although quite unsatisfactorily, to take the discussion forward. The final decision lies with the readers, and they can make up their own minds about this whole issue.

(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)

Start the Conversation Before It's Too Late

By Arpita Saikia

In 2003, World Suicide Prevention Day was established by the International Association for Suicide Prevention (IASP) in partnership with the World Health Organization (WHO). Since then, September 10th has been globally observed as the World Suicide Prevention Day. This year, marks the final year of the three-year theme i.e. "Changing the Narratives on Suicide" with a message "Start the Conversation". According to the WHO, more than 720,000 people die due to suicide every year. The National Crime Reports Bureau data, recorded 1,70,746 suicide deaths in 2024 in India with young and middle aged adults between 18 and 45 making up close to two thirds of the data. Meghalaya Police website reports of 213 cases of suicides in the year 2022 in the state.

"The statistics provide the numbers. But every number carries a story. Perhaps a story of struggle, a pain that became too difficult to express in words or too heavy carry alone. More than a century ago, in 1897, Sociologist Emile Durkheim had written Le Suicide (Suicide: A Study in Sociology) in which he explored how suicide, despite being an individual act or a private tragedy, is also deeply rooted in the society in which we live."

The statistics provide the numbers. But every number carries a story. Perhaps a story of struggle, a pain that became too difficult to express in words or too heavy carry alone. More than a century ago, in 1897, Sociologist Emile Durkheim had written Le Suicide (Suicide: A Study in Sociology) in which he explored how suicide, despite being an individual act or a private tragedy, is also deeply rooted in the society in which we live. He drew attention to the importance of social bonds, something he termed as social integration. When people are disconnected from family, community etc. the vulnerability increases hence increasing the risk of suicides. Simultaneously, he also recognized that excessive social integration can be harmful too, when a person's individual identity becomes secondary to the demands of a group. There is a thin line between "I don't belong anywhere" and "My individual self doesn't matter". Even as later scholars have identified shortcomings in his methods, his focus on social connections remains relevant.

A person having suicidal thoughts may not always want to end their life. Sometimes they may be desperate to stop the struggles, pain or the feeling of being trapped in a situation. The thoughts may not be permanent but can be overwhelming enough to set off a spiral of thoughts from which finding a way out may feel impossible. There is no single reason why a person may become suicidal. Mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety etc. can contribute to emotional distress. Traumatic experiences, loss, relationship problems, financial pressure, social and academic expectations, prolonged stress etc. can further add to the struggles. Often, these factors may leave a person feeling trapped and hopeless. A person may become exhausted from the constant tug of war within themselves and despite wanting help they may hesitate to share their experiences in order to avoid being judged, becoming an inconvenience or burden or simply because they cannot find the words to express what they are going through. It can lead to the feeling of being lonely despite having people around. How does one tell someone "I am not okay" without being judged, dismissed or asked "to be strong"? As a result a person may begin to hide their struggles, withdraw from others and try to handle their challenges on their own. Failing to do so may leave them with feelings of guilt and inadequacy.

But the struggle to speak of suicidal thoughts or even suicide ideation is just one part of the issue. The other part of struggle is listening. We may want to help, yet not know how to listen. We are afraid of the word "suicide". We are quick to offer solutions, to ask those who are struggling to be strong. But despite coming from a place of caring, this can close the conversations around suicide.

That's precisely where and why the conversation needs to start. A global mental health researcher Brandon A Kohrt had highlighted in his 2025 article the reasons why we struggle to talk about suicide. Fear is one of them: fear of saying the wrong things, fear of making things worse, fear of not knowing what to do next. This fear, leads us more towards rules, formalities and procedures instead of building genuine human connections with the person who is struggling. We are not expected to have all the answers. Nor are we expected to fix a person. What can we do is, listen. We can acknowledge our own discomfort and fear we may feel when confronting difficult conversations. We can listen without immediately trying to solve the problem and help them to connect with appropriate support when they need it.

Changing the narrative around suicide and mental health includes challenging the stigma surrounding it. Talking about suicide does not mean normalizing suicide. Rather it means normalizing conversations about suicidal thoughts, mental health and seeking help. It means learning to listen without judging or dismissing the unseen struggles of a person. As IASP states initiating conversations can help in breaking down barriers and raise awareness.

Changing the narratives begins with a conversation. So, start the conversation before it's too late.

"A global mental health researcher Brandon A Kohrt had highlighted in his 2025 article the reasons why we struggle to talk about suicide. Fear is one of them: fear of saying the wrong things, fear of making things worse, fear of not knowing what to do next. This fear, leads us more towards rules, formalities and procedures instead of building genuine human connections with the person who is struggling. We are not expected to have all the answers."

Letters to the Editor

NPP's Lok Sabha Election Campaign Pitch

Editor,

The news, "NPP candidate makes WKH's Parl representation key Shillong by-poll pitch" (ST 7th September 2026) made interesting reading. Dr DRL Nonglait made a profound statement during his campaign for the by-poll of 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency at Maweit, West Khasi Hills on September 6, 2026 that, "politics and faith have one common mission and that is service to humanity." In principle politics and faith do share a common mission when they are at their best: service to humanity. Both are means to uplift people, protect dignity, and create conditions for a meaningful life. Faith at its core in most traditions, emphasizes compassion, justice and care for the vulnerable. Politics ideally, should translate those values into laws, institutions, and policies that ensure fairness, opportunity and protection for citizens. But here is the tension: faith often works at the level of moral guidance and personal conscience, while politics operates through power, compromise and governance. When politics loses sight of service, it can become about control or self-interest. When faith is misused, it can become exclusionary rather than compassionate. So, the overlap is real, both can be vehicles of service but the challenge is keeping them aligned with that mission rather than drifting into division or self-gain. The healthiest societies are those where politics borrows the moral compass of service from faith, but remains inclusive and secular enough to serve all citizens equally.

Another important statement made by Dr DRL Nonglait in his campaign in the same place is, "When the NPP called me, I remembered the people of West Khasi Hills. West Khasi Hills has the right to have an MP from the region. This reflects that the NPP has not discriminated against us." Here Dr Nonglait has hit the right chord. Why do I say so? If we look at the available data it will be seen that right from the 7th to the 18th Lok Sabha or from 1983 to 2024 (i.e., for 41 years), we have been electing Members of Parliament to 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency only from East Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills: the APHLC in 1983, INC from 1984 to 1995 and from 1998 to 2019, Independent in 1996, and VPP in 2024. For a careful observer Nonglait's campaign blends regional pride (representation for West Khasi Hills) with tangible development promises in education, healthcare, and infrastructure, while also emphasizing cultural recognition and inclusivity. The last point he made in the campaign is, "If you want funds to follow up projects from Delhi, elect an MP who is with the government—and that is your own person Bah Rock." This is the most vital point of the campaign in the context of the present state of the Lok Sabha.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

The Himalayas Are Warning Us. Are We Listening?

Editor,

As I read about young Nepali activist Rakshya Bam's speech at the Nobel Peace Conference in Oslo on September 3, 2026, my thoughts naturally turned to the people of our own Northeast, who are already facing the growing impact of floods, landslides and a changing climate. Speaking at the Nobel Peace Center, she brought climate justice into the wider discussion on peace, democracy and justice. Her message was simple but powerful: there can be no real peace and justice without climate justice. She also reminded the world that "carbon has no passport."

Those words should make us stop and think. The Himalayas may look far away, but they are not really distant from us. The Brahmaputra and its many tributaries connect the mountains with our plains and valleys. What happens in the Himalayas can eventually affect the lives of people living downstream.

The warning from the International Centre for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), Kathmandu, makes this even more worrying. On 18 March 2026, ICIMOD reported that the rate of glacier ice loss across the Hindu Kush Himalaya has doubled since 2000. Its assessment found that between 1990 and 2020, the region lost about 12 per cent of its total glacier area, with the Indus, Ganges and Brahmaputra basins among those experiencing major losses.

For many of us, these may sound like numbers meant for scientists. But what do they mean for ordinary people? They mean greater uncertainty about our rivers and water. They could mean more dangerous floods and landslides at some times and water shortages at others.

The recent disaster in Nepal has given us another painful reminder of how dangerous the changing Himalayan environment can become. We should be careful not to blame climate change for every individual disaster before scientists establish the exact causes. But as of now, there is clear evidence that the Himalayan region is undergoing rapid changes in its glaciers, snow and water systems, increasing the vulnerability of mountain and downstream communities. The August 26 disaster in Nepal, which followed a glacier collapse and caused devastating floods, is a stark reminder of that vulnerability.

Another concern is the huge hydropower project China is building on the Yarlung Tsangpo in Tibet, which enters Arunachal Pradesh as the Siang and becomes the Brahmaputra in Assam. Construction of the five-station project officially began in July 2025. Given its enormous scale and location in a seismically active Himalayan region, its possible impact on downstream water flow and the environment remains a serious concern. The project itself does not mean that downstream flooding will automatically occur. However, in an extreme situation, if an emergency requires a sudden release of a large volume of water, the consequences downstream could be serious. For Arunachal Pradesh and Assam, transparency, advance warning and regular sharing of hydrological information are therefore essential.

This is why I believe international environmental and climate forums must take the Himalayan crisis much more seriously. The Himalayas should not be seen only as a concern for Nepal, Bhutan, India or other Himalayan countries. The rivers flowing from these mountains support the lives and livelihoods of millions of people far beyond them. International forums should give greater attention to glacier and river monitoring, early-warning systems, safer construction, protection of forests and wetlands, and support for communities facing repeated floods and landslides. Climate justice should not remain only a phrase in international speeches. What is needed now is action.

The Northeast needs development and jobs, but development must respect our forests, rivers, wetlands and mountains. Progress should not come at the cost of the environment that sustains our lives. We need better warnings before disasters strike, better information about our glaciers and rivers, safer infrastructure and greater support for vulnerable communities. Most importantly, we must listen to people living close to these rivers and mountains. They often see the changes before they appear in official reports.

As I reflected on Rakshya Bam's words in Oslo, I felt that her message was not only about Nepal. It was also a message for us in the Northeast. The warning signs are already around us. The Himalayas are changing, and the rivers connect us to those changes. We cannot stop every natural disaster, but we can prepare better, develop more responsibly and take the warnings seriously.

Let us listen before the warning comes down the river.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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"Where words fail, music speaks."
— Hans Christian Andersen

The Shillong Times

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Parochial politics

A strongpoint for the Congress party, which inherits the legacy of the Freedom movement, is that it has an open-minded approach to all issues of national importance. The obverse is true of the BJP that runs the nation -- and for the past 13 years at a stretch. Its obsessions are Hindu and Hindi-centric, with no regard to the fact that this is a secular nation with a federal character where the parts are as important as the whole. A recent instance at Surajkund, Faridabad, where the National Women's Commission held a loosely-termed 'capacity-building workshop' in which women ministers and legislators from various states attended, is only one example of the parochial, sectarian, divisive mindset of those who rule the nation today. The NWC, led by nominees of the Modi government, conducted the entire proceedings in Hindi, as was cited by some delegates from the South who boycotted the meeting at its fag end. They say there was no facility for translation of the speeches, nor was anyone allowed to speak in English. This left them high and dry.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who has a deficit in formal education, learned English after he became PM to a level he can somewhat communicate with the outside world. Most BJP leaders, including parliamentarians, cannot speak in English or communicate with the outside world. This reflects in their parochial mindset. They live in their cocooned world. This reflects pathetically in the governance process as well. Notably, after the Operation Sindoor, when Modi sent a parliamentarians' delegation to various countries to justify India's position, he had to put a Congress parliamentarian like Shashi Tharoor to lead it from the front. The multifaceted intellectual deficit in the BJP was, thus, all too pronounced. The sectarian mindset of this party, which harms the nation, is evident in all its actions and in its continued anti-Muslim-proclivities. By raising the bogey of a 'threat' to Hindus, the Sangh Parivar demolished a dilapidated mosque in Ayodhya and erupted into jubilation in 1992. This was also a turning point in the political history of the nation. A single act divided India vertically, but its political benefits were reaped gleefully by their political arm, the BJP, which grabbed power. The past 13 years saw the Prime Minister and his government concentrating their attention on the select states in the North and meting out a step-motherly treatment to states that did not signal their full support to the BJP.

The result is also that there has been marginal progress to the eastern/ north-eastern states, where non-BJP governments were/are in rule. A divided opposition has not been able to effectively question this, challenge such indulgences or revert the process. The North-South divide is more pronounced today thanks to the parochial attitudes of the central dispensation headed by Modi. The South managed to progress by dint of its IT booms in cities like Bengaluru, Hyderabad etc, by other commercial initiatives and by heavy flow of money from Indians working abroad as is also the case with Kerala. The BJP governments' unhelpful attitudes are also a reason why the South and the North-East mostly reject the saffron party. Parochialism has a price to pay.

UDP's Tectonic Shift: Why Are We Surprised When Politicians Follow Power?

By Patricia Mukhim

For Meghalaya having a stable government that lasted from 2018-2023 is nothing short of a political wonder. Since 1972 we have had 3-4 CMs in a five-year term. The so-called government never had time to make policies. The state of Meghalaya trudged along like a purposeless man who does not know where he wants to reach. When PA Sangma took over as CM in 1988, he asked to see the policies on Health, Education etc. The answer he got was: What policy? We never had any Policy? We just did a hit-and-miss kind of governance. And then when elections knocked at the door and we are asked to show results, we used people to raise ethno-centric slogans that made the "dkhar" the mynder and villain of the piece who was and still is responsible for all that has gone wrong with Meghalaya. For politicians, protecting the people from the non-tribal exploiter who is caricatured as the devil incarnate is the main theme and rhetoric of their election campaign. And many rode to victory on this shallow claim – "ban iada ia ka jaidbynriew na u mynder" (to save my people from the outsider. The word outsider has several connotations depending on its use).

Self-Interest Drives the Political Agenda

If those UDP blokes about to jump to the BJP gravy train are still blabbering about "principles" or "better development for our people," by joining the Bee Jay Party (BJP) they are lying through their teeth. I have said this before and will repeat it till I go blue in the face that all politicians fight elections because (a) they want power (b) power is 'the' guarantor to the good life (c) It feels great to move around with a siren shrieking vehicle (d) the ministry they hold serves their personal purpose and if someone is holding PWD or PHE then all the contracts go to his supporters/contractors. But not for free. There is a cut out of every deal (d) Their wealth ranking and acquisitions of properties go up exponentially when they hold ministerial berths. That's what has happened in the past 50 years where those with nothing to their names now own properties worth hundreds of crores. Sadly, no one has the guts to do a wealth audit of these MLAs/ministers prior to being elected and after they have held ministerial berths for 10-15 years.

This will continue to happen because we voters are the biggest idiots who continue to believe politicians after having been lied to and abused for the past 50 years. We voters are guilty of one mortal sin. We look for personal freebies and anyone who can give us that is our role model politician. Who cares about good roads? Those are part of the government's responsibility; it has nothing to do with my MLA. As long as my MLA helps me get some job, some money to pay the children's school fees, my medical bills etc., to make our demands too? If people today are asked to vote for or against the railways the majority who understand the importance of railways as a major step towards cheaper transportation and hence cheaper essential food items, the large majority would vote for railways.

But look at Meghalaya! All 60 MLAs have never said a word about whether railways are integral to better connectivity and if they will cut down the prices of goods. Perhaps all 60 MLAs are sold to the truck lobby and that is a strong lobby which funds people to keep railways at bay. So there we are! We the public are held to ransom by vested interests who profit at our expense.

"Their wealth ranking and acquisitions of properties go up exponentially when they hold ministerial berths. That's what has happened in the past 50 years where those with nothing to their names now own properties worth hundreds of crores."

she/he will be my choice. Multiply this by 20 lakh people – that is assuming that the rest 10 lakh vote differently – and ask if you can ever get a government that delivers governance. You won't. We won't ever get a government that looks after our collective needs.

Meghalaya Needs Cockroaches to Show Politicians the Door:

This is where the younger generation comes in. Unlike the older generation they are not into worshipping these 5-year gods and goddesses (Ki Blei San Snem). They can loudly call out the acts of omission and commission. Also the CJP can change equations because they don't care who you are. They treat you as you deserve. Sadly, there is not even a squeal here that can give us hope that we in Meghalaya too can produce a Cockroach Janta Party (CJP). This is very disillusioning. It means we as a people have a long way to go before we understand the importance of collective action and the critical need for people's protests in a democracy. For too long, this society has allowed a few groups with no accountability to anyone to demand certain rights "on behalf of the people," without ever consulting us. Were we the people consulted when the Khasi Students' Union decided to oppose railways? Don't we people have the right

Performative Governance: Overdoes of Culture

Have we realised that these days politicians and senior bureaucrats are busy in one inaugural function after another? And we all seem to enjoy the YouTube videos shared by the government's own media channels without questioning because reels don't leave us with anything to question. We watch; our sensory organs take in the dances and speeches and the awards and rewards given to sundry people and we move on. Our minds are already too full of memes and WhatsApp forwards that distract us from the core issues that we should be focussing on. Have we noticed that performances of traditional dances are a common spectacle these days? Some bigwig from Delhi comes, and we are performing. It reminds me of the book of short stories by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar – "The Adivasi Will Not Dance," because we tribals have just become exhibitionists for those 5-10 minutes and people now have poor recall value. The same person from Delhi who watched us tribals dance in our own habitats will not be better educated. He/she will not raise their voices when the same tribals suffere racist slurs in Delhi/Bangalore/ Punjab/ etc.

Sorry about the short diversion. Coming back to the larger political imbroglio enacted in Meghalaya, we have to recognise that the NPP is today an overcrowded bus. Those who got in first have got a seat and others who join later will be left standing. Besides, in 2028 the NPP will not need a coalition partner. Today the NPP has 33 MLAs. They don't even need the BJP but because of the pressure from Delhi they have to accommodate BJP MLAs in the ministry. The UDP MLAs recognise their own lack of clout and realise that being with the BJP is a better bet for a ministry in 2028 or some post with power and perks. It is my firm belief that the UDP MLAs today are least bothered about their regional ideology which they parrot out during elections but which means nothing. All that the UDP MLAs do after every election is become part of the ruling coalition irrespective of which party is at the helm – national or even international if one were to be established. That's how deep their commitment is to the issue of regionalism. The word "regional" is just an excuse for the party's existence which of course had evolved from APHLC to Hill People's Union and then the United Democratic Party. Now that the Voice of People Party (VPP) is presenting itself as the more formidable "regional" voice, the UDP has perhaps lost its even that vigour to clamour for that space in peoples' memories.

The UDP has always played second fiddle to the Congress in the past, Now its MLAs want to switch over to the BJP so they can become the game changers and drive the gravy train themselves while the NPP plays second fiddle. They know the NPP has to keep going to Delhi to beg for money. Once they are part of the BJP they will also be able to negotiate as strongly as the NPP with Nirmala Sitharaman and Amit Shah. And guess who these two bigwigs will listen to? To their own Party members of course! That's it! Nothing more, nothing less. Whether these newly minted BJP MLAs can defeat the NPP candidates in Garo Hills and in the Khasi & Jaintia Hills and become the more prominent hagglers in Delhi is the crore- rupee question.

They Did This To Us (And Other Bedtime Stories)

By Ellerine Diengdoh

Warning: This is mostly a memoir. The rest is a debt I owe my conscience. If you're the sort who loves blaming everyone else for the mess we're in, consider this the wake-up call you never asked for.

Look at us. Just look, really look - not the polite glance we give when we're trying to convince ourselves. we're fine, but the raw, unflinching stare you reserve for wounds you've been picking at for years. If you are looking, you will see us huddled together in this self-imposed exile of "purity," in a room where the air's gone stale, thick with the smell of our own fear, because we're too terrified to open a window, too terrified of what might drift in, too terrified of what might drift out.

I still remember a childhood that feels like a fever dream now, way back many lifetimes ago, back when the lines between "us" and "them" weren't drawn in accusations and bitterness.

Children aren't communal by nature, when they choose friends to play with, they don't think about differences. So, I remember playing with them, eating with them, living close to them, so close that we bled into each other's lives, until you couldn't tell where my red ended and their blue began, until we were all just purple and messy and human.

I remember the music drifting from their windows, cutting through the thin, cold winter air like a serrated knife. I remember one neighbour especially, an old Bengali gentleman who lived right across from us, who didn't just play the violin but made the wood weep, he made it bleed, he made it mourn for that faraway land he'd left behind for these hills. Now and then he would call me to sing a hymn or two and he would play along. That is what music does: it connects us, it stitches us together.

In those distant, mist-heavy mornings, I was a small shadow standing perfectly still, listening to another child sing "Saaaa, Re, Ga, Ma...", mimicking it, my throat clumsy and tight, never realising that I was being baptised into a classical tradition that didn't bother asking me about the name of my tribe, didn't care about my surname, didn't need to know my lineage to let me in, to let me belong, to let me be.Even my younger sister caught the fever, shadowing her Bengali friend to dance class, infected by a rhythm that wasn't "ours," dancing in a language she didn't speak, belonging to a world she was never supposed to enter.

My circle of friends was never a gated community of familiar faces. Two of my best friends in school were Bengalis, in college my closest buddies were girls from different communities and different religions, and I loved them, I loved the way their stories didn't sound like the ones I heard at my own dinner table, I loved the way they made my world bigger and wider. Being raised on blood and meat, I didn't even know what vegetarianism was. I didn't know you could live without meat, but I remember those Marwari homes: the quiet love served in every divine vegetarian spread, the way they fed me without asking. I recall the glorious Muslim food of Eid, the rich Assamese and Bengali spread at weddings and funerals. I ate at their table, never felt like I didn't belong. I just felt full, just felt loved and like I was exactly where I was supposed to be.

I remember their festivals too, the colour, the sights, the sounds, the smell, because they were moments when my little world came alive, when the grey of my everyday cracked open to let their light in. I was a child when I saw my first Muharram procession; it was a hypnotic, magical, rhythmic thumping of hands hitting chests keeping time with the drums, I remember the fire-breathers spitting orange flames into the cold, dark sky. I was in awe.

Then came the Pujo drums, the colourful madness of Holi, the Diwali crackers I was petrified of but watched anyway, fingers in my ears, eyes wide, watching the sky glow in a thousand bright colours, no "Khasi" or "non-Khasi" then, just a pack of breathless kids frantically trying to burn a hole in the night sky,too busy being blinded by the same light, too busy being children, too busy being human.

But that light dimmed, didn't it, flickered and died while we weren't looking, while we were busy drawing lines and building walls and teaching our children to be afraid, while we were busy forgetting the music, forgetting the food, forgetting the festivals, forgetting the friends, forgetting the love.

We've become infinitely poorer, haven't we? We've scrubbed the colour out of our world until we're left with this grey, homogeneous mass of look-alikes and think-alikes, living in an echo chamber so thick we've forgotten the sound of a different opinion.....screaming about "outsiders", those who stayed and those we chased away, ignoring the painful truth that so many of them gave their marrow and their soul to this soil, gave their lives to our hills, gave their love to our children, gave their everything to a place that's decided they don't belong.

Are we better off now because many of those good people have left? Don't lie to yourselves. Every "outsider" wasn't a predator, just as every local isn't a protector. We fear the migrant workers and blame them for everything, but show me the local boy who will sweat the same blood under the noonday sun for the same pay. Show me the local hands that will build our roads, dig our mines, build our homes, do the dirty work we're too proud to do, too scared to do, too lazy to do.

And while we vent our rage by beating poverty, corruption and unemployment out of any unlucky stranger who happened to cross our path on the wrong day, look at the rot we've cultivated, look at the mess we've made, look at the world we've built for our children.Our education is at the bottom of a dark pit. Our healthcare is in shambles. Our educated youths have no jobs. Our poor have no means to earn a living. Our farmers are pushed to the brink of poverty. Our rivers are poisoned, thick with the viscous rot of our own greed. Our future is mortgaged by debt. Our hills have been flayed open, flattened for a quick, dirty buck.

And who do you think did this to us? It was our own, who sold us, and pointed to the "Outsider", and walked away clean. While we looked away. While we let them. In the end who do we blame? The outsider?

Sadly, no. Look again and you will see. It's the privileged few who snatch a job through the back door, it's the student who steals a seat through the back door, it's the public servant who clocks in, does the bare minimum, and leaves his conscience at the back door, it's the connected who siphons a government scheme through the back door, it's the "Riew Ieid Ri" who takes protection money while selling his own people through the back door, it's the officer who collects his kickbacks through the back door, it's the powers-that-be who auction our land and its resources to the highest bidder through the back door, it's the person who carves us into small, hateful groups to further his own interest through the back door.

We have all, in our silence or our greed, tip-toed through that same entrance. Our enemy is not the outsider, and until we realise this, we will continue to burn our future to the ground, through the back door.

Letters to the Editor

Paul's Call for Digital Detox to Save School Children

Editor,

Our times are soaked in digital wonders. The luxuries, and conveniences have, in fact, overwhelmed us all. None of us wish to be left behind. Noteworthy is that some of those technological advantages are being abused to the extreme. This misuse has gone so far as to weaken both body and mind. Yet we remain unconcerned about their impact at the individual level. We merrily ignore the hard times countless households across the nation are experiencing. The point I wish to emphasize is that we have corrupted our minds by immersing ourselves too deeply in these technologies, particularly in the digital world.

Leaving aside adults, the younger generation's growing engagement with social media is now a serious cause for concern. The way platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, and YouTube flood young minds with endless and often unhealthy content deserves serious study. Many psychologists and neuro-scientists have expressed alarm at this trend. This issue was also raised very thoughtfully recently by former Minister of Arts and Culture Bah Paul Lyngdoh. We must thank Bah Paul for drawing attention to the matter in the Assembly and urging the government to give it serious thought, "Paul flags impact of mobile phone use, calls for digital detox for schoolchildren" (ST, August 28)

An assistant principal of a higher secondary school asserts: "In today's world, mobile phones have become a serious source of distraction and harmful exposure for schoolchildren. Of course, what begins as a harmless habit of watching cartoons or short videos, which parents often allow, soon grows into a dependency that is deeply harmful." Very true. We often notice how young children or teenagers become restless without their devices. When they get a little older, they cannot sit through a single lesson without popping their head up to check for new likes or notifications. Frankly speaking, they find it very difficult to focus on their studies for even ten minutes. Whether one agrees or not, these constant distractions, especially from academic work, have taken a heavy toll on their performance, discipline, and mental balance. What is most disturbing is that much of the content served to users is selected by systems designed to hold their attention for as long as possible. Sensational, provocative, filthy or emotionally charged material is deliberately promoted to grab more eyeballs and go viral. The "algorithms," cunningly devised by money-hungry companies to push such content, are equally dangerous.

Yes, steady dependence on this stream of visuals gradually hardens into "obsession." Is this not worse? The young mind, unable to resist the lure of flashy visuals and endless scrolling, clings to the cell phone as if it were its second self. When this obsession is interrupted, for instance, when parents take away the phone, the reaction can be extreme, exploding into anger. Some even throw tantrums, refusing food or pushing it away, when their parents snatch their mobile sets. This anger does not rise against the parents, but against the fact that they are forced to part with the phone -- the very object that has already enslaved the child.

To say that "repeated anger' brings a kind of memory blindness is no exaggeration. When anger erupts the mind loses stability. Its ability to think critically may then begin to weaken. In a deeper sense, "loss of memory" does not mean ordinary forgetfulness. It means losing touch with innate wisdom, values, and past experiences that should guide present judgment. Let me draw a comparison in modern parlance --- if the data in a laptop's RAM were suddenly erased while it was running, active programs would freeze, unsaved work would disappear, and the system might crash. In much the same way, when children keep losing memories due to an obsession with digital distractions or similar distractions, their minds start malfunctioning. They gradually lose their sense of responsibility, not only toward their studies but also toward their family, society, and even their own well-being.

How can we overlook the rising number of youths committing shocking acts, even heinous crimes, simply because they were restricted from using mobile phones or objects of obsession? A few weeks ago in Maharashtra, a heart-wrenching tragedy unfolded when a 19-year-old boy, distressed by his parents' argument over payment issues for an iPhone they had purchased, jumped from the edge of a hill in anger. What unfolded next was even more spine-chilling. In a desperate attempt to save his son, his father also fell, and moments later, his mother also died of suicide by jumping from the same place after seeing both her son and husband fall to their deaths. Should this not be reason enough for the government to urgently address such dreadful issues? Closer home about two years ago, a 10-year-old girl from Mawryngkneng died of suicide after her parents asked her to focus on her studies and not use her phone.

It is not that children don't love their parents or deliberately wish to harm themselves. It is because their minds are overpowered by delusion born of memory loss, unable to grasp "critically," that the love of their parents is far more precious than any mobile phone. This is the danger of unchecked digital obsession of the present times. It uncontrollably interferes with the faculty of judgment, weakens memory, and distorts values, leading to choices that can destroy families and shake society to the core.

Thus, when happiness is encouraged to be sought only from external sources that are as addictive as drugs, we fail ourselves, we fail our society, and we fail our civilization. Bah Paul has already pressed the wake-up button. Nations like Australia, Finland, Sweden, Poland, China, and France are already uninstalling digital waste from young minds. India, it seems, is still busy hitting snooze!

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

Effects of Social Media & How to Navigate It

Editor,

While reviewing my WhatsApp messages a few days ago I noticed a turmoil in a group chat stemming from a discussion where specific individuals were targeted due to their reactions to complaints made by certain individuals/group on derogatory AI-generated videos. Although the original creators of the AI content remain unidentified, legal complaints were filed against those who produced and shared related content on social media. In response, someone suggested that taking offense at humour or sarcasm is avoidable by distancing oneself from social media platforms. The core argument presented was that, much like public officials, individuals should develop the resilience to disregard such critiques. It was also noted that maintaining a social media presence requires a high degree of responsibility and discretion. This perspective incited a strong reaction within the group.

The effects of social media and how to distance from it by practicing tolerance remains the most sophisticated approach to navigating online discourse.

Yours etc.,
L A Sangma,
Tura

Faded Zebra Crossings & Absence of Traffic Cops

Editor,

The state Public Works Department which is entrusted to oversee and check repairs of roads, lanes etc., is also tasked to check important junctions and crossings for wear and tear of signages put up for information of drivers and pedestrians and also of faded zebra crossings. The critical area at Civil Hospital seems to have lost its shine thereby putting commuters and pedestrians at high risk. The absence of traffic police near the entry to Civil Hospital is an accident waiting to happen. And if God forbid it does, who shall be held accountable for this lapse? The SP Traffic Department should take this information as an initiative to place one traffic guard at this point and also between the Additional and Main Secretariat. Hope this matter is taken up with utmost urgency.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Shillong 21

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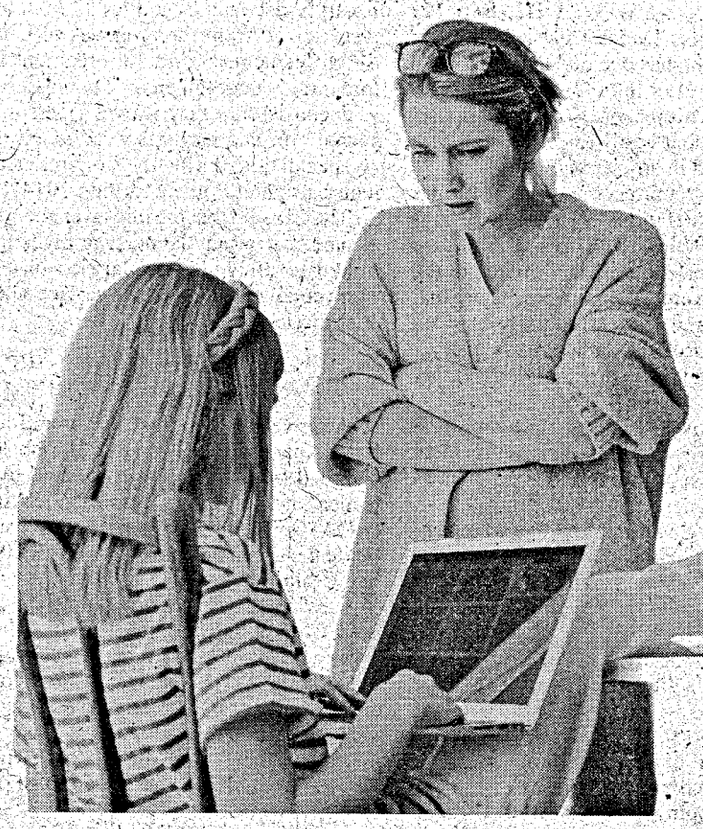
Has gentle parenting gone too far?



To be or not to be a gentle parent? That is the question. There is so much controversy these days about gentle parenting. What is it, and what is it not? A recent headlines provocatively told us about a toddler holding up an airplane because they refused to get into their seat and have their seatbelt fastened.

Is this a case of gentle parenting gone awry or is it simply a child experiencing a genuine panic attack? Who knows, but it has certainly sparked the imagination and intense debate, including among parents.

At its core, true gentle parenting is a model that combines high emotional warmth with clear boundary setting.

This approach is firmly grounded in the psychological framework of authoritative parenting. But what does this mean?

Decades of robust developmental research demonstrate that children raised by parents who balance emotional warmth with clear, consistent boundaries thrive. They achieve significantly better outcomes in their emotional development, self-regulation and social and cognitive development.

Balancing warmth and boundaries

To truly understand this concept, we have to look at it in historical context. The view of parenting as an active verb is a relatively recent phenomenon. As Alison Gopnik brilliantly explores in her 2016 book, *The Gardener and the Carpenter*, child-rearing used to be seen simply as something you did. It just happened naturally, heavily supported by the broader community.

However, around the 1970s, shifting workforce dynamics and societal changes transformed parenting into an active, high-pressure verb.

Out came the expert-driven guidebooks, shifting many parents' collective mindset from trusting our guts as responsive adults to an anxious belief that parenting must be executed just so.

Biologically and historically, humans evolved in an ecosystem where the responsibility of raising a child was shared collectively, something known as mutual alloparenting and allomothering. Today, we have stripped that community away, leaving isolated caregivers to lose sleep, worrying around the clock.

No boundaries alarm children

What children need to thrive, according to decades of western developmental research, is a combination of high responsiveness and high structure. Children require predictable boundaries.

'When a four-year-old is put in charge - dictating when they go to sleep, whether they wear a seatbelt or constantly negotiating daily routines - it is actually deeply alarming to them.

Predictable boundaries should be known and discussed, but they must never be negotiated when it comes to safety. Alongside these firm limits, emotional validation is hugely important. Children need their internal experiences acknowledged without adults minimizing their fears, by saying "Don't be scared" or shaming their anger by saying "Don't behave that way."

The meaning of 'co-regulation'

This balance is the foundation of co-regulation. A child's nervous system is fundamentally immature, and it's this nervous system that triggers the brain activation that drives behaviour. Therefore, young children require a calm adult to literally "lend them their calm," anchoring their physiological system.

One of the best pieces of parenting advice available is to check in with your own internal state before saying a single word to a dysregulated child.

The empirical evidence backing this approach is substantial. In the 1960s, psychologist Diana Baumrind conducted foundational studies tracking the long-term outcomes of different parenting styles.

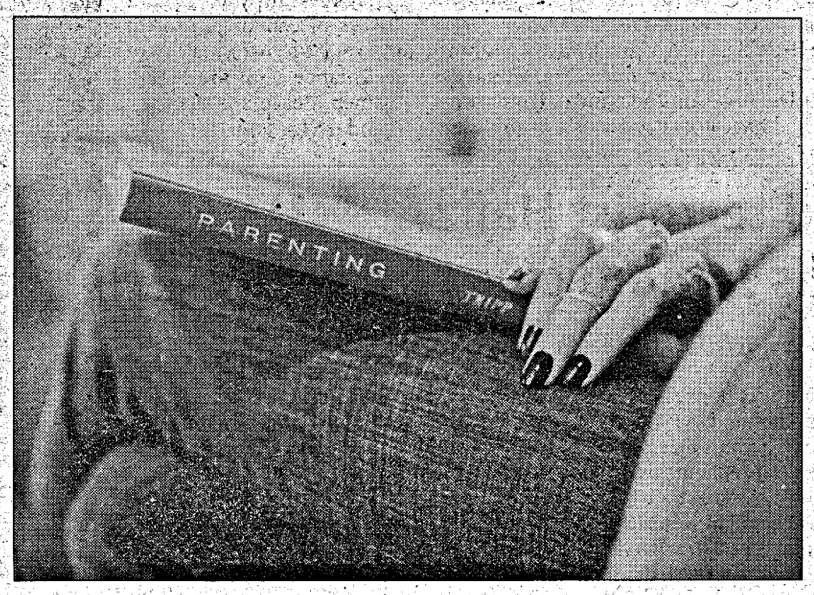
She contrasted authoritarian parents - whom author Barbara Coloroso later vividly visualised as the rigid "brick wall" family - with permissive parents (whose style looks like saying: "Don't put the cat in the microwave, OK, honey?") right next to outright neglectful parenting.

Time and again, the style that yields the best outcomes for both parents and children is the authoritative balance: firm limits paired with warm responsiveness and a deep respect for child autonomy.

Emotion coaching

Similarly, the excellent research of psychologist John Gottman produced 30 years ago emphasises the power of emotion coaching.

His work shows that when parents label and validate emotions, problem-solve through distress and simultaneously maintain firm, fair boundaries, it dramatically lowers children's physiological stress and fosters long-term emotional competence.



These empathetic interactions do not make children soft; instead, they forge the vital neural connections necessary for all future relationships and cognitive growth.

Through co-regulation, children gradually internalise peaceful conflict resolution. They experience feeling awful and dysregulated, notice a calm adult stepping in to allow the emotion while containing the behaviour, and learn that they can safely return to equilibrium.

This predictable sensitivity is how secure attachments are built, heavily relying on the healthy cycle of relational rupture followed by meaningful repair.

Permissive parenting

Today, some child behavioural experts believe what we are sometimes seeing is not true gentle parenting, but rather an anxious drift into "permissive parenting." Some researchers connect behavioural problems at school and classroom challenges with permissive parenting approaches - for example, if children expect endless negotiation because the fundamental notion of adult authority has been abandoned.

The misunderstanding that adult authority is inherently a problem demands a superhuman, impossible level of self-control from caregivers. Some public health experts have connected parents' unrealistic expectations around parenting strategies, among other factors, with reports of intense parental burnout.

'Good enough' parents

We desperately need to return to the wise counsel of psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott, who introduced the liberating concept of the "good enough parent." The sensationalised cultural narrative that gentle parenting could be ruining or spoiling kids is fundamentally false; rather, it is the anxious misinterpretation of the concept that is causing harm. But, of course, a nuanced truth does not make for nearly as good a headline.

Ultimately, an adult cannot ask a child to regulate themselves when the adult is completely dysregulated. If a child's neurological system is in a state of meltdown, it's important for parents to know they cannot talk the child out of it. Children need a parent's steady, grounded nervous systems to find their equilibrium.

By anchoring their own state and lending their calm, a parent offers the child the greatest gift a caregiver can provide.

Because at the end of the day, beyond the expert manuals, the guidebooks and the online debates, every child deserves something novelist Toni Morrison wisely described: at least one adult whose eyes light up when they enter the room. *(The Conversation)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi — **Sunday, SEPTEMBER 13, 2026**

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon opposite Saturn on your solar return chart and will give amazing results. Your hard work will be duly rewarded. You will not leave any task unfinished. Your enemies and rivals will not get success. You will plan to buy something new for the house. You will have all your work done with your intelligence and wisdom. Some of your long-lasting worries will come to an end. You will meet some VIP through the communication channel which will prove useful to you later. You will visit a religious place for mental peace. You may get good professional opportunities. You will also be successful due to some bold decisions. You will get support of your bosses. You will manage to solve your private and personal problems by your tact and tenacity.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) As there will be pressure of work, you will feel a little tense. But hard work will pay off, and you will earn well. You will be rewarded with handsome returns. You will also manage your business well. There will be chances of some new work plan. The time is favorable. You will get better opportunities in your career and job. All the problems and difficulties you were having in your domestic life will come to an end. You will not take any sort of risk this time. Your health will get better. The situations of differences between husband and wife, father and son will come to an end. The orbit of the Moon in your horoscope will brighten your path. Your enemies and foes will be defeated and your interaction with people will continue. There will be an increase in your family's happiness.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) There will be lot of travelling related to work this week. You will meet lot of people and learn a lot from them. It will prove to be beneficial, and you will have gains too. You will bring about a change in your speech and behavior. The worry that was there regarding your business will come to an end. You will enhance your capabilities and skills and will get excellent results. The obstacles in the path of getting money will get removed. Expansion plans in business will fructify and you will get opportunities to be promoted in your job. You will also give fearless replies to things. This is little uncalled for and does not prove beneficial for you. Just apply yourself. Your life will be back on track. Mutual love between friends will increase.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will be getting lot of praise from all sides. You will receive money that was struck somewhere. You will be praised from all sides. In business, you will take strong and firm decisions which will prove beneficial. You will have monetary gains and profits. You will get success in competitions. New job offers too will come. In your domestic life, you will make vital decisions, and your family members will cooperate fully. The time is right for studies, research etc. There can be a positive change in your life with somebody's advice. The graph of your fame and respect may go up. There are good chances of money coming in. The association with some influential person will enhance your luck. Husband and wife will understand each other's feelings.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will have the ability to turn losses into gains. You will also make best use of limited opportunities to your advantage. You will be generous and liberal. You will be busy with decoration and renovation of your house. You will also help your family members to the best of your abilities. You will be ambitious in your work. A property related matter will be resolved. Something unexpected will happen. You will develop interest in religion and philosophy. You will also be successful despite hurdles and obstacles. You will also get lot of mental peace. You will also get relief from some long-standing problems. Do not trust unknown people. There are good chances of money coming in.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will plan to buy a house or property. You will also buy an expensive item for your house. There will be harmony between husband and wife. You will also take important decisions regarding your career. You will get lot of success in your business. You will also plan a major expansion. Misunderstanding with partners will get resolved. You will also have something vital to discuss with your mate. You will get your work done with your quick wittedness and astuteness. There will be sudden gains from strangers. You will also face your enemies very boldly. You will also take time out of your busy schedule despite being extremely busy. You can think of implementing some new plans. Your reputation will get enhanced. You will be monetary and mentally satisfied.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Money that was about to come will get stalled. You will need to do lot of talking to get things in your favor. You will always remain positive in your business dealing with people. You will adopt a practical approach towards life. You will be able to win over the hearts of people. Matters relating to property will be resolved. The examination that you had given with respect to administrative service will be in your favor. You will overcome health related problems. The resolutions taken by you will be fulfilled. You will be happy. You will get a favorable result in the financial field. Money might come in from somewhere. You will be full of self-confidence. You will achieve your targets in job.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will devote a lot of time to your work and business. Students will be devoted to their studies. You will rely on your hard work rather than expecting from people. You will also achieve your targets. Change of a location or house is indicated. You will also undertake a journey. Those in government jobs may get their desired assignment. Things will start to get normal. Your health will also improve. You will also enjoy a lot of support from your family members. You will also make efforts to improve your image. You will bring about a change in your thinking and style. People will react positively to it. You will take steps forward for success in life. There may be temporary setbacks, but you will face it resolutely. New contacts will be established which may prove quite rewarding in future.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It is a period to enjoy and relax. Business will give you lot of gains which may prove rewarding in future. With increased profits you will feel very happy. Progeny may give you good news to be delighted. Your own achievements will be admired by all. You will feel confident and will have plans to take a new job or start a new business. Things will be better as your desired targets will be achieved to make you happy. Your hurdles will get removed. Students will remain devoted to their studies to utilize their time properly. You will enrich your knowledge. Mental satisfaction will see you gain supremacy in your work field. All your money realizing endeavours will be crowned with success.

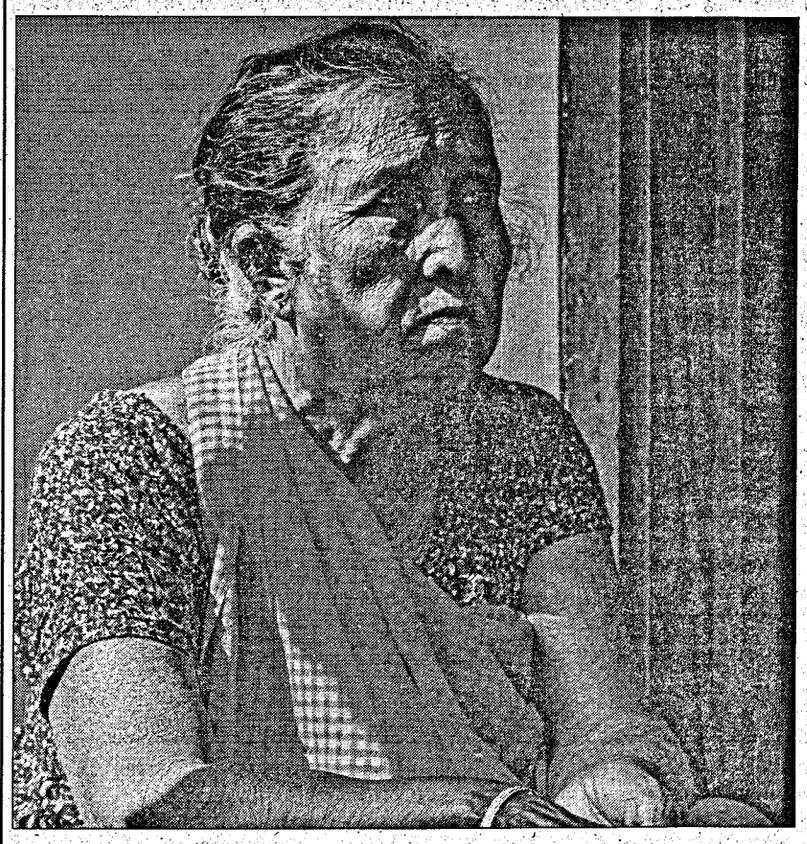
Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) As the week goes by, many things will be better as your desired targets will be achieved to make you happy. Your obstacles will be a thing of the past. You will be a lot more positive and confident. Avoid confrontations and struggles while taking important tasks. They will in the end be in your favor. Your honor and reputation will get a boost in your society, community and even in politics. Raising fame will make you an important person in your society. You will be mentally uplifted. You should not rely on strangers in financial deals. A positive event will take place in your favor. You will get good results from all your achievements. Held up projects will be revived. Your prestige will get a boost.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) It will be a very challenging and trying phase. You need to act with abundant care. Your health will remain good. You need to curb your spending habits. You need to have money in your pocket to meet rising cost of living with your talent. You will be able to show your distinct class in your workplace. But you need to wield the stick. Your work will be finished in a hurry. You will keep yourself busy at work. You will also take time off from work and spend time with family. You will pass time in exchanging jokes and in worshipping God.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It will be a peaceful time. Things will be wonderful and pleasant for you. Your hard work will pay off well. Some of your colleagues and opponents may criticize behind your back. It will adversely affect your confidence, but it will also spur you to come out a bit stronger. The pending jobs will get done. You will also be very ambitious at this point in time. You will also be highly extolled and will have a special interest in spiritual matters. You will be more than busy with family programs and functions. You will take time out for romance, hobbies and entertainment. Plans for something special will be made. Your hopes and expectations will rise, and your attitude towards life will be positive.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will feel elated as you get to meet an old friend or acquaintance, which will make you nostalgic by evocation of past. You will do your best to improve career related possibilities. In matters related to property sharing, the conditions and circumstances will be in your favor. You will not rest until you have completed the work that you have undertaken. Your self-confidence will be at its peak. A rift between husband and wife will get averted. You will receive auspicious news from somewhere. There will be an atmosphere of joy and happiness in the family. You will use your time to hone your skills and acquire knowledge.

Loneliness among elderly emerging as 'silent epidemic' taking toll on health



Loneliness among the elderly is emerging as a serious but often overlooked concern, doctors have warned.

Older adults can feel isolated even while living with their families, and prolonged social disconnection can take a toll on both their mental and physical health, they say.

According to Dr Harjit Singh Bhatti, a senior consultant of geriatric medicine at Sitaram Bhartia Hospital, loneliness is not simply about living alone but an emotional state in which a person feels disconnected, neglected or deprived of meaningful relationships.

"An elderly person can live with their family and still feel lonely, while someone living alone may remain socially active and well connected. Loneliness, therefore, cannot be assessed simply by looking at whether a person lives alone or with others," said Dr Bhatti.

Changing family structures, urbanisation, migration of younger people for education and employment and the growing prevalence of nuclear families have further complicated the problem, he said.

Older adults who have lost a spouse, live alone, have disabilities or suffer from chronic illnesses can be particularly vulnerable, while retirement and children moving to other cities or countries may further reduce social interaction, Dr Bhatti said.

Dr Avinash Chakrawarty, Professor of Geriatric Medicine at National Centre for Ageing (NCA), Delhi AIIMS, said loneliness should be viewed as a health issue rather than a consequence of ageing.

Social connection is an important component of healthy ageing, and when it erodes, it can affect sleep, appetite, physical activity, mood and even treatment adherence in an elderly person, he said.

Many seniors gradually withdraw from social activities because of mobility problems, hearing difficulties or a feeling that they are no longer needed, Dr Chakrawarty said.

"This can create a cycle in which isolation leads to poorer mental and physical health, which in turn makes the person less willing or able to engage with others.

"Families need to recognise subtle changes such as loss of interest in routine activities, reduced communication or spending most of the day alone. Regular conversations, shared meals, outings and involving seniors in family decisions can help restore a sense of belonging and purpose," Dr Chakrawarty said.

Dr Anup Singh, Founder Head of the Department of Geriatric Medicine, IMS-BHU, and nodal officer/Chief of the upcoming National Centre of Ageing at BHU, said prolonged loneliness has been linked with several physical and cognitive health concerns.

"Persistent stress associated with loneliness may contribute to sleep disturbances, high blood pressure and cardiovascular risk, while reduced physical and social activity can worsen existing chronic conditions," he said.

"There is also growing evidence linking social isolation and loneliness with depression, anxiety and cognitive decline. In older adults, therefore, assessing social connectedness should be part of a broader health evaluation," he added.

Doctors must ask about who the patient interacts with, how often they participate in activities and whether they feel supported, rather than limiting consultations to medicines and laboratory reports, Dr Singh said.

The problem is not restricted to cities, doctors insist.

While busy urban lifestyles and limited neighbourhood interaction can leave seniors isolated, migration of younger generations for employment can similarly leave older adults in rural areas without regular companionship, Dr Singh said.

Technology can help bridge geographical distances through phone calls, video calls and social media, though, he stated.

Dr Bhatti said tackling loneliness does not necessarily require major interventions.

"Regular conversations, sharing meals, involving older family members in everyday activities and genuinely listening to them can go a long way. They need to feel that they continue to be an important part of the family," he said.

Senior citizen clubs, community centres, volunteering opportunities, cultural programmes and intergenerational activities can also help older adults remain socially engaged.

As India's elderly population continues to grow, doctors said addressing loneliness will become increasingly important to ensure that longer life also translates into healthier and more fulfilling ageing. *(PTI)*

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"A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way."
—John C. Maxwell

The Shillong Times
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BRICS, regional ties

THE global economic grouping, BRICS, majorly involving Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, is significantly helping these nations share their resources for the common good. Formed 20 years ago on the sidelines of a UN meet in New York, it has acquitted itself well and brought 20 more nations into its fold. It involves nearly half of the world's population, 40 per cent of the global GDP and 20 per cent of international trade. The alliance sought to promote geopolitical cooperation involving even mutually suspicious nations like India and China under one umbrella. The grouping's leaders holding the third bilateral meeting in New Delhi, in a space of two years, is also significant because India is hosting it after a seven-year gap, necessitating the presence of China's Xi Jinping alongside Prime Minister Narendra Modi in a new spirit of limited bonhomie.

With the promotion of trade between these nations being the principal agenda of the meeting, member nations will benefit from its decisions, and this will, in parallel, act as a balm on strains in relationships between, say, India and China. Cooperation between Asia's two largest nations with populations totalling nearly 3 billion, is a prerequisite to regional and global peace. Such sentiments were reflected in Xi's statement that India and China are "partners in development, not rivals," and PM Modi's stress on border peace between the two nations as an important factor for regional cooperation. Significantly, China quoted Modi as stressing during the bilateral meeting with Xi that relations between the two countries will not be influenced by any "third country" – oblique references not only to the US but also Pakistan. India, Modi asserted, continued to follow an independent foreign policy. This should soothe the dragon's nerves. Modi has also rightly cited the huge trade imbalance between China and India – the latter importing goods massively and disproportionately from the former—but this is also due to China being a manufacturing nation while India is not able to push its industrialization agenda significantly. That Xi skipped the dinner hosted by the Prime Minister on Saturday is, however, a dampener on hopes for normalizing ties between the two nations. This occurred even as Modi cited a "steady improvement" in Sino-Indian relations.

China has grown hugely in the last quarter of a century – from a position where both nations were on equal ground by the turn of the century. This is equally true of the military strengths of the two nations; China currently has five times India's might. At the same time, the Chinese military at the ground level is no match for the physical might and moral resolve of the Indian army. Firepower from the air alone cannot win a war, as both the US and Russia learned the hard way recently. China is mindful of this fact and has only attempted limited provocations along India's partly demarcated border regions. China has also been hesitant to send its military to Taiwan, which it claims is part of the Communist mainland. Peace is a prerequisite for progress.

Unitarian Church with the Indigenous Foundation

By H.H. Mohrmen

Understanding the theology of the Unitarian Union in Northeast India requires an appreciation of both its Christian heritage and its indigenous context. The church did not emerge in a cultural vacuum. Rather, it developed through the encounter between the global Unitarian tradition and the religious worldviews of the Khasi, Pnar, War, and Karbi peoples. Its theology is therefore the product of both historical continuity and cultural contextualisation.

The history of Unitarianism in Northeast India began during the late nineteenth century through the pioneering work of Hajom Kissor Singh (1865–1923). Influenced by Rev. C.H.A Dahl a Unitarian Minister then based in Calcutta, Hajom Kissor Singh embraced the Unitarian understanding of the unity of God while remaining deeply rooted in the culture and traditions of his own people.

Unlike many Christian missions that sought to transplant European forms of Christianity, Hajom Kissor Singh envisioned a church that would express Unitarian faith through the language, culture, and worldview of the indigenous peoples of the region. Consequently, the Unitarian movement in the Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills gradually developed its own identity, incorporating local customs and modes of worship without compromising its central affirmation of one God.

The uniqueness of Unitarianism in the Hills of Meghalaya and Assam is the fact that its roots is distinctively indigenous while its trunk, is strong in liberal thoughts and philosophy and it branches and flowers itself into an open and progressive understanding of the world. This blending of liberal Unitarian ideals with tribal thoughts and philosophy is the strength of the church and it is unique only to this region.

H.K. Singh's concept of the oneness of God was based both on traditional beliefs and on the Bible of the Judeo Christian tradition. H.K. Singh's concept of God is a synthesis of the "Yahweh" of the Old Testament, the Father in Heaven of Jesus, and the ultimate God and Creator of the Khasi tradition.

U Blei Nongthaw Nongbuh is not the only name that the Khasi and Pnar use for God. They also have another name for God: U Trai Kynrad. Whether U Trai Kynrad is a Khasi translation of the English "Lord," which is itself derived from the Greek word Kyrios, is debatable. Certainly, in the Christian context, the use of the word U Trai connotes the New Testament concept of the Lord, which often refers to the second person of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ.

U Trai is not a post Christian period invention. In Khasi parlance, the term has been in use since time immemorial. Apart from using the word for God, the Khasi also use the word Kynrad, or U Trai Kynrad, when paying obeisance to God Almighty. Incidentally, the word Trai in Khasi also has meanings similar to those of the English word "Lord," including owner, foundation, foothold, and related concepts. Kynrad is a personification of God.

H.K. Singh went further in indigenizing the concept of God by using the Khasi word Phi ("you") to address the Almighty. This term is commonly used to address someone in a position of much higher status and respect, instead of the Khasi word Me ("thou"). H.K. Singh's concept of the oneness of God was based both on traditional beliefs and on the Bible of the Judeo-Christian tradition. H.K. Singh's use of Phi to address the Almighty was sometimes misunderstood as referring to God in the plural. Hence, he was thought to worship many gods. His replacements of the Khasi word 'Me' with 'Phi' when addressing the Almighty is, in itself, a landmark, because Phi is a polite and respectful term in the Khasi Pnar context.

It is evident from the hymns he composed that Hajom Kissor Singh's concept of God was rooted in the traditional Khasi Pnar understanding of God as the Creator, who is both God and Lord at the same time. Like the traditional concept, he did not differentiate between the two. However, his concept of God went beyond the understanding of God held by his forefathers.

In his Statement of Belief, H.K. Singh describes his idea of God in stanza 2 of Hymn No. 1 in the Khasi Unitarian Hymn Book: /The living God is one only God/He is our real Father Mother/. Singh, in stanza 2 of Hymn No. 1 in the Khasi Unitarian Hymn Book, he describes his idea of God: /The living God is one only God/He is our real Father Mother/. By describing God as both a "Father and Mother" entity, H.K. Singh went a step further than the traditional concept of a male God. His God is genderless, or more importantly, his concept is of a God beyond gender. This is one of the unique features of Unitarian theology in this region. Believing that God is both mother and father is innovative even within a matrilineal society.

Although Khasi Pnar tends to use the prefix U before the word for God, which represents the male gender, the Unitarians here have no image of God. Its concept of God is more that of a spirit that pervades all things.

The two original readings written by H.K. Singh are Readings Nos. 10 and 11 in the Khasi Unitarian Hymn Book. Both readings are dated 1891, and Reading No. 10 is another piece that describes his concept of God: "…who is our Creator, our foundation, and the source of all things; eternal and everlasting, perfect in every respect, and who loves us beyond measure. God is eternally good, infinitely wise, and present both within us, and around, and pervading all of existence and permeating everything." The phrase "God is within us" expresses the idea of divine immanence: God is not distant from human beings but intimately present within human life and consciousness. The second part, "beyond our being," prevents the statement from being understood simply as saying that God is identical with the human self.

This expresses divine transcendence. God exceeds human comprehension, individual existence, and the limitations of the created world. Although God may be experienced within us, God cannot be reduced to our thoughts, emotions, or consciousness. "God is everywhere" extends this understanding beyond the individual human being. Divine presence is not confined to a particular temple, church, sacred place, nation, or religious community.

God is in everything suggests that the whole of creation participates in, or bears witness to, the presence of the divine. This does not necessarily mean that everything is God; it is the identification of God with the universe itself. H.K. Singh's concept of the oneness of God was based both on traditional beliefs and on the Bible of the Judeo-Christian tradition. Singh's understanding of God can be interpreted as an affirmation of both divine immanence and divine transcendence. In describing God as being "within us and beyond our being, present everywhere and in everything," he presents a conception of the divine that is neither confined to a distant transcendent realm nor reduced to the human self or the material universe. God is intimately present within human existence while simultaneously exceeding it.

Two Khasi stalwarts, Radhon Singh Berry and Job Solomon, were contemporaries of H.K. Singh. They were also known for their contributions to the literary world of the emerging Khasi language. R.S. Berry and Job Solomon contributed immensely to the growth of the Unitarian movement by composing hymns for the Church. Radhon Singh Berry of Seng Khasi, who composed more than 30 hymns for the Unitarian Hymn Book, later became a Unitarian, while Job Solomon remained a Presbyterian until he breathed his last. Both these men of letters emphasised in the hymns they composed for the Unitarian Hymn Book the idea that the Khasi Unitarian concept of God is rooted in the traditional Khasi Pnar understanding of God.

In Hymn No. 40, stanza 3, R.S. Berry says: /This is not a foreign God/God of our own, He is/

The Khasi version says: *(Une Um long U Blei nongwei/ U Blei la jong U dei/ U ba thaw ïa phi ka long briew/ Mynta U wan kyrsiew/).* Job Solomon, in Hymn No. 7 further stresses this idea in stanza 5: /this is our God/God of our ancestors too/God of the Pnars and the Khasi/He is also Lord of the Lords/. *(Une U long U Blei jong ngi/ Blei ruh ki Bahyndai/ U Blei ki Pnar bad ki Khasi/ Uba U Trai ki trai/)*

The concept of God that emerged within the Unitarian Union represents a distinctive understanding of the divine as universal, formless, spiritual, and all pervading. It differs significantly from the conventional Judeo Christian conception of God as a heavenly Father or as an anthropomorphic being fashioned in the image of humanity. Instead, it understands the divine as a spiritual presence that transcends human form while remaining present within and throughout creation.

It is in this sense that Unitarianism in the Khasi, Jaiñtia, and Karbi Hills can be understood as an indigenous religion. It did not merely transplant a foreign theological system into the region; rather, it emerged from the religious and philosophical soil of the people and entered into dialogue with their indigenous worldview, concepts of the divine, and understanding of human existence. The result is a distinctive theological tradition in which universal Unitarian principles are expressed through indigenous thought and experience. Its uniqueness, therefore, lies in its creative synthesis of liberal religious ideas with the intellectual and spiritual heritage of the region.

Meghalaya Defence Corridor: The Next Big Strategic Move in India's Defence Calculus

By Shahin Yusuf

India's Northeast is no longer merely a frontier to be secured; it is a strategic space where connectivity, commerce, defence logistics and geopolitics converge. Meghalaya must craft a policy architecture that converts geography into strategic advantage, minerals into technology, community consent into competitive strength and ecological stewardship into industrial resilience.

The recent unveiling of RAKSHA, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's 10-year defence-diplomacy roadmap, provides precisely such an opportunity. Its four pillars—Strategic Partnerships, Capacity Building, Indigenous Exports and Maritime Security—can provide the national framework within which Meghalaya must re-imagine its own Defence Corridor. The idea should not be misconstrued as the creation of another military cantonment or a purely military road network. I propose instead the grand dice roll—Meghalaya Defence Industrial Corridor and Ecosystem (M-DICE) —before the Meghalaya Government which shall become a dual-use economic and strategic architecture linking infrastructure, defence logistics, MSMEs, research, skills and regional connectivity. The upcoming Dhubri–Phulbari bridge can strengthen western Meghalaya's connection with Assam and reduce dependence on conventional connectivity routes. The state's strategic geography, combined with its proximity to Bangladesh and the wider eastern frontier, makes it particularly relevant to India's security calculus. The Khasi-Jaintia legacy of metallurgy from traditional weapons to indigenous craftsmanship found in the earlier Museum paintings hung on the official corridors also offers a cultural foundation that can be connected with 21st-century engineering and technological skills.

Why Meghalaya?

The question is not whether India should develop defence-industrial capacity in the Northeast, but why Meghalaya should become one of its important nodes when established defence corridors already exist in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu and an industrial-defence ecosystem is emerging in Assam. The answer lies in geography, strategic connectivity and the possibility of creating a specialised frontier ecosystem. Meanwhile, Bangladesh faces instability after regime change, with electoral violence and energy protests threatening to destabilise India's northeastern frontier. With Chinese infrastructure investments in Myanmar and Bangladesh such as the China–Myanmar–Bangladesh Economic Corridor (CMBEC) which is part of Beijing's wider Belt and Road initiative, Meghalaya becomes a critical piece on the strategic chessboard encircling India. This makes it urgent to strengthen an endogenous defence supply chain in the North East, ensuring resilience against external shocks and regional volatility.

Shillong, once the capital of undivided Assam, should be reimagined as a defence-diplomacy and capacity-building hub. The state already possesses military infrastructure, including the Assam Rifles presence, while proposed road projects such as the Ranikor–Ratacherra–Dalu and Darugiri–Baghmara–Dalu links can strengthen strategic militarized mobility. The Shillong Airport expansion can further support multimodal connectivity. RAKSHA provides a larger strategic vocabulary for these otherwise disconnected projects.

Its first pillar, Strategic Partnerships, can be operationalised by positioning Meghalaya as a gateway for India's engagement with neighbouring and friendly countries. Ranikor–Ratacherra should therefore be viewed not merely as roads but as a strategic mobility spine, linking border areas with the Barak Valley and the wider Northeast. Such infrastructure can facilitate logistics, disaster response, border development and, where appropriate, future joint training and cooperation with friendly partners. The second pillar, Capacity Building, presents an even bigger opportunity. Shillong could develop a specialised defence and HADR ecosystem involving the armed forces, Assam Rifles, universities, technical institutions, MSMEs and disaster-management agencies. A proposed collaboration between DRDO, NIT Shillong and the security establishment could focus on drones, counter-drone technologies, communications, geospatial systems, mountain logistics and climate-resilient technologies. The rise of drones meant democratization of air power with radars churning out data in the nearby border areas. This will further reduce the 'brain drain' of engineering graduates in Meghalaya by establishing employability after passing out from college.

Meghalaya could aspire to host an India–ASEAN Northeast Defence and HADR Training Centre, focused on humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, mountain operations, emergency response and technological cooperation. RAKSHA explicitly emphasises joint exercises, training programmes and sharing of best practices with

From Importer to Exporter

The third pillar Indigenous Exports could transform the economic argument for M-DICE. India's defence exports have risen dramatically, reaching ₹38,424 crore in 2025–26, according to the Ministry of Defence. Rajnath Singh has simultaneously called for greater R&D, technology upgradation, university-industry partnerships and stronger participation by MSMEs and start-ups. Manpower consumes most of India's defence budget, crowding out funds for modernization. Nearly 70% goes to salaries, pensions, and benefits, leaving only 30% for equipment and upkeep. The Agnipath scheme, though unpopular among some officers, has shifted this balance introducing a measure of rationalization and improving the ability to manage defence expenditure.

Meghalaya need not replicate large defence manufacturing complexes elsewhere. Its comparative advantage could lie in high-value, low-footprint technologies: drones and components, rugged communications equipment, surveillance systems, GIS and geospatial services, protective equipment, specialised textiles, field medical systems, renewable mobile power, emergency shelters and software. The objective should be simple: design in Meghalaya, manufacture in the Northeast, test where appropriate, and export through India's wider defence network. A Defence Extension Centre under the MSME Technology framework could deliver precision engineering, prototyping, testing, and skilling. With targeted incentives and a PPP model, private defence firms can be drawn in, turning M-DICE from mere infrastructure into a demand-driven ecosystem. Innovation now flows through direct Army–private coordination, replacing the bureaucratic delays that once stifled indigenous defence production.

Meghalaya and the Maritime Dimension

The fourth RAKSHA pillar, Maritime Security, may initially appear disconnected from a landlocked state but this may not be the case. Meghalaya should not attempt to portray itself as a maritime state. Instead, it should position itself as an inland strategic logistics node supporting India's wider Bay of Bengal and Indo-Pacific architecture.

The Phulbari–Dhubri connectivity network via Jogighopa Inland Water Terminal can connect Meghalaya more efficiently with Assam and the national transport grid. From there, strategic logistics can connect with the eastern seaboard and the Bay of Bengal. Hence Meghalaya's contribution to maritime security would be indirect but significant: resilient inland connectivity strengthens the national logistics chain that ultimately supports India's role as a Net Security Provider and First Responder in the Indian Ocean Region—the stated maritime objective of RAKSHA.

Community As Stakeholder

Yet execution remains the litmus test. The greatest challenge will be land, particularly within the constitutional framework of the Sixth Schedule. A conventional land-acquisition model could generate precisely the social resistance that a frontier industrial project cannot afford. A Community Land-Lease Model, under which indigenous landowners voluntarily lease land for long periods in exchange for equity, annuity or other assured benefits, deserves serious consideration. The objective must be to transform local communities from land providers into economic stakeholders.

Strategic Minerals

Meghalaya's mineral resources could provide another long-term dimension to M-DICE. The State Government has opposed uranium extraction, and that position must be respected given the state's ecological sensitivity and community concerns. However, future technological advances may change the equation. If modern extraction, waste-management and environmental-monitoring technologies can demonstrate negligible ecological impact, backed by independent regulation and genuine community consent, Meghalaya could reassess the strategic potential of its mineral resources. Uranium and other critical minerals have growing importance for India's energy security, advanced technology and defence-industrial autonomy.

A National Security Compulsion.

Meghalaya's Defence Corridor should not be marketed merely as another demand for central funds. It should be presented as a regional implementation platform for India's larger strategic objectives. RAKSHA provides the national doctrine. M-DICE can provide the Meghalaya mechanism. It is an opportunity to make Meghalaya a bridge between India's frontier security, defence industry, regional diplomacy and Indo-Pacific strategy. In the words of Chanakya, "The king shall lose no time when the opportunity awaits." Meghalaya's defence corridor is that opportunity—one India cannot afford to squander.

(The writer is Advocate, Gauhati High Court)

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya's AI Training Push Needs a Verification Habit

Editor,

Meghalaya's recruitment of AI trainers for Shillong Polytechnic, ITI Rynjah and ITI Tura is a practical sign that AI literacy is moving into the state's skills system. The Meghalaya State Skill Development Society is also expanding AI and machine-learning training, alongside broader efforts to connect skills with employability.

That makes one teaching habit especially important: verification.

Learners should pause before relying on an AI-generated answer that could affect a customer, student, patient, application, calculation or workplace decision. They should identify the consequential claim, find an independent source or method to check it, and name the person responsible for the final judgment.

This is a way to make AI adoption durable. People learn faster when they understand where a tool is useful, where it can fail, and what they remain accountable for.

If Meghalaya's AI training teaches prompting without verification, learners may become fluent users without becoming reliable decision-makers. A simple verification habit can help turn new AI skills into better

Yours etc.,
Gleb Tsipursky, (PhD, PhD, behavioural scientist, CEO of Disaster Avoidance Experts, and author of The Psychology of AI Adoption at Work: From Resistance to Results (Georgetown University Press, 2026). https://disasteravoidanceexperts.com/aibook)
Columbus, Ohio, United States

Televised Spectacle in Shillong: Faith, Performative Politics & Public Trust

Editor,

The recent televised scenes from the BJP state headquarters have sent a palpable shockwave through our local society. For a state where communities are deeply anchored in regional values and Christian heritage, watching a former regional party member formally switch flags feels less like standard legislative realignment and more like a total disconnect from the grassroots.

What struck many citizens as deeply unsettling was the nature of the welcoming ceremony. Opening a political induction with sacred Christian hymns like "How Great Thou Art" presents a profound paradox. When a political entity historically viewed with scepticism regarding minority rights suddenly adopts the vo-

leaves the public asking a critical question: Is this genuine alignment, or is it a calculated, superficial performance?

True leadership is defined by an unyielding commitment to the core values and foundational principles that our society has stood by for generations. Any political movement that pushes aside these deep-rooted societal convictions cannot easily hide its true intentions behind seasonal moralism and performative displays. Our society watches closely to see if our collective identity is being actively championed, or if it is being bartered away simply for personal advancement and political survival.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Via email

Political Landscaping in Khasi-Jaintia Hills

Editor,

If only Rahul Gandhi had recognized the gravity of the moment when Himanta Biswa Sarma (HBS), alongside key Assam Congress leaders, walked into his office in 2011 with a list of grievances, the political landscape of Assam and the Northeast would look entirely different. Had HBS been retained as a core asset rather than alienated, the crippling internal factionalism of the mid-2010s would have been neutralized. Tarun Gogoi's succession plan could have been steered smoothly through Sarma—or handed to him directly—thus averting and preserving Congress hegemony for a stronger defensive stand in the 2016 elections.

Instead, true to form and seemingly allergic to institutional learning, the Congress high command repeated the exact same playbook in Meghalaya. Mukul Sangma's high-profile defection to the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) in November 2021 proved that the party leadership hadn't evolved. For Mukul and his loyalists, the gamble ended in a bitter lesson: the heavy regional stigma of the TMC being branded as a "West Bengal party" attempting to dictate terms to a proud tribal state. Today, the once-formidable Chief Minister is largely relegated to offering expert soundbites from the sidelines.

One must credit the sheer operational mastery of the BJP during election cycles—its extraordinary, almost gravitational pull in acquiring MLAs and MPs both pre- and post-poll. In contemporary politics, finding a regional heavy-hitter who hasn't at least entertained a nudge toward the saffron camp is nearly impossible. After all, why shouldn't Meghalaya buy into Modi's grand sales pitch of "From Periphery to Priority: Transforming the Gateways of Growth"?

The real test, however, lies in the execution. It remains to be seen whether this newfound political alignment in Meghalaya has the grassroots grit to walk door-to-door through the rugged terrain of the Khasi-Jaintia hills and convince local voters of what a transactional can truly deliver.

Yours etc.,
Narottam Subedi,
Shillong 2

Informational Obesity Will Kill Us

Editor,

Informational obesity will first dumb us down. Actually, it already is. We ourselves know it. We wake up, pick up the phone and begin eating information before our brain has even brushed its teeth. By breakfast, we have consumed a war, 4 political opinions, 7 LinkedIn sermons, a celebrity divorce, someone explaining quantum physics in 43 seconds, another person telling us why coffee is killing us and a podcast clip in which a 24-year-old millionaire explains how waking up at 4:37 AM changed his life.

I know it is relatable and we are smiling, but our brain was never designed for this buffet. For most of human history, information was expensive. Books had to be copied by hand, libraries were limited, newspapers came once a day, and knowledge often required finding someone who actually knew something. But today, information is effectively infinite. We can sit on the toilet and encounter more ideas, arguments, headlines and opinions in 20 minutes than our great-grandparents encountered in a month. Has that made us proportionately wiser? I doubt it.

We increasingly know a little about everything and understand almost nothing

us enough vocabulary to feel informed about geopolitics, psychology, nutrition, relationships or economics. Then we walk into conversations carrying 11 half-digested facts and the confidence of a man who has personally advised the United Nations.

That is information obesity. The problem with overeating food is that the body eventually shows it. But informational overeating is more deceptive because we can mistake consumption for intelligence and feel intellectually active because our thumb has travelled 3 kilometres today. But exposure is not understanding. Reading is not thinking. And knowing that something happened is not the same as understanding why it happened, what it means or whether it matters.

I have started believing that intellectual health will increasingly depend on refusal. Which article deserves 20 minutes? Which book deserves 10 hours? Which person deserves access to our heads? Which piece of information will actually change how we think? So, in a world where information is infinite, wisdom may depend less on how much we can consume and more on what we are willing to ignore.

Because informational obesity has the same tragedy as physical obesity, we can be completely stuffed and still terribly undernourished.

Yours etc.,
Hrishikesh Raychaudhuri,
Shillong-1

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"Recognizing the need is the primary condition for design."
— Charles Eames

The Shillong Times
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A Statesman Remembered

A book on Meghalaya's third Chief Minister, BB Lyngdoh, released recently by the Assembly Speaker Thomas Sangma, is a timely and appropriate memoir of the man, his vision and commitment towards doing not what is "good" but what is "right" for the people." A no-nonsense politician here was a man credited with at least three 'firsts'. He introduced the MLA Local Area Development Scheme because he felt every MLA irrespective of whether in the ruling or opposition required a certain amount for addressing urgent issues in the constituency. Lyngdoh also first introduced coalition politics in Meghalaya. Above all, he envisioned what is today the North East Indira Gandhi Regional Institute of Health and Medical Sciences (NEIGRIHMS), which has become a go-to hospital for people from across the seven states. This fact is so little known. In 1980, BB Lyngdoh took the proposal for a regional hospital, comparable to AIIMS, to Indira Gandhi when she was the Prime Minister. She readily agreed to the proposal and its location in Shillong. The younger generation would not know this, and the generation before it would have forgotten at whose initiative the NEIGRIHMS stands tall today.

Reflective of the politics of the time is the resistance to some of the far-reaching reforms BB Lyngdoh suggested which would have been a boon for the state's people. In March 1975, when he was the Revenue Minister, he proposed a cadastral survey of all of Meghalaya so that government records would show who owned how much land. BB Lyngdoh was then the Revenue Minister. That this proposal came only three years after Meghalaya became a full-fledged state means Lyngdoh had at the time identified something that remains a fundamental problem in Meghalaya today: the absence of comprehensive, authoritative records establishing land ownership. His proposal was not simply about mapping land. The wording -"to determine the right owners"- shows that he understood the cadastral survey as a foundation for resolving questions of ownership, land rights and land reform. But as is the case with all positive proposals in Meghalaya the person who vetoed the cadastral survey was none other than Hopingstone Lyngdoh who argued that this was the Government's way of exacting land revenue from the tribals. This issue never received the Assembly's consent, and today landlessness in rural Meghalaya is rampant even as there is elite capture of land occurs everywhere. It was the tribal elite then and the same tribal elite now, that continue to resist the cadastral survey of land which in turn has contributed to landlessness and opacity in land ownership.

The proposal made in 1975 eventually found legislative expression in the Meghalaya Land Survey and Records Preparation Act, 1980, which provides for cadastral surveys and preparation of land records with the involvement of the Autonomous District Councils. Yet, as late as 2016, the government was still saying that it was trying to implement the cadastral survey across the state. That is an extraordinary 51-year policy failure. And there is a particularly interesting line in the 2016 Assembly report: the survey had not taken off because it was criticised as an attempt by the government to "impinge on the rights of the people in matters related to land." Meghalaya does not deserve a statesman

Beyond Boycott and Conflict: A Common Tourism Future

By Shaidul Islam

The recent violence in Shillong and the targeting of Assam-registered vehicles have increased anxieties between two neighbouring states. But the appropriate response is not retaliation or boycott. It is stronger institutions, safer connectivity and a shared economic vision. The temptation to answer violence with counter-mobilisation is understandable. It is also shortsighted. The recent incidents in Shillong, followed by protests and disruptions at Jorabat, have once again demonstrated how quickly an isolated act of violence can acquire a wider interstate dimension. A vehicle registration number, ordinarily a mere administrative identifier, can suddenly become a marker of collective identity. An Assam-registered vehicle becomes an "Assamese vehicle." The individual inside it disappears behind the label. That is precisely how local disturbances become regional conflicts.

Assam and Meghalaya share an approximately 884.9-kilometre interstate boundary, but their economic and social relationship is far deeper than the boundary suggests. Students cross it for education. Patients travel for specialised healthcare. Traders depend on markets on both sides. Workers move in search of employment. Families maintain relationships. Tourists cross the border every day. The border regulates administration. It does not regulate interdependence.

That reality must inform the political response. There can be no justification for targeting people or vehicles because of their place of registration. Equally, the actions of a few individuals cannot be attributed to an entire community. The Khasi people cannot be collectively blamed for the actions of alleged miscreants, just as Assamese people cannot be collectively held responsible for every act committed by an individual from Assam. Collective blame is not justice. It is the beginning of a cycle of retaliation. The Assam and Meghalaya governments therefore have a responsibility that extends beyond arresting offenders after an incident has occurred. They need institutional mechanisms for preventing escalation: regular communication between senior officials, coordination between police forces, rapid verification of rumours and a credible system for protecting interstate transport and travellers.

For taxi operators, particularly those whose livelihoods depend on the Assam–Meghalaya tourism corridor, political statements are of little value. What they need is the confidence that they can travel, work and return home safely. Tourism is the first casualty of distrust. The tourism economy makes interstate cooperation even more important. Assam is the gateway of Northeastern states and much more,. Meghalaya and Assam are not competing islands. They are components of the same regional tourism ecosystem. Guwahati is a principal gateway to the Northeast, while Meghalaya remains one of the region's most attractive destinations. A substantial share of Meghalaya's domestic visitors comes from Assam. Thousands of Assam-based drivers, tour operators and travel businesses depend on tourist movement towards Meghalaya. A sense of boycott would therefore not punish Meghalaya alone. It would also hurt taxi operators, travel agencies, hotels, restaurants and small businesses of both states.

The consequences of instability are cumulative. Fear reduces bookings. Disrupted roads discourage travel. Uncertainty affects investment. Negative images spread through social media aggravate the situation. The destination's reputation suffers. Tourism depends on one commodity above all others: confidence..Once tourists begin to associate a destination or a travel corridor with uncertainty, restoring confidence is far more difficult than creating it in the first place. This is why interstate harmony should be treated not merely as a political or social objective but as an economic necessity.

Assam's real challenge is not Meghalaya, nor are the Assamese enemies or counterparts to the Khasis of Meghalaya. There is another lesson we should draw from the present situation. Instead of asking how to reduce dependence on Meghalaya in tourism sector, Assam should ask why it has not developed enough alternative destinations to create a broader tourism economy of its own. The state possesses extraordinary assets: Kaziranga, Manas, Raimona, Majuli, the Charaideo Maidams, Sivasagar's Ahom heritage, Kamakhya, Hajo, Karbi Anglong, Dima Hasao, the Brahmaputra, tea gardens, Sualkuchi's textile traditions and an exceptionally diverse culinary culture. Yet Assam's international tourism identity remains disproportionately concentrated around Kaziranga. That is a branding and product-development failure, not a resource failure.

Assam needs a coherent tourism strategy that transforms individual attractions into marketable experiences. Wildlife, heritage, spirituality, river tourism, tea, cuisine, festivals and living cultures should not exist as disconnected promotional categories. They should form a single, recognizable tourism proposition. The success of Meghalaya offers useful lessons. Its emphasis on homestays, community participation, music, festivals, destination branding and improved connectivity demonstrates how tourism can be converted into a broad-based local economy rather than an industry concentrated around a few large establishments. Assam need not copy Meghalaya. It needs to learn from it.

I personally believe the Northeast should be sold as one region. The larger opportunity lies in abandoning the outdated idea that each state must market itself separately. The Northeast is one tourism circuit, and can't stand separated in tourism industry. A tourist arriving from Delhi, Mumbai, Bengaluru, Europe or Southeast Asia does not necessarily think in terms of administrative boundaries. The visitor sees the Northeast as a destination with multiple experiences. Policy must begin to reflect that reality. The Guwahati–Shillong–Sohra–Mawlynnong–Dawki corridor can become an integrated hill-and-culture tourism route. The Guwahati–Kaziranga–Majuli–Sivasagar–Charaideo corridor can offer wildlife, riverine and heritage experiences. These routes can eventually connect with Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram and Tripura to create a genuine Northeast Tourism Circuit.

Such integration cannot be achieved merely by drawing routes on a tourism brochure. It requires coordinated investment and common standards. Interstate governments should work towards seamless tourist information, better road and public transport connectivity, standardized accommodation and homestay facilities, trained multilingual guides, common signage, emergency assistance and verified communication channels during periods of crisis. Even tourism promotion should become collaborative. Someone tell me why should a foreign visitor be encouraged to choose between Assam and Meghalaya when the stronger proposition is to experience both?

We should have competitions, but not contradiction; rather it should be complementarity. Assam has wildlife, rivers, tea and one of India's great civilizational histories. Meghalaya has hills, waterfalls, caves, living indigenous cultures and a powerful music identity. Majuli represents a distinctive cultural landscape; Shillong has developed a strong musical identity; Charaideo offers a new gateway to Ahom heritage. These are not competing assets. They are complementary ones. The economic logic is compelling. A tourist visiting Meghalaya can be encouraged to extend the journey into Assam. A visitor arriving in Assam for Kaziranga can be encouraged to travel onwards to Meghalaya. Longer stays mean higher expenditure, more employment and wider distribution of tourism income. The objective, therefore, should not be to decide which state receives more tourists. It should be to increase the total number of tourists visiting the Northeast, extend their length of stay and distribute the economic benefits across communities and states. That requires trust.

I think the present crisis is also a test of political maturity in the Northeast. Road blockades may create pressure. Boycott calls may generate headlines. Social-media outrage may produce temporary political visibility. None of these can guarantee the safety of a taxi driver, rebuild a damaged destination image or create a sustainable tourism economy. Only institutions can do that. Yes, we can put pressure on the system to do that. Political parties, civil-society organizations and regional bodies must resist the temptation to convert every interstate dispute into a contest of collective pride. Organisations with a regional mandate should be at the forefront of dialogue, not spectators to escalation.

The governments of Assam and Meghalaya should consider establishing a permanent Interstate Tourism and Mobility Coordination Mechanism to address transport security, tourist movement, crisis communication, infrastructure and joint promotion. Such an institution would turn goodwill into a system and make cooperation less dependent on political personalities. The Northeast cannot demand greater national attention while allowing internal divisions to undermine its own connectivity and economy. The region's diversity is its greatest tourism asset. Its fragmentation must not become its greatest liability. The choice before Assam and Meghalaya is therefore not between strength and weakness, nor between pride and compromise. It is between short-term confrontation and long-term strategic interest. The future belongs to the latter.

The hills of Meghalaya do not diminish the forests of Assam. Assam's rivers do not compete with Meghalaya's waterfalls. Shillong's music does not weaken Majuli's culture. Charaideo's heritage does not diminish the living traditions of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities. Together, they tell a far more compelling story than any state can tell alone. The Northeast needs fewer borders in the imagination and better bridges in reality. The future of tourism in the region will not be secured by boycotting a neighbour. It will be secured by making cooperation itself an economic strategy.

Questions Over MBBS College Allotment in Meghalaya

By TFL Mawlong

NEET is one of the most competitive entrance examinations in India. It has also become a very tough exam to crack, especially given that the Physics paper has become increasingly difficult. That is why students study hard for years and burn the midnight oil for months before the exam to achieve a good score.

Scoring high in NEET requires not only extensive preparation but also a strong conceptual understanding and the ability to perform under intense competition. This is why rote learners find it hard to crack it. Every aspirant wants to crack this NEET with a better score and higher rank because in a merit-based MBBS entrance, like any other entrance exam, ranks decide not only whether or not they get an MBBS seat but also which college they are allotted.

Let's understand a Merit-based allotment. It's a rather simple idea: A student with a better rank is considered before a student with a lower rank, and depending on the seats available, he or she should be allotted the highest possible college from the preference list. Of course, there are reservations, different quotas, categories and other rules that have to be taken into consideration. But once students are competing under the same applicable category and conditions, merit must mean something. Otherwise, what is the purpose of preparing a merit list in the first place? And what is the point of calling students for counselling? This is why some of this year's MBBS college allotments by the Directorate of Health Services, Meghalaya need explanation.

Consider the case of one student who secured Rank 7 in the Khasi-Jaintia category. Despite a high rank, the student was allotted a college from her last preference. Now, this in itself is not necessarily a problem. Perhaps the colleges she placed as her first, second, third, fourth and fifth preferences had already been filled by students ranked above her. If that were the case, there would be very little to question.

But apparently, this was not what happened. Colleges which she had placed as her 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th preferences were allotted to students ranked below her. How does one explain this?

Suppose Rank 7 asks for College A as her first preference, College B as her second preference, Colleges C as her third, College D as her fourth, College E as her fifth and College F as her 6th and she was given a college at the bottom of her preference list. Naturally, one would assume that Colleges A, B, C, D and E were no longer available for her. But then, if these very colleges were allotted to many lower ranks, the obvious question is: how were these colleges unavailable for Rank 7 but available for students below Rank 7?

The concern becomes greater because Rank 7 is not the only such case. There are several other students who have received colleges much lower in their preference lists while colleges they preferred more were allotted to students below them in rank.

Let's understand the issue better. Suppose a student at Rank 100 lists College A as the first preference, College B as the second, and College C as the third. Eventually, the student is allotted College F, which was his sixth preference. There is nothing wrong with that if Colleges A, B and C were legitimately exhausted before Rank 100 was considered. But suppose College A is then allotted to Rank 130, College B to Rank 140 and College C to Rank 150, with all these candidates competing under the same applicable category and seat conditions. What happened to Rank 100? Why was he made to move all the way down to his sixth preference?

If College A was available for Rank 130, why was it not available for Rank 100? If College B was available for Rank 140, why was it not available for Rank 100? And if College C was available for Rank 150, why was Rank 100 again passed over?

The current seat allotment by the DHS defies basic logic of merit-based allotment. But we don't really need mathematics to see the problem. We can apply the same simple question to every disputed allotment: Under the Khasi-Jaintia or Garo category, was a college appearing higher in the preference list of a higher-ranked student allotted to a lower-ranked student, while the higher-ranked student was given something further down his or her list?

If yes; then we ask why? What were those allotment rules or the SOPs of the DHS? And how were they applied by DHS? For the case of Rank 7, for example, what happened to her first preference? Why was she not eligible for it? Then move to her second preference and ask the same questions. And then do it again for the third, fourth and fifth preferences. If each step can be explained according to the SOPs, the matter ends there. But if it cannot, then surely the allotment needs to be reviewed.

MBBS aspirants spend years preparing for NEET. We tell students that every mark matters. Sometimes a difference of just a few marks separates hundreds of students. and one mark is the difference between getting and not getting the MBBS seat , or whether you're getting into prestigious colleges or not. That is the nature of a competitive examination, and students accept it.

But if we demand such precision from a 17- or 18-year-old student, shouldn't we demand at least the same precision from the DHS? What is being asked is much simpler. If a student with a superior rank could not get a college because the seat had legitimately gone to someone with a stronger claim, DHS must show it. If some eligibility condition prevented the student from getting the seat, DHS should identify that condition.

But if a higher-ranked student asks for a college, but was denied that college and was pushed much further down the preference list, while that same college was given to a lower-ranked student competing under the same applicable conditions, then simply saying that "the allotment was done according to the SOPs" is not an explanation.

For now, the question from Rank 7—and apparently from many others—remains remarkably simple: If the colleges I preferred were available for students ranked below me, why were they not available for me? The students deserve an answer.

"If each step can be explained according to the SOPs, the matter ends there. But if it cannot, then surely the allotment needs to be reviewed. MBBS aspirants spend years preparing for NEET. We tell students that every mark matters. Sometimes a difference of just a few marks separates hundreds of students. and one mark is the difference between getting and not getting the MBBS seat , or whether you're getting into prestigious colleges or not. That is the nature of a competitive examination, and students accept it."

Letters to the Editor

Needs Assessment Survey Important Before Opening New Institutions

Editor,

The efforts of the State Government to spread development across the State and not confine it only to the State capital is indeed a welcome step. However, as far as educational institutions, especially technical institutions are concerned, it is humbly suggested that the Government should conduct a proper needs assessment through a detailed survey before opening new ones.

The financial burden and constraints of the Government are evident if one visits the existing institutions. Many of them are functioning with inadequate infrastructure, faculty and laboratory facilities. It would therefore be advisable to first properly equip and strengthen the present institutions. Otherwise, in the event of a physical verification by the regulatory authorities, they may not even stand a chance and may face withdrawal of Extension of Approval for running various courses.

The employment scenario of the pass-outs is another important aspect that needs to be considered while planning new institutions.

Last year, after decades of waiting, the State of Meghalaya was blessed with its first Medical College(Shillong Medical College) and its first Engineering College(Shillong Government College of Engineering). This landmark achievement was made possible thanks to the sincere and hardworking efforts of two brilliant IAS officers, Dr Joram Beda and Dr Vijay Kumar Mantri, who put their heart and mind into the system. No doubt, they were ably backed by a team of dedicated officers and staff whose selfless sacrifice resulted in this historic milestone for the State.

We should also thank the Hon'ble Chief Minister, his Cabinet colleagues, and acknowledge the vital role played by former Health Minister, Ampareen Lyngdoh and former Education Minister Rakkam A. Sangma. It is hoped that while we celebrate these achievements, we will also take steps to consolidate and strengthen what we already have before expanding further.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Of Political Party Hoppers & Their Winnability in 2028

Editor,

The Shillong Times report "Will BJP tickets help turncoats in 2028" (ST 14th September 2026) reflects a broader pattern of political realignment in Meghalaya. It must be noted that defections to the BJP are driven less by ideological conviction and more by the hope that the party's national clout will secure electoral success. Yet, as the article points out, this strategy is fraught with risk: local BJP cadres resent being sidelined, and voters often view defectors as opportunists rather than genuine representatives. This dynamic mirrors a recurring theme in Meghalaya's politics — where regional identity and grassroots credibility often outweigh national party labels. The BJP's attempt to expand through defectors highlights both its ambition and its limitations in states where cultural and religious contexts differ sharply from its Hindi–Hindu heartland base. The report rightly suggests that tickets alone won't guarantee legitimacy; in the Northeast, political survival still depends on authentic local engagement.

Looking at the recent past elections in Meghalaya, the trend is quite telling: defectors rarely enjoy smooth success simply by switching parties. In the 2018 Assembly elections, several Congress and regional party leaders who defected to the BJP or NPP struggled to retain their seats. Voters often punished them for perceived opportunism, preferring candidates with strong local roots. In 2023, a few defectors did manage wins, but largely because they aligned with dominant regional forces (like the NPP) rather than relying solely on BJP's brand.

Historically, Meghalaya's electorate has shown a strong preference for continuity and credibility at the grassroots level. Party-switching without clear local engagement has often backfired. So, when the report asks whether BJP tickets will help turncoats in 2028, historical evidence suggests that party labels alone don't guarantee legitimacy in Meghalaya. Success depends on whether defectors can convincingly embed themselves in local communities and overcome the stigma of opportunism. Hence party-switching isn't a shortcut to success in Meghalaya. From 2018 to 2023, defectors learned that voters value credibility over convenience. As 2028 approaches, the BJP's gamble on turncoats faces the same test — can national ambition overcome local trust?

Yours etc,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Political Debates Should be Based on Historical Facts

Editor,

Recently, concerns have been raised about BJP's growing presence in Meghalaya based on reports of a few legislators from a regional party likely joining the BJP, citing its ideological roots vis-à-vis the state's present Christian majority status. (VPP flags BJP-RSS ties amid UDP MLAs defection buzz, ST 12th Aug, 2026).

The BJP-RSS ideology considers all religions equal, unlike Christianity and therefore does not believe in the doctrine of religious conversion. Moreover, labelling Meghalaya as a "Christian-majority state" is historically fallacious. Christianity arrived here less than two centuries ago, whereas indigenous faiths flourished for millennia. Therefore, to define the state solely by Christianity appears nothing but a deliberate attempt to erase its original heritage and the people who practiced it long before the arrival of two Welsh missionaries in 1841.

Faith is definitely a matter of personal choice and every individual has the right to choose, change, or abandon their faith. The real contradiction, however, lies in treating BJP-RSS ideology, which does not believe in religious conversion, as a threat to Christianity while overlooking the fact that the real demographic shift in Meghalaya came through mass conversions to Christianity and not through BJP-RSS influence. Political debate should therefore, be based on constitutional principles, historical facts and ideological distinctions—not on fear or inaccurate portrayal of any ideology.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar,
Shillong-3

Safeguarding school children from mobile addiction

Editor,

With reference to the letter "Paul's call for digital detox to save school children," published in the Shillong Times on 11 September 2026, I agree with every point highlighted by Salil Gewali. First of all, kudos to Bah Paul for raising this issue for the first time in the Meghalaya Assembly, something no other MLA had done before. Social media addiction has deeply disturbed the mental balance of the younger generation. If an eight-year-old schoolgirl is encouraged to increase her followers, the consequences will surely be harmful, as rightly noted by Bah Paul.

What is sad is that students are often encouraged to prepare study material directly from websites, which means they do not need to put effort, unlike during our time. Whenever something is difficult, teachers advise students to look for answers on the internet. The students, in turn, simply copy notes into their exercise books without trying to understand them. This reduces their ability to think and learn critically.

Many studies have shown clear differences between reading on mobile devices and reading from books. Reading from books or exercise books always has an advantage, as it holds attention for a longer time than reading from a mobile screen. Obsession, loss of attention, and extreme changes in behaviour are now serious concerns among the younger generation, and Salil Gewali has discussed these issues very well.

Parents also share the blame for this growing addiction. Just to keep their children happy for a while, they hand over their own mobile phones. This is how children slowly get addicted. Unless the government takes steps to restrict mobile use among children, their mental balance will continue to be affected by unhealthy reels and images. I hope Bah Paul will be able to convince other MLAs to pass a bill addressing these pressing issues.

Yours etc.,
Hilarius Umdor,
Shillong-8

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

"Every artist was first an amateur."
— Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Cash paradox

INDIA has done reasonably well in encouraging digital transactions – to the extent that this process surged to nearly a billion a day by now. But the fact is also that the RBI is printing currency notes of nearly 30 billion across six denominations a year and this number keeps growing. RBI says, "currency circulation continues to grow at double-digit rates" even as cash transactions at the individual level declined in recent years due to the digital-adoption. An RBI official termed this a "cash paradox." Clearly, as he admits, this also reflects the fact that large sums are drawn and kept by people as a reserve for future use rather than spending the money. Obviously, the upper segments of society flushed with cash do this while the common man, the large majority, leads a hand-to-mouth existence. The large mass of ordinary people has no reserves to keep for the future. Overall, bulk cash transactions are done by the rich and the not-so-rich, who appear not to have taken a fancy to digital transactions. Since corruption is all-pervasive in society, cash transactions are preferred by many over digital payments.

The net-based payment system in the country gained currency in the past decade—spurred by the Modi government's 2016 demonetization of high-value currency, which aimed to weed out counterfeit currency. The large-scale influx of fake Indian currency consignments from Pakistan, which reached India through its porous northern and eastern borders for circulation, had the potential to destabilize the national economy. It appears the 2016 demonetization helped check this to an extent. Alongside, the government encouraged digital transactions. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) system came into being, which greatly helps people avoid carrying cash or running to banks every time a transaction is required. Purchases have been made easier. Commercial activities got a boost. Yet, what was a free facility for a decade is now likely to be affected by a governmental move to introduce a service charge for most such transactions. At a time when the government's effort should be to encourage digital/UPI transactions and control the sway of black money, the reverse seems to be happening.

Fact is also that India is a nation where digital literacy is high thanks to the leaps it made in the telecommunications and IT sectors starting with the modernization of the ageing systems at the time of Rajiv Gandhi as prime minister and with able help from his technology adviser Sam Pitroda. Digital transactions are now easier also because of the massive spread and use of mobile phones, which can scan QR codes and effect money transfer with the click of a button or two. India has 1.29 billion mobile phone subscribers, of whom some 70 crore use smart phones. As a result, the digital/ UPI cash transactions systems have gained more currency in India than in the advanced West. This positive side must be strengthened further as a guard against the spread of black money and fake notes, and also as a means to check corruption. It is imperative that the nation progressively reduce people's reliance on the printed currency system.

Real Life Singham! Why India needs more Tukaram Mundhes

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Last week, Maharashtra's Food and Drug Administration turned its attention to eateries run by ISKCON, the highly popular Krishna Consciousness movement. For millions of devotees, ISKCON is far more than just another institution. It is a global religious and spiritual movement with an enormous following and a powerful public presence. But the message from Maharashtra FDA Commissioner Tukaram Mundhe was unmistakable. No one is above the law. Not a small roadside eatery. Not a fashionable restaurant. Not a powerful food business. And, if there are violations of food safety rules, not even an institution with the popularity and influence of ISKCON. The data is clear: in the 100 days since he took over, the Mundhe led FDA has exposed more cases of food adulteration than in the previous 18 months.

In fact, Mundhe's raids have also taken place ahead of Ganesh Chaturthi, the most widely celebrated festival in Maharashtra. When I spoke to him about it, his response was characteristically direct: the law is not religion-specific. Anyone who violates it will be brought to task.

That, in many ways, explains why Tukaram Mundhe is increasingly being dubbed a real-life Singham, a reference to the blockbuster Hindi film of a super-cop who takes on political corruption. There is something deeply revealing about the reaction to his recent crackdown on adulterated and unsafe food.

Among those businesses that have got used to lax regulation, there is fear of losing their licences. Among ordinary citizens, there is hope. And perhaps there is also a quiet sense of relief. Finally, someone seems to be asking a question that the government should have been asking all along: what exactly are you feeding us?

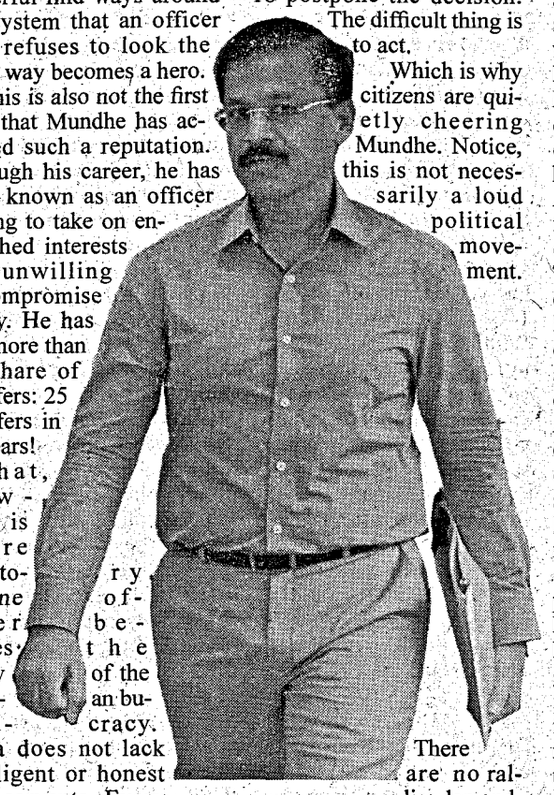
We live in an age when eating out has become part of everyday life. We order food online without a second thought. We buy milk, paneer, ghee, spices, sweets and packaged food assuming that someone, somewhere, is checking whether what we consume is safe.

But every raid that exposes unhygienic kitchens, adulterated ingredients or blatant violations of food safety norms shatters that comfortable assumption. The problem is not that the laws do not exist. The problem is that they are too often not enforced. And that is why Mundhe has struck such a chord. He hasn't invented a new law. He hasn't announced a revolutionary scheme. His most powerful weapon is not particularly cinematic. It is the law.

And perhaps that is precisely why he appears exceptional. In a system where rules are routinely bent, negotiated, selectively enforced or simply ignored, an official who decides to enforce them without fear or favour can look almost revolutionary.

Which brings us to the larger question: why should an officer simply doing his job have to be seen as a superhero? Tukaram Mundhe has no superpowers. He does not need background music or cinematic punchlines. Yet the Singham tag has stuck because citizens have grown so accustomed to seeing the powerful find ways around the system that an officer who refuses to look the other way becomes a hero.

This is also not the first time that Mundhe has acquired such a reputation. Through his career, he has been known as an officer willing to take on entrenched interests and unwilling to compromise easily. He has had more than his share of transfers: 25 transfers in 21 years!



That, however, is where the story of one officer becomes the story of the Indian bureaucracy. India does not lack intelligent or honest civil servants. Every year, some of the brightest young Indians enter the civil services. What is often lacking is the institutional environment that allows them to exercise independence.

Among those businesses that have got used to lax regulation, there is fear of losing their licences. Among ordinary citizens, there is hope. And perhaps there is also a quiet sense of relief. Finally, someone seems to be asking a question that the government should have been asking all along: what exactly are you feeding us? We live in an age when eating out has become part of everyday life. We order food online without a second thought. We buy milk, paneer, ghee, spices, sweets and packaged food assuming that someone, somewhere, is checking whether what we consume is safe.

An officer can survive a difficult posting. What is harder is surviving in a system where every important decision requires a calculation. Who will be upset? Will a politician complain? Will a powerful businessman make a phone call? Will a religious group protest? Will an influential lobby use its connections? And will the transfer order arrive before the work is completed?

That is how institutions gradually lose their spine. Not because every bureaucrat is corrupt. That would be a lazy caricature. But because a system that repeatedly punishes independence and rewards compliance sends a powerful message to everyone watching. Don't stick your neck out. The easiest thing in government is often to do nothing. To pass the file. To form a committee. To seek another clarification. To postpone the decision. The difficult thing is to act.

Which is why citizens are quietly cheering Mundhe. Notice, this is not necessarily a loud political movement. There are no rallies demanding his elevation to some higher office. But every time photographs or videos emerge of an inspection, every time a well-known establishment is questioned, there is an unmistakable public response.

At last, someone is doing something. Indians don't necessarily dislike regulation. What they dislike is selective regulation. The law cannot first ask: Who owns this establishment? Who knows whom? How powerful is the organisation? Which political party or religious group might be offended? If the law is to have meaning, it must apply equally.

That is the real lesson of Tukaram Mundhe. We don't need bureaucratic Rambos. We don't need officials who confuse shouting with courage. We need public servants with a spine. Public servants who are willing to ask not, "Who will be upset?", but, "What does the law require?"

Perhaps the most revealing aspect of the Mundhe story is not that he is being called a real-life Singham. It is that we the people seem so desperate for one. Food safety should not depend on whether Tukaram Mundhe happens to head the FDA. Restaurants should not suddenly become hygienic because a particular officer has begun conducting raids. Adulterators should not be frightened only when a tough commissioner is in office. The system should work even when the Singham leaves. That is ultimately the difference between a hero and an institution. A hero can transform a moment. An institution transforms everyday life. And yet, until our institutions become consistently reliable, individuals like Mundhe will continue to matter enormously.

Imagine, then, if every public servant did what Tukaram Mundhe likes to say he is doing: his duty. No grandstanding. No favouritism. No fear of the powerful. No calculation of caste, religion, political connections or social status. Just a straightforward commitment to enforce the law fairly and do the job for which the taxpayer is paying you. India has no shortage of laws, policies, schemes and committees. What it often suffers from is a crisis of implementation.

Imagine if every public servant simply did his or her duty with honesty, independence and a spine. India's governance crisis might just become a little less overwhelming. And perhaps we would no longer need to search for real-life Singhams. Because doing one's duty would no longer be seen as heroism. It would simply be normal.

Post script: Last week, I asked a senior minister from Maharashtra: 'So what do you think of Mr Mundhe?' 'Oh, he is a mad chap!' came the sharp response. Maybe we do need more public servants with a touch of madness, who are committed to citizen welfare and not to the needs of their political bosses.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

The Sixth Sense

By Dr Ininaki N Lyngdoh

The early 2000's was the beginning of what seemed to be an outburst of technology. From the formerly known cyber cafes or hubs to now having search engines at the tips of our fingers, we became witnesses to what is now known as the modern era. Growth came, as technology dwindled in physical size. Now, we are in a generation of speed and a fast-paced life. However, with the advent of rapid technology, also came the hazardous effects with it. Yet, technology started thousands and hundreds of years ago, from the first tool made in the stone age, the first letter written on papyrus to the time the massive computers were made.

Peter Thiel, in his book zero to one, argues that we are living in a generation of technological stagnation. An old but famous saying states that necessity is the mother of all invention, however, in order to invent, there is the question of "needs" or at least the thought process that requires a basic need. What prompted those inventions during the age of hunting gathering, was a profound dependence on the five senses given by God. Therefore, a generation, too preoccupied with technology, thus requires a Sixth sense.

The first sense, not in order of importance, the sense of smell. To consider this sense obsolete would be a misnomer, but in the context of survival, it might have become a vestigial organ. Often, we find ourselves oblivious to the dangers of life by the sense of smell. Nor can we sniff out those impending dooms coming our ways. Unlike most mammals, our sense of smell, seem but to aid in our food indulgence.

The next sense in question, is the sense of taste. A sense quite familiar even to infants and toddlers who simply spit up bitter medicines, but can be compelled when enticed with chocolates. Taste is sense often associated with gluttony, hence, can vary through ages. The sensation indicted here, again stands charged. Though in the era of food shortages and famines, it would have had a fair trial in the fight for survival.

Following the sense of taste, comes the infamous sense of hearing. The idiom "turn a deaf ear", has changed from a mere analogy to physically shutting of the ears. Though, still an important organ for survival, the age of technology has brought a new meaning to noise cancellation. We indulge ourselves with this technology irrespective of the time, place or person. However, not only does shutting the outside voice become a nuisance, it creates an environment where your voices are at a high decibel than required by the environment. We also find ourselves in conversations with people who had the privilege of selective hearing. A sense, that once protected our ancestors from the wild animals or enemy tribes, is now forced to extinction because of willful ignorance of the dangers that lie ahead. When learning has become monotonous and the well has run dry, what do we expect from a distracted world that pays little notice, except to develop a new sense, the sixth sense.

Now, the sense that, once upon a time, built and destroyed empires by simply seeing what others could not, the sense of sight. From the rusty old heavy phones that could crack skulls to the massive wave of yearly innovation and release of new technology. The closure of the last telegram office in India in 2013 marked the end an era. In a world of brokenness, technology is the lesser evil. A generation engrossed in screen time, with an endless scrolling that was designed to create an algorithm that can keep you hooked till the early hours of morning is one that has lost the sense of sight. Through the bustling streets with a never- ending line of traffic, we have eyes glued to our phones skillfully crossing the streets like a champ, more than often associated with closed eyes too. It makes me wonder if our sense of awareness is far beyond the five senses or simply a matter of luck.

Often, we find ourselves having conversations with our phones more than the person in front of us. As we move across the waves of "digital zombies" and "doom-scrollers", it makes one wonder if this technology that was once created to benefit us might create a world of mindless thinkers who, too, have lost their sense of sight. It makes us question if social media regulation laws, as enforced by most countries maybe the answer to this problem. In all honestly, a sixth sense would be relatively easier to create than to thread this camel.

The last and not the least of all sense, the sense of touch. Many a times you may find yourself at a road not taken, ever doubtful you should come back unless, you are following maps on your phone and you never arrive at your destination. Science says that we have at least 100 billion neurons in our body, each designed to perform a particular function. With each touch, we can differentiate between different types of surfaces and temperature. A technology that mainly requires the mere to and fro movement of thumbs, may become an obstacle to this useful organ. Most evolution theories, speak of how humans learnt how to use tools and the use of these various tools is what led to the differential growth rate around the world. A world governed by growth can lead to global inequality. What made all the difference? Complacency is the enemy of progression. Now, tools and senses that were once used for inventions stand idle at the bottom of our screens, waiting for the next scroll. Hence, with all the senses becoming outdated, we have no choice but to develop the sixth sense.

And finally, comes the author of this article, smiling sheepishly at her laptop at what she felt was a clever satirical conversation she had with her screen.

Letters to the Editor

SSLC Examination Schedule Warrants a Thorough Review

Editor,

The MBOSE has recently announced that the SSLC exams for 2026-2027 will be held from December 4 through December 16. I am concerned about how students will manage to appear for these exams without disruption, given that December in our state is typically marked by significant activity. The atmosphere is quite hectic between the festive season, ongoing final exams at schools and universities, wedding celebrations, and various annual gatherings—including church events, picnics, farewell parties, annual events, last minute preparations for house decor, etc.

Traffic congestion remains a significant concern in Shillong and Tura, necessitating that students depart well in advance to ensure timely arrival at their examination centers. I am also concerned that these numerous activities and commitments, influx of people returning home to be with their families during this season, all these combined together may cause considerable inconvenience for the students.

Could we consider proposing a more suitable timeframe, like mid-February, for the next (2027-28) SSLC examinations? This definitely warrants a thorough review.

Yours etc.,
L.A.Sangma,
Tura

SPF and the Future of the Deficit System in Meghalaya

Editor,

A strong society depends on an effective education system. It is therefore important to raise serious concerns about the Government's proposed Structured Pay Framework (SPF) and its possible implications for teachers, teacher trainees, unemployed graduates, parents, and aspiring educators.

The foremost question is simple: Who will truly benefit from the SPF, and who may ultimately be affected by it? If the SPF is genuinely intended only for the categories specified in the order, then why should there be concern about government teaching posts? And if similar restructuring is considered necessary, why is the Education Department being specifically targeted rather than vacant government posts in other departments?

These questions inevitably raise a deeper concern. Could the SPF gradually weaken and eventually replace the existing deficit system?

The issue is particularly significant for the Khasi-Jaintia region, where there are comparatively fewer government teaching posts, especially at the Lower Primary and Upper Primary levels, while deficit posts constitute a substantial part of the teaching structure. The Garo Hills, by comparison, has a greater number of government teaching posts and relatively fewer deficit posts. Therefore, any major alteration to the deficit system could have a disproportionate impact on the Khasi-Jaintia region, affecting employment opportunities and the future prospects of many educators.

Reform should strengthen, not weaken. The deficit system has provided employment, stability, and opportunities for many educated young people to enter the teaching profession. Teachers in deficit and private schools have also demonstrated commendable performance in MBOSE examinations, and many parents continue to choose these institutions for their children.

If certain schools or institutions are underperforming, the answer should be better teacher training, improved infrastructure, stronger academic support, and greater accountability not the dismantling of an established system.

A system with shortcomings should be reformed and strengthened, not simply replaced by an uncertain alternative. The Government must also consider the thousands of teacher trainees, unemployed graduates, and aspiring educators preparing for a career in teaching.

The public also deserves clarity on whether financial considerations including possible future obligations under the 6th Pay Commission are influencing the proposed framework. Financial discipline is important, but education policy should not be determined by financial considerations alone.

I therefore appeal to the Government of Meghalaya to (a) Suspend the SPF in its present form and reconsider its implications; (b) Protect and strengthen the existing deficit system; (c) Invest in teachers, training, infrastructure, and educational quality; (d) Provide clear and transparent information regarding the future of teachers and teaching posts; (e) Protect opportunities for teacher trainees, unemployed graduates, and aspiring educators.

The deficit system represents more than a structure of employment. For many, it represents hope, stability, dignity, and an opportunity to serve society through education. Therefore, any reform must preserve what works, correct what does not, and create greater opportunities for the next generation.

The way forward is to preserve, strengthen, reform and improve for the future of teachers, students, aspiring educators, and the education system of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
Synshar Marwein,
Via email

India Must Figure Out Its Role in BRICS

Editor,

The editorial "BRICS, regional ties" (ST 14th September, 2026) made interesting reading and the editor has rightly concluded that "Peace is a prerequisite for progress," a powerful truth especially in the BRICS context. Without stability, economic growth and regional cooperation are fragile. Peace creates trust and countries can trade, invest and innovate only when they feel secure while conflict drains resources. Military tension diverts money, talent and political focus away from development. Dialogue unlocks opportunity. India and China, despite differences, hold the key to shaping Asia's future. If they prioritize peace, they can jointly drive prosperity across BRICS and beyond. Peace is not just a moral ideal; it is the foundation of sustainable progress. Nations that manage to resolve disputes and build cooperative frameworks tend to grow faster and wield greater influence globally.

Economist Surjit Bhalla's analysis of BRICS is blunt. He says that the bloc's rise is essentially a China story given that China contributes 72% of BRICS income growth and 94% of export expansion, the collective narrative masks stagnation in Brazil, South Africa and Iran. India, while performing better than most peers, still accounts for only 3.5% of world income and has modest export growth compared to countries like Vietnam.

This raises a critical question for India: should it continue to rely on BRICS as a platform for global influence, or focus on domestic reforms and bilateral trade strategies? Dr Bhalla's conclusion is clear – BRICS membership alone does not drive growth. Unlike the EU, the bloc lacks a common market or binding commitments. Success depends on national policy choices not collective branding. For India, the path forward lies in leveraging its demographic dividend, investing in technology, and expanding trade partnerships beyond BRICS. Aligning with emerging economies is useful, but India must avoid being overshadowed by China's dominance.

Strategic diversification such as strengthening ties with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Africa and western economies will ensure India's rise is not contingent on a bloc where one member dictates the narrative. Bhalla's warning is timely: BRICS is not a guarantee of prosperity. For India, the real test is whether it can transform its promise into performance through reforms, innovation, and global engagement.

Economist Jeffry Sachs sees BRICS as a cornerstone of a multipolar world order. He calls India-China ties "the most important bilateral relationship in the world," arguing that cooperation in climate technology and trade could reshape Asia's global role. For Sachs, BRICS is not just about numbers but about geopolitical leverage – a platform to challenge Western dominance and build a fairer global system. He urges India to embrace collaboration with China, despite historical disputes, to anchor a cooperative future. There is a divergence between the two economists: Bhalla views BRICS as economically hollow without China; India must rely on reforms. Sachs is of the view that BRICS is geopolitically vital; India-China cooperation can redefine global governance.

Therefore, India's strategic choice is whether it should treat BRICS as a symbolic counterweight to the West (Sachs), or recognize it as a China-dominated bloc offering limited economic benefit (Bhalla)? The answer may lie in balancing both – leveraging BRICS for diplomacy while pursuing independent reforms to secure sustainable growth.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

C M K

"Silence is a source of great strength."
— Lao Tzu

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Revamping Meghalaya's State Planning Board

MEGHALAYA has never had a session or several sessions to decide what its priorities are for the next 10-15 years or longer. The Government read 'Chief Minister' is seen moving at a rapid pace without the time to take a deep breath and see if the projects implemented have long term impacts or yield short term political dividends. Politicians are tuned to plan for five years and to measure their successes on whether they are re-elected the next term. But Meghalaya – a state created without a long term vision except that of being divorced from Assam and charting out its own course, continues to face economic challenges. It is with the precise idea of charting out long-term, medium-term, and short-term goals. But who has critiqued the functioning of this important institution in the past 53 years? Has this state-created institution been strengthened by appointing experts from various fields such as Economics, Education, Water Management, Road Planning and Construction, and Health, to name a few?

Why should Government appoint politicians to head the State Planning Board? Do these persons have the vision and the breadth of understanding of the entire state's urgent and long- term needs? The office of Chairman State Planning Board is now reduced to a space where a minister who is replaced by another MLA is appointed so that he continues to enjoy the perks of office. In the past we have had MLAs who lost their seats being accommodated to chair the Board. Now it's time to ask some uncomfortable but fundamental questions: The State Planning Board, when it meets should be taking a critical look at Government's claims of development. Is spending crores of rupees equal to development? Is the state actually developing, or merely spending? For instance, instead of simply recording the kilometres of roads constructed, the Board could engage researchers to find out if those roads have reduced travel time, improved access to markets, schools and hospitals, and survived beyond a few monsoons. In fact, it is high time for the State Planning Board to get into the business of engaging experts to assess the learning outcomes in our primary schools. That way it could assist the Government in addressing poor educational outcomes. This is because in Meghalaya no one ever measures outcomes.

In Tourism, instead of just counting the number of tourist footfalls, the State Planning Board could engage experts to examine the carrying capacity of tourism destinations in Meghalaya; what the local benefits are and the impact on Meghalaya's ecology. In fact, the State Planning Board should be demanding the closure of abandoned coal mines numbering a staggering 25,000, with about 21,000 in the East Jaintia Hills alone. Think of the devastation these mines are causing through acid mine drainage apart from causing floods into mines that are still operational. The Planning Board should have envisaged eco-restoration and generated more forests for long term benefits. The role of economists in the Government is not only to measure development through expenditure and GDP but also to ask whether development is reducing inequality and improving the quality of life of people across Meghalaya. Hence the critical function of the State Planning Board is not to plan government spending, but to help the state think strategically about the future.

Protecting Indigenous Land: Allotment of 20 Acres to NorthEast United FC

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A week ago, John Abraham, the actor and owner of NorthEast United FC, a club based in Guwahati, revealed that the Government of Meghalaya had given the club 20 acres of land in Mawkhanu to build its own academy. This will function as a Centre of Excellence and is expected to take shape over the next two years. John Abraham claims that the academy will be the best in the country, and his goal is to produce medal-winning athletes for India at the Olympics. Personally, I am completely against this move for many reasons, both political and sporting.

How is a non-tribal entity getting so much land in a state where the Sixth Schedule does not allow indigenous tribal land to be transferred to non-indigenous non-tribals? As far as I know, John Abraham does not belong to any of the state's indigenous communities. And if the land is given on lease, what are the terms of the agreement? How much is the payment? Will land also be given to local teams like Langsning, Lajong, Mawlai and Rangdajied on similar terms if they desire to acquire 20 acres of land in Mawkhanu? Unlike NEUFC, these are teams based in Meghalaya and Rangdajied already has its own Centre of Excellence in Langkyrding, which has produced many good players in the past, including Eugeneson Lyngdoh. If anyone deserves 20 acres of land, most probably on concessional terms, it should be a local team like Rangdajied, not a Guwahati-based team like NEUFC. Therefore, at a moment when teams from the state are trying to make the jump to the next level by qualifying for the top tier of Indian football, this preference for an 'outsider' team is quite perplexing.

Land acquisition in the New Shillong Township area has already seen much controversy in the past. There were reports that land was bought from local villagers at Rs. 3 per acre and allotted to IAS officers at Rs. 1 per acre through the Civil Services Officers Housing Cooperative Society Limited. The matter was brought before the Meghalaya High Court, which, in its 2014 judgment in Smti. Agnes Kharshiing v. The State of Meghalaya and Ors., held that the allotment served a public purpose and that the transfer of land was legally permissible. However, in its affidavit, the Civil Services Officers Housing Cooperative Society Limited revealed that membership in the society would be extended "to all categories of officers/public servants and constitutional authorities, who have worked and have been working in the affairs of the State of Meghalaya". Does this mean that retired officers will also be eligible for land allotment, including those who are non-indigenous? That would be unacceptable. Once their service is over, all officers must vacate their plots and return to their own personal residences or native places. Under no circumstances should indigenous peoples' land ever be alienated to non-indigenous individuals or entities, whoever they may be. Isn't this precisely why we fought for our own state in the first place? And isn't this also why the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971, was introduced?

According to Section 3 of the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971, there is a prohibition on the transfer of land in Meghalaya by a tribal to a non-tribal or by a non-tribal to another non-tribal except with the previous sanction of the competent authority. The Government's response to the court was that the Revenue and Disaster Management Department was the 'competent authority' under the Act and had already sanctioned the allotment. Thus, the transfer of land to the Civil Services Officers Housing Cooperative Society Limited was held to be legally permissible.

In practical terms, the Government appeared to be exercising its own authority to permit the allotment of indigenous tribal land to a non-indigenous non-tribal entity. Basically, this is the mechanism that allows transfers that would otherwise be prohibited under the Act, provided permission is obtained from the 'competent authority'. This is why such discretionary powers, which effectively operate as exemptions, can potentially be used to undermine the very purpose of the Act. The same mechanism could be used in the future to open the floodgates for the alienation of indigenous peoples' land. In the case of the NST, it appears that this has already taken place. All that would be required is permission from the 'competent authority'. People should demand that the government make public the full details of the 20-acre allotment to NEUFC: the legal basis for the allotment, whether it is a lease or another form of arrangement, the duration of the arrangement, the premium or rent payable, the conditions attached to it, and the precise public purpose that justifies the allotment.

Before Lajong returned to the I-League, it had very little local representation in the team. There might have been a couple, but the first XI was mostly made up of players from outside Meghalaya. The team did try to bring in some big local names, such as Rocus Lamare and Aiborlang Khongjee, but there were not many young players coming through. There were a few players, such as Redeem Tlang, Samuel Shadap and Rupert Nongrum, who later got some good playing time. But when they were not playing, there was not much opportunity for others. I attribute this to the fact that Lajong's marketing strategy of representing the entire Northeast was too appealing. However, there were some problems with this strategy.

Most of the non-local players who joined Lajong came from Manipur and Mizoram, both of which already had well-established football structures of their own. They were already producing a large number of players who went on to play all over the country. It was only a matter of time before some Meitei or Mizo businessman decided that a local team consisting of local talent could be a viable option. And that is precisely what happened. Since then, Manipur and Mizoram have each had two teams competing in the I-League. NEUFC had also emerged by then, and it was playing in the ISL. This season, Nagaland will also have its own team in the I-League.

At the same time, local supporters had become alienated because they did not see their own players in the team. The uncertainty surrounding football in the country also compelled the Lajong management to let go of its foreign players for the 2018–19 season and play only Indian players, many of whom were from Meghalaya. Finally, the supporters got what they wanted. However, the lack of experience saw the team being relegated at the end of the season. But the 2025–2026 season, which saw Lajong finish second in the table, was built on local talent and a local coach, Birendra Thapa. This time, the difference was that the players were already highly experienced. Things have also changed in the academy, and you now see a lot of local players coming through.

This is where I am disappointed with the Meghalaya Government's decision to hand over 20 acres of land to NEUFC, which appears to be trying to follow the failed Lajong model. The Centre of Excellence will take young players from all over the region, give them coaching and prepare them for a pathway to play for their senior team in the future. But how many of them will be local players? And how many of them will be guaranteed the opportunity to showcase their talent? Some may argue that local players should have to compete on the same terms as everyone else. I agree. And therefore, I do not want this Centre of Excellence in Shillong. Let it be in Guwahati. If our young players are good enough, they will get admission to it. If they are not, they will go elsewhere. I don't want to go through the frustration of pre-2023 Shillong Lajong again.

The Conrad Sangma government has shown that it supports the growth of football in the state. It allocated 1 crore rupees for the MSL tournament and rewarded Lajong with 3 crore rupees for their outstanding performance during the 2025–26 season. However, in this case, I feel that the decision to give the land to NEUFC was driven more by political considerations than by purely sporting reasons. I believe Conrad Sangma's long-term goal is to have a unified voice for the entire Northeast. I respect that vision. But charity begins at home. In the future, I do want Meghalaya to take a leadership role in articulating the aspirations and concerns of the region. But that can only happen when we first strengthen our own people and institutions. The allotment of 20 acres of land to NEUFC is not going to help us achieve that. I, therefore, hope that the Government will rethink its decision.

(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)

Are the days of Hindu-Muslim politics coming to an end?

By S. N. M. ABDI

It's around 50 days since Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned due to the mass unrelenting protests at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar. At that watershed moment in contemporary Indian history, Cockroach Janata Party chief Abhijit Dipke had lamented how Hindu-Muslim politics was preventing issues-based debates from taking place in India to the nation's detriment. He said that religious polarisation in the last 10-12 years stopped issues like unemployment and the rot in the education system from being discussed and debated. After forcing Pradhan's resignation, Dipke appealed to everyone, especially the government, to shun the divisive Hindu-Muslim agenda and focus on jobs, education, livelihood and health so that India can develop and progress.

It's too early to gauge which way the wind is blowing across India after Gen Z's spectacular win and Dipke's exhortation. But there are clear signs that politics is shifting from Hindu versus Muslim mode to substantive issues for which CJP deserves full credit.

The Jantar Mantar protests flagged our corruption-ridden education system exemplified by repeated medical entrance exam paper leaks. The June-July upheaval shone a torch on the crisis in education and the challenge of youth unemployment. And now the death of as many as seven students in the collapse of Hostel Daze, a building in the Satya Niketan neighbourhood of south-west Delhi, has suddenly underlined tottering educational infrastructure in the capital itself and the sordid government-builder nexus. Apparently, many students are still unaccounted for and there are demands that the government release complete data of the mishap.

Importantly, Dalit students are becoming increasingly assertive. Cries of Jai Bheem during the Jantar Mantar protests showcased their role in the agitation. It's a period of ferment among Dalit and non-Dalit youths. There is an unmistakeable backlash against the central government's abrupt retreat last month after framing University Grants Commission guidelines to stop the entrenched discrimination against Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Other Backward Classes by the upper castes in higher education campuses. Behind the Narendra Modi government's somersault is the desire to appease Brahmins and other higher castes frothing at the mouth over new UGC guidelines which have now been put on hold. Today, the restlessness and anxieties among the youth is also manifested in the ongoing anti-reservations demonstrations in Jantar Mantar and elsewhere.

Also witness the raging debate over the government's claims of 7.8 percent economic growth during the April-June quarter. The opposition is demanding to know that if the country has indeed clocked 7.8 percent growth despite the crisis triggered by the Gulf war, why isn't the growth rate reflected in in other measurable parameters of the economy like jobs, wages, consumption, trade and investments, including foreign direct investment? Why has the 7.8 percent growth not resulted in better schools, better hospitals, better roads, better water supply and better policing? The government is on the backfoot in the face of relentless questioning. I can't recall such an outcry over GDP numbers, indicating a marked shift from the Hindu-Muslim obsession spawned, fuelled and fanned by the right wing.

The last 50 days seem to have transformed and rebooted Rahul Gandhi too. He started wearing a trademark white T shirt since launching the Bharat Jodo Yatra four years ago. But now he wears blue, pink and yellow T shirts too. Along with the colour of T shirts, Gandhi's political strategy too has undergone a sea change. Earlier, he fought an ideological battle against the Bharatiya Janata Party rooted in the core principles of the Constitution. He framed it as a fight between truth and lies, between good and evil, and between Mohabbat and Hindutva-induced hate.

But the success of the Jantar Mantar protests has clearly influenced him to take up bread and butter issues, instead of propagating what many think are highfalutin ideals sans electoral yield. His ongoing serial Chattron ki Goonj public meetings are tapping into youth-student anger and discontent which the CJP has brilliantly whipped up. He is also batting with all his might for a full and proper caste census which will bring to light the actual Other Backward Classes numbers so that they can claim their rightful share of the national pie, fighting against untouchability and gunning for Manu Smriti for belittling women of all ages. Gandhi's new approach targets Dalits, OBCs, youth, minorities and women, who together account for 90 percent of the electorate.

The BJP has obviously noted the change in Gandhi's strategy. While addressing a BJP state convention in Pune on September 1, Maharashtra Chief Minister and Rashtriya Swayamsevak Singh-favourite, Devendra Fadnavis, urged partymen to combat what he called the Congress' "new model". He observed that the Congress has realised the futility of its principles-based politics – which was no match for the BJP's Hindutva centric approach – and switched to issues-based politics to win elections. Fadnavis accused Gandhi and other opposition leaders of raking up various socio-economic issues to discredit the BJP and tarnish Modi's image to come to power.

The BJP is adopting a two-pronged approach to protect its turf. Firstly, Modi – who is turning 76 -- is leaving no stones unturned to engage with Gen Z and somehow woo them. His recent lecture at Delhi's Sri Ram College of Commerce on the occasion of Teachers Day was an all-out attempt to win over India's agitated youth. His target was the youth who will cast their vote for the first time in 2029. They were still in school and oblivious to stark socio-economic-political realities in 2014 when Modi rode to power defeating the Congress Party.

Secondly, the BJP is trying to brand all those harping on the government's failures on various fronts as Dimagi Naxals and pitting them against so-called nationalists who are essentially lumpen elements and foot soldiers of the right. This approach is more than evident in most BJP-ruled states where agitators and protesters are being dubbed anti-national Dimagi Naxals out to destroy India. The prospects of India ridding itself of the curse of Hindu-Muslim politics only to descend into the vortex of Dimagi Naxals versus nationalists clash cannot be dismissed at this juncture. But there is still plenty of hope as the post-Jantar Mantar generation is no pushover. (END)

(S. N. M. Abdi is a distinguished journalist who writes on domestic politics and foreign policy.)

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya Cannot Afford to Think Small on Medical Education

Editor.

For a patient in Meghalaya, a delay in medical-college expansion is not merely a bureaucratic inconvenience; it is a public-health concern. Travelling outside the State for specialist care means additional expense, lost working days and, in critical cases, precious time. The operationalisation of medical colleges at eligible district hospitals must therefore be treated as a public-health priority.

Meghalaya has demonstrated the potential of a brownfield approach by linking Shillong Medical College with existing public hospitals. The same principle should now be examined for high-volume district hospitals at Jowai, Nongpoh, Williamnagar, Nongstoin, Baghmara and other suitable centres, subject to bed strength, patient load, clinical services, teaching infrastructure and other National Medical Commission requirements.

Yet Meghalaya's policy ambition must extend beyond individual projects. There has been a tendency to approach large health infrastructure through conventional departmental construction rather than as strategic, multi-year infrastructure programmes. The State should consider an Infrastructure Financing Authority, professional Project Management Consultants and convergence with schemes such as Pradhan Mantri Swasthya Suraksha Yojana (PMSSY). Notably, while Assam has pursued multiple proposals under the national medical-college expansion framework, Meghalaya has yet to secure a comparable PMSSY project.

Historical constraints may explain administrative caution, but they cannot become a permanent policy philosophy. The new generation cannot inherit yesterday's institutional limitations.

Faculty is the other immediate challenge. Student organisations are justified in protecting opportunities for Meghalaya's youth. But that objective should not inadvertently leave medical institutions without qualified teachers. This is not a choice between local and outside doctors. Meghalaya needs a phased strategy: recruit eligible specialists nationally, permit visiting/adjunct arrangements where regulations allow, develop inter-State institutional partnerships, provide housing and hardship incentives, and simultaneously expand local postgraduate training, nursing education, cancer care and super-speciality capacity.

Meghalaya must stop thinking of medical education as a State-bound project and start seeing it as part of a Northeast-wide healthcare ecosystem.

Yours etc.,
Shahin Yusuf,
Guwahati

The Uncertain Fate of Wards' Lake

Editor,

Some months ago I read several letters to the editor from responsible citizens, expressing their deep concern on the fate of Ward's Lake. Firstly, I would like to thank them all for the wake-up call on this very important issue. I have watched these undesirable activities within the premises since three four years ago and it's propensity to lead to "over" commercialization. The open spaces for children to play and run around beside the flower beds is now occupied by business stalls that have ruined the lawn grass extensively, leaving the ground bare and dusty, also making it muddy when it rains.

Earlier, aloo-muri or any other snack sellers were never even allowed inside Wards Lake. I wish to share my concern over the destructive attitude of the Government on such an iconic and priceless public property, gifted by Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam in 1893-94 under the British rule. I was a regular visitor to Wards Lake also known as " Nan Palok" for morning walks until 2023. It was wonderfully peaceful with fresh morning air, squirrels running around, a variety of birds singing, adding natural music to the tranquility of the Lake. I now doubt whether these are preserved.

It seems the organisers are ignorant of the value and importance of this local heritage site, which is both disrespectful to Sir William Ward, who conceived and took so much pain to envision the Lake and turn that into reality for our sake and for the sake of our children and grandchildren. If Sir William Ward was still alive today, he would have never allowed such mindless activities in the Lake gardens.

The iconic Sal-wooden Bridge, which is a beauty and main focal point of the Lake is left to rot. Though attempts were made to repair it, it seems our engineers are not familiar with this old age engineering and while ignoring Ward's Lake for so long, the Government is busy with multi crore hi-tech projects which do not cater to the basic needs of a common man, like uninterrupted power supply, safe and uninterrupted water supply, good roads that match the standard of the twenty first century and efficient public transport system to curb traffic snarls.

It is understood that the Tourism Department which is working with the Urban Affairs Department is planning for a major beautification and restoration project. The Government has entrusted Wards Lake to the wrong Departments. It's like pushing a square peg in a round hole. Any attempt to beautify it artificially, will only destroy its natural beauty. What Sir William Ward had conceived of was wisely planned and executed efficiently and effectively. Its standard is supposed to last for centuries beyond the twenty first century.

Rs 25 crores to transform Wards Lake is ridiculously and an unnecessarily excessive amount. Such an amount is enough to set up a mini cement plant. This property only requires proper maintenance and efficient management which would amount to a few lakhs would have been enough to restore the Sal-wood Bridge and maintenance of the Lake.

Hence, I would humbly suggest that it should be handed back to the obviously correct parent Department i.e. the Forest and Environment Department. This Department is well equipped to look after the overall maintenance and management of the Lake. Further, the Horticulture Department could collaborate with this parent Department. The Horticulture Department would play a very vital role in promoting the natural beauty of the Lake, well qualified floriculture experts could develop a better garden layout, setting up rose gardens, orchids shed and propagate different varieties of colourful flowers for all four seasons to attract tourists throughout the year; the Fisheries Department could also play a role in taking care of the water quality and help promote aquatic life in the Lake.

The Tourism and the Urban Affairs Departments clearly do not possess the requisite knowledge, as seen when artificial snow was used in one of such events "Snow Festival" which is questionably non-sustainable and maybe toxic even. Another problem is that the main entrance to the Lake, opposite Tara Ghar, is fitted with dull rusting metal sheets and has already created a bad impression on many locals and tourists as well. Its unwelcoming facade is "ungarden like", almost appearing like an entrance into the Tihar jail. In fact an entrance to Ward's Lake should be colourful and well decorated with multiple creepers and flowering plants.

The Tourism Department could instead play the part of a co-ordinator, the Urban Affairs Department may look after the surroundings of the Lake by conducting thorough inspection of Shillong Club, the Lakeview Inn, etc. so that no waste water, kitchen waste or sewage/sewerage waste flows into the Lake. The Lakeview Inn is situated in the basement of the Parking Lot. How can Tourist or travellers rest in a basement? What about proper ventilation, cleanliness, proper sanitation, etc.? Does anyone know if the toilet waste from that guest house is properly filtered?

We can only hope the Government will take a sensible decision on this very important issue, so that Ward's Lake will remain the pride of Shillong.

Yours etc.,
Namphrang Hynniewta,
Via email

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"The only way to have a friend is to be one."
— **Ralph Waldo Emerson**

The Shillong Times

Vol No:LXIX No.39 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2026

Modi's 25 years

IT'S a huge credit for a politician to remain in the saddle for an uninterrupted 25 years. So too with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who completes 25 years in office, first as chief minister and then as prime minister, at a stretch. The BJP rightly celebrates this occasion with a month-long list of events up until October 17, from the date of his 76th birthday on Thursday. While Modi's terms as chief minister were largely controversial and he earned widespread condemnation for his failure to control the communal riots following the Godhra train burning incident, his three terms as prime minister have been a smooth going. He took special pains to skirt controversies. He avoided touching sensitive subjects even at the cost of national well-being. Be it in relation to the farm reform legislation or the Citizenship Amendment Act, he slow-pedalled matters, which helped him save his chair. So with the confrontation between the Cockroach Janata Party and his government vis-a-vis the NEET exam fiasco.

Through several fiascos, as in the note demonetization, Modi survived odds by showing a willingness for compromise. The result was the political stability that marked his three terms – as was also the case with the two UPA terms run by Manmohan Singh as PM. Overall, the nation benefited from this stability. However, realisation dawns on many now that the Modi era has not taken the nation forward the way Manmohan Singh did. The national economy grew much better during Singh's terms. Yet, the national economy remains in a reasonably good shape, thanks also to the strong grounds Singh laid for it first as finance minister and later as PM. While the Singh era was marked by brain power, the three terms of the Modi government and the previous Atal Behari term were marked by a push for infrastructure growth. Yet, while the roads sector developed, the equally important railway sector remained hugely neglected. Evidence also shows that the much-acclaimed Vande Bharat trains travel at a speed of no more than 140 km per hour while the Rajdhani series introduced over 40 years ago had the same speed. Improvements were minimal. Reservations are hard to secure due to the sway of vested interests in the system. Time largely stood still for the railways. There's also merit in the argument being advanced from some quarters that Modi failed to build or strengthen institutions, unlike what the Congress dispensations did in several sectors. Under the Modi dispensation, the performance of the justice dispensation system as also the crime investigation mechanisms touched their nadir.

Corruption pervaded all sectors of the establishment in unprecedented ways during both the UPA and NDA periods, even though Singh and Modi were believed to be personally incorruptible. Modi won the 2014 polls by promising to root out corruption, but this proved to be another of his empty rhetoric from the podium. He neither showed the inclination nor the courage to stem the rot, which has also gripped the judiciary in worse forms, over and above the drag through decades that court cases experience. Modi did precious little to improve the systems. His governance is marked by an intellectual bankruptcy.

The Nose In The Councillor's Uniform: Who Made Lok Bhavan's Additional Chief Secretary?

By Napoleon S. Mawphniang

There is a story by Gogol, which I often revisit during this monsoon. A minor official wakes up one morning to find his nose missing. At one point he finds it, praying inside Kazan Cathedral -- in the uniform of a State Councillor, a rank considerably higher than his own. Kovalyov finds it impossible to confront the thing. How can he demand the nose to explain itself, if he himself occupies a rank beneath the one it already wears?

I laughed at the story in college, but I don't find myself laughing now.

Let me say first what this piece is not about. It is not about a man. Personally - I don't know Harish Chandra Chaudhary, IFS, and I have no quarrel with him. My questions are addressed to the Government of Meghalaya, which has signed and approved the orders in question, and to the departments that have contradicted one another most recently in letterhead and seal.

Once I read, Kong Patricia Mukhim wrote in the Shillong Times about MBK Reddy, a 1993-batch forest service officer, who has served as a principal secretary in this state, despite having been convicted in a CBI court in 2011 in a case relating to the 1996 civil services examination. Her headline said it all, without embellishment: one single individual had made a mockery of the rule of law. Many of us skimmed the piece and sighed, moved on. We are all good at that.

Now there is another forest service officer, and a second set of questions. Different questions. Nobody has accused Shri Chaudhary personally of any crime, and I will not do so either. But what should concern us is the same: a government of men, who have treated procedure as something for the small people.

Here is the paper trail, as the government itself has passed it to me.

On 15 March 2024, the Personnel & AR Department notified that Shri Chaudhary, as the Principal Chief Conservator of Forests, "shall also function as Principal Secretary to the Governor" till further orders. Fine. Additional charge is a common enough thing.

On 24 April 2026, Notification No. PER.14/2026/4 has promoted him to the Apex Scale, Level 17, and posted him as Additional Chief Secretary to the Governor. Three days later there was a charge certificate signed on which he figures as both the officer handing over charge and the officer taking it. He relieved himself. (I have read that certificate more times than I care to admit.)

Additional Chief Secretary. In Indian administration, that title has, by long custom belonged to the senior-most IAS officers. I have found no other forest service officer in Meghalaya who carries it. Perhaps some rule allows it. If so, it should be no trouble to produce it.

So in June I filed two RTI applications from Syadheh, in Ri-Bhoi, asking simple questions. Who created this post? When? With whose sanction? From which budget head is the salary paid?

The Governor's Secretariat replied on 14 July, transferring most of my questions to other departments under Section 6(3) of the RTI Act. On others, the answer was, more or less, "no such records maintained." No attendance register. No tour diaries.

Then, on 28 July, the Secretariat Administration Department (Accounts), responded. It says it has no records pertaining to the post of Additional Chief Secretary to the Governor, and that the officer has been drawing his salary since November 2025 from a different post altogether: the Principal Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya.

Read that again, slowly... The office that pays him has no records of the post he is said to hold.

And the Personnel & AR (B) Department has not answered at all, and thirty days have passed. Under Section 7(2) of the RTI Act, this is a refusal.

Depending upon which government paper you read, the same man is Additional Chief Secretary to the Governor, Additional Chief Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya, and the Principal Secretary to the Government of Meghalaya. Three titles. One chair. And no document that anyone will show me who created the chair.

The dilemma here is the government's, not mine. Suppose this is a cadre post. Then Rule 9 of the IAS (Cadre) Rules, 1954 allows a non-cadre officer to fill it only when no suitable IAS officer is available, and anything exceeding three months' needs the approval of the Centre. Was there truly no IAS officer available? Where is the Centre's approval? If it is not a cadre post, then somebody has created a new apex-level post inside Lok Bhavan. Where is that order? Where is the concurrence of the Finance Department? The State can walk through either door, it has not opened one.

What bothers me more than paperwork is... no, let me change the way I put that. What bothers me is the silence.

Meghalaya has a Chief Secretary, and a whole body of IAS officers from the Assam-Meghalaya cadre, who watch their seniority lists the way our elders keep a land boundary. A post their service has always treated as its own has gone to someone outside it, and I have not heard one of them ask how. Not in public, and not, as far as the record shows, in a single file noting.

Chekhov has a story about a clerk, Chervyakov, who sneezes on the back of a general's head at the opera. He apologises, then again, and again, and can't stop. Finally, he goes home, lies down on the sofa in his uniform, and dies. Of deference, really. I think of Chervyakov when I think of our senior officers. Nobody here is dying, thank God. But something is, the habit of asking "under which rule?" is dying, and it always dies first at the top.

Why is the Government defending this? Well, not with words. It simply does not answer. The silence defends it, and that is worse, because an argument can be tested, and silence cannot.

Shrilal Shukla understood this in Raag Darbari. Every institution in Shivpalganj exists on paper: the college, the cooperative, the village council. None of them works the way the paper says, everyone knows it, and everyone gets along. It is funny for a hundred pages. Then it becomes frightening, for the rot isn't of one man; everyone has made peace with it.

In Plato, Glaucon tells of Gyges, a Lydian shepherd, who finds a ring that makes him invisible, and then does as he pleases. Glaucon's point was that most of us would do the same. I do not think Shri Chaudhary is Gyges. I think the ring is the file. Orders move without reasons, posts appear without sanction, and the office that pays does not speak to that which posts. When that happens the file itself becomes invisible, and anyone standing near enough to power can slip it on.

That is the lesson a young officer in Shillong will take from all this: Not that you work hard and wait your turn. That proximity pays; that the right corridor will do what the rules won't. I am not saying that is what happened here, I am saying that is how it looks from outside, and a government that won't bother to correct the appearance has already accepted it.

In most of our villages, a Rangbah Shnong doesn't simply announce himself. The dorbar recognises him, with people present who may freely object. It is slow, occasionally maddening, and it works, because a title means something only when everyone knows where it came from. We ask more of a village headman than the State has asked of an apex-scale post in the Governor's own house.

The Governor's Secretariat and the State Government cannot agree, in writing, on which post a man holds. That failure is not his, but that of the two highest offices in Meghalaya... And a state whose top offices can be rearranged this quietly has already conveyed to every clerk underneath them what the rules are worth.

I will be filing first appeals and, if it comes to that, a complaint before the State Information Commission. I expect more transfers under Section 6(3). I expect more "no records maintained."

Kovalyov did in fact get his nose back; Gogol never explains how. There it was, on his face one morning, and Kovalyov, relieved, went town as if nothing had happened.

I would rather we asked where it had been.

(The writer is an advocate based in Syadheh, Ri-Bhoi District.)

Bob's Banter

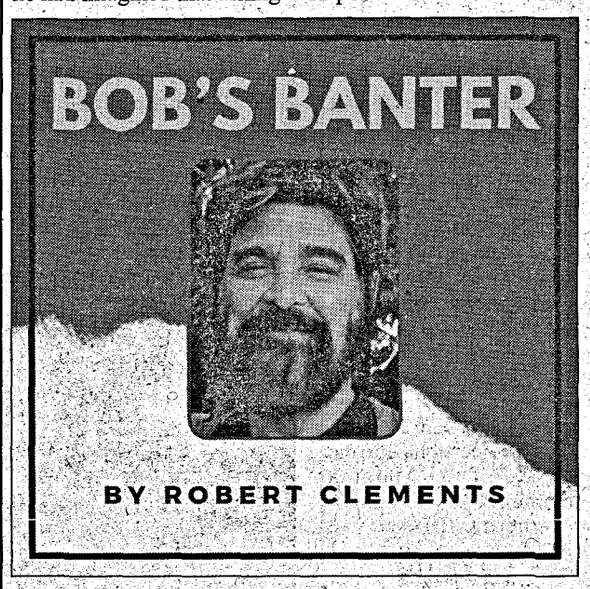
By Robert Clements

India's Angry Uncles..!

Our Prime Minister recently, at a college gathering, compared those who constantly question his government to naraaz fufas, the permanently upset uncles at a family gathering. I immediately imagined one such Indian gathering where an uncle sat in a corner wearing the expression of a man who had discovered that the samosas were funded by his brother, with whom he had fought during childhood over a cricket bat.

"Why are you sulking, Fufaji?" asks a youngster. "I am not sulking," he replies. "I am simply asking why the new sofa cost so much." The room falls silent. Grandfather switches off the fan. Auntie drops the chutney spoon. A cousin whispers, "Careful. First you question the sofa. Then you become a dimagi Naxal."

Poor Fufaji stares at his samosa. Until that moment, he had imagined that asking



where the family money went was called responsibility. He now discovers it is negativity. The head of the family clears his throat. "This sofa," he announces, "is a symbol of family progress." "But the springs are coming out," says Fufaji. "That is because you are sitting with a negative mindset." "And why did it cost three times the estimate?" "Are you against comfortable seating?" "No, I am against uncomfortable accounting."

Auntie quickly offers him another samosa, because in many Indian families food is the traditional method of stopping an argument. If one samosa fails, add jalebi. If jalebi fails, question the patriotism of the eater.

Is this the lesson being served to our youth?

In our so- called democracy, if somebody asks why a project was needed, why it cost what it did, why promises were not kept, or whether another priority deserved attention, do not answer. Give the questioner a funny family label and invite everyone to laugh. It is an efficient system. Answers require facts, figures and thought. Labels require only a microphone.

The Statue of Unity was questioned. UPI was questioned. High speed trains were questioned. The new Parliament building was questioned. And why not?

Public projects are paid for with public money, which is the money you and I pay as taxes. We are simply asking how our money, yes our money is being spent! Questions do not automatically make a project bad. They may make it better, cheaper, safer and more accountable.

If a bridge is questioned before it is built, engineers may strengthen it. If it is questioned only after it collapses, television anchors will strengthen their voices.

A democracy without questions is not a democracy. It is a family WhatsApp group where only the administrator may post.

Our political vocabulary is becoming wonderfully efficient. A critic may first be called a naraaz fufa. If he persists, he becomes anti-national. If he reads, researches and produces figures, he may be promoted to dimagi Naxal. Apparently, thinking itself is suspicious, especially when the thought does not arrive wearing the correct party scarf.

What exactly is a dimagi Naxal? Is it someone whose brain refuses to stand for the national anthem of unquestioning obedience? Is it a person who enters a library without police permission and returns carrying dangerous weapons such as statistics, history and an independent opinion?

What then should our universities teach?

"Students, please memorise everything, repeat everything and applaud everything. Do not ask why jobs are scarce. Do not question examination leaks. Do not wonder why institutions weaken. Do not ask why a promised deadline passed three years ago. Thinking can be dangerous. Independent thinking can be positively seditious."

Examinations may have new question papers. Question one: Praise the project. Question two: Praise it more enthusiastically. Question three: Identify the angry uncle in the room. Extra marks will be awarded for reporting him before lunch.

The irony is delicious. A political leader enters a celebrated college, a place built to sharpen minds, and there he mocks a questioning mind. It is like addressing a culinary school and warning pupils against cooking. It is like visiting a hospital and telling doctors that diagnosis is disrespectful to disease. It is like entering a courtroom and asking the judge why the accused is being so negative about the prosecution.

A university is not an applause factory. Its duty is not to manufacture rows of young heads that nod together. Its duty is to encourage those heads to think, examine, doubt, discover and sometimes disagree.

Yes, some critics criticise everything. Some opposition leaders would complain even if the government delivered sunshine in sealed packets. Some uncles arrive at weddings determined to dislike the food, the music, the bridegroom and possibly the marriage itself. Criticism can be petty, political and ridiculous.

But the answer to poor criticism is a good answer, not a mocking nickname.

That upset uncle may be irritating. He may complain about the flowers, the food and the photographer. He may recall how much cheaper everything was in 1984. But occasionally he may notice that the roof is leaking while everyone else is praising the chandelier.

And that is why power dislikes questions. The chandelier looks magnificent from the stage. Only the man sitting beneath the leak feels the water falling on his head.

So let the uncle ask. Let the student challenge. Let the journalist investigate. Let the citizen question. Their voices may sound unpleasant, but democracy was never meant to be background music for those in power. A confident government answers criticism. An insecure one invents names for critics. And a wise leader does not fear the raised hand of a student. He fears the day when no hand rises at all.

Because the most dangerous relative in India is not the angry uncle. It is the smiling nephew who has been taught never to think, who applauds the chandelier, ignores the leaking roof and thanks the family leader for the rain...!

Do you want to author a book? Under the guidance of Robert Clements? Send a thumbsup to whatsapp no 9892572883 for details. or a message to bobsbanter@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

Urgent Need for 80:20 Female-to-Male Nursing Recruitment at NEIGRIHMS

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to draw urgent attention to the pressing need for NEIGRIHMS, Shillong, to adopt an 80:20 female-to-male ratio in its upcoming Nursing Officer recruitment a practice already followed by premier institutions like AIIMS, JIPMER, ESIC and RIIMS under the NORCET framework.

A skewed recruitment history : In the last major Nursing Officer recruitment at NEIGRIHMS (Letter No. NEIGR-E.III/15/2014/Pt./VII), 194 posts were advertised; of which 174 selected candidates were male—nearly 90% of the intake. This has resulted in a significant gender imbalance in an institute that serves a mixed patient population, including women, children and other vulnerable groups who often require gender-sensitive care. If this trend continues in subsequent recruitments, it will pose a great risk to the nursing manpower leaving female nurses highly sought after and highly burdened.

Presently, NEIGRIHMS has approximately 549 Nursing Officers: about 317 female (57.7%) and 232 male (42.3%). While male nurses play a vital role, the current composition does not reflect the clinical reality that most wards (33 departments in all) cater to both genders, and only two departments exclusively house male patients.

Clinical necessity, not discrimination

Critical areas such as Obstetrics & Gynaecology, labour room, female medicine and surgery wards, paediatric wards, Paediatric ICU and Neonatal ICU predominantly require female nursing manpower for reasons of patient privacy, dignity, cultural comfort and effective communication. Nursing is not only about technical competence; it equally demands compassion, ethical conduct and culturally appropriate caregiving attributes that are often better aligned with patient preferences in sensitive clinical settings.

Legal backing for gender-based recruitment : It is important to note that the demand for an 80:20 ratio is not without legal foundation. Courts have upheld special provisions for women and children under Article 15(3) of the Constitution, recognising the need for gender-sensitive caregiving in healthcare institutions. Several plaintiffs have challenged the 80:20 reservation in nursing recruitment, but courts have rejected such pleas, affirming that such measures are constitutionally permissible when tied to patient-care requirements.

Peer institutions already follow the model : AIIMS, through its NORCET recruitment from its inception, has consistently applied an 80:20 female-to-male reservation for Nursing Officer posts across participating institutes. ESIC's 2026 nursing recruitment bifurcates its 523 vacancies into 418 female and 105 male posts, strictly adhering to the 80:20 norm. JIPMER similarly reserves at least 80% of its nursing posts for women. Given this established precedent, it is baffling why NEIGRIHMS, a premier regional tertiary care institute has not adopted a similar policy.

Looming retirement wave : Compounding the issue is the impending retirement in the next decade of a large cohort of experienced female Nursing Officers appointed around 2006–2008 and in subsequent cycles. Without proactive workforce planning, NEIGRIHMS risks a future shortage of female nurses in departments where they are most needed, affecting both patient care quality, patient safety and staff deployment.

A call for evidence-based policy : We respectfully urge the NEIGRIHMS administration, the Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, and the Institute's Governing Council to:

1. Conduct a ward-wise and specialty-wise assessment of gender-sensitive staffing needs.
2. Review patient feedback and complaints related to privacy, communication and comfort in nursing care.
3. Formally examine the feasibility of an 80:20 female-to-male recruitment model for future Nursing Officer intakes, in line with constitutional provisions and central recruitment rules.
4. Consider regional language and cultural competence as part of workforce planning, given NEIGRIHMS's mandate to serve the North-Eastern population.

Several other concerned groups and stakeholders have already taken up this issue, demanding the 80:20 ratio and greater local representation in healthcare jobs. It is time for the authorities to respond with a structured, evidence-based and legally sound recruitment policy that prioritises patient-centred care.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Shillong

No December Board Exams for Students' Sake

Editor,

As a concerned citizen, I would like to express my deep disappointment and frustration regarding the decision of the Education Department for the Meghalaya Board of Secondary Education (MBOSE) to conduct the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) Examination for the year 2026-27 in December 2026.

What grounds and justification did the MBOSE and the Education Department use for this particular decision? For the kind information of readers, one of our legislators raised this issue during the last concluded Autumn Session, 2026

While the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) and Indian Certificate of Secondary Education (ICSE) boards still conduct their board exams in February and March, following their academic calendar from April to March, I fail to understand the ground and logic behind conducting our board exams in December.

I would also like to enlighten you that our students apart from attending their regular classes for the whole academic session (February/ March to November), are also involved in other extra, co-curricular activities. Having said that, they are also enrolled in tuitions (Offline & Online) leaving them limited time for recreational activities. So, do you really expect them to be ready for their board exams right away. From a student's point of view, this approach will in fact, compel a student to resort to shortcut learning - Viz. referring guidebooks such as the CM Impact Guidebook, which we all know will adversely IMPACT – (pun intended) the quality of learning in our students.

Considering, the benefits of an extended study leave and self-study, which can effectively give our students a deep focus and revision on the papers they will be appearing, as they need hours of uninterrupted time to finish their large syllabus portion. Moreover, the numerous benefits of self-study/learning which help promotes lifelong learning, enhances problem solving skills, improves critical thinking, builds self-discipline and self-reliance, and so on. Self-study/learning is a very important trait of learning for our children, which I feel should not be stripped away from them. Dedicated and unpressured preparation lowers exams related anxiety and also boost student's motivation and performance.

Our education system must ensure that time and space should be given to our students for effective learning, and this will enhance the ability of our students to compete with students from other boards for higher studies. This will be possible only if we still follow the old system of conducting the board exams somewhere in the month of February 2027.

Considering the overall wellbeing of our children which is of prime importance, deferring the exam month to February 2027 would be ideal. Hence I would recommend that the board exams should start somewhere in February 2027.

Therefore, I strongly urge the student communities, parents and the society at large to ponder upon this issue and demand the immediate roll out of this decision for the sake of our children's future. We should not allow the bureaucrats and officers to hijack the future of our youth just because of administrative and executive convenience.

Yours etc.,
Samborlang Dkhar,
Shillong 10

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"Science is nothing but perception."
— Plato

The Shillong Times
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The Faceless Bureaucracy

THE reason things on the ground have not changed is largely because bureaucrats spend too much time pushing files and in endless meetings. The word "faceless bureaucrat" is a familiar one. It refers to a government official or administrator perceived as remote, anonymous, impersonal, and unaccountable to ordinary citizens. This phrase implies that decisions affecting people's lives are made by someone behind a desk, a file, a rule, or procedure, rather than by a person who must listen to or answer directly to those affected. India inherited the bureaucracy from the British as much as it did the Constitution which has been amended 106 times to date; the latest being the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam of 2023 which provides 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies.

For a country steeped in poverty and illiteracy when the British left in 1947, adopting a system of governance designed by the very colonialists was inherently precarious. It meant the ruling class was disconnected from the people on the ground and had no idea what their real problems were. Yet, these elite bureaucrats design schemes and projects and dish them out for implementation by the Block Development Officers (BDO) who then depend on clerks and so-called field staff that spend more time behind files than actually working with the people and creating awareness about the multifarious government schemes available. Take for instance the maternity benefit scheme of 2017, which should be available to all who work in government construction or industrial construction sites provided they are registered with the State Labour Department. Very few people know of such schemes and fewer still find the time to visit a government office. In a country like India, it would have been more practical for government officials to visit the construction sites and enrol all women who are eligible for the maternity benefits rather than wait for them to visit a government office.The bureaucracy with its hierarchy creates a distance between the people and the system, where the citizen becomes just a number (Aadhar/MHIS, etc.); the government turns impersonal and the person applying for a scheme within his/her rights just disappears behind the file. When citizens have to 'Sir' a minister or an officer, that system clearly is not designed for a democracy where people are the so-called "rulers." Too often when officers don't want to help a citizen they hide behind the rules when a little bit of tweaking of the rules would have helped many a poor farmer, agricultural labourer, a construction worker etc.,

The Directorate of Information and Public Relations is supposed to be the bridge between the people and the government, but it has failed by not having people with the compassion and empathy to work with rural folks and the patience to explain things to them. Not that the bureaucracy is devoid of officials with a conscience. Some have stood out for their commitment to help villagers access government schemes by ensuring that the rules do not become a hindrance. Every rule made by the central government does not necessarily fit Meghalaya's ecosystem. It's important for ministers and bureaucrats to make those in the centre to understand these hiccups and tailor the schemes to meet the needs of people here.

Minding the Gap - Scientific Advice in India: Lessons for Meghalaya

By Dr. Donkupar Syiem

Science and technology, powered by knowledge and innovation are key engines of the global economy. Such a system referred to as a knowledge economy is fuelled by intellectual capabilities, information and innovation, rather than physical resources, to generate wealth. Its core asset, knowledge capital, comprises intangibles like skills, patents, data, and organizational expertise. Economic strength depends less on natural resources, labour and industrial capacity alone, and increasingly on a country's ability to create, acquire, apply and commercialise knowledge.

The 2025 Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences was awarded to Joel Mokyr, Philippe Aghion and Peter Howitt for explaining innovation-driven economic growth. Their work shows how knowledge and scientific progress create technological advances and sustained growth, while creative destruction which is the process by which innovation creates new economic activities making older technologies, products, and businesses obsolete.

Knowledge, science, technology, and innovation form a connected chain that drives economic growth. Knowledge develops through education, research, skills, and data; science transforms it into discoveries and technology turns discoveries into practical applications. Innovation creates economic value through new businesses, industries, jobs, and productivity. Supported by capital, markets, and strong institutions, these elements promote sustainable economic development.

This chain is now shaping fields such as artificial intelligence, semiconductors, biotechnology, quantum technology, advanced manufacturing, clean energy, space technology, and digital infrastructure. These sectors increasingly determine which countries lead the global technology-driven economy and which risk falling behind.

India's scientific advisory system reflects this transformation. Its history can be understood through one recurring question, whom does a Prime Minister turn to when the problem is too big for one ministry? The answer has evolved from a small handful of laboratories in the years after Independence to today's network of national missions. This reflects the steady shift of science and technology decade by decade from the periphery of government to the heart of national policy.

From Coordinating Labs to National Missions (1948–2018):

India's high-level scientific advisory system began soon after Independence. In 1948, the Advisory Committee for Coordinating Scientific Work, chaired by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru with scientist Shanti Swarup Bhatnagar as secretary, was created to align research with the priorities of a young nation. In 1956, it was replaced by the Scientific Advisory Committee to the Cabinet, bringing scientists such as Homi J. Bhabha and D. S. Kothari closer to policymaking. Reorganisations in 1968 and 1971 further strengthened science in national planning, leading to the first Science and Technology Plan (1974–79), focused on technological self-reliance. A significant shift came in 1986, when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi established a Science Advisory Council, giving practising scientists outside the administrative system a stronger voice in identifying emerging technologies and shaping long-term priorities. Two examples illustrate the impact. The Department of Biotechnology, established in 1986, built research institutions, laboratories and trained manpower, accelerating work in vaccines, molecular biology and plant biotechnology. Computing provided an even more dramatic example. When the United States declined to supply India with an advanced supercomputer in the 1980s, India responded by developing its own. The Centre for Development of Advanced Computing (C-DAC) was established in 1988, leading to the PARAM 8000, unveiled in 1991 became a landmark in Indian computing and a demonstration that a technology denial can double as an unintended innovation strategy. The effort has since grown into today's National Supercomputing Mission. These experiences established a lasting principle. When scientists have a direct voice in policy, national challenges can become opportunities for technological self-reliance and innovation.

In 1999, the Office of the Principal Scientific Adviser (PSA) was created to provide the Prime Minister and Cabinet with cross-sectoral scientific advice. A. P. J. Abdul Kalam was the first PSA, followed by R. Chidambaram. A further restructuring in 2018 placed the office under the Cabinet Secretariat and established the Prime Minister's Science, Technology and Innovation Advisory Council, bringing ministries, scientists, universities and industries together around specific national challenges: artificial intelligence, quantum technology, language translation, biodiversity, electric mobility, human health, waste management and deep-ocean exploration among them. The essential change was from a department-based model to a problem-solving one. The question, "Which department should own this programme?" became, "What challenge are we trying to solve, and who needs to be in the room to solve it? The focus has shifted from individual departments to collaborative solutions to national technological challenges.

That same logic now extends to equipment facilities and services. I-STEM, (Indian Science, Technology and Engineering Facilities Map) treats expensive scientific instruments as a national resource rather than the property of whichever institution happened to buy them, letting researchers, students and start-ups anywhere in the country find and book access to these facilities. Good equipment, in other words, should not have to gather dust simply because it is in the wrong postcode.

Where do the States fit in? An obvious question follows. How closely should individual states align their priorities with national science and technology goals, particularly when smaller states face real constraints of finance, infrastructure and skilled manpower? The answer cannot be to simply copy national priorities at state level. Each state needs a strategy suited to its own economy, geography, human resources and comparative advantages, and this is particularly relevant to Meghalaya. Its challenges include, dispersed rural settlements, connectivity gaps, limited industrialisation, shortages of specialised skills and a relatively small research and innovation base. The objective should not be to compete with larger industrial states in every field of advanced technology.

A practical strategy could rest on five interconnected priorities.

1. Strengthen the foundation: Rural connectivity, reliable digital infrastructure, quality education, healthcare and basic research facilities are prerequisites for participation in the knowledge economy, and no amount of advanced technology can compensate for weak foundations.

2. Invest in people: For a resource-constrained state, skilled people may generate greater long-term returns than expensive institutions alone, with priority given to digital technology, data, healthcare, agriculture, tourism, environmental management, entrepreneurship and advanced vocational training.

3. Build on local strengths: Meghalaya need not reproduce the industrial model of larger states. Science and technology can instead strengthen high-value agriculture and horticulture, biodiversity, forestry, eco-tourism, food processing, renewable energy, natural-resource management and rural enterprises.

4. Connect rather than duplicate: The state does not need every sophisticated laboratory locally when national platforms such as I-STEM, together with universities and national laboratories partnerships, can provide access to capabilities that would be costly to establish independently.

5. Make innovation solve visible local problems: Technology programmes should ultimately improve learning, healthcare, farm incomes, rural enterprises, public services, connectivity and employment opportunities for young people.

For smaller states, the objective should not be technology imitation but strategic participation. National missions can supply knowledge, infrastructure and institutional networks, while states identify local problems, develop talent and apply these capabilities to their own economies.

For Meghalaya, then, the central question is not simply what technology to adopt. Rather, what are our most important development challenges, where can science and technology make the greatest difference, and how can we connect our limited resources to the much larger national knowledge and innovation ecosystem? Answered well, this lets a smaller state work within the national framework while pursuing a development path suited to its own people, geography and strengths.

Meghalaya does not lack scientific institutions, it lacks a sufficiently empowered mechanism to bring scientific thinking into the centre of State policymaking.

The Government of India's India Science, Technology & Innovation portal lists 35 State/UT Science & Technology Council organisations. In Meghalaya, the State Council of Science, Technology and Environment (SCSTE) was constituted in 1995, and science and technology functions remain distributed among various departments and institutions under the Planning Department, including the Science & Technology Cell, State Planning Board, MBDA and BRDC. While the SCSTE promotes and implements science and technology programmes, Meghalaya lacks an independent, multidisciplinary scientific voice at the highest level of State decision-making. Departmental and administrative advice, along with national schemes and priorities, cannot fully address the State's unique challenges. The Gap therefore is the requirement for a strategic advisory body which is needed to provide the Chief Minister and Cabinet with timely, independent and evidence-based advice on emerging scientific, technological, environmental and socioeconomic issues. The Council would bring together relevant scientists and practitioners, identify Meghalaya-specific priorities, assess emerging technologies and support cross-departmental policy decisions, while complementing existing institutions and avoiding duplication of departmental functions.

That is the institutional shift Meghalaya needs—from programme adoption to knowledge-led State policy.

(The author is Retired Professor, Dept of Biochemistry and former Director, Design Innovation Centre, NEHU)

Sepai i Por: The Silent Crisis of India's Educated Youth

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

As higher education costs rise and job markets stagnate, the song "Sepai i Por" (Time Lost), sung by popular Jaintia singer U Ram Suchiang, exposes the growing rift between family sacrifice and economic reality, beginning straight away with the pain of a young graduate's reality. In villages across the Jaintia Hills, it has struck a deep chord with youth who see their own struggles reflected in its lyrics. Sung in Pnar, the song captures the frustration of educated youth who, despite years of study and family sacrifice, return home with degrees but no jobs.

The singer begins by recalling the long hours he spent studying while his parents with limited means borrowed money, and cut back on their own needs to support his education. He remembers their words, spoken like blessings: "Yow soh wa thiang daw yoh kheit phi ki" ("The fruit of success will be yours to pluck.") They encouraged him with lines like, "Suffer now in your youth so you can live comfortably later. Your hard work will bring success."

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The song then turns blunt and honest: "I read books till my eyes dried, but the office doors stay locked unless your pockets speak." These lines point directly to the widespread belief that stable career paths are increasingly out of reach for those without money or connections. Across the country, this is not just discouraging. It feels like a broken promise. Yet the song does not end in despair. Midway through, the tone shifts. The singer decides to stop waiting and start working for himself. He chooses to work whether daily wagering, farming, selling, driving, or crafting not out of desperation, but as an act of dignity. "Better to sweat under my own sun than beg at a gate that only opens for money," he sings. This message of self-reliance is gaining real traction. As graduate unemployment remains a pressing concern, the song speaks to a reality faced by thousands of young people nationwide who are learning that a degree alone no longer guarantees a future.

This struggle is not only about one young man or one song. It reflects a problem that many families now understand too well. Parents spend years saving, borrowing and making sacrifices to educate their children, often believing that a degree will give them a better and more secure life. Some families spend much of their savings on college fees, accommodation, books and travel. Others take loans or postpone their own needs so that their children can continue their studies. Yet after graduation, many young people return home and spend months, sometimes years, looking for a suitable job. The disappointment is not theirs alone. Their parents also begin to wonder whether all those sacrifices have really led to the future they had hoped for.

Perhaps this is what makes Sepai i Por so relevant today. A young person studies for years, hoping that the education will help him find a decent job and build a better life. When that does not happen, disappointment naturally sets in. There is no shame in doing farming, driving, daily wage work, selling things or any other honest work. What matters is the willingness to work, earn one's own living and live with dignity. What is painful, however, is to see educated young people returning home after years of study with no clear way forward. Their parents have spent their savings, borrowed money and made many sacrifices, only to see their children still struggling to find a job. Young people must certainly learn to stand on their own feet, but they also need opportunities. A degree should not become something that a young person carries home only to remind him of the job he could not find. That is why Sepai i Por is more than a song of disappointment. It speaks about a reality that many families are living through today.

Letters to the Editor

Anomalies in MBBS Counselling 2026–27 Meghalaya — Parents Seek Answers

Editor,

We, the concerned parents of NEET-UG 2026 candidates from Meghalaya, wish to bring to public notice serious anomalies in the ongoing Combined Counselling process for MBBS Admissions 2026–27, conducted by the Directorate of Health Services (DHS).

It must be recognised at the outset that this year's candidates have already been through an unusually gruelling ordeal even before reaching this stage. Many of our children sat through a re-NEET examination, followed by multiple rounds of counselling and re-counselling, each accompanied by its own uncertainty and anxiety. Many had also taken drop years — sacrificing a year or more of their young lives, often at considerable financial and emotional cost to their families — solely to prepare rigorously for this examination and secure a medical seat. Having endured all of this, our children deserved, at the very least, a transparent and consistent allotment process at the finish line. Instead, they are met with confusion, shifting goalposts, and outcomes that are difficult to reconcile with merit.

We placed our full faith in the promise that seat allotment would be strictly merit-based, as laid down in the counselling SOP, which reserves State Quota seats as Khasi & Jaintia – 40%, Garo – 40%, UR – 15%, and SC/OST – 5%. What we have witnessed instead has left us deeply troubled.

Consider the case faced by several ST (Khasi & Jaintia) candidates this year — a pattern that is not isolated but has affected many similarly placed families. By virtue of their high NEET scores, these candidates qualify not only for reserved K&J seats but also for the general UR merit list. Rather than benefiting from this dual eligibility, they are being called for choice-filling only under the UR category — often many cycles later than their true K&J rank would warrant. In one such instance, a candidate placed within the top ten of the ST (K&J) merit list was called several cycles later than his rightful turn would have warranted, and was consequently forced to choose from a far smaller pool of remaining seats — losing out to a candidate ranked well below him in the very same category. This is not a one-off grievance; several other parents have reported near-identical outcomes for their own children. What incentive remains for a child to score well, if a higher mark under one head only shrinks their choices under another?

Separately, several families among us have raised concerns over the re-counselling round itself. Candidates called under a batch system were often left with very few options by the time their turn arrived, and were consequently allotted seats far removed from their preference. In one such case, a candidate was allotted his top-choice college during re-counselling, only for the published results (Notification No. DHS/MER.150/MBBS Admission/2026-27/6101, dated 17 September 2026) to subsequently show the very same seat allotted to candidates with distinctly lower merit — a pattern several other parents recognise from their own children's experience as well. We fail to understand how a seat once secured by a higher-ranked candidate on his top preference can pass to candidates ranked far below him, even within the same category.

Adding to this, the detailed SOP notified on 15 September 2026 was reportedly made public only on 16 September — the same day choice-filling was conducted. Our children were made to lock in life-defining decisions before they could even read the rules that governed those very decisions.

What compounds our distress further is that, on the strength of the first list, some of our children took what they believed to be a sound and final decision. Having been allotted a college of their choice, several candidates voluntarily gave up seats they had already secured in other, often more prestigious, institutions elsewhere — including seats obtained through All India Quota or other state counselling processes — trusting that their allotment here was settled and dependable. The subsequent inconsistencies in the re-counselling round have now left several such families in a far worse position than if they had simply retained their earlier seat through no fault of their own. A counselling process that induces students to surrender genuine opportunities elsewhere, only to then upend their own allotment through inconsistent re-counselling, causes irredeemable harm. A lost seat in another institution can rarely be reclaimed.

We would also like to draw attention to a broader concern. The national counselling calendar this year — necessitated by the re-NEET examination — has already been compressed and repeatedly revised at the central level, leaving states with a shrinking window to conduct their own rounds. It is precisely in such compressed timelines that states are expected to exercise greater, not lesser, diligence in adhering to due process — ensuring that SOPs are finalised and published sufficiently in advance; that candidates are given a genuine and unhurried opportunity to exercise their choices, and that seat-allotment logic is applied consistently and is open to verification. A candidate's right to make an informed choice, based on complete and timely information, is as fundamental to a fair admission process as merit itself. It cannot be treated as a mere formality to be rushed through to meet a closing date.

We would further urge the Department to consider the long-term implications of getting this process wrong. Medical admissions are not merely an administrative exercise — they determine who trains to become the doctors of tomorrow. An opaque or inconsistent allotment process does more than disappoint individual families; over time, it erodes public confidence in the fairness of the system, discourages genuinely meritorious students from investing years of preparation, and risks a mismatch between a candidate's demonstrated ability and the institution they are trained at. These extract a heavy cost and impact directly on the quality of healthcare our state and country will have in the years ahead, and on whether talented young people continue to believe that hard work and merit are actually rewarded.

We do not write this letter out of disrespect for the counselling authorities or the reservation policy, which we recognise and support. Our concern is narrower and, we believe, entirely reasonable: that the mechanics of choice-filling and allotment must actually reflect the merit principle the SOP promises on paper. After all that this year's candidates have already sacrificed — repeated examinations, repeated rounds, and in many cases an entire year of their youth — the least they deserve is a process that honours their merit rather than penalising it.

We appeal to the Health & Family Welfare Department, Government of Meghalaya, to:

Clarify without delay how ST, particularly the Khasi & Jaintia candidates are to be treated during choice-filling;

Review the specific allotments that appear inconsistent with merit, including the cases cited above;

Ensure that any SOP or amendment is published well before, not during, the choice-filling exercise, and that the State's counselling timeline leaves candidates adequate time to exercise informed choices, in keeping with the spirit of the national counselling schedule;

Put in place a transparent, verifiable mechanism for seat allotment that candidates and parents can trust;

Give due consideration to candidates who, relying in good faith on an earlier allotment, gave up seats secured elsewhere, and ensure they are not left worse off on account of subsequent inconsistencies in the process; and

Take corrective steps before the next round of seat allotment, so that no more children are made to pay the price for administrative haste, after everything they have already endured this year.

We hope this letter will draw the attention of the concerned authorities and the wider public to an issue that affects not only the futures of individual candidates, but the long-term quality and credibility of medical education and healthcare in our state.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Shillong

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

Learn a new language: Your brain will thank you

Learning another language is a highly complex mental activity. It requires people to remember words, distinguish unfamiliar sounds, recognize patterns, work out grammatical rules and retrieve the right expression at the right moment. All of this happens while listening, interpreting and preparing a response.

Could all this mental activity also help keep an aging brain healthier? Research suggests it can.

Concerns about memory and dementia can send aging adults looking for ways to exercise their brain and maintain cognitive function, whether it is solving crossword puzzles or playing a musical instrument.

Language learning might not seem like the same kind of brain exercise, but it is a complex activity that engages several mental processes at once.

I am a linguist who studies language acquisition, use and loss.

My new book, "Beyond Words: How We Learn, Use, and Lose Language," examines language and the mind across people's lifespans.

Research increasingly suggests that language learning and bilingualism can offer cognitive benefits – including for older adults.

Learning another language can also create opportunities for communication and social connection.

A workout for the brain

A person's brain remains capable of change throughout their life.

This ability to adapt in response to experience is known as neuroplasticity.

Learning unfamiliar sounds, vocabulary and grammatical patterns requires the brain to form and strengthen connections.

Language learning engages several mental processes at once, requiring people to absorb and retrieve information, notice when something does not work out, and adjust.

This sustained mental effort makes language learning a particularly rich form of cognitive exercise.

Research on bilingualism has found differences in both the brain's gray matter, which contains neurons and their connections, and white matter, which consists largely of nerve fibers linking different parts of the brain.

Studies have shown greater gray matter density or stronger white matter integrity in bilingual people, compared with people who speak one language.

These findings suggest that language experience can be reflected in the brain's structure, as well as its activity.

But brain differences are only part of the picture.

The brain as it ages

One reason researchers are interested in language and aging is the idea of cognitive reserve.

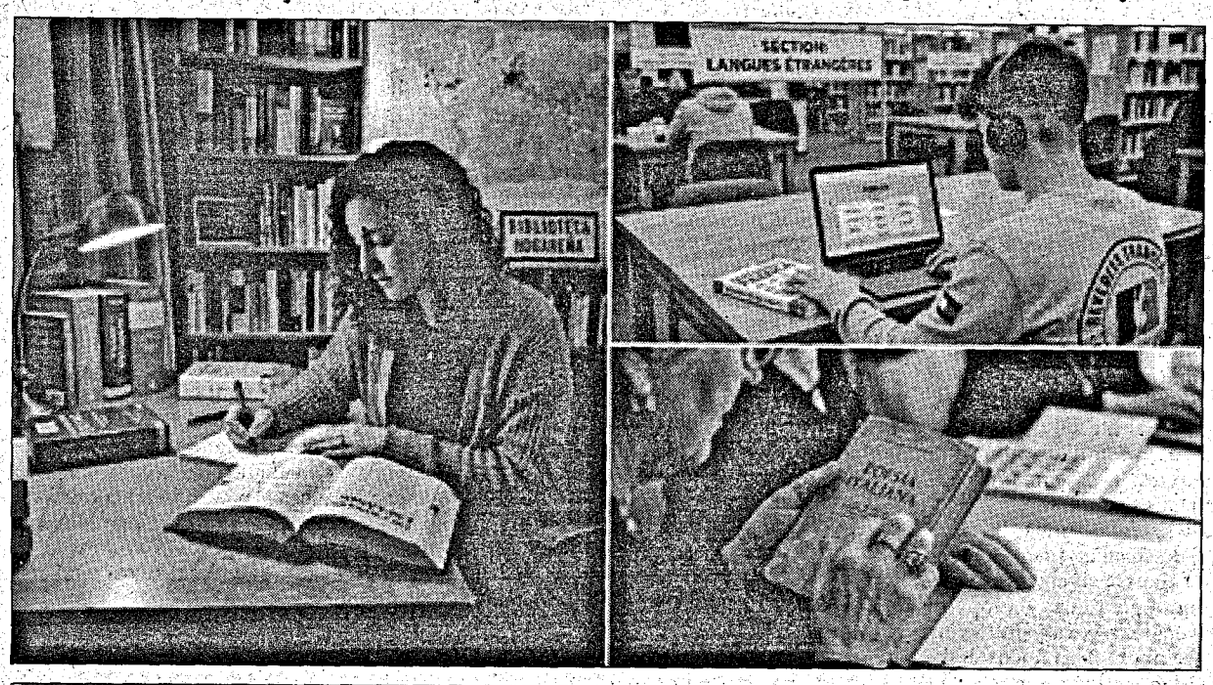
This term refers to the ability to maintain cognitive function despite age-related changes or damage to the brain.

Bilingualism has been proposed as one factor that can help the brain cope with the effects of aging, because managing two languages places ongoing demands on people's attention and cognitive control – ultimately helping to strengthen cognitive reserve.

Some studies have found that bilingual people who develop dementia show symptoms at a later age than people who speak one language.

This suggests that bilingualism may provide some protection against the effects of brain aging, although it does not necessarily prevent dementia or the brain changes associated with it.

The potential benefit may therefore be greater resilience in the face of those changes, rather than prevention of the underlying disease.



Learning later in life

This raises another question:

If lifelong bilingualism may help protect the brain as we age, can people gain similar benefits by learning a language later in life?

Age changes the way languages are learned, but adults remain capable of learning new languages throughout life.

Adults and kids bring different strengths to the task.

Children tend to have advantages with pronunciation and some aspects of grammar, while adults bring larger vocabularies and better-developed strategies for learning.

Research involving older adults suggests that learning a language can produce cognitive benefits, although the findings are mixed.

The potential benefit may come less from achieving fluency than from the process of learning itself.

Language learning is a sustained challenge that keeps people learning, practicing and adapting.

There are social benefits, too.

Learning another language can deepen cultural understanding, improve interpersonal communication and encourage people to empathize with other people's perspectives and experiences.

It can also connect people with others from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds, creating opportunities for conversation and friendship.

There is no established formula for how much language learning is needed to provide these benefits.

Studies have used everything from intensive classroom instruction to short daily sessions with language-learning apps, over periods ranging from weeks to months, to see whether language learning can improve cognitive function.

Rather than a magic number of hours, what matters may be sustained engagement in a challenging activity like learning a new language.

Building cognitive resilience

Learning another language is not a miracle cure for aging, and it cannot guarantee protection against Alzheimer's disease or other forms of dementia.

But it is an unusually rich form of mental activity.

Perhaps the most useful way to think about language learning is not as a way to keep the brain young, but as a way to support cognitive resilience

– the ability to keep learning, adapting and functioning despite the changes that come with age.

Aging inevitably changes the brain, but people retain the capacity to learn throughout life.

Keeping our brains engaged in demanding new activities may contribute to that resilience. *(The Conversation)*

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi — **Sunday, SEPTEMBER 20, 2026**

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Saturn on your solar return chart and it will give mixed results. There will be times when you will face obstacles, but you will also taste success. Your plans would face difficulties at the inception stage but will be completed in due course. You may face some opposition at workplace. Your enemies will conspire against you. Your relations with subordinates will remain good and they will obey your orders. You can be involved in love relations. This may turn into marriage ties. Relations with life partner would remain cordial. Family atmosphere will be one of joy and cheer. Children will shine in studies. You will get good job offers and will undertake short trips with family. Those who plan to go abroad for job or business can do so.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) Things will be a lot better this week. You will gain confidence from your bosses, and your work will come in for lot of praise. You will also remember some close ones with moist eyes. You may be lost in the memories. You will also get a promotion or transfer in your job. You will be in a dominant position at your workplace. You need to stay away from controversy and arguments. Expenses will be on the rise. You need to curb it. A secret affair of yours could also be exposed. But it will not trouble you much. Things will be fine at your home. You will be finishing your work with the cooperation of your family members. You will remain devoted to your partner. You will also remain busy with meditation, prayers and spiritual works.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Good news will lift your spirit. It could be related to a promotion, getting a new work order or about property. You will be much sought after person. And people will love your company. Your friends will also support you. You can also enter new love relations. Some issues at your work will trouble you as a few things will be done against your wish. But you will hold your ground and will have the final say. You will not accept anything unethical. In the workplace, conditions are in your favor. Students will again work hard to complete their syllabus. They will try to make up for the lost time. There are chances of money gain.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Some minor argument at your workplace may prove to be a headache for you. It will look like that dispute will go out of hands. But you will resolve it in time with your intelligence mixed with cleverness. Your opponents will have to suffer defeat in the process. Keep a sharp eye on your enemies and foes. Someone may try to take advantage of your trust and goodwill. A pleasant news related to your children's progress will lift your morale and mood. Businessperson will get success in their trade, and their profits too will rise. Students will also get good results in exams and interviews. You will also enjoy confidence and trust of your family members. Your partner/spouse will be your biggest source of strength. He/she will keep motivating you. Your government related task will also get done with ease.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is an ideal time to make your best efforts and to cash on to it. Your name, fame, respect and prestige will rise. You will be busy with official activities. Your peers and superiors will back you fully. Your advice will be taken on important matters. Income will be good. You will also explore new avenues of growth in your business in collaboration or partnership. Those who are unemployed for a long time will get suitable offers. Even those who want to change their present job will have ample choice in their hands. Your honesty and dedication will be your biggest plus. You will also be not afraid to tell the truth and call spade a spade. You will keep your target in mind and complete it in period given to you. You need to deal with strangers with a wise head and cautions thinking.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) The timing is perfect. You just need to plan out things. Your best is yet to come. You can change your destiny as you plan well. You could get a very good job offer. You can also get transferred to some new place. You can also plan to go out of country and settle there. Be prepared to work in a new atmosphere and surroundings. You will meet a lot of new people and contact them. It will help you in the long run. An engagement or marriage can also get fixed. Additional sources of income could be explored. You plan a major expansion in business in partnership. Your rivals will be active but will get dealt friendly. Your presence of mind is your biggest plus point. You could face some opposition in your home and workplace. Then it will only bring out the best in you. Things come only to test us and in the end we only become stronger. And gain valuable experience.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) The time is fabulous. Your physical health will be at its best. You will be at the peak of your fitness and will feel mentally cheerful to take on new challenges. Work and home will both be important for you. There will be freshness in your personal relations. You will also begin new work/projects. You will also take up multiple work on many fronts at a time. It will prove to be tiresome experience, but you will manage well. You will finish all your work by any means. You will be liked by people around you. Rich and powerful people will get to know you. You will see a rise in your popularity. You will be praised for some efforts of yours. Your image will improve as you have worked a lot on it. You will be willingly helping people.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It is going to be a wonderful week for you. You will be working to achieve your goals. Your personality will undergo a sea-change. A visible change will be seen in your personality. You will be admired a lot. You will make best use of your communication skills. You will also give talks and sign financial deals. You need to control your words. It is time for financial gains. You will have amazing time with your spouse. You will also fulfill your responsibilities very well. There will be career related works. You will be earning lot of money. You will do introspection about your present state of affairs and how to go about things in future. You will do your work very thoughtfully. You will also get rid of tensions, and you will feel cheerful and a lot better.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) A pleasant news from somewhere all of a sudden will lift your spirits. You will earn lot of money in business and work. Additional responsibility too may be given to you. You will not compromise with anyone in terms of work. Your relationship with your partner will get better. You will feel very happy. The time will be peaceful, and you can plan a lot of things. You will enjoy clothes, luxuries and entertainment in plenty. You will never be sort of funds. Stay from legal complexities. You cannot dilly dally in office work. There will be expenditure on children's education and career. You will put much trust in your hard work to meet the target in your work. Students will focus on their studies and do well.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It will be a beneficial week for you. You will make profits in every work. You will be cheerful at home and will share wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also get support of your peers and bosses. Your work will also be completed on time. Outside also you will spend your time in entertainment and recreation. You will be at best in your creative pursuits. You will continue your hard work and get success in due course. You can also expect arrival of some guests at your home. It will keep you busy and occupied. The matters of land, housing and other property will be solved quickly. You will stay away from bad company. Your tactics in business will help you increase your profits.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Some matters at your workplace will remain preoccupied. You need to take help and aid from your seniors to get out of the situation. In business you may lose a valuable order. You will do research work. Your friendly and social nature will take you far ahead. It will increase the feelings of love people have for you. You will have monetary gains. You will make contacts with people for finance related work. In this period even your little efforts will fetch good results. Avoid making any new experiments at work. You also need to take care of health of eiders in your family. You will be very happy and satisfied with your colleagues and subordinates for work done wisely and sincerely.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) This week you will be busy with your family and work. There are possibilities for promotion in your job/work. You will keep continuing your good work. You will have the ability to take people along with you. You will be kind, bright, ambitious and diplomatic. You will also get support from unexpected quarters. You will be spending money and time on home renovation. You will also have the ability to win over your enemies and opponents. Husband and wife will be supportive of each other. Business activities will gather speed. These are days for prestige and growth. The placement of Jupiter can lead to some auspicious event taking place. Your government-related work will gather momentum and progress in the right direction.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) There are promotion possibilities. You will have good equations with your bosses. They will be happy with your performance. Your self-confidence will also be high. You will have monetary gains. You will not compare yourself with others. But you will miss the company of a family member close to you. Your parents' blessings will be with you. You will get a letter about the new appointment. You will also be successful in competitions/exams. Take care of your diet. You will also get materialistic things easily. You will also think about the welfare of your servant. You will also do new experiments in your business and make it grow many folds. Destiny will favor you a lot.

How a traditional Nordic way of eating could help you live longer

We live in Denmark, which consistently ranks as one of the world's healthiest countries. The modern Danish diet, however, may not be quite so world-leading – with many Danes consuming high levels of sugar, salt and convenience food.

Yet, go back a few generations and science is increasingly showing that many of the staple foods of our grandparents' generation.

Think homemade rye bread, herring, root vegetables and berries – can significantly reduce your risk of chronic disease and help you live longer.

Often described as the Mediterranean diet of the north, the Nordic diet is a predominantly plant-based diet rooted in traditional Nordic foods.

It emphasises whole grains such as rye and oats; fatty fish, like salmon, herring and mackerel, root vegetables and cabbages, Nordic fruits like apples and pears and berries like bilberries – with modest amounts of dairy and rapeseed oil as the main source of fats.

These foods work together to support health.

Rye, oats and vegetables provide a diversity of dietary fibres, which help to regulate cholesterol, blood sugar and digestion. Salmon, herring, mackerel and rapeseed oil supply heart-healthy unsaturated fats. Fruits and berries contribute antioxidants that may reduce inflammation. And the overall diet is typically low in sugar and saturated fat.

A look at the evidence

Much of the evidence for the Nordic diet comes from something researchers call the Healthy Nordic Food Index, a score that ranks people by how closely their everyday eating matches traditional Nordic staples.

One of the earliest studies using this index tracked 57,053 Danes over 12 years. It found that men who ate the most Nordic-style foods ended up with a 36% lower risk of dying than those who ate the least.

Similar studies have linked this pattern of eating to a lower risk of type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and stroke.

Participants were asked to swap to porridge and rye bread instead of eating white bread and pasta, rapeseed oil instead of butter and more locally grown produce like apples, berries and cabbage alongside fatty fish like salmon and herring.

In this study, people in the Nordic diet group saw improvements across several risk factors for chronic disease compared to the people who weren't eating in this way. This included the lowering of high blood sugar and cholesterol, a reduction of liver fat, along with decreased inflammation levels – all of which can raise your chances of developing heart disease, type 2 diabetes, or liver disease over time.

A local diet

The Mediterranean diet and the Nordic diet have a great deal in common. In fact, they share more similarities than differences.

Both are big on plant foods, whole grains, fish and healthy fats. Both diets also treat processed food and red meat as occasional extras rather than staples.

How to adopt the Nordic diet

It's clear then that adopting some healthy Nordic habits could bring clear health benefits.

Some simple changes might include:

- swapping refined grains for whole grains like oats and rye bread and aiming for 90g a day
- eating more fatty fish each week
- using unsaturated oils instead of butter
- adding more legumes, root vegetables and seasonal produce to meals
- cutting back on highly processed foods

It's also important to add that healthy eating does not depend on specific "superfoods" or exotic ingredients. Instead, this diet demonstrates the value of simple, local and minimally processed foods. Think: more whole foods, more plants, better fats and fewer sweets and snacks.

Ultimately, though, the healthiest diets are not about perfection, but about consistent, balanced choices that can fit into your everyday life. *(The Conversation)*

"Mother's love is peace. It need not be acquired, it need not be deserved."

—Erich Fromm

The Shillong Times

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Assault on Civil Servants

THE central services officers posted to Meghalaya have left behind their families thousands of kilometres away to serve the state. Most of them work hard and well beyond the call of duty. On September 18, Lovish Garg IPS, was brutally run down by a speeding two-wheeler while he was on naka duty at 1:30 am, when the rest of the world was safely and comfortably tucked inside their beds, sound asleep. While there can be cases of dereliction of duty by a few, those are exceptions to the rule. The large majority have served the state well. Any attack on a civil servant while the person is discharging lawful public duties is not merely an assault on an individual; it undermines the authority of the State and the functioning of public institutions.

As recently as July 2026 the High Court of Meghalaya in Ajit Das alias Avinash Das & Ors v. State of Meghalaya noted that assaulting or obstructing a public servant in the discharge of official duties attracts offences under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). The case concerned allegations that a police officer was pushed and assaulted while intervening at a quarry. The High Court refused to quash the criminal proceedings against the party that assaulted the policeman merely because the parties had subsequently reached a settlement. There are times when public servants fail to discharge their duties and they deserve the strongest public censure. However, attacking or preventing them from carrying out their duties is a criminal act deserving the strongest public condemnation and for the law to take its course.

Lovish Garg, IPS, currently the Additional Superintendent of Police (Traffic) is recovering at Woodlands Hospital after having been operated upon for serious injuries. Some pressure groups in this state today believe in and promote the dictum: "In our own land, we will do whatever we wish to," (Ha Ri Lajong, Leh Katba Mon). This is a very dangerous slogan which if repeated too often could become a compelling factor for breaking the law. Disagreement with certain actions of the government cannot become a licence to use physical force or intimidation against an officer performing a lawful duty. In Meghalaya, if the public does not speak up there is a danger that such attacks on officials will become normalised. In that case a civil servant who tries to enforce the law to prevent illegal activity, conducts an inspection, removes an encroachment or takes an unpopular administrative decision could be exposed to physical attacks. An attack on a civil servant is not simply an attack on a person—it is an attack on the functioning of government itself, hence the need for strict action against such attackers. In recent times there have been a series of petrol bomb attacks on government vehicles and the perpetrators have not been apprehended. Two petrol bombs were lobbed at the Laban Police Station on September 11, causing policemen to run for their lives. Fortunately, no one was injured. Such vicious attacks on public property and public servants deserve the severest public censure and for the law to take a serious view of the matter.

Meghalaya Combating HIV AIDS

By H.H. Mohrmen

The increasing number of HIV cases in Meghalaya is a serious concern and calls for a strong and coordinated response. On September 15, after chairing the first meeting of the Meghalaya State Council on AIDS in Shillong, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma said that HIV/AIDS remains a serious public health challenge for the state.

The Chief Minister's statement came after a review of the HIV situation in Meghalaya. According to the latest HIV estimates and figures presented by the government, the state's HIV prevalence stands at 0.40 per cent, compared with the national average of 0.20 per cent. New HIV infections have increased by 58.74 per cent since 2010, equivalent to nearly seven new cases being detected every day. Meghalaya currently has an estimated 9,240 people living with HIV, while 618 cases were reported in the current programme data, including 60 pregnant women living with HIV. These figures are a matter of serious concern.

The major modes of transmission

According to data released by the Meghalaya AIDS Control Society, casual sexual contact accounts for about 52 per cent of reported HIV infections in the state. Regular partners or spouses account for about 32 per cent, while injecting drug use accounts for around nine per cent. Commercial sexual exposure accounts for about four per cent and mother to child transmission for around 2.5 per cent.

The figures relating to injecting drug use are particularly concerning because they connect the HIV response with another major public health issue in Meghalaya: drug use. A coordinated response therefore needs to address not only HIV testing and treatment but also substance use, prevention and harm reduction.

Stigma, discrimination and other causes for concern

One of the saddest findings is that only 77.2 per cent of people living with HIV are currently on treatment. This means that a substantial proportion of the affected population is not receiving ART. The gap is worrying not only because treatment is essential for the health and well being of individuals, but also because maintaining treatment and viral suppression is central to reducing the risk of transmission.

The number one challenge in combating HIV/AIDS is stigma and discrimination. Even today, some people working on projects to reduce the spread of HIV continue to view the disease almost as a death sentence. This is reflected in the experiences of many people living with HIV whom I personally know. Only a few are willing to speak openly about their status because of the stigma attached to HIV. There have also been cases in which people living with HIV have chosen to visit an ART centre in another district because they fear being recognised and stigmatised in their own community.

The UNAIDS 95:95:95

The Chief Minister said that the government would focus on a five pronged approach: early detection, better treatment and retention, prevention of new infections, protection of mothers and children, and reducing stigma.

This approach is broadly aligned with the UNAIDS 95:95:95 targets. This means that the 95 per cent of people living with HIV should know their HIV status. This explains the importance of expanding testing and encouraging people to know their status. The second 95 means, that 95 per cent of those who know their status should be on treatment. However linking a person to an ART centre is not always as easy as it may sound to be. Once a person is linked to treatment, ensuring regular adherence and preventing loss to follow up is another challenge.

The third 95 aims that 95 per cent of people on treatment to achieve viral suppression. This requires regular monitoring and viral load testing. For a person who is bedridden, elderly, financially constrained or living far from an ART centre, travelling regularly for testing and medicines can be difficult.

Our comrades in arms

The government has rightly recognised that it cannot combat this contagion alone. The Chief Minister has called for the involvement of the public at large and described the response as requiring a coordinated, whole of society approach.

Our partners are not only government health agencies, including the Meghalaya AIDS Control Society. The most important comrades are those working within communities. At the community level, traditional and local leaders need to be made aware of HIV, particularly the stigma and discrimination associated with it.

ASHA workers are especially important partners. It is heartening to know that ASHAs are aware of the need to maintain confidentiality when a new case is detected in a community. In some cases, even the headman relies on the ASHA worker for important community health information.

The other important community strength is the network of self help groups and their village organisations. These groups are active community agents and change makers. They are also generally open to working on issues that contribute to the betterment of society. Their involvement can make HIV awareness more local, trusted and sustainable.

The brighter side of the problem

There is also encouraging news. AIDS related deaths in Meghalaya have declined by 61.18 per cent since 2010. This is an important indication of the benefits of HIV treatment and care. HIV is no longer necessarily a life threatening condition for people who have access to effective treatment and take their medication regularly.

We have seen many people living with HIV lead normal, productive lives, and in some cases they are healthier than many of us. One reason is the principle known as U=U: Undetectable equals Untransmittable. When ART is taken regularly and successfully suppresses the virus to an undetectable level, a person living with HIV does not sexually transmit HIV.

It is also encouraging that people living with HIV are increasingly organised. There are organisations of people living with HIV in several districts of the state. The government should involve them meaningfully in planning and implementing programmes. After all, those who live with HIV understand the practical difficulties of treatment and care better than anyone who has not experienced them.

Financial challenges of people living with HIV

The Chief Minister has stated that the biggest gap today is not diagnosis but treatment and retention. He also identified financial constraints and stigma as major reasons for loss to follow up, noting that 2,381 diagnosed persons had yet to begin treatment.

While the government's efforts are appreciated, there is still a need to strengthen outreach to people living with HIV. I have raised this issue several times in meetings with the Meghalaya AIDS Control Society. The government has rightly recognised that financial barriers contribute to gaps in treatment and follow up.

One case we encountered involved a mother and child living in a village near the international border. At one point, the mother almost stopped taking her medicine because her two year old child, who was also living with HIV, was unable to take the medication. She told our staff, "What is the point of me living if my child is not?" Such experiences remind us that HIV treatment is not only about medicine. It is also about emotional support, family support, transportation and the ability to reach services.

It is not enough to make ART and other essential services available; people must be able to access them. One immediate need is the establishment of an ART centre at Khliehriat. Many people living with HIV also need financial assistance, including travel support, to visit ART centres for medicines, testing and follow up. People who test reactive through community based screening may also need to travel to an ICTC for confirmation.

We also face the challenge of people lost to follow up and those who are unable to continue treatment. Viral load testing creates additional travel and financial burdens. If we are serious about controlling HIV and ensuring that people remain on treatment, greater support is needed to remove these practical barriers.

Convergence

Most HIV projects in the state are supported through the National AIDS and STD Control Programme. However, the state government can develop policies that supplement these existing programmes. The central government's Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan and the state's own DREAM project can be better linked with the broader goal of reducing HIV transmission, particularly where drug use is a contributing factor.

The fight against HIV/AIDS cannot be won by the health department or MACS alone. It requires government departments, communities, educational institutions, civil society organisations, ASHA workers, self help groups, people living with HIV and families to work together. Most importantly, we must replace fear and stigma with knowledge, compassion and practical support. If people can test without fear, begin treatment without delay and continue treatment without financial and social barriers, Meghalaya can make substantial progress in its response to HIV/AIDS.

"Am I scoring too high?"

By TEL Mawlong

For an MBBS aspirant, one would expect the stress to end with NEET and Re-NEET. Score the marks, get your rank and choose the best available college. For some Meghalaya students this year, however, the ordeal has continued through counselling and re-counselling.

Over the past few days, students have shared their experiences with me. Their stories differ, but one concern keeps recurring: were all available seats actually shown when it was their turn to choose?

"No seat available" — until there was?

According to one student's account, during re-counselling candidates waited while available seats were displayed in big monitor before being called individually. When her turn came, she says she was told that nearby colleges were essentially exhausted except Agartala. She preferred Shillong Medical College but was allegedly told that its seats were occupied. Nervous and faced with an immediate decision, she eventually chose Agartala.

Then came the shock. According to her account, many candidates called after her subsequently obtained Shillong Medical Colleges (We have verified that from the new MBBS allotment list.)

The student who refused to accept "no"

One Khasi-Jaintia candidate in unreserved category had clearly expressed that he preferred RIMS Imphal. He was told there were no more seats at RIMS. Other Colleges were suggested to him. He remained silent. His mother reiterated that he wanted RIMS only. Again, they were told there was no RIMS seat. He still refused to choose one of the alternatives. Then, he says, in the end they said, and I quote "let him have that RIMS seat." Had he not remained stubborn, he would have lost his rightful RIMS.

Again, the authorities should verify the sequence. But if the account is accurate, it raises an obvious procedural question: how can a seat be unavailable at one moment and become available moments later?

Allotted, sent home — and called back

Another reported experience is even more distressing. A candidate allegedly chose RIMS as his first preferred college. He was informed that RIMS was available, completed the process and went home believing that the matter was settled. Later, according to the account shared with me, he was called back and told that RIMS was no longer available. The problem now was no longer merely the loss of RIMS. By then, his second-preferred college that had been available earlier was allegedly no longer available either. The student ultimately had to settle for another college.

Again, this is the student's account. DHS may have its explanation. But think about what that means from the perspective of an 18, 19 or 20 year-old. For a few hours, you believe one of the most important decisions of your life has been settled. You inform your family. Perhaps plans begin immediately. Then the phone rings and everything changes: What kind of counselling was that?

Then comes the strangest question: "am I scoring too high?"

Another student belonging to Khasi-Jaintia category had scored rather well and was placed under unreserved category. The student told me that he had worked intensely to score above 500 in re-NEET. Often sleeping only 3 hours a day. The message he wrote to me after the re-counselling was heartbreaking: "I always thought scoring high marks would secure more opportunities in college-preferences. When I entered yesterday, they told me, 'you have only two options - Shillong Medical college or RIMS'... So what's the point of working so hard and scoring good when I cant's even get three options for preferences? If I had scored 30 marks less it would have been 10 times better." The feeling behind this message should trouble all of us. A counselling system should never leave a high-scoring student wondering whether scoring "less" might somehow have produced a "better" outcome.

This issue needs urgent and special attention. Suppose two Khasi candidates score 600 and 500. The first candidate is high enough to enter through the Unreserved (UR) category. The second enters through the Khasi-Jaintia reserved category. The first candidate has not stopped being a Khasi-Jaintia because he scored higher. In merit terms, he ranks above the second candidate. So why should entering the UR list as a Khasi-Jaintia Candidate (because of a higher score) ever put him behind a lower-scoring Khasi-Jaintia candidate in exercising a choice of colleges? That question needs a clear answer. The counselling system in Meghalaya should not shrink the opportunity of a Khasi-Jaintia or a Garo candidate merely because his higher score moved him into the Unreserved cat. Merit should benefit a student. It should never punish him. Why are humans doing this job?

This brings me to what I think should be seriously considered. The solution does not require us to first prove that somebody favoured somebody. Meghalaya needs to build a system where favouritism becomes much harder in the first place. We need to stop conducting MBBS seat allotment in the manner it's done today in our state. Move to a proper computer-based counselling system.

Students can register online. Publish the complete seat matrix. Let every student arrange colleges in order of preference: NEIGRIHMS, MAMC, RIMS, SMC, VVMC, AMC, GMC, KGMC...and so on. Then lock the choices. After that, let the software do the boring work. Rank. Category. Reservation. Preference. Seat availability. Nothing else.

There should be no need for somebody to tell a student: "This college is not available." The computer knows whether it is available. There should be no: "Take this college, It is good." That is not the counsellor's decision. There should be no 'mind-game'. There should be no nervous student sitting on a chair trying to make immediate decision. There should be no need for boldness, mental toughness, stubbornness or negotiation skill in MBBS counselling. Because that is not how counselling should be. After choice filling, let the algorithm process everybody according to the published rules. And publish the result.

With a properly designed computerised system, a seat cannot quietly disappear because somebody says it is unavailable. Every movement is recorded. Candidate A got College X because of Rank X and Preference Y. Candidate B did not get it because it had already been allotted. Candidate C got it later because Candidate A surrendered it. This system is simple, verifiable and it removes favouritism. Importantly, it protects the officers too. If allegations of favouritism arise, nobody needs to defend himself with words. Produce the digital trail. Last but not the least, as said before, have a system that rewards rather than punishes the meritorious Khasi-Jaintia or Garo students who enter the unreserved category.

Letters to the Editor

Outrage & Condemnation Over the Vicious Attack on Addl. SP Lovish Garg

Editor,

I am writing to express my absolute fury and deep heartbreak over the brutal attack on East Khasi Hills Additional SP (Traffic), Lovish Garg, IPS. To learn that an outstanding, deeply humble officer was deliberately run down and severely injured while doing his duty at a late-night checkpoint is sickening. This news has shaken me to the very marrow of my bones.

Officer Lovish Garg is a man of rare excellence. His humility is a constant source of inspiration to everyone who knows him personally, and his dedication to the public was proven beyond doubt when he led the team to Bengaluru to rescue Mr Kwis Sumer. For a man who has poured his heart into serving our community to be targeted in this manner is an absolute disgrace.

The monsters who committed this crime are absolute cowards. Smashing a vehicle into a police officer who is standing on the road to keep the peace is not just a crime – it is a vicious, unprovoked, and completely unhinged act of violence. Anyone who would do this has a completely warped, sick mind, utterly devoid of human conscience or basic sanity. They did not just attack a man; they attacked the very law and order that keeps our families safe.

Our society must refuse to tolerate this level of lawlessness. We demand that the authorities hunt down every single person involved in this heinous act without mercy. The culprits must be thrown in prison and prosecuted to the absolute maximum limit of the law. A severe, unmistakable lesson must be taught so that no one ever dares to raise a hand against an on-duty officer again.

My heart and prayers are entirely with Officer Garg as he fights to recover at Woodland Hospital. We wish him a full, speedy recovery, and we stand solidly behind him. The criminals who did this deserve nothing less than the harshest justice the law can inflict.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Via email

Why Punish Citizens for Digital Payment?

Editor,

The proposed Merchant Discount Rate (MDR) of 0.4 per cent on certain UPI transactions above ₹2,000 has raised a simple question: who will finally bear this cost? The proposed charge is not a government tax or cess on ordinary customers. Person-to-person UPI transactions will remain free, while eligible merchant transactions up to ₹2,000 will also remain free. The government has also said that merchants should not pass the charge on to customers.

But there is another side to the matter. The immediate burden of MDR will fall on traders for the transactions covered by the new rule. For a trader receiving hundreds of UPI payments, even 0.4 per cent can add up to a sizeable amount over a month. A large retailer may be able to absorb the expense, but the sorry state is that a small trader with a narrow profit margin may find it more difficult to do so. This makes one wonder whether customers will really remain unaffected.

A trader may not charge the customer separately for using UPI, but there could be other ways of recovering the additional expense. Prices may be adjusted, for example. Some traders may also encourage customers to pay cash when the purchase amount is high.

Reports in newspapers have already highlighted similar concerns among traders in different parts of the country. Some traders have said that the additional cost could encourage people to use cash for larger payments.

I wanted to know how traders in Tura look at the matter. I therefore spoke over the phone to a few traders here. Their views were not all the same. Some were concerned that the cost could become significant for businesses receiving a large number of UPI payments. They said that while 0.4 per cent may appear small, the amount can become substantial when calculated over a long period. Some also felt that customers might prefer cash for bigger purchases.

These are the views of only a few traders I spoke to and cannot be taken as the opinion of the entire trading community of Tura. But their responses do show the kind of practical problems that may arise at the ground level.

There is also a wider concern. India has been encouraging people to move away from cash and use digital payments. UPI has made this change much easier. Digital transactions leave a record and can generally be traced. Cash payments do not offer the same level of record-keeping.

If more traders and customers begin choosing cash for larger transactions because of the additional UPI cost, some of the progress made towards a less-cash economy could be affected. It could also create more room for cash transactions that are not properly reported, with the possibility of contributing to the circulation of black money.

I am not suggesting that the proposed MDR will lead to black money. Such a conclusion would be unjustified. But the possibility of some transactions moving from digital payments back to cash is something that should not be ignored.

There is also a valid argument on the other side. UPI has grown enormously, and maintaining such a large payment network involves expenditure on technology, cybersecurity, fraud prevention and other infrastructure. The payment system also needs a way to remain financially sustainable.

The concern, therefore, is not simply whether 0.4 per cent is a small or large amount. What matters is how the new charge will affect traders, particularly small traders, and whether it will influence the payment choices of customers.

A small shopkeeper and a large corporate retailer do not face the same business conditions. An expense that is easily absorbed by a large company may be significant for a small trader. After encouraging traders and customers for years to adopt digital payments, the authorities should be careful that the new arrangement does not unintentionally encourage people to return to cash. The government should ensure that customers are not asked to pay a separate UPI charge. At the same time, the difficulties faced by small traders should also be considered.

UPI has become part of everyday life for millions of people. Its convenience and simplicity have been major reasons for its rapid growth. Any change in the system should therefore be introduced in a way that does not discourage either traders or customers from using digital payments. The question is not only about 0.4 per cent. It is about whether the new arrangement will keep UPI convenient and acceptable to both traders and customers, while retaining the transparency that digital payments have brought to everyday transactions.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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

"We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope."
— Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Shillong Times

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Mimicry, politics

POLITICS, for most of its practitioners today, is a profession. This is unlike the initial years of Independence, when a nationalistic spirit dominated the political discourse. Worthies like Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel and Dr Sarvappalli Radhakrishnan fired the imagination of a nation that was taking baby-steps into the new era of self-rule. People from across the broad social spectrum glued their ears to the pearls of wisdom emerging from them. Seasons change; so does the tone and tenor of politics or statecraft. Today, audiences are 'herded' into public meeting venues even for top leaders. Fewer people opt on their own to attend such events. This makes it imperative that new techniques need to be adopted to ensure large-scale mass presence. This is obviously a reason why a mimicry artist was ushered in -- and he hogged the limelight -- at an event addressed by Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi in Indore this past week. That he has chosen to mimic none other than Prime Minister Narendra Modi is a telling commentary on the times we are in.

Clearly, the political class in this country lacks a sense of humour. Their long-winding speeches before captive audiences are either aimed at scoring brownie points for themselves or at running down their political opponents. Most politicians hardly talk sense. Except for Roads and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari, hardly any minister in the Modi cabinet across three NDA terms has spoken publicly about what is new, if anything, or what's happening in the governmental wings they preside over. Hardly ever do they appear on the public podium, which is the exclusive preserve of the PM himself. That the PM continues to draw large crowds at his events across states even in this 13th year at the helm is creditworthy – though obviously the governmental machinery works overtime to ensure maximum crowds at such events. The political culture has transformed to a level that neither the audience expects any gems of wisdom from the leaders nor are they dissatisfied with the political slugfest being dished out for their consumption on a daily basis from top political figures.

On the action front too, there obviously is a deficit. There hardly is any inspiring action from the government by way of giving a morale boost to the people at large. Routine governmental functions like changing rules, regulations or laws do not inspire the masses unless they sense a significant difference to their lives from these governance initiatives. For instance, the new education policy has its good sides, but those were overshadowed by perceptions that the government intended to implement the RSS-Hindutva agenda through the backdoor. The new labour laws, or the changes effected in the Nyay Sanhita, failed to impress many. These were half-baked. Obviously, when a leadership continues for long, it runs out of ideas. Three consecutive terms for a prime minister is a luxury in a democratic set-up; a reason why those like the US prohibit a president from continuing in power for more than two terms. New minds bring new ideas, which is a prerequisite to a nation's forward march.

Elucidations on Population Based Reservation and the KHADC Land Bill 2026

By Melarbor L Thabah

Innumerable arguments have been made that Reservation based on population and Section 16 of the KHADC Land Bill 2026 are not feasible. An elucidation in the public interest is necessary to clarify these points through this editorial.

1. Reservation Issue: In the case of the Kerela Government versus M. Thomas in 1976, a five-judge bench initially heard the matter, during which two judges observed that the 50% ceiling on reservations was not an inviolable constitutional rule, but rather a rule of caution aimed at maintaining balance. The Supreme Court had stated that when a large number of the backward classes constitute 80% of the population belonging to the Scheduled Tribe, the Government can make reservations even if it exceeded this cautionary rule of maintaining balance in order to ensure adequate representation.

The Court also ruled that reservations may be introduced in promotions to guarantee sufficient representation of Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs) in public services and that Article 16(4) doesn't violate the Right to Equality of Opportunity in public employment under Article 16(1). The Supreme Court has made it clear that the provisions of the constitution regarding equal opportunity rights and the provisions granting preferential treatment to backward classes are not contradictory. Instead, they complement each other.

The ramifications of the judgement are that the State Government by way of Articles 15(4), 15(5) 15(6), 16(4), 16(4A), 16(6), 46 and 335 has the right to make reservation for the backward classes and that the 85% reservation is constitutionally legal and justifiable since Meghalaya has an indigenous ST population of around 86%. Furthermore, the Supreme Court highlighted that while interpreting the provisions of Article 16(1) and 16(2), it is important to emphasise Article 46 which directs the State Government to take measures to uplift the interests of backward classes, specifically the SCs and STs. The Court interpreted the provisions of the said Article 16 and explained that a guaranteed right to equal opportunity in public services with a provision which provides privileges to SCs and STs is a positive approach to achieve the principles of equality. The Court interpreted the grounds of discrimination under Article 16(2). It was explained by the Court that the word "Caste" in Article 16(2) does not include SCs and STs. The SCs and STs are recognized under Article 366 (24). Intrinsically, under justifiable grounds, reservation can go beyond the 50% threshold.

On May 5, 2021 while delivering its judgement on the Maratha Reservation Case, the Supreme Court while hearing the reservation case pertaining to Maharashtra had ordered the Maharashtra Government to stick to the 50% limit but after hearing from the counsels of Meghalaya, Assam, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Andhra and other states which have high tribal population percentages, granted exemptions once again, of increased reservation for the tribal populace of those states. The Attorney General of Meghalaya submitted to the Supreme Court that reservation in Meghalaya is in accordance with Paragraph 810 of the Supreme Court's judgement of the Indra Sawhney case of 1992 which stated explicitly that the 50% limit is a rule which can be breached under extraordinary circumstances which have to be taken into consideration inherent in the great diversity of this country and its people. It may happen that in far flung and remote areas, the population inhabiting these areas might, on account of their being out of the national mainstream and in view of the conditions peculiar to and characteristic to them, need to be treated in a different way. Hence relaxation in this strict rule may become imperative. In doing so, extreme caution is to be exercised and a special case made out. This judgment establishes that while the 50% reservation ceiling is the standard rule of thumb, extreme and extraordinary situations involving isolated or remote populations like the remote land locked North Eastern states may require rare relaxations with a well-established special justification.

After hearing the arguments of the counsels of those states which have high percentages of tribal population, the Supreme Court adopted as a precedent to be followed of the criteria spelt out in the said Indra Sawhney 1992 judgement. The Maratha Reservation Quota case judgement of May 5th, 2021 contains paragraphs 131 and 133 which reads as follows:

Para 131: "Thus, greatest common measure of agreement in six separate judgments delivered in Indra Sawhney is that (i). Reservation under Article 16(4) should not exceed 50%, (ii). For exceeding reservation beyond 50%, extraordinary circumstances as indicated in paragraph 810 of the Indra Sawhney case for which extreme caution is to be exercised." Para 133: We, thus, do not find any good ground to revisit the Indra Sawhney case or to refer the same to a larger Bench on the above ground."

Therefore, taking the Kerela Government versus NM Thomas case of 1976 and the Indra Sawhney versus Union of India case of 1992 and finally taking the Government of Maharashtra versus Innumerable Petitioners case of 2021, it is visibly evident that the 50% reservation ceiling limit rule laid down by the Supreme Court is not unalterable thereby allowing special considerations, exemptions and exceptions. Since the issue which I am clarifying here pertains to Meghalaya, hence, taking the submitted representation by the Attorney General of Meghalaya to the Supreme Court in the Maratha Reservation Case, I, most, emphatically state that reservation based on population does not hold water, is a fallacy.

Land Bill Issue: The main function of the raid land is to provide a piece of raid land to the indigenous household populace of the area who do not own land in order to prevent landlessness of the indigenous populace falling under the raid which is the true essence, intent and utility that the Raid Land is meant to serve. However, we have seen many a times how the "Raid Land" was misused or there are allegations of misuse by community leaders belonging to the Dorbar Shnong, Dorbar Raid and Dorbar Hima where large swathes of Raid Land have been sold to rich people consequently preventing the rural landless people belonging to those communities falling under the raid from getting free pieces of Raid Land which is their due right.

The Executive Member (EM) Land in his press conference had stated that on opening the files of past Executive Committees (EC) of the Land Department, it was glaringly noted that whenever the Rangbah of the Dorbars were called to solicit their opinion on regulation of Raid Land that this issue "lands" nowhere and was not met with a positive response. Hence the EC was forced to regulate the Raid Land via Land Ceiling which it further classified as "Raid Land Types" so that the poor, the needy and the landless will get a fair share of their in the Raid Land by way of systematized selling or handing over of this raid. This is the very intellection as to why Section 16 was removed because the Rangbah Dorbars allegedly failed to work together for the benefit of the people living under the Raids thereby stalling the entire process. Apparently, they do not want any regulation of the raid land. Readers, ask yourself this pertinent question, if removal of Section 16 from the Land Bill was so bad, they why haven't the people belonging to those raid land areas throughout the Khasi hills come forth in droves to protest in front of the KHADC office? The answer is that the action that the EC had taken is pro poor and is the right choice.

Like any other bill subject to scrutiny, two amendments to the Land Bill 2026 are needed. Firstly, the term "Breach" has to be abrogated since it has the potential to be misused by the people connected to the current MDCs or ex MDCs or future ECs or the ex and current MDCs themselves will take advantage of this word for which they will show cosmetic formality causes for such a breach when in fact the true intent for such a breach was never actually implemented in reality. Secondly, the Land Bill does not address clearly about the issue of "Land Types" whereby the same person can buy different land types or when friends or family members can buy the same land type or different types of land which the current Executive Council has classified. Hence, further clarification on these complexities is needed. These two points are glaring inducers to subvert the system which warrants necessary changes when the government will send its views to the KHADC.

It is hoped that clarification on these two important topics will enlighten the public regarding reservation and land, as reservation affects job and education prospects while land impacts the downtrodden. The National Socio-Economic studies reportedly state that 76% of Meghalaya's rural population is landless.

Do Not Sully the Tata Name

By Jagdish Rattanani

Recent developments at the Tata group will leave many with a distinct sense of unease. At the centre, headlining a deeper divide, are two dates, an uncomfortable turn and an obvious question: What transpired this year between August 12 and September 17 for the Chairman of Tata Sons, N Chandrasekaran, to take a dramatic U-turn on continuing as Chairman for another term of five years? The first date records Chandrasekaran as saying he would not offer himself for reappointment as Chairman after his current term because his continuation did not enjoy unanimous support. The second date marks an ugly, public acceptance of a new term in the face of continued, and indeed vociferous, opposition from the principal shareholder. The opposition to him comes in the voice of Noel N Tata, Chairman of the Tata Trusts, which own about 66% of Tata Sons. In simple words, this is a professional chairman holding on in the face of the majority owner asking him to go. That owner is not a family but a set of charitable trusts, whose widely celebrated model funds hospitals, research and relief from the dividends they receive.

Chandrasekaran's turn carries at least the whiff of a power grab, riding on what is feared to be partisan political meddling from the highest quarters. Such events would be a sign of disaster for any institution. But when this transpires at Tata Sons, the principal investment holding company and promoter of the Tata companies, the stakes are larger.

There is a second Tata Trusts nominee on the board of Tata Sons, the industrialist Venu Srinivasan, also Vice-Chairman of the Tata Trusts, who voted in favour of Chandrasekaran getting an extension. But the 'no' by Noel Tata is significant because under the Tata Sons Articles of Association (AoA), a majority of the Tata Trusts nominees on the Tata Sons board must approve any decision of that board. This is a protective mechanism that honours the pre-eminent ownership of the Tata Trusts, which is in effect armed with a veto to ensure that the board of Tata Sons is aligned with its majority shareholder.

What happens when the two Tata Trusts nominees vote differently? On a plain reading of the Articles, the resolution must fail because one out of two is not a majority. But the resolution is now said to have passed and holds, at least for now, framing a boardroom battle that will have its deleterious impact on the entire group.

The battle will be bitterly fought. On Sunday (September 20), the Tata Trusts issued a statement that said the appointment of Chandrasekaran was void ab initio because these decisions cannot be taken by a simple headcount of the board. The Tata Sons AoA, or rule book, "provide that no decision can be taken unless it has the affirmative support of at least a majority of the Directors nominated by the Tata Trusts," the statement said. That the Trusts have chosen to call out Chandrasekaran publicly, and in such clear terms, shows how far relations have broken down: "It is unfortunate that the Chairman of Tata Sons, a company renowned for setting high standards of corporate governance, is contending reappointment on such an untenable interpretation of the Articles."

Chandrasekaran's supporters will likely argue that the board majority has spoken, that one Trusts nominee backed him, and that his record at the helm has been strong. None of this settles the question. His record is not what is in dispute; the rules are. A protection written into the AoA precisely for situations such as these has, on the Trusts' reading, been overridden by the Tata Sons board. A Chairman assuming a new term in such a case weakens the very governance he is meant to embody. And even if the board's reading were to survive a legal challenge, the question of how a chairman accepts a new term in the teeth of opposition from his principal shareholder will linger.

The dispute is tied to listing. RBI rules require an "upper layer NBFC" to list, and the central bank has classified Tata Sons as one, even though the company has paid off its debts and therefore applied to deregister as an NBFC. Being allowed to deregister means Tata Sons comes under no compulsion to list, which is what the Tata Trusts seek, reiterating a long-held Tata view. But this application to deregister was rejected by the RBI in September, after lying pending for over two years, days before the crucial September 17 board meeting. The RBI also filed a caveat in the courts asking to be heard if its decision was challenged, a highly unusual move, leading to fears that someone from New Delhi might be pulling the strings. The regulator owes an explanation for this timing.

Supporters of listing argue that it will mean tighter supervision and more open governance. Yet there is something unseemly about lecturing the Tatas on governance when the group has long been prized for its leadership in governance and charity, whatever its lapses. More to the point, the listing rule exists to contain systemic risk from large finance companies that run on borrowed money. Tata Sons has repaid its debt. Forcing it to list applies a rule to an entity it no longer fits. The Trusts say that "pulling apart a hundred-year-old structure to fill an imaginary gap is taking a sledgehammer to crack a nut." *Listing will* help minority shareholders, notably the debt-ridden Shapoorji Pallonji (SP) group, get the full market price for its 18.4% holding. Getting a fair value for its holding is a reasonable ask from the point of view of the SP group, which has welcomed the majority board decision to list. But there are other ways to meet that ask, such as a buyout of the SP stake at an independently determined fair value, that honour the stand of the Tata Trusts against listing.

This is not the first time that the Tata group has faced a crisis. In 2016, when the Trusts under Ratan Tata lost confidence in Cyrus Mistry, the board removed him as Chairman, and the Supreme Court later upheld that decision. This time, for the first time, the board has sided with a Chairman against the controlling shareholder. Would events have played out this way without a nod from political circles backing the side opposed to the majority owner? The government must resist the temptation to pick sides here. It must instead build bridges. Partisan meddling in a private institution is dangerous for everyone, not only the Tatas: if a regulator can be drawn into one boardroom fight, it can be drawn into any.

The Tata group is a national icon, a picture of enterprise, growth and service packed in a business model that many Indians cherish and hold as an exemplar. That model, in which the bulk of a great enterprise's profits flows to charitable trusts for the public good, is rare anywhere in the world. It should not be dismantled by regulatory overreach without a clear, stated reason. Nor should its future turn on a chairman's reading of rules that his principal shareholder rejects. On August 12, Chandrasekaran said he would not continue without unanimous support. He should hold to that word, and the RBI should explain itself.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Through The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Minimizing Pay Disparity & Introduction of Proper Performance Appraisal System

Editor,

The large pay disparity among public servants—be it in the teaching profession, medical field or other services—has created widespread dissatisfaction and disgruntlement, especially among persons performing the same or similar duties with equivalent qualifications. This issue was also deliberated by the Hon'ble Chief Minister in the last Assembly Session, which drew reactions from certain sections of society.

The main difference in salary is between those drawing State Pay and those drawing Central Pay or higher pay structures (such as UGC, AICTE, Judicial Service, etc.). For instance, a Lecturer/Professor drawing Central/UGC pay draws substantially more than a Secretary, Director, Chief Engineer or Medical Specialist drawing State Pay.

Pay structure has become a burning issue in social media and the print media in the last one week, to the extent that there was a move for the removal of one of the most brilliant, hardworking, and most accessible senior IAS officer, Vijay Kumar Mantri, without appreciating his sincere attempts to resolve other long-pending matters in the departments under his charge.

Considering that everyone depends on the same market, pays the same electricity bills, transport fares and other expenses, it is a grave injustice that public servants should face such huge discrimination in salary for serving the same Government.

To reduce this disparity, it is strongly suggested that:

1. The State Government should adopt, Central Pay for all public servants like in other North Eastern States, to ensure equity and justice in remuneration.

2. Simultaneously, the Government should put in place a proper mechanism to ensure Performance Accountability and full-time presence in the workplace. A strict performance appraisal system based on the principle of "Perform or Perish," as practised in the private sector, should be introduced with the implementation of the upgraded Pay Scale.

Pay parity with performance accountability will not only restore morale but will also improve efficiency and public service delivery.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

After the Sentence, What Authority Keeps a Foreigner in Prison?

Editor,

The Meghalaya High Court, in W.P.(C) No. 91/2026, has brought to light a grave lapse in deportation cell and immigration administration. What initially emerged as 17 foreign nationals lodged in Shillong District Jail despite completion of their sentences reportedly rose to 28. One Myanmar national is stated to have remained in custody for over a decade beyond his sentence, while a Bangladeshi national remained incarcerated for four years thereafter. Persons suspected to be foreign nationals have also been identified in the district jails at Tura, Williamnagar and Nongpoh. It is sad to note herein that there are prisoners reportedly between 70 and 81 years of age.

A foreign national completing a sentence does not, by that fact alone, acquire a right to remain in India where deportation is otherwise legally possible. It is equally emphasised that the administrative inability to secure repatriation cannot furnish a lawful basis for indefinite incarceration. Article 21 mandates that deprivation of personal liberty must be authorised by law and follow a fair procedure.

The immediate remedy lies in institutional coordination. The Home and Political Department should, in accordance with applicable MHA 2019 guidelines, designate an appropriate government facility as a temporary transit/holding camp, distinct from ordinary prisons, until a permanent facility is established.

The Meghalaya Police, FRO/FRRO and Ministry of External Affairs should forthwith liaise with the concerned diplomatic missions. Where necessary, video conferencing with embassy officials, subject to verification of identity and nationality, may facilitate emergency travel certificates and other requisite documentation.

A dedicated coordination mechanism should maintain a case-wise timeline covering nationality verification, documentation and repatriation, commencing well before completion of sentence wherever nationality is established.

Every prison must thereafter maintain a digital sentence-expiry alert system to ensure timely administrative action.

Yours etc.,
Shahin Yusuf
Guwahati

The High Stakes of Choice

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to draw the urgent attention of the state government, education department, and the public to a distressing trend in our society: the alarming rise in school dropouts and the subsequent surge in youth drug addiction, heavily triggered by the rigid screening systems in PREBOARD-SELECTION of MBOSE.

In many schools across Shillong especially schools affiliated to MBOSE, the selection test acts as a severe filtration point. In a bid to secure 100% pass percentages in the Board examinations (SSLC), schools frequently detain or fail students who do not meet a certain academic benchmark. Instead of receiving remedial support, these young teenagers are abruptly filtered out of the formal education system.

Left with a sense of failure, rejection, and sudden emptiness, many of these young dropouts become highly vulnerable. Without the daily structure of school or constructive avenues for their energy, a growing number of them fall prey to the rampant drug menace gripping our neighbourhoods. The transition from an "academic failure" to a substance abuser is happening at an incredibly rapid pace among our youth.

We cannot prioritize institutional board results over the lives and futures of our children. Schools must pivot from eliminating weak students to supporting them through counselling and targeted remedial classes. Furthermore, the government need to provide proper instructions and to abolish this screening system for all students. Every student deserves the right to attempt the board exams after completing their academic year. Filtering them out at the last stage disproportionately impacts students from vulnerable backgrounds who cannot afford private tuition. The need to introduce accessible vocational training and skill-development programs specifically tailored for dropouts to keep them engaged and employable is important.

If we do not address this systemic failure in our schooling system immediately, we will continue to lose an entire generation to crime and addiction. I earnestly hope the concerned authorities take proactive measures before the situation deteriorates further.

Yours etc.,
M. Dkhar,
Shillong

Public Roads Don't Belong to VIPs

Editor,

What's with the blazing sirens and the escorts of our public representatives? They ply on the road with so much speed as if they own the road. Unabashed they rush through, flouting and disrespecting traffic rules with no inhibitions. Just last week, I experienced the ire of the escorts at Golf Links who angrily waved at vehicles signalling that we must all steer clear of the black topped road so that the government vehicle and its entourage can pass through the smoothened road uninterrupted. It does not really matter to them if a common man's vehicle plunges into the drain or even hits pedestrians. They have but one goal: to see to it that their boss's vehicle must not be stranded in traffic nor must it be disturbed. Moving at the speed of a missile it looks like they perceive every other citizen as insignificant. I fail to understand the high-handedness of those in power but as an ordinary human being, I hope sanity, wisdom and humanity will dawn on them sooner than later.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

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

"Let your hopes, not your hurts, shape your future."
— Robert H. Schuller

The Shillong Times

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Post-NEET Counselling Imbroglio

WHEN the public is agitated for the right reasons, the newspaper provides a space for airing their concerns. This year, following the traumatic experience of students sitting for the NEET exams twice due to a question paper leak, confusion is compounded by the seat allotment following the counselling sessions for students in Meghalaya who have passed their NEET exams. There are reasons why the NEET counselling in Meghalaya has become so confusing and controversial this year. Normally counselling sessions are meant to soothe and calm the nerves of students as they embark on a 5-year journey of medical studies. It was a case of poor communication or miscommunication, as the process has been repeatedly altered and restarted. It is not that parents and students have misunderstood the rules.

The official Meghalaya Health Department has ordered a fresh round of counselling and instituted a grievance-redressal mechanism with multiple counselling notifications for MBBS/BDS admissions for 2026–27. The question is: what has caused the confusion leading to such uncertainty and mental trauma for students and their parents? It appears that the original allotment has effectively been disrupted. Meghalaya Government issued a list of selected candidates for MBBS and BDS seats on September 11, but following objections to the allotment process, the Government ordered a fresh counselling process. Reports say the earlier MBBS allotment was scrapped following objections raised by the Jaintia Students' Union. This has created grave uncertainty for a student who believed she had secured a seat and was just waiting to join the allotted medical college. The problem is that there are different pools of seats -- the Meghalaya State Quota seats; the Central Rool seats; the Shillong Medical College seats; Government-sponsored seats and seats handled through the MCC/All-India Quota; MBBS/BDS and other medical courses. The Meghalaya Government's own notices combine several of these categories, making the process difficult for ordinary applicants to follow. Furthermore, the national counselling and Meghalaya counselling are running simultaneously. The MCC has its own NEET UG counselling schedule. Results for the final second round were out on September 12, while Round 3 registration is scheduled for September 22. Meanwhile, Meghalaya is conducting its own State/central-pool counselling and has now issued a combined SOP providing four rounds, including a stray-vacancy round.

So a candidate is now simultaneously dealing with: NEET result, MCC counselling, Meghalaya counselling, seat allotment, possible re-counselling, and reporting. That is a recipe for anxiety unless the authorities communicate exceptionally clearly. And that is the crux of the matter: the rules have not been communicated in one simple document. Meanwhile the Government's latest SOP acknowledges the communication problem. It states that the State counselling control room will issue notifications, FAQs, bilingual information material and instructional videos, and will monitor social media for misinformation and fake notices. This clearly shows that the Government has failed in information management. As of now, students are bogged down by uncertainty over who is entitled to what. Parents now wonder if the eligibility criteria, merit, category, domicile/reservation provisions and seat allocation principles have been applied consistently. Some parents have publicly alleged anomalies in the combined counselling process and complained about transparency and consistency. While these are allegations they also reflect a distrust in the system since an allotted seat is cancelled and fresh counselling ordered. Hence students who were not responsible for any error have to bear the consequences.

Meghalaya's Draft Agricultural Policy. Perspectives and Suggestions

By Toki Blah

The Shillong Times dated September 13, 2026, tucked away on the right-hand side of page 3, carried a news report titled "Meghalaya's first agri policy seeks to shift focus from farm output to farmer income." The news item continued to say that the policy was still in its draft form, still available for public consultation and yet to be finalised!

We attained statehood in 1972 and woke up only in 2026, 54 years down the line, to realise that we need an "Agricultural Policy" to streamline the livelihood, fortunes and destiny of 80% of the State's population (if Meghalaya's total population is 35 lakhs then 28 lakhs of this population) who are in the rural sector totally dependent on Agriculture and allied activities for their livelihood. A painful question arises. One that cannot be ignored. What the bloody hell then were the priorities that our honourable elected representatives discussed and debated in the Legislative Assembly for the last Half Century? Did none of them realise the critical importance Agriculture plays in the day-to-day lives of the rural poor and that this important sector needed guidelines in the form of a policy? Are we to understand that for the last 54 years, centrally oriented schemes, whether suitable or not, were the only agricultural instructions available for our farmers to sustain themselves? Shameful, is the only word that comes to mind!

It's shocking to realise the hard truth but worse is that when such an important policy matter is being announced, news of the same does not even find mention on the front page. Front page News Headlines of September 13, instead were full of reports on the "Aaya Ram, Gaya Ram" antics of our MLAs. This depraved nonsense of political fence jumping from one party to another is entertaining news that sells. It occupies the time of our MLAs and saps the emotions of the people. Balderdash and baloney come first, Governance and development can wait. The welfare of the people can wait. It seems we have learnt nothing from 54 wasted years. This realisation, however, should not in the least diminish the dire urgency of finalising the said draft; discussing it on the floor of the Assembly; passing it as an Act of the State; and finally implementing it in the field as early as possible. For the record, despite everything, Conrad Sangma and his MDA II Government are to be congratulated for introducing the draft policy. The Government the Agriculture Minister and the officers of the Department involved in this welcome though belated act are to be appreciated. Better late than never. The news report has called for suggestions, views and comments from concerned stakeholders. My take on the issue: if you have something to say, say it quick and let's be done with it. Waiting half a century for a Policy is inexcusable. Let's not play with people's lives anymore. It's sinful!

The limited space often allotted to articles in The Shillong Times will not allow this op-ed to address each and every aspect of this crucially momentous document under discussion. One therefore has to resort to the next best alternative by highlighting the most critical or core sectors that demand specific stimulus and attention. The most important mission statement made is the declared shift from Agricultural growth to the enhancement of Agricultural Income. This is a major paradigm shift with enormous potential for lifting the rural sector from its current poverty status. The draft Agri Policy has detailed the many issues responsible for this poverty and proposals on how to tackle them. One such proposal that I find quite exciting is the recognition that each of the 12 districts of Meghalaya is a distinct agro-ecological and cultural zone with its own crop traditions, governance systems and landscape management practices. Each district therefore requires a distinct unique approach of its own. Another thrust area template of the Policy is the proposal to address endemic assets of global standing that Meghalaya holds but which are still undervalued because of a lack of certification, documentation and proper market linkages. One such asset is our famous Lakadong turmeric. The Draft Policy also states that the rationale is not only to create value where none exists, but also to ensure the value already inherent in Meghalaya's agriculture is captured by the people who produce it. Our Sohphlang or Flemingia vestita is another unrecognised asset. Friends who have experimented claim its excellent qualities as a cocktail chaser and drink snack. It can be tried as a high-value, low-overhead organic product for the luxury cocktail market. Just an idea for value addition for some of our endemic products.

The Draft Policy recognises the ground reality regarding the fragility of our upland farmers. They are agriculturists with small holdings unable to achieve the scale required for viable market participation, input efficiency or effective negotiation with buyers. The Policy therefore advocates systemic overhaul in this sector too. Farmer collectives have been identified as the primary mechanism for aggregating dispersed production into market-relevant volumes. Aggregation is also the only route by which certification, traceability and buyer contracts, each of which carries a fixed cost, become affordable for an individual producer. Farmer Collectives as a Thrust Area for Development in the Agri sector has therefore been proposed. This is crucial. This is the turning point for change to happen. Collectives will be run on a commercial basis rather than on a stand-alone standard scheme. This is the institutional foundation on which the thrust area is built. A strategy will be adopted where the State shall expand its cooperative network into a movement of community-owned farmer institutions, rooted in traditions of collective organisation, that give farmers ownership of their value chains and a share in the returns. Cooperatives shall be positioned as enduring social enterprises in which farmers participate as members and investors, draw benefits through quality inputs, advisory services and assured forward linkages, and share in dividends generated from collective enterprise.

Considering the various constraints that our individual small farmers face, the idea of introducing collectives such as Cooperatives or SHGs to enhance the market viability of their products is an excellent idea. History, however, must be taken into account and the history of the Cooperative movement in these hills has been a wretched failure. So before this ambitious Policy is put into action we need to understand the causes of these past failures. Truth is the cooperative movement in Meghalaya in the past was beset with severe setbacks ranging from poor management, lack of trained full-time staff, and most damagingly, the public perception that cooperatives were merely government departmental schemes rather than autonomous people-driven enterprises. There was a lack of people's understanding of the Cooperative movement. People saw it as Sarkari and never really felt any sense of ownership over the Cooperative movement. If Farmer collectives are being proposed as the cornerstone for the proposed Agri Policy, then this feeling of detachment by the main stakeholder must change drastically. It is important for farmers to be comfortable with being members of a cooperative; eager optimism must replace scepticism; transparency and accountability must support all activities of each collective unit while member articulation and participation in society meetings should be encouraged and most importantly, there should be facilitation for members to have a sense of ownership over their respective societies. It is in this context that I suggest how this could be achieved and sustained.

The need for Government facilitation to instill a sense of people's ownership over their respective Cooperative Societies or Cluster societies cannot be overemphasized. There are two ways this can be done. First, to instill this feeling of ownership in practising farmers who are already operating in the field. It can be done in a concentrated phased pilot scheme manner. Second, I would like to draw the attention of the Agri Deptt to a small booklet titled "Training module on Entrepreneurship and soft skills" published by Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT) Meghalaya , 2025. The concept of the cooperative movement; the idea of participatory development; the viability of the economies of scale over small individual entrepreneurship can be part of our rural school curriculum, say from class 6 or 7 upwards. Classes need not be everyday. They can be held once a week or even fortnightly. The idea is to familiarise the rural student, our future farmer, theoretically and practically on the benefits of working together in a participatory manner. The Policy can encourage the Government to guide and support current and future farmers on managing issues together, such as value addition, shelf life preservation of perishable crops, transportation, accounting procedures, and marketing of farm products. These are the Soft Skills that our rural agriculturists lack. The need is to help them strengthen their perception of ownership over their farms, its produce and to make Agriculture and its allied activities economically sustainable for those who depend on it for a livelihood.

Why disaster risk reduction must begin before disaster strikes

Meghalaya's unsafe buildings: Disaster is round the corner

By Dr. E.S. Langshiang

A Beautiful State with Growing Risk

Meghalaya is known for its beautiful hills, heavy rainfall and rapidly growing towns. But these same geographical and climatic conditions can increase the risks faced by buildings and communities. Earthquakes, landslides, intense rainfall and slope instability can turn an already vulnerable building into a serious hazard.

Whenever a building develops major cracks, suffers structural damage or shows signs of deterioration, the immediate concern is often whether it will collapse. But the larger question is: Are there other buildings in the surrounding area with similar risks? A disaster involving one building should therefore become an opportunity to examine the safety of other vulnerable structures before another incident occurs.

When Buildings Become Hazards

Buildings are intended to provide safety and shelter. However, unsafe construction, poor maintenance, unauthorized alterations, overloading, weak foundations, water seepage and poor-quality workmanship can gradually make a building vulnerable. In Meghalaya, the risk is greater because of the State's high earthquake hazard, heavy monsoon rainfall, steep terrain and landslide-prone slopes. Heavy rainfall can saturate the ground, weaken slopes and affect foundations and retaining structures. An earthquake can then place sudden additional stress on already weakened buildings. A building that appears safe during normal conditions may therefore become dangerous during an earthquake, intense rainfall or landslide. The risk is not only in the building itself; it is also in where it is built, how it is constructed and how well the surrounding slope and drainage are managed.

The Warning Signs Must Not Be Ignored

Unsafe buildings often provide warning signs before serious failure. These may include new or widening cracks, uneven floors, leaning walls or columns, water seepage, exposed or rusting reinforcement, falling concrete, damaged foundations and deteriorating retaining walls. Not every crack means that a building will collapse. However, serious or increasing defects should not be ignored. They should be inspected by a qualified technical professional. A building that has remained standing for years is not necessarily a safe building. Familiarity must never be mistaken for safety.

Beyond Cosmetic Repairs

Structural problems are sometimes treated as cosmetic defects. Cracks are filled, plaster is replaced, roofs are patched and buildings are repainted. Such maintenance may be necessary, but it does not necessarily address the underlying structural problem. A coat of paint can hide a crack, but it cannot repair a damaged structure. Where serious defects are suspected, proper technical assessment should determine whether the building requires repair, strengthening, retrofitting, restricted use or, where necessary, demolition. The objective must be to make a building genuinely safe, not merely make it look safe.

Rules Must Lead to Action

Meghalaya has building regulations and technical standards intended to promote safe construction. The National Building Code of India, 2016 (NBC 2016) provides important provisions relating to structural safety, earthquake-resistant design, fire and life safety, building services and construction practices. The Meghalaya Building Bye-Laws, 2021 also provide an important regulatory framework for building development in applicable areas. The challenge, however, is not simply having rules. Rules must be followed, monitored and enforced.

Unauthorized construction, additional floors, unsafe structural alterations, blocked drainage, inadequate access and construction on vulnerable slopes can increase disaster risk. Building permissions and safety requirements should therefore not be treated merely as administrative procedures.

Schools and Public Buildings Must Come First

Schools, hospitals, government offices, markets and other public buildings deserve particular attention because large numbers of people may occupy them at the same time. A school building, for example, may appear ordinary during normal days. But during an earthquake or fire, inadequate exits, weak structures, overcrowding or blocked access can turn a manageable emergency into a major disaster. Regular structural and fire-safety inspections, followed by corrective action, should therefore be given priority in high-occupancy buildings.

Think Beyond the Individual Building

Building safety cannot be considered in isolation. In many growing towns, several buildings may be located close together, sometimes along narrow roads or steep slopes.

Before approving or developing high-density areas, authorities and planners should consider simple but critical questions:

- Can fire engines and ambulances reach the area?
- Are evacuation routes available and accessible?
- Are drainage systems adequate during heavy rainfall?
- Are retaining walls and slopes stable?
- Can buildings withstand earthquake forces?
- Where can people safely assemble after evacuation?

These are not merely planning questions. They are disaster risk reduction measures.

Technology Can Strengthen Monitoring

Technology can help authorities identify and monitor vulnerable buildings more effectively. Building permissions, approved plans and inspection records can be digitized and linked to locations.

High-risk buildings can be identified for periodic inspection, while photographs, inspection reports and structural assessments can help track changes over time. Where construction differs significantly from approved plans, timely inspection and enforcement should follow.

Technology, however, should support—not replace—professional inspection and responsible enforcement.

Communities Are the First Line of Awareness

When a building collapses, catches fire or is affected by a landslide, local residents are often present before emergency services arrive. They may alert authorities, help people evacuate, provide basic first aid and identify persons who may be trapped.

Communities therefore need basic disaster preparedness. Residents, local volunteers, market associations, schools and community organizations can be trained in evacuation, first aid, fire safety, emergency communication and identifying vulnerable persons.

Simple emergency drills and awareness programmes can save valuable minutes when every minute matters.

From Response to Prevention

Disaster management should not begin only after a building collapses. It should begin when the risk is identified.

Building safety audits should therefore lead to action. A dangerous building should not remain dangerous simply because an inspection report has been prepared. Depending on the findings, appropriate measures may include repair, strengthening, retrofitting, evacuation, restricted occupancy or removal of the structure.

Inspection without action does not reduce risk.

The Question We Must Ask Today

Meghalaya cannot prevent earthquakes, heavy rainfall or landslides. But we can reduce the damage they cause. Building owners must understand the risks associated with their buildings and act when warning signs appear. Authorities must enforce safety requirements, and communities must remain prepared. The important question is not: "When will the building collapse?" but: "What can we do today to prevent it?"

A Safer and More Resilient Meghalaya

Unsafe buildings should not become accepted as a normal part of urban growth. Development and safety must go together.

Meghalaya needs a stronger culture of inspection, maintenance, enforcement, preparedness and community participation. Every building owner, engineer, architect, contractor, authority and occupant has a role to play. Disaster preparedness is not simply about rescuing people after a building collapses. It is about identifying the risk, reducing the vulnerability and preventing the collapse in the first place.

Building safety is not only about the building itself. It is also about where it is built, how it is built, how the surrounding slope and drainage are managed, and whether the owner recognizes and addresses risks before they become disasters. The time to act is before the next earthquake, before the next landslide and before the next heavy rainfall exposes a weakness that could have been corrected today.

(DECLARATION: This article was written with the assistance of AI for clarity, structure and word-count requirements. The author remains responsible for the content and final version).

Letters to the Editor

Punishment for obtaining a Ph.D

Editor,

This letter is written with two purposes. First, to draw the attention of the Education Department, Government of Meghalaya, to the matter; and second, to update my colleagues and friends who have been enquiring about the progress of the case.

The Directorate of Higher and Technical Education (DHTE), Government of Meghalaya has deprived me of my legitimate gratuity amounting to rupees 10 lakh. The Department has asked me to first refund an alleged "overdrawal" on account of Ph.D. increments before releasing my gratuity. This is not only surprising but also against the UGC provisions. I joined St. Anthony's College, Shillong, as a lecturer in November 1988, completed my Ph.D. in January 1996, and retired as an Associate professor in 2022. The alleged 'overdrawal' pertains to two advance increments that I received when I was promoted to the Selection Grade in 1999. The DHTE has taken the view that, since I had already been granted two advance increments on obtaining my Ph.D., I was not entitled to receive two advance increments on promotion to the Selection Grade. This interpretation, however overlooks the fact that the Selection Grade increments were a continuation of the incentives already granted for acquiring the Ph.D., and were not mutually exclusive benefits. This position is clearly supported by clauses 6.3.0 and 6.4.0 of UGC Circular No.F.3-1/94(PS), dated 24th December, 1998 which deal with independent and distinct situations and are not mutually exclusive. Continuation of the increments at the time of promotion to the Selection Grade has also been reiterated in another UGC Circular No.F.5-3/2001(PS) dated 31st August 2001. By seeking to recover these increments after such a long period and treating the Selection Grade benefit as an "overdrawal", DHTE is, in effect, denying a benefit applicable under the UGC provisions. Such action would place Ph.D. holders on virtually the same footing as non-Ph.D. holders, defeating the very purpose and intent of the UGC's incentive schemes for higher qualifications. In effect, instead of continuing the benefit, the Department is seeking to withdraw and recover it retrospectively.

Considering the unjust decision of the DHTE, I have been approaching the offices of the Education Department seeking justice since 2021. During this period, I have had discussions with 2 Commissioners, 1 Secretary, 2 Directors, 3 Deputy Directors, 1 Director of the Directorate of Local Fund Audit (DLFA), and 3 Joint Directors of the DLFA. Almost all these officials expressed the view that I am eligible for two advance increments at the time of being placed in the Selection Grade after 11 years of service. In fact, during this period, the Commissioner also sought the opinion of the Advocate General, Meghalaya, on the matter and subsequently received the AG's opinion on 29/09/2023. The Commissioner reportedly forwarded the matter to the Director for appropriate action at their end. But nothing materialized.

However, despite repeated representations and assurances, no order has been issued by the competent authority, leaving the matter unresolved. Whenever I approached an officer, I submitted copies of every relevant document when requested. As nothing has progressed despite my repeated efforts, I was left with two options: either to take legal recourse or to bring the matter to the attention of the media. I have chosen the latter. Many people have been asking me about the outcome of my prolonged efforts and repeated visits to the concerned offices. This letter is also an answer to them.

Yours etc.,
Dr. N.C.Bharali,
Shillong

Need for Digital Discipline, Not Total Ban on Smartphones

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I would like to share my views on the two letters published recently suggesting a ban on children using smartphones, and the similar demand made by one of our respected MLAs. (The ST dated 11 & 15 Sep '26 refers.)

While I appreciate their concern about the ill-effects of excessive screen time on children, I feel that a total ban is neither practical nor possible in the present context.

During the two spells of Covid-19, when schools were closed, the smartphone saved the academic year. Classes were imparted through smartphones. Even now, many tutors continue to teach through smartphones and many study materials are shared online.

Some schools here in Shillong intimate their intended school events and examination dates/schedules through mobile phones.

Today, the smartphone is a single-window device. It has made the school atlas, globe, calculator, dictionary and encyclopedia obsolete. At home, it has replaced the TV, camera, radio, clock and calendar.

When children see all their elders glued to their phones, asking them to abstain becomes difficult, if not impossible.

The writers have cited examples of some countries making laws to ban children from using smartphones, but the success of such laws is yet to be assessed.

Instead of a total ban, I would like to suggest a balanced approach. Children should not be ordered but requested to use smartphones judiciously and in moderation, to avoid backlash. They should be reminded that there is time for everything: time for reading lessons, for exercise, for physical play, outdoor activities, for proper sleep, and for family interactions, and so on.

Let us teach our children digital discipline rather than imposing an unenforceable ban.

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri
Shillong -2

Why Are Roads in Cantonment Area Falling Apart So Quickly

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I would like to draw the urgent attention of the concerned authorities of Shillong Cantonment to the dilapidated condition of Trenching Ground Road in Jhalupara, Shillong 2.

In several places, the road is dotted with large, deep potholes. Smooth movement of vehicles is almost impossible. The situation becomes particularly worrisome during the morning hours. Parents rushing to drop their children off at school often get caught in traffic. Yes, vehicles crawl along, dodging potholes and squeezing past one another, which often leads to traffic jams.

The problem becomes worse after the rains. Many potholes usually remain "filled with water", making it difficult for drivers to judge their depth. The situation becomes particularly unpleasant when vehicles pass through these water-filled potholes, splashing dirty water onto pedestrians walking along the road.

What is particularly fishy is that this stretch of road was probably repaired barely five months ago. If so, why has it deteriorated so quickly? Such premature damage raises serious questions. Were substandard materials used? Was the workmanship poor, or was there inadequate supervision? The Cantonment Board authorities should look into the matter and ensure that contractors entrusted with public works strictly maintain the required standards.

I would also like to mention that this connecting road to the highway is important, as it serves traffic from Lower Mawprem and even from the Mawlai side. Many drivers take this route to avoid congestion on GS Road. As a result, the road often carries a considerable volume of traffic every day.

Hence the Cantonment Board authorities are requested to take up the matter with all seriousness. Contracts for such works must go only to competent, honest and responsible contractors. If a newly repaired road starts breaking up within months, taxpayers have every right to speak up -- did they pay for a proper road or merely for a thin coat of asphalt?

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali
Shillong

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

"The great gift of human beings is that we have the power of empathy."

—Meryl Streep

The Shillong Times

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Democracy, Jungle Raj

EXERCISING one's mind on matters of critical importance to national well-being is rare today, as society is caught in the cacophony of mutual recriminations by politicians and other lesser known players. In a scenario where the media gives exposure to politicians and sensational matters, major issues rarely come up for public discourse. With the quality of parliament and legislature debates having shrunk to rock bottom and when bills are passed and new laws made without substantial discussions, the overall scenario is depressingly below par. In this context, a silver lining was an event organised by the Centre for Discourses on Criminal and Constitutional Jurisprudence at the India International Centre in the national capital recently. This occasioned some soul-searching on the part of senior judges of the Supreme Court, most notably by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan. More such discussions should stir the public mind about the way this nation functions today.

Among several matters of deviations from well-laid-out principles of democratic functioning of a nation, Justice Ujjal Bhayan noted that criminal cases registered on frivolous grounds are making the Indian judicial system an "object of ridicule" before the liberal democratic world. He cited instances of arrests and jailing on flimsy grounds like consuming food (like beef), participating in demonstrations, raising slogans, making comments on social media, performing as a stand-up comedian etc. This has become a common practice in this temple of democracy. Arrests are made and shameful acts of handcuffing done at the drop of a hat. Merely touching a girl can invite jail for decades under provisions of the POSCO act. A stare on a woman can lead to arrest and jail. Anyone from, say, the Muslim minority can be arrested at will on the charge of support to terrorism. In other words, cherished provisions of the Constitution that guaranteed freedom and liberty to individuals are getting subverted through promulgation of new draconian laws. Vested interests in the establishment are behind such framing of laws. The new Neeti Sanhita introduced by home minister Amit Shah under the Modi dispensation, like most other lukewarm, half-hearted, motivated reform processes, have made little difference to the existing ills plaguing the policing systems or justice dispensation systems.

Situations similar to those existing in an Islamic theocratic state like Saudi Arabia are created here by an irresponsible governmental system. There's no one to raise a finger against such indulgences, other than for stray voices of sanity as have now emerged from a senior Supreme Court judge. When a judge of the apex court speaks up, it stirs the nation's conscience, but not the frozen minds of those who govern this nation at its apex. The NDA government headed by Narendra Modi for three terms has increasingly been showing a tendency to muffle dissent, muscle-flex the media to toe its lines or singing paeans of it, and is taking the nation away from the high democratic traditions set by its founding fathers. These are sad times. While the guiding spirit of the present dispensation is the RSS, this entity's stress is on religion even at the cost of national unity and well-being.

The UDP Rebels, the BJP and the Risk of Broken Promises

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

It appears that the very move intended to balance the distribution of power among the different partners has instead contributed to the crisis now plaguing the UDP, with eight of its 12 members having switched to the BJP on Wednesday. While the mid-term reshuffle affected the BJP as well, with Shanbor Shullai replacing AL Hek in the cabinet, the change did not give rise to any controversy. For the UDP, the move led to Metbah Lyngdoh and Lahkmen Rymbui being inducted into the government at the expense of Paul Lyngdoh and Kyrmen Shylla. Even Ampareen Lyngdoh was caught by surprise at the reshuffle, which saw her being removed from the cabinet while she was attending the All India Agriculture Ministers' Conference in Delhi as the state's agriculture minister. She did express her displeasure at not being informed, but later accepted the decision. On the other hand, the unhappiness over the reshuffle has led to an open revolt within the UDP, with the demise of a once-powerful regional force looking imminent.

The rebels have justified their switch by asserting that they joined the BJP after they got firm assurances on their four demands, viz., inclusion of Khasi in the Eighth Schedule, exemptions on coal mining, the Them Iew Mawlong relocation question, and implementation of the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act. But what do "firm assurances" mean? Will those demands be met within a month or two of the UDP legislators joining the party? Or will these demands become part of the election manifesto of the BJP when they contest the next Assembly Election in 2028? This is where the case of Sonam Wangchuk and Ladakh becomes very pertinent.

Initially, Sonam Wangchuk welcomed the abrogation of Article 370 and the creation of Ladakh as a Union Territory, believing that it would give Ladakh greater political autonomy. However, the abrogation of Article 370 – a constitutional provision that, among other things, gave protection to the land rights of local communities – also left Ladakh without any legislation to protect their land from encroachment. Therefore, political and civil-society leaders in Ladakh, including Wangchuk, subsequently sought constitutional safeguards in the form of Article 244A under the Sixth Schedule. The BJP, in fact, supported the demand and promised the inclusion of Ladakh under the Sixth Schedule during the 2020 Hill Council elections. Not surprisingly, the BJP won 15 of the 26 seats and formed the government.

However, after the election, the BJP did not make any move to live up to its promise of giving the Sixth Schedule to Ladakh. Protests began soon after, and in 2024, more than 100 people, including Wangchuk, marched to Delhi to draw attention to Ladakh's environmental concerns and constitutional demands. Talks kept going on between the leadership in Ladakh and New Delhi, but the demands were not met. Then, in 2025, a planned 35-day hunger strike in support of the demands began on September 10. After 15 days, the protest turned violent, with four people being killed, forcing Wangchuk to end his fast and appeal for peace. The Union Government blamed the violence on "provocative speeches" by Wangchuk. He was arrested and charged under the National Security Act (NSA), which allows a suspect to be detained for up to 12 months without being formally charged. He was released after 170 days.

So, what do "firm assurances" mean in the context of Meghalaya? The BJP might give an early date, maybe a month or two, for all the demands to be fulfilled. But as the timeline approaches, they might ask for an extension of the deadline, citing procedural issues, pushing the deadline closer to the 2028 election. This could mean that the BJP is using the assurances as a delaying tactic, allowing it to strengthen its organisation by tapping into the grassroots networks of the rebel MLAs. By then, the newly inducted MLAs would have already 'wined and dined' with the top leadership of the BJP, who have assured them of greater political influence in the future. As such, the political incentives for these MLAs to leave the BJP would have changed, regardless of whether all the demands are ultimately fulfilled. These rebel UDP MLAs have now become die-hard BJP supporters, and would have little incentive to leave the party. But who are these future Modi-bhakts?

So finally the eight UDP MLAs who travelled to Delhi to meet Shah on August 10, accompanied by Patra, namely Lahkmen Rymbui (Amlarem), Kyrmen Shylla (Khliehriat), Balajiedkupar Synrem (Shella), Synshar Lyngdoh Thabah (Sohiong), Pius Marweiñ (Ranikor), Mayralborn Syiem (Nongpoh), Ollan Sing Suin (Mawsynram), and Matthew Kurbah (Mawphlang) are now baptized into the saffron party. How many of these MLAs would be willing to follow a path similar to Wangchuk's if the BJP ultimately fails to fulfil the assurances they have received? Who among them will lead an agitation against the BJP if the party does not fulfill the demands and go on a hunger strike? Who will be the ones to court arrest under the NSA and stay in jail for six months? If the demands are not met for that would be the only option left.

So, I guess what might happen is that some of the demands would be met, but not all of them. This will give these rebels an excuse to continue with the BJP despite not all of the demands being met. The correct approach, however, would have been to join the BJP after all the demands have been fulfilled. That way, there will be no charge of political opportunism against them. But as things stand now, the perception among the public is that of betrayal, and that could have grave consequences for the rebels.

The next Assembly election is just 17 months away. So, the rebels have to be very sure that their move would be well-received by their supporters. Kyrmen Shylla tried to create that perception by organizing a public meeting where those gathered were asked if they consented to his move to the BJP. Reportedly, a large section stood up in favour. Maybe they are the die-hard Kyrmen Shylla supporters or Shylla-bhakts, and we will only know for sure if the rest of the constituents agree with his move after the next election. So, if he and the rebel UDP MLAs win the next election, and the BJP comes back to power in Delhi, their political careers will look very bright. If they lose their elections but the BJP still wins the next General Assembly election, they will still be in a good position. There is a high possibility that they may still get some highly paid political appointments as well as lucrative contracts, which should still bring substantial financial rewards. But if they lose and the BJP also loses power at the Centre, then they would be in big trouble.

The rebel MLAs would still get their MLA pensions, but it could signal an end to their political careers. VPP, for sure, will look to capitalize on the narrative that they betrayed the regional cause. NPP will try to move onto their turf by presenting themselves as a viable alternative, a party that will bring money from a BJP-led Union government without the baggage of Hindutva. If Congress comes back to power in Delhi, many legislators will similarly switch to Congress, instigated probably by those who were once Congress members. Where will these rebels UDP legislators figure in all of this? If they win their seats, they would still have a good chance of putting themselves in a good bargaining position. But if they lose, one election loss will become two, then three, and then they will be forgotten. So, for the next two years, they will enjoy the benefit of being with the richest political party in the country, but those days may not last forever. The rebels, on their part, would hope that this move would create the foundation for a brighter political career.

The move by the rebel UDP MLAs to join the BJP is a bold one, laced with great dangers but also promising big rewards. It could realign the political landscape by giving the BJP a more prominent voice in the affairs of Meghalaya, from which the local population has so far kept largely excluded. The possible decline of the UDP could create space for the VPP, which would then be the only regional alternative. Then there is the NPP, which would look at all this as a possible prelude to what the BJP could be planning for them as well. Congress would hope that this chaos creates an opportunity for it to make a comeback. As always, the final decision rests with the people.

(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)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

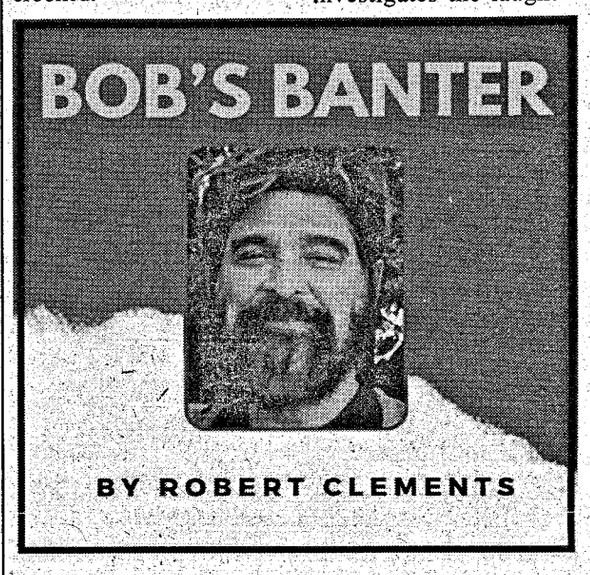
Rahul the Comedian..!

A ruling party spokesman has suggested that Rahul Gandhi should consider becoming a stand-up comedian. I am sure it was meant as an insult. But it may have accidentally become the finest compliment the party has paid him.

After all, a stand-up comedian became President of Ukraine and has spent years standing up to a superpower trying to bully his country. Volodymyr Zelensky did not stop being courageous because he once made people laugh. In fact, his ability to communicate may have helped him rally a nation when bombs began falling.

In earlier times, comedians were found in royal courts. They were called jesters or the king's fools. They wore ridiculous clothes, made strange faces and said things nobody else dared to say.

The ministers praised the king. The courtiers applauded the king. The generals saluted the king. The royal astrologer assured him that the stars supported every decision he made. Only the fool told the king that his crown was crooked.



That required courage. It also required considerable intelligence because the joke had to enter the king's mind without causing the comedian's head to leave his shoulders.

"Your Majesty," the fool might say, "the people are hungry." "The minister says they are well fed," the king would reply. "Indeed, Your Majesty. They have been fed so many promises that they are suffering from indigestion."

The court would laugh nervously. The minister would glare. The king might smile. And somewhere inside that palace, truth would have entered through the servants' door because it had been refused admission at the main gate.

A good comedian does more than make people laugh. He makes them think. He holds up a mirror and allows the powerful to see themselves as others see them. Sometimes the reflection is so uncomfortable that instead of correcting the face, the powerful decide to break the mirror.

"You are insulting the nation!" they cry. "No," says the comedian. "I am only describing what I see." "That is even worse!" they reply.

The thing about humour is that it travels where speeches cannot. A joke slips past barricades, ignores television anchors and enters the mind before the guards can demand its credentials. By the time authority understands what has happened, the audience has laughed, recognised the truth and carried it home.

No wonder powerful people become nervous when ordinary citizens begin smiling.

Citizens may smile only on public holidays. Laughter requires prior permission. Satire is permitted only if directed at the opposition. Any joke about the government must first be submitted in triplicate to a committee that has never laughed.

Perhaps that is the real problem. Those who follow orders blindly are considered loyal. Those who ask questions are called disruptive. Those who applaud are patriots. Those who point out the absurdity of power are suddenly dangerous.

We certainly need more stand-up comedians in India. We need millions of them. We need citizens who can stand up and point out that a pothole does not become a swimming pool merely because a minister inaugurates it.

We need commuters who can laugh when told that a three-hour traffic jam proves the economy is moving. We need students who can laugh when an examination paper leaks before the municipal water supply arrives.

We need job seekers who can smile politely when informed that unemployment is actually extended leisure. We need taxpayers who can applaud when their money builds a magnificent project and then ask why the ceiling fell before the applause ended.

We need villagers who are told that everything has gone digital, even though the nearest mobile signal is standing on a hill five kilometres away holding its phone toward the sky.

We need citizens who can listen to a leader declare, "There is no problem," while standing knee-deep in the problem.

Humour does not weaken democracy. It strengthens it. A confident leader laughs at himself. An insecure leader investigates the laughter. There is also a difference between mocking the powerless and challenging the powerful.

That is why dictators dislike comedians. A dictator spends enormous energy building a gigantic image of himself. He wants statues, slogans, portraits and songs. Then a comedian arrives, points at one absurdity, and the gigantic image begins losing air like a punctured balloon. Pfffft!

Years of propaganda can collapse in one well-aimed joke.

So perhaps Rahul Gandhi should indeed consider stand-up comedy as a career. He already stands up in Parliament, stands up at public meetings and stands up while walking across the country. All he now needs is a microphone and someone brave enough to keep it switched on.

And perhaps every opposition leader, every journalist, every teacher, every student and every citizen should consider the same profession. Not because governance is a joke. But because sometimes a joke is the sharpest way to expose bad governance.

Most of all, we need people who can recognise the biggest joke of all: that democracy means remaining silent before those we elected. No, democracy means that the citizen is not the courtier. The minister is not the king. The voter is not a subject. And the Constitution is not a decorative book to be displayed on important occasions and forgotten the following morning.

So, Rahul, accept the compliment. Stand up. Speak up. Use wit, facts and intelligence. Let those who mocked you discover that the fool in the royal court was often the wisest man in the room. And let millions of citizens become comedians with you.

Because when a nation can laugh at foolishness, foolishness still has reason to fear. But when citizens stop laughing at foolishness, they may soon be forced to applaud it..!

(Do you want to author a book? Or Learn how to write a book? Under the guidance of Robert Clements? Send a thumbsup to whatsapp no 9892572883 for details. or a message to bobsbanter@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Daylight Robberies, Untouched Drug Hubs: Shillong Citizens Demand Permanent Eviction of Narcotic Networks

Editor,

There was a time when the citizens of Shillong were only scared of the dark, avoiding unlit alleys to escape drug-addled muggers. Today, that fear has spilled into broad daylight. The recent horrific assault in Laban, where a woman's ears were torn open for her gold earrings, proves that public spaces are no longer safe at any hour. The public's patience has completely run out, and the message to the state government is loud and clear: it is time for the permanent, aggressive removal of both the drug hubs and the users fuelling this crisis.

The public is demanding that the government wake up to a fundamental law of economies: if there is no user, the suppliers and dealers are absolutely nothing. Chasing down individual peddlers is a cosmetic fix. As long as thousands of addicts roam the streets looking for their next hit, the multi-crore drug market will remain highly profitable.

By failing to aggressively round up, institutionalise, and permanently remove active drug users from public spaces, the government has allowed a predatory environment to thrive. The state's local youth are already facing an acute employment crisis, struggling daily to find legitimate jobs to sustain their families. It is an insult to their struggle that while law-abiding local youths are unemployed, illegal settlements and unmonitored enclaves are allowed to flourish as highly lucrative, tax-free hubs for narcotics trafficking.

When addicts are caught and interrogated by local communities, their confessions consistently point to the exact same supply coordinates: Lum Survey and Punjabi Lane. These areas have become notorious ground-zero locations for Shillong's drug trade.

The public views the administration's inability to permanently clear Lum Survey and fully resolve the Punjabi Lane issue as a massive institutional failure. If local, educated youths cannot find jobs, how are the refugees and illegal settlers in these areas sustaining themselves? The open secret on the street is that the illegal drug trade is their primary economy. By failing to evict these settlements and allowing them to fester under the cover of administrative paralysis, the government is actively protecting areas that act as safe havens for criminals.

The citizens of Shillong are tired of short-term police crackdowns that see addicts arrested one day and back on the streets the next. The government must take decisive, unyielding action to restore public safety:

Permanent Institutional Separation: Active drug users must be systematically removed from the streets. They cannot be allowed to wander residential areas terrorising citizens.

Total Clearance of Known Hubs: The administrative gridlock surrounding Lum Survey and Punjabi Lane must be broken immediately. The government must execute complete evictions, conduct strict anti-infiltration checks, and dismantle these distribution centres permanently.

Shillong's streets belong to its law-abiding citizens, not to drug syndicates and violent addicts. If the state government cannot guarantee safety in broad daylight, it must admit its failure and allow aggressive community-led profiling to protect local neighbourhoods.

Yours etc.,
H. Umdor
Shillong-8

Producing unemployable graduates

Editor,

The country is at the crossroads with respect to employing candidates who are largely unemployable. This state of hopelessness is on account of acquiring academic degrees that are not in sync with the current demand. As jobs are created almost entirely by the private sectors, they will definitely look for candidates with the required skills in that specific area. However, in the present state of education, the bulk of the students with their degrees from the basic sciences, humanities, commerce and arts are simply becoming unemployable as they are devoid of the required skills which will get them jobs. This has now extended to other courses of studies also.

In India, where there is a very large pool of unskilled youths, this state of affairs seems perilous. The situation is even more alarming in Meghalaya, where almost all the graduates coming out are unskilled and unemployable in the job market leading to high unemployment. The reason is primarily that the academic curriculum is so designed and developed that they do not impart skills and job requirements. Institutions that frame the curriculum are largely to be blamed for this deficiency and are reluctant to bring about positive and productive changes. Also, a very limited number of institutions provide courses that impart skills.

The government doesn't seem to have a policy to bring about changes where the graduates are skilled and has lately established a state university which carries on with the same old conventional courses in sciences, arts etc, devoid of any professional and skilled program. The future of the graduating youths has become highly challenging and will worsen if desired actions are not taken immediately.

Yours etc.,
Dr. H. S. Ranhotra
Shillong

Why Burden One Officer With Multiple Departments

Editor,

The news item "VPP Questions 15 departments load on an IAS Officer" would leave any reader perplexed. One is not a fan of any political party for bringing the matter before the general public nor is one questioning the credibility of any particular officer but this certainly warrants questioning the administration's manner of functioning. How can a single officer be entrusted with as many as 15 departments? I am sure that the concerned officer must be burdened as each department requires regular supervision, decision-making, coordination and accountability. Can adequate time and attention be given to each one of the departments? Obviously no, as files will accumulate, supervision will be reduced, decision-making will be delayed and follow-up will be difficult.

If there is a shortage of officers, the government must consider appointing additional officers, redistributing responsibilities, or putting in place some mechanism that will smoothen administrative responsibilities. This would permit efficiency, accessibility, accountability and transparency. Even if exceptional circumstances do require additional charges for one officer, this should be temporary, and the arrangement must be reviewed periodically to ensure administrative work does not suffer. Now that the matter is brought to light, one hopes that it will be addressed with immediacy and the rationale behind it clarified.

Yours etc.,
Jenniefer Dkhar,
Via email

Grim Picture of Human Resource Development

Editor,

District-level periodic labour force survey (PLFS) for 2025 paints a grim picture of human resource development in several districts in India. In nearly 250 out of the above 800 districts in the country, more than 25% of youth (15-29 age group) are neither engaged in any productive work nor pursuing education or any kind of training for work. The young population labelled as NEET (not in employment, education or training) is a matter of serious concern especially in north India. The survey lays bare deterioration in human capital development. A country's economic development and progress are determined by strong human capital. Millions of young people are deprived of their right to live a dignified life. The government must take measures to impart practical and vocational training to youth so that they are well-prepared for the labour market. The government must prioritize job-oriented courses over traditional courses. Promotion of industrial development is the cornerstone of economic development. Education and training must be aligned with industrial competency standards. The government must invest sufficiently in education as it is the basis of economic growth and productivity.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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

"Hope is a waking dream."
— Aristotle

The Shillong Times
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Right to vote curtailed

THE Election Commission is caught in a tricky situation with two of the panelists -- Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi -- writing to the Union Cabinet Secretary about their disagreements vis-à-vis the functioning of CEC Gyanesh Kumar – himself a highly controversial constitutional authority. That the Supreme Court has intervened in the matter and is seeking to set things right is some consolation. Yet, the fair name of the Election Commission has been tarnished beyond repair under the questionable leadership styles of the present CEC. It's a pity that the Election Commission that won wholesome praise and admiration for its efficient, transparent and bold styles during the term of senior bureaucrat TN Seshan has come to such a pass.

The main complaint advanced against the CEC by its two members was that Gyanesh Kumar has been taking unilateral decisions on his own without consulting the two members. Such a style of functioning defeats the very concept of collective responsibility on the part of the 3-member commission that oversees the world's largest election process. The national-level Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, which is currently underway, has its good sides and bad sides. A clean-up of the rolls is appreciable; more so as politicians have adopted dirty tricks to include fictitious names on a massive scale to the rolls in constituencies, and more importantly in states like Bihar and Bengal. The SIR process that started with Bihar in June, 2025 has, by now, struck some 13 crore names from the draft voter lists across 30 states and UTs. The two members of the panel, who were supposed to oversee the progress of this process alongside the CEC, say they were "kept in the dark" by Kumar in matters of addition and removal of voters in the revised rolls. They have repeatedly been sounding the CEC -- some 14 times in 10 months -- about matters like the integrity (or rather the lack of it) of the voter software, but these "concerns have been ignored.". This is an unprecedented situation; and a call for impeachment of the CEC was a natural step forward. Curiously, however, Gyanesh Kumar claims that all decisions of the Election Commission were taken unanimously.

Notably, the alleged overreach by the EC vis-à-vis revision of electoral rolls in Bihar prior to the SIR had led to protests from the Congress and other opposition parties before the assembly polls there. Gyanesh Kumar's response was rather undignified. Later, EC held the SIR in Bengal, where too there have been massive deletions. But, to EC's own admission before the Supreme Court, some 93 per cent of those who went in appeal against their removal from the voter list have won their case and got reincluded in the voter lists. This shows that the kind of weeding out done by the EC was riddled with flaws. That the BJP won the assembly polls in Bengal, and a similar scenario unfolded in Bihar earlier, also raises suspicions about likely foul play. This process should not be done in a ham-handed manner. The only right of the people today is their right to vote. This must be protected and preserved at all cost.

Revisiting Politics in Meghalaya. Has it Always Been About Development?

By Patricia Mukhim

Development...development...development. It's the reason why the 8 UDP MLAs jumped ship and decided to sail on the more luxurious BJP Titanic. We can only pray that like the historically known ship this Titanic does not sink sooner than later. Can these 8 newly minted BJP MLAs call a public meeting where they can spell out in greater detail and break down the word "development?" For someone like Kyrmen Shylla it means opening up the coal mines in a jiffy and taking out whatever coal is inside those mines to allow other crore-patis in his constituency to extract the black rock and make their money. It's now or never. Waiting for the NPP-led government to get a nod from the Supreme Court to start the extractive trade is taking too long. The pockets of the mining cohorts are emptying and those need to be filled up soon or he may not win the 2028 election. Sadly, the ring leader of the pack who gave the press conference and justified why the UDP MLAs had to abandon the sinking boat is obviously spending more time in these political shenanigans than in worrying about the state of Education in this land of clouds. Is Education being dumped on him? Would he prefer the PWD, PHE or even Urban Affairs Department considering there is so much money for the smart city project there? Education does not yield dividends; only curses from the teaching community. In any case, Lahkmen Rymbui already owns a beautiful resort in Samanong village and that should see him through in case he is not re-elected.

A lot has happened this week which tells us that politics is the most uncertain profession. The only thing that has remained unchanged is the behaviour of the voters. They continue to vote to the Assembly candidates who are unfit to take up those roles. The MLA is now reduced to constantly taking money out of his/her pocket to pay for private dues of his/her constituents. The MLA does less legislation and more trying to figure out when the next lakh or few lakhs or crores will come to his/her pocket because shelling out money to voters and non-voters in his/her constituency day after day after day is no longer a viable business. That MLA/minister also has to make enough money during his/her tenure to buy property, construct mansions and resorts; save for the rainy day when he/she is voted out and ensure his/her children get the best education in foreign universities. All of that has to come from the public exchequer, not from the MLA's salary.

How many political aspirants actually enter politics to serve the people? That is one of the biggest, most well-fed lies served to the public. That the same people are re-elected also shows us that large swathes of the electorate are not just gullible but also self-centred. In over 50 years do we believe that the electorate of Meghalaya ever voted for the over-all growth of the state? Never! It was always about their constituency; their own private welfare (the MLA attended my wedding/my son's/daughter's wedding; he/she attended a funeral at my home; he provided rice during the bereavement... And I could go on counting the personal favours done by the MLA and the reasons for why they get voted in). It has never been a well-thought-out reason that a locality has sat together to debate the merits and demerits of each candidate. Should that not be an exercise undertaken by people in every dorbar shnong? While we don't expect the office bearers of the dorbar shnong to preside over the function as they might be accused of favoring one candidate or the other, they can provide the space and allow people to debate the pros and cons of each candidate and leave it at that. There's no need to urge people to vote candidate A or B. They will at least know the reasons why we vote for an MLA and those reasons need to be divorced from the personal experiences they have had with their serving MLAs and an opportunity to take a fresh look at why we vote for an MLA.

There's no need to urge people to vote candidate A or B. They will at least know the reasons why we vote for an MLA and those reasons need to be divorced from the personal experiences they have had with their serving MLAs and an opportunity to take a fresh look at why we vote for an MLA.

With such a large population of poorly educated or uneducated voters should we wonder why Meghalaya keeps throwing up some of the worst candidates we can think of. Have we ever heard any MLA talk of a long- term economic vision for the state? Have we heard any MLA speak of the poor state of education and demand that what is ailing the present system – namely the different categories of pay scales for school and college teachers—should be ironed out?

At a recent meeting of the Indian Police Foundation held in Delhi, noted Police Chief Prakash Singh who had filed a case in the Supreme Court asking for Police Reforms pointed out that the police are increasingly being used not for law and order duties but to serve the government of the day. He said that the survival of democracy is itself at stake if the existing system is not changed. He pointed out that 40% of MPs have criminal cases of which 25% are serious criminal cases. Among the chief ministers of this country, 45% have cases against them of which 35% are of a serious nature. And among the MLAs of the country, 45% have criminal cases of which 29% have serious cases against them. With such representatives of the people at the helm can India hope to have a functioning, accountable democracy? The listeners were further informed that the average assets of MLAs in this country is Rs 118 crores and one particular Chief Minister is worth 1413 crore. So are the elected serving us or themselves?

In the case of Meghalaya the policing system has a major defect: investigation has never led to conviction in the majority of cases. The Prakash Singh case demanded that officers attached to the investigation wing should not be put on law and order duties so that they can concentrate on investigation and reach conclusions whereby the offenders don't get away due to lack of evidence. The recent spurt of violence which started on August 19 needs to reach a conclusive stage where the arsonists and vandals who beat up helpless people on the streets and torched vehicles etc., are not just hauled up but suitably punished and made to compensate for the loss. We are awaiting the results. What was surprising was the absence of cops along the route through which KSU activists were to have their bike rally on that fateful day. Interestingly a day or two later we saw several Rapid Action Force (RAF) guys guarding the streets right from the Assembly building (since the Assembly was in session and the MLAs and Ministers had to be secured) up to the State Secretariat. So ironic that the lives of 60 people are way above the lives of ordinary citizens – the very voters who put them in that "honorable" position. This is not what governance is supposed to be. This VIP culture has to stop and we the people have to put a halt to this because the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo societies don't believe in hierarchy, a caste system or special privileges for 60 people who were elected to "serve" their constituencies in case they have forgotten.

The reason why MLAs are jumping jack flashes has nothing to do with the development of their constituencies which they could demand even if they are in the Opposition benches. It is about a better life for themselves and their families. That's it and that's evident from their wealth ranking before joining politics and after that. Some of them were pressure group leaders who owned nothing. The politics came by and now they own so many businesses. We know it all but refuse to seek accountability from these shameless "Very Insignificant Persons" (VIP) who will be forgotten once they lose elections.

It's time for the citizens of Meghalaya, especially the youth to take charge of their own governance and not to look at their MLAs and ministers as "Ki Blei San Snem" (The five-year gods) who must be appeased lest they don't give us "development." Development is our birthright and not giving us roads, water, electricity in a timely manner is a sin committed against us by those we have empowered to work for us.

We hope the guys who have joined the BJP will not only chant "Jai Shri Ram" but show us what "development" means (not just its spelling) in the next 18 months. Till then "Jai Meghalaya," and as we beat the retreat for the United Democratic Party let us sing "Abide with Me....

Agriculture: The Backbone of our Economy

By Dr S.P. Rngikseh

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy of the people in Meghalaya, as about 80-81% of the population in the state depends on agriculture, which is a sustainable occupation, which can feed, and which can earn money to support all the needs of the family. It provides employment to people in rural areas, it supplies markets and haats, traders and factories. Therefore, if agriculture is good, the family is well and the State prospers, but if agriculture fails, the economy fails, and well-being declines. It is also a service that fulfills the needs of the citizens and a sector that generates huge revenue for the country and the State.

Even though it is the backbone, farmers face many problems. Many places have to depend on rain because of lack of irrigation systems. Climate change affects the rainy season and affects the planting and harvesting seasons. Moreover, the hilly terrain and water runoff causes loss of soil fertility.

The second problem is marketing and pricing. Many farmers have to depend on dalals and middlemen who pay a low price. Market deduction causes huge losses to farmers. The absence of government markets and proper storage facilities forces farmers to sell their produce at a throwaway price and when the price falls too low they have to just throw it away.

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The third problem is mechanization, financial support and training on modern farming methods, which are still lacking, and getting loans is still difficult for poor farmers.

The demand and aspiration of the farmers is to get a fair and genuine market, free from middlemen and dalals. The government has not listened to the cry of the farmers. If there is no proper market, agriculture cannot become a sustainable occupation. All these problems have made agriculture in Meghalaya subsistence farming, only for survival, not as a profitable occupation.

Now the Draft Meghalaya State Agriculture Policy (DMSAP) 2026 points out the same problems that farmers have always talked about. Can DMSAP really increase the income of the farmer (from farm output to farmer income) and strengthen the supply chain from the field to the market, from the farmer to the consumer? If roads and connectivity are good, the produce can quickly reach markets without wastage. This policy proposes to set up 3-5 Main Regulated Market Yards in Ri-Bhoi, East Khasi Hills, Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills along with Sub-Yards having weighing, grading, auction and cold storage facilities. Will these market yards really become a reality on the ground? Because we have seen many proposals in the past remain only on paper.

Furthermore, if the Government opens direct marketing through Market Complexes, Commercial Complexes, Shopping Complexes and even through online platforms, the farmer will no longer need to go through traders and will directly get a larger share of the profit. The long-standing demand is to set up Minimum and Maximum Price Control and MSP for both perishable and non-perishable produce to act as a strong protection, to prevent black marketing and illegal secondary markets. If the price falls, the farmer can store his produce in cold storage and when the price rises he can take it out to sell again or convert it into other products through Processing Units. This is why farmers strongly demand that the Government set up more Cold Storages and Food Processing Units in every District.

We see that the government and the present Policy aims to change the farming system by reducing chemical fertilizers and chemical pesticides and encouraging Organic Farming to increase income and maintain good health. Bio-fertilizers and bio-pesticides that do not pollute the soil, and also vermi-composting promoted by ICAR, are good. But these methods have not yet reached the poor farmers in remote villages and there is also a lack of training.

Modern Farming methods are most needed in Meghalaya. The Government has tried Protected Cultivation, Soil-less Farming, Smart Agriculture and especially Integrated Farming, such as growing paddy in the field and rearing fish in the same field, rearing pigs, poultry at the backyard. If one activity fails, the other will support and the income will remain stable.

The Government should also ensure that different departments like Agriculture, Horticulture, Sericulture, Soil & Water Conservation, Forest and Veterinary work together so that the assistance reaches directly to the genuine farmers who deserve it.

Today farmers have understood well that agriculture is not just earning money, but it is the backbone that gives health to the body, the backbone that strengthens the family, the backbone that sustains the tribe, the backbone of the nation and the backbone of the state's economy.

To promote agriculture, sustainable farming, integrated and environmental protection (Sustainable Agriculture & Environment Protection) and also linking modern Technology with traditional crop cultivation and natural farming which maintains soil fertility are very necessary.

The Government should also listen to the cry of the farmers, that they should not be exploited by companies that destroy the land. It should also listen to livestock farmers because the outbreak of diseases among poultry, pigs has caused huge losses, and to prevent the indiscriminate selling of sick animals, in order to prevent human diseases especially in remote areas.

Agriculture and animal husbandry are the most important occupations, as about 80% of our people depend on land and the growth of the State depends on the growth of the farmer. And if we can give them a good market, a fair price, new knowledge and protection of the land, it will increase the income and prosperity of the people in the State.

Land in Meghalaya is not just a boundary, but it is a mother that feeds and sustains the tribe. Under the Sixth Schedule, land belongs to the community, not to big companies or rich people. Therefore, to sustain agriculture we must first protect the land, because without land we have no future, when we have land we have a future for the tribe to live.

Land is the foundation of growth, income, agriculture, animal husbandry, family livelihood and life itself. So when we strengthen the farmer we strengthen the State, and if the Government stands by the farmer, the State of Meghalaya will stand before the world as a State that can feed itself, that can live by its own strength, its own land and its own hands.

Letters to the Editor

The Idolatry Tearing Us Apart

Editor,

The recent headlines in our region paint a devastating picture of spiritual bankruptcy. From the tragic killing of a 17-year-old boy reported in today's Times of India (September 22, 2026), to the shocking report featured in The Morung Express of two Kuki women killed by cadres of a Naga armed group at Leisangphai in Jiribam District, the ongoing ethnic warfare in our hills brings public shame to the Gospel of Christ.

The fatalistic narratives surrounding these tragedies assume there is no way out. However, as a Christian, I believe the solution begins with a brutal evaluation of our own religious institutions. We must confront the cultural idolatry gripping Northeast Christians. While we reject physical idols, we treat our ethnic identities, political ideologies and land claims as infallible and sacred – worshipping even our languages and ancestral customs over biblical truth. When tribal survival justifies murder, our ethnicity has become an idol – and scripture is clear about how much God hates idolatry.

The Church has failed in its primary duty. By acting as custodians of tribal interests rather than prophets of reconciliation, Christian leadership has allowed faith to become a mere social badge. We are witnessing a spiritual failure leading to collective self-annihilation. If the Church does not find the courage to castigate its own tribalism and preach Christ over culture, we will have no one to blame but ourselves for our destruction.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Via email

On Fundamental Duties of a Lawyer

Editor,

"Lawyers are the guardians of the Constitution and the protectors of fundamental rights." — Dr. B.R. Ambedkar

Being a lawyer is often seen through courtroom drama, sharp arguments and high-stakes wins. Yet under the prestige and technical skill sits a base that is far less glamorous but much more important duty. A lawyer does not just practice a profession. They hold a rare position of trust in society. Their duty is to protect the rule of law, to protect the constitution that has been given to us by our forefathers. Their basic duties form the moral and working compass which keeps the justice system from slipping into mere strategy and transaction.

At its core, a lawyer's duties split into four clear areas, to the client, to the court, to the profession and to society at large. Balancing these duties can be tricky because they sometimes seem to pull in opposite directions, but understanding their order is what marks a true legal professional.

Duty to the Client

A lawyer's duty to their client rests on complete loyalty, skill and confidentiality. When someone seeks legal advice, they are often at their most vulnerable. A basic duty of a lawyer is to strongly support their client's interests, giving clear and honest legal advice and representation. But zeal should never be confused with breaking the law. A lawyer must protect a client's sensitive information with strict confidentiality, which is a core part that lets clients speak openly without fear.

Duty to the Court and the Administration of Justice

A lawyer must support the client's case. The lawyer's most important duty is to the court. A lawyer is, first and foremost an officer of the court. This means that the lawyer's loyalty to a client stops where the lawyer begins to lie to the court. A lawyer has a duty of honesty: the lawyer must never knowingly present false evidence mislead a judge or hide binding legal precedents even if those precedents hurt the lawyer's own case. When the lawyer's duty to a client clashes with the lawyer's duty to keep the court honest, the lawyer's duty to the court must always come first.

Duty to the Legal Profession

The legal profession relies heavily on respect and politeness. The lawyer owes a duty of fairness. Courtesy to opposing counsel, court staff and witnesses. The courtroom is a place for debate, not personal fights. The lawyer must keep the dignity of the profession. Must not do unethical things like filing useless lawsuits, charging too much money or lying about facts. Keeping standards of honesty keeps public trust in the whole legal system.

Duty to Society

Finally, the lawyer has a duty that goes beyond paying clients. Access to justice is a human right yet many people cannot afford a lawyer. The lawyer's duty, to society includes doing pro bono work supporting aid and pushing for needed law changes. Because the lawyer knows how power and laws work the lawyer has a duty to speak out against unfairness protect constitutional principles and uphold the rule of law.

A lawyer's purpose extends far beyond financial gain. They dedicate themselves to pro bono work for one fundamental reason: they know that without them, the poor, the indigent, and the marginalized would have no voice. It is their solemn duty to stand by them and defend their rights, regardless of the consequences.

In conclusion the lawyer's fundamental duties are not a set of rules written in a code of ethics—they are the spirit of the legal profession. A great lawyer is not defined by how many cases the lawyer wins but by how honourably the lawyer fights them.

Yours etc.,
Ziauddin Ahmed,
Shillong

Private Sector Investment Needed in Meghalaya

Editor

Meghalaya is a state blessed with a captivating climate condition, varied topography, natural resources and above all a vast pool of untapped skills and talents be it at the most interior rural areas of our state or the urban spillover. The state's vision in bringing domestic and also foreign direct investment is a mixed bag and we are still in the nascent process of securing high-value investments. Take for example neighbouring Assam which has a number of top regional and national-level firms ranging from manufacturing sector to service sector and in the midst of this is the large scale inventory of skills accompanied by a robust mechanism of ensuring that an investment becomes the fruit of accommodating educated and skilled young people. The TCS semi-conductor manufacturing unit which is already in the works is pulling in varied skill sets which we in our state could have benefited from if we had some proactive political foresight but we are too busy with nitty-gritty political appeasement and soft on anti-socials which is why we fail to attract top-grade firms.

The Tourism sector alone cannot guarantee perennial income nor can government jobs but to create a positive investment climate we also have to create a positive mindset and a friendly atmosphere. We have to take a call on whether we are serious of what fifty years from now would look like or do we subscribe to the notion of disallowing investments and job opportunities.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Vua email

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

"The secret to happiness is freedom...
And the secret to freedom is courage."
—Thucydides

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Federalism Murdered

THE recent defection of eight UDP MLAs to the BJP has altered the Assembly arithmetic: the BJP has risen from 2 to 10 MLAs, while the UDP has fallen from 12 to 4. Both remain within the NPP-led MDA government even as Chief Minister Conrad Sangma claims that the government's functioning is not affected. Ampareen Lyngdoh of the NPP while speaking to the media brushed aside all speculations that there could be a regime change in Meghalaya considering that several NPP MLAs are parked in Delhi. She attributed the speculation to a hyperactive media spinning yarns and brushed aside the chances of there being a major cabinet reshuffle. But this is to downplay the seriousness of the matter. MLAs don't jump ship merely because they have fallen apart with their party leader. There are other undercurrents and offers, in this case from the BJP which is ruling the country and which the MLAs could not resist. It is also not pragmatic to expect politicians to have high moral standards and loyalty to the party that got them elected. Not in Meghalaya, not in West Bengal.

What will have long term consequences for Meghalaya is that the present shift of 8 regional party MLAs will change the character of regional politics in the state and leave a huge vacuum which the Voice of People Party (VPP) will likely fill. The UDP has historically been one of Meghalaya's principal regional political vehicles. Paul Lyngdoh who is still with the UDP has described the development as a major political shift and questioned who will occupy that vacuum. That's a significant question because the regional parties have traditionally provided a political space for issues that are specifically rooted in the state's history, identity, land, language and relationship with the Union Government. In February-March 2028 (just about 18 months away) when the state goes to the polls there could be a reconfiguration of Meghalaya's politics because a huge chunk of voters still has loyalties to regional parties, especially one as old as the UDP. These voters would need to reassess what regional politics itself means. Add to that the disenchantment expressed by the Khasi-Jaintia Church Leaders Forum which sees the BJP as anti-Christian and which is keen to do away with the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA). Camp followers of the BJP-RSS actually are disdainful of Christians and call them derogatory names such as "rice bags" etc., which is a direct accusation that those who have adopted the Christian faith did so because they were bribed with bags of rice.

The MLAs who defected to the BJP however defend their move and claim to have negotiated with the central government on the most pressing issues which the NPP-led MDA Government had failed to extract. The demands include recognition of the Khasi and Garo languages in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, the MRSSA, lifting the ban on coal mining, resolving the Iew Mawlong/Them Metor issue and the Assam-Meghalaya boundary dispute. This raises a fundamental question as to whether India as a country or the present NDA Government at the Centre actually believes in the principles of federalism or whether it is holding states to ransom that don't toe its line thereby forcing state MLAs to join the Party in power to increase their bargaining power? Apart from what's happening with the Election Commission of India which is compromised beyond redemption, federalism too has been silently aborted.

Meghalaya's Broken Ladder

By Hrishikesh Raychaudhuri

Every day in the early hours, nearly half a million kids cross the school gates of primary classes, and begin their journey with a promise that is being denied to them by the State of Meghalaya at this point. Follow the same cohort of students when they enter into higher secondary school and you will see the road does not merely narrow – it drops off the cliff. By the time these students are ready to leave secondary school, almost nine in every ten have disappeared from the rolls. This is not due to a lack of desire, but rather a systematic and extreme institutional barrier designed to cut off young people before they reach adulthood.

The "romantic" images of Meghalaya which we are shown in our postcards depicting lush pine covered mountains and valleys shrouded in clouds hide an education system in complete disrepair. A simple cold mathematical calculation based on data provided in The Statistical Handbook of Meghalaya 2025 removes all of the romance to reveal a stark reality: A physical environment where there are no senior secondary classrooms for the vast majority of rural residents (and therefore no possibility of access to further education); Dropout rates draining entire regions of their resources; And generation after generation abandoned to economic dead ends. Far from acting as a cradle for regional knowledge, Meghalaya oversees a 'ghost corridor' of unfulfilled potential – creating under-development from the ground up through the very mechanisms of its education system.

The structure of the educational system in Meghalaya is shaped by an "inverted funnel" which is built to be exclusionary. Unlike many other states that provide increasing opportunity as students age, the number of institutions available decreases dramatically from primary education into upper-secondary. During the 2024-2025 school year there were 9,083 primary schools and 3,548 upper-primary schools in Meghalaya. However, when we look at the Secondary level, that number drops significantly to just 1,512 institutions, and it gets even worse with only 444 Higher Secondary schools available across the entire state. There is a 95% decrease in the number of schools that offer Higher Secondary level of Education as compared to the the number of schools offering only primary Education. For every twenty Primary schools that welcome young learners, there's barely one Higher Secondary school ready to help them clear a national level exam such as NEET or JEE.

This bottleneck results in a staggering loss of students According to enrolment data for 2024–25, there are 498,505 children in Primary schools, but that figure plummets to 217,520 by Upper Primary. If you do simple maths, this means 44% students only move up to Upper Primary, while the remaining 56% students are not able to enter Upper primary level of schooling. Now this can be due to economic factors that the students might be facing where impoverished and poor households are forced to pull their children out of education and push them into something that can keep their families afloat, but then that also raises a question on the economic conditions of the state citizens. At the Secondary level, enrolment shrinks to 110,089, and then it falls to a mere 52,678 students in Higher Secondary classes. Between Class 1 and Class 12, nearly 90 percent of the state's school-age children simply disappear from the educational system.

The issue of student dropout rates is a serious concern that threatens the very essence of our right to education. In our state, the secondary school dropout rate has reached a shocking 21.97 percent in just one academic year, with boys at 23.14 percent and girls at 21.05 percent. The situation is even more dire in the interior districts, where we see signs of systemic failure. For instance, North Garo Hills has a staggering secondary dropout rate of 43.45 percent, with boys leaving school at an alarming 44.44 percent. East Jaintia Hills isn't far behind, with a dropout rate of 38.61 percent, while West Khasi Hills sees 32.13 percent of students dropping out, and South Garo Hills has a rate of 30.70 percent.

An even more alarming statistic is the Upper Primary dropout rate of children who have yet to cross the high school level, with the rate at a staggering 12.39 percent in the state with the figures for East Jaintia Hills district at 22.32 percent and in South Garo Hills at 23.32 percent. When viewed alongside a Lower Primary Gross Enrolment Ratio of 178.4 percent, the state's mass grade repetition and late enrolments only go to highlight how children's educational foundations have failed them.

Lateral exit from the education system continues to be a pervasive issue in Meghalaya, with some of the lowest participation metrics in the country. While primary attendance may present as deceptively high, Net Enrolment Ratios (NER) – which measure the official school-age children attending their corresponding educational level – provide a bleaker picture. At secondary level, Meghalaya has the second-lowest NER among states in the country, at 41.36 percent statewide, and 34.46 percent for boys. Over half the adolescents aged 14 and 15 in the state have no access to high school classrooms.

Reports on the state of education in Meghalaya often get sidetracked by the high rates of enrolment in primary and upper primary schools. The reality at the Higher Secondary stage (Classes 11 and 12) is even more stark and may be downright pessimistic — the Higher Secondary Net Enrolment Ratio (NER) in the state is 20.11 percent. This means that four out of every five teenagers aged 16 and 17 is entirely outside of the formal schooling system. This reality is even more intense in the state's rural heartland where the ratio is virtually non-existent. In South West Garo Hills, the Higher Secondary NER is just 3.49 percent (3.31 percent for boys), which means that over 96 percent of youth of the appropriate age for senior secondary education has not gone to school. In South Garo Hills, the Higher Secondary NER is 5.64 percent; in East Jaintia Hills, it is 10.39 percent; in North Garo Hills, 10.42 percent; in West Khasi Hills, 12.41 percent; and in Eastern West Khasi Hills, 12.63 percent.

Rather than tackling the exodus with targeted technical training, Meghalaya's school administration has neglected vocational education. In 2024-25, just 157 (8.1 percent) of the state's 1,937 Secondary and Higher Secondary schools offer vocational courses within the National Skills Qualifications Framework (NSQF).

The government has delegated basic education to private and ad hoc organizations without implementing technical standards. Private unaided institutions make up 1,066 of the 1,937 secondary and higher secondary schools in the state, but only 3 of these private schools offer vocational education. In areas such as South Garo Hills and Eastern West Khasi Hills, only 4 and 6 schools respectively provide vocational training among all management categories. As students lack access to marketable trade skills or technical options, those who leave school are directly funneled into manual labour, seasonal farming, or illegal mining.

The State's social protective policies aimed at protecting vulnerable children failed. Although a total of 2019 students with physical handicap received education scholarship for the school year of 2023-2024; there were zero students with physical handicap who received the education scholarship during 2024-25. Only fifty-one students with disabilities throughout the state of Florida received token relief payments. Overall, basic support mechanisms are still developing while economically disadvantaged or disabled students face the full weight of an unresponsive bureaucracy.

Meghalaya's higher education sector is both geographically isolated and academically underdeveloped. There are only eleven institutions offering degree-level programs in the entire state of Meghalaya; however, nine of those institutions are located solely within East Khasi Hills (six) and Ri Bhoi Districts (three). Therefore, eight of Meghalaya's twelve districts have no university. This includes the whole of East Garo Hills, South Garo Hills, North Garo Hills, South West Garo Hills, West Khasi Hills, South West Khasi Hills, Eastern West Khasi Hills, and East Jaintia Hills.

Additionally, college infrastructure is also woefully inadequate. There are only seventy-four colleges throughout Meghalaya, with a dismal eight being operated directly by the state government. Furthermore, there are no state-run medical universities, technical universities or agricultural universities in the state. As such, the number of students enrolled in tertiary education is extremely low. At present, the number of undergraduate students studying in all types of institutions is approximately seventy-five thousand, the number of postgraduates studying in all institutions is about 10,882.

For those who successfully navigate the obstacles of higher education and eventually graduate, few job opportunities exist locally as seen by the fact that employment exchanges operating throughout the state recorded 18,648 jobless, educated individuals registered for potential employment in 2024; 11,029 were female and 7,619 males. Further evidence of this lack of jobs exists in the form of statistics demonstrating that the same employment exchanges processed a total of only 218 job placements over the course of the entire year; a placement rate of barely 1.1 percent. Districts such as South West Khasi Hills, North Garo Hills, and South Garo Hills, there were no placement data even recorded.

Meghalaya's educational landscape is defined by systemic failure. A combination of factors such as lack of classrooms and a high rate of school dropouts and lack of availability for education in rural areas and no technical university in the state are all contributing to the fact that Meghalaya is failing its youth. Meghalaya is effectively limiting the future opportunities for its youth through its neglecting of the physical school infrastructure and through its inability to provide equal access to quality education to every child across all regions.

The Slow Erosion of Conversation

By Dr. Dipon Sharmah

Recently, I stood in front of my first-semester students and spoke not about plants but about their phones. It was a session on digital well-being, part of the Mental Health Awareness Week at our college. While lecturing, somewhere in the middle I told them that we as human beings are outsmarted by the very smart little device that we built and carried all along. The greatest proof of this isn't how much we look at our screens, but how little we now speak to one another.

For more than two lakh years, humans have been speaking with one another. We have been speaking long before the advent of the written word, the printing press, or the smartphone became part of our daily life. Spoken language is not just a communication tool, but it is our biological inheritance. It helps build trust by letting us express our care for our loved ones. But something is quietly changing. As we enter an age of unprecedented digital connectivity, we are speaking fewer words to each other, day by day, year by year.

A study published in the journal Perspectives on Psychological Science confirms this. Since 2005, the researchers found that the average person speaks about 338 fewer words each day than the year before. One might argue: it is only 338 words, so why are we complaining so much? My students might see it through the lens of the exam answers they write: just a little higher than the 200-word limit for a five-mark question, and way lower than the 600-word limit for a ten-mark question. On the surface, the loss does not feel alarming. However, one must not ignore the math and the magic of compounding. When compounded annually, that deficit reaches a staggering 120,000 words.

This decline is not sudden. It was not like we woke up one fine day to find our ability to talk was completely gone. Rather, the erosion has been gradual. For example, at the grocery store, we prefer to pay our bills by quickly tapping on a payment screen, thus eliminating our brief exchange with the cashier; while navigating unfamiliar city streets, we now rely on GPS instead of asking a stranger for directions; and even at the family dinner table, we are often glued to separate screens. Yours truly, hailing from a coastal town, can relate to it, as it is much like slow coastal erosion. During my recent visit to Netaji Island (formerly Ross Island), I looked at a fifteen-year-old photograph of my colleagues and me playing cricket on the sandy beach, which has now retreated.

Although the study focused on Western societies, its warnings are relevant to us here as well. The timeframe of the study, from 2005 to 2019, is not a coincidence. It covers the precise years when texting became universal and social media—from Orkut to Facebook to YouTube, Instagram, and WhatsApp—evolved from novelty to necessity. As the smartphone intruded into everyone's life, the researchers noted a direct correlation.

Through the course of evolution, nature has hardwired our nervous systems to respond to the warmth of the human voice. Text notifications, no matter how beautifully composed, simply cannot replicate that biological connection.

What actually travels between two people in a spoken conversation? My Physics department colleague would say it is mere sound waves. But language, as any of my English department colleagues will attest, is not merely physics. It is the pregnant pause before a reply, or the slight tremble in a friend's voice when they insist they are fine. It is the spontaneous laughter that fills a room. And it is the pin-drop silence between two people after something important or confidential has been shared.

Can these nuances travel or even survive in a text message? The current generation might use hundreds of emojis - a thumbs-up, a red heart, a laughing-crying face, or folded hands - but do they carry the same depth and weight as a spoken word? Deep down, we all know what is happening and what we are losing. Yet, we keep choosing the shortcut.

In recent years voice notes have become increasingly popular on platforms like WhatsApp. Perhaps we are trying to find a middle ground by injecting speech into our digital spaces. But a voice note is still a monologue. It lacks reciprocity; there is no pause and no spontaneous laughter. Humans are, of course, an adaptive species. We have always adapted to new tools, and we will adapt to this one as well. But adaptation does not negate loss. T.S. Eliot once warned of a world that ends "not with a bang but a whimper." The quiet recession of the spoken word is unfolding in much the same way, without any big announcement, like the beach at Netaji Island where the small cricket pitch from my old photograph is now water. Therefore, it is worth standing on the shore for a moment, before the whimper fades away, to ask ourselves what we truly stand to lose.

(Dr Dipon Sharmah, PhD is Assistant Professor and Head of the PG Department of Botany at Jawaharlal Nehru Rajkeeya Mahavidyalaya, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, where he has taught since 2011. Email: sharmah.dipon@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Who Controls Access to the Voters' List

Editor,

The latest Indian Express investigation reveals something more serious than a confrontation between the Election Commission of India (ECI) and the Opposition, Media and Civil society: an apparent institutional disagreement within the constitutional body itself. The newspaper which is widely reported to be aligned with Sangh Parivar, has unearthed a can of worms that depletes democratic values and played a crucial role in responsible journalism.

Under Article 324 of the Constitution, the ECI was expanded from a single commissioner to a three-member body, with the explicit mandate that decisions be taken collectively by majority consensus. However, post-June 2025, this constitutional requirement has been blatantly ignored. The CEC has proceeded unilaterally, bypassing consultation with fellow Election Commissioners.

Two Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi, reportedly raised at least 14 objections over ten months concerning decisions allegedly taken without their knowledge, including changes to Form 6, voter deletions and the centralisation of electoral-roll data.

The centralisation of electoral databases raises an equally important question: can statutory Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) effectively exercise their functions if centrally controlled software can override or restrict their decisions? Under whose direction has the Chief Election Commissioner acted to control access to the electoral database? The Indian Express reports that such concerns were raised, including instances where ERO decisions could not be recorded.

West Bengal adds urgency. Of 27.16 lakh deletions, more than 22 lakh voters have appealed for restoration, while 16.10 lakh appeals seek further deletions. The decisions of Election Tribunal on West Bengal reveals an interesting take that 90~95% deletion were wrongly made. A bare perusal of this statement reveals that such uniformity cannot be done by one BLO; it suggests centralised access to electoral voters.

Electoral integrity requires more than political assurances. The ECI must publish the relevant decision-making records, permit an independent technical audit of its electoral database, restore transparent institutional oversight and ensure that no eligible citizen loses the franchise through an opaque technological process.

Regrettably, the Supreme Court upheld the defective SIR which defeats the election process of universal adult franchise, Gyanesh Kumar must be removed forthwith. It is a blot on Indian democracy if he continues. This is the scandal of the highest order. The Meghalaya High Court must look into the SIR that took place in Meghalaya and whether these issues had appeared at first instance.

Yours etc.,
Shahin Yusuf,
Guwahati
Via email

The Defection Game in Meghalaya

Editor,

The headlines in red "Suspense over: BJP now No.2 in Meghalaya with ten MLAs "(ST September 24, 2026) made interesting reading. V.Venkata Rao, Barrister Pakem and Niru Hazarika jointly authored a book "A century of Government and politics in North East India Vol.II Meghalaya," which states, "Power, like women, is fickle-minded. How long she will stay where she is at present one cannot say." The three authors further state, "The reasons for defection are too complex for a clear analysis. Essentially it is greediness for power that induces one to defect. Power brings in its train affluence, position and prestige. The contention that a multi-party system breeds defections is not true. A single party with an absolute majority may break up because of personal ambitions and conflicts. If a party consists of more than one dominating personality, or if the party is dominated by a dominating personality, defections may occur. One may not like to work under a dominating personality. Political jealousy may also promote defections. Sometimes, defections may be a necessity to check the growth of dictatorship of a party or a leader which tramples on the rights of the minorities or when a rump controls the party to its advantage."

The total defections in Meghalaya from 1978-2026 is over 50 legislators switching sides. The most unstable period was late 1990s to 2000s with governments collapsing rapidly. The peak instability was during 1998-2003 where Meghalaya had four Chief Ministers in three years due to mass defections. In the ongoing shifts in the state there is speculation that more legislators will switch sides. Therefore it is a persistent trend even after the anti-defection law being in place, that Meghalaya's fragmented party system and coalition politics keep defection alive.

Until 1978, in Meghalaya there were no defections in the accepted sense of the term; one party had an absolute majority with a recognized leader. Some independents migrated to the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLC) after the 1972 elections. These migrations were not significant. But from 1978 onwards there were numerous defections. In Meghalaya defections like clouds are common. However, it is necessary to watch and wait whether the crucial demands of the people of Meghalaya will be met under the Government headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. If the demands are met it will be a defining moment for the state of Meghalaya and the government led by Conrad Sangma in Meghalaya, an NDA government that will be further strengthened. Kiren Rijiju, Union Minister is right in stating that the legislators are impressed by the transformation of the Northeast under Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP-led NDA government which has been spending on an average Rs 82,000 crore per annum in the last five years and has a Budget Estimate of Rs 1,08,335 crore for the CFY (2026-27 BE) for the development of North Eastern Region.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Shift Media Focus from Political Squabbles to Urgent Socio-economic Challenges

Editor,

I am writing to draw the attention of your readers and editorial team to a concerning trend in our local media landscape. While developed Indian states and global regions are rapidly advancing in infrastructure, healthcare, and education to drive their economies forward, our state presents a far more troubling contrast.

Despite celebratory declarations regarding our economy reaching milestones, the reality on the ground remains deeply concerning. Our public services continue to suffer from critical gaps, as evidenced by low Performance Grading Index (PGI) scores in education, alongside mounting public debt and a growing cohort of highly educated yet unemployed youth. These issues threaten the long-term economic stability and future of our citizens.

However, over the past several weeks, tuning into leading local newspapers, television channels, and social media platforms reveals an overwhelming focus on a single narrative: political bickering and party-hopping between political factions. Watching politicians switch allegiances and engage in verbal point-scoring has dominated headlines for weeks on end.

It is disheartening that mainstream journalism and social media creators continue to echo these political spats ad nauseam while neglecting constructive discourse. It is time to move past this political circus.

I strongly urge your publication and the broader media community to redirect their focus toward issues that genuinely impact the public. Highlighting policy analysis, employment strategies, healthcare reform, educational improvements, and sustainable development will inform the public, foster civic awareness, and hold decision-makers accountable. Let us prioritize knowledge over political sensationalism.

Yours etc.,
Dr Andy TG Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

Bridging the Gen Z workplace language gap

For all the talk about generational differences at work, some of the biggest differences show up in surprisingly ordinary moments.

Is this a case of gentle parenting gone awry or is it simply a child experiencing a genuine panic attack? Who knows, but it has certainly sparked the imagination and intense debate, including among parents.

Take being late for work. A Gen Z employee in her 20s I spoke with works at a small, locally owned cafe and restaurant run by an older Gen X owner. When she realised she was going to be late one day, she texted him. He was frustrated. To him, being late was serious enough to warrant a phone call, and a text felt too casual and impersonal.

She saw the exact same interaction very differently.

"He's super busy, so I felt a call was going to take up too much time," she told me. "So I texted. I thought it was more considerate." Both thought they understood what respectful workplace communication looked like. They just had completely different definitions of it.

I study workplace culture and communication, and I see this type of misunderstanding as increasingly common in multigenerational workplaces. And this is becoming more pronounced as Gen Z moves further into the workforce. The oldest members of Gen Z are now approaching 30, while the youngest are in college and high school.

What's distinctive about the older members of Gen Z is that many went through college, internships or their first jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, when much of our communication moved online and masks often covered half our faces. And there's a new twist now, as artificial intelligence changes how we communicate all over again.

The result isn't necessarily that Gen Z employees communicate better or worse with their bosses and colleagues than previous generations did. I argue that they have simply learned to do so in a very different environment.

When a text means something more

The cafe example is an easy one to dismiss as younger workers preferring texting and feeling that phone calls are for important occasions only.

But that misses what I think is the more interesting point: The employee wasn't trying to avoid her boss. She thought she was respecting his time.

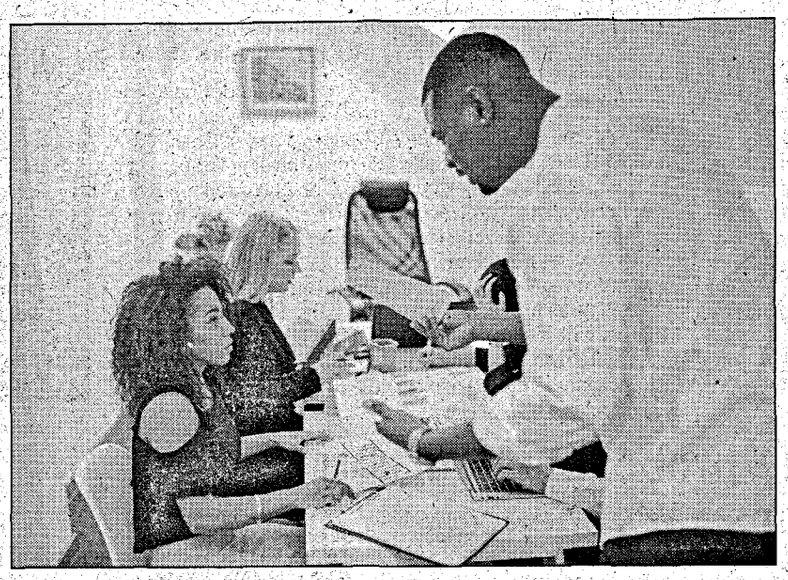
For her boss, by contrast, the phone call itself carried meaning. It communicated that she understood the seriousness of being late.

Neither one had explained that expectation to the other.

Managers shouldn't assume employees attach the same meaning they do to a particular form of communication. If being late requires a phone call, they need to say so. A two-minute conversation about expectations can prevent both people from walking away from an interaction believing the other was disrespectful.

Another common stumble concerns openness, which might feel like oversharing.

One Gen Z worker I spoke with had recently started a job at a large New England company in a blue-collar industry. He was struggling with severe anxiety and decided to tell his baby boomer manager. The manager was sympathetic, but also uneasy.



"It made me feel uncomfortable, if I'm being honest," the manager told me. "I didn't want to downplay his anxiety, but I'm not sure I needed to know." That distinction matters. His reaction wasn't that anxiety wasn't real or that his employee should simply get over it. But he questioned how much of it belonged in their professional relationship.

Many older workers learned that professionalism is about setting clear boundaries between personal and professional life. Members of Gen Z are coming of age during a period when conversations about mental health and personal well-being are considerably more public. What feels like honesty to one person can feel like oversharing to their boss.

This doesn't mean that managers have to become therapists, and employees don't have to disclose everything happening in their lives. But both may need to recognise that their comfort level around disclosure isn't universal.

Learning to read a room when the room disappeared

Some workplace communication is never spoken at all. Think about how people traditionally learned to read a room. They watched faces around a conference table. They noticed a change in a manager's tone. Someone caught them after a meeting and quietly explained what had just happened.

Now think about someone who was 18 or 19 in 2020.

At exactly the age when many young people would have been developing these skills in college, internships and early jobs, the room disappeared. Classes went online. Internships became remote. When people returned in person, masks sometimes made facial communication more difficult.

That doesn't mean members of Gen Z can't read facial expressions, but we should be careful about assuming everyone had the same opportunities to learn the unwritten signals of professional life. If feedback matters, I believe managers should say it. A disappointed expression on a Zoom call is a poor substitute for a conversation.

I thought that was understood

Imagine a manager telling a young employee: "I need this by Friday." The employee sends it back at 4:30 pm that Friday afternoon. The manager is annoyed because they intended to review it that morning, make changes and send it along to someone else.

The employee is equally confused. The deadline was Friday, and they met it.

This deadline mismatch gets at something I have repeatedly encountered in my research with Gen Z workers. In a survey I conducted of 250 Gen Z professionals across industries, clear structural expectations emerged alongside fairness and empathetic engagement as recurring themes.

If an employee wants clarity, it shouldn't automatically be confused with hand-holding. An employee can want autonomy and still want to know exactly what success looks like. "Friday" and "Friday by 10 am because I need three hours to review this" communicate very different expectations.

Artificial intelligence may make this issue even more important. We can now produce polished emails, summarize meetings and generate information faster than ever. But more communication does not guarantee more understanding.

I believe that may be the larger lesson for every generation working together. We tend to mistake the workplace norms we learned for common sense. They aren't. They were taught to us by the workplaces, technologies and moments in history in which we began our careers.

Gen Z is learning theirs in a very different world. *(The Conversation)*

[Authored by Jeff LeBlanc, Learning Facilitator for Online Master of Business Administration, Boston University]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, SEPTEMBER 27, 2026***

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Venus on your solar return chart, and it will give wonderful results. You will decide about your future. You will be satisfied with your performance. You will also develop new interests and hobbies. Your financial position will get better. You will use your creativity and imagination. You will be interested in focusing attention on studies, careers and business. You will share wonderful bonding with your bosses. You will have the support of your colleagues, friends and family members. Relations with your partner/spouse will be good. You will devote lot of time to your home too. You will emerge victorious and you will shine in your business. Your hard work and efforts will be behind your success. You will be more open-minded and will pay attention to your interests. Your energy level will be high.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) The week will begin on a bright note. All your held-up work will be completed. You will get an important post. Victory is written all over. There is yog of promotion in your job. Your officials will be supportive. You will begin a new work. Days will bring joy and wealth. You will also contact new people. With the help of your friends your messed up tasks will improve. There are chances of you going on trips. You will spend your time having fun with your friends and close people. Politics will attract you. You will achieve success in your business. You will also see some positive changes in yourself. Decisions taken after deep thought will help you earn money.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) The week promises to bring positive results for you. Meeting with influential people will open doors of destiny for you. You will manage to get the support of your officers and subordinates. Many plans will occur to you, and you will make an outline of those plans. You will be ambitious and achieve your goals. You will have good monetary gains. You will also enjoy worldly pleasures. Meeting with loved ones will lighten your mood. You will be guest somewhere. Your relations with family members will strengthen. You will also develop your own self. You will have the desire to learn something new; you will feel that your performance has become better than before.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) There are indications and Yog of receiving unexpected gains and windfalls for you this week. You will reap rich dividends from some investments you made in the past. Your financial position is going to improve drastically. Your spirits will be high, and you will remain cheerful. You will find yourself financially strong and in a better position during this time. Your creative potential will come out before everyone. This is a highly favorable time for writing, editing and other creative works. Take business-related decisions only after giving a lot of thought.ou will also have good marital relations with your partner. You will also welcome guests at your house. Students will excel in studies. Feelings of patriotism and national interest will engulf you. Through hard work and grit you will achieve everything that you have ever desired for.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be an amazing week for you. You will have a passion to perform tough tasks. You will work passionately and truthfully towards your relations. Money will come to you. You will deal with your emotions and sensitivity properly during this time. You will also keep trying to balance your family and married life. You will also get into a fight with someone at your workplace. It will not be of any worth. Avoid complicating things. You will devote yourself to a task, but the result of that task will not be much. There are strong chances of getting a reward from long-term plans. You will hear good news related to your friend or relative. Your self-confidence will increase by leaps and bounds.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your influence and prestige will grow. You will also recollect some good memories. Your prestige in society will increase. And your deeds will bring lot of name and fame. You will have kindness and pity for the sick and needy. It is a very good time for financial gains. Some new guests will arrive at your home and will keep you busy. You will settle disputes and problems peacefully. Your time and money will be utilized properly. Love birds will have an amazing time. You will touch new heights of achievements in your business. Students will work hard and get desired results. You need to introspect and analyze yourself. It is time to become a bit vocal and express your feelings. You need to bring about a change in your communication and behavior. It will help you in meeting challenges of life well. Your friends and family members will keep supporting you.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Your well-executed plans will bring in lot of money. You will have sudden gains. Your efforts will also bear fruit. You will meet people with the same thinking. You will also pay attention to sports and entertainment. You will work hard and make progress in business/job. At home, the atmosphere will be in your favour and your family members will look towards you for guidance. You will also enhance your knowledge. Some happy moments will come in your life. You will be able to take everybody with you. Housewives and working women will pay attention to their families. You will top in some interview. There will be some enthusiastic activity in family life. Your opponents will try to dominate but not get success.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) Things are looking up again for you this week. A dispute that has been going on for long will get resolved with the help of a third person. It will bring you lot of relief. Possibility of some journey with your family is there. You will be appreciated for your contribution to your society and workplace. Your opponents will be active but will not be able to face you. You will also fulfill your family responsibility well. You will be able to make a separate identity for yourself on the basis of your talents. Officials will be influential by your style of working. It is an ideal time to realize your dreams. There will be improvement in the health of elderly. You will be successful in a competitive exam.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It is a wonderful week. Your relations with closed ones will improve. You will also enjoy good food in a restaurant. You will also purchase a new property. It is time to leave some of your old ideas and bring new energy and thinking into your personality. You can also get interested in religious work. The time will be well spent in the company of your spouse/mate. There will be stability in money related matters. You will make good gains in business. The atmosphere at home will be happy. Students will get admission in institutes/courses of their own choice. You will do meditation and religious work. You will make a business trip that will be very satisfying.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It is a very promising week for you. You will achieve your targets. Your popularity at workplace will increase. You could be promoted in your job. You will also have financial stability and strength. Your self-respect and dignity will increase. Your colleagues will perform every task in office after consulting you. Students will get success in exams and interviews. Your government related work will get done. You will receive the rewards in the form of monetary gifts or benefits. You will also get benefits due to the change in your life. This will ensure that you have a happy and secure future ahead. You will also enter new romantic ties leading to marriage. You will strike a balance between work and happiness.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Time will be highly beneficial for you. Some auspicious functions will take place, and you will enjoy your time with your family. Due to your busy schedule at work, you will be a bit tired. Yet you will complete your task. You will take proper care of your health. You will also be enthusiastic about something which will make you happy. You could fall in love with a person working in your office leading to a rollicking affair. Do not meddle in affairs of others; you may get a bad name for no fault of yours. You will achieve your targets. You will take part in a special event. Your efforts will bring good results. Marital life will be cheerful. You may also plan for an outing altogether. Time is very favorable.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) Some very positive developments will take place. You will get a work order from abroad. Those who are in business may enter new partnership or association which will be beneficial. Your importance at your work will increase. Your work conditions will be better, and you will spend your time enjoying yourself. Your enemies will try but will not be able to harm your interests. You will also get success in government related matters. Your subordinates will fully support you. You will also get good support from your spouse. You will spend some quality time with him/her. You will get blessings from your elders. Students will keep performing well. You will also receive the full support of your parents and in-laws. You will understand your duties and carry them out nicely.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will change decisions that you take in haste and will have no regrets in doing it. Work that was stalled will be completed with the help of dear ones. You will be full of happiness and warmth in your personal ties. Love mates will enjoy each other's company. You will discuss something vital with your mate. You will also be understanding the feelings of your colleagues, otherwise you will repent later. There will be an increase in your business. Meetings with people will be beneficial. You will be connected to the internet. Your efficiency will be commendable. New contacts will be beneficial. You will get the desired success. You could plan a short journey with partner.

The science behind 451,000 super El Niño deaths estimate

The University of Chicago's Energy Policy Institute's report that claimed that the 'super El Nino' might cause around 15,800 additional heat-related deaths in India over the next six months, was measured using two components, seasonal temperature forecasts, and temperature-mortality relationships, a co-author of the study said.

Nearly 451,000 additional deaths are projected globally in the next six months due to the prevailing 'super El Nino', compared to a normal year, according to the study released on Wednesday.

Emily Grover-Kopec, a co-author, said that temperature-mortality relationships were assessed using "one of the most commonly referenced seasonal forecasts" from the European Centre for Medium-Range Weather Forecasts (ECMWF SEAS5).

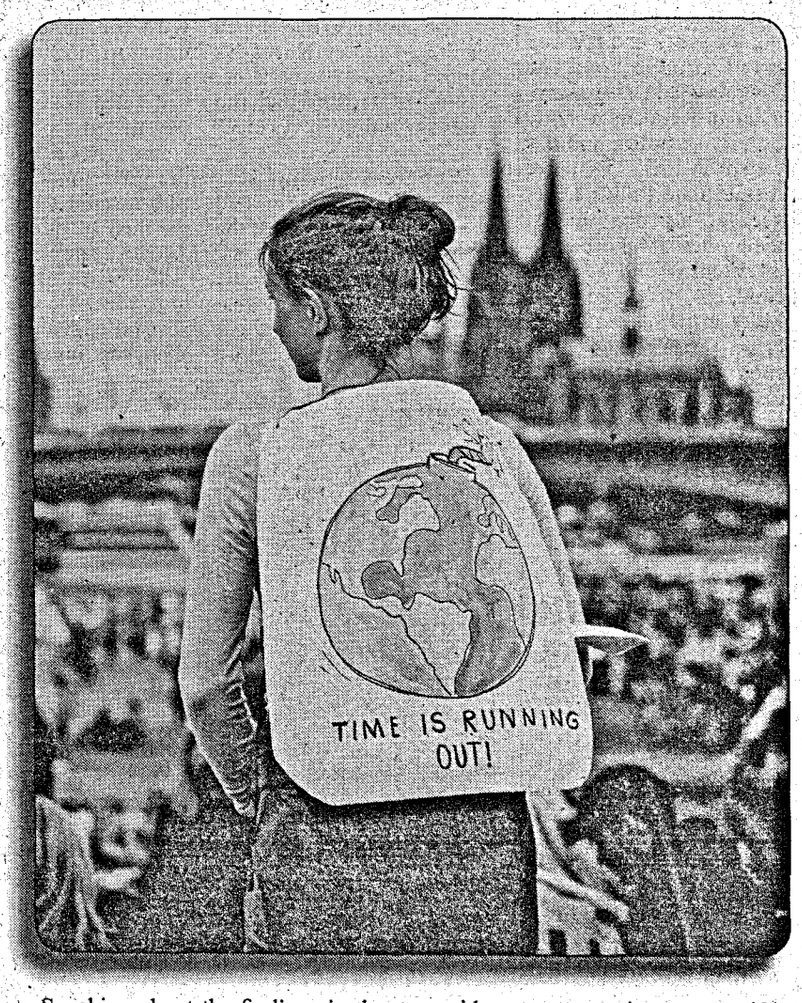
The recently published report claimed that the climate phenomenon could push global land temperatures 1.2 degrees Celsius above normal in the coming months, resembling the higher temperatures that climate change is projected to deliver in the next 20 years.

"When considering a wide suite of seasonal forecasts that are available, the ECMWF SEAS sits in the middle in terms of the projected temperature anomalies, so this presents a relatively moderate view. We also used temperature-mortality relationships that were peer-reviewed and published in one of the most rigorous economics journals, the *Quarterly Journal of Economics* in November, 2022," Grover-Kopec, who is also a director at the climate and energy practice at the Rhodium Group, said.

She said that the earlier study used the same formula to predict deaths far into the future based on climate models, adding that this time it was used differently for shorter-term seasonal forecasts.

Asked why a specific window of 1996 to 2025 was chosen for the report, she said that the goal was to keep the numbers relevant to how decision-makers currently plan and act, as the projections are meant to inform how resources are used, and when early action is taken to save lives.

"Using a long baseline period of 30 years in climate science is common and often considered best practice. We therefore referenced the most recent 30-year period as our baseline: 1996-2025," Grover-Kopec said.



Speaking about the findings in the report, Abhiyant Tiwari, who leads the climate resilience and health team at Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) in India, noted that it is a useful early warning and underlines the call to action. "The study is a useful early warning, but its mortality estimates should be treated cautiously as model-based projections, with the full methodology yet to undergo peer review. The findings nevertheless underline the call to action," Tiwari said.

He said that India's experience with Heat Action Plans (HAPs) and stronger institutional frameworks offer a foundation to scale sustained preparedness, protect vulnerable communities, and share valuable lessons with the Global South and the wider world.

Meanwhile, Harshal Ramesh Salve, a public health professional and faculty at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), stressed that the report provides an opportunity to act swiftly with clear intention for mitigation strategies such as implementing HAPs at all levels.

"The report further cements the current knowledge regarding heat impact on human health in the form of mortality and morbidity. As expected, the South Asia region is getting one of the worst estimates of mortality. However, it also provides us an opportunity to act swiftly with clear intention for mitigation strategies such as implementing HAPs at all levels, data driven policy making, and developing data-sharing mechanisms at national and local levels," Salve said.

According to the public health professional, an equity-driven approach focusing on the most vulnerable, such as the elderly, people with comorbidities, children, pregnant women and occupational workers, is essential to tackle the situation. *(PTI)*

"There are many of us who should be in a position to bring peace to the world."

—Shirley Temple

The Shillong Times

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Circus sans Ring

REGIONAL satraps have been in the forefront of rubbishing the political process in this country In the past several decades, the principal national parties might have behaved in a more responsible manner. Take for instance the claim of Bengal's former (defeated) chief minister Mamata Banerjee. The Trinamool Congress leader claimed at a public meeting in Serampore the other day that "there's no need to see who is red, blue or yellow. We are all one now." The reference was to her confabulations with the Left leaders, seeking joint action against the Modi-led NDA government. In a way, there's justification for Banerjee's warming up with the Left, as both are wounded tigers. Banerjee had played the main role in the ouster of the Left government in West Bengal after its rule there for an uninterrupted three decades. She replaced the Left as the ruling alliance in Bengal and ran the state for three consecutive terms from 2011, erased more of the Left legacy in the state only to be outwitted by the BJP in the last assembly polls. Now, while both the Left and the TMC are down and out, they could be strange bedfellows.

Banerjee had started as a Congress woman. The tricolour party uplifted her first as an MP and then as minister. She broke ranks to form her own Trinamool Congress in 1998 and seized power from the Left in 2011 by raising the slogan of "Parobortan" (Change) – which caught the fancy of a people fed up with the tired faces of the Communists. All along since 2014, she as CM refused to acknowledge the grand old party's dominant role in the opposition and Rahul Gandhi's leadership of the anti-BJP bandwagon. She apparently saw Gandhi as a threat to her ambition of becoming the PM in the event of Modi losing a poll in future. Having been defeated in a humiliating manner in the last assembly polls, when she even lost her own seat, Banerjee made attempts to be a part of the INDIA bloc, but the Congress apparently did now warm up much to her. The choice open to Banerjee now is to take the help of the Left to fight the ruling BJP in Bengal or face a political disaster of a more serious nature.

Clearly, for the regional satraps as a whole, no ideology guides them other than their greed for power and pelf. Chandrababu Naidu of Andhra Pradesh, who fought against Modi while as chief minister since 2014 and faced political oblivion since 2019, tied up with the BJP to defeat the YSR Congress and grab power in Andhra Pradesh. He sings paeans of Modi now. In Tamil Nadu, a defeated DMK is now attempting a tie-up with a section of its bitter rival of the past, AIADMK, as a cine star in the form of Vijay formed a new regional outfit and outwitted both the Dravidian parties to grab power in the state. Bihar's ageing politician Nitish Kumar made similar somersaults that helped him continue in the CM post for many years. No ideology or principle guides the regional parties as a whole. And certainly all of them are there, not to serve the people of their states but to hold on to power.

The Tympang Club and the Story of New Jowai

By H.H. Mohrmen

Tympang Club Jowai will conclude its yearlong Quasqui-centennial celebration in December. However, the story of Ïawmusiang Club, then Tympang Club, and eventually Ka Dorbar Chnong Tympang Ïawmusiang, is also the story of how the second half of Jowai came into being. It is the story of Jowai expanding from its ancient settlement into the town we know today. It is a fascinating history, rich in culture and intertwined with the commerce, missionary activity, and politics of the time.

The Legend of the Four Divine Progenitors

Jowai, like many towns and cities in the region, is traditionally understood as a settlement that has existed since time immemorial. Its early history cannot be established through written records, but oral narratives provide some insight into how people first came to settle in the area and give the place its primeval status.

According to oral tradition, the first settlers of the area were four divine sisters, believed to be 'chiteiñ i bru, chiteiñ i blai', meaning half human and half divine. They were known as ka Bon, ka Teiñ, ka Wet, and ka Doh.

Jowai and the Two Sections of the Town

Jowai is perhaps an Anglicised form of Jwai. Another distinctive feature of Jowai is that the town was traditionally divided into two sections, a distinction that may not be apparent to those unfamiliar with its history.

Old Jowai comprised localities that were part of the original settlement, including Panaliar, Loom'iongkjam, Dulong, and Chilliangraid. Later a locality called Loompyrdi Ïongpiah was created by carving out a small portion of Loomïongkjam and Dulong. These were perhaps the five original localities that formed old Jwai.

The Geographical Edge of the Old Settlement

Beyond these localities, to the west, lay the Mission Compound, which was then on the outskirts of the village. Evidence of this can be found in the location of many clans' ossuaries or cists. In many tribal settlements, cremation grounds, graveyards, and ossuaries are traditionally located on the outskirts of villages.

Loom Moolikso, and the ossuary of the Soo Kpoh clan, lies between Ïongpiah and Lion Mission Compound. Ossuaries belonging to other clans, including the Passah, Bareh, and Laloo, are located in areas now known as Lion Mission Compound and Chutwakhu.

Two cremation grounds: that of the Sumer is located in an area called Tredieiñling, while the other is at Khimmusniang. These spatial arrangements provide some indication of the western edge of the old settlement, beyond which new settlements gradually emerged.

The New Jowai (Jwai)

In common parlance, the new section of the town is called Pohskur, while the old part is known as Pohchnong. This distinction is connected with the advent of Christianity. Skur is a general term used for converts to Christianity, who are commonly referred to as ki skur, or "school people". Chnong, on the other hand, refers to followers of Niamtre. Thus, old Jowai came to be called Pohchnong, while the area beyond it was not considered chnong at that time.

Localities in the newer township that are more than a hundred years old, such as Lion Mission, Chutwakhu, and Tympang, are all situated on the outskirts of old Jowai. Loomkyrwiang was established in February 1920 and Tpep-pale which has only recently celebrated its Golden Jubilee is located within the old Jowai settlement.

The Old Stone Path

On the outskirts of Jowai, the area now known as Ïawmusiang was once an important thoroughfare. A stone path connecting Nartiang with Jaintiapur and onward to Gobha in Nowgong passed through this area. Naturally, there was a need for ki ïung wasa, or lodging houses, for travelers using the route. This may explain why people began settling in Ïawmusiang.

At the centre of Ïawmusiang, in front of the office of the Jaiñtia Hills Autonomous District Council, stand two monoliths erected to commemorate the achievements of u Tongka and u Buidkha. These figures are associated with the beginnings of the Sutnga dynasty. Ïawmusiang, however, also has a profound connection with the great freedom fighter u Kiang Nangbah.

UKiang Nangbah and the Tale of Two Ïawmusiang

Although the exact location where u Kiang Nangbah was hanged is not known, both oral traditions and British records confirm that he was executed at Ïawmusiang. After Kiang Nangbah was hanged in 1862, his body was received by ka Hat Lyngdoh, the mother of ka Kurimai Lyngdoh, one of the founders of the club.

According to oral tradition, Ïawmusiang, the premier market of the Jaiñtia Hills, was originally located at Nangbah village. There is evidence supporting this claim. A locality in Nangbah still bears the name Ïawmusiang, and the Daloi of Nangbah continues to perform rituals in honour of the market. Monoliths associated with the market deities also remain at the old Ïawmusiang site in Nangbah.

New Jowai and the Advent of Christianity

The first missionary to preach the Bible in Jowai was Rev Thomas Jones, in 1842. The first Welsh Calvinistic Methodist church in Jowai was established in 1858 at a place that is still known as Pohskur or Mission Compound. As the church gained converts, some moved to the area where the missionaries lived. This may have contributed to the emergence of the locality commonly known as Pohskur. Yet an important question remains: where did the first settlement in the new Jowai actually emerge? Did people first settle in Ïawmusiang, or did the settlement begin around the Mission Compound?

The Unitarian Connection

The first Unitarian church in the region was established in Jowai in 1887, in the locality now known as Ïawmusiang. Historical accounts indicate that several people associated with its founding, u Kat Samyntiñ Shylla, ka Hirbon Lakadong, and later ka Kurimai Lyngdoh, lived in this area.

Ka Hirbon Lakadong and ka Kurimai were also among the eleven women present when Dong Ïawmusiang was first established. U H.K. Singh, the founder of the Unitarian Church in Jowai, was from Saitsohpen, Sohra, but moved to Jwai after being appointed as a government clerk.

New Jowai and the British Raj

Old Jowai was an ancient settlement, but the development of new Jowai was closely connected with the arrival of British administration. This also helps explain the emergence of the locality and dong of Ïawmusiang.

Jaintia, or Ka Hima ki Syiem Sutnga, was a flourishing kingdom until the British annexed it on 15 March 1835. After the annexation, u Ram Singh, the king, was left with the hills portion of the kingdom, which provided him with no revenue. He therefore opted to receive a pension of Rs. 500 rather than continue ruling the hills.

Two Political Entities under British Administration

Initially, the British established their base at Nongkhlaw, which was later shifted to Sohra (Cherrapunjee). From Sohra, the British administered the Khasi and Jaiñtia Hills, including territory that had formed part of the former Jaiñtia kingdom.

In 1855, the British established a thana at Jowai. This appears to have been the first government institution established in the hills portion of the former Jaiñtia kingdom. It is reasonable to assume that the establishment of the thana encouraged people to settle in and around Ïawmusiang.

The creation of the Jowai Subdivision was notified in the *Calcutta Gazette* on 24 November 1869. The establishment of the thanah in 1855 and the Jowai Subdivision subsequently brought further administrative activity and settlers to the Ïawmusiang area.

The Area's Connection with Shillong

The distance between Sohra and Jowai was one of the factors that contributed to grievances during the Jaiñtia rebellion, as it made it difficult for people to seek redress from the authorities. After the rebellion ended in 1863, the government decided to station an English officer with full powers at Jowai.

When the administrative station was eventually shifted from Sohra to Shillong, or Yeodeo, the government recognised the need for stronger public administration and sanctioned two experimental offices, one at Yeodeo and the other at Jowai. By the mid 1860s, the British had established several government institutions in Jowai. It is therefore reasonable to conclude that the area now known as Ïawmusiang would have attracted an increasing number of settlers.

Conclusion

The emergence of new Jowai cannot be attributed to a single event. The shifting of the market, the ancient stone path, the establishment of British administrative institutions, and growing commerce all contributed to the expansion of Jowai beyond its ancient settlement.

These developments help explain why people were already settling in the area now known as Ïawmusiang well before 1901. Residents, including migrants from surrounding villages and from the Pohchnong area of Jowai, eventually organised themselves into a dong. This culminated in the formal establishment of ka Dong Ïawmusiang in 1901.

The story of Tympang, therefore, is more than the history of a club celebrating 125 years. It is also a story of the making of new Jowai: a story of migration, commerce, faith, administration, resistance, and community formation.

Why the Gen Z Appeasement Will Not Work

By Jagdish Rattanani

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has taken to Instagram, aiming his messages at the tell-it-as-it-is generation called the 'Gen Z'. The RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat has also chimed in to the current times by opening conversations with them. The entire establishment, it appears, wants to listen to voices that in a matter of some 12 days at their peak wiped out 12 years of carefully constructed, extensively choreographed and lavishly funded PR campaigns that have sold a particular image of the current party leadership. This was a new kind of the bulldozer effect, giving the demolition squad politics of the BJP a taste of its own medicine in the digital world.

But how do you patch up with those who reject yesterday's polite conversation and genteel criticism for raw honesty and stripped-down candour that is not understood if not unknown in India's hierarchical social order? One safe statement bandied about in old-world fashion (and some outdated management training) used to be that it is okay to be disagreeable but only in an agreeable way. In India, authority is presumed to be knowledgeable and responsible. We are told to "respect" the Prime Minister.

"The entire establishment, it appears, wants to listen to voices that in a matter of some 12 days at their peak wiped out 12 years of carefully constructed, extensively choreographed and lavishly funded PR campaigns that have sold a particular image of the current party leadership. This was a new kind of the bulldozer effect, giving the demolition squad politics of the BJP a taste of its own medicine in the digital world."

The 'Gen Z' wants to ask: 'Why?' If there is so much to disagree with, why not throw out the niceties and disagree in a disagreeable way?

In boldly walking that path, the protestors who made history at Jantar Mantar by gaining the rare exit of an incompetent minister, have taught the BJP-RSS some important lessons. They have also turned many assumptions on their head, not the least of which is that fancy campaigns and claims using hyperbolic language may build an image in the interim but can over time tear apart that image mercilessly. Hard selling has a hard stop if it is not to trigger skepticism or worse. Numbers celebrated in terms of likes or followers on social media date back to the age of influencers. This is the time of anti-influencers who are ready to call you out. Further, raw numbers say nothing about the buy-in on a political message. When the digital space is flooded with fish-market-style propaganda, high view counts representing a mix of organic, bought and forced reach, do not necessarily translate into support. IT cells either mistake visibility for genuine support or have an interest in promoting this easy metric, masking a growing audience that watches not out of admiration, but out of deep scepticism and some outright contempt.

What matters in this world is the honesty of content, not the flaky paint of the form. It brings back the classic style of conversation rooted in the world of spontaneity that is increasingly being seen as a byword for trust and conviction. This grammar is in fact not so new; it is a way of being that was lost to the age of gloss, false framing and feigned outrage on controlled television and money-spinning social media platforms. The 'Gen Z' have reclaimed the classic and they deserve to be celebrated just for that if not more. The system pushed far too much on one side and the spring has now pulled back.

The dynamic mounts an almost insurmountable hurdle for a leadership that is fashioned from ideas of power, machismo and the grandiose advice to the graduates was to tackle massive challenges by breaking them down to smaller components. As anyone working with the world's wicked problems knows, this is called the reductionist approach and is precisely blamed for the big crises of our times like climate change, and for having landed humanity in the age of the Anthropocene. The universal call of leaders sensitive to the connectedness around us is to look for systemic accounts of how the world and nature works, to understand how one act impacts another and to extend this to its widest with the call for science to be humane and to be driven by values rather than a march of the value-free. That may be more like 'Gen Z' language, but it is nowhere in the BJP understanding or even the vocabulary.

Seen in this light, the 'Gen Z' may well represent the wholesale rejection of the philosophical foundations of the BJP-RSS. Of course, the party under its current leadership will not climb down easily – it has the resources to fight back and try to hold on but there is little hope of recreating the story for a new audience. On the other hand, the Opposition and in particular the Congress under Rahul Gandhi may have emerged as a very attractive proposition. Do note that Rahul Gandhi excels in spontaneous interactions, the exact ones that Modi dreads. Yet, Rahul Gandhi will have to face difficult tests, one of which is the political twist seen in the student protests at Jharkhand which were lathi charged and the government sits in power on Congress support. Gandhi has done well so far by criticizing the police action there.

In sum, it would be a mistake to see the story of the changed political scenario as an issue of style or language or rebellious youth when it may well represent a shift in the substance of the politics of our times.

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Through The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Careful Men; You Might Look Like a Woman

Editor,

I was doing my daily ritual of scrolling through state news, half expecting something to make me pause and release a deep sigh. That's the regular entertainment package here: new ways to be annoyed, shocked or plain exhausted and disappointed by what passes as public discourse. This one particular day last week didn't disappoint.

In a video released by a local news channel, MLA Banteidor Lyngdoh declared that if he were ever afraid to speak the truth against the ruling government, he should wear a "frock" and should no longer be considered a "rangbah" (an elder, fully adult man in Khasi society).

Why does femininity have to be used as the ultimate metaphor for cowardice? In this worldview, the quickest way to insult a man is to dress him like a woman. Never mind the fact that women wear frocks every day and don't turn into metaphors for failure. What makes this particularly ironic is that the very people invoking the idea of the "rangbah"- the mature, respected man—seem to have such a remarkably childish understanding of respect.

Across India, and most recently, in a neighbouring state, skirts, frocks or any form of female clothing are routinely used to ridicule and criticise male leaders. Each time, the same tired joke is dragged out, and each time it seems to generate laughter and agreement from an audience, which is depressing and saddening. The only thing more worn out than that joke is the dignity of women.

If this continues to be the standard of maturity on offer- proving one's maturity by insisting one is nothing like a woman - then perhaps the real test of adulthood is unlearning that instinct. Have enough confidence that a frock, a skirt, or femininity itself cannot threaten your sense of worth. No frock required.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Reciting Vande Mataram Not a Hallmark of Patriotism

Editor,

The Supreme Court has sent a clear message that patriotism cannot be enforced by punishing someone for expressing freedom of conscience. People who refuse to sing Vande Mataram in whole or in part must not be prosecuted. People have their freedom of choice. It goes without saying that national symbols like the national song must be respected and sung appropriately on solemn occasions. On the other hand, it is not fair to impose it on people and punish them for not singing it. People have the right to dissent and freedom of choice. Preferences vary from person to person. True, Vande Mataram evokes patriotic feelings in people and was a source of inspiration for thousands during the freedom struggle. The first part of the song continues to inspire people. However, the religious beliefs of certain sections of people do not allow them to accept the later stanzas. Whether they want to sing it or not is their personal choice. There are some other takeaways in the message of the Supreme Court. Patriotism and loyalty cannot be measured solely by one's willingness to sing the national song. Dissent and disloyalty must never be equated. Patriotism can never be demanded; rather, it is to be freely expressed.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

A Meaningful Initiative Against Drug Abuse

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper, I would like to express my appreciation for the commendable initiative taken by the Garo Hills Gorkha Welfare Society (GWS), in collaboration with the District Administration and the District Social Welfare Department, to organise a Nukkad Natak (street skit) under the Nasha Mukt Bharat Abhiyaan.

The street skit was staged at three locations in Tura—Chandmary, Tura Bazar and Dakopgre (P.A. Sangma area)—with the objective of creating awareness among the public, particularly students and young people, about the harmful effects of drug abuse and other negative influences. It is encouraging to see a community organisation taking up such a meaningful social initiative at a time when the younger generation is increasingly exposed to various challenges. The growing use of intoxicating substances, particularly drugs, among young people is a matter of serious concern. Children and adolescents, especially those in the 12–18 age group, can be particularly vulnerable to such influences. Awareness programmes of this nature have considerable social importance. A street play can convey a serious message in a simple, direct and engaging manner, enabling young people to understand the physical, psychological and social consequences of drug abuse. Such initiatives can also encourage families, schools and communities to take a more active role in preventing substance abuse among children and adolescents.

I deeply appreciate the initiative of the Garo Hills Gorkha Welfare Society and extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who contributed to organising this timely and much-needed programme. The cooperation and support extended by the District Administration and the District Social Welfare Department are also worthy of appreciation.

It is equally encouraging to learn that the Society is planning another drug-awareness programme on October 2, with officials from the Social Welfare and Police Departments, along with teachers from different educational institutions, invited as resource persons. Such wider participation can help make the awareness effort more informative and effective.

At a time when drug abuse poses a growing challenge to our society, sustained awareness, preventive education and community participation are essential. Initiatives that reach young people directly and communicate the message in an accessible manner deserve encouragement and support.

Thanks once again to the Garo Hills Gorkha Welfare Society for taking up this important social cause and for contributing towards building a healthier, safer and more responsible society for our younger generation.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Tura

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"Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier."
— Colin Powell

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Meghalaya's Unregulated Tourism

IT is difficult for Meghalaya to regulate its tourism now that things have moved beyond control. Wise people plan things before they venture into anything that has the potential to affect them in the long term. This is not to lay the fault for tourism gone awry at the doorstep of the MDA Government. There was no Tourism Policy until 2011. The state was created in 1972. It took the Government 39 long years to come up with a Tourism Policy. Not that Meghalaya had any policy before that. The State Health Policy came up in 2021 and Education Policy in 2018. So Meghalaya was literally running on auto-pilot mode and no one was any the wiser. For decades those running the government did not bother to think of policies for every aspect of human development. And neither did those in the Opposition ever demand that Meghalaya should have a policy for those key areas of human development so that fund allocation is prioritised rather than skewed.

Those leading Meghalaya since its statehood should have outlined the priority areas such as education, health, roads, water supply, and electricity, to name a few. Within the first five years after statehood the government should have envisioned Meghalaya's enormous tourism potential and created a master plan for the kind of tourism it envisaged which should not have been the mass tourism we see today. Those running the government were only interested in holding on to their chairs and left the state to bureaucrats who decided the development priorities for Meghalaya. As expected, those priorities changed every five years when a new set of politicians were elected. The price for this lack of a long term vision for the state is being paid by the present generation. The MDA Government is playing catch-up and has a lot to achieve to make up for the years of sleep-walking.

The slogan for this year's World Tourism Day is "Digital Agenda and Artificial Intelligence to Redesign Tourism." This agenda was set by the United Nations. It is essentially a western agenda that does not match the kind of tourism practised here. The first question to ask is: How can tourism serve Meghalaya and not how Meghalaya can serve tourism. Hence the Meghalaya Government should have come up with its own state-specific slogan to observe World Tourism Day instead of just repeating what the West prescribes. Those promoting tourism in Meghalaya and the government need to sit together and sort out a few thorny issues. Meghalaya has to decide what it does not want tourism to become. Its time to ask hard questions. These questions are – Who owns tourism; who controls it and who benefits from tourism. Tourism in Meghalaya will only be sustainable if it follows the high value, low volume model such as the one Bhutan adopts. In Bhutan people respect silence and demand that silence from visitors. In Meghalaya the tourist decides how he/she behaves because the state has not set out a code of conduct for tourists. How can 20-30 people stand and pose for pictures on a living root bridge without it fraying at the edges? But there is no one to regulate tourism on the ground. The tour guides are too polite and have not been trained to insist on ethical tourist behaviour and to respect the wonders of nature such as the waterfalls, rivers, canyons etc. Meghalaya's tourism model should be "high value, low volume" and one which is truly community-owned.

MTDC Trusts Them to Run Its Tourism, But Not Enough to Regularise Them

By Napoleon S. Mawphniang

There is an old Malayali proverb that my grandmother often told me, translated more or less as "The hand that carries water does not drink first." I am a Khasi, not a Malayali, but have been following this proverb ever since I discovered that it had been keeping company with me all along. And so I was not surprised to find 143 such hands, all over my desk in the petition submitted by the workers of the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation.

Allow me to explain, before I delve into the philosophy here, because I will get lost in it, eventually, since that is the way my writing tends to go.

They are people who have spent more than ten years cooking, cleaning, guiding, maintaining, and guarding MTDC's properties. Who have worked in Orchid Lake, Umiam, and other resorts, their services, it seems, being "contractual." One would think fifteen years of competent labor might earn a permanent post, but I wonder if they have forgotten the word.

Allow me to ask the most obvious question at this point, the one any human being might ask. If MTDC can find competent people to do the work of a Tourism Corporator, why should you, Corporation, not be content to be content with them forever?

Because, dear reader, I think you might have noticed that the word "contractual" no longer describes the work.

Someone has to clean the rooms at Orchid Lake Resort every day for the next forever, and someone has to run the boats at Umiam this season. Someone, in other words, will do this work, and someone has to be here to do it. So someone please tell me, where is the end of permanent work? Where, exactly, does permanent work stop being permanent work?

I think a lot about Gogol's Overcoat, and am surprised to find myself thinking of it again. The story, for the uninitiated, is about a lowly copy-clerk, Akaky Akakievich, who copies down papers day after day, unseen and unnoticed. One day, he decides he would like a new overcoat, to keep himself warm in the dead of winter. Asking his superiors to treat him with some dignity by funding this new overcoat, he is ignored. He dies and haunts the streets as a ghost, still unable to be separated from his overcoat, which had been stolen long ago.

Do MTDC workers not deserve this kind of dignity? Do they not deserve to be seen as individuals rather than easily-renewable, cheaper units?

If so, I do not know why it has taken so long.

Allow me to segue into Greek mythology, because I feel it is rather appropriate here. Do you know about Procrustes? He was a character from ancient mythology who had a bed, an iron bed, and told any wandering stranger that they could stay in his house for as long as they liked, so long as they fit perfectly into this bed. If the stranger was too tall, their feet would be broken and bent until they fit. If they were too short, they would be stretched until they fit. The stranger would always fit. The bed never changed.

MTDC has its own iron bed, the word "contractual," and I feel confident in saying the rest fits the story from here. No matter how appropriate or permanent the work, no matter how long these people have been here and how much they know about MTDC, the bed stays the same. The label stays the same. Someone, somewhere, has decided it is always going to be this way, and nobody has decided to change it. Because changing the bed would cost them pension or other benefits, and so the people stay in it.

I think I am beginning to see the light in your eyes, my friends, but please, hear me out. I do not think the evil-doers behind this are cartoon villains in a moustache-twirling sense, but in a much, much sadder one. The people who signed this renewal form year after year are not people who have to actually make a decision. It is a form. A piece of paper. It is easier to renew someone every year than to actually have to give them permanent status. Someone with the power to sign the paper, to say "Yes, this person is permanent, here is their pension and benefits," has not sat down and looked at this person in the eye and decided they were worthy. It is a decision not made.

It is the distance between someone who works in air-conditioned facilities with a salary in their pocket, and someone for whom the salary is in their hands and the working conditions are whatever they can find.

It is also a matter of fact, and I do not intend to speak here purely in emotional terms, although I will be doing so regardless, because there are legal grounds for what I am saying. Because, as a man who spends his time writing court documents and newspapers, I know legal grounds when I see them.

In the Umadevi judgment, the Supreme Court carved out a legal ground for workers who have done continuous, court-free service to a State for ten or more years against a real post. This is not a case of loophole, but of truth and law meeting on the ground and saying "Yes, this must end, at some point, and it must end fairly."

Our very own Meghalaya High Court, in its judgment in the case of MeECL, has stated that a worker cannot be denied equal pay on the grounds of their contractual rather than permanent status. It is my belief, and I think it a reasonable one, that if this does not apply to money, it most certainly does not apply to everything else.

There is one thing I have yet to say here, one fact that seems almost darkly funny, and I am sure you will be dying to know it. MTDC's very own recruitment advertisement, in the part stating their promise to new recruits, promises that new MTDC workers may be considered for regularisation in future, subject to good performance.

The words are true. But I have yet to hear MTDC tell their existing workers, those who have proven their skill and ability and who have worked in MTDC's guest houses for more than a decade and a half, that they will consider regularisation. They will consider renewal.

I do not know, reader, how to explain this, and have tried several times since first reading it.

There is a passage in Ambedkar's writings that I think of here, in which he talks about political equality without social and economic equality being a hollow promise and a mockery of the rights given on paper. The Constitution, as many of you know, promises equality before the law (Article 14) and equality of opportunity (Article 16), etc. But what does it all mean to a worker who is denied equal pay or benefits by their employer? Does that not make the law, too, meaningless?

Sisyphus, at least, knew what he was in for.... Every day, he had to roll the rock back up the hill, only for it to roll down again at the end of the day. Cruel, yes, but not as cruel as rolling the rock down while you roll it up.

These workers at MTDC might as well be being forced to repeat the cycle for the next forever, with no promise of stopping. It is a far crueller fate to push, and I think most of us would rather fall on a long road to fall down a short one.

The union has asked MTDC to reply within thirty days, and hopes to hold a peaceful sit-in outside the Corporation's premises in October if they do not do so. I find it unlikely, as an outsider looking in, that this request will be refused, because two years of polite requesting has so far yielded only silence.

This is, perhaps, my most sincere question for MTDC. If you trust these people enough to allow them to work with your guests, your kitchens, your reputation every single day for fifteen years, what exactly do you not trust them to do? Because, from where I am standing, MTDC's decision has already been made.

(The writer is a practising advocate from Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya)

ECI and the Gandhi Test of Public Integrity

By Sudarshan Iyengar

The Election Commission of India is not an ordinary government department. It is a constitutional institution entrusted with something more fundamental than conducting elections: protecting the citizen's right to choose. Article 324 vests the Commission with superintendence, direction and control over electoral rolls and elections. Its credibility is therefore inseparable from that of Indian democracy.

The controversy over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has now acquired an unusual and serious dimension. Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recorded objections on at least 14 occasions over ten months concerning decisions relating to electoral rolls, voter registration, deletion and restoration of names, Form 6 and the centralisation of the electoral database in the hands of the Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar. They reportedly objected that some communications had been issued without their knowledge or approval and, in one instance, described a move as "unauthorised" and "illegal".

Disagreement between Commissioners is not in itself a constitutional failure. Indeed, the ability to disagree and record one's disagreement is part of institutional accountability. Similarly, the SIR itself is not a new idea. The present exercise, however, is exceptional in scale.

Dissent within the Election Commission is not unprecedented. There have been big differences among Commissioners in the past, including during the tenure of T. N. Seshan and, more recently, when Election Commissioner Ashok Lavasa recorded dissent on the Model Code decisions in 2019. What is unusual about the present episode is the reported frequency and nature of the objections and their connection with the electoral-roll revision now affecting very large numbers of citizens.

Disagreement between Commissioners is not in itself a constitutional failure. Indeed, the ability to disagree and record one's disagreement is part of institutional accountability. Similarly, the SIR itself is not a new idea. The present exercise, however, is exceptional in scale. A voter is not a number in a database. Every entry in the electoral rolls records a citizen whose right to participate in democracy may depend upon that entry being correctly maintained and never wrongfully deleted or impaired in any manner. The reported objections of the two Commissioners therefore deserve public examination. If they genuinely believed that important decisions were being taken without proper consultation, that changes were being made contrary to prescribed procedure, or that the electoral database was being centralised in a manner that weakened accountability, the public has a legitimate interest in knowing whether those objections were answered and how the final decisions were reached. If, on the other hand, the objections were satisfactorily resolved within the Commission, the facts should also be made public.The recent intervention of the Supreme Court adds another reason for caution. In September 2026, while hearing a challenge concerning Delhi's SIR, the Court asked whether notices to more than 33 lakh voters on grounds including "logical discrepancy" appeared to have been issued mechanically and asked the ECI whether additional safeguards were necessary. This does not establish that the exercise is unlawful. But when a constitutional institution is dealing with millions of names, even the appearance of mechanical or careless procedure deserves serious attention.

There is, however, another danger. The political drama surrounding SIR can be almost as harmful as administrative carelessness. The opposition has a more important responsibility. It must build a fool proof case, not only top down but also bottom-up. It should document specific cases, produce verifiable evidence, ask precise questions, approach the appropriate constitutional and judicial forums, and demand public acknowledgement and correction where errors are established.

Another aspect that deserves to be stressed is that the same standard of accountability must apply to all three Commissioners. If the two Commissioners have recorded serious objections, they should tell the people clearly what they objected to and whether their concerns were resolved. If they conclude that serious wrongdoing occurred and that they themselves became witnesses to it without being able to prevent or correct it, a case can be made that resignation would be an act of personal integrity rather than political manoeuvring. Equally, if the CEC is satisfied that the Commission acted lawfully and that the objections were properly considered, he should explain the facts and accept responsibility for the decisions taken.

This is where Gandhi's example becomes relevant. Gandhi did not regard public leadership as a shield against personal responsibility. When he concluded that he had committed a grave error in calling for civil disobedience prematurely, he publicly acknowledged what he called a "Himalayan miscalculation". He wrote that he never regretted making that confession. For him, acknowledgement of one's own error was not weakness; it was part of the discipline of truth.

The same principle should apply here. If there has been a serious error, it should be acknowledged. If citizens have been wrongly excluded, they should be restored. If procedure has been violated, responsibility should be fixed. If the Commissioners' objections were justified, they should not remain buried in files. And if any constitutional functionary believes that continuing in office would compromise his or her integrity, resignation and public explanation would be legitimate forms of accountability. The Chief Election Commissioner is answerable but so are the two Commissioners equally answerable.

India does not need an Election Commission without disagreement. It needs an Election Commission in which disagreement is fearless, recorded, considered and transparent. The ultimate issue is whether every eligible Indian citizen can trust that his or her name will be included and retained through a process that is lawful, transparent, careful and capable of correcting mistakes. Mass pruning and mass deletions renders the entire process questionable.

The Election Commission belongs neither to the government of the day nor to the Opposition. It belongs to the people of India. Its first duty is to protect the citizen's vote. That is the standard by which the CEC, the two Election Commissioners should be examined. That is the real Gandhi test of public integrity.

(Dr. Sudarshan Iyengar is the former Vice Chancellor of Gujarat Vidyapith, the University founded by Mahatma Gandhi in 1920). (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org) (Syndicate: The Billion Press)

Letters to the Editor

What Defecting MLAs Can Learn from John Walker

Editor,

The recent televised spectacle of our elected representatives shamelessly defecting to the BJP has sent profound shockwaves through the collective consciousness of our State. In a society where Christians compose 75% of the population (as per the 2011 census, and likely 80% by now), and where the BJP historically held a mere two seats, this sudden political realignment is not a standard legislative shift—it is a calculated, malicious subversion of the democratic mandate.

The leaders we elevated to high office have betrayed our trust in the most absolute, unforgivable sense. To turn one's back on the very constituency that birthed their political life, exchanging the collective will of the people for personal advancement, is the defining act of a traitor. By abandoning their voters, these politicians have acted as traitors to the foundational ethos of the community they swore to protect. They have hollowed out and betrayed the very soul of the electorate.

We have fallen and sunk so low that everywhere we look in our society, there is only performative moralism and an underlying hedonism—and no genuine morality at all. We are witnessing a tragic ideological capitulation, where individuals masquerade as pillars of the community. We saw them singing from the Christian hymn book during the welcoming ceremony of a former regional party member to the BJP, and we watched the subsequent induction of eight former UDP legislators, all while these leaders actively compromise their core doctrines for raw political survival. This sickening alignment reveals a devastating truth: there is no genuine conviction in their hearts, only a ruthless willingness to barter our collective heritage for fleeting power.

By shifting their allegiance, these nine former regional party members have committed an act of absolute political suicide. Their actions bring to mind a historic account published in Reader's Digest in 1987 regarding the infamous Walker spy ring—the family that imperilled American intelligence during the Cold War. When the mastermind, John Walker, was finally brought to justice for selling foundational cryptographic secrets, the sentencing judge looked at him with utter contempt. Recognising the absolute betrayal of trust, the judge vowed to use all his power to ensure Walker would never see a single day of parole.

Our defecting MLAs should take this history as a sobering lesson. They may have escaped legal prosecution through political loopholes, but they cannot escape the jury of the public square. Once the voters rightfully recognise you as a political traitor, the verdict is absolute: you will never ever be granted electoral parole, and you will never ever be elected again.

Yours etc.,
Morning Star Sumer,
Via email

When Post-Election Political Arithmetic Overrides the People's Mandate

Editor,

The recent political developments in Meghalaya have once again brought into sharp focus a fundamental question concerning our democracy: What happens to the people's mandate when elected representatives change political allegiance after an election?

This is not a question concerning any one political party. It concerns the integrity of the electoral mandate itself.

The people elect their representatives under a particular political party, its symbol, programme and political commitments. However, the composition of the Assembly can subsequently change substantially when elected MLAs move from one political party to another. Meghalaya has witnessed such political movements in the present Assembly. MLAs elected on the tickets of different political parties have subsequently crossed over to other parties, thereby changing the political arithmetic that existed immediately after the election.

The latest development involving the eight UDP MLAs who have reportedly joined the BJP is particularly significant. The BJP had originally won seats through candidates elected on its own ticket, while the UDP had secured twelve seats. Following the reported movement of eight UDP legislators to the BJP, the political balance between the two parties has changed substantially.

The legal status of this latest development will, of course, have to be examined under the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, including its provisions relating to merger and disqualification. The Speaker has a constitutional role in determining questions arising under the Anti-Defection Law, subject to judicial review.

But the larger issue is not merely legal. It is democratic. When voters cast their ballots, they do so in the knowledge of the political identity of the candidate they are electing. A substantial post-election transfer of elected representatives can alter the political balance of the Assembly without the electorate being given an opportunity to express its opinion on that change.

This raises an important question: Should elected representatives be able to fundamentally alter the political mandate received at an election without seeking a fresh mandate from the people?

The Anti-Defection Law was introduced through the 52nd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1985, and incorporated into the Tenth Schedule precisely to address the problem of political defections.

At the same time, Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule provides an exception for mergers, subject to constitutionally prescribed conditions, including the requirement concerning two-thirds of the members of the legislature party.

The present Meghalaya situation demonstrates why this provision deserves serious national discussion.

In the case of the eight UDP legislators, the reported numbers are particularly significant because eight out of the twelve UDP MLAs represents exactly two-thirds. Whether all the constitutional requirements for protection under the merger provision have actually been fulfilled is a matter for the competent constitutional authorities to determine.

But from the perspective of the voter, another question remains: Did the people who voted for those representatives give their mandate knowing that a substantial number of them could subsequently represent another political party? The same democratic question applies regardless of whether the beneficiary is BJP, NPP, UDP, Congress or any other political party.

Therefore, Parliament should seriously consider whether the existing Anti-Defection Law requires reform. Possible reforms could include:

1. A clearer definition of a genuine political merger, distinguishing it from a collective movement of legislators.

2. A review of the two-thirds merger provision under Paragraph 4 of the Tenth Schedule.

3. A time-bound mechanism for deciding disqualification petitions, so that such matters do not remain unresolved for extended periods.

4. Greater clarity regarding whether the original political party itself must merge for the protection under the merger provision to apply.

5. Consideration of whether, in circumstances involving a fundamental change in political allegiance, a fresh mandate from the electorate should be required, subject to constitutional feasibility.

The objective should not be to prevent legitimate political realignment, nor should any reform favour one political party over another. The objective should be to ensure that the political arithmetic inside the Assembly does not become completely detached from the electoral mandate given by the people at the ballot box. Today it may be UDP MLAs joining BJP; tomorrow the same situation could affect another political party.

Therefore, this is not fundamentally a BJP issue, a UDP issue, an NPP issue or a Congress issue. It is an issue concerning the voter and the sanctity of the electoral mandate. Political parties may change, alliances may change and governments may change. But the mandate given by the people deserves the highest degree of respect.

The present developments in Meghalaya should therefore provide an opportunity for Parliament to revisit the Anti-Defection Law and examine whether the existing constitutional provisions adequately protect the democratic mandate.

Democracy should not end at the ballot box. The mandate given by the people should continue to have meaning throughout the life of the Assembly.

Yours etc.,
Dr. O.S. Jyrwa
Shillong

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

"Let your hopes, not your hurts, shape your future."
— **Robert H. Schuller**

The Shillong Times

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Shame on the nation

CURIOUSLY, the Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar carried with him the image of a corrupt and ill-mannered bureaucrat. But, Prime Minister Narendra Modi found virtue in him, leading to his appointment as the Chief Election Commissioner – a Constitutional authority vested with independent powers. In the past 19 months since his appointment in February, 2025, he went haywire, allegedly sided with the ruling BJP as its hatchet man, and as suspected sought to subvert the vaunted electoral system in the world's largest democracy. Allegations of corruption and other such acts came up against him throughout his career. With two of his associate election commissioners openly complaining that the CEC was taking his own decisions without consulting them, and the Supreme Court expressing dismay at his style of functioning, Kumar is not willing to step down. Impeachment is the way forward even as the Opposition parties led by the Congress on the one side and the Cockroach Janata Party on the other pressing hard their demand for his ouster from the august office.

It's no secret that Prime Minister Narendra Modi, ably assisted by his home minister Amit Shah, has sought to subvert several hitherto well-maintained systems and institutions; and with ulterior motives. The Modi government's removal of the Chief Justice of India from the selection panel for the CEC post, and insertion of a cabinet minister (alongside the PM and the Leader of Opposition) – and the modifications he made in the ECI act in 2023 to facilitate this – had raised eyebrows. These moves, it is suspected, were part of a well-planned exercise to manipulate the 2024 general elections – which as usual combined parliament and (some) assembly polls. With wayward moves of Kumar as CEC now becoming public through dissent from the two election commissioners, who functioned alongside him, these suspicions have strengthened. The 2024 polls took place at a time when the Modi government's image had begun dimming; and this was evident in the results as the BJP and its allies failed to muster a majority. Obviously, time was short for Kumar to indulge much. The Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of voter lists, initiated by the CEC later, removed lakhs of voters on various pretexts, first in Bihar and then in West Bengal; and the process is now going on in other states. It is nobody's argument that fake names should not be weeded out from the electoral rolls. But the CEC apparently went overboard, as is evident from its own admission vis-à-vis the appeals filed by genuine voters in Bengal etc, which had then to be granted and their names re-included in the lists.

The Indian democratic system enjoyed a high reputation for the fair conduct of the election process, for most part. TN Seshan as CEC furthered this reputation by his fair, assertive and independent styles. If Seshan as a bureaucrat had enjoyed a high reputation, the reverse is true of Gyanesh Kumar. By all accounts, he's a shame on the nation, and suspectedly a puppet in the hands of ruling party politicians. The Opposition should insist on his removal from the chair with the same aggressiveness with which it and the CJP managed to remove Dharmendra Pradhan from the cabinet at the height of the NEET row.

(Pnar) Chah rah Synphut: (English) To be led astray by a mischievous evil spirit

By Toki Blah

In August 2026, eight MLAs of the United Democratic Party (UDP) set off for a confrontation with the powers that be in the Central Government in New Delhi. Let us be clear from the onset that this was no clandestine visit to the national capital. As a matter of fact the entire trip was publicly and officially framed as a trip to nudge the Central Govt to review its proposed revision of the FCR Act which this largely Christian state was apprehensive of. The delegation, led by Cabinet Minister Lahkmen Rymbui, explicitly stated to the media and the public that they were traveling to meet Union Home Minister Amit Shah to voice the concerns of Christian-majority Meghalaya. They publicly argued that the proposed FCRA amendments could severely disrupt humanitarian, educational, and healthcare institutions run by minority and religious groups in the state. They were off to help prevent that. The mental picture of knights in shining armour out to fight for a good cause was quite popular with the general public. It was the kind of stuff a Regional Party is expected to do. Occasions for our local heroes to rise and shine. A sort of Glory be and Hallelujah journey of warriors to do battle against the forces of evil. What one didn't foresee was the inability of the group to read road signs of the Indian Capital. So instead of landing up in North Block of the Central Secretariat and confronting the Home Minister in his den, they got carried away by U Synphut to the BJP office at 6-A, Pandit Deendayal Upadhyay Marg, New Delhi, 110002. What followed is now the popular topic of discussion even among dajus of Iewduh!

No apologies are offered for the above observation. Look we got to understand that this story started off with 8 persons journeying to Delhi to fight for a certain cause. It was a political rescue mission of sorts which somehow lost its way. By the first weeks of September rumours started filtering out in bits and pieces that all was not well with the UDP. The President of the party rushed to Delhi to comfort his flock and take stock of the situation. Facing the press he emphasized that all was well within the party but his body language failed to meet the assurance of his words. For some of us watching from the sidelines, the sudden silence on the progress relating to the talks on the FCRA and the sudden switch over to the health of the UDP was unsettling but little did we suspect what actually was taking place in Delhi.

It is only now that we know that the FCRA rescue mission had by then been jettisoned. Like small, irresponsible children the warriors that had set forth to fight the Good fight had given up long ago, their attention perhaps distracted by the glitter of something the bright lights of Delhi had to offer. By now news of the 8 MLAs crossing over to the BJP camp had taken over local news headlines. Rumours started to filter out. By mid-September, it became quite clear that all was not well within the UDP. Instead of informing about the progress of talks on FCRA, news of the 8 crossing over to the BJP camp started to emerge. On 23rd September 2026 the 8 MLAs officially defected and joined the BJP. Fact accompli! FCRA? What FCRA? The initial FCRA rescue Mission had been long abandoned. In its place a transition from Advocacy to Defection had taken place. It was the final and worst form of betrayal. The 8 turncoats returned home with huge smiles on their faces and a pocketful of excuses. Something of the sort had happened in the garden of Gethsemane 2000 years ago. With the passage of time the value and price appreciation of 30 pieces of silver might have risen to 30 crores. Who knows? Anyway, it's just a passing thought.

It is but natural for people now to start asking, "What Next?" Where do we go from here? Interesting questions that demand plausible answers that themselves pivot around the year 2028 when the next Assembly elections will be held. There are those who feel that the 8 will be returned on BJP tickets possibly with others in tow. Don't be too sure. There is no evidence till now to back up such a belief. 8 individual UDP MLAs crossed over to the BJP. Please remember their constituencies did not. They continue to remain intact as strong regional party constituencies . Matter of fact the UDP base in those 8 constituencies is likely to increase because of voter disenchantment with the recent developments which most consider as a betrayal of regional interests. Voters feel their MLAs have betrayed them. Very likely the constituencies will not return the turncoats. Then there is also the belief in the UDP camp that its top leadership has failed them. The party will definitely try to reorganise itself and come up as a strong front runner in the Khasi Jaintia Hills in 2028. The person therefore to watch out for is Paul Lyngdoh. He is playing his cards very close to his chest right now. When the time comes for him to play his cards do not be surprised if he comes out as the new Leader of the UDP with some strong regional appeal. He is the man to watch. The UDP might just spring a 2028 surprise on everyone.

"The mental picture of knights in shining armour out to fight for a good cause was quite popular with the general public. It was the kind of stuff a Regional Party is expected to do. Occasions for our local heroes to rise and shine. A sort of Glory be and Hallelujah journey of warriors to do battle against the forces of evil."

The other expectation doing the rounds is that the BJP, a 2 MLA coalition partner in MDA II has overnight suddenly become a major partner with 10 MLAs. So will there be a Cabinet reshuffle to accommodate the BJP? Logically why should the NPP comfortable with 33 MLAs of its own , accord the BJP the satisfaction of more Cabinet seats than its present one (Sanbor Shullai from Laban)? Such accommodation will only help the BJP strengthen its voter base? In 2028 it is unlikely for the two to have any seat sharing arrangement. They will contest as rival parties. So why give undue advantage to the BJP?

Both the NPP and the BJP will be doing their respective calculations on this one. In so doing the BJP might decide to beat the NPP to the draw by doing another Aaya Ram Gaya Ram deception on the NPP similar to the one they just pulled on the UDP. They would need 33 NPP MLAs to cross over. Money can move mountains. 33 MLAs is nothing, so don't be so shocked by such a suggestion. If this happens the BJP will have 10 + 33 = 43 MLAs. Secure for Government formation and adequate time for concentrated preparation for 2028 . Question is who is likely to head this speculative Government for the next 1 ½ years? Now both Sniawbha and Prestone have stoutly denied the possibility of their involvement in such a political evolution. Anyway anything is possible in politics and so if 10+33 comes to pass, does Laban or Pynthor produce a CM? Que Serra Serra! Tra la la la la! Political speculation is such fun!

Playing speculative games is fun but let us get serious. Since Feb 2023 Meghalaya had enjoyed one of those rare moments in its 54 year history – political stability in governance. Whether we governed wisely or foolishly during that period only history will tell. Now with the selfish merger of these 8 UDP MLAs with the BJP , Meghalaya is once again poised for a future period of political turmoil and chaos. We have tried above to visualise various eventualities and their likely political fallout. Nonetheless, one cannot deny that a vacuum now exists regarding regional political loyalties for 2028. HSPDP is in no shape to fill in that void. UDP as mentioned above is therefore likely to re energise itself and return with either the same number of seats or slightly fewer. Nonetheless it is not likely to forego its king-maker role. The Congress and the VPP are waiting in the wings to step into this empty space and either one or both are likely to walk away with a chunk of the votes.

Post 2028 polls is likely to see the NPP walk away with seats from both Garo, Khasi and Jaintia Hills. Not sure about the BJP but its tally is expected to increase from urban constituencies while its rural attempts might be difficult for it to harvest successfully. So once again a number of equally matched parties, advocating diametrically opposite manifestoes and policies, scrambling to form shaky unstable coalitions among themselves is likely to be the post 2028 poll results. That seems to be the destiny of post 2028 Meghalaya. It simply emphasises once again, as nothing ever could , what blind unthinking greed of a few can do to the welfare and wellbeing of a whole community and even a state.

Can We Still Trust the Election Commission?

By Mantre Hame Dkhar

There was a time when the Election Commission of India was seen as one institution that stood above politics. Governments changed, political parties fought elections and candidates accused each other of many things, but there was still a general belief that the institution conducting the elections would remain neutral. That faith is now being tested, and the latest controversy surrounding Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls should concern every citizen, irrespective of which political party one supports.

The controversy is not simply about Rahul Gandhi or the Congress versus the BJP. It is about the institution that decides who is on the electoral roll and, ultimately, who gets to exercise the right to vote. A report by The Indian Express has revealed that Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi recorded objections on at least 14 occasions over decisions connected with the revision of electoral rolls. The objections reportedly covered changes in electoral forms, the addition and deletion of voters and other decisions relating to the roll. The Election Commission has said that differences within an institution are normal. That is fair. Commissioners can disagree. But the important question is whether those objections were properly considered and answered, and whether the public has been given a clear explanation of what happened.

This matters because the electoral roll is not just a government document. Behind every name is a citizen. The Indian Express has reported that more than 13 crore names were deleted from draft electoral rolls across 30 States and Union Territories during the SIR exercise. These are draft deletions and should not be described as 13 crore people being permanently denied their right to vote, because there are procedures through which names can be challenged and restored. But the figure is large enough to show why the exercise must be handled with the greatest care. A mistake in a government register may be corrected later, but a mistake involving a voter's name can affect that person's ability to participate in an election.

The concern is not only about the number of names. In Delhi, the Supreme Court recently questioned the manner in which notices were being issued to voters during the SIR process and observed that some appeared mechanical. The Court sought an explanation from the Election Commission. Again, this does not prove that the Commission deliberately tried to remove genuine voters. But it shows why people are asking questions. If a voter receives a notice saying that his or her name is in doubt, the person should be clearly told why and what must be done to correct the record. The process should not become so complicated that an ordinary citizen gives up.

This is also where the BJP needs to exercise some restraint. The Election Commission does not belong to the BJP, just as it does not belong to the Congress or any other political party. It belongs to the people of India. Therefore, whenever questions are raised about the Commission, the answer should not simply be that the Opposition is trying to damage the institution. If the Commission has acted correctly, the government should welcome a full explanation. If there were disagreements among the commissioners, the country should know how those disagreements were dealt with. If mistakes were made, they should be corrected. Transparency should not be seen as an attack on the institution; it is what strengthens the institution.

Rahul Gandhi has gone much further by saying that elections are being "rigged" and that the country's elections are "fundamentally broken". These are serious political allegations and should not be treated as established facts without evidence. At the same time, they should not simply be brushed aside because they come from an Opposition leader. The proper response is to examine the evidence and answer the questions. If the Election Commission believes that the allegations are false, it has every opportunity to demonstrate that through facts, records and a transparent explanation of its procedures.

The demand by the Opposition for the resignation or removal of the Chief Election Commissioner has therefore become part of a larger debate about public confidence in elections. Parliament will have to deal with the proposed motion according to the law and the constitutional procedure. But beyond the political battle lies a much bigger issue. The Chief Election Commissioner is not supposed to protect the interests of the government of the day or the Opposition. The office exists to protect the integrity of the electoral process. That responsibility becomes even greater when doubts are raised about the electoral rolls.

This should matter to Meghalaya as much as it matters to Delhi, Bihar, Goa or any other part of India. In our State, people understand the importance of every vote. Elections are not distant events here. They affect our villages, our towns, our constituencies and our everyday lives. For an ordinary voter, democracy is not a complicated constitutional idea. It is simply the confidence that when election day comes, his or her name will be on the list and the vote will be counted.

That confidence must not be taken lightly. The Election Commission should not merely tell people to trust it. It must give people reasons to trust it. The best way to do that is through openness, clear explanations and accountability. The BJP, too, should remember that an institution whose credibility is weakened today may become a problem for everyone tomorrow. Governments change, parties change and political fortunes change, but institutions remain.

The Election Commission is meant to be the referee in India's political contest. A referee does not need to win the match, nor should it be seen as playing for one side. Its greatest strength is that both sides believe that the rules are being applied fairly. Once that confidence disappears, even a genuine election result can become the subject of suspicion.

That is why the present controversy should not be reduced to a fight between the BJP and the Congress. It is about something much more basic. It is about whether an ordinary Indian can continue to look at the electoral roll, walk into a polling station and believe that the democratic system has kept its promise. Political parties will come and go. Governments will rise and fall. Chief Election Commissioners will change. But the vote belongs to the people. And when people's faith in that vote begins to weaken, every political party should be worried not about who wins the next election, but about the health of the democracy itself.

Letters to the Editor

When Vigilantism has Replaced the State

Editor,

Sunday, the 27th, was designated as a working day for all government banks. Yet again, here in Meghalaya, jingoism seemed to lead the way, with unauthorised, self-proclaimed protectors of land and this time, seemingly religion taking it upon themselves to decide whether banks should function and people should be allowed to work and service should reach people.

What, then, was Sunday working for? The working Sunday was part of the decision taken in the context of the United Forum of Bank Unions (UFBU) agitation, one of whose demands was the introduction of five-day working weeks and holidays on all Saturdays for bank employees. The Sunday was therefore kept open in anticipation of the subsequent three-day bank closure arising from the strike, so that businesses, institutions and ordinary citizens would not be pushed into avoidable distress.

Yet what we witnessed in Meghalaya was something entirely different. Some NGOs took it upon themselves to enforce their own understanding of what ought to happen, with religious identity appearing to enter the front stage of what was essentially an institutional and labour matter. People were reportedly sent home, banks were prevented from functioning, and the question naturally arises: under whose authority?

This growing pattern of vigilantism, particularly when it appears to operate without meaningful intervention from the State, is deeply troubling. Meghalaya risks becoming an isolated beneficiary of national institutions while simultaneously allowing local forces to decide, through pressure and intimidation, when those institutions may function.

More troubling is the apparent absence of the police like always and this time the high court has not taken any suo moto cognisance. If groups can prevent a government institution from functioning and there is no visible consequence, what message does that send about the authority of law? The same question becomes even more uncomfortable when one considers the long-standing allegations that certain groups issue what are effectively private tax or collection slips to businesses. This is hardly an unknown phenomenon, yet meaningful action appears elusive.

The pattern therefore continues: an organisation asserts itself, a particular religious identity enters the protest, and the State appears to stand aside. The silence of the Church, too, in relation to the functioning of government institutions during such crisis and emergency is noteworthy, particularly at a time when a senior Church leader has publicly criticised the UDP for allegedly moving towards the saffron party and described it as a betrayal of its voters. One cannot loudly invoke secularism when it is convenient and then remain selectively silent when a particular religious identity is brought to the forefront of public intervention.

I am not suggesting that religious institutions have no place in public discourse. They do. But the functioning of banks, government institutions and the enforcement of law cannot become matters of religious preference or street-level authority. When this pattern continues, we are not building a stronger Meghalaya. We are slowly undermining the very institutions that are supposed to hold a constitutional society together. A State cannot remain a State if every difficult question is eventually settled by whoever can gather the largest crowd, shout the loudest or claim the strongest ethnic, cultural or religious authority. That is not the protection of society, but a cacophony of irresponsibility. That is the gradual normalisation of a parallel authority over the State.

Yours etc.,
Dhruv C,
Via email

Meghalaya Lacks Professional Contractors

Editor,

It is seen that most of the local contractors in Meghalaya are not professional contractors because when we compare them with contractors from outside Meghalaya, our local contractors don't have the strategies or plan on how to work. They concentrate only on gaining maximum profit and don't care much about the quality. In the case of contractors from outside, they came to Meghalaya with full strength and team of engineers like surveyors, project engineer, machine operator and they are equipped with latest technologies like GPS, Drone, Digital Machines, etc. Meanwhile, Most of the local contractors in Meghalaya don't even have their own engineers. Only few Local contractors can compete with the contractors from outside the State. Worst are the class-III contractors, in which most of them don't even know the duty as contractors; they rely on MLAs to get a contract work because they are his vote bank. If this is the way on how our state function, then the future is in the dark.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Unsafe Construction & Lack of Inspection

Editor,

As a resident of Madan Laban and a structural engineer it has come to my notice that some buildings are inherently faulty in the way they have been constructed. There is a building coming up at Madan Laban adjacent to the State Bank Guest House where a slab was cast on August 29, a Saturday, using ready - mix concrete. On Sunday it was left unattended and there were plastic cracks all over. The cracks could be a result of using excessive water for workability and/or reverse bleeding of concrete caused by evaporation due to breeze and sunlight

On Monday the slab was ponded but simultaneously the workers started tying reinforcement of the columns. The column casting starts and mechanical vibrators were used. At times the needle of the vibrator touched the reinforcement. The work should not have been started prior to attending to the cracks of the slab.

The concrete was barely 3 days old and hence still green. Vibrations on it must have transmitted to the slab and caused micro-cracks in the concrete and hence the strength of the concrete may not attain the desired strength.

The curing of the columns was not done and was left to the scanty rain. The practice in-vogue is to wrap the column with hessian cloth and keep it wet throughout for at least 7 days. Now, over and above that, before the concrete of the column could attain its strength it is loaded with shuttering intended for the next level.

I am unaware of any workability test or on- site concrete cube test being done to assess the grade of the concrete poured for the RMC or normal concrete at site. To my understanding the concrete needs to be evaluated by a reputed agency before the work proceeds. Even a cursory assessment of time from August 29 till date is sufficient to narrate the story.

I am writing this letter only as a person concerned with safety and with no prejudice to anyone.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

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