"It is what we know already that often prevents us from learning."

Claude Bernard

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Signals from Punjab

WITH an impressive win in the civic elections in Punjab, Arvind Kejriwal's besieged Aam Aadmi Party has just had a reprieve – and this also signifies a morale boost to the national opposition that's facing odds for quite some time. The BJP, on a victory march, failed to make a mark in this poll, winning decisively only one municipal corporation, while the AAP won five of the total eight and the Congress one. The BJP has been relegated to the fifth position overall, against the AAP's win of some 958 of the total 1977 wards. That the AAP established its hold over 40 of the 75 municipal councils reinforces the feeling that the ruling party in the state enjoys the confidence of the people.

Considering that this electoral verdict comes against the backdrop of the approaching assembly polls in the state next year, the civic poll results need not necessarily be replicated in the assembly hustings, as was evident in Punjab in the past as well. But the AAP's good performance in Punjab, outwitting the two national parties and the once-powerful regional entity, the Shiromani Akali Dal, amply demonstrates the popular mood. The AAP, formed in 2012 under the leadership of anti-corruption activist Arvind Kejriwal, has been having troubled times of late. The BJP used all the resources at its command to defame and drive out the AAP government in Delhi in the last state polls. This was followed by the defections in April of several senior AAP leaders including seven of its 10 Rajya Sabha MPs to the BJP. Many thought this was going to be the end of the AAP and its leader, the redoubtable Kejriwal. The Punjab civic poll results give him and the AAP palpable relief. The signals from Punjab also give fresh confidence to the national opposition led by the Congress. The grand old party, which has faced odds since 2014 remains badly mauled across the Hindi belt, and its attempts for a revival in Assam and West Bengal fell flat this time too. Yet, Congress' electoral victory in Kerala after 10 years of its hibernation under the Left rule reinforced the party's continued hold in the South. As a minor partner, the Congress is also part of the new TVK-led government in Tamil Nadu. A leadership re-configuration in Karnataka, done deftly by the party high command, has also been a smooth process.

Notably, two stumbling blocks for the national alliance against the ruling BJP had been Arvind Kejriwal of the AAP and Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress. With both these parties now removed from power, Kejriwal and Banerjee are going through difficult times. The physical attacks on TMC's senior brass are a hint of what's in store for the regional party there. These, however, should bode well for the opposition unity. Chances are that a chastened Banerjee and Kejriwal would now stop ploughing a lonely furrow and help the INDIA bloc to regroup and reassert itself against the BJP. Divided they stand, united they fall. A strong opposition is a must for the proper functioning of the democratic system.

Between Autonomy and Dependency:

The Quiet Centralization of the Sixth Schedule?

By Patrick P. Sawian

One of the more unsettling paradoxes, within modern Indian federalism, is that institutions originally designed to protect indigenous autonomy may gradually be evolving into instruments through which autonomy itself, becomes diluted. This concern is increasingly visible, in the functioning of Sixth Schedule institutions across Northeast India. Conceived as constitutional safeguards, for tribal self-governance, customary law, land protection, and cultural continuity, the Autonomous District Councils were meant to function as robust local institutions capable of preserving indigenous political agency within the Indian Union. Yet over time, many of these bodies appear to have drifted into a condition of financial dependence and political vulnerability that risks reducing them to quasi-vassal entities functioning more through external patronage than genuine constitutional confidence.

The Sixth Schedule emerged, from the recognition that tribal societies in the Northeast possessed distinctive customary systems requiring protection from excessive assimilation into uniform administrative frameworks. The framers of the Constitution understood that applying identical governance structures across radically different societies could produce instability, alienation, and eventually political unrest. The District Councils were therefore intended not as symbolic ethnic ornaments but as meaningful mechanisms of local self-rule capable of exercising authority over land, customs, village administration, and traditional institutions. In theory, this represented one of the most sophisticated experiments in asymmetrical federalism within postcolonial constitutional history.

However, constitutional autonomy without economic independence often becomes fragile. Many Sixth Schedule institutions today remain heavily dependent on financial allocations from state governments or indirectly through centrally sponsored schemes (CSS) routed via state administrations. Once an institution lacks substantial independent revenue generation, leverage naturally shifts toward the entity controlling financial flows. In practice, this creates a dangerous imbalance. An institution dependent on another authority for salaries, projects, administrative functioning, and development funds gradually becomes cautious about antagonizing the very structures upon which its survival depends. Over time, this dependency risks transforming constitutional autonomy into a carefully managed administrative relationship rather than a genuinely assertive form of self-governance.

This is how centralization frequently advances in modern democracies. It rarely arrives dramatically through open constitutional destruction. More often, it progresses incrementally through financial dependency, bureaucratic conditioning, political patronage, and administrative influence. Funds become delayed, approvals become conditional, development projects become politically selective, and institutional assertiveness gradually gives way to cautious accommodation. Slowly, autonomous institutions begin behaving less like constitutionally empowered guardians of indigenous self-rule and more like intermediaries functioning within systems ultimately controlled elsewhere. The institution survives physically while its practical sovereignty weakens psychologically and administratively.

It is within this context that one increasingly hears arguments from certain political circles, urban commentators, bureaucratic interests, and sections of civil society that the District Councils themselves should simply be abolished altogether. On the surface, some of these criticisms appear reasonable. Critics point to corruption allegations, inefficiency, overlapping jurisdictions, administrative confusion, delays in governance, nepotism, poor financial management, and endless political infighting within the Councils. Some argue that the Councils duplicate the role of the state government while contributing little to development outcomes. Others portray them as outdated relics obstructing modernization and economic integration.

Certainly, many of these criticisms are not entirely fabricated. Several District Councils have indeed suffered from mismanagement, factionalism, weak governance, politicization, and administrative stagnation. Yet the deeper question is whether these institutional weaknesses justify abolition itself or whether they are being strategically amplified to weaken the constitutional basis of indigenous autonomy altogether. This is where the debate becomes more troubling.

For beneath some abolitionist rhetoric lies a far more insidious logic. Certain political and economic interests may view Sixth Schedule protections not merely as inefficient but as obstacles. Autonomous Councils exercise authority over land, customary practices, local regulation, and indigenous protections that can complicate large-scale commercial acquisition, centralized administrative control, demographic expansion, and external political influence. In regions where land remains deeply tied to tribal identity and customary ownership rather than unrestricted market transfer, autonomous institutions can act as barriers against aggressive commodification and outside penetration.

To some centralized political visions, exceptional constitutional arrangements themselves may appear ideologically inconvenient. A highly centralized national framework naturally prefers uniform systems, standardized administration, consolidated authority, and direct political influence. Institutions possessing special constitutional protections and localized authority may therefore increasingly be perceived as interruptions within the larger machinery of centralized governance. The danger is that public frustration over corruption or inefficiency may gradually be weaponized to normalize the idea that indigenous autonomy itself is the problem rather than the failure to strengthen and reform these institutions properly.

There is also an economic dimension rarely discussed openly. In many tribal regions, even in Meghalaya, land is not merely real estate. It represents ancestry, identity, customary continuity, and social security. Sixth Schedule protections complicate unrestricted external access to such land systems. For powerful commercial interests seeking easier acquisition, extraction, infrastructure expansion, or urban development, autonomous institutions may appear frustratingly resistant. Weakening the Councils could therefore gradually weaken the constitutional defenses surrounding indigenous land ownership itself. Another subtle factor involves demographic anxiety. Autonomous protections, indirectly preserve indigenous political influence within certain regions, by protecting customary systems and regulating aspects of land and local governance. Sections favoring greater demographic integration, or political homogenization may quietly perceive these protections as barriers to fuller assimilation into broader national political structures. Publicly, the language used may revolve around "development," "efficiency," or "national integration." Yet beneath the rhetoric may lie discomfort with the very idea of differentiated constitutional autonomy existing permanently within the Union.

This tendency, becomes especially pronounced during periods of strong political centralization at the national level. Under governments emphasizing national integration, centralized coordination, and ideological coherence, exceptional constitutional arrangements, may increasingly appear politically inconvenient. Autonomous institutions, rooted in customary authority and localized governance, can then begin facing subtle pressure, not necessarily through direct abolition, but through gradual administrative containment, financial dependency, and erosion of public legitimacy. The objective need not be open destruction. Rendering autonomy politically harmless may suffice. Examples from the Northeast have occasionally reinforced public perceptions that District Councils operate within constrained political environments rather than with full constitutional confidence. In Meghalaya, disputes involving trading licenses, issued under the Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Trading by Non-Tribals) Regulation repeatedly exposed tensions between District Council authority and wider political or commercial interests. Litigation concerning administrative appointments and governance disputes, within the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council also revealed recurring concerns regarding financial instability, state influence, and institutional fragility. Courts did not always explicitly state that pressure existed, yet the surrounding circumstances often created the impression that the Councils were functioning under political and financial constraints, rather than exercising independent authority freely.

One of the less discussed consequences of this process, is the gradual bureaucratization of indigenous politics itself. Traditional authority systems and customary governance cultures increasingly become absorbed into state-centered administrative logic. Indigenous institutions begin prioritizing procedural compliance, political accommodation, and project approvals over assertive constitutional autonomy. The institution remains indigenous symbolically while becoming increasingly derivative operationally. The tragedy is that, once autonomous institutions become heavily dependent on external political and financial ecosystems, local populations themselves may gradually lose confidence in the practical meaning of autonomy. Younger generations may begin perceiving the Councils not as powerful guardians of customary sovereignty but as weak administrative appendages surviving through patronage. This erosion of confidence may ultimately prove more dangerous than direct legal dilution because institutions lose vitality once communities cease believing they genuinely possess meaningful authority.

At the same time, the blame cannot be placed entirely upon external centralization. Internal weaknesses within many autonomous institutions have also contributed to their vulnerability. Corruption allegations, administrative inefficiency, factionalism, and lack of long-term planning have weakened public trust. External interference becomes easier when internal governance already appears fragile. Yet institutional weakness should logically lead to reform and strengthening, not necessarily abolition. One does not dismantle federalism because some states are corrupt, nor abolish Parliament because legislators misbehave. The same principle should apply to autonomous institutions.

The solution therefore does not lie in emotional anti-state rhetoric or simplistic romanticism of tradition. The real challenge lies in strengthening the practical foundations of autonomy itself. It is therefore pertinent, that Sixth Schedule institutions may require stronger fiscal decentralization, improved revenue generation, greater transparency, enhanced administrative professionalism, and constitutional assertiveness capable of resisting gradual dilution. Without such reforms, autonomy risks surviving largely as ceremonial symbolism while practical authority steadily migrates upward toward centralized political structures.

India today stands at a delicate constitutional crossroads. The country simultaneously requires national cohesion and meaningful federal diversity. Excessive fragmentation can destabilize states, but excessive centralization can suffocate local legitimacy and erode trust among indigenous communities. The Sixth Schedule, represented one of India's most intelligent attempts, to balance those competing realities. If such institutions gradually transmogrify, into financially dependent quasi-vassals, functioning primarily through political accommodation rather than constitutional confidence, India may ultimately weaken not only tribal autonomy, but also the broader federal imagination, upon which its democratic diversity depends.

The greatest danger, facing institutions like the Autonomous District Councils, is not always open abolition. Sometimes it is something quieter and more tragic. An institution slowly forgets how to behave autonomously at all. It continues speaking the language of sovereignty, while internally adjusting itself to dependency so thoroughly that servility begins feeling normal. And once that psychological transition becomes complete, constitutional autonomy may still exist beautifully on paper while practical self-governance quietly evaporates in reality.

On Role Models and bans: World No Tobacco Day 2026

By Dr. Caleb Harris

The Indian Premier League(IPL) is a media spectacle, drawing eyeballs, several of them youngsters, and it was shocking to see a young player, hailing from a neighbouring state, vaping in the dressing room. All the more as he held a leadership role in the team, which incidentally had a minor player! While it may not seem to be a big deal, with rampant smoking of cigarettes in public places, all around minors, one has to note that use of e-cigarettes is banned under the Indian law. The Government of India has to be credited for acting early and banning these seemingly harmless products in 2019, even before they started becoming popular. Yet, it was procured illegally and used in full view of the camera in a cricket stadium.

Not long ago, a Hollywood actor, best known for portraying a flamboyant secret agent, was seen promoting a brand of 'mouth freshner' on Indian screens. He claimed ignorance of its association with tobacco when this was pointed out to him. But there are several 'stars' out there who abuse their positions of influence to sell tobacco in various ways. TAPS- Tobacco Advertising, Promotion and Sponsorship- is banned under the COTPA(Cigarettes and Other Tobacco Products Act) 2003, which is a key aspect of the World Health Organisation's(WHO) Framework Consensus on Tobacco Control(FCTC). This Act bans the indirect sponsorship of events and all other forms of surrogate advertisements. But for this law, we would still have major cricket events named after tobacco brands.

Electronic Nicotine Delivery Systems(ENDS) are small devices which heat a nicotine containing solution and is vaporised to be inhaled by the user. These come in various shapes and varied flavours, albeit the key ingredient being nicotine. Nicotine is the most addictive substance and while it may not be directly carcinogenic, it may be harmful in high concentrations. The nicotine content in ENDS is high, can cause other health problems, including affecting the mental health. The most dangerous aspect of nicotine is the dependence it causes. While the Prohibition of Electronic Cigarettes (Production, Manufacture, Import, Export, Transport, Sale, Distribution, Storage and Advertisement) Act, 2019 banned such products in India, it is obvious that the ban has not been effective, allowing the cricketer to use it.

The United Kingdom, where smoking and vaping is rampant, has woken up late, and banned the use of tobacco and vaping recently. What is unique about this ban is that it is generational-with the ban being applied to all individuals born after Jan 2009, meaning all who turned 18 next year will not be able to use these products. Further, they will never get to use tobacco- not when they turn 21, not at 25 years! But it remains to be seen how well it would be implemented, because if a group of friends is out to shop for tobacco, while someone who was born on 31st December 2008 will be able to legally purchase tobacco, the one who was born on 1st January 2009 cannot. Few years later, a 40 year old may be able to buy while a 39 year old will be refused. Hence the onus is on the tobacco retailers and not the users.

This is hailed as a landmark legislation, as Sir Chris Whitty, the Chief Medical Officer for England remarked, "Cigarettes take choice away by addicting people and most smokers wish they had never started but are trapped". This is exactly what the UK Tobacco and Vapes Act wants to achieve- a generation of non-smokers. The Indian laws have been well drafted, and as per COTPA, smoking in public places, selling tobacco products to or by minors, or selling tobacco products within a radius of 100 metres from any educational institution is illegal. Establishments where tobacco products are sold must display messages like "Tobacco Causes Cancer" and "Sale of tobacco products to a person under the age of eighteen years is a punishable offence under law". However, the community has to ensure this is implemented better.

"The United Kingdom, where smoking and vaping is rampant, has woken up late, and banned the use of tobacco and vaping recently. What is unique about this ban is that it is generational-with the ban being applied to all individuals born after Jan 2009, meaning all who turned 18 next year will not be able to use these products."

World No Tobacco Day is observed on the 31st of May every year, since 1987. An initiative of the World Health Organisation (WHO), this year, the theme is "Unmasking the Appeal: countering nicotine and tobacco addiction" and aims to focus on revealing the tactics the tobacco and nicotine industry use to make their products look attractive despite being harmful. The tobacco industry tried to promote e-cigarettes and even convinced several doctors that it may help in tobacco cessation. But research has revealed otherwise- these e-cigarettes lead to further use of tobacco by promoting addiction to nicotine. We as a society, have to ensure that not only tobacco products even such e-cigarettes are not sold to minors so that the law is implemented in letter and in spirit. The role models whom we look up to have to be held accountable for their actions.

(The writer is M.Ch. (Surgical Oncology) Surgical Oncologist: Email surgonco@outlook.com. Views expressed are personal).

Letters to the Editor

When Forests Become Real Estate and Every Tree Just Timber

Editor,

I had been debating with myself for some time whether I should write this letter. After all, I do not wish to appear as an obstacle to the government's grand vision of development. However, every morning when I go for a walk, it pains me to witness the desecration of nature taking place in the name of development, and it compels me to write.

I am referring to the rapid loss of the last few patches of forest within the city. In particular, I speak of the stretch that once existed from Polo Junction up to Bishop Cotton Road and beyond, along the slope that forms the catchment area of the Umkrah River. I remember, in my younger days, taking shortcuts through this patch of forest on our way to the Polo Grounds. It was a dense and beautiful forest. I also recall that this area had been earmarked as a conservation zone in the Master Plan of Shillong. Gradually, however, through deliberate actions and with the active participation of those in positions of power, the first portion of this green belt—from near Polo Junction to around Topovan—was lost. Over the years, the green cover was encroached upon and replaced by unsightly concrete structures belonging to influential individuals and groups. The encroachment has not only continued but has expanded with each passing day. Now the assault has shifted to the remaining portion of this green belt, specifically in the stretch near Topovan both from the upperside and lower side.

This stretch from Topovan to the official residence of the Chief Secretary, is a beautiful forested area frequented by morning walkers and joggers, with lush green trees on one side and the soothing sounds of birds and insects filling the air. Walking there is a pleasure; it rejuvenates the spirit. Sadly, mature trees—many of them likely more than a hundred years old and standing long before several of today's political parties even existed—have been felled. Smaller trees and shrubs have been cleared, and the land has been dug up. This appears to be yet another step towards converting this strip of greenery into real estate. The very authorities entrusted with protecting our forests seem to be actively facilitating this process of destruction.

Why is there such a blind obsession with development at the expense of the environment? Why this desecration of nature and assault on entities that have no voice of their own? This protest is not mine alone. Many others have also voiced their concern over this brazen destruction. At a time when the world is increasingly aware of the dangers of global warming and the urgent need to preserve green cover, we in Meghalaya seem intent on destroying what little forest remains—right in the heart of our city, not to mention the gradual extension of habitation in the Laitkor range.

We are already experiencing the effects of climate change in our state, yet those in power appear oblivious to the consequences of their actions. Development is necessary; on that, we all agree. But it should not come at the cost of our forests and environment. If this present trend continues, we should perhaps stop this hypocrisy of celebrating World Environment Day and paying lip service on that day as to how concerned we are about the disappearing forests in our state.

Yours etc.,
B Dutta,
Shillong-1

Unidentified Miscreants and Identified Indifference

Editor,

Manipur's story is, above all, a heartbreaking one. Every few days, another incident emerges from the conflict, prompting one to wonder what sort of game the warring groups believe they are playing. It is difficult to identify any strategic logic that explains a cycle of violence so self-defeating that victory itself appears indistinguishable from ruin.

Yet, amid the bloodied history of conflict in Northeast India, perhaps the most inconsequential death—at least in the eyes of the nation—is that of the migrant labourer. These men, largely non-tribal wage earners from beyond India's narrow Chicken's Neck corridor, are scattered across the Northeast, building roads, driving trucks, carrying supplies, and performing the countless mundane tasks that keep society functioning.

The recent clip of security personnel painstakingly retrieving the lifeless body of a truck driver was particularly haunting. His offence was apparently that he chose to continue doing his job: delivering essential supplies to a region that desperately needed them. The video will likely join the ever-growing archive of viral tragedies—watched, shared, mourned briefly, and then quietly forgotten. For decades, the migrant labourer has occupied a peculiar position in the region's conflicts: visible enough to be targeted, yet invisible enough that few questions follow his death. He is the ideal victim for militants seeking publicity, a convenient statistic for aspiring pressure groups wishing to add gravitas to their credentials, and easy prey for the apex predators —the mysterious "unidentified miscreants." These elusive creatures possess extraordinary abilities: they can burn, stab, bludgeon, intimidate, and disappear with such efficiency that their identities remain perpetually undiscovered.

Contrast this with events occurring on the other side of the Chicken's Neck. There, if an air-conditioner installation leads to a neighbourhood dispute, accompanied by allegations of racial slurs, the entire nation quite rightly erupts in concern. Television panels awaken from their slumber, social media discovers its conscience, politicians issue statements, and public outrage travels at broadband speed.

Indeed, this collective sensitivity is the silver lining in an otherwise dark cloud of communal tension. Our own Chief Minister rightly ensured that his views were heard and even indicated that the matter could be escalated to the highest institutional levels if necessary to secure justice. Will he do the same for Manish Sharma, Papu Sharma, Raj Kumar Sharma, Mitlis Kumar, and Sorjo Bhumij who were assaulted at the construction site of the second Ri-Kynjai project by the Centrepoint Group at Laitkynsew village, Sohra, on Thursday, May 28, 2026 afternoon?

One cannot help but admire such responsiveness. It does, however, provoke an uncomfortable question. If a verbal insult can mobilise national attention, official interventions, and institutional concern, what level of urgency should be reserved for the truck driver whose body had to be pulled from a ditch, or for the countless migrant workers who have been assaulted, displaced, or killed over the years while serving communities far from their homes?

The tragedy is not that some victims receive attention. The tragedy is that others receive so little. In the hierarchy of public outrage, it sometimes appears that a dead migrant labourer ranks somewhere below a trending hashtag and only marginally above yesterday's weather report.

A nation that prides itself on unity cannot afford such selective empathy. Justice loses much of its moral force when it arrives enthusiastically for some victims and reluctantly—or not at all—for others.

Your etc.,
Narottam Subedi,
Via email

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

"If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading."

— Lao Tzu

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VPP's Crowd-funded Election

PURSUING its crusade for clean elections the Voice of People Party (VPP) launched its campaign for the Bye-election to the Shillong Lok Sabha seat at Sohra where people freely donated money towards the campaign. Whether this is done for photo-ops or if the VPP really upholds the ethics of asking for votes without succumbing to the pressure of appeasing voters with money remains to be seen. If the VPP can truly infuse in voters the spirit of electing a person who stands for certain values in public life, then it would have succeeded where the rest of the country hasn't. In India today the ruling political party – the BJP—succeeds in winning elections partly because it is seen as the party that will deliver the Hindus from the Muslims and rides on the slogan of "Hindu Khatre mein hai" (Hindus are in danger). This fear is so deeply embedded in the psyche of the average Hindu that arguing with them is pointless. They believe the Congress Party had for decades allowed a free flow of illegal immigrants first from East Pakistan and later Bangladesh. What they fail to see is that a substantial number of migrants are also Hindus by faith and are fleeing from regimes that persecuted Hindus. But in politics there is no place for reason. Emotions drive the voter to vote for a certain political party or person.

The role of emotions in politics is well researched. In the 2023 elections the VPP came up with a song that resonated with a large section of voters. People see the Government's lapses; its inability to provide basic necessities such as water, electricity and roads in large swathes of rural Meghalaya. These continue to be issues of great concern. Then there's unemployment despite the Government coming up with a plethora of schemes. All these formed the lyrics of the VPP song, "Ha U Prah." The point is that the Government alone cannot be the job creator. But credit must be given where due. The MDA Government has tried to empower farmers through various schemes that assist with packaging, branding and marketing niche products such as the Lakadong turmeric and other spices besides helping the farmers to find markets for their oranges and pineapples. Meghalaya has also made great strides in the Eri silk industry. People hopefully see these aspects too but Opposition Parties will always have their own narratives. The bandwagon on which the VPP rides is 'corruption' and the downslide in education. In fact, the Party has threatened to storm the Secretariat without notice. The public wonders what the VPP has up its sleeve. But elections demand a lot of posturing.

As far as the Lok Sabha Bye-election is concerned the VPP is expected to retain its loyal voters and also gain from sympathy votes since (Late) Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon was an MP who struck a chord with voters and who they genuinely trusted. He visited homes in rural Meghalaya and was pained by the poverty he saw on such visits. The VPP has put up Dr Batskhem Myrboh a teacher in NEHU's Political Science Department as their candidate. Myrboh is pitted against another academician and until recently the President of the Khasi Author's Society - Dr DRL Nonglait. Then there's the UDP candidate a veteran lawyer VGK Kynta and Vincent Pala of the Congress. It remains to be seen whether people will still vote for the VPP and its clean election agenda.

Beyond Political Blame: Understanding Meghalaya's PGI 2.0 Performance

Dr. Treemmi Lamare

The recent Performance Grading Index 2.0 by the Ministry of Education has generated considerable debate across Meghalaya after the state was placed at the lowest position among Indian states and union territories. Public reactions emerged with discussions rapidly turning political and emotional. Many interpreted the ranking as direct evidence of administrative failure, while others dismissed the report entirely as inaccurate and disconnected from the realities of the state. However, both responses risk oversimplifying a far more complex educational situation. The PGI 2.0 report should be approached not merely as a ranking exercise, but as an opportunity to critically examine the deeper structural, geographical, institutional, and administrative conditions that shape education in Meghalaya today.

A careful understanding of the PGI framework is necessary before drawing conclusions from the rankings themselves. The index is not designed to measure classroom learning alone. Rather, it evaluates states through a wide range of indicators connected to learning outcomes, infrastructure, governance, teacher education, enrolment, retention, digital reporting systems, and administrative efficiency. Much of the information used in the preparation of PGI is drawn from platforms such as UDISE+, NAS, PRABAND, PM POSHAN, and other management information systems maintained jointly by the Union and state governments. Consequently, educational governance in contemporary India has become increasingly dependent upon statistical visibility and digital administration. States are no longer assessed solely through educational realities on the ground, but also through their institutional ability to produce, verify, upload, maintain, and manage educational data within centralised digital frameworks.

This aspect becomes particularly important in the context of Meghalaya. The state continues to face considerable administrative limitations in relation to digital reporting and institutional coordination. In many schools, teachers themselves are expected to manage responsibilities extending far beyond classroom instructions. Alongside teaching, they are frequently required to maintain enrolment records, scholarship documentation, welfare related reporting, online portal updates, midday meal records, attendance verification, and other administrative processes simultaneously. The growing dependence on digital compliance has therefore expanded the role of teachers from educators into administrative managers and data handlers as well. In remote and rural areas where internet connectivity is inconsistent and technical infrastructure limited, delays and inaccuracies in reporting are difficult to avoid. Under such circumstances, weak reporting mechanisms gradually become interpreted as weak educational performance within national ranking systems. The issue therefore is not merely educational deficiency alone, but also the question of administrative visibility within a highly digitised governance structure.

An equally important issue concerns the question of technical training and administrative preparedness among personnel responsible for educational data management. Across many institutions, the process of uploading and maintaining records within platforms such as UDISE+, PM POSHAN, PRABAND, and other reporting systems is often handled by teachers, clerical staff, or data entry personnel who may not always receive adequate formal training in digital data management and statistical reporting procedures. In several cases, the absence of regular orientation programmes, technical workshops, verification mechanisms, and institutional support may contribute towards inconsistencies in data entry, delayed submissions, incomplete documentation, and reporting inaccuracies. Since contemporary evaluation frameworks such as PGI 2.0 rely heavily upon digitally maintained records, even relatively minor administrative or technical errors may eventually influence the overall grading outcomes of states. Proper capacity building, periodic technical training, and systematic monitoring of data management processes are therefore essential not only for administrative efficiency, but also for ensuring that educational realities are accurately represented within national assessment frameworks.

The statistical nature of PGI also creates unique challenges for smaller states like Meghalaya. In states with smaller populations and lower institutional numbers, even minor inconsistencies in enrolment figures, delayed verification, incomplete uploads, or discrepancies between physical records and online submissions may produce disproportionately larger impacts upon overall rankings. Statistical fluctuations that may appear insignificant in heavily populated states can generate substantial consequences within smaller administrative systems. This makes careful verification and repeated rechecking of educational data especially important. Stakeholders associated with the educational system, including the schools, district authorities, administrative offices, and data entry personnel, must therefore ensure that both physical and digital records are carefully examined before final submission in order to minimise the possibility of statistical inaccuracies. In a data driven evaluation system such as PGI 2.0, even minor reporting errors may significantly influence the final outcome.

Geography further complicates the educational realities of Meghalaya. Unlike urbanised states characterised by concentrated populations and relatively accessible infrastructure, Meghalaya is marked by scattered settlements, remote villages and uneven transport connectivity. Many schools operate in geographically isolated locations with very low enrolment numbers, while others continue to face infrastructural shortages and teacher related challenges. Maintaining educational institutions across fragmented and difficult terrain requires administrative capacities and logistical arrangements that are fundamentally different from those required in metropolitan regions. However, despite these differences, centrally designed ranking frameworks often apply uniform indicators across all states. This raises important academic questions regarding whether national evaluation systems are fully capable of capturing the lived educational realities of geographically complex tribal regions.

Another important contradiction lies in the relationship between educational culture and institutional governance within Meghalaya. Historically, the state has possessed a strong social respect for education. Missionary institution, church-based schooling traditions, and widespread English medium aspirations have contributed toward shaping a society in which education is highly valued by families and communities alike. Meghalaya has long been recognised for producing students who perform successfully in higher education, professional sectors, and institutions outside the state. Yet the presence of an educational culture does not automatically guarantee the existence of strong institutional governance. While social respect for education remains visible, the public educational system itself often appears administratively fragmented, unevenly monitored, and structurally inconsistent. This contradiction between educational aspiration and institutional capacity forms one of the central tensions underlying the present debate surrounding PGI 2.0.

The increasing dominance of statistical governance also deserves deeper attention. Contemporary governance systems increasingly reward states that are administratively measurable, digitally organised, statistically visible, and institutionally standardised. Meghalaya, however, continues to function partly through community-based systems, informal administrative practices, local negotiations, and relational modes of governance that do not always align neatly with highly bureaucratised statistical frameworks. Consequently, states with smoother administrative machinery and stronger digital infrastructures often perform more effectively within ranking systems, even when actual educational realities may be more complex than statistical outcomes suggest. This does not necessarily imply that the PGI framework is entirely inaccurate. Rather, it highlights the need to interpret rankings within broader geographical, institutional, and socio-political contexts. The issue therefore is not whether the ranking is entirely correct or incorrect, but whether highly standardised statistical frameworks are capable of fully capturing the educational complexities of geographically and culturally distinct regions such as Meghalaya. The issue of learning quality must also be approached carefully and honestly. Over the years, the expansion of English medium schooling across Meghalaya has created a widespread perception of educational advancement. Parents increasingly prefer English medium institutions because they are associated with opportunity, mobility, and social prestige. However, linguistic aspiration alone does not automatically guarantee conceptual understanding. In many instances, students may acquire basic communicative familiarity with English while simultaneously struggling with deeper comprehension in subjects such as mathematics, science, and analytical reasoning. Standardised assessments such as the PARAKH frequently reveal these conceptual gaps. This suggests that the challenge facing Meghalaya is not simply one of educational access, but also one of pedagogical depth and conceptual learning within classrooms.

At the same time, educational realities within Meghalaya remain highly uneven across districts and institutions. Certain schools and urban centres continue to demonstrate relatively strong performance and academic culture, while other institutions located in geographically remote areas face serious structural constraints. Consequently, broad state level averages do not always fully capture the diversity and unevenness of educational experiences within Meghalaya itself. The educational realities of Shillong, for instance, may differ substantially from those found in remote rural districts. Such unevenness complicates attempts to interpret educational performance solely through broad statistical rankings and numerical averages.

Nevertheless, it would be intellectually dishonest to dismiss the PGI outcome entirely as a problem of data collection or statistical methodology alone. Genuine structural weaknesses within the educational system remain across many parts of the state. Teacher shortages, infrastructural deficiencies, dropout rates, low enrolment institutions, uneven rural schooling, and weak monitoring systems continue to affect the overall educational environment. These challenges are real and require serious policy attention. At the same time, these conditions did not emerge suddenly, nor can they be simplistically attributed to a single political administration or one particular government. The educational difficulties confronting Meghalaya are cumulative in nature and rooted within long term structural conditions involving geography, administrative capacity, institutional development, and historical inequalities that have evolved over decades.

The present debate therefore requires a shift away from simplistic political reactions toward a more serious and research-oriented discussion on educational governance itself. The central question is not whether Meghalaya possesses intelligent students or whether its people value education. Rather, the more significant issue concerns the ability of public institutions to effectively deliver, manage, monitor, and sustain educational quality within an increasingly data driven governance environment. Meghalaya's PGI performance reveals not merely a crisis of education, but a deeper tension between educational culture, institutional governance, geography, statistical evaluation, and administrative modernisation.

In conclusion, the PGI 2.0 report should neither be blindly rejected nor uncritically accepted. Rankings can undoubtedly serve as important instruments for policy reflection and institutional introspection, but they do not always capture the full complexity of social realities. Meghalaya's low ranking undoubtedly reflects genuine institutional weaknesses that require urgent and sustained attention. At the same time, it also exposes the limitations of evaluating geographically distinct and administratively complex states through highly centralised statistical frameworks. Educational rankings should therefore function not merely as instruments of comparison, but also as opportunities for institutional reflection, administrative improvement, contextual understanding, and long-term educational reform. The challenge before Meghalaya is therefore not only to improve its ranking within national frameworks, but to build an educational system that is institutionally strong, administratively visible, socially meaningful, and capable of responding effectively to the unique realities of the state.

(The author is a Post Doctoral Fellow).

Supreme Court Judgment on the Dolloiship: A Lesson for Sohra and Khasi Himas

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

The ongoing controversy surrounding the appointment of the Syiem of Hima Sohra and the recent suspension of the Syiem of Hima Mylliem by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) has sparked an important debate about the relationship between traditional governance, customary law, and indigenous religion in Meghalaya.

While political parties and various groups continue to debate issues of procedure, legality, and governance, one important question remains largely ignored: Can a traditional chief who is required to perform indigenous Khasi religious rites and sacrifices be appointed if he does not follow the indigenous faith?

This is not just a political question. It is a question that has already been addressed by the Supreme Court of India.

In the landmark case Ewanlangki-E-Rymbai v. Jaintia Hills District Council (2006), the Supreme Court upheld the exclusion of Christians from contesting the office of Dolloi in Elaka Jowai. The Court ruled that this exclusion was not based simply on religion, but on the duties and responsibilities attached to the office itself.

The Court noted that a Dolloi is not merely an administrative head. The office carries important religious responsibilities that are deeply rooted in the indigenous faith and customs of the Jaintia people. Since the Dolloi is required to perform traditional religious ceremonies, sacrifices, and rituals, the Court held that a person who does not follow the indigenous religion may not be able to carry out these duties in accordance with customary law.

The Supreme Court also emphasised that the Constitution protects not only individual rights but also the collective cultural and religious rights of indigenous communities under Articles 25, 26, and 29. Preserving tribal customs and traditional institutions was recognised as a legitimate constitutional objective.

Relevance to Khasi Traditional Institutions

The principle laid down by the Supreme Court has direct relevance to Khasi traditional governance.

In several Khasi Himas, the Syiem is not merely a secular administrator. The Syiem performs religious ceremonies, offerings, sacrificial rites, and other customary functions associated with the traditional Khasi faith, commonly known as Niam Khasi or Niam Tynrai.

These rituals are not optional. They are an essential part of the institution and have been practised for generations as part of Khasi customary governance.

If the reasoning adopted by the Supreme Court in the Dolloi case is applied consistently, then the office of a Syiem who is required to conduct indigenous religious ceremonies should necessarily be held by someone who follows the indigenous faith and is capable of performing those duties according to custom.

The issue, therefore, is not about discriminating against any religious community. Rather, it is about preserving the integrity of a traditional institution whose authority is rooted in customary law and indigenous religious practice.

The Sohra Question

The current dispute in Hima Sohra has largely centred on the issuance of a sanad, electoral procedures, and the role of the KHADC. However, the larger issue concerns the preservation of the traditional structure of the Hima itself.

If the office of Syiem in Sohra continues to carry religious obligations under Khasi customary law, then any process of appointment or succession must also take into account the customary qualifications needed to perform those duties.

Traditional institutions cannot be separated from the customs and beliefs that gave rise to them. Retaining the title while removing the customary responsibilities would fundamentally change the nature of the institution.

The controversy has also raised concerns among traditional leaders and custodians of Khasi customs, who fear that political considerations may increasingly influence institutions that have historically functioned according to customary law and indigenous traditions. The debate, therefore, goes beyond the question of who should become the next Syiem. It also concerns how traditional governance can be protected in a rapidly changing political environment.

Lessons from the Mylliem Controversy

The controversy surrounding Hima Mylliem similarly highlights the growing tension between administrative governance and traditional authority. While the current dispute focuses on financial and administrative issues, it also raises broader questions about how traditional institutions are regulated and preserved.

The survival of these institutions depends not only on legal recognition but also on the continued observance of the customs that define them.

Adding to these concerns are reports that the VPP-led Executive Committee of the KHADC is also considering action against the Syiem of Hima Khyrim. Although no final decision has been formally announced, these reports have intensified public discussion about the relationship between the Council and traditional institutions. With controversies already surrounding Sohra and Mylliem, the possibility of similar action involving Khyrim has led many to wonder whether a pattern of increasing intervention in traditional governance structures is emerging.

Supporters of the Executive Committee argue that the Council is simply exercising powers vested in it under the law and customary regulations. Critics, however, contend that repeated confrontations with traditional institutions risk undermining the autonomy and dignity of offices that have existed for centuries and remain central to Khasi identity.

Whether one agrees with the actions of the Council or not, these developments highlight the urgent need for a clear framework that balances accountability with respect for customary institutions. Traditional offices should not be viewed solely through the lens of modern administration. They must also be understood as custodians of culture, religion, and community identity.

Preserving Indigenous Identity

The Supreme Court's judgment in Ewanlangki-E-Rymbai serves as an important reminder that tribal institutions are not merely political offices. They are cultural and religious institutions that embody the identity, heritage, and traditions of indigenous communities.

The Constitution, through the Sixth Schedule and Articles 25, 26, and 29, recognises the importance of preserving these unique institutions.

Therefore, where the office of a Syiem requires the performance of Khasi religious rites, sacrifices, and customary ceremonies, the holder of that office should be a practitioner of Niam Khasi. This is not a question of religious exclusion. It is about ensuring that the institution remains faithful to the customs and traditions it was created to uphold.

The principle affirmed by the Supreme Court in the Dolloi case establishes that qualifications linked to the performance of indigenous religious duties are constitutionally permissible when they are essential to preserving the institution itself. The same reasoning deserves serious consideration in discussions concerning the succession and appointment of Syiems in Khasi Himas where traditional religious responsibilities remain inseparable from the office.

As Meghalaya navigates the current controversies in Sohra, Mylliem, and the reported developments concerning Khyrim, the focus should remain on safeguarding the integrity of indigenous institutions rather than allowing them to become battlegrounds for partisan politics. The preservation of Khasi customary law, traditional governance, and indigenous faith is not only a cultural necessity but also a constitutional one. The future of these institutions will depend on whether society chooses to uphold the customs and traditions that have given them legitimacy for generations.

Letters to the Editor

From the Secretariat to Smit: The CM Connects

Editor,

It was an unusual scene shortly after 3:00 PM on May 30 at Smit market, the seat of culture, tradition, and administration of Hima Khyrim. There was a buzz as Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma alighted from his vehicle and spontaneously connected with the citizens in what his social media handle termed "Live with Conrad." Indeed, it was a lively connection. It was a relief to witness no security cordons, no chasing away of citizens, no barricades stopping people from approaching a Chief Minister who is a Z Plus Category protectee. Mainland citizens would have felt a pang of envy had they seen a Chief Minister with no airs and no traffic regulations imposed.

In no time, Sangma was inside a tea stall interacting with the women who run it. After exchanging greetings, the Chief Minister sat down to Putharo (soft rice flatbread), Doh Syiar (chicken curry), and Sha Saw (red tea). Tea stalls are places where people gather to chit-chat, voice opinions, exchange ideas, and work on solutions. The Chief Minister did just that, like any ordinary resident in any traditional market in the hills.

It was refreshing to watch from the sidelines as citizens aired their concerns without fear and the Chief Minister gave them a patient hearing. Some women nearby remarked that Sangma looks very young. When the head of government steps out of his office to interact with citizens, he gets a fair idea of whether policies and programmes are actually working on the ground. And when citizens get the opportunity to interact, they get to know their leader better. Proximity does that. It humanises both sides of the equation.

At the tea stall, Sangma encouraged visitors to explore and support local businesses, carrying a larger message about promoting local tourism, supporting local entrepreneurs, and appreciating the state's natural and cultural assets. Smit is one of the crucial places in Khasi Hills. It is a transit point, proximate to the Shillong-Jowai highway, with tourist spots scattered within and beyond it. Many residents of Meghalaya are yet to explore the hundreds of destinations within the state's own boundaries.

Meghalaya is a state with a tourism economy that is as dependent on word of mouth as it is on infrastructure. The waterfalls, the living root bridges and the rolling highlands draw visitors. But what keeps them talking, what turns a trip into a story worth telling is often something more intangible. The warmth of a local interaction, the taste of something eaten at a roadside stall, the sense of being welcomed into a place rather than merely processed through it.

Governance is not just about lectures from podiums, signing files, or issuing orders. Essentially it is about connecting with those at the grassroots. A disconnect from citizens renders governance hollow. We have spent decades debating policy from the top down, discussing budget allocations, infrastructure timelines, and development indices. These conversations matter and must continue but there must be measurable outcomes.

What is missing in modern governance is the habit of showing up not to be seen, but to understand. The gap between those in power and those they serve is not bridged by legislation alone but through repeated and genuine contact through a Chief Minister who sits at the same tea stall as a market vendor and asks how business has been. These are not grand gestures or policy announcements. They are the raw material of trust, and trust in a democracy is the only currency that compounds over time.

That said, Meghalaya faces real and pressing challenges in connectivity, employment, healthcare access, and the economics of its rural communities. A cup of tea at Smit does not build a road or fund a school. The work of governance is slow, technical, and often unglamorous, and it must be judged on outcomes as much as on intent. The way a leader moves through the world, the habits they model, the interactions they choose, and the moments they decide are worth their time set a tone that eventually filters through institutions. Only a government that genuinely listens and values the grassroots not as a talking point but as a real site of understanding, is more likely to make decisions that reflect the actual texture of people's lives. The visit to Smit, whatever its limitations, was evidence of that intent.

Sangma later proceeded to RC Homestay, where he encountered another dimension of Meghalaya's growth story. Tourism is often measured in visitor volumes, revenue figures, and infrastructure investments. But for many families in Meghalaya, it has become something far more personal: a reliable source of income. At R.C. Homestay, the proprietor explained how government assistance had helped develop and sustain the property. Tourism had expanded, bringing new opportunities, visitors, and confidence. Listening to these accounts, Sangma emphasised that homestays are more than accommodation; they are among the most effective tools for local communities to directly benefit from the state's tourism expansion.

This reflects a larger vision shaping Meghalaya's tourism strategy. Unlike approaches that concentrate economic rewards in a few large establishments, community-based tourism distributes opportunity across households and local enterprises. A family that welcomes tourists earns directly. Local guides find work. Small eateries gain customers. Transport operators benefit. This Tourism model translates into livelihoods rather than footfall. The numbers suggest the approach is gaining ground. Meghalaya currently has around 900 active homestays, with a further 2,100 pending approval. If realised, the state could soon have a network of roughly 3,000 homestays spread across its districts.

The "Live with Conrad" session itself gave voice to many of the aspirations and concerns of Meghalaya's young people. Questions ranged across tourism careers, business opportunities, environmental sustainability, and the approaching National Games. On the tension between development and conservation, Sangma was clear: economic growth cannot come at the expense of Meghalaya's environment or its communities, and many government initiatives are designed to ensure local involvement in decision-making.

On employment, the Chief Minister pointed to Skills Meghalaya, under which nearly 30,000 youth have already received training across various sectors, including 2,000 in tourism. The government aims to train 1.2 lakh youth in the coming years, opening pathways in tourism, entrepreneurship, healthcare, transportation, and other growing industries. Regarding the 39th National Games, which Meghalaya will host in 2027. Sangma described the event as more than a sporting tournament, highlighting its potential to generate opportunities across tourism, hospitality, culture, and local business, with the state's growing homestay network expected to meet a significant share of accommodation demand.

The first edition of "Live with Conrad" showed something simple but increasingly rare in public life: direct, unmediated engagement. Whether over tea in a market, in conversation with a local entrepreneur, or during a live exchange with citizens, what is consistent is that meaningful governance begins with listening, and listening begins with showing up.

Yours etc.,
Bawan Lyngdoh,
Via email

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"A champion is afraid of losing. Everyone else is afraid of winning."

— **Billie Jean King**

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Troubled education scenario

THE Education sector has been experiencing a series of shocks with massive irregularities, bunglings and administrative improprieties resulting in distressing outcomes for students who have burnt the midnight oil to prepare for these examinations. The leak of the NEET exam papers not only casts a shadow on the integrity of the National Testing Agency but also exposed the ineptness of the Education Ministry that's duty-bound to guide and oversee matters in better ways and plug loopholes. This was followed by the glaring system flaws in the CBSE examination process involving the Class XII On-Screen Marking system (OSM). The technical glitches, evaluation discrepancies and post-result verification snags were unprecedented. Data integrity and the strengths of the digital evaluation process remain suspect. The entire education system now bears the brunt. That Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan has accepted the moral responsibility for what went wrong is in itself small comfort. The NEET leak turned the dreams of some 18 lakh students sour. Their hard work, sweat and tears while preparing for the tests ended up in deep disappointment. This was followed by the CBSE exam mess-up, which also affected lakhs of students. The repeated glitches have caused immense distress for both students and their parents.

Notably, the education sector did not get the attention that's due to it under the Modi government, other than re-christening the department into 'Education' instead of 'Human Resources' or introduction of some marginal reforms. What was needed for this sector was a total overhaul. The government just could not rise up to the emerging challenges. Under Modi, the first minister in charge of Education was Smriti Irani, who was not even a graduate. Incumbent Dharmendra Pradhan is a run-of-the mill politician. Several ministers in the Modi dispensation are faceless figures. Governance in the 21st century cannot be conducted on the lines that India started its journey straight after Independence under 'Desi' rule eight decades ago. Unfortunately, the politicians who run governments are still cast in the old mould. Expertise in respective sectors has not been given any importance. Add to this the allegations about "favouritism" on the part of Pradhan in the selection of the agencies to oversee the technical aspects of the exam process.

The result of such drift in the administrative mechanisms is also that India fails to project an image of academic excellence. It's rare that any higher education institution here finds a place in the global lists of top 100 universities. Fewer students come to India for studies than the number of youths going out for education elsewhere. Proper governance of a nation does not limit itself to the erection of highways as the Modi government keeps boasting of. The big talk about India's economic super power status has come to naught as its placement in terms of GDP ratings and currency value has fallen from the fourth place to the sixth in view of the several global uncertainties. For most people, life remains stagnant. Things fail to change or reform. The hits that the education sector took will take a long time to heal. The responsibility must be fixed, and both corrective and punitive steps should follow.

The Concept of Markets in Khasi Traditional Thought

By Fabian Lyngdoh

Traditional markets are physical open-air settings where people sell the goods they produce and buy what they need for their day-to-day life. Besides being economic and trading hubs, markets in the Khasi traditional milieu were also like informal weekly festivals for social and cultural exchange. On market day people put on their best clothes, especially the youth who meet each other for romantic courtship. The market is also the place where adults meet to discuss and settle social and political issues. The Khasis had an eight-day week in accordance with the eight market days. Hence the Khasi word for the week is called 'Taïew', a reference to the markets. Overall, there were eight important markets in the Khasi Hills which also determined the duration of a week: Iewduh, Lyngka, Nongkrem, Mawlong, Rynghep, Shyllong, Pamtiah, and Umni. Besides these eight markets in the Khasi Hills there are other markets in the Jaintia Hills, such as Musiang, Muchai, Pyngkat, Thymbleiñ, Hat, Khyllaw, Pynsyiñ, and Mulong.

The Khasi traditional markets were established in the Ri-raid lands which were under the management and control of the rulers of the Raids. Traders set up stalls called 'basa' in this market area and didn't have to pay rent for setting up their stalls. No one could have plots of land as private property, and no one could construct permanent buildings in the market area which should remain public property or Ri-raid. The stalls are called 'basa' to indicate that they are temporary market platforms. There was no concept of a shop in Khasi traditional thought. The Khasi word for shop is 'dukan' which is borrowed from Hindi. Everything the people need for the week's provisions has to be bought from the common market of the Raid. The people who sold goods in the stalls and those who brought goods to sell in the market had to pay a nominal tax, called 'Musur' or 'Pynshok' to the Syiem Raid or Syiem Hima.

To have a clear understanding of Khasi traditions, we must visualize the social situations the Khasis were in before the British rule. In the past, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were sparsely populated. By 1853 when the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were already under British rule, the total population in the Khasi Hills was only 82,400; the population of Jaintia Hills was only 36,525, including Mikirs (Karbis) and Lalungs (Tiwas). There were only 22,335 people in Hima Khyrim, 10,300 people in Hima Sohra, 9,200 people in Hima Mylliem, and only 5,855 people in Hima Nongstoin. Small Himas like Maharam had 2765 people; Langrin had 910 people; and Hima Bhowal had only 580 people. Imagine, how small the population of the Khasis was a hundred years before the British rule!

In the past, the Khasis lived in numerous small independent political communities called the Raids, and they identified themselves by the Raids where they had their permanent residence, such as u Mylliem, u Nongkrem, u Thaïang, u Iapngar, u Nongtham, u Jwai, u Mushai, u Raliang, etc. When the Syiemship began to be instituted in the Raids, or when several adjacent Raids confederated to form a Hima and instituted the Syiemship, the need arose to maintain the Syiemship institution. So, whatever funds were collected from the markets as 'musur' or 'pynshok'; and the fines called 'kuna' imposed on criminals or on judgement debtors in civil disputes, became the main sources of income for the maintenance of the Syiemship. But there is a catch! It was the Syiem's responsibility to maintain law and order in the markets and to keep the markets clean and decent. In the past, the Syiem of Hima Khyrim used to employ Chaprassies, who were mainly non-Khasis, as a police force for maintaining law and order. The elderly people in Ri Bhoi called them 'Chaprachi'.

Oral traditions say that the founding clans of the Raids were considered 'ki bakhraw' (the great) and noble, who thought it was dishonourable for them to extract goods or money from the earnings of other people, or to eat from the sweat of others. To do so was considered 'ban khrong' (to beg). There was no concept of revenue collection by the political authority in Khasi thought, and there is no Khasi word equivalent to revenue collection. So, tax collection from the markets, or revenue collection from anywhere, is equated with the word 'khrong' (the act of begging). Hence, the words 'khrong-iew', 'khrong-gate', 'khrong parking lot', etc. All acts of tax collection and imposition of fines were conferred by the Dorbar of the Bakhraws to the Syiem, not as an absolute and inalienable right, but with corresponding responsibilities. Today, the markets in the Khasi Hills have come under The Khasi Hills Autonomous District (Establishment, Management and Control of Markets) Regulation, 1979.

In today's social situations, the concept 'ban khrong' (to beg) has lost its original meaning, and became equivalent to 'extract benefit', from the earnings of others. Indeed, it has become a business profession which everyone, including the Bakhraws would like to lay hands on. Many years ago, I read a joke in some magazine about a man who boasted that he knows a hundred ways of making money. "But why do you sit here as a beggar then?" his friend asked. "Of course! But this is the easiest way," the beggar replied. Today, it seems that everyone is up in arms for this easiest business method: 'ban khrong check gate', 'ban khrong iew', 'ban khrong' parking lot, 'ban khrong' tollgate, etc. Tradition changes when concepts change.

Visualizing the traditional Khasi society only from what is being restructured and practised today, especially from the perspective of Shillong, would only lead us to wishful thinking about the past. The present city of Shillong was formerly only a small hamlet called 'Laban' in Raid Mylliem where the British set up their headquarters in 1862. Strictly speaking, Khasi traditions (riti) and customs (dustur) were relevant to the actual life of the people during the period when the population was very small compared to their geographical territories and according to their traditional socio-political life in their own respective Raids. There is a huge difference between the socio-political life that the Khasis lived in the past in their own respective Raids, and the socio-political life they are living today when the traditional socio-political and cultural barriers of the Raids have been practically dismantled beginning from the British rule. For example, in the past there were only a few clans living in Raid Mylliem, and all the clans had a fair share of rights and responsibilities as Basans in the administration of Raid Mylliem. In the past, only residents of the Raid had the right to own land in that Raid. People who live in Hima Sohra, or in Raid Iapngar, had no right to own lands as absentee landlords in Raid Mylliem. If any Basan clan of Raid Mylliem migrated to another Raid, their land would again become Ri-raid and they would also be considered an extinct clan as far as Raid Mylliem is concerned. A new Basan clan would replace them.

Presently, there is an argument as to why the Syiems of the Himas should be under the regulation of the District Council. This is only an attempt to superimpose an image of a lost tradition over the present-day situation. Today, there are hundreds, or even thousands of clans who migrated from different Raids into that small corner of Raid Mylliem, previously called Laban, which became the city of Shillong. The people who live in Shillong today are no longer 'ki shongthap-shongbiang' (temporary settlers or immigrants). They have become private owners of the lands where they live by way of purchase, and not merely by way of grant or permission to live in the Ri-raid. Strictly speaking the whole of Shillong ceased to be a Ri-raid or a traditional territory of Raid Mylliem. Here is the question. In the past, only a few clans had the right to the political affairs of any Raid or Hima because there were also only a few clans living in them. But now, when thousands of clans are living as private land owners in the Raid or Hima is it still rational for a few clans to have the absolute right to govern the settlement?

This example applies not only to Raid Mylliem, but also to all other Raids and Himas in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. The tradition of Ri-raid is no longer in existence as it has been replaced by absolute private ownership; the independent socio-political and cultural existence of the Raids has almost been totally wiped out; the markets are no longer trading centres composed of 'basa' (stalls) on the ri-raid, but have become clusters of permanent shop buildings privately owned by individuals; the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have become integrated into the modern political economy. Is there any other cultural basis for the hereditary traditional institutions to exist?

It is here that the unspoken ground for the existence of the District Council, under the provision of the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution of India came into being. The District Council stands for all the people of an autonomous district, regardless of the traditional socio-political boundaries of the Raids or Himas. The District Council is needed to control and regulate the activities of a few clans who claim to have traditional rights to rule over the hundreds or thousands of other clans in the modern socio-political settlements.

Advice for UG Students: Four-Year FYUP or Two-Year PG?

By H. Srikanth

The first batch of students pursuing the FYUP under NEHU are now writing their third-year UG exams. As the first batch of students, they indeed became guinea pigs in the experiments conducted by NEHU authorities in collaboration with the state government and college managements. Surmounting all the problems and difficulties that they had to encounter through no fault of their own, the first batch of students is now about to complete their third-year of FYUP. Students who complete a three-year degree with one major and secure 120 credits have the option to discontinue with a three-year degree, pursue the fourth year of FYUP for an Honors degree, or opt for a traditional two-year postgraduate program at NEHU. This article helps undergraduate students understand their priorities and make their choices.

For students aspiring to secure a valid degree that enables them to appear for most competitive exams for central and state service jobs, a three-year degree is enough. Those who aspire to become school teachers or lawyers can join B.Ed. or LLB. after a three-year degree. They may pursue short-term coaching to enhance skills necessary in their respective fields. Learning AI or computer courses helps. Some papers or topics taught in the PG or fourth-year FYUP may also help in competitive exams. For that purpose, there is no need to pursue postgraduate studies. The students can study those specific topics and papers on their own.

Those keen on competing for All India Civil Service Exams or interested in pursuing an academic career in higher education institutions may opt for the fourth year of FYUP or join the traditional two-year PG program offered by NEHU or other known universities. The fourth-year under FYUP is something new that the university is experimenting with. Only those who have completed the third-year degree without backlogs become eligible to pursue the fourth-year under FYUP. In the fourth-year, the students will study ten advanced courses to get an Honours Degree, or do seven advanced courses and one dissertation to get an Honors Research Degree. Although NEHU has gone for FYUP, several college-managements have realized that they do not have the infrastructure or human resources to run the fourth-year under FYUP. They have made the right decision not to offer the fourth-year courses. Consequently, only select UG colleges in the state will run the fourth-year FYUP. Since the fourth year involves advanced courses unfamiliar to UG college teachers, the Academic Council suggested that colleges offering the fourth year should appoint two additional teachers. Such colleges should acquire books and study materials for their libraries and improve lab facilities for the students. Furthermore, UG colleges aspiring to offer Honours with Research Degrees should have at least two teachers with Ph.D. degrees in the concerned department. Without fulfilling these requirements, the UG colleges cannot offer the Honors degree programs under FYUP.

It makes no sense to join the fourth year of FYUP in UG colleges that have limited infrastructure and inadequate teachers. After obtaining a three-year degree, students have the option to choose good colleges with better infrastructure and faculty to offer the fourth-year FYUP. However, students should be prepared to pay an enhanced fee and experience teething problems, as these colleges are offering the courses for the first time. As of today, no government in the country has stipulated a four-year Honours degree as minimum eligibility for appearing in any competitive exams. Still, doing advanced courses may help improve knowledge in the discipline, provided the UG colleges have the infrastructure and enough faculty. Still, doing advanced courses may help improve knowledge in the discipline, provided the UG colleges have the infrastructure and enough faculty.

According to NEP 2020, one who gets an Honours degree may go for a one-year PG degree. It even says that those who secure over 75 percent CGPA may go for research, bypassing the PG program altogether. Although this looks good on paper, there is little possibility of a one-year PG program materializing soon. Few reputed public universities have gone for one-year PG. It is not clear whether the government expects the universities to give up the two-year PG degree program and run only one-year PG programs, or the NEP expects all the universities to run both two-year and one-year PG programs. Running two parallel PG programs becomes difficult because it requires additional financial allocation for the universities which also necessitates recruiting additional faculty. The financial allocation by the governments–both central and state–for higher education has drastically reduced in recent decades. Many PG programs in universities are run with temporary faculty. The quality of PG programs drastically declines if universities are asked to run two or three streams of PG programs with the same infrastructure and faculty. Further, it is not clear whether those completing an Honours degree will have a separate CUET to enter the one-year PG.

At present, NEHU is going through a crisis period. Apart from the financial crunch, NEHU is facing problems because of the absence of a regular, functional Vice-Chancellor. Many senior teachers and non-teaching staff have retired, but there have been no fresh recruitments. Some departments are running with five or six teachers, and some have even fewer. Because of the research component, which has become compulsory, the teachers in some departments are guiding around ten PG dissertations in the second year of PG. If NEHU is to offer a one-year PG alongside traditional PG program, then the quality of PG will drastically decline. The students may secure a PG degree, but they will not have any market value. The teachers, overloaded with teaching responsibilities, neglect research and publications, bringing down the university ranking further. Individuals and organizations in the state rooting for a one-year PG should be aware of the ground situation, and not force the university to take a hasty decision. Students should join the FYUP fully aware of the pros and cons of this still-evolving system.

Under these circumstances, the best option for the UG students who complete the three-year degree is to compete for traditional two-year PG program offered by NEHU or other reputed public universities in India. Those who cannot afford to study in better universities outside the region, may seek admission in traditional PG program offered by NEHU in its campuses or in select affiliated colleges. There is nothing special that the fourth-year of FYUP offers to the students, for they study the same syllabus taught to the students of the first year PG program offered by NEHU.

Compared to the colleges, NEHU has more qualified teachers and better library and laboratory facilities than the UG colleges in the state. Teachers in NEHU and affiliated PG colleges are better equipped to teach and guide research. Once the students join the traditional PG program, they don't need to worry about the one-year PG. They don't need to change the institutions to complete their PG. Given these advantages, NEHU students should first try to gain admission into the University's two-year PG program. Only those students who fail to secure admission in NEHU or in its affiliated colleges offering traditional PG programs may consider joining the fourth-year FYUP in some good UG colleges.

It's imperative that students understand the pros and cons of different options, discuss with their teachers and parents, and take appropriate decision.

Letters to the Editor

Systemic and Unmindful Degradation of the Natural Habitat

Editor,

It was a coincidence that I read the letter to the editor (ST June1, 2026) by B Dutta on the loss of forest cover around Shillong. I am currently on a short visit to Shillong, my birthplace and also where I grew up. I left Shillong in 1968 and am now based at Bangalore. On Monday morning I went for a walk to the Golf Course area and noticed the unmindful and systematic degradation of the greenery and the ugly concrete structures that deface the entire area. I clearly recall how green and forested the area used to be during the 1960s. While development must happen, those governing the state must apply their minds to balance development with ecology. I am distressed that this is happening to Shillong. I also know that Mr Dutta's grievances and my own disappointment at what I saw on this visit will hardly matter because what matters ultimately is money power and the corruption prevalent in our society today.

Yours etc.,
Dr HK Roychoudhury,
Camp: Shillong

A Wild Goose Chase: Tribal Edition

Editor,

Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma recently announced the state government would fund a research project to study the origins of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo tribes. According to him, this comprehensive study will involve "DNA mapping, along with the study of linguistic and cultural linkages," and is expected to take 18 to 24 months to complete. At first glance, this appears to be a commendable effort to preserve indigenous heritage. However, a closer analysis reveals a troubling narrative: a potentially wasteful expenditure of public money on a project of questionable academic value, led by a provincial academic apparatus that has yet to demonstrate world-class calibre.

The central flaw of this project is that it is a redundant research question. The origins of the Austroasiatic (Khasi-Jaintia) and Tibeto-Burman (Garo) populations are not the mysterious black box that some people pretend it to be. Decades of peer-reviewed research in linguistics, anthropology, and population genetics have already provided robust, evidence-based conclusions.

Linguistically, the Khasi language belongs to the Khasic branch of Austroasiatic languages. Genetically, multiple high-resolution studies have confirmed that the Khasi and Garo tribes carry distinct lineages. Studies clearly show that the Khasi predominantly carry a marker deeply associated with the Austroasiatic migration from Southeast Asia, while the Garo carry lineages common in East and Southeast Asia. Anthropologically, the matrilineal system of the Khasis, while unique within India, has parallels in pockets of Southeast Asia and has been documented exhaustively since the colonial era. What new "facts" could a two-year DNA mapping project possibly uncover that global science hasn't already clarified? Unless the government expects to find evidence of an Atlantis-like origin or a direct lineage to Martians, this is an exercise in academic redundancy. Spending public funds to replicate established findings is not research; it is an expensive form of intellectual wheel-carting.

The most indefensible aspect of this project is its opportunity cost. Meghalaya is not a state with limitless resources. According to numerous respected Central Government agencies and research bodies, Meghalaya has consistently struggled with HDIs such as healthcare access and educational outcomes. The Ministry of Education recently brought out a survey that highlights Meghalaya's poor ranking in school retention rates and high rates of rural unemployment. Every rupee spent on this tribal origin study is a rupee diverted from improving a government school classroom in a remote village in West Jaintia Hills, from purchasing medicines for a primary health centre in South Garo Hills, or from improving the state's notoriously pathetic joblessness. The cost of DNA sequencing - including sample collection, laboratory analysis, and collaboration with "national and international institutions"- will not be a free deal and will easily run into several crores. For a state struggling to lift its HDIs, funding this ill-defined and badly conceived exercise is a luxury it cannot afford. It signals a government more interested in romanticized identity politics than in the mundane but vital duties of governance.

This announcement implies that Meghalaya's own academic institutions will be central to this research. But here lies a second, more uncomfortable critique: the calibre of academia in Meghalaya. While institutions like the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) have produced sincere scholars, they are not global leaders in population genetics or archaeological linguistics. A quick survey of leading journals - Nature, Science, The American Journal of Human Genetics - shows a glaring underrepresentation of first-author papers from Meghalaya-based researchers. The state's universities struggle with chronic vacancies, underfunded laboratories, and a research culture often limited to low-impact, descriptive studies rather than hypothesis-driven science. As of now, local faculty lack the expertise, peer recognition to lead such a complex project without external crutches. The government should look into supporting them to get to a higher level.

As per news reports, the project will rely on "consultations with national and international institutions". That is wonderful! So why do these Khasi, Jaintia and Garo academics have to force our government to pay for these "research trips"? If they possess such high academic calibre and intellectual abilities, they should jolly well be able to get international grants and funding. In my opinion, this entire thing is nothing more than an excuse that some people have devised to get to travel abroad and spend our public money as they please. Also, another crucial question come to mind: what exactly will these researchers from here do when they land up at Angkor Wat? Start digging into some random mounds, excavating tons of soil to get to some Austro Asiatic truth? When they hear words like "khon, kha, phi, khao" (which are words heard everywhere in SE Asia) will they weep joyously and embrace the speakers as fellow "kur" (clansmen). The comedic potential is tremendous!

None of this is to say that the history and origins of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo people are unworthy of study. On the contrary, our unique matrilineal culture and linguistic heritage are treasures of human diversity. However, scholarship must have clear questions and a justification that goes beyond "we would like to see more documentation." In a mature democracy, public funds demand accountability. What is the precise budget, including salaries, equipment, travel and staying expenses of this budget? Until such answers are provided, this project stands as a monument to intellectual vanity and fiscal imprudence. It uses the cloak of "research" to obscure a basic failure of priority. Meghalaya's children do not need a map of their ancestors' Y-chromosomes; they need functional schools. Its citizens do not need a linguistic linkage to Vietnam; they need reliable electricity. The government's money would be better spent not on digging up the past, but on securing the future.

Yours etc.,
Avner Pariat,
Via email.

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

"The key to success is action, and the essential in action is perseverance."

— Sun Yat-sen

The Shillong Times

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Coal Mining Advocates

IT is ironic that the only legacy the outgoing Rajya Sabha member WR Kharlukhi will leave is to advocate for lifting the ban on coal mining ostensibly because too many people depend on rat hole mining for their livelihoods. He could add that it is also the easiest way for sharks to earn money by sending migrant workers to negotiate those dangerous mines and if their luck fails, they are destined to die inside those very mines. No questions are asked and no one is penalized for causing such inhuman deaths inside a mine. The irony is doubled because on the very same day that Kharlukhi pleaded for reopening mines, the dead body of a 41 year old man was retrieved from an abandoned mine by the State Disaster Relief Force (SDRF). The man had gone to fetch water from the abandoned mine when he fell in and it took 8 days to retrieve his body.

Now this is where the rat hole mining business gets complicated. In the many years Kharlukhi was a Rajya Sabha member he never once approached the Ministry of Mining and Geology to assist the state in reclaiming the abandoned mines which pose a past and present danger. According to the Centre for Science and Environment there are about 25,000 to 26,000 abandoned and unscientific rat hole mines in Meghalaya of which about 22,000 are in East Jaintia Hills. Since the 1980s when PA Sangma was Chief Minister he had broached the topic of reclaiming these abandoned mines because they posed a danger. The then Chief Secretary, KK Sinha had broached the subject with the central ministries but nothing happened. After that the matter was forgotten. People continued to die inside these rat hole mines which is why the National Green Tribunal banned rat hole mining until safety measures are in place.

Those who propose lifting the ban on rat-hole mining should have a blueprint for safety of miners. In fact, civil society groups from Meghalaya should approach the courts on the need for the state to create a reclamation plan whereby all the 25,000 mines are filled up and reforested. Until that plan is implemented in letter and spirit merely lifting the ban on rat hole mining to allow a few influential politicians to get their kickbacks from the trade-off, should not be allowed to happen. If the people of Meghalaya cannot take responsibility for the resuscitation of nature they are headed towards a major environmental catastrophe.Death inside a coal mines happen because miners are digging horizontally for coal and suddenly they hit an abandoned mine that is flooded. The water then enters the active mine and before the miners can exit, they are sucked in the floodwaters and die inside. It takes a while before they are found. This happened in the Ksan Mining Tragedy that claimed 15 lives in December 2018. That these politicians from Meghalaya cannot think beyond the immediate profit and have not an iota of care or responsibility for the environment has been proved times without number. The Wah Lukha poisoned through acid mine drainage has not healed and no one cares. This is where the law must take its course and human greed must be nipped in the bud.

More Children in School, More Children Leaving: Meghalaya's Education Paradox

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

The 2026 'School Education System in India: Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap For Quality Enhancement' by NITI Aayog has made unwanted headlines for the state by revealing that Meghalaya is one of the states with the highest dropout rates in the country. In fact, even indicators that may seem positive at first glance hide signs of deeper problems affecting the education system. For example, consider the Gross Enrolment Ratio, or GER, which is a statistical metric used in education to measure the total number of students enrolled in a specific level of education (e.g., primary, secondary, or tertiary) as a percentage of the total population in the official age group corresponding to that level. It is desirable that the GER is as close to 100 as possible, which indicates that most children in the relevant age group are enrolled in school. In this, Meghalaya has performed very well.

In 2024-25, primary GER was the highest in Meghalaya (180.7%) which is much higher than the national average of 90.0%. In fact, over the past decade, Meghalaya reported one of the highest increases in primary GER – 141.69% to 180.7%. The same can be seen in upper primary GER, where the state is again one of the highest in the country – 115.6%. Similarly, during the last decade, the state is again among those recording the highest increases in the country – from 98.59% to 115.6%. So, these may appear to be very positive statistics showing that many more children are enrolling in primary and upper primary education compared to other states in the country. However, the unusually high numbers must be properly understood.

The almost double number of students in primary classes, and the slightly lower but still higher number in upper primary classes, compared to their official population, could actually mean that many students are older than the required age group (having enrolled quite late), are under-age, or have repeated grades. The Right to Education Act, 2009, prohibits the detention of children until they complete elementary education, i.e., Class VIII. However, the Right of Children to Free and Compulsory Education (Second Amendment) Bill, 2017, amended this provision to state that a regular examination will be held in Class V and Class VIII at the end of every academic year. According to it, if a child fails the examination, he or she will be given additional instruction and allowed to take a re-examination. If they fail the re-examination, the relevant central or state government may decide to allow schools to detain the child. Looking at the numbers alone, it is not very clear why the primary and upper primary GER is so unusually high. Others, however, might argue that it could also mean that primary and upper primary schools have improved significantly from the past and, therefore, enrolment in these categories has also improved. This could be due to improvements in infrastructure, services, or better school coverage, which may be attracting older children to rejoin classes. The same argument can be made for the secondary-level GER (86.2%). Though it is not as high as that of some other states, it is higher than the national average of 78.7%. Over the last decade, this indicator has also increased from 70.62%, which was actually very close to the national average, making the increase one of the highest in the country.

So, when one looks at primary, upper primary and secondary education, the statistics are moving in the right direction. Though it has not achieved near-universal coverage in secondary education, the numbers are improving in the right direction. Therefore, the situation appears to be quite positive at these levels. The only issue lies at the higher secondary level. The national average GER at the higher secondary level is 58.4%. Meghalaya has the second-lowest rate (39.7%) in the country, sandwiched between Bihar (38.1%) and Nagaland (39.8%). The only positive aspect is that, unlike some states, the higher secondary GER has improved over the last decade, when it was just over 30%. So, even here there is some positive news, but a lot more can still be done.

But the biggest problem the state is facing is in terms of retention and continuity, i.e., how many students are able to stay and progress through each stage. In general, there is a consistent decline in transition rates as students advance through successive stages of schooling. At the national level, while 88.8% of students progress from primary to upper primary, the rate drops to 83.3% at the secondary level and further to 71.5% at the higher secondary level, indicating increased attrition in the later years. This is generally true for Meghalaya as well but there is a concern specific to the state. The transition rate from primary to upper primary in 2014-15 was 94.51%, which was higher than the national average of 89%. This declined to 75% in 2024-25, while the national average increased to 92%. So, the state has regressed while the rest of the country has improved. Similarly, the transition rate from upper primary to secondary was 82% in 2014-15, which declined to 65% in 2024-25, an astonishing decline of almost 20 percentage points.

This decline in the transition rates from primary to upper primary and from upper primary to secondary could very well be due to the fact that the GER for primary and upper primary is already very high, at more than 100%. Therefore, it could simply be the figures correcting themselves at the higher levels. However, this argument does not work for the higher levels, i.e., secondary and higher secondary. The transition rate in 2014-15 from secondary to higher secondary was 54%, which was lower than the national average of 67%. In 2024-25, this declined to 47%, while the national average increased to 75%. So, the situation has actually regressed when it comes to retention and continuity of students, especially as they move to higher classes. Many students leave the education system rather than continue to higher levels of schooling. This is reflected in the dropout patterns.

In 2024-25, 22 states and Union Territories reported zero or near-zero dropout rates, which is reflected in the national average of just 0.3%. However, some states continue to face challenges, with Mizoram (10.8%) reporting the highest incidence, followed by Arunachal Pradesh (4.8%), and Meghalaya (4.2%). The rate worsens for Meghalaya as one moves up the education ladder. The national dropout rate for upper primary is a little higher at 3.5%, but Meghalaya's rate is more than double that at over 7%. Similarly, the dropout rate at the secondary level stands at 17%, significantly higher than the national average of 11%.

It is here that the figures on school infrastructure become very important. The national figure for schools with functional electricity in 2024-25 is 91%, while it is only 28% in the state, which is a shocking statistic. Schools with computer facilities account for just 19%, against the national average of 64%. Similar figures are found for schools with internet facilities: 26% in Meghalaya as against 63% at the national level. The national figure for smart classrooms is lower, at 30%, but for the state it is an abysmal 4%. One can argue that such infrastructure is not always possible in rural areas. Instead, one must look at basic infrastructure that all schools, whether rural or urban, should possess. But even here, the situation is highly alarming. Schools with functional boys' toilets stand at 72%, but this is still lower than the national average of 92%. The corresponding figure for girls' toilets is a little lower, at 68%, which is again less than the national average of 94%. Over the last decade, infrastructure has improved, but the figures remain below the national average. So, the argument that the high GER for primary and upper primary is due to improved infrastructure does not seem entirely convincing. Instead, given the continuing deficiencies in school infrastructure, it is possible that part of the unusually high GER is due to older children remaining in or re-entering the school system, which casts a question mark over some of the positive statistics that the state has.

All of this makes it very clear that the education sector in the state is indeed in a very poor condition. While there has been progress in certain indicators, particularly GER, a closer look suggests that these gains may conceal more fundamental challenges. What is undeniable, however, is the high dropout rate, which could indicate that the infrastructure is not sufficient to accommodate students or that there is a loss of hope regarding the prospects of higher education. Both possibilities are troubling and need to be addressed.

(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)

Meghalaya's Health Report Card: Cause for Hope, Cause for Alarm

Dr Tiken Das

The sixth National Family Health Survey reveals a state that has made genuine strides in child survival and maternal care — but where chronic undernutrition and gaps in institutional delivery demand urgent, honest reckoning

Based on NFHS-6 (2023–24), published 29 May 2026, Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, Government of India | Compared with NFHS-5 (2019–21)

When India's sixth National Family Health Survey was published last Friday, the national headlines focused on rising caesarean section rates and a slowing fertility decline. For Meghalaya, the more urgent task is to read what the data say about our own state — plainly and without deflection. The verdict is mixed: real progress in some areas that matter, and a stubborn, worsening crisis in others that no government scheme has yet managed to fix.

What Meghalaya Has Achieved

The good news is genuine. Institutional births — deliveries in a hospital or health facility — rose from 58.1% in NFHS-5 to 65.6% in NFHS-6, a gain of 7.5 percentage points in four years. This remains well short of the national average of 90.6%, and far behind Kerala or Andhra Pradesh, which have achieved near-universal institutional delivery. But the direction is right, and the pace of change is encouraging.

Full vaccination coverage among children aged 12–23 months improved from 64.0% to 75.3% — an 11-point gain driven largely by Mission Indradhanush. The second dose of the measles vaccine, historically weak in Meghalaya, leapt from 25.9% to 60.0%. Rotavirus vaccination, at just 4.1% in NFHS-5, now stands at 77.2%. These are public health victories. The prevalence of diarrhoea in under-five children fell sharply from 10.4% to 3.6%, and acute respiratory infection symptoms dropped from 4.8% to 1.0%. Child marriage among women aged 20–24 years has declined from 16.9% to 13.8%, and adolescent pregnancy fell from 7.2% to 4.6%.

Perhaps the most striking improvement is in gender-based violence. The proportion of ever-married women who reported experiencing spousal violence fell from 15.0% in NFHS-5 to 5.9% in NFHS-6 — a significant shift, even if the absolute figure remains unacceptable. These gains represent years of programme delivery reaching communities that were previously unreached, and they deserve acknowledgement. Where Meghalaya Is Failing Its Children."One in three children under five in Meghalaya is chronically stunted — a figure worse than the national average of 29.3%, and worse than Bihar at 35.6%."

Meghalaya's child stunting rate stands at 36.8% in NFHS-6 — down from 46.5% in NFHS-5, a 10-point fall that is real. But 36.8% means more than one in three children under five is too short for their age due to chronic undernutrition. That figure is worse than the national average of 29.3%. It is worse than Bihar — a state this newspaper would not ordinarily wish to be compared unfavourably with. Kerala, which has largely solved its child nutrition crisis, records stunting at 20.1%. Meghalaya is not converging toward Kerala; it is still closer to the bottom.

The dietary data explains why the stunting numbers refuse to move fast enough. Only 18.9% of children aged 6–23 months in Meghalaya receive an adequate diet — diverse, frequent, and nutritionally sufficient. Strikingly, this is a fall from 28.5% in NFHS-5. Thousands of anganwadi centres distribute supplementary rations across the state. But rations are not nourishment. The survey tells us that food is not reaching children in the right form or at the right frequency. That is a failure of implementation, not of intent, and it must be named as such. Wasting — acute undernutrition, children dangerously thin for their height — has edged up from 12.1% to 13.2%, and severe wasting has risen from 4.7% to 6.2%. These figures point to an acute nutritional emergency unfolding quietly in rural households. Meanwhile, skilled birth attendance stands at just 70.9% against a national average of 91.3%. In rural Meghalaya, nearly four in ten mothers still deliver without skilled assistance — the background condition against which preventable maternal and newborn deaths continue to occur.

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What the Numbers Demand

One figure appears reassuring until it is read carefully. Meghalaya's caesarean section rate of 6.4% is the lowest in northeast India and far below the national average of 27.2%. Compared to Telangana at 62.2% or Sikkim at 51.1%, this seems virtuous. But a low C-section rate is not automatically good. Given that institutional births cover only 65.6% of deliveries and skilled attendance only 70.9%, the low figure may partly reflect limited access to emergency obstetric surgery rather than clinical appropriateness. The WHO's recommended range of 10–15% is a floor as much as a ceiling.

The NFHS-6 data are a mirror, not a programme. What Meghalaya sees in that mirror is a state making real gains on vaccination, child marriage, domestic violence, and facility delivery — gains that must be protected. It also sees a state where one in three children is stunted, where infant dietary quality is falling, and where rural mothers remain far from safe obstetric care. The solutions are known: behaviour-focused nutrition counselling, not just ration distribution; accelerated staffing of rural delivery facilities; and honest accountability for front-line health workers against measurable outcomes. What is needed is the political will to treat child undernutrition as the central public health emergency it is — not a residual welfare problem to be managed, but a crisis to be ended.

(The author is Health Economist and Assistant Professor of Economics, Nagaon University, Assam).

Letters to the Editor

SC Legalises Prostitution, Not Brothels

Editor,

In a landmark ruling the Supreme Court has said that adult girls engaging in prostitution is not illegal and they must not be raided, victimized or harassed. The Supreme Court held the view that consenting adult sex is legal and such people have the right to do so. This ruling underscores people's right to engage in consensual sex. In our country sexual act is considered a taboo and even talking about it is considered unpleasant. Sex is a biological need and people must not be prevented from engaging in consensual sex. Too much control and restrictions on having sex leads to sexual crimes. Voluntary prostitution is legal but running a brothel is illegal. Running a brothel may cause human trafficking, coercion and other atrocities. Although the Supreme Court has given such a judgement on adult prostitution, it has its negative side as well. With the backing of this ruling, adults and under- aged girls may be dragged into the flesh trade and they may end up in brothels. There is a likelihood of misusing such a ruling and prostitution may flourish leading to health hazards and other social problems.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

Streamlining Alimony for Daughters

Editor,

As the name goes, Social "Justice" which is implied in the names of the two ministries namely the Ministry of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Law and Justice, it would be apt if the support for the daughter(s) by the father who is divorced from his wife to be up to 23 years. By doing so, Justice and Equality is achieved for the males of India as enshrined in the Preamble and in the Fundamental Rights to the Indian Constitution.

The suggested and propositioned 23 years is a 5-year age relaxation in alimony for daughter(s) when compared to the alimony for son(s) which is 18 years. 23 years is also the age which the daughter(s) will finish basic fundamental bachelor's graduation degree. Thus, a "Cut Off Age" of 23 years should be set up for which the daughter(s) by then, should have finished the critical Bachelor's degree should she decide to pursue her studies. Should she quit her studies mid-way, the support will be the same which is 23 years in the public interest of "Women Empowerment". If the daughter(s) want to extenuate their degree by pursing a Master's or especially her PhD, then the father should not be mandatorily obligated by law to support the daughter(s) since it is the daughter(s) personal ambition. Moreover, there are various sorts of central and state scholarships to support the daughter(s) especially for a doctoral degree. Graduation degree is the degree where a person can get 90% of private jobs, state and central government jobs including Civil Services Exams should the person(s) pass these exams.

Consider this fact, in rural areas or in poor families of both rural and urban areas where parents are either farmers or daily labourers living from hand to mouth, no support is given by the father to mother and her children or their many children when they have separated for good or when the father has fled away especially in cases of co-habitation which is very common in poor families especially in rural areas. And even when they are married in a low key manner, they cannot afford a lawyer for divorce nor can the mother file a case for child support. There is a huge percentage of fathers who do not pay child support in India which is why there is so much poverty amongst the urban poor and more so in rural areas. At least here in this case which I am proposing, the father who is either a salaried person or a businessman is actually paying for child support. What I am simply doing here is making the case for paying alimony to support the daughter should be up to 23 years.

As per the current unjustified law, the father has to support the daughter(s) till the time they get a government job which is extremely scarce and hard come by in this day and age or to start her own business which is also extremely difficult to acquire a shop because of heavy down payments. The father will be financially restricted in starting a new family since he has to support the grown-up daughter(s) till she is old if the daughter(s) remain unemployed or unmarried. There is no formulated mechanism in place to ascertain whether the daughter has got a job or a non-permanent job or is married especially when the father or daughter(s) have moved to distant places or are in a huge city where its difficult to keep track of them. Having a cut off age of 23 years, negates all these complications. This is also extremely unfair to the father because he will not be able to support the new family who will have to look after him till the time of his death. His new family will face financial hardships since he will not be able to give the best for his children from another wife in all spheres of their lives. And if he has a third wife should his second wife also choose to divorce him., then the father will be at a severe financial disadvantage. He will become an emotional wreck and will surely have severe mental health problems, irrespective of whether he is a daily wage earner, salaried person or businessman. As per current law, there is no "Cut Off Age" for daughter(s) which severely lacks justice and equality and must be changed immediately.

We have seen throughout the world that when the parents are divorced, in 90% of the cases, the mother always gets full custody of the children since the law is tilted lopsidedly towards women leaving the father with no one to look after him and the father having to start his life all over again with a new family. This is more glaring in a matrilineal state like Meghalaya. In the interest of "Justice" by the Ministries of Social Justice and Law and Justice, this decadent extremely unfavorable law must be immediately amended so that these Ministries live up to their names.

The Ministries of Social Justice and Empowerment and Ministry of Law & Justice should act in a synchronized manner and as a single cohesive unit to make sure that the Preamble and Fundamental rights to the Indian Constitution of Justice and Equality are strictly followed which this archaic Alimony Law for daughter(s) does not follow at all. This current Alimony Law for Daughters promotes financial detriment and adds to the deterioration of the physical, mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing of divorced or separated fathers. This Law has been a cause of great aggravation to the fathers and serves as a deterrence for future modern male fathers to start a family in our beloved nation of India.

This Law also indirectly encourages female feticide because of the lack of a cut off year of 23 years support for daughter(s). This Law must be absolutely and fundamentally changed this year by these two ministries and be passed by the Union Cabinet, both the Union Legislatures and finally assented to by the President this year. The time has come for reforms and changes. After Amendment, the Hindu Adoption and Maintenance Act, 1956 should be expanded to all religions and should not be specific to any religion in India.

Yours etc.,
Melarbor L Thabah,
Via email

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

"The road to success is always under construction."

— Lily Tomlin

The Shillong Times

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Miffed Mamata

POLITICS in West Bengal is getting curiouser. Mamata Banerjee, who called all the shots in Bengal politics for the past several years and with three consecutive terms in power, has been badly mauled in the assembly polls. The victorious BJP, which formed the government is not satisfied with grabbing power in the state. It is bent on decimating the Trinamool Congress, and by extension Banerjee, by encouraging a vertical split and more tumult in the regional party. Much to Banerjee's shock, a rebel faction leader walked away with sufficient MLAs from the TMC to claim the Leader of Opposition status in the assembly. Indications are that more than half of the Trinamool MPs in parliament are already set for a break-up with the parent party and bent on joining the BJP. More might follow. The party, which aggressively "fought" the Centre, is "over" in a jiffy.

What led Banerjee to such a predicament is worth a deep study but the fact is also that a strong anti-incumbency sentiment ran through the present round of assembly polls across three states. Assam and Puducherry proved to be different. Regional satraps like MK Stalin in Tamil Nadu and Pinarayi Vijayan in Kerala had to concede defeat. Like Banerjee, Stalin also faced personal defeat in his assembly constituency. Voters bundled out incumbent governments and their leaders lock, stock, and barrel with vengeance and rare frenzy. Yet, the undoing of both Banerjee and Stalin was their dynastic twist. One kept her nephew on her side and Stalin, his son. The same thing happened to two other regional satraps, Mulayam Singh in Uttar Pradesh and Lalu Prasad in Bihar; not to mention the eventual disintegration of the Thackeray family enterprise, the Shiv Sena, in Maharashtra. Such trends hurt party cohesion and lower the morale of party workers. People saw through these satraps' games, thereby reinforcing the strength of democracy.

Mamata Banerjee has no way left now other than to try and rally forces with two other political forces she decimated in the state in the past – the Congress and the CPIM. She broke ranks with the Congress and formed the TMC, turning the tricolour party in Bengal into a non-entity. She went on to grab power and decimate the CPIM later. Now, with the BJP being the lead force in Bengal and Suvendu Adhikari as Chief Minister doing his best to finish off his former political boss, Banerjee at age 71 may not necessarily have the energy to champion her causes the way she did in the past. Rebuilding her party is in itself a difficult task considering the kinetic force with which the TMC rank and file is deserting her at this critical juncture. Allying with the Congress or the CPIM at this juncture is futile and it depends on whether the Congress will accept Mamata under the present circumstances. One after another, these parties took Bengal to its social, cultural and economic depths. Bengal is where an overdose of political aggressiveness undercut the state's progress. The BJP exploited this situation to its best advantage.

HNLC Bro, Time to Come Overground & Fight Real Battles

By Patricia Mukhim

Dear Bro Sainkupar Nongtraw, its now 30 years (3 decades) since the Hynniewtrep National Liberation Council (HNLC) was formed and about two decades since you have been sending press releases to the media stating your grievances; condemning someone's statements or proposing your own set of prescriptions and injunctions to the Government or to different politicians. Of late you have been going hammer and tongs at the Voice of People Party (VPP) and its President, Ardent Basaiawmoit who you feel is not following long-held traditions in the appointment of the Syiem Sohra after the demise of Late Freeman Syiem. One can understand your sentiments since you come from Khlieh Shnong, Sohra. But this article is about another agenda. That agenda is to request you and your team to come overground and fight the real battles that ordinary folks like us are doing all the time without coercion and intimidation. We don't believe subterfuge can push any Government to improve governance. And I am sure good governance is also what you are pushing for, right?

Since those traumatic years of the 1990s you have held the people of Khasi-Jaintia Hills to ransom. We cannot forget how Rajesh Saigal who owned a car spare parts store in Police Point, Laitumkhrah was gunned down in broad daylight because he did not respond to your organization's extortion notice. There were several killings thereafter. Is killing a human in cold blood part of your written agenda? How can you and your team live with such a heavy conscience as a burden you can never be free of? You might not have been part of the group then but you still carry the weight of guilt for all the killings that happened during that phase of your operations. Remember the gunning down of innocent people in Aristo Store, Malki-Dhanketi. We had a big gathering at Malki Ground to condemn that. Then there were people who were kidnapped and whose bodies were never found. In the beginning the HNLC targeted non-tribal business houses and individuals. Later you did not spare the "jaidbynriew" either. Yet for decades you have gone around claiming to love the jaidbynriew more than other organisations. How can an organization that claims to work towards eradicating corruption and dealing out its own style of punishment to rapists etc., even indulge in such merciless killings? This is a dichotomy that we could never understand then and we are no wiser today. What were you all doing with the money collected from different individuals and groups?

I recall the case of a businesswoman who was served an extortion note from your organization and went to meet the Home Minister of Meghalaya (I will not mention his name since I don't want to shame him) to inform him that she was served an extortion note and that despite being a Khasis she was not spared from extortion. But guess what the Home Minister said. He told her to negotiate with you guys and pay a certain percentage so that she could continue with her business and the HNLC with theirs. That was the level to which Meghalaya had sunk then and the Government was a Congress-led one. It just did not know how to respond to the crisis or it chose not to. There were, of course, a few cops who sought to honour their profession who took on you guys. Some lost their lives in such encounters.

It was only in the year 2000 when RG Lyngdoh was Home Minister that he took serious note of the matter and filed FIRs against those businesses he learnt were regularly funding your Organisation. It was when the income to the Organisation dwindled that many from your ranks chose to come overground and were perhaps enabled by the Government then to start some self-employment activity. Two of your members – Julius Dorphang and Banteidor Lyngdoh – fought and won elections. Dorphang went on to commit a crime and is serving a jail term under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act after being convicted to serve a 25 year sentence. It's paradoxical that a man heading the HNLC which punished rapists, himself ends up raping a minor. Banteidor is a 2-time MLA of Mawkynrew and was also a minister in the last government. Hence if you too wish to change the present circumstances in Meghalaya you should come overground and work towards a responsive, clean governance.

I am not sure what you are doing at the moment and what your sources of income are. The large majority of our people are struggling to survive a hand-to-mouth existence. Judging from the tone and tenor of your releases to the media you seem like an educated guy. For all I know we might even have met sometime, somewhere. Now tell me one thing. The Naga Peace Talks between the NSCN (IM) and the Government of India (GoI) has been going on for 29 years beginning in 1997. Some of their leaders are dead and gone and there is no sign of the peace talks ever materialising. You know better than anyone about the wiles and guiles of the GoI. You know how street-smart the National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval is. We tribals cannot match their mind-games. So for how long are you going to remain underground? And what do you seek to achieve by operating from some sneaky space? If you really care for the jaidbynriew I request you to come overground and take on the politicians you think deserve to be exposed.

The cloak-and-dagger business that the HNLC is currently engaged is a worn-out script. Those who really care to serve their people must walk alongside them and feel their pain. Let's hear your suggestions for improving our educational status which is now in the pits. What have you done as an Organisation to draw attention to the poor schooling conditions in the rural hamlets of Meghalaya? Does it bother you that in Meghalaya many more children are dropping out of primary school than anywhere else in the country? Does it give you sleepless nights? Well let me tell you that it bothers many of us who are trying in our own way to help assist some schools. We can't do much as individuals but we are at least trying.

Yes, we engage with the Government from time to time about the rapidly deteriorating environment. You would know that hundreds if not thousands of trucks are carrying away limestone, boulders and sand to Bangladesh the land that once gave your organization shelter and which is perhaps still sheltering some of your cadres. How do you feel watching your "Mei Mariang" massacred and plundered by your own "jaidbynriew?" Do you ever remind them that they are destroying this Mei Ramew (Mother Earth) and will be leaving behind a barren land for the future generation?

Come on Bro, let's get real. Stop playing these games of hide-and-seek, for you fool no one and frankly, people are quite tired and disinterested in your press releases. The only reason you are sending those releases is to remind all of us that the HNLC is still active and capable of resurrecting itself. But Bro, what are you doing about the capture of land by your own jaid bynriew to the point of leaving many of our own rural people landless? Also, there is corruption at every level of governance so why don't you come out of hiding and file RTI complaints against so many wrongdoings? You must have read the reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) which says that there were no utilization certificates submitted for money amounting to Rs 7460 crores spent in 2024. This means the money was misutilized and has gone to someone's pocket. Does this not trouble you and the Seng? And what about the Drawal and Disbursement Officials (DDOs) who put the leftover money at the end of the financial year into private bank accounts? Is that not stealing?

So, you see Bro, there is a hell of a lot of work to be done if you can come out of hiding and do 'real' work beyond press releases. The agenda-less talks with the government (I am saying so because the agenda has not been publicly spelt out) are not going to lead you anywhere except the garden path. It's time to sweat it out and earn your living the hard way like everyone else is doing and stop the extortion business. Only then will you prove to be a real "nongieid jaidbynriew bashisha, ban im ka kyrteng, sah ka nam" (a true patriot whose name will live forever).

Ghuspathiya Narrative & Border Security Along Indo-Bangladesh Border

By RC Sharma

Border security is national security. Treating border security as a perfunctory professional domain and linking the Bangladesh border only with the "GHUSPATHIYA" narrative ignores other pressing problems along the borders, thereby undermining national security. Border security is both a concept and a methodology for ensuring national security. It encompasses and needs integration of, human resources with modern weapon and equipment, obstacle system, flood lights, towers and surveillance devices. Inadequacy or scarcity of one dilutes the effectiveness of the other, rendering the border security ecosystem vulnerable to exploitation by anti-national elements. What's needed is a balanced approach and federal cooperation among border security stakeholders, including Union and State governments, the border guarding force, and the local population. Nonchalant approach to border security from governments undermines national security. Let's analyze the Indo-Bangladesh border in light of its strategic importance for India's North East and internal security. The Indo-Bangladesh border is a 4,096.7 km land and riverine border running along the states of West Bengal (2216.7 Kms), Assam (263 Kms), Meghalaya (443Kms), Tripura (856 Kms), and Mizoram (443 Kms). The land component is plain and hilly with unfenced gaps, villages ahead of fence and cultivation up to zero line all along West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura borders with many population center's right on the border. Riverine component characterizes char lands, which are unfenced, with population along the char areas and cultivation up to zero line. At many places, it is difficult to comprehend where India lies and where Bangladesh is unless one spends time in the area and becomes fully familiar with it.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, in response to Rajya Sabha unstarred question no. 2437 by Dr Kirori Lal Meena answered on 17 March 2021 informed that fence work remains pending in West Bengal (578.653 Kms), Assam (52.983 Kms), Meghalaya (117.227 Kms), Tripura (61.627 Kms), and Mizoram (162.923 Kms). The total unfenced area is 973.413 Kms which is about 23.76 percent of the total border. The reasons cited for pending fence work are difficult terrain, riverine and marshy land, short working season, land acquisition problems, public protests and objections by Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB). Government says that it is regularly monitoring the progress of the fencing work. Regarding illegal infiltrators caught by the BSF along the Indo-Bangladesh border from 2016-2020, the numbers are 31 for Assam, 152 for Meghalaya, 429 for Tripura and 4,844 for West Bengal. Altogether, 5,456 illegal infiltrators were caught along the Indo-Bangladesh border. The Ministry further states that there is no accurate estimate of infiltrators entering the country clandestinely. With these figures emerging officially, one wonders at the authenticity of the statement then Minister of State for Home Affairs, Prakash Jaiswal in 2004 in Parliament about there being 12 million illegal Bangladeshis in India. Kiren Rijiju, then Minister of State for Home Affairs, made a statement in Parliament in 2016 claiming that according to available information, there were about 20 million illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in India; he later retracted this statement. Even data on Indian citizenship between 2015-2019 does not reveal anything on illegal immigrants. In 2015, 14,880 Bangladeshis were granted Indian citizenship; the figures for 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2019 were 39,49, 19, and 25, respectively. Data and statements do not support each other. One wonders if Ghuspathiya narrative is real or just a political slogan for perception building for emotional exploitation.

Now let's analyse the progress on the border obstacle system, specifically the fencing, to curb illegal immigration and smuggling. Fencing was a political hot potato during the recently held West Bengal assembly elections. In response to Rajya Sabha unstarred question no. 3044, asked by Shambhu Sharan Patel and Neeraj Shekher, Nityanand Rai, Minister of State in Ministry of Home Affairs, replied on August 20, 2025, that out of a total length of 2216.7 Kms in West Bengal, 1647.696 km is already fenced. Of the 569.004 km stretch that remains unfenced, 112.780 km is non-feasible and 456.224 km is feasible. He further states that out of the 456.224 km feasible in West Bengal, land for 77.935 km has been handed over to the executing agency. For the remaining 378.289 km stretch, the state government has yet to initiate land acquisition for 148.971 km, and the land for the remaining 229.318 km is in various stages of acquisition. Government data paints a grim picture of border security infrastructure as priority. Between 2021 and 2025, in about four and half years' a tiny stretch of just 9.649 Kms has only been fenced in West Bengal. Fencing work on 77 Kms is ongoing while about 378.289 km remains unfenced. This means border security is more of a political punching bag than a real priority. Neither the Union nor the State government showed the desired determination to expedite the fencing of feasible stretches. The story must be the same for other Northeastern states along the Indo-Bangladesh border.

Fencing requires managing issues that dilute its effectiveness. The first is management of hamlets ahead of fencing in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. These hamlets pose risks to border security because they allow easy cross-border access for both sides. BSF has domination protocols ahead of fencing but these hamlets and Bangladesh villages have easy unnoticed access at night and may be used for facilitating illegal immigration, infiltration, cross border smuggling, espionage, spying and radicalization. There are possibilities that children born in Bangladesh are registered in India as born to mothers residing in these pockets. It is also possible that Bangladesh citizens are using these hamlets as residential proof to obtain Indian passports. In a nutshell, these hamlets pose a risk to border security because residents can be easily arm-twisted by anti-national elements to do their bidding.

Fencing is the antidote to containing illegal immigration, infiltration, and the smuggling of fake currency, drugs, arms and ammunition, local merchandise, sand, stone and lime stone smuggling from river beds. A multi-pronged strategy is needed to strengthen border security along the Indo-Bangladesh border, prioritized by importance. Firstly, begin the process to fence the feasible gaps by expediting land acquisition. The non-feasible gaps too need strengthening by resorting to situational security. West Bengal government has started a three-step process to expedite land acquisition which should not lose steam. In the process government transferred 142.79 acres of land across nine districts covering about 27 Kms stretch for border fencing. This process needs to be expedited in all north Eastern states. Secondly, we need to enhance our focus on strengthening existing fencing by replacing old fencing which is badly rusted in many areas and poses no obstacle to illegal migrants. Unfenced gaps and habitation along the fence alignment, which creates man-made gaps, render the Indo-Bangladesh border highly porous due to the population ahead of the fence.

Government's priority must be to relocate the population to deeper areas ahead of the fence by identifying suitable land for this purpose. Expedite land acquisition and fence construction as the topmost national security priority. Stop practice of frequent pull out of Border Security Force for elections and internal security duties creating repetitive artificial porosity in border security. Address non-feasible gaps using situational domination protocols. Professional analysis of both artificial and natural porosity along the Indo-Bangladesh border is imperative and must be the top-most national security priority along the Indo-Bangladesh border. BSF cadre command has ensured effective foolproof border security along the Indo-Bangladesh border despite monumental constraints. Now, the double engine political dispensation along the Indo-Bangladesh border must catch the bull by the horns, expedite infrastructure development to contain artificial and natural porosity, and implement human resource reforms to turn the political rhetoric of "GHUSPATHIYA" into reality. The data on such push backs and hand-overs must be in the public domain. It is also necessary to prioritize and address multiple threats and combat challenges along the Indo-Bangladesh border, rather than treating illegal immigration as the only threat. Action on ground alone will reassure the nation that the political dispensation means business.

(The writer is Commandant (R) BSF)

Letters to the Editor

Rethinking how blind singers earn a living in our market

Editor,

Every day in Police Bazar we see blind singers sit by the nearby stalls or the bazar corners, mic in hand, a blue-tooth connected sound amplifier a bowl at their feet. Their songs are often beautiful and soothing. People drop a few coins and move on. The talent is real, but the setting reduces it to begging.

The problem is not in the singing. It is where the singing happens. When a blind artist performs on a dusty pavement, in the blazing heat, incessant rain and rushing crowds, the public first sees them as a beggar or a nuisance, and second as a musician. That perception decides the payment: pity money instead of an artist's fee.

I sometimes wonder who promotes these blind performers to perform in these areas? Is it an organisation or an individual looking for quick earnings with the help of these blind singers? Are these singers paid well, fed and looked after or are they just left to fend for themselves after their stint everyday? Often, I have seen these singers walk back to their destinations in the evenings, each holding the shoulder of the person in front. If organizations are involved in making them perform in designated areas, are these organizations recognized by the authorities? Have their antecedents been checked?

Many towns and cities in India I have visited have spaces the government maintains for public programs — town halls, cultural centers, park amphitheaters, and designated street-performance corners. These stages were built so art could be shared with dignity. Moving blind singers from the market floor to these platforms changes three things at once:

Dignity of Work

On a stage, the singer is presented as a performer, not a petitioner. The audience comes to listen, not to donate out of guilt. A microphone and a posted name turn a "beggar" into "Smt. Or Shri 'something', Vocalist."

Better Earnings

Organized shows can sell tickets, pass a hat at the end, or be sponsored by local businesses and Government cultural funds. A 30-minute set on a Saturday evening at the town square will collect more than a full day in the market, and it allows multiple artists to share the slot.

Public Awareness

When the government allocates time slots for blind musicians, it signals that disability is not inability. Children walking past learn that music is a profession, not a plea. This slowly shifts the market's culture from charity to respect.

What needs to happen

Municipal list of venues: Publish the halls, parks, and weekly bazaar stages where approved artists can book a slot for free.

Simple registration: A blind singer should only need a disability certificate and a short audition to get on the roster. No bribes, no middlemen.

Fixed timings: Announce "Saturday/Sunday Evenings for Special Artists" so the public knows when to attend and vendors near the venue can benefit from foot traffic.

Basic equipment: Provide a mic, one bluetooth speaker, and a mat. The government already owns these for official functions.

Link with social welfare: Connect stage earnings to existing pension or skill-development schemes so artists do not lose benefits by performing.

The voices in our market deserve an audience, not just alms. The government has built the stages. We only need to open the doors and invite the singers up the steps. When we do, the market will be quieter, and the town will be richer — not in coins dropped from guilt, but in music chosen with respect.

Hope to see some changes in the future.

Yours etc.,
Casper Tariang,
Via email

How Prepared Are We to Face Fire Incidents

Editor,

The tragic fire in Delhi's Malviya Nagar, which claimed 21 lives, is not just another news story. It is a warning for all of us. Reports suggest that the hotel did not have the required fire clearances, lacked adequate emergency exits, and failed to follow basic safety norms. A place where people expected safety and shelter suddenly became a death trap.

As I read about the incident, I could not help but think about our state. We have countless schools, colleges, hostels, hospitals, hotels, shopping complexes, and government offices where people gather every day. A fire does not announce its arrival. It can break out anywhere and at any time. The question we need to ask ourselves is: Are we really prepared?

This concern is not imaginary. Meghalaya has witnessed several major fire incidents over the years. The devastating fire at the Janata Furniture Building in Police Bazar highlighted the difficulties faced by emergency services in congested areas (The Shillong Times, October 15, 2023). More recently, the massive fire at Goenka Compound left around 200 families homeless (The Shillong Times, January 17, 2026). Another fire destroyed several roadside shops at Them Bijoy (The Shillong Times, May 10, 2026). Thankfully, these incidents did not result in a tragedy on the scale of the Delhi fire, but they should remind us that we are not immune to such disasters.

What worries me is that we often take safety seriously only after a tragedy occurs. We discuss fire safety after a fire, road safety after an accident, and disaster preparedness only after lives have been lost. By then, it is usually too late. I sincerely feel that the concerned departments and authorities should make fire safety a top priority. Schools, colleges, hostels, hotels, hospitals, commercial establishments, and government offices should undergo regular fire safety audits. Emergency exits must remain open and clearly marked. Fire extinguishers, smoke detectors, alarm systems, and other safety equipment should not merely be installed to satisfy regulations; they must be maintained and checked regularly. Mock drills should also become a routine practice so that people know exactly what to do during an emergency.

After all, prevention is always better than cure. A functioning fire extinguisher, a properly maintained emergency exit, or a timely inspection may seem like small things, but in a moment of crisis, they can save lives.

Let us not wait for a major tragedy in Meghalaya to teach us this lesson. The warning signs are already there. The time to act is now.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Why Is Municipal Water Costlier?

Editor,

In some localities of Shillong, many families wake up each morning worrying, "Will there be enough water today? Or will the taps run dry yet again?" Having no choice, they call tankers to meet their daily needs.

The irony is that the Shillong Municipal Board, entrusted with public welfare, charges Rs. 900 for 1,800 litres of water, while private suppliers deliver up to 2,300 litres for Rs. 800. Why this huge difference? For ordinary households already burdened by rising expenses this gap feels unfair. Shouldn't the Municipal authority be expected to provide water for "free?" When the poor must pay more to quench their thirst, it brings shame to the Board itself.

Many residents often voice their frustration openly and ask, "Is it not the responsibility of the Municipal Board to ensure a consistent supply of water to every nook and corner of the town? Instead of easing our hardship, why do they charge more than private suppliers?" This shows the growing disappointment of the people. They feel completely let down in their most basic need. Some say when they call the municipal tanker, it shows up only the next day. But the private supplier arrives promptly.

Therefore, in public interest, I fervently urge the Shillong Municipal Board to tackle this basic problem with utmost compassion and fairness. If the people are parched for want of water, accountability must rest on the Municipal Board. It's high time the public received water from the Municipal without paying a single rupee.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

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"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin."
— William Shakespeare

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World Environment Day and Beyond

THE annual World Environment Day observance is over and done with. Hundreds of saplings have been planted across the state by well-intentioned individuals who perhaps genuinely care for the environment. But it cannot be denied that many are merely fulfilling an obligation as dictated by their organisations and sundry government departments. It is doubtful if such individuals ever return to check on the sapling they planted, say a few months later, to see if it has survived the elements or grazing cows and sheep. Also, it is amusing to note that the environment has been reduced only to greenery as if trees alone constitute the environment. Very few stop to think of our water bodies which include rivers, streams, lakes and ponds that increasingly face the onslaught of regressive human behaviour: turning all these water bodies into garbage dumps. Humans are supposed to be endowed with basic intelligence and the ability to connect their actions to certain outcomes. How does the human conscience, with which each person is endowed, allow humans to become so ruthless as to poison a living water body?

It is important here to take a holistic view of the environment which goes beyond trees, air, and water but to consider the entire system of interconnected elements that support and sustain life on this planet. In a holistic sense, the environment includes natural components such as land, water, air, plants, animals, and ecosystems. Lest we forget the environment also includes human-made elements such as cities, infrastructure and technology. Then there are social and cultural factors which include communities, traditions, lifestyles, and human interactions. Last, but perhaps not least, are the economic and political systems that determine how resources are extracted managed, and distributed. What we humans seem to miss is this interconnectedness. The environment is not separate from humans. On the contrary humans are an integral part of the environment but a gap in understanding that aspect is what has turned humans into predators. Today humans see a tree and think of timber and the money it would generate. Some humans fail to cherish nature's beauty because they are obsessed with its monetary value. So a piece of hill or mountain is quickly turned into a quarry or mine with the land actually gasping for breath. But humans who turn nature into a business don't feel the pangs. On June 5, did the Government of Meghalaya speak about reclaiming the abandoned coal mines? Did anyone stop near a stone quarry to ask how much quarrying is enough to maintain an ecological equilibrium in this hilly state which ironically is also trying to sell itself as a destination for eco-tourism? These glaring dichotomies have to be called out and addressed. Sadly most of these mines and quarries are in rural Meghalaya where villagers are voiceless although in the long run their own water bodies and even the air they breathe are affected.

The environment does not exist in isolation. When water bodies are polluted they affect human health, wildlife and the economy. The buildings constructed on river banks so that sewage is released directly into rivers are as damaging to our entire eco-system but humans are past caring. So, World Environment Day has become a symbolic observance. It's time to step back and reflect on the intrinsic meaning of this day.

Coins of the Jaiñtia Kingdom

By H.H. Mohrmen

Jayantia (Jaintia) was one of the major kingdoms in medieval Northeast India until it was defeated by the colonial British government on March 15, 1835. Throughout its approximately three hundred years of history, the kingdom resisted invasions from almost all neighbouring powers, including the Koch, Ahom, Dimasa, Tripuri, and Mughal kingdoms. However, it is only now that people have started to tell the history of this small but remarkable kingdom.

When the kingdom was annexed by the British, the territory of the Jaiñtia Kingdom comprised two parts: the hill section, now known as the Jaiñtia Hills of Meghalaya, India, and the plains section, which extended into Sylhet, now in Bangladesh. The kingdom had its capital at Jayantiapur, which is now in Bangladesh, while in the north its territory extended to Gobha Sonapur in Assam (Bhattacharjee, J.B., 2009). The kings were originally of Pnar and War descent, which also constituted the predominant population of the hills.

The Merger of the Two Kingdoms

The plains of present day Bangladesh, lying at the foothills of Meghalaya, share a deep and intricate historical connection with the Pnar people of the hills. Though the people of the hills and those of the plains belonged to different ethnic groups, their histories intersected and at one point in time, both regions were unified under a single authority known as the Jayantia Kingdom. This remarkable kingdom, which had its origins in the hills, expanded its territory down to the Surma River (Dutta, S.K., July 10, 1937, Jayantia Buranji, Introduction, p. v).

Historians generally agree that the Jaiñtia Kingdom emerged from the merger of two smaller states: a tribal kingdom in the hills and a flourishing kingdom in the plains. Several narratives explain how these two diverse kingdoms became one. One narrative, as recorded in the Jayantia Buranji, suggests that the merger was peaceful. Landabur, who had been adopted by the tribal chief of Sutnga, later became the ruler of the Jayantia Kingdom in the plains. Another narrative states that a tribal chief, after uniting the tribes of the hills, invaded the plains and extended his dominion over the region. According to this account, the victorious ruler was called Prabhat Rai, "The Lord of the Hills," by the subjects of the conquered kingdom (Gait, E.A. 1906).

The Jayantia Kings and Their Tribal Origins

One point on which scholars agree is that the Jaiñtia Kingdom was thereafter ruled by kings of tribal origin from the hills. Although they were influenced by the culture of the plains and eventually adopted Hinduism, they continued to follow many tribal customs and traditions. This was most evident in the succession to the throne. Instead of the king's son, it was his nephew, specifically the son of his youngest sister, who inherited the throne. However, the study of the coins of Jayantiapur has brought to light another important tribal tradition that was continued by the Jayantia kings.

The Jayantia Kingdom's First Encounter

Historians also agree that the first recorded encounter involving a Jaiñtia king was with the Koch Kingdom. A king of Jayantia died on the battlefield in 1564 while resisting a Koch invasion led by Chilarây. Following his death, his nephew was placed on the throne under certain conditions. These included the payment of an annual tribute of ten thousand rupees, seventy horses, and three hundred swords, and the condition that he should not strike coins in his own name (Bose & Rhode, 2010). This invasion is recorded in Koch history and perhaps marks the first appearance of the Jayantia Kingdom in the written records of another kingdom.

The Early History of the Hill Kingdom

Since the Jaiñtia people had no written records prior to the annexation of the kingdom by the British, the only option is to rely on oral traditions, of which the hill people have many. Consequently, much of the kingdom's early history remains in the realm of legend and oral tradition. Tradition holds that the united tribal kingdom of the hills was originally known as ka Hima Sutnga until the Pnar kings defeated the kingdom in the plains and extended their dominion southward.

In the Jayantia Buranji, it is recounted that the last ruler of the Jayanti Kingdom was a queen who banished her husband. With the help of her favoured deity, she transformed her shadow into a woman, who then turned into a fish and swam upstream to where her exiled husband, Landhabar, was living. Landhabar caught the fish in a nearby river, and it later transformed back into a woman, whom he subsequently married.

An intriguing aspect of this tradition is that both the hill kingdom of Sutnga and the plains kingdom of Jayanti share similar origin stories. The Buranji contains multiple versions of the kingdom's origin story, while the Pnar and War people preserve similar narratives through oral tradition. This version, with its tribal characteristics, is linked to several natural features that still exist today. For instance, the Waikhyrwi River, from which Lo or Lot Ryndi is said to have caught the legendary fish, still flows today, as does the Thlumuwi River, where the woman is believed to have disappeared.

Chronology of the Kings

The Jaiñtia Kingdom has its own versions of the chronology of the kings who ruled the country, and the Jayantia Buranji records four different lists. Scholars in the past undertook the task of authenticating the succession of the Jayantia kings. More recently, a significant contribution to this effort came through a study of the coins of the Jayantia rulers, published in 2010.

N.G. Rhodes and S.K. Bose studied these coins in the book titled The Coinage of Jayantiapur: With an Account of the Last Days of the Jaintia Raj published by Marudhar Arts, Kolkata, in 2010. Rhodes and Bose are well known numismatists who have published a series of monographs on the coinage of Northeast India, including studies on ancient Assam and the kingdoms of Cooch Behar, Tripura, Ahom, and Dimasa Kachari used coins to authenticate the lists.

The monograph covers all known Jaiñtia coins that have so far come to the attention of scholars and coin collectors. The authors have examined each coin in meticulous numismatic detail, documenting its metal composition, size, shape, weight, countermarks, authenticity, and the identification of fake and forged specimens. The study also includes a critical analysis of the inscriptions and other features, along with the dating, cataloguing, and classification of the coins, providing valuable keys to understanding the coins.

Jaiñtia Coins and Their Characteristics

One of the major findings of the study is that the coins of Jaiñtiapur are among the most distinctive in the numismatic history of Northeast India. Some of their most notable characteristics include the fact that almost all Jaiñtia coins prominently feature a six pointed star, often referred to as the Star of David, and although it's exact symbolic meaning in the Jaiñtia context remains uncertain. Some later coins also display a five pointed star.

Many coins depict a sword and a gun and because of the sword motif, they were locally known as Kâtrâ Tâka or "sword tanka." A unique feature of Jaiñtia coinage is that the date on many coins represents the accession year of the king, helping historians reconstruct the chronology of Jaiñtia rulers.

Many coins contain carefully arranged dots, which were likely used as mint or security marks to identify mint contractors and ensure quality control. Most Jaiñtia coins were made of debased silver, often of poor quality, which led some early collectors to mistake them for forgeries.

Unlike most other Indian kingdoms, Jaiñtia coins were usually anonymous and did not bear the name of the ruling king. According to the Koch chronicle, the new Jaiñtia king was forbidden from issuing coins in his own name, leading some historians to explain the continued use of anonymous coins in Jaintiapur until the late eighteenth century. However, this interpretation is doubtful because Cooch Behar never regained political control over Jaiñtiapur and would have been unable to enforce such a condition. It is more likely that anonymous coinage was already an established practice, and the Koch rulers merely claimed credit for it. The absence of the king's name on the coins probably reflected the unique status of the king in Jaiñtia and Khasi society rather than any external restriction.

Important Collectors and Institutions Holding Jaiñtia Coins

The book also listed the important collectors of Jaiñtia coins include Vasant Chowdhury of Kolkata, who is regarded as one of the earliest serious collectors of Jaiñtia coinage. Upon his demise, the collection passed into the custody of J.P. Goenka, who later acquired and expanded this important collection.

Bose and Rhode also mentioned that some of these Jaiñtia coins are now in the hands of several additional private collectors. More importantly, some of these coins are now in the possession of a Pnar businessman. Major institutions holding Jaiñtia coins include the British Museum, the Ashmolean Museum, the Fitzwilliam Museum, and the Indian Museum.

Fill the Classrooms, Fill the Minds

By Maitphang Syiem

As you begin to read, imagine a Class 6 student named Bahduh. Every morning, he walks past a newly tarred road to reach school. Bahduh sits at his desk present and accounted for in the register. But although Bahduh is in Class 6 he cannot reliably read a paragraph from his class textbook; he cannot perform simple numerical tasks without emphatic support. Perhaps he will likely drop-out before reaching Class 10. When he does, Bahduh's unrealised potential will be an impeding economic loss that no infrastructure project can recover.

This story is not imaginary; it is what education reports and datasets are telling us. It is a story that demands to be read as a conversation about what kind of future we are actually building. Yes, dear readers we are talking of the PGI 2.0. Simply put it reveals uncomfortable metrics. The (PGI 2.0) for 2024–25, released by India's Ministry of Education in May 2026, evaluates school education across six domains. The domain that cuts to the core is Learning Outcomes and Quality which measures what children in Class 3, Class 6 and Class 9 can actually do: read, calculate, reason, apply. It carries 240 of the total 1,000 points. Our score stands at 47.2 out of 240; this is below 20% of the maximum possible in the most important domain of the entire index.

Every other North Eastern State has improved but why are we in Meghalaya ranking so low and alone in Akanshi-2 (Grade in the PGI 2.0) for Learning Outcomes? Now drawing further from the UNDP Human Development Framework, the HDI measures the years of schooling that adults in our state have completed and that today's children are likely to complete. The HDI stands at 0.690 in the medium human development band with an index of 0.601 which resonates to population receiving moderate formal education. Looking deeper the HDI counts the years a child sits in school whereas the PGI learning outcomes measure what happens to their minds while they are in school. If one looks into the indices, the HDI says that children are attending school, and the PGI says the attending is not translating into learning; therefore, the return on investment is not happening.

Having seen the low side of the situation, there are also strengths that we must acknowledge honestly. In terms of Equity our state score in PGI is 208.7 out of 260 (Uttam-2 grade) a nationally high performing category. This implies that the state does not discriminate sharply between its students. Everyone gets roughly the same experience. The problem is that the experience itself is inadequate. Now coming to the Access score, we stand at 42.8 out of 80 (Prachesta-1, grade) implying that children are in school, enrolment is up. Over three consecutive PGI cycles, the state improved from 401.6 to 417.9 to 448. These are real gains indeed; however, the pace is the problem.

The pertinent question now is whether the risk is already inside the classroom? In the context of disaster science, we speak of risk as a function of three things: hazards, the exposure of people, the vulnerability and the capacity. Applying this language, here the hazard is the school system that occupies children's time without building their minds. When a child attends school for nine years and leaves without functional literacy, that is a slow-onset hazard to human development invisible until a generation has been lost. A Low Outcome score of 47.2/240 is not a forecast; it is the hazard in real time. Furthermore, the exposure is for every child enrolled in a government school in Meghalaya. Because Access is reasonably strong, (as per the PGI 2.0 score) and large numbers of children are inside a low-learning system. High attendance in a low-learning outcome environment means high exposure but nothing gained. The more children the system draws in while failing to teach them, the wider the damage.

Now the Vulnerability factor denotes many entities and runs deeper than the classroom walls. Firstly the lesser educated parents-student interrelationship brings less learning support at home; secondly the malnourishment which undeniably results in a cognitive challenge that no curriculum alone can overcome; and thirdly undertrained teachers, reflected in the state's weak Teacher Education and Training score of 46.7/100. These compound vulnerabilities are what transform a school-quality problem into a generational human development crisis. To counter this we need to leverage capacity collectively through an adaptive bottom-top approach with inclusive, impactful deployment and this matters most at the moment.

If one would introspect and confront the problem there would be no deliverables that can deliver the greatest return on investment comparable to a child who can read, calculate and think rationally and analytically. If children master foundational literacy by Class 3 they would be statistically more likely to complete secondary school. A child who completes secondary school earns significantly more over a lifetime. Higher earnings raise the income component of HDI. Better-educated mothers raise healthier children directly improving the health component of HDI. Education and health are not line items in a welfare budget.

They are the engine of every other development goal the state has ever announced.

Development is needed but what matters most is to develop minds that can build better all-weather roads, minds that can generate sustainable employment, minds that can establish transparent, incorruptible governance, minds which can deliver equal and fair justice, minds which can preserve nature. The most important question at this juncture is how we can build and fill those minds. The clear-cut answers are many. Capacity development not just capacity building, investment in foundational literacy, which is a necessary intervention and non-negotiable brick. It may sound amusing if we say, "Feed the child before asking the child to learn," but the link between malnutrition and learning outcomes is not theoretical it is neurological and one can say investment that adequately funds school nutrition is investing in its GDP of the next decade.

With all due respect to the teachers, this is a profound thought. Anyone can become a teacher but few can teach. A TE&T score of 46.7 out of 100 means classrooms are staffed by educators who want to teach but have not really capitalized on professional tools. It is the single most direct lever on Learning Outcome scores available. Every Learning Outcome point gained today comes with a time lag of ten to fifteen years - a measurable improvement in Meghalaya's HDI education index. Higher learning outcomes mean longer school completion. Longer completion raises mean years of schooling. Higher educational attainment raises income and health. The HDI, currently resting on a fragile "medium" perch, begins to climb for the right reasons not because the world's methodology changed, but because Meghalaya's children genuinely learned more. That is the positive horizon. It is reachable. The trajectory from 401.6 to 448 across three PGI cycles proves the system can respond. What it needs is not more schemes with painted signboards. It needs sustained, adequately funded, unromantically prioritised investment in learning quality, teacher competency, child nutrition, and community accountability year after year, regardless of election cycles.

The only question that should matter is this - are we spending our money on the things that will change what happens inside Bahduh's mind or on the things that merely look, from the outside, like they are?

(The writer is a Geospatial Technology Expert).

Letters to the Editor

Verification Before Allegation

Editor,

I write to express concern regarding a social media post circulating under the banner "ANTOR – U Sangot Kyrsiew Ri," wherein it has been alleged that the Facebook account "Ri Pnar Student's Union" was created and operated by a teacher from a reputed college in Shillong, coupled with a statement that the individual's identity would soon be exposed.

Such a serious allegation warrants careful scrutiny and verification before being placed in the public domain. In an era where information spreads instantaneously through social media, unverified claims can cause significant and irreversible harm to a person's reputation, professional career, and personal well-being.

The ownership and operation of a Facebook account are matters that can only be conclusively established through technical evidence, platform records, and, where necessary, investigation by competent authorities. Merely assuming or alleging that a particular individual is behind an account without substantiated evidence risks misleading the public and undermining the principles of fairness and due process.

The statement that a teacher created the Facebook account "Ri Pnar Student's Union" and the accompanying threat to expose the individual's identity raise important questions. Has the claim been independently verified? Has the concerned person been given an opportunity to respond? What evidence exists to support the allegation? These questions ought to be addressed before any public accusation is made.

Furthermore, it is pertinent to note that while U Sangot Kyrsiew Ri has publicly expressed its intention to expose the identity of the person allegedly operating the Facebook account "Ri Pnar Student's Union," the identity of the individuals administering or operating the U Sangot Kyrsiew Ri platform itself is not publicly disclosed. This raises an important question of consistency and fairness. If anonymity is considered objectionable in one instance, the same standard should apply uniformly to all parties. Public accountability should not be selective. Before seeking to reveal the identity of others, it would be appropriate for those making such demands to themselves demonstrate transparency and accountability regarding their own identity and authority to make such allegations.

It is a fundamental principle of justice that an individual should not be subjected to public condemnation based on suspicion, conjecture, or unverified information. The presumption of innocence and the right to reputation are recognised legal and constitutional principles. Publicly identifying or threatening to identify an individual without adequate proof may expose the accuser to allegations of defamation and could potentially result in unnecessary harm to an innocent person.

Teachers occupy positions within society. Any accusation against them must therefore be approached with the highest degree of responsibility, objectivity, and respect for due process. If there is credible evidence linking any individual to the account in question, the matter should be referred to the appropriate authorities for investigation rather than being tried in the court of public opinion.

I therefore respectfully urge U Sangot Kyrsiew Ri to verify all facts thoroughly before issuing such statements and to refrain from making public assertions that may adversely affect the reputation of an individual without conclusive evidence. Responsible public discourse requires accuracy, fairness, and accountability from all stakeholders.

The pursuit of truth is best served not by speculation or public threats of exposure, but by evidence, due process, and respect for the rule of law.

Yours etc.,
Mantre Hame Dkhar,
Via email

World Environment Day: Beyond Plantation Drives and Seminars

Editor,

As the world observed World Environment Day on June 5, it is an appropriate time to reflect honestly on the state of our environment and the gap between our promises and our actions. Every year June 5 we witness plantation drives, awareness rallies, seminars, speeches, and social media campaigns. Saplings are planted, photographs are taken, and commitments are made to protect nature. For a day, environmental conservation becomes everyone's concern. Yet one question remains unanswered: What happens during the remaining 364 days of the year?

Meghalaya, often celebrated as one of the greenest states in India, is not immune to environmental degradation. While our state continues to enjoy rich biodiversity, several warning signs are becoming increasingly visible. Unscientific mining practices in certain areas have affected rivers and streams. Rapid urbanization, improper waste disposal, plastic pollution, and shrinking water sources are becoming major concerns. Seasonal water shortages in parts of Shillong, Tura and other urban centres indicate that even a state blessed with abundant rainfall cannot take its water resources for granted.

The situation is equally worrying in our forests. While Meghalaya retains substantial forest cover, environmental experts have repeatedly pointed out that forest quality and biodiversity are under pressure from encroachment, fragmentation, forest fires, shifting cultivation practices in some areas, and developmental activities. The loss of mature trees not only affects wildlife but also reduces the land's ability to conserve water and prevent soil erosion.

Across India, the picture is even more alarming. Reports indicate significant loss of tree cover over the past two decades. Hundreds of polluted river stretches continue to exist despite numerous clean-up programmes. Excessive dependence on chemical fertilizers and pesticides has degraded soil health and contaminated water sources. Climate change is further intensifying floods, droughts, landslides, and extreme weather events.

What is particularly disappointing is that environmental concern often ends with seminars and celebrations. Resolutions are passed, certificates are distributed, and photographs are published. Yet the desired results remain elusive.

Planting a sapling is easy. Protecting it from grazing animals, watering it during dry periods, and ensuring its survival for the next few years is far more difficult. The success of a plantation drive should not be measured by the number of saplings planted but by the number of trees that survive and grow. As citizens, we need not wait for governments, institutions, or large organizations to act first. Environmental conservation can begin from our own doorstep and within our own locality. Proper waste management, protection of water sources, reduction in plastic use, care for planted saplings, and community participation can collectively bring about meaningful change.

Nature does not need more speeches. It needs sincere action. As we celebrate World Environment Day, let us ask ourselves a simple question: When the next Environment Day arrives, will the saplings planted this year still be alive? The answer to that question may reveal how serious we truly are about protecting our environment.

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*

Washington politicians hunt for stake in AI boom

It was perhaps a surprising private overture from OpenAI CEO Sam Altman to Sen. Bernie Sanders.

The meeting between the two had come just after the Vermont senator announced a plan for the public to take a 50 per cent ownership stake in artificial intelligence companies such as OpenAI, using their stock to create a public wealth fund that would spread the fortune generated by AI behemoths.

Altman told Sanders that he, too, wants the public to have equity in AI companies. Though the CEO said he couldn't support Sanders' threshold of 50 per cent, he nonetheless wanted to work with him to advocate for the general idea, according to people with knowledge of the conversation.

The nearly hourlong meeting in Sanders' Senate office this week, held at Altman's request, highlighted the inherent tension between AI powerhouses and policymakers as Americans are increasingly asked to accept the costs of the AI boom even as they remain unconvinced of its direct benefits. Yet it's also creating odd political bedfellows fuelled by populism as politicians from Sanders to President Donald Trump embrace giving the public a stake in AI's growth.

Speaking to reporters on Air Force One on Friday, Trump described a potential partnership "where the American people can benefit from the success of AI" and said executives from leading AI companies will visit the White House, "probably next week," to discuss the idea.

"There's something very interesting about it, where it almost becomes a partnership with the American public," Trump, a Republican, said Friday.

When reporters noted to Trump that Sanders, a self-proclaimed democratic socialist, had proposed public ownership in AI companies, he pointed to similarities in their coalitions. The economic views of Trump voters and voters who supported Sanders for president, Trump said, "aren't that far apart." Trump has embraced government investment in private companies in his second term, scrambling his party's politics. His administration last year secured a 10 per cent stake in the struggling Silicon Valley company Intel, and it considered a government takeover of Spirit Airlines earlier this year, although the airline couldn't reach a deal and ultimately closed.

Public backlash is becoming harder to ignore

The positioning of leading figures such as Trump and Sanders comes as concerns about AI are emerging far beyond Washington.

In Michigan, Democrats recently clashed over Gov. Gretchen Whitmer's appearance with Altman at the site of a major data center. Candidates such as New York Democratic House hopeful Alex Bores have also made AI regulation a campaign issue by tapping into voters' angst about the technology.

"This is a real change to society," Altman told reporters this week. "I think it's possible both that people can use AI a lot and like using it and also have anxiety about what it's going to do for the future." Data center projects across the country have drawn opposition from residents concerned about electricity demand, water consumption and environmental impacts. Some states once eager to attract the facilities, including Ohio and Virginia, have moved to reconsider tax incentives.

"We need to pass legislation right now that says there's not going to be any further data center development until they agree to pay for their own electricity, build their own grids and pay for their own water supply," Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley, a leading Republican skeptic of Big Tech, told The Associated Press.

Before arriving in Washington, Altman stopped in Michigan on Monday to appear alongside Whitmer, a Democrat, at the building site of a 1.65 million-square-foot data center. Whitmer's team claimed the project will create more than 2,500 union construction jobs.

But it also drew criticism from local activists and some Democrats, including Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib, who called the project "disgusting." She said she was "so disappointed" in Whitmer.

"It's a very controversial topic right now and it's coming from the ground up," Michigan Sen. Elissa Slotkin, a Democrat, said about the grassroots pushback. "People feel very strongly about it." Whitmer, however, told reporters after the event that "one thing's very clear, everyone has a cellphone in our pocket." "We are all, more and more, consuming technology and data and these data centers are going to get built. So, my thought is if we can hold them to a high standard and do it in Michigan, that's the best way to do it," she said.

The tensions extend beyond data centers. On college campuses, commencement speakers have been interrupted by boos when discussing artificial intelligence. About 70 per cent of college students see AI as a threat to their job prospects, according to a 2025 poll by the Institute of Politics at the Harvard Kennedy School.

Altman acknowledged those concerns. He said that while "the impact on jobs has been less than many people in our field expected," he understands "that college students have a lot of anxiety about the future."

Washington searches for an AI bargain

The idea that AI's expansion is inevitable is increasingly shared by leaders across the political spectrum, even as they disagree sharply about how to manage it.

That reality was at the centre of Altman's conversations in Washington. In addition to Sanders, Altman met with Trump administration officials such as Michael Kratsios, the White House's chief science and technology adviser, and congressional leaders from both parties.

Sanders' team emphasized that the two did not reach an agreement on the main points that the senator made to Altman, including the 50 per cent figure so the public has decision-making power. Sanders also expressed opposition to the growing election spending by the AI industry.

"Unfortunately, Sam Altman did not commit to any of those," said Sanders' spokesperson Jeremy Slevin.

Altman, in emerging from the conversation, described it as "great," adding that the two "obviously don't agree on everything."

Policy makers are also looking at how AI should be governed

Congress this week released a bipartisan framework that would establish the first broad federal approach to AI regulation while temporarily *preempting* many state laws.

Anthropic, one of OpenAI's top competitors, has proposed mechanisms for coordinating pauses on advanced AI development if systems become too powerful.

The Trump administration has also begun constructing its own oversight structure, signing an executive order to establish a process for reviewing national security risks posed by advanced AI systems before their public release.

Sanders said he found the administration's move notable after years of warnings that regulation could slow American innovation.

"Even these guys are beginning to catch on that there are legitimate concerns that have to be dealt with," Sanders said. *(AP)*

Is undisclosed use of generative AI morally wrong?

Imagine you have used a generative artificial intelligence (AI) tool such as ChatGPT to tidy up notes you took while in a meeting. Your colleague comments on how clear they are. You don't disclose it was the AI that made the notes clear and not you.

Now consider a different scenario. You are at your mother's funeral. Her best friend of many years delivers a heartfelt eulogy, wishing her well in the afterlife. But later you discover her friend did not actually write the eulogy in any way — AI did.

The undisclosed use of generative AI in these two scenarios is deceptive. But is it morally wrong? It's worth considering this philosophical question in detail, given the rapid uptake of generative AI and the fact research has found people may be strongly incentivised to not disclose their use of generative AI because it may impact their relationships.

This is because people take generative AI outputs, generally, to be less valuable, and regard those who use the technology as less competent and authentic.

Distinguishing different kinds of deception

Roughly speaking, if you're engaging in a "deceptive act", you're trying to get someone to believe something you know is false. However, deception can come in different varieties.

Philosopher John Danaher provides a useful framework to distinguish between three forms of deception by AI or robots. This framework is useful because, just as robots might convincingly mimic human behaviours, generative AI technologies are allowing humans to do the same.

Some deceptions involve lying or misrepresenting the external world, such as telling someone you saw a horse in the street, even though you didn't. Danaher calls these "external state" deceptions.

So, when is deception immoral?

To go back to the first example, by not disclosing you used AI to tidy up meeting notes, you've allowed your colleague to believe you have the capacity to do the work, which might be true.

However, you also allowed your colleague to believe that you demonstrated that capacity by doing the work, which is false. This would fall into the category of an "external state deception".

While this deception is morally objectionable, it's arguably ethically permissible. Trivial deceptions like this happen all the time — and surely we aren't obligated to always disclose everything about what we do and why we do it.

For example, we don't blink an eye at undisclosed use of spell-checking software because, in most situations, being a good speller isn't important. But triviality depends on context. If someone used spell-checking software at a spelling bee, we might be less forgiving.

The scenario about the funeral speech is similar to the first scenario, but less trivial. Your belief over your mother's friend's superficial state — that they wish her well — may or may not be false. However, your belief over the external state of affairs — that the eulogy is a demonstration of those well-wishes — is certainly false.

This is more morally problematic. When we claim an AI-generated output as our own — and particularly one that aims to reflect something about ourselves — we signal to others that we not only endorse the output, but that we have authored it.

In this case it matters to us that the friend is the source of the eulogy — and not AI. The external state deception is deceptive in a non-trival way.

We imply the output was directly caused by our thoughts, feelings or competencies. When we don't disclose our use of AI, we deprive others of the kinds of information needed to form true beliefs about how the world is and how others are. This is wrong if people deserve to have such information.

However, the eulogy example can still show how not disclosing our use of AI can — all things considered — sometimes be permissible. Perhaps, for example, the friend was so wracked with grief, that having AI write the eulogy on their behalf was the only way for them to get the speech written in time for the funeral. So they endorsed the generated output as their own.

In such cases, not disclosing the use of AI may be permissible, even though still a morally objectionable kind of deception. This is because, like triviality in the first scenario, other reasons might sufficiently outweigh the wrongness of non-disclosure.

Using AI more ethically

So, how can people use generative AI more ethically? If we are to avoid immorally deceiving others, we ought to disclose our use of it in non-trivial cases. What makes undisclosed AI use non-trivial is malleable and context-dependent. It changes in response to social norms couched within particular social practices.

Being open about AI use gives others the opportunity to form more accurate beliefs about what we are communicating — and the internal states our communication demonstrates. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Siavosh Sahebi and Thomas Montefiore, Macquarie University

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi — *Sunday, JUNE 7, 2026*

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon conjunct Rahu on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results. You will make spiritual progress and will race ahead in life. You will feel peaceful and will remain in good spirits. You will remain in fine fettle, and your health is going to be wonderful. You will be having good monetary gains. Additional responsibility will be given to you. Your bosses will show confidence in your talent and abilities and will keep encouraging you. There will be an increase in your work capacity, and great satisfaction in your mind. You will have wonderful bonding with your spouse/partner. Students will perform well in exam/interview. The time is right for studies, research and thesis. You will be also getting good marriage proposals. Situations will improve because of change in planetary position.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) The whole week will be filled with happiness for you. These days are totally in your favor. You will have financial gains. Your work will also be appreciated, and you will work with lot of dedication. You will also find peace in your personal life. You will also have time for pleasure and entertainment with your loved ones. The time will be good from all angles. You will be successful in establishing a dialogue by your gift of conversation. Students will do well in exams. You will also discharge your new additional responsibility. Days of tension and worries are over. Your health is going to be perfect, and your elders will bless you. Business-related trips will keep you busy.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Time is fully favorable. Whatever work that you want to do, will be done now. It is time to realize your dreams. Those looking for job for a long time will get success. For those who have an interest in politics and media, time is right to establish your influence and impression. You will be able to prove your worth before everyone. You will also get name and fame due to your noble deeds. You will help people a lot and will harbor generous feelings towards poor and weak people. You will show them the right path. Travelling will be comfortable. You will get some good news from somewhere. A misunderstanding between husband and wife will get removed. You will also utilize your time well. You will remain busy with religious activities.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Take special care of your needs. Do not interfere in other's affairs, otherwise you might have to pay some special price. You will play an important role in your organization and get promoted too. You will have some problems with relatives. It is a time of self-analysis and introspection. You will also win a debate. You will be successful in whatever you do. The latter part of the week will be prestige enhancing days. You will get the due for your work. A charming person will come into your life suddenly filling it with colours. You will share your feelings with him/her and understand each other better. Students will focus on their studies. Examinations will give their best. You will gain expertise in your field. You will get the blessings of elders.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will through yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will also make best use of money. And you will buy valuable items. The time will be extremely good and happy. You will also be successful in some interviews or competitive exams. Your right advice will change the life of a person. You will be appreciated by one and all for your work. You will also get rid of diseases. It will be knowledge enhancing days. A long-standing worry will come to an end. You will also meet lot of new people. You will take advice from experts in legal property matters. You will remain busy with social activities. Luck is favoring you. Your efforts will be appreciated.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will shine in your work. You will impress people with your attitude. Your behavior will be very good. Some new work will be completed at this time. You will also adorn new clothes. And buy jewelry for wife or sister. You will also spend some quality time with your family. You might take leave and go to some nearby place for a holiday. You will try your best to achieve your objectives. There will the happiness in family life. You will also give salary to your staff. Someone will talk behind your back but will be disappointed. You will mediate in some matters and will also get success in it. But you will get happiness by meeting an old friend. You will establish cordial relations with neighbors. Mutual understanding between husband and wife will be good.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) The time is favorable. You will get promoted in your job. You will also have financial gains. You will get support of your bosses. You will feel a change in your relative's behavior and get good news from their side. You need not be worried about the health of your elders. The situation at work will be under your control. You will also be stable in your job. You will be busy but will be happy that your desired work is completed. In the field of politics/media you will establish contact with new people. The time is good from all perspective. You will be successful in whatever you do. Your contacts will prove to be beneficial. Your boss will be in your favor.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will remain very busy. You will have new responsibilities to complete your job in a specified time frame. Even your bosses will put pressure on you and expect a lot from you. Students will study quite concentratedly to get good results. You will face wrath of a family member. You will also make some solid decisions in business which might give you good gain later. Your love life is going to be amazing. And your relationship with your spouse will be better. Money inflow will remain uninterrupted during this phase. You may make some big decisions after consulting all your family members. You need to drive your vehicle carefully. You could get deceived by your trusted man.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) You may come across many good professional opportunities. May recover your money that was held for long. You will enhance your income. You call fall in a trap so take adequate care. A government related matter will get resolved. You will get the blessings of your senior family members to have your morale boosted. Your investments will give you good returns. Property disputes will also be resolved by some senior family members' intervention. Your health will remain perfect. Lovebirds will have an amazing time. You will get unexpected success in your professional deals. Long-hold money will also be recovered.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will get lot of opportunities for professional growth. Even your boss and seniors will be happy with you. You may get a new contract. Your family dispute with your brothers relating to property will get resolved. Business gains will make you cheerful. Health of your spouse will improve. You may bring a massive change in your organization and staff. But some secret of yours will come out in the open. It will cause trouble for you. You must exercise restraint and patience during this phase. You will get a stable career as your terms with your boss and seniors will improve. You will make plans to go abroad for research and higher studies. You will also be reading spiritual and religious books. Students will be willing to learn new techniques.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will be full of self-confidence. And will take some strong decisions in your business which will cast a powerful impact upon your rivals. Your profits will increase. And you will use your talent and abilities to your best advantage. You will come closer to your partner, and all misunderstandings of the past will get removed. You will recover money that was given to someone. You will have much mental peace. Your long-standing worries will come to an end. You will take some vital decisions which may prove to be fruitful for your family later. But you will not like anyone poking your private life. You will meet an influential person. And will plan to introduce a novelty in your work.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is going to be a progressive week for you. You will make plenty of money. The problems that you were having with your health will come to an end. Matters related to courts will be settled with ease. You will overcome hurdles and defeat your opponents. Students will get busy in their studies and get lot of success. Check your documents carefully. You will get lot of success in love and romantic matters. You can get married too. Don't compare yourself with others. it will hurt your interests. There will be an increase in your earnings and sources of income. Relatives will be wary of you. You will get the blessings and love of elders and parents.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) The start of the week will be stupendous. You will get money, fame and will be bestowed with wonderful health. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will be guest somewhere and derive pleasure. You will focus on your studies and career. This is the right time to get the results of your hard work. Your fame will spread in all directions. Marriage talks may be finalized. Brother and sister will assist and cooperate with each other. Some close relatives may deceive you. You will win a big order. There will be inclination towards spirituality. Your personal life will get the cool breeze of romance.

Half of bookshops in Australia closed within decade. Who will rescue them?

In the past year alone, at least 13 independent bookshops have closed in Australia. Some have operated for decades. Perth's Boffins Books recently announced it would close after 37 years, citing rising costs and "shifting CBD dynamics".

In February, Thesaurus Booksellers in the Melbourne suburb of Brighton closed after nearly 50 years, citing rising rent and operating costs. And late last year, The Bookshop in Sydney's Darlinghurst closed due to "financial pressures", after 43 years.

In the decade from 2013 to 2023, the number of Australian bookshops more than halved: from 2,879 to 1,457 — and continues to decline. Overall financial pressure is one reason. Competition from discount department stores, such as Kmart and Big W, as well as online giants such as Amazon, is another. Local bookshops account for fewer than half of print books sold in Australia each year, the Australian Booksellers Association reported in its submission to Australia's National Cultural Policy last month.

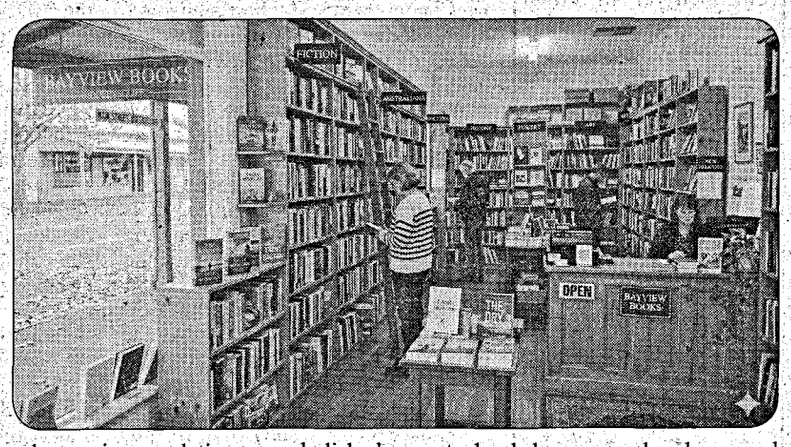
For die-hard book lovers, the independent bookshop is a special place: to browse, get expert recommendations on all things bookish, and engage in events that connect readers more deeply to books and community. As novelist Charlotte Wood has said: "Bookshops are the safety vaults for the seeds of our country's cultural and intellectual life." The health of Australia's independent booksellers is directly linked to the health of Australian publishing — and the availability of Australian books to readers. With fewer people reading recreationally, preserving dedicated bookshops where readers can discover new books is important.

Price fixing in Europe

There are things the government could do to help, such as price regulation, practised successfully in Europe, and tax discounts, a form of support Australia already gives its film industry.

Fixed book pricing is common in Europe, where books are formally exempted from European Union competition rules, as "objects of culture". This allows publishers and their distributors to determine the retail price of books.

France has capped discounts of print books since 1981 at 5 per cent. Since 2011, this has applied to ebooks too. The number of bookshops in France far exceeds that in the United Kingdom,



where price regulation was abolished in 1997, deemed restrictive and anti-competitive.

Countries with fixed book pricing have higher book sales — and the effect on average book prices is typically minimal. When they can't compete on price, booksellers are motivated to provide other services.

Results, however, can be mixed. In Italy, fixed book pricing has existed since 2011, with discounts capped at 15 per cent. A 2025 study showed book prices rose overall as a result.

But while the discount cap had no effect on the number of books published, more kinds of books were sold, with less focus on bestsellers.

The cost of cheap books

Last year, Booker Prize-winning author Richard Flanagan called for the return of fixed-price policies in Australia — which abolished its scheme in 1972.

He claimed discount department stores "don't really care about books, they just use books as a way of dragging customers through the doors". They focus on providing cheap bestsellers, often sold at a loss. This means less variety of books.

In 2024, a petition with 600 Australian signatures was presented to federal parliament asking for regulation of book prices. Andrew Leigh, Minister for Productivity, Competition, Charities and Treasury, acknowledged the pressures high discounts were having on independent booksellers — and the importance of books and reading. But no solution was forthcoming.

One hurdle is the rising cost of producing books. In a fairly stable market, book prices might remain consistent. But without competition, price regulation might lead to costs being passed on to book buyers, as has happened in Italy.

Australian book prices are currently reasonable: for example, the average trade paperback, which cost around AUD 29.95 in 2010, is now around AUD 36.99. If it rose with inflation, it would now cost at least AUD 44.66.

Could tax relief help?

The Australian film industry has benefited from a range of tax incentives since 2007, via the Australian Screen Production Incentive. It offers a strong model.

In its National Cultural Policy submission, the Australian Booksellers Association has suggested an Australian Bookshop Tax Offset, in the form of a tax rebate on core operating expenses such as wages, rent and purchases of Australian-authored titles.

It has also asked the government to look at GST reduction or exemption on books. In 1998, the Democrats, who held the balance of power in the Senate, initially said they would not pass the GST unless books (along with food and tourism packages sold offshore) were exempted. Obviously, this didn't happen.

In the UK, some reference books and children's books are free of its GST equivalent, VAT, to encourage reading and help families. These essential tax breaks are welcomed by the publishing industry, too, as incentives for early readers. While rising costs and competition from Amazon and discount department stores are a factor in the decline of Australian bookshops, government has a role to play in stemming it — if it wants to. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Katherine Day, Bec Kavanagh and Matthew Holden, The University of Melbourne

"A man who trusts nobody is apt to be the kind of man nobody trusts."

—Harold MacMillan

The Shillong Times

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Message from Cockroaches

WITH a modest weekend rally in the national capital, the Cockroach Janata Party (CJP) launched from the United States by a young techie hailing from Maharashtra, has 'landed' on the Indian soil. The peaceful congregation at Jantar Mantar – not far from Parliament – comprised no more than a few thousand youths drawn from the national capital. But it carried a message to the nation and, obviously, a threat to the wayward establishment. The rally heard the CJP raising the demand, among other things, that Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resign in view of the massive bungling vis-à-vis the NEET test and the CBSE exam - systems that are symbolic of the incompetence of the establishment. The principal opposition, the Congress party, too had raised the demand a while ago, but when CJI did it, it drew significant new attention. It now gives the government no more than a week's time to do so.

It's premature to gauge the influence of a movement started online a month ago even as the campaign has won massive response from netizens, with the size of young techie Abhijeet Dipke's fans and his CJP's support base rising to more than 20 million against the BJP's nine million online followers. This, so far, is the only proof of the new party's relevance. Online support does not suffice. Support on the ground is what makes a political establishment credible. It is clear however that Dipke is not being whimsical. That the activist has done some mental homework is all too clear. Significantly, he carried with him a copy of BR Ambedkar's autobiography as he walked out of the Delhi airport and travelled to Jantar Mantar, where he spoke up for the students and youth, who have "not sold themselves out" to the establishment like many others. Equally significantly, he and the CJP demand that the BJP stop the politics of dividing Hindus and Muslims, and instead concentrate on an agenda of mass uplift. His call to his followers was to raise slogans supporting, not him, but the Mahatma and Ambedkar; and oppose "communal" politics". The die is cast.

The CJP is banking on the mass discontentment against the establishment, especially among the aspirational, jobless youths and students. They are largely orphaned as the established political outfits do not care for them. They are a large, unorganised force. But it will be an uphill task for the CJP to harness this discontent and turn it into an anti-establishment offensive. The run-of-the mill politicians are waiting in the wings to undercut new entities that seek to upstage them. Notably, however, the Total Revolution campaign by Jaiprakash Narain in the 1970s uprooted Indira Gandhi from power and changed the political equations. It led to the formation of the Janata Party that won power and formed the government. It did not have the backing of the Internet. The Anti-Corruption movement, initiated by Gandhian Anna Hazare created a mass frenzy aided by the Internet in 2013, but it soon died out. The fate of the CJP is unpredictable though the right conditions exist here for a new upheaval.

My Experience with the LGBTQ+ Community & The Pride Month

By H.H. Mohrmen

The month of June every year is observed throughout the world as Pride Month, and the LGBTQ+ community, especially those in more advanced and developed countries, come out in large numbers to celebrate their very existence. While communities in the West have become more open, their counterparts in other parts of the world still have to hide themselves for fear of being stigmatized and mistreated by their own families and communities.

I know that the transgender (LGBTQ+) subject is very complex, especially when linked to religion, and I admit that I am not an expert on the subject. However, what I will share is my own experience with LGBTQ+ people and how these experiences have shaped my perspective on the issue.

The Journey of Understanding

Let me start from the beginning. In the latter part of 1989, when I was just beginning to understand the life and culture of the people in the UK, I came across this issue. I already had too much on my plate, including the many challenging experiences that were part of the culture shock I encountered while living in a foreign land. I had the shock of my life when, for the first time, my roving eyes caught couples embracing and kissing one another at railway stations and in city parks. I was not used to seeing people engage in these activities in open spaces.

Another shocking experience during this period of culture shock was learning about the existence of gay and lesbian people. In 1989, some Unitarians were already moving the church toward recognizing people who identified themselves as gay and lesbian. I was a twenty-year-old young man coming from a small town, with no experience of even living in another part of India. The experience was beyond what my younger self could comprehend.

As one would expect, my initial reaction was, "This is a cultural problem, and it is present only in the Western world." I also added, "We do not have such people in our culture." Then a colleague who was present in the group tapped me on the back and said, "When you go back, look more carefully and you will see them living quietly in society. Although sometimes they may not be as obvious as others because of the fear of being stigmatized, rest assured that they are among us, as being gay and lesbian is only natural."

A few months later, I watched a documentary on BBC Channel 4, a series about gay and lesbian issues, which further enlightened me on the subject. Eric, my friend who was training to be a Baptist minister, was upset when he saw me watching the documentary. His immediate reaction was, "You should not watch that kind of documentary."

Everything was new to me, and they say curiosity kills the cat, but not in my case. Luther King House at Rusholme, Manchester, was part of the Northern Federation College for the training of ministers, and all my colleagues, both young and old, were training to become pastors, ministers, or priests in their respective Christian denominations.

In 1989, even in the UK, the general perception of people regarding gay and lesbian issues was still very negative, and they were often viewed in a bad light. They were not accepted in society and were seen as bad examples that should not be encouraged. Looking back, and considering that even today the LGBTQ+ community still faces immense challenges, I can only say that the community has come a long way, yet many challenges persist.

I really appreciate the courage of those people who first came out publicly and the hardships they endured when the movement was in its initial stages. Even in England, there were only a few courageous people who supported them, and fewer still had the courage to come out openly. There were also very few churches and ministers who began accepting them into their congregations.

I was lucky to be born into a family with parents who had a liberal mindset, and being brought up to be tolerant and open to learning new things from whatever I came across also helped me in my personal growth. I knew that my time in the country was limited, and as much as possible I tried to observe closely the different aspects of the society that I encountered and to learn and understand from them.

Meeting Them in Person

My first journey by train was perhaps in 1986. As a student of Kiang Nangbah Government College, I was part of an excursion tour, and it was then that I had my first encounter with transgender people. Years went by, and then one evening, while returning from Guwahati to Jowai on a night super bus that stopped at Nongpoh, I had a chance encounter with a local transgender person.

Before the road was widened at Nongpoh, there was an open fruit stall under the banyan tree at the centre of the town. Before the four-lane highway from Umïam to Guwahati was constructed, frequent travellers to Guwahati would remember this small open shop under a huge banyan tree at Nongpoh centre. The vendor sold some of the choicest seasonal fruits, and travelers would stop by to buy fruits and bananas.

After I had my tea, I went to the stall and picked up a few apples oblivious of the surroundings, and asked the vendor, "Ei bah phi die katno shi kilo kine soh apple?" (Brother, how much do you sell these apples per kilogram?) Immediately came the reply, "Wa ine i bah ïa nga ruh ong bah." (Oh brother, why do you call me brother?) I looked again at the person's face and realized the vendor was a trans-person who wore lipstick and earrings. My mind had played a trick on me, and I had made a wrong assumption based on only a brief glance. Like a bolt from the blue, I realized my mistake and apologized profusely.

The incident helped open my eyes, and I realized that there are people who may appear to be male or female on the outside, but inside they may have different feelings about themselves. The incident also reminded me of the discussion I had with my colleague in the UK, who had advised me to look carefully when I returned home.

Surely there are transgender people in our communities, but we simply take them for granted, and some are reluctant to come out because of the fear of being stigmatized. These people are present in society, and we simply accept them as they appear outwardly without really trying to understand them. We rarely try to know their wishes, their desires, and how they see themselves. We also have gay and lesbian people whose identities may not be as obvious as those of transgender individuals.

Our Recent Interaction

We are implementing the LWS project supported by MACS, and the project also includes a category of vulnerable population that we need to reach out to called MSM (men having sex with men). The first MSM case we identified was a young man living in one of the villages along the Assam-Meghalaya border. When we were able to contact him and link him to services, we found that he was HIV positive. A few months later, it was reported that he had passed away.

At the beginning of last year, I received a call from the former DRP of our LWS project in West Jaiñtia Hills. She called me from the Jowai Women Police Station and said that it was urgent and that I needed to come to the police station.

At the station, the officer in charge informed us that they had a repeat offender and wanted us to counsel her. When we started talking with them, we learned that the woman was bisexual and was living with a female partner who was also an offender. Our staff followed up with them, and we were shocked to later learn through media reports that the dominant partner, who also dressed like a male, had been arrested for the crime she committed.

They Are Us

One might think this is foreign and not part of our culture, but these are also humans present in society. They exist, and they are not merely ideas or subjects of debate. They are flesh and blood human beings, and we meet and interact with them every now and then. There are also many people within the population whose sexual orientation is not obvious, and they dare not come out because of the stigma attached to it. Whether we agree or disagree with their choices or identities, the fact remains that they are members of our communities and are part of the society in which we live.

Will the Khasi People Survive if They Did Away with Customary Practices?

By Richard H. Dkhar

Introduction

The question of whether the Khasi people would survive as a distinct tribe if they abandoned their customary practices and customary laws is not merely a legal or cultural question. It is a question of identity, memory, spirituality, and collective existence. The Khasi people have survived for centuries not because of political power, military strength, or economic dominance, but because of a deeply rooted indigenous system of customs, traditions, values, and laws that have shaped their social life and worldview.

In the modern era, many indigenous communities around the world face pressures from globalization, urbanization, migration, modernization, and religious transformation. The Khasi people are no exception. As younger generations increasingly adopt modern lifestyles, some have begun to question whether customary laws and practices are still relevant. Yet the abandonment of these customs raises an important concern: if the foundations of Khasi society are removed, what remains that makes the Khasi people distinct?

This essay argues that while the Khasi people may continue to exist biologically and politically, the abandonment of customary practices and customary laws would gradually erode the unique identity, social structure, and cultural heritage that define them as a people.

Understanding Khasi Customary Practices and Laws

Khasi customary practices refer to the inherited traditions, rituals, social norms, and cultural values that have been transmitted from generation to generation. These include kinship obligations, clan relationships, marriage customs, inheritance systems, community festivals, respect for elders, and traditional institutions. Customary laws are the legal expressions of these customs. They govern matters such as inheritance, clan membership, land ownership, dispute resolution, and social responsibilities. Unlike modern statutory laws, customary laws emerge from the collective wisdom and experience of the community.

For the Khasi people, customs and laws are inseparable from social identity. They provide a framework within which individuals understand who they are, where they belong, and what responsibilities they owe to others.

Role of Customary Laws in Preserving Khasi Identity

One of the most distinctive features of Khasi society is its matrilineal system. Descent is traced through the mother, and clan identity is inherited from the mother. This system is not merely a legal arrangement; it is a cultural institution that shapes family relationships and social responsibilities. Through it, children know their lineage, clans maintain continuity, and ancestral connections are preserved.

If customary laws governing clan membership and inheritance were abandoned, the social structures that have sustained Khasi identity for centuries would gradually weaken. Over time, the community might lose important markers of its distinctiveness and become increasingly assimilated into dominant cultural patterns.

The survival of a people depends not only on physical existence but also on the continuity of their collective memory. Customary laws serve as vessels of that memory.

The Importance of Tip Kur Tip Kha

Among the most profound ethical ideals of Khasi culture is Tip Kur Tip Kha—to know one's maternal and paternal relations. This principle is far more than genealogical knowledge. It embodies an entire philosophy of social responsibility and communal belonging.

To know one's Kur (maternal clan) and Kha (paternal relations) is to understand one's place within a web of relationships that extends across generations. It prevents social fragmentation and strengthens communal solidarity. Tip Kur Tip Kha forms a moral foundation for Khasi society.

If customary practices disappear, these ethical principles may lose their practical expression. The result would not simply be the loss of certain traditions but the weakening of the moral framework that sustains Khasi communal life.

Customary Practices as Carriers of Cultural Memory

Culture survives through practices. Languages, stories, songs, rituals, festivals, and social customs are the means by which a people remember who they are.

Khasi festivals, traditional rites, and customary practices in Khasi Insitutions associated with family and community life serve as living expressions of Khasi identity. They connect present generations with their ancestors and reaffirm the values of the community.

Without such practices, culture risks becoming merely an object of historical study rather than a living reality. A people who cease to practice their traditions may retain knowledge about them, but eventually that knowledge becomes detached from daily life.

The loss of customary practices therefore threatens cultural continuity.

The Relationship Between Custom and Spirituality

Traditional Khasi thought does not sharply separate culture, ethics, and spirituality. Human life is understood as existing within a sacred order established by U Blei Nongthaw, the Creator.

The ethical ideals of Khasi life are rooted in this understanding. To live rightly is not only to follow social rules but also to maintain harmony with the divine order. Many Khasi thinkers, including H. O. Mawrie, have emphasized that Khasi religion and culture are deeply interconnected. The erosion of customary practices therefore affects not only cultural identity but also spiritual consciousness. Their disappearance would create a significant gap in the collective life of the community.

Lessons from Other Indigenous Peoples

The experiences of indigenous communities around the world demonstrate that the abandonment of traditional customs often leads to cultural decline.

Many indigenous groups that lost their languages, customary institutions, and traditional practices eventually experienced identity crises and social fragmentation. While individuals continued to exist, the collective identity of the people became increasingly weakened.

Conversely, communities that have preserved and adapted their customs while engaging with modernity have often maintained a stronger sense of identity and cohesion. The challenge is therefore not choosing between tradition and modernity but finding ways to integrate both.

Can Khasi Society Modernize Without Losing Its Identity?

The answer is yes. Customary practices and laws are not static relics of the past. Throughout history, Khasi society has adapted to changing circumstances while preserving its core values. Modern education, technological advancement, democratic governance, and economic development need not require the abandonment of customary institutions. Rather, they can coexist with them. Some customs may require reinterpretation in light of contemporary realities. Others may evolve naturally over time. However, reform is different from abandonment.

A tree may grow new branches, but it cannot survive if its roots are cut off.

Similarly, Khasi society can modernize successfully only if it remains connected to the cultural and ethical foundations that have sustained it for generations.

Letters to the Editor

Foundational Learning Must Be the Top Priority

Editor,

I wish to compliment the author of the Special Article 'Fill the Classrooms, Fill the Minds' by Maitphang Syiem, published in The Shillong Times on May 6, 2026, for highlighting a matter of grave concern regarding the poor learning outcomes among school children in Meghalaya.

The author has rightly stressed that the primary focus at the elementary level must be on Reading, Writing and Basic Arithmetic. If a student reaches Class VI and is unable to read a simple paragraph, write a meaningful sentence, or solve basic arithmetic problems, it clearly indicates that his educational foundation is weak.

The findings cited in the article are alarming. While enrolment and attendance may have improved, learning has not kept pace. A child who spends six years in school without acquiring foundational literacy and numeracy is being deprived of the very purpose of education.

One of the major reasons for this situation is the acute shortage of teachers in many Lower Primary Schools. It is not uncommon to find schools with only one or two teachers managing classes from KG to Class V. Under such circumstances, it is difficult to provide the individual attention that young learners require to master the basics.

The problem is further aggravated by the increasing burden of non-teaching duties assigned to teachers. Apart from classroom teaching, they are required to perform duties related to election work, BLO assignments, census operations, maintenance of Mid-Day Meal records, online data entry, digital reporting of school activities, surveys and numerous other administrative tasks. As a result, a significant portion of their time and energy is diverted away from teaching.

Today, our teachers are undoubtedly more qualified, better trained and more professionally equipped than their predecessors. This raises an important question: Why are so many children unable to achieve the same foundational competencies despite being taught by a far more qualified teaching force? The answer perhaps lies not in the quality of teachers but in the conditions under which they are expected to work. Much of their valuable time and energy is consumed by duties unrelated to teaching, leaving less time for meaningful classroom instruction and individual attention to learners.

I belong to a generation when nearly 90 percent of teaching and learning took place within the classroom itself. Until the Generation X era and even a few years thereafter, there did not appear to be any serious concern regarding foundational learning outcomes. Most people who completed their elementary education during those years could read fluently, write correctly and perform basic arithmetic with confidence.

Ironically, many teachers in those days were less qualified than today's teachers and had little or no formal professional training. Yet students learned. Teachers had a clear mission—to ensure that every child could read, write and calculate. They were not burdened with endless administrative responsibilities.

Another important fact worth noting is that most parents during those days were not highly educated. Many children came from families where parents had studied only up to the primary level, while some were completely illiterate. There were no private tuitions, coaching centres, smart phones or online learning platforms. Yet children acquired basic literacy and numeracy because schools and teachers ensured that learning took place within the classroom itself. This demonstrates the crucial role played by effective classroom teaching and a strong focus on foundational learning.

I still vividly remember that by Class V we were confidently solving fractions, composing sentences from a vocabulary of words given by our teachers and reading fluently. The strong foundation laid during those formative years enabled us to progress smoothly in higher classes and later in life.

I also vividly recall that during census operations and many election-related activities, enumerators and supervisors were commonly recruited from educated unemployed youth. This arrangement served a dual purpose: it provided temporary employment opportunities while allowing teachers to remain in schools and focus on teaching. Today, when thousands of educated young people are searching for work, there is a strong case for reconsidering this practice instead of routinely assigning such duties to teachers. Every day a teacher spends away from the classroom is a day lost in a child's learning journey.

The Government must seriously reconsider the growing load of non-teaching work imposed on teachers. Duties such as census operations, surveys and election-related assignments can be entrusted to educated unemployed youth, as was often done in the past. This would not only provide temporary employment opportunities but also allow teachers to devote their full attention to classroom instruction.

At the same time, urgent steps must be taken to address the shortage of teachers in Lower Primary Schools. No school should be expected to function effectively with only one or two teachers handling multiple classes. Ensuring adequate teacher strength is a prerequisite for improving foundational learning outcomes.

If Meghalaya is serious about improving learning outcomes, the solution lies not merely in more schemes, reports and infrastructure projects. It lies in ensuring that every child acquires strong foundational skills in reading, writing and arithmetic, and that every teacher is given the time, support and freedom to teach.

The future of our children depends not on the number of years they spend in school, but on what they actually learn while they are there. Unless we strengthen the foundations at the elementary level, we will continue to produce students who advance from one class to another without acquiring the basic skills necessary for higher learning, meaningful employment and responsible citizenship.

Yours etc..,
Jairaj,
Via email

Growing Impact & Implications of the "Cockroach Janta Party" Social Media Trend

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I would like to draw public attention to a rapidly escalating online phenomenon known as the "Cockroach Janta Party." This trend has recently gained massive traction across various social media platforms, transforming from a seemingly isolated internet joke into a widespread cultural talking point.

What initially manifested as a light hearted meme has now evolved into a mainstream digital movement, engaging a significant demographic of internet users, particularly the youth. While internet humour is a staple of modern communication, trends of this nature often carry underlying social commentary or cynicism that can influence public discourse. As young minds increasingly consume and participate in this wave, it raises important questions about the nature of contemporary digital satire, political irony, and its long-term impact on youth perspectives.

As a society heavily plugged into the digital world, it is crucial to analyze how such viral trends shape the mindsets of our younger generation. I hope this letter serves as a prompt for readers to critically reflect on the media we consume and propagate daily.

Yours etc.,
Jake Leuken Chullai
Shillong

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

"The greatest enemy of progress is not stagnation, but false progress."

— Sydney J. Harris

The Shillong Times

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Who's Behind the Recent Arson

PEOPLE of Meghalaya have all but forgotten what it is to live in fear; to close shop by sunset and not to be able to observe the two important national holidays – Republic Day and Independence day. Those were the years when militant outfits called the shots. After the year 2000 when Meghalaya had a no-nonsense Home Minister the gun-toting outfit sent feelers to come overground. Many took up the challenge of pursuing livelihood activities with Government assistance. Since then, life has almost returned to normal and tourism is booming. Police Bazar is a great indicator of the number of visitors thronging the state. Add to that the visitors in the state's rural tourist hubs and you have a fairly huge number. Tourists visit Meghalaya because it is a safe place. And this important aspect must never be lost sight of.

It is now a matter of speculation as to who could have been behind the series of arson in the early morning hours of June 6, largely targeted at Government vehicles, most probably parked by the roadside and a tourist taxi in another locality. That the arson occurred within a very narrow window, reportedly between 3 am and 4 am on the same morning and vehicles were targeted in different locations speaks of a well-coordinated plan. Hence it could not have been a random act. The question is who is behind this act. Some groups are known to use petrol bombs as a strategy to intimidate individuals or departments they have had disagreements with. East Khasi Hills SP Vivek Syiem stated that investigators are trying to determine whether the attacks were coordinated. This indicates that the possibility of a common plan is the central line of inquiry. No arrests have as yet been made and neither has any group claimed responsibility for these series of actions. It is also uncertain as to which group or groups have a grouse against the Government at this point in time since no group has placed any urgent demand recently. The motive is therefore unclear.

So while the series of incidents appear to be linked to one group because of the timing, method and target selection, the perpetrators are yet to be identified. This is why eternal vigilance is needed, more so in a state that has a history of such attacks in the past. Investigation into such crimes require that police have close co-ordination with the local dorbar shnong and a healthy police-public relation. There was a time when some DGPs made this aspect an important part of their agenda. But later the police-public relationship just fizzled out. At this point there are only conjectures that the departments targeted might have been selected because of local grievances. Normally one department that is usually targeted is the Police Department. So, what is it in recent times that the Police Department has done to anger or frustrate any organisation or pressure group? What law enforcement actions were taken against any group? Perhaps that's where the answer lies. But getting to the root of the matter is imperative as this could escalate into future undesirable actions that could endanger public safety.

Cockroach Janata Party: The New Kid On The Block

By K C Monnappa

A new pulse has arrived in the streets of India's youth, and it came disguised in a humorous web campaign. The Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) began as a satirical response to a flippant remark. On 15 May 2026, Supreme Court Chief Justice Surya Kant compared certain activist youth to "cockroaches," sparking nationwide outrage. A day later, Maharashtra native Abhijeet Dipke – then a 30-year-old public relations student in Boston – embraced the insult. Using borrowed snark, he launched the Cockroach Janta Party online on 16 May 2026 as a parody of the political establishment, especially as a pun on the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The timing was right, millions of young Indians took notice on social media.

Within days, CJP's message spread like wildfire across social networks. The party's Instagram and X accounts exploded in followers, reaching well over twenty million within a week – more than most national parties could boast. Its posts combined sharp memes, stylized posters and a simple manifesto: five core demands touching hot-button issues. For example, it demands blocking post-retirement judicial appointments to Parliament, treating any vote-rigging as an act of terror, reserving half of all parliamentary seats and cabinet posts for women, cancelling licences of billionaire-owned news channels, and penalizing political turncoats with a 20-year ban. The platform even proclaimed itself the "Voice of the Lazy & Unemployed," opening membership to anyone chronically online. Its founders styled every demand to mix humour with outrage, knowing that young people are frustrated by nepotism, systemic corruption and a feeling that the system rarely addresses their real problems.

These organizers are not career politicians. Founder Abhijeet Dipke is a former AAP social media volunteer turned student activist, and his team is similarly unconventional. Chief spokesperson Saurav Das is an investigative journalist who has covered legal and social issues and even joined anti-pollution protests at India Gate. Another spokesperson, Vijeta Dahiya, is a political researcher, author and filmmaker (he's known for directing Haryanvi feature films and writing books). The third spokesperson, Ashutosh Ranka, was a management consultant turned activist, with credentials from IIT Kanpur, LSE and a stint at McKinsey. None of these figures emerged through the usual political ladder; instead, they built public influence through content creation, reporting and grassroots causes. Their appointment as CJP spokespeople is itself telling, it shows that the movement values digital savvy and issue-based credibility over old-school patronage networks.

Behind the screen banter were real protests and petitions. By late May local CJP chapters had sprung up in dozens of cities. Volunteers in some places even staged guerrilla cleanup drives in cockroach costumes; symbolically "unclogging" society's drains. The biggest moment came on 6 June in Delhi. Dipke flew home from the US and immediately led a rally at Jantar Mantar, joining hundreds of mostly young supporters. They demanded the Education Minister's resignation over repeated exam paper leaks and careless grading errors that had jeopardized students' futures. Dipke even set a symbolic 5 pm deadline for the minister to step down; when it passed with no answer, he warned of broader demonstrations nationwide. The message was clear: this youth uproar had a sharp edge beyond mere internet banter. Participants chanted for accountability, with banners reading slogans like "When cheats rule exams, justice loses" and "End the exam scam." Police described the Delhi event as largely peaceful, with barricades but only minor detentions as the crowd dispersed. The CJP linked its cause to ongoing exam controversies such as the NEET undergraduate leak, showing how its members tap into existing student anger.

In Northeast India, including Shillong and Meghalaya, the CJP story is still unfolding. Enthusiasm may start on screens, but it has become palpable locally. A simple search on Instagram revealed five Meghalaya specific Instagram pages which have quickly gained hundreds of followers – a significant feat, given that local student unions and clubs rarely break a few hundred. Even if no large rally has taken place in Shillong yet, the buzz has reached colleges and cafés. Some young voters here relate to the slogans about jobs and corruption, because Northeast graduates also struggle to find steady employment. Local observers note that Meghalaya's youth have their own list of grievances – unemployment, exam issues and infrastructure gaps – which the CJP rhetoric mirrors. Some state politicians have downplayed it as a passing internet trend, but community activists warn that young people are watching how issues are handled. If local leaders ignore this stir, they risk appearing out of touch with a generation that already feels neglected.

What is this shift? At its heart the CJP is led by members of Generation Z, digital natives with high social-media savvy. Their organizing bypassed traditional party offices; they built momentum by viral hashtags and meme cards, not handshakes and rallies. The three new spokespeople announced by the party reflect that generation's mode of influence. Saurav Das built a profile online through journalism and street campaigns; Vijeta Dahiya built one through writing and filmmaking; Ashutosh Ranka through education activism and online content. All three had audiences before joining CJP – whether readers of investigative reports, viewers of indie documentaries or followers of education reform debates. This trend shows how the creator-economy is spilling into politics, these leaders were known via social media long before they became a party's public face. For young members, that is a virtue, not a vice. It means CJP's image is crowdsourced from below, not draped from above by one boss. Even Abhijeet Dipke's leadership feels self-made, he introduced himself as a voice from within the crowd, not a seasoned powerbroker.

Crucially, the key figures and supporters seem genuinely motivated by the issues they champion, at least so far. No credible evidence has surfaced that any major party is secretly pulling the strings. Dipke insists he cut ties with the AAP well before starting CJP, and no sitting politician has publicly endorsed it. Speculation and gossip abound on social media – some sceptics suggest shadowy funding or rival involvement – but nothing concrete has emerged. So far CJP has primarily been a self-funded campaign of memes and volunteers. That does not guarantee purity for long; any rapid success will attract attention. But for the moment, CJP appears to be an authentic groundswell, a loosely organized swarm united by shared frustration, not by contracts or corporate backers.

The CJP may also pose a question for governance. Democracies often tolerate satirical protests, but the sheer digital scale here is new. Already, the ruling coalition in New Delhi has noticed the buzz. So far it has acted with caution. The government quietly had the CJP's Twitter/X account blocked on security grounds, prompting a legal challenge by the party. Some ministers publicly denounced the movement's language as unseemly, likening certain chants to unpatriotic slogans. Yet beyond that, no formal negotiations or policy responses have been announced. The muted official reaction seems calculated, a heavy-handed clampdown might only make the movement bigger. Indeed, a few on social media joke that the authorities appear to be "watching but not squashing" the cockroaches for now. This response may reflect worry that too much suppression would galvanize all those online followers into offline activists. So far, the message is mixed: the CJP attracts attention, but no one dares grip the ladder too hard and risk a crash.

Is this energy likely to force changes or to fizzle out? Only time will tell. If the phenomenon spurs any tangible action – say, more thorough probes of exam scandals or new job programmes – it would validate the movement's impact. Already, opposition leaders have begun to highlight the very issues CJP raised (exam paper integrity, youth unemployment) in their own speeches, hoping to co-opt some of the fervour. On the other hand, experience suggests many viral movements fade once the initial excitement passes or gets diluted. Critics recall older digital movements (over the Citizenship Amendment Act, or NEET etc.) that saw a burst of intensity and then ebbed. It will matter how established politicians respond, if they treat CJP as a joke or a nuisance, dismissing it in interviews, they face the risk that a real swell of resentment will continue to build. If they start adopting some of its language or trying to channel youth concerns into policies, the unrest may ease.

The CJP's rise is also a caution about co-option and free-riding. The movement prides itself on being independent. CJP leaders insist it was built without help from any political party. But in India's sprawling democracy, even organic protests can attract opportunists. Opposition figures have already slipped out messages of solidarity on social media, hoping to tap into CJP's momentum with minimal commitment. Meanwhile, some ruling-party strategists may be exploring angles to neutralise the threat or even start their own youth projects in response. In a land where veteran parties adapt quickly to new challenges, no uprising stays pure for long. The concern is that if the trend grows, mainstream actors on all sides will try to ride the wave. The coming months will show whether CJP can hold its own or be pulled into the familiar playbook of Indian politics.

What does this mean for Shillong and beyond? The Cockroach Janta Party may sound like a joke, but the warning is serious. India has 400 million people aged 15 to 29, and creating jobs for them has long been a struggle. Young people here see themselves in the CJP story, thousands of local graduates live in hope of jobs and accountability. If leaders dismiss this as a passing fad, they will miss the point. Ignoring such youthful anger is risky. The "cockroaches" will not vanish until core issues – jobs, fairness and opportunities – are addressed. Political leaders of all stripes should take note: listen now or be outmanoeuvred by the very generation they must rely on.

In the broader sweep of Indian politics, the CJP may not become a long-term party on the ballot. But it has already become a symbol of the demands that today's youth are placing on all parties and governments. In Meghalaya and elsewhere, it offers a clear message, new movements can come from nowhere to create a groundswell. Veteran politicians are well-advised to heed it, rather than kick it aside. When young voters start trending in phone screens and filling up rallies, it is a wake-up call that the road ahead – for any ruling coalition or opposition – must include real answers on employment, education and transparency. Those who ignore the chant of movements such as "Cockroach Janata Party" do so at their own peril. In a democracy, the light cannot stay off on these issues forever. Far from being mere cartoonish venting, the movement's rise is a warning to all parties; ignore young people's anger over jobs and exams at your own risk.

Traffic Lights and Trust: A Public Health Lesson from Shillong's Intersections

By Benedicta Sthuti Kumar

Shillong has no traffic lights.

At the busiest intersections in the city, where roads converge from impossible angles and traffic seems to be on the verge of collapsing into chaos, a single traffic policeman or woman stands in the middle of it all. Sometimes small in stature, armed with a whistle and an outstretched hand, they direct the flow of cars, taxis, scooters and pedestrians through observation, communication and tiny gestures that everyone understands.

Somehow, it works.

Where much of the world relies on blinking lights, countdowns and automated systems to control traffic flow, Shillong begs to differ. What keeps order here is not infrastructure. It is trust in a human being. People slow down because somebody is looking directly at them. They move because another person signals that it is safe to do so. Shillong's roads function not through automation, but through relationship and real-time human judgement. It struck me recently that public health in Meghalaya may function in much the same way.

For years, we have tried to change health behaviour through information. Posters are printed and distributed in stacks. IEC materials arrive in villages by the hundreds. Television programmes, loudspeaker announcements and WhatsApp forwards endlessly repeat the same messages. Frontline workers are trained to recite the "five key messages" exactly as written. This communication is valuable but after repeated exposure, it can drift past without truly settling anywhere. It is seen, acknowledged briefly, and forgotten.

Human beings rarely change simply because they are instructed to.

A young man who has watched alcohol abuse slowly consume the lives of people around him is not suddenly transformed by a poster warning him about liver disease. Parents deciding whether to vaccinate their baby are not simply responding to a pamphlet. A teenager struggling quietly with anxiety is unlikely to open up because a slogan told her mental health matters. These decisions are deeply human. They sit inside fear, memory, mistrust, family histories and years of lived experience with systems that have often felt distant or indifferent.

We at IIPH Shillong are reminded of this repeatedly, especially while working on immunisation in some of the most vaccine hesitant communities in the state. In these villages, the issue was never that families had not heard about vaccines. They had heard the announcements. They knew the session dates and some could even repeat the health messages back word for word. What they lacked was trust — confidence that help would be available if complications arose, that their questions would be answered honestly instead of brushed aside in the rush of another immunisation session, and that vaccination was being recommended because it genuinely mattered for their child's wellbeing rather than because somebody higher up in the system needed targets met and quotas filled.

The families who are initially the most hesitant are often not convinced by more information. They may change their minds because somebody sat with them. Perhaps a familiar ASHA returned again and again without frustration or a neighbour shared their own experience. Through these acts, trust can slowly replace suspicion.

This distinction feels important at a time when conversations around healthcare are increasingly dominated by dashboards, apps and digital systems. These things matter, of course. They make systems measurable and scalable but health-seeking behaviour is rarely built through data alone. Preventive healthcare, in particular, asks people to act before crisis arrives. It asks someone who feels perfectly healthy to attend a screening camp. It asks families to rethink food habits before illness appears. It asks people to pause long enough to consider what years of tobacco, alcohol or unmanaged stress may eventually do to their bodies and minds.

Those are difficult shifts to create through information alone. Which is perhaps why the idea behind Meghalaya's Village Health Councils remains so compelling. When the VHCs were first envisioned, the idea was not simply to create another committee in the already busy village. The idea was to create a trusted bridge between communities and the health system itself. A group of local people who understood the realities of their own villages and could mobilise action from within, not through authority, but through relationship.

The most effective VHCs are already working quietly in this way. In Mawsadang, the VHC has organised activities ranging from water testing initiatives to tobacco cessation programmes aimed at improving lifestyle and health awareness. In Ichamati, the VHC identified anaemia in pregnancy as a major local concern after discussions with the Community Health Centre, and subsequently organised a community awareness programme focused on maternal nutrition and early care-seeking. In Wahlyngdoh, local leadership has played a major role in mobilising the community for health discussions and collective action, with even male community members being called in from the fields to participate in meetings. Across areas such as Jirang, Khliehriat and Rongram, active VHCs have supported awareness activities, facilitated discussions around local problems like teenage pregnancy, arranged transport for women in labour or persuaded someone who has avoided treatment for months to finally visit a health centre. These may seem like small things when written in reports but on the ground, they matter immensely.

I suppose the messenger changes the message.

A warning about substance abuse delivered by a stranger, even a doctor, can feel distant and rehearsed. The same conversation, held by a respected headman, a teacher, an elder or even a neighbour, carries an entirely different weight. Suddenly the message is not coming from "the system." It is coming from somebody whose life is entangled with yours. In many ways, VHCs can function like Shillong's traffic conductors. They can stand at the intersection between communities and systems, helping people navigate decisions that are often far more complicated than they appear on paper. They can signal when it is time to go and seek care; they can help people stop and reconsider habits that have silently become normalised. Sometimes they can simply create enough trust for someone to pause and admit they are afraid.

For me as a health practitioner, this is the deeper lesson: human beings rarely move because systems tell them to. More often, they move because another human being, somebody familiar, trusted and patient, quietly raises a hand and shows them the way forward.

(Dr. Benedicta Sthuti Kumar is One Health Fellow, Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong)

Letters to the Editor

Challenging the Regressive Reality of Hostel Timings

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw urgent public attention to the unfair practice of imposing separate hostel timings for men and women in our educational institutions. Across India, and notably within our own region, almost all women's hostels enforce rigid night curfews that administratively confine adult students indoors beyond a certain hour. After 6:00 PM, while male students enjoy the ordinary freedom to move about the campus, female students find themselves effectively caged by the college administration, restricted from walking through buildings or occupying campuses that belong to them just as much.

These discriminatory curfews essentially dictate who is treated as a free citizen and who is viewed as a liability. In a patriarchal framework, women are routinely treated as the latter. Furthermore, these lock-up policies introduce severe safety hazards. What happens in the event of a fire? What happens during a sudden medical emergency? More so what happen during earthquake? These are critical questions that institutional authorities consistently refuse to answer.

If the world outside is deemed unsafe for women after dark, and men are presumed to be the primary threat, why are the potential victims being locked up? As the Kerala High Court aptly noted, "Hostels are not prisons. Discriminative restrictions cannot be imposed on women, and if men create trouble, then lock up the men."

Instead of imposing regressive restrictions on women, institutions in Meghalaya must pivot toward robust campus security measures. We need better lighting, reliable campus transportation, active security patrols, responsive grievance redressal systems, and strict punishments for harassment.

Every hostel curfew teaches a damaging political lesson: it tells women that equality ends at the campus gate. I sincerely hope this issue receives the urgent attention it deserves, prompting educational institutions to dismantle these outdated policies and truly uphold gender equality.

Yours etc.,
Murchana Kashyap
Shillong

Name of the Khasi faith

Editor,

With reference to the news headline, "Khasi faith followers agree on 'Niam Khasi, Niam Tre' as a common religion for Census," which appeared in this news daily on June 3, 2026, I wish to state upfront that I totally disagree with the name 'Niam Khasi,' and Niam Khasi Niam Tre as a common religion that had been decided by the leaders of the Seng Khasi (Kmie).

The name of the Khasi faith / Khasi religion is 'Khasi' and it is the name that the Khasi faith followers must write and must ask all the adherent to write in all official government and non-governmental documents (offline/online) that require them to disclose the name of their religion.

My siblings, my mother and I normally write the name of our religion as 'Khasi' and I believe many Khasi faith followers do the same. However, I was shocked that the leaders of the Seng Khasi (Kmie) and the Seiñ Raij had decided on the wrong name for the Khasi faith / Khasi religion. I think the leaders know the meaning of "niam" in English. In English, it means faith and religion. The names of the religions in this world differ from one another. For example, we have Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, Sarna, Songsarek etc. When a Hindu writes the name of his/her religion in any document he/she writes Hinduism, not 'Hinduism religion.' Therefore, the name of the Khasi religion must be 'Khasi' without the prefix 'niam'

To conclude, Khasi is the name of the indigenous faith(religion) practiced by the Khasis, and Niamtre is the indigenous faith(religion) practiced by the Jaintias so why add the word 'niam' meaning religion to the faith?

Yours etc.,
Wallambiang Rani,
Via email

When Justice is Denied

Editor,

Delay in delivering judgement in criminal cases causes a several hardships. In some cases the verdict comes after a very long time and by that time the accused are either dead or too weak to be in prison. The case of an 84-year old Bihar man accused in a crime he committed 34 years ago raises several questions. Others accused in the same crime have died and he is the only survivor. His present condition evokes pity in onlookers. He cannot walk without help. How will such a criminal become a threat to society? What is the logic of putting him behind bars? Certainty of punishment is more important than its severity. Punishment handed out after a long delay loses its relevance. Fast and fair trial and delivering of verdict are of utmost importance in the judicial system. Handing out punishment without delay will act as a deterrent in criminal cases. Humanitarian considerations are important even in punishment. Very old and physically weak people must not be put in prison for a long time. Long delay in trial and meting out punishment will undermine trust in the judicial system. Substantial reforms must be implemented in the judicial system. Even in punishment people must not be treated unfairly. Justice delayed is indeed justice denied.

Yours etc.,
Venu G S,
Kollam

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"It does not matter how slowly you go as long as you do not stop."

— Confucius

The Shillong Times

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Unity, INDIA bloc

CURIOUSLY, INDIA bloc held its meeting in the national capital on Monday at the behest of West Bengal's former chief minister Mamata Banerjee. Banerjee had been undercutting the cause of opposition unity and charting an independent course. She often trashed the Congress that led the bloc and targeted its leader Rahul Gandhi. But, on Monday, she was among the first to reach the Constitution Club and sit through the discussions. A chastened Banerjee stressed the need for opposition unity – at a time when sand is slipping from under her feet, when her Trinamool Congress is collapsing under the weight of its own contradictions and of her own dynastic pushes, and when her set of parliamentarians are negotiating with the BJP to join the saffron front. Even as the opposition bloc needs her, she for a change needs them more to remain afloat. Defeated in her own constituency, and the TMC seeing a vertical split after the elections, Banerjee is a shadow of her former self.

Yet, what's evident in her eagerness to urgently seek a meeting of the India bloc to discuss the post-poll situation was obviously guided by two factors, namely her desire to keep proving her relevance by appearing on a national stage and a keenness to avoid a situation of the rebel TMC joining the India bloc, which she could now resist from within. The Congress played into her hands by immediately calling the bloc's meeting at her behest. The hug between Sonia Gandhi and Banerjee demonstrated the warmth the Congress still retained for the TMC leader, who had ditched the Congress to form her own party and win power in Bengal by also decimating the parent party there. Politics is the art of the possible, it is said. Yet, with the TMC showing every sign of a total disintegration, alternative regional forces are bound to gain steam in the state. These should as well be a part of the INDIA bloc, to which Banerjee and her party had never been an integral part.

The pointed reference that Rahul Gandhi made at the Delhi meeting to the constant criticism of the Congress by Banerjee and the Left was both understandable and justified. Perceptibly, out of a desire to "promote" herself to the PM post should a chance arise in future, Banerjee had refused to acknowledge the importance of the Congress and its leader Rahul Gandhi, who's now the opposition leader in Parliament. He has grown with the times. The Congress party has revived itself, doubled its strength in Parliament from 50-plus to nearly a hundred, and runs governments in as many as four states now. Yet, Banerjee seeking to outwit it until the other day presented a curious sight. The division in the opposition ranks – reflected also in the fact that the India bloc could not hold a single meeting after the 2024 general elections – was advantageous to the BJP. All the same, it's significant that the opposition meeting in Delhi took some unanimous decisions. As Rahul Gandhi noted, "Divided we stand, united we fall."

The Opposition Doesn't Need INDIA 2.0. It Needs Congress 2.0

By Rajdeep Sardesai

Sequels in Indian cinema rarely work. Audiences have usually seen the original, the novelty factor is gone and the script feels stale. There are exceptions like the recent blockbuster Dhurandhar , of course, but most follow-ups struggle to recreate the magic of the first hit.

Which is why the coming together of an INDIA Alliance 2.0 hardly inspires confidence that the grouping which surprisingly challenged the Modi-led BJP in the 2024 Lok Sabha elections can so easily stage a repeat performance.

Much has changed in the last two years. The Congress has suffered a string of electoral setbacks in major states. Several regional parties that formed the backbone of the alliance are also weakened. The Trinamool Congress has imploded after its defeat in West Bengal. The Shiv Sena (UBT) and NCP (Sharad Pawar) have been split apart in Maharashtra. The AAP is struggling to retain relevance after losing Delhi. Across the country, opposition parties appear to be fighting for survival as much as for power.

On the face of it, the INDIA alliance increasingly resembles a gathering of political forces united less by a shared vision than by a common desire to stop Narendra Modi at all costs in 2029.

The problem is that politics is about chemistry as much as arithmetic. Electoral alliances can be stitched together in conference rooms, but voters are quick to spot opportunism. Less than two months ago, Rahul Gandhi was accusing the Trinamool Congress of corruption and striking backroom deals with the BJP. Can the same leaders now appear on a common platform and expect voters to suspend disbelief?

The contradictions are everywhere. The DMK is upset with the Congress after feeling abandoned following the Tamil Nadu verdict. The AAP has little appetite for sharing space with a Congress that remains its principal rival in Punjab. The Left is deeply resentful of the Congress's attacks in Kerala. This is hardly the profile of a cohesive political alternative.

The BJP, by contrast, offers clarity. One may disagree with its ideology or oppose its methods, but voters know who leads the party, what it broadly stands for and where authority lies. The BJP's dominance is not merely a product of Narendra Modi's popularity. It is also because the opposition often appears fragmented, uncertain and internally conflicted. Which is why the opposition may need an entirely different reset.

Perhaps the challenge is not to revive the INDIA alliance but to revive something much older: the Congress ecosystem itself. One of the more fascinating aspects of Indian politics is that many of today's regional parties emerged from the Congress universe. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress, Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party and Jagan Mohan Reddy's YSR Congress all trace their origins to the Congress. Their leaders may have broken away because of leadership disputes, political ambition or regional compulsions, but they remain part of a broadly similar ideological ecosystem.

There is a reason why these parties continue to carry the Congress imprint in their names and political identities. They emerged from the Congress womb. Over the last four decades, the Congress family fragmented into multiple regional formations. In the process, the anti-BJP vote became increasingly dispersed and divided.

Instead of yet another fragile anti-BJP alliance, why not explore a political reunification of these Congress offshoots? A merger, or at least a structured political coming together based on mutual accommodation, would energise the Congress far more than another alliance stitched together a few months before an election. It would create a stronger centre of gravity in opposition politics and enable the Congress to negotiate with smaller allies from a position of strength rather than weakness.

Such an idea may sound unrealistic today. But politics is full of unlikely reunions. The BJP itself is a product of decades of patient consolidation of the broader Sangh Parivar. Why should the Congress family be condemned to permanent fragmentation?

For such a project to succeed, however, the Congress would need to change too. Any return of regional heavyweights would require a Congress leadership willing to share power and authority in ways the party has often struggled to do. But the responsibility cannot rest with the Congress alone. Regional satraps too would need to look beyond personal egos, family interests and short-term calculations. No leader is likely to dissolve decades of political identity merely to become another courtier in Delhi, but nor can every regional player hope to remain a national kingmaker while operating from an increasingly diminished political base. A larger Congress can only emerge if all sides are willing to subordinate individual ambition to a broader political purpose. Only then can the opposition move from being a loose collection of anti-BJP forces to a coherent political alternative.

That brings us to Rahul Gandhi.

Over the last decade, Gandhi has emerged as the principal ideological challenger to the BJP. He has shown resilience in the face of relentless political attacks and has succeeded in giving the opposition a sharper ideological edge. But being the ideological mascot of the anti-BJP opposition is not enough.

The Congress cannot be rebuilt around one individual alone. It needs experienced regional leaders, fresh faces, organisational depth and a greater willingness to accommodate diverse political interests. Above all, it must recover its ability to function as an umbrella or a 'big tent' formation it once was rather than a shrinking political silo.

The opposition's biggest mistake in 2024 was not merely the absence of a prime ministerial face. It was the failure to create a credible collective leadership structure. One of the great "what ifs" of recent Indian politics remains Nitish Kumar. Had the INDIA alliance set aside competing ambitions and empowered him as convenor when he first proposed the grouping, who knows what shape Indian politics might have taken? Instead, strategic thinking gave way to personal calculations.

History rarely offers second chances. As 2029 approaches, the opposition faces a fundamental choice. It can attempt to recycle an old coalition under a new banner and hope lightning strikes twice. Or it can attempt something more ambitious: a political reunification of forces that once shared a common inheritance.

The original INDIA alliance was largely driven by regional parties seeking to contain the BJP. A reimagined Congress ecosystem would invert that equation. It would place the Congress at the centre while creating space for strong regional leaders within a larger political framework. Most importantly, it would offer voters a clearer contest: between a dominant BJP and a revitalised Congress-led alternative.

In politics, as in cinema, audiences rarely pay twice for the same script. INDIA 2.0 may be a sequel. What the opposition really needs is a reboot.

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

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Jaidbynriew and the Politics of Fear

By Tyngshain Kharlyngdoh

The debate around jaidbynriew has long occupied the political and social imagination of the Khasi people. From village dorbar to pressure groups, from student unions to political party, the call for the "protection of the Jaidbynriew" has become almost sacred in Khasi public discourse. As a Khasi man, I understand why this sentiment exists. Our ancestors fought to preserve our kur, shnong, language, customs, and identity in the face of colonialism, infiltration, and political uncertainty. The fear of cultural erosion is not imaginary. Yet, an uncomfortable question confronts us today. Has our obsession with protecting the jaidbynriew prevented us from progressing as a society?

For decades, Khasi leadership has framed nearly every issue through the lens of identity protection. Whether it is land ownership, employment, migration, trade, or politics, the dominant narrative has remained the same: "protect the Jaidbynriew." While identity preservation is important, a society cannot survive on defensive politics alone. A community also needs economic vision, educational reform, industrial development, entrepreneurship, scientific advancement, and institutional excellence. In many of these areas, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills continue to lag behind.

Meanwhile, other communities in Meghalaya, despite facing their own struggles, have increasingly focused on economic mobility, education, and institution-building. We see growth in entrepreneurship. Yet among the Khasi leadership, there remains a tendency to reduce every challenge into an existential threat against identity. The result is a politics of fear rather than a politics of aspiration.

One of the deepest contradictions within Khasi society is that we constantly harp about unity while remaining deeply fragmented internally. The slogan of Khasi unity often hides internal divisions based on region, political interests, and social and cultural differences.

The tragedy is that while we debate identity endlessly, the economic foundations of Khasi society remain weak. Many educated Khasi youths continue to depend overwhelmingly on government jobs, while entrepreneurship and private-sector participation remain limited. Our markets are often dominated by outside traders not because they conspired against us, but because we failed to create strong local business ecosystems. Tourism flourishes in Khasi and Jaintia Hills, yet much of the larger capital and organisation comes from beyond our own communities. Instead of asking only "who is entering our land?", we must also ask "why are we not leading our own economy?"

There is also a growing culture of symbolic politics. Protests, pressure groups, and emotional rhetoric have become substitutes for long-term planning. It is easier to mobilise people around fear than around policy. It is easier to shout about outsiders than to improve education, roads, support farmers, or create industries. The common Khasi citizen is repeatedly told that identity is under attack, but rarely shown a concrete roadmap for prosperity.

This is not an argument against protecting Khasi identity. Identity, language and land rights matter. Indigenous communities everywhere have legitimate concerns about cultural survival in a rapidly globalising world. But identity without development becomes stagnation. Protection without progress becomes isolation. A society cannot merely preserve itself. It must also evolve.

The Khasi community today stands at a crossroads. One path continues the politics of anxiety, constant suspicion, defensive mobilisation, and emotional appeals to ethnicity. The other path embraces confidence: protecting culture while competing economically, preserving tradition while modernising institutions, and strengthening identity through achievement rather than fear.

Our ancestors were not weak people hiding behind slogans. They were traders, negotiators, agriculturists, thinkers, and community builders. The true spirit of the Khasi people was never about isolation from the world, but engagement with dignity. If we genuinely want to protect the jaidbynriew, then we must build a society where Khasi youth become entrepreneurs, scientists, scholars, artists, industrialists, and leaders beyond Meghalaya.

The future of the Khasi people will not be secured merely by speeches about protection. It be secured by education, economic strength, innovation, discipline, and visionary leadership. A community that only fears disappearance has already begun to lose confidence in itself. But a community that believes in its own capacity to grow can preserve its identity naturally through success.

The time has come for Khasi leadership to move beyond survival politics and begin the harder work of nation-building within our own society. Protecting the jaidbynriew should not mean standing still while the world moves forward. It should mean ensuring that Khasi identity survives not as a fragile relic of the past, but as a confident and thriving force in the future.

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Letters to the Editor

Delayed Justice for Candidates Appearing for Assistant Architect Post

Editor,

The prolonged delay in declaring the results of the interview for four Assistant Architect posts conducted by the Urban Affairs Department has once again exposed the government's alarming, lackadaisical attitude toward the aspirations of Meghalaya's educated youth.

It is learnt that the interviews for these posts were completed on February 27 this year. Over four months have passed, yet the results remain mysteriously stuck somewhere in the corridors of the Secretariat. What is causing this delay? Why are the selected candidates being kept in the dark? More importantly, who should be held accountable for this administrative paralysis?

At a time when unemployment continues to haunt thousands of qualified young people and when the State itself faces a shortage of professional architects, the government's silence is both baffling and unacceptable. The delay sends a disturbing message that merit, transparency and efficiency are no longer priorities in public recruitment.

The irony is hard to miss. While deserving local professionals wait endlessly for the outcome of a legally conducted recruitment process, government departments increasingly depend on consultants for projects that qualified architects from within the State could very well handle. Such a trend not only undermines local talent but also raises questions about the government's commitment to creating employment opportunities for its own youth.

The NPP-led government often speaks about transparency, accountability and youth empowerment. The Chief Minister is widely projected as a people's leader who understands the concerns of the younger generation. However, such claims ring hollow when recruitment processes are left hanging without explanation. Transparency is not a slogan; it is demonstrated through timely action and public accountability.

The candidates who appeared for the interview deserve answers. They have invested years in acquiring professional qualifications and have patiently complied with every requirement of the recruitment process. Keeping their fate in abeyance indefinitely is unfair, insensitive and contrary to the principles of good governance.

As the saying goes, "Justice delayed is justice denied." If the delay continues, one cannot rule out the possibility of aggrieved candidates seeking legal recourse. Should that happen, the government will have to explain why a duly advertised post, for which interviews have already been completed, remains without a declared result.

The government must immediately clarify the reasons behind the delay and publish the results without further procrastination. Public institutions exist to serve the people, not to subject them to endless uncertainty. Silence and inaction only deepen public suspicion and erode confidence in the system.

Yours etc.,
Bhalangki Blah
Shillong

Is India Really a Free and Democratic Country?

Editor,

Can India be called a free and democratic country when a tribal woman is forced to carry her infirm husband on her back to reach a government hospital which is clearly a naked bureaucratic arrogance in the Akola district of Maharashtra. Yes a tribal woman had to literally physically carry her paralysed husband on her back through the corridors of a government medical college while clutching a small child. This is not merely a heartbreaking image but it makes us question the system that allows such a situation to happen.

This is an indictment of India's public healthcare system. The viral video from Government Medical College, Akola, should shame every official responsible for health administration in this country. A brainstroke patient requiring urgent medical attention was reduced to a burden that his wife had to physically carry from one department to another because no stretcher, wheelchair, attendant or emergency response mechanism was available. If this is not institutional failure, then what is?

What makes the episode even more disturbing is the response of the hospital administration. Instead of acknowledging the glaring lapse and apologising unconditionally, officials chose to hide behind technicalities. The woman allegedly arrived outside OPD hours. She was supposedly unable to complete documentation. She did not specifically ask for a stretcher. Such explanations reveal a mindset that values paperwork over patients and procedure over compassion. Since when has a critically ill patient needed to fill forms before receiving basic human assistance? Since when must an illiterate tribal woman know hospital protocols before she qualifies for empathy? And since when does a public hospital wait for a desperate family to ask for a stretcher before offering one?

The Hospital Dean's initial suggestion that the video could be AI-generated or part of a conspiracy to malign the institution only compounds the tragedy. In India, denial has become the first response to administrative failure. Rather than confronting uncomfortable truths, authorities seek refuge in excuses, inquiries and damage control.

The incident also exposes a larger reality. Politicians routinely boast of world-class healthcare schemes, digital health missions and record budget allocations. Yet for millions of poor Indians, especially tribals and rural families, access to healthcare remains a daily battle against neglect, indifference and bureaucratic arrogance. Grand announcements mean little when a woman must become an ambulance, a stretcher and a caregiver all at once. The inquiry ordered by the hospital may identify individual lapses. But the real culprit is a system that has normalised suffering among the poor. The Akola incident should not be viewed as an aberration, it is a symptom of a deeper disease afflicting public healthcare. A civilised society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable citizens. In Akola, the system failed that test spectacularly. The woman carried her husband. The government failed to carry out its most basic responsibility. Such incidents send shivers up the spine.

The administrative response from GMC Akola has further fuelled the controversy. The Dean, Dr. Sanjay Sonune pointed to systemic rules, explaining that patients are required to complete prerequisites and formal paperwork before structural transport and departmental shifting take place. The administration argued that because the family was uneducated, they did not navigate the administrative desks or make a formal request for equipment.

Furthermore, the institution raised suspicions about the intent behind the video recording, suggesting it was timed to damage the hospital's public image. Local health advocates, however, have countered this defence, stating that GMC Akola is notorious for severe shortages of basic wheel-support infrastructure, regularly forcing poor relatives to manually lug frail patients between diagnostic blocks.

This incident is not an isolated systemic failure in the state's public healthcare framework. Just recently, a similarly devastating event occurred at a government hospital in Jalalgaon, where a grandfather was forced to sit overnight holding the body of his two-and-a-half-month-old granddaughter due to administrative lapses. The unfolding crisis in Akola underscores how bureaucratic delays and a lack of baseline empathy continue to heavily penalize vulnerable and marginalised communities who cannot afford private health care.

What happened at GMC Akola is a devastating reminder of how our public systems fail those who need them most. To watch a woman bear the literal and metaphorical weight of an entire failing healthcare system on her back while hospital staff look on, shatters the very definition of basic human kindness. Bureaucracy, paperwork, and Aadhaar cards must never become roadblocks to saving a human life.

An emergency room should operate on empathy first, and protocol second. We hope this internal probe results in real, tangible accountability and a permanent fix to infrastructure shortages, rather than just empty administrative promises. True progress as a society lies in building communities where the vulnerable are lifted up by our systems, not left to struggle in the dark.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

"Aging has a wonderful beauty and we should have respect for that."

—Eartha Kitt

The Shillong Times

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Coal Mining & Livelihoods

MEGHALAYA is a state that lacks robust data on many crucial areas of human development. Hence when individuals claim that the ban on coal mining has adversely affected several families, that claim has to be backed by solid data. It's important to know how many families are directly and indirectly dependent on coal mining - such as the literal mining of coal from the mines; the profits accrued by the mine owners; the transportation business; and how coal mining as a circular economy has enabled farmer-producers to also earn and subsist. The coal mining business as we have known it, is not a co-operative venture. Hence the earnings are not equitably shared among the members. Affluent residents of East Jaintia Hills own the mines and have made significant wealth from this business, subsequently investing in real estate in Shillong and outside the state.

It is also important at this juncture to examine the background of Marchall SB Biam who has been on a 9-day fast to pressure the MDA Government to allow coal mining to resume. Why has he undertaken the fast now and not since 2014 when the ban was first imposed by the National Green Tribunal which was later upheld by the Supreme Court? How many schools has the coal economy built and supported till date? Not a single one. Considering corporate social responsibility (CSR) involves reinvesting profits into social services, what social welfare has the coal economy invested in? What NGOs involved in social service have the coal mine owners promoted and supported? The acid mine drainage has poisoned rivers in Jaintia Hills to the point where those who can afford it buy their water in tankers brought from far-off distances to avoid the toxicity of the local water supply systems. But what about the poor? How do they cope with this toxic eco-system? Yet today the same people are supposedly supporting the revival of coal mining without putting any safeguards in place? What about the thousands of abandoned coal mines? Does the Government have a reclamation scheme in place? When the environment is in such a fluid state and the climate is changing irrevocably why doesn't the restoration of the abandoned mines and re-afforestation become an important agenda for the MDA Government? Why is there talk of scientific mining without first addressing the past onslaught on the environment?

If coal mining is to be resumed it must take into account the environment and safety standards required by law. It cannot be that 15-20 people, because of their pecuniary circumstances, should be forced to enter the mines without any safety gear. Those who are currently demanding the resumption of coal mining activities should also speak about the dangers of rat hole mining. Just because those entering the mines are not locals can coal mining resume without putting safety standards in place? There cannot be a quick-fix solution if the coal mines do re-open. There is need for far-sighted solutions which means that coal mining must operate on a transparent basis. The mine owners must daily account for the number of miners they employ and their safety. The mining has to be environmentally compliant and it must be socially beneficial and ensure that the profits are ploughed back into the environment and social sectors such as education and health care.

The Choices Working-Class People Make: When Education Is a Luxury

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Places like Mawlai, Pynthorumkhrah and Nongmynsong have long been known to be working-class neighbourhoods because of the high number of poor people residing in these areas. This is because the rents are comparatively cheaper, attracting households from poorer economic backgrounds. I was born in Mawlai, but my parents left the place to settle in Nongmynsong, where I spent most of my childhood and adulthood. I have faint memories of my childhood in Mawlai, including a steeply inclined road that ran beside our house. Sometimes, when I pass through Nongpdeng, I try to guess which lane or house might have been where I grew up. Alas, I know no one whom I can ask who might remember our family.

While Mawlai had been classified as a Census Town since the 1970s, Nongmynsong was elevated to the status of a town only in the 2011 Census. So, for a long time, we were people of the 'Shnong' and not the 'Sor'. We still had people farming, and there were fields of sweet potatoes, which my friends and I would raid from time to time to steal some tasty snacks. During the season when the radishes were in the flowering stage, white butterflies would flutter around the plants looking for a suitable place to lay their eggs. I would then use a stick to hit them while they were in mid-flight and collect them in a plastic bag to feed them to the chickens. Not far from where I lived, there was a pine forest where we would go and swing from a rope tied to the branch of one of the trees. Below the forest was the Wah Umkhrah, with its crystal-clear water and grassy banks where people would have their picnics.

I had friends from different communities, including many from poorer socio-economic backgrounds. In fact, some people I had known in my childhood are still working as daily-wage labourers. I come across them sometimes, and I feel greatly pained by it. In fact, during my college holidays, I worked as a helper to my friend in laying toilet pipes in the same building where I later studied for my Master's degree, i.e., NEHU. However, that was for just one winter, and I never went back to doing daily-wage labour again. However, for a few of the people I grew up with, that life is all that they still know to this day.

When I was in high school, one of my friends boasted to us that there was no point in studying hard since we were not going to get a good job anyway. There was a belief that jobs, at least the better-paying ones, were reserved for those whose parents already belonged to the Don Burom class, with a reservation system already in place for their benefit. If your parents were already in a good job, usually a government job, and could afford to send you to an elite school, there was every chance that they would ensure that you got a highly sought-after job.

In recent days, there has been a lot of talk about how the selection of the Rajya Sabha candidate, James Sangma, is an example of dynastic politics. Both he and his elder brother, Conrad Sangma, the present Chief Minister, are sons of the late P. A. Sangma, a distinguished parliamentarian and former Chief Minister of the state. How many of us believe that Conrad Sangma's elevation as the party president has nothing to do with his father's legacy? So, while politicians talk about how we have to think beyond reservation, they will do their utmost to hoard the best opportunities for their own children and loved ones, while people from the working class are gas lighted for asking for their constitutional rights.

I find it very interesting that whenever I meet people working in the government or engaged in other highly paid professions, there is invariably someone in their family who was something or the other. In fact, it appears that everything revolves around just a few families and their extended relatives. For all our claims of being an egalitarian society, social mobility is highly restricted, with privileges being hoarded by a select few families of the Don Burom class. It was over 25 years ago that my friend remarked that we should not waste our time trying to excel in our studies since there was no hope for us. I do not think things have changed much since then.

When I cleared my matriculation examination, my late mother told me to stop studying and find a job since I was already grown up. Looking back now, I am not surprised by her advice. She had studied only up to Class III, like my dad, and her first priority was for me to immediately support the family whenever I was ready. If I had been in my village, i.e. Nongjri-Rana, I am sure I would have given up on higher studies and looked for a job. In that event, I would very likely be harvesting broom grass in my village, worrying about whether I would get a fair price for it so that I could save money for my children's education.

"There was a belief that jobs, at least the better-paying ones, were reserved for those whose parents already belonged to the Don Burom class, with a reservation system already in place for their benefit. If your parents were already in a good job, usually a government job, and could afford to send you to an elite school, there was every chance that they would ensure that you got a highly sought-after job."

Though they would have liked me to get a job, my parents supported my education for as long as they could. Finally, I earned my PhD, becoming the first person from Nongmynsong to achieve that distinction. But before I got my PhD, I still had to complete my graduation.

After I cleared my Higher Secondary examination, I had a choice to make. I had done well but missed making it into the top 10 in the Arts stream. Now it was time to choose a subject for my honours degree. I wanted to take History as it was the subject I had always enjoyed. However, one of my friends persuaded me against it by revealing to me that his brother had done his Master's in History and was currently unemployed. Perturbed, I decided to take Geography because there was an impression that it was partly a science subject and, by that logic, had more job opportunities. Having done my PhD in the subject, I would say that I was fortunate to take a subject that allowed me to gain an appreciation of both the earth sciences (geology, meteorology, etc.) as well as the social sciences (sociology, anthropology, political science, etc.), and despite the fact that I have not, and may never, achieve what I deeply desire, intellectually I am quite satisfied. What I want to impress upon the readers through this story is that, as someone belonging to the working class, the choices we made were never just about personal interests but also about trying to avoid an uncertain future.

While I was still doing my BA, there was a training programme for BPOs organised at Don Bosco Institute. This was in the early days of call centres, and they were very picky at that time. I went for the training, and we had an interview at the end of it. I was not selected for the job because, according to the trainers, my accent was not neutral enough. I was very disappointed because I wanted to find a job and start earning money to help the family, even if that meant that I did not get to complete my studies. But fortunately or otherwise, I was able to complete my graduation and then my post-graduation and finally my PhD.

Looking back, I do not know if I made the right decision, but I know I am satisfied with it. There were many opportunities when I could have dropped out of my studies and entered the job market. Was not doing so the right decision? I do not know. But I understand the thousands of young people in the state who make that choice every year. This is what, in my opinion, is one of the reasons for the high dropout rates in the state. I think it should change, but that will require giving them hope that continuing with their studies gives them a better chance of having a good life. If they are convinced, the dropout rates will decline. If not, they will continue to rise, as they have over the last decade, as seen in the 2026 report School Education System in India: Temporal Analysis and Policy Roadmap for Quality Enhancement by NITI Aayog.

(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)

Socio-demographic paradox of matrilineality and high fertility in Meghalaya

By Dr Mayur Trivedi

Meghalaya's matrilineality portrays the popular imagination of female empowerment as a progressive outlier in India's patriarchal landscape. Yet the state has the second-highest total fertility rate (TFR) and one of the lowest rates of contraceptive use nationally. While most Indian states were below replacement fertility (around 2) by the 5th round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) in 2019-21, Meghalaya's TFR of 2.9 was just behind Bihar's. The recently released NFHS-6 (2023-24) estimates indicated that Meghalaya remained among the second highest at 2.2 (2.4 in rural areas), tied with Jharkhand and Uttar Pradesh. Meghalaya's comparison with its Christian-majority, constitutionally protected tribal neighbours like Nagaland (identical to Meghalaya at 3.7 in 2005-06, now 2.0) and Mizoram (1.6) shows that Meghalaya's slower change is a structural issue rather than one attributable to geography, religion, or tribal identity.

The problem of extended fertility beyond young age

When discussing fertility transition, demographers emphasize the importance of the quantum of fertility (the total number of children) and the tempo (the timing and pattern of childbearing throughout a woman's life). In most Indian states, the transition involved fewer children and earlier childbearing, mainly in the twenties. NFHS data across various rounds (1992-2021) shows that Meghalaya's pattern features a long, flat plateau, with childbearing remaining elevated well into the thirties and forties. In NFHS-5, the fertility rate for women aged 30-34 years in Meghalaya was more than double that of Bihar and 10 times the national average for women aged 40-44 years. This is confirmed starkly by contraceptive data. In NFHS-6 (2023-24), modern contraceptive use among currently married women in Meghalaya continues to be the lowest of any Indian state (30%, with an insufficient improvement over 23% in NFHS-5 (2019-21), against a national average of 53%, a slight decline from previous estimates of 56%.

Female sterilization, the method through which most Indian women signal that their family is complete, stands at just 7% in Meghalaya, compared with 37% nationally (NFHS-6). While women with four or more children in the rest of India are far more likely to have adopted contraception, NFHS -5 indicated that contraceptive use among women in Meghalaya who already have four or more children was identical to the state's overall average of 23%, indicating no changes in reproductive behaviour with increasing parity.

The matrilineal paradox

The inheritance rule that passes property to the youngest daughter leaves the other children economically vulnerable. The traditional role of the maternal uncle, who historically provided economic protection to his sister's household, has been eroding for decades under the combined pressures of changing norms. Current manifestation in the Khasi and Jaintia communities has rendered women with only token authority, and men the de facto powerholders with limited accountability. Meghalaya, especially in the Khasi and Jaintia regions, experiences a complex mix of situations involving polygyny, single mothers, including out-of-wedlock adolescents living with their parents, and female-headed households, leading to negative consequences for women and children born from these unions

Meghalaya has the highest rate of polygynous marriages of any Indian state (6% in 2019-21, up from 4% in 2015-16). East Jaintia Hills recorded a polygyny rate of 20% — the highest of any district in India. Polygyny stems from men's lack of marital accountability and weak legal enforcement within the indigenous system. Matrilineal norms assume women's self-sufficiency in managing households and children, enabling men to withdraw from caregiving and financial roles without repercussions. Consequently, women face abandonment, are legally unprotected, and are burdened with full caregiver roles. Driven not by empowerment but by such abandonment, 41% of households in Meghalaya were female-headed in 2019-21, more than double the national average of 18%. In the absence of spousal support and adequate social protection, and with children as their primary old-age safety net, limiting family size becomes economically irrational. Contraception is not the missing piece here; what is lacking are legal accountability, financial security, and social protection. The consequences are intergenerational. Despite recent improvement, more than one in three children is stunted in 2023-24, the worst performance of any Indian state. Stunting exceeded 55% among children born to mothers who have already had five or more children in 2019-21.

What will change this?

The Meghalaya Health Policy 2021 recognizes gender inequality and poverty as root causes and advocates for birth spacing as a health right and women's economic empowerment. However, addressing the vicious cycle where women lack economic and reproductive autonomy requires more concerted efforts, as this affects decisions on contraception, antenatal care, childcare, and access to food and nutrition, leading to intergenerational deprivations. Family planning outreach must reach older, high-parity women whose continued childbearing is the primary driver of Meghalaya's elevated TFR, and whose unmet need is for limiting methods. Abandoned women potentially cannot seek maintenance or child support unless there is documentation. The resulting lack of economic security often results in high fertility rates. To address this, the health system must raise awareness of the Meghalaya Compulsory Registration of Marriage Act 2012, alongside community-based legal literacy initiatives. The health system must also anchor the targeted extension of social protection schemes to female-headed, high-parity households. Lastly, men, who currently bear no measurable contraceptive burden despite the rising polygyny, must be drawn into reproductive accountability to ensure gender equality envisaged in the health policy.

While Meghalaya's fertility decline in NFHS 6 is encouraging, it may remain somewhat superficial unless policies address the structural drivers of continued childbearing, namely weak legal accountability, economic insecurity for women, and low male responsibility. True gender equality will require combining reproductive health services with enforceable legal protections and social protection measures that make limiting family size a viable and safe choice.

(The author Dr Mayur Trivedi, is a professor at the Azim Premji University, Bhopal)

Letters to the Editor

MCA Rot Must End: Our Cricketers Deserve Better

Editor,

The revelations from media reports that have steadily poured out of the Meghalaya Cricket Association in recent weeks paint a picture that is as disturbing as it is unsurprising to those who have watched this body function for years. What we are witnessing is not a crisis that emerged overnight. It is the accumulated consequence of years of misgovernance, unchecked authority, and an institutional culture where the welfare of cricketers was always the last consideration and personal benefit was always the first.

Let us begin with what no one can now deny: the harassment of our young women cricketers. What kind of institution sits on harassment complaints filed by its own women athletes and does nothing? What were the then office-bearers doing by remaining silent for all these months? What message does such silence send to every young girl who has picked up a bat and dreamed of representing this state? The answer, regrettably, is a very dark one. It tells them that the association meant to protect and nurture them was instead protecting those who wronged them.

And if the harassment cover-up were not enough, The Shillong Times has recently reported on a financial irregularities document that lays bare a pattern of systematic overbilling and questionable expenditure that has long bled the MCA dry. A travel agency overbilling by more than 100% consistently over years. A resort selected for MCA elections in Ri-Bhoi, instead of the MCA headquarters in Shillong, which billed the association twice for election-related events in December 2025, totalling over Rs 16 lakh, for room and dining covers wildly disproportionate to the actual number of people in attendance.

They are funds meant for cricket infrastructure, coaching, tournaments, and the development of the next generation of players from this state. Every rupee siphoned off through inflated invoices and questionable hospitality is a rupee stolen from a young cricketer's future in Meghalaya who deserved better. That is the real human cost of this corruption, and no amount of official denials can change that equation.

What makes this worse is the brazenness of it all. The same names appear in multiple controversies, across multiple years, and yet there has been no moral accountability, no voluntary stepping down, no introspection. These individuals have treated their positions in the MCA not as a public trust but as a personal estate, to hold, to benefit from, and to defend against all scrutiny.

It is in this context that one must view the rift between President James PK Sangma and Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni. Sangma has publicly accused Kharkamni of attempting to cover up the harassment complaints and even of convening a meeting apparently designed to undermine the authority of the MCA Ombudsman who was looking into the matter. The internal conflict is real, the rift is deep, and it has paralysed day-to-day operations. And yet, at this particular moment in the MCA's troubled history, this rift may be precisely what was needed.

For too long, there was no meaningful opposition within the MCA. No dissenting voice. No internal checks on those who ran the association as though it were their personal property. Sangma brings with him his political weight and his political history, and one need not be naive about the complexities and baggage of that. But at the very least, for now he represents a a voice that refuses to look the other way and so far has functioned to the benefit of the MCA. A president who calls harassment a matter of "grave concern" and uses the word "institutional failure" publicly; who has said there must be "zero tolerance for misconduct," is at the minimum a disruption to the status quo. And disruption, in this case, is necessary and a pathway to accountability.

It must be said plainly: the individuals who presided over the MCA through these years of financial irregularity and institutional indifference to harassment have no moral standing to continue in positions of authority. Political connections, however useful in shielding oneself from consequences, do not confer the right to govern a body built on the trust of athletes and the resources of a sport that belongs to the people of this state.

The media reports suggesting that some of the named individuals maintain political ties that may have emboldened them, only makes the demand for accountability more urgent. No political shelter should be available to those who failed our women cricketers and leaked the funds meant for our sport.

Meghalaya has always had talented cricketers. Shillong has a cricketing legacy that goes back over a century. The state was among the leading performers when it first entered national domestic competitions. That potential has been squandered not by lack of talent, but by lack of integrity in its administration. The youth of this state deserve a cricket association that works for them, not against them.

The time for euphemism is over. The time for polite suggestions is over. This is a demand for accountability, transparency, and genuine institutional reforms at the MCA before yet another generation of Meghalaya's cricketers are let down by the very people entrusted to serve them.

Yours etc.,
Patrick Kurbah,
Via email

Traffic Crisis in Shillong

Editor,

Traffic congestion in Shillong has now reached a point where it is disrupting the daily lives of residents. Hours are lost in jams, productivity is affected, and stress levels are rising. Yet, instead of finding solutions, authorities seem focused on approving more shopping malls that will only add to the problem.

I urge the concerned authorities to urgently consider the following measures:

1. Increase the frequency of SPTS/STEM buses to provide a reliable alternative to private vehicles.
2. Extend public transport coverage to all localities so that dependence on personal cars reduces.
3. Make school buses compulsory engaging SPTS/STEM buses for the purpose, to cut down on private vehicles during peak hours.
4. Stagger school timings for different clusters of schools to distribute morning and afternoon traffic load.
5. Identify and strictly enforce designated stops for embarkation and disembarkation of public transport to prevent haphazard roadside halts.
6. Implement higher parking fees in commercial areas to discourage unnecessary private vehicle use in the city centre.

At the same time, I appeal to fellow Shillongites to drive responsibly and strictly follow traffic rules. Indiscipline on the roads is a major factor behind jams, and public cooperation can significantly improve traffic flow.

These suggestions are based on Shillong's present infrastructure. However, long-term measures such as road widening, construction of flyovers, and multi-level parking complexes are unavoidable as the number of vehicles grows daily.

Specifically, the State Government should study the feasibility of a flyover along the Wah Umkhrah river from Nongmynsong to Mawlai. This would greatly decongest the Nongmynsong–Polo route while also reducing travel time, saving fuel, cutting pollution, and helping address flooding in low-lying areas.

The city cannot afford further delay. I hope the authorities act before Shillong's roads come to a complete standstill.

Yours etc.,
Krishnendu Deb,
Shillong

Correction

Editor,

Apropos the letter to the editor captioned, "Delayed Justice for Candidates Appearing for Assistant Architect Post (ST June 10, 2026), I had inadvertently mentioned "Assistant Architect" instead of "Assistant Urban Planner" which is the correct position.

The error is regretted.

Yours etc.,
Bhalangki Blah,
Via email

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

"Happiness, to some, elation;
Is, to others, mere stagnation."

— Amy Lowell

The Shillong Times

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Assessment Of Our PMs

WITH a new feather on his cap, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is at the height of his political career. Having emerged as the longest-serving Prime Minister without interruption, he has carried on for 12 years through three consecutive terms. He will carry on for three more years for as of now a break-up of the BJP is unthinkable because of the RSS glue that binds its rank and file. Besides, Modi is keeping the alliance partners in good humour – by giving them more than what they ask for. Crossing the record of Jawaharlal Nehru, the first prime minister, in terms of duration of term is in itself a creditworthy gain. Yet, Indira Gandhi as prime minister functioned for 16 years with an interruption in 1977 – which remains as a record. Independent India grew steadily through the able leadership of successive prime ministers. Several of them did well. Modi, however, is uniquely lucky to have carried on without facing any social or political upheaval against his governance, thereby providing a rare period of stability to the nation.

As prime minister, Nehru towers over others – a line-up of 15 so far. His eminent Western education and his exposure to public life steeled by the heat of the Independence movement provided him with a clear vision about a future India. Nehru, at the outset as first prime minister, worked systematically to shape the destiny of the nation by re-energising a complacent nation at multiple levels. He set up huge dams to boost agricultural output; steel plants to push the growth of the industrial sector. Nehru took India straight to the Space Age and encouraged the fields of science and technology. To boost defence, he set up giant production units in Jabalpur and Avadi. He kept the world by his side, mostly, with an eminent leadership of the Non-Aligned movement that eventually claimed a membership of around 120 nations. Nehru's undoing was his commitment to peace, which a scheming China took advantage of, resulting in an invasion in which India lost heavily. Nehru's Socialist pursuits had their good sides but, like Communism, it did not allow a fast-paced economic growth for the nation.

Narendra Modi's 12 years in office saw India keeping up the progress on multiple fronts – as is also the case with most prime ministers who preceded him. The Narasimha Rao-Manmohan era in the 1990s was a major turning point in economic growth. They joined India in the global push for Liberalization and Globalization, raising the GDP growth to an unprecedented 9.5 per cent. Atal Behari Vajpayee as PM launched the national highway modernization process. Indira Gandhi stabilized Arunachal Pradesh and militarily helped in the formation of Bangladesh through a historic break-up of Pakistan. Modi boldly abolished Article 370 and ended the special privilege for Kashmir. He implemented market reforms through GST, which was conceived by the UPA government. The Modi government took highway development forward. A combination of advantageous situations including the steep fall of crude oil prices since 2014 end, kept the economy in growth mode. Modi's foreign policy initiatives were moderately successful.

Challenges of an Entrepreneur in Meghalaya

By Patricia Mukhim

The other day, students from the Sociology Department of Williamson Sangma State University, Tura, visited Shillong for an exposure trip and went to NEHU for a learning experience. The Department has a paper called The Sociology of Entrepreneurship. In my interaction with them I suggested that a better theme would have been the Sociology of Tribal Entrepreneurship since there is a difference between a tribal entrepreneur and a mainstream one. Most tribals are first generation entrepreneurs. Damewanmi Suchaing, a former teacher of St Edmunds College turned entrepreneur, said that he found a niche market in the packaging of the products that Meghalaya is marketing, particularly the Lakadong turmeric. While Meghalaya boasts of the best turmeric, black pepper, tea etc., the packaging leaves much to be desired. He found a way to better package the products and found takers in the rest of the country. His products are Na Kper Homegardens' Harvest.

During the exchange with the students Suchiang raised an important point – the difference between an entrepreneur and a business person. This is important for all of us to understand. An entrepreneur creates and develops a new venture by identifying opportunities, innovating and taking risks. Any new venture is risky because there is no prediction if there will be takers for that product. That includes starting a café, a bakery, a homestay or any new venture which has no history behind it. Today quite a few entrepreneurs have started packaging Lakadong turmeric and they have takers because of its reputation as the turmeric with the highest curcumin content in the world. Entrepreneurs have expressed their consternation at the huge demand for Lakadong turmeric not being commensurate with production. But that's also the selling point. No product from Meghalaya can compete on volume. What it can compete on is high value. Hence 'low volume, high value' is the catchphrase.

Now let's come to the word business. What is business? No one would know that better than someone who owns a cloth store in Police Bazar and inherited it from their parents and grandparents. So, a business is essentially an ongoing activity of producing, selling or providing goods and services to earn an income. A business is something tried and tested such as selling paints or sanitaryware, which always has buyers as long as there is construction work to be done. It's an established business that usually will not fail unless it is managed and run badly. A business is run professionally; the owner does proper bookkeeping and knows the daily profit and the turnover. Suchiang stressed that turnover is not profit. This is something that entrepreneurs often miss and what they need to learn along the way.

A new café or homestay started by an entrepreneur is not tried and tested. Anything could happen. It could take off brilliantly or fail depending on whether the entrepreneur has had adequate training at managing the business.

This is important for all of us to understand. An entrepreneur creates and develops a new venture by identifying opportunities, innovating and taking risks. Any new venture is risky because there is no prediction if there will be takers for that product. That includes starting a café, a bakery, a homestay or any new venture which has no history behind it. Today quite a few entrepreneurs have started packaging Lakadong turmeric and they have takers because of its reputation as the turmeric with the highest curcumin content in the world.

Once an enterprise takes off it becomes a business. Hence a business is an ongoing activity of producing, buying, selling or providing goods and earning an income. Simply put, entrepreneurship is about starting and innovating. Business is about operating and managing. Once the venture is established and focuses on day-to-day operations, marketing, accounting, staffing, and profit-making, it becomes a business, and the owner functions as a businessman or businesswoman. Every entrepreneur eventually has to become a businessperson once the venture succeeds but not every businessperson is an entrepreneur. As stated above those who inherit or purchase an existing business and manage it effectively without introducing major innovations are businesspersons.

In Meghalaya today, several entrepreneurs who have come into the eco-tourism model that combines community homestays, digital booking, and cultural experiences. Such new enterprises are visible as one travels to Sohra and even within city limits. The majority of our homestays however do not live up to their names because a homestay essentially is an extension of a family home where extra rooms are added for guests. The guests can enter the kitchen to see what food is being cooked. Some even like to learn the recipe. What has happened in Meghalaya is that guest houses are erroneously termed as 'home stays.' The guests are treated like hotel guests where they have to register at a reception desk. Homestays usually cannot accommodate more than a couple of guests because of their intimate nature.

So, do entrepreneurs have it easy in Meghalaya? Are all entrepreneurs trained to manage a business? Or do the large majority of them take a chance? It's true that PRIME (Promotion and Incubation of Market-driven Enterprises) Meghalaya, a government initiative which started in 2019 to support aspiring entrepreneurs and start-ups by providing them training and start-up finance is doing its best. PRIME offers skill development which trains entrepreneurs in branding, packaging, and business management. PRIME also offers training in technology where modern tools are provided in physical co-working spaces. Above all, PRIME assists young entrepreneurs in gaining access to funding, bank loans and innovation funds by facilitating credit linkages.

The Tourism Department has assisted with funding of several guest houses and homestays and these stand out as we travel to the tourist destinations of Meghalaya. But ask every entrepreneur what challenges he or she faces, and we have a standard answer: having to pay the plethora of pressure groups.

Many entrepreneurs have to deal with avaricious Dorbar Shnong who believe it is their right to demand a cut out of the business. Some Rangbah Shnong however are supportive but those are few and far between. Then there are pressure groups with all manner of acronyms especially the established ones who think its their birthright that all businesses should share their profits with them. For struggling entrepreneurs this is the biggest impediment. This is nothing but extortion which is given the respectable name of collecting money for a cause. And the causes are many – these pressure groups will organise all kinds of functions to popularise themselves but instead of collecting money for the same from their members they have made it a habit to fleece businesspersons.

Then there are all manner of "seng" (organisation) from the Seng Kynthei (women's organisations) of the shnong to the Seng Samla (youth organisation) all looking at getting easy money. If this is going to be our attitude then businesses in our state have a very low survival chance. This is also one aspect of governance that has failed miserably. In reality all the groups that go around collecting money should be told to show their official registrations and they must provide receipts for the money collected. A non-registered group has no right to collect money from the public. So why do we take all this as "normal." Where is the law in such cases and what protection does it give to struggling businesses?

Another problem with businesses in Meghalaya is that most are not innovations; they are copy-cat ventures. If someone starts a café at a particular place and that café does well, very soon another cafe will come up nearby to compete for customers. Some may say, "So what, I have every right to start any venture I choose to?" The problem is that both ventures will not do well because the customer base is low. This is fine if the place is milling with crowds 24x7 and there is space for another café to come up but not every place in Shillong can boast of such a crowd. One sees bakeries come up a dime a dozen and probably their bakes are not getting sold on a daily basis leaving those bakeries to sell stale stuff the next day. Besides, these days there are bakeries that specialise in home delivery and people don't really need to go shop for cakes and pastries.

Another aspect that needs attention is quality control. We are not really sure of the quality of the honey that's packaged in Meghalaya. How much of it is organic and how much is processed. If entrepreneurs claim that something is organic it has to be backed up by certification. This is the only way to win public loyalty.

Entrepreneurship is the need of the hour since government employment has reached beyond saturation point. Its time the Government of Meghalaya gives some attention to the problems faced by entrepreneurs and address those upfront. It is also time for entrepreneurs to build solidarity and address their problems collectively instead of moaning and groaning individually.

Running around for water

By Rudi Warjri

The United Nations declared June 5 as World Environment Day. The date was chosen because it marked the first day of the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment. Another resolution, adopted by the General Assembly the same day, led to the creation of UNEP (United Nations Environment Program), headquartered in Nairobi, Kenya where I had my first posting as a diplomat in the Indian Foreign Service. I also had a chance to interact with UNEP. In fact I also used to send useful literature on Environment to one then interested Head of the Soil Conservation Department , Meghalaya .

Since its founding in 1972, UNEP has served as a neutral convener of Member States, civil society, the private sector and UN agencies to address humanity's most pressing environmental challenges. From protecting species to restoring the ozone layer, UNEP-facilitated international agreements have made global environmental action possible throughout the years. Today, UNEP hosts the United Nations Environment Assembly, the world's highest-level decision-making body on the environment, with a universal membership of all 193 United Nations' Member States.

Through robust science, global coordination and powerful advocacy, UNEP continues to support all UN Member States – and all of society – to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and forge a future where people and planet live in harmony. With a workforce of nearly 3,000 people across 41 countries and territories, UNEP's mission is to inform, enable, and inspire nations and peoples to improve their quality of life while safeguarding the environment for future generations.Let me switch gears and talk about my own woes. I will take only one part of the much wider and grand subject of Environment and that is Water .

I returned to Shillong for good in 2014. Destiny fated that my residence is outside the Municipality where civic amenities are entirely at the mercy of the Shnong. In the last few years my family has been preoccupied with something very basic that was taken for granted when I was growing up in Shillong, leave alone during my diplomatic life abroad. That's running around for water, especially during the dry months. The word 'Um' (Water) is the most used word in my family, from morning till night at times even leading to a row. The day is filled with keeping track of when the water would come in the pipes from the two sources the PHE (Public Health Department) and the Shnong, subjected also to the whimsical timings of the functionary of the Shnong . The supply could also stop anytime during the dry months or even during rainy seasons because the flow of water would be obstructed by falling branches, leaves, pine needles etc; in the water bodies in the forest and the Shongs are not equipped with the wherewithal to address the problem urgently .

Among the ubiquitous private enterprises flourishing in Shillong are the water tankers selling water by those who own the water sources through drilling or natural springs. Drivers of the water tankers function like a cartel. Their phone numbers are as busy as those of the police or the fire brigade. For a new comer it was not easy to get someone who would be ready to deliver water urgently. So one learned to anticipate when would water be required and call the driver of the water tanker at the right time.

I also learnt that some Rangbah Shnong also have a vested interest in the water supply business. In one growing locality a senior official of the Water Resource Department, Government of India had acquired land for building a house. He found that the PHE Department , Government of Meghalaya didn't have a water supply system in the locality. He prevailed upon the PHE to conduct a survey where others besides him would also benefit. The PHE Department submitted the report and assured that it could do the job. The stumbling block was the NoC from the Rangbah Shong.

Now I am used to buying water especially when purchase of water has become a normal practice for most of the under-privileged population in Meghalaya regardless of the much publicized Jal Jeevan Mission. At the risk of sounding blasphemous, paraphrasing a line from the 'sermon in the mount, "Blessed are those who don't have to buy water because they own the water drillings sources or natural springs or because of wealth. But more flaunting is done by those who are in position of political power and influence irrespective of their own descendants inheriting an earth without drinking water.

Back to World Environment Day, the Government of India had made a bid to hold the COP (Conference of Parties) 33, scheduled for 2028. Sometime ago it issued a statement that it has withdrawn from holding the COP 33. No reason was given . COP by the way refers to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change international meeting focusing on Climate Change. Water and climate change are inextricably linked in myriad ways. Only 0.5% of water on Earth is useable and available freshwater – and climate change is dangerously affecting that supply. Over the past 20 years, terrestrial water storage – including soil moisture, snow and ice – has dropped at a rate of 1 cm per year, with major ramifications for water security. This requires a longer discussion in another article.

About Meghalaya, rivers are the most visible sources of water . The Economic Survey 2025 – 2026 tabled in Parliament in January 2026 highlighted the critical water crisis faced in Meghalaya. The Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) had recently published data which revealed the depressing state of rivers in Meghalaya. Be it change in the colour of the Lukha river in Jaintia Hills or the polluted rivers because of mining, garbage, sewage disposal, quarrying, etc. Prominent among them is the Wah Umkhrah in Shillong. Not to speak about the deforestation and cutting down of trees that are the mainstay of ensuring water supply .

Religiously, however every June 5 , World Environment Day would be celebrated. Symbolical demonstration of tree planting with a political luminary among school children with a surfeit of colourful photo – ops would take place, only to be forgotten the next day about the much-needed consequential action that would ensure availability of clean water to those children in their future.

The way forward in Meghalaya is to put water at the heart of action plans. This should begin with the State Government and the District Councils sitting together and thrashing out where the institutional problem lies that impede existing laws from acting against deforestation , illegal mining of coal , stone , sand, etc., and wanton misuse of water bodies by the public. Next is to come up with institutional changes wherever required with no excuse of political backlash. This can of course be possible by placing water above party politics , personal egos , vested interests , etc. Next is to implement the decisions by involving all stakeholders, the Shnongs, Village Development Councils, civil societies, community activist bodies, academia etc.

Among the specifics that could be considered are (a) protecting existing water bodies ecosystems and reducing carbon emissions from water and sanitation transportation and treatment. (b)Protecting natural buffers like regulating water flow to bind the soil in forest, embankments, etc. (c) Harvesting rainwater and techniques include rooftop capture for small-scale use and surface dams to slow run-off to reduce soil erosion and increase aquifer recharge. (d) Adopting climate-smart agriculture by using conservation techniques to improve organic matter to increase soil moisture retention; drip irrigation; reducing post-harvest losses and food waste; and, transforming waste into a source of nutrients or biofuels/biogas. (e)Reusing wastewater (f) Harnessing groundwater.

Letters to the Editor

Reflection on Financial Security & Better Socio-Economic Future for People of Meghalaya

Editor,

Shillong, has always been a city that teaches resilience. Carved into the hills of Meghalaya, its landscape has long reflected the character of its people — determined, patient, and deeply rooted in community. But as the city navigates the pressures of a changing economy, one question grows more urgent: are its people financially prepared for tomorrow?

The answer, for too many households, is no — and it is time to change that.

Start saving before you need to. Meghalaya's living root bridges were not built in a day. Grown strand by strand across generations, they are nature's greatest lesson in compounding patience. The same principle applies to money. Setting aside as little as Rs 500– Rs 1,000 every month in a recurring deposit or provident fund, beginning today, builds a foundation that no emergency can easily shake. The habit is simple: pay yourself first, then live on the rest.

Insurance is not an expense — it is protection. Shillong is a city of musicians, traders, and self-employed earners whose livelihoods depend on their health and presence. A term life insurance cover of Rs 25–50 lakhs can cost as little as Rs 300–500 per month for a young person — a small price to ensure that a family does not collapse if the worst happens. A basic family health insurance floater, at Rs 8,000–15,000 per year, means one hospitalisation does not erase years of savings. The present may feel stable, but protection must be secured before it is needed.

Women must lead the financial transformation. Meghalaya's matrilineal tradition places women at the heart of inheritance and family continuity. Yet many women in the informal economy, including the tireless vendors of iewduh market, operate without a bank account in their own name, without insurance, and without a retirement plan. Every woman earning an income deserves a savings account, a registered nomination on her assets, and an NPS or PPF account building quietly for the future. Cultural strength must now be matched by financial inclusion.

Remittances must build, not merely sustain. Shillong's young people are working across India and beyond, sending money home. But without a plan, those remittances are absorbed into daily expenses and nothing remains permanent. Every earner working away from home should follow three steps: protect the family with affordable government schemes; save with a specific goal using SIPs or recurring deposits; and invest a portion back into local enterprises or cooperatives that create opportunities in Shillong itself. Migration, managed wisely, can become the seed capital for the city's next chapter.

Community spirit must be backed by formal security. The warmth of Shillong's deep culture of sharing and collective care — is one of its greatest assets. But goodwill alone cannot bear the weight of every medical emergency or financial crisis. Relying solely on community goodwill for financial emergencies places a strain on social bonds and often leads to debt spirals that damage relationships. A family with a health insurance policy does not have to borrow from neighbours when someone falls ill. A household with a term cover does not have to depend on the charity of relatives when the breadwinner passes away. A small business owner with a credit history and a registered enterprise can access formal loans instead of predatory moneylenders.

Shillong's socio-economic future and the State of Meghalaya as a whole will be written one household at a time. The hills have always rewarded those who build with patience and purpose. Begin today — open that Savings/Recurring/Fixed account, buy that policy, start that SIP.

The city's most prosperous chapter is still ahead. You are the one who will build it.

Yours etc.,
Shakeel Rafee Swer,
Via email

Grave Irregularity by SMB

Editor,

Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw the urgent attention of the Shillong Municipal Board (SMB) to a matter of grave public health concern.

The stretch from Polo Bazar to 4th Furlong in the capital town is dotted with numerous shops and commercial establishments, most of them stand-alone in nature. Shockingly, hardly any of these establishments have toilet facilities, despite such provision being a mandatory requirement under the Meghalaya Municipality Act, 1973, which obligates every licensed commercial premise to maintain adequate sanitary conveniences for employees and customers.

Moreover, there is not a single public toilet in the entire stretch. As a result, shopkeepers, their staff, and customers are compelled to attend to nature's call in the open, turning the area into an unhygienic, stench-filled zone. This blatant violation of municipal regulations raises serious questions about the functioning of SMB.

It is therefore, baffling how trade licences and permissions continue to be granted or renewed for establishments that are apparently operating in blatant disregard of these statutory requirements.

I strongly urge the SMB to immediately investigate the matter, initiate suitable action against violators and ensure the construction of public conveniences in the area. If no immediate steps are taken, citizens will be left with no other choice but to seek legal recourse to uphold their right to a clean and healthy environment.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

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

"Experience is simply the name we give our mistakes."

— Oscar Wilde

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Fluid Border Security

THE case of a mentally imbalanced person, later identified as a Bangladeshi resident, crossing into the Indian side of the border near Mahendraganj, West Garo Hills is one of many such instances. This incident, which led to a war of words between the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guards Bangladesh (BGB) exposes the fluid nature of the detection process. When a person caught crossing the border from Bangladesh toward India claims to be an Indian citizen but lacks documents to prove his citizenship, the situation becomes tricky. Thankfully, in this case, the man's relatives came to his rescue and produced documents proving he is a Bangladeshi citizen.

Usually, if a person caught crossing the border from Bangladesh claims to be an Indian citizen but has no documents to prove it, the authorities generally follow a legal process rather than immediately accepting or rejecting the claim. The person is usually detained by the Border Security Force, state police, or immigration authorities for questioning. The individual will be asked about his/her place of birth, family, residence, language, and other details. Verification of the person's identity would include verifying the claim through local authorities, village records, electoral rolls, school certificates, land records, or testimony from relatives and community members. However, the task becomes challenging in situations where documents are usually unavailable, especially for poor, rural villagers. But the absence of documents does not automatically prove that a person is a foreigner, although it can make the verification process more difficult. As per Indian law the burden of proving citizenship often falls on the person claiming to be an Indian citizen. If authorities suspect the person is a foreign national, proceedings may be initiated under the relevant immigration and citizenship laws. If family members can prove the person is an Indian citizen the person cannot be deported merely on the plea that he/she lacks documents. The accepted practice is that the authorities may rely on other evidence or records to establish the individual's citizenship.

If it is proven that the person who tried to cross over is indeed a Bangladeshi national, he/she will be held in a detention camp before deportation. This requires several processes, including Bangladeshi authorities accepting that the person under detention is a citizen of Bangladesh. Often, establishing the nationality of a person who crosses over is difficult, and such cases drag on for a long time since both countries are unwilling to accept that person without proper credentials. In Assam, however, the adopted process is different as special mechanisms for identifying illegal migrants, such as foreigners' tribunals and other citizenship verification procedures, have been in existence. Along the Indo-Bangladesh border on the Meghalaya frontier, there are large unfenced stretches where people cross at will. In fact even trucks carrying vegetables and other grocery items such as sugar regularly cross over from the Indian side of the border to the Bangladesh side at Balat and Ranikor. There are individuals who cross over from the Bangladesh side, work as house help in Indian homes and return in the evening. These are the realities at the border which the Union Home Ministry has unfortunately not taken seriously.

When Cockroaches Started Marching: What the CJP Phenomenon Is Really Telling Us

By Dhruba Jyoti Goswami

It began in a courtroom, during a routine hearing that most Indians would never have noticed. On 15 May 2026, Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, while presiding over a bench examining a contempt petition related to fraudulent professional credentials, made an oral observation that was sharp and colourful, as judicial observations sometimes are. He said there were "youngsters like cockroaches, who don't get any employment or have any place in the profession," and suggested that some of them turn to social media, RTI activism, and journalism to "attack the system." He called them "parasites of society."

By the following morning, those words had travelled across every corner of the internet, and India would never quite hear them the same way again.

The Chief Justice clarified the very next day that his remarks had been misquoted and misunderstood. He said his criticism was directed specifically at individuals who enter respected professions like law using fake and bogus degrees, and that it was "totally baseless" to suggest he had criticised the youth of the nation. But here is the uncomfortable truth about words and the age we live in: clarifications travel slowly, and outrage travels fast. By the time the correction was issued, a 30-year-old political communications strategist named Abhijeet Dipke had already done something unexpected. He asked, on X, a simple question: "What if all the cockroaches come together?" And then he launched the Cockroach Janta Party.

Within 78 hours, the movement's Instagram account had crossed three million followers. Within five days, it had surpassed ten million, overtaking the official follower counts of both the BJP and the Indian National Congress. As of this writing, the CJP has amassed over 22 million followers, with its slogan "Voice of the Lazy and Unemployed" draped across memes, AI-generated imagery of suited cockroaches standing at political podiums, and volunteers dressed in cockroach costumes cleaning the banks of the Yamuna River. If you were designing a movement to confuse and unsettle the establishment, you could not have done it better. The CJP is funny and angry at the same time, which is perhaps the most potent combination in democratic politics.

But before we get caught up in the spectacle, it is worth pausing and asking a harder question. Why did millions of people gather so quickly around a joke?

The answer, if we are honest, is that the joke was never quite the point. People do not flock to a symbol because they believe in the symbol itself. They flock because the symbol gives shape to something that was already sitting inside them without a name. When a sarcastic movement, born from a single courtroom remark, attracts twenty-two million followers in three weeks, it is telling us something that we should take seriously. A large population of young Indians was waiting, perhaps without knowing it, for exactly this kind of outlet. They were not waiting for a party manifesto or a policy document. They were waiting for someone to say, out loud, that they existed, that their frustration was legitimate, and that the system that produced it was worth mocking.

That is a signal, not a trend. And signals of this kind deserve more than a news cycle. Those of us who grew up in the Northeast know something about what happens when frustration finds no legitimate outlet for too long. It does not disappear. It organises.

India today has one of the youngest populations in the world. It also has an unemployment problem that has stubbornly refused to respond to electoral victories or economic announcements. The NEET-UG paper leak scandal, which the CJP has now folded into its list of demands including the resignation of Union Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan, represents something even more corrosive than a single administrative failure. It represents the breach of a promise.

Young people study for two, three, sometimes four years for competitive examinations that determine the entire arc of their lives. When those examinations are compromised, it is not merely an administrative lapse. It is a message, received clearly by an entire generation, that the system does not value their effort as much as it claims to. Institutional trust, once damaged, does not repair itself simply because investigations are announced and dates are rescheduled.

The story of the Chief Justice's remark also carries a warning that applies regardless of one's political sympathies. Words carry different weights depending on who speaks them, and in what room. An ordinary person using the word "cockroach" in conversation produces nothing beyond that conversation. But when the occupant of the highest judicial office in the Republic of India uses that word in open court, those words immediately acquire constitutional dimensions. The judiciary is not just another institution. It is the one institution that citizens are supposed to be able to trust when every other door is closed. When its language carries even the impression of contempt for ordinary young people, the damage to that trust is real and lasting, regardless of what was actually intended.

It is worth noting that the CJI's clarification was reasonable in content. The distinction he drew between fraudulent credential holders and unemployed youth in general is a meaningful one. The problem was not the distinction itself. The problem was that the original remark, as heard by millions, did not sound like it was drawing that distinction. And in a democracy where millions of people are already feeling economically marginalised and institutionally ignored, even the impression of contempt from high office lands with tremendous force.

Now, here is where the picture grows more complex, and where honest commentary must resist the temptation to choose a side.

Abhijeet Dipke, the founder of the CJP, is a political communications strategist who previously worked with the Aam Aadmi Party. He flew from the United States to Delhi to lead the Jantar Mantar protest and applied for permission at the last moment, despite the fact that Delhi Police guidelines ordinarily require advance notice of at least seven days for such events. He had also urged supporters to gather at the airport, an invitation that, had it been taken seriously, could have created a security situation at one of the country's most sensitive public spaces. These are not the actions of someone entirely unfamiliar with how political events are managed and what kind of attention they generate.

This raises a question that does not diminish the legitimacy of the underlying grievances, but must still be asked. Was the primary purpose of the Jantar Mantar protest to demand accountability on paper leaks? Or was there also a secondary calculation at work, one that assumed the government might refuse permission or make arrests, thereby generating a narrative of suppression that would amplify the movement further?

The government, it appears, read the situation clearly. Delhi Police ultimately granted permission as a one-time exception, the protest went ahead peacefully, and climate activist Sonam Wangchuk joined the dharna in solidarity. By allowing rather than blocking the event, the administration denied the organisers the martyrdom narrative that might have poured additional fuel onto an already blazing fire. Whether this was strategic wisdom or genuine respect for the right to protest, the effect was the same.

But the day also saw "Azaadi" slogans, and the gathering of several anti-government groups under a single platform. The old political saying applied itself almost inevitably: the enemy of my enemy is my friend. A genuine public grievance became a tent large enough for groups with entirely different motivations to stand under together. It is worth naming that plainly, so that we are not startled by it later.

Here is what responsible observation requires us to hold simultaneously, without collapsing into either cheerleading or cynicism.

The paper leak crisis is real. Lakhs of students, many of them from small towns and economically struggling families, prepared for years only to find that their examinations had been compromised by people who should have protected them. The government should have acted with far greater urgency than it displayed. Accountability for that failure is not only legitimate to demand, it is necessary.

At the same time, the CJP's rapid growth and the diversity of its supporters warrant a degree of watchfulness. When a movement grows this fast, it inevitably attracts not only people who genuinely care about the original cause, but also those who see in it a convenient vehicle for something else entirely. Asking whether a protest could be used for purposes beyond its stated goal is not the same as being anti-student or pro-government. It is simply the responsibility of citizens who want the system to improve rather than just collapse.

And then there is the deeper warning that the CJP carries, regardless of its future trajectory. We have seen in Nepal, Bangladesh, and Indonesia how quickly social media-driven youth movements can disrupt governments and destabilise institutions when the underlying frustrations reach a certain depth. The CJP's founders themselves have pointed to these examples. India is not immune to this dynamic. Political stability built on electoral victories can sometimes create an illusion of social stability, and the two are not the same thing. A government can win elections comfortably while a generation of young people slowly loses faith in the institutions those elections are meant to sustain.

The movement's website was taken down at one point. Its X account was withheld in India. Its founder says his Instagram accounts were hacked. Whether these were coordinated acts of suppression or routine platform enforcement actions, the effect is the same as it always is when information is restricted in the digital age: suspicion grows, sympathy deepens, and the movement acquires the one thing that no online campaign can manufacture on its own. A grievance.

Websites can be taken down. Pages can be suspended. Trends fade. But if the frustration that gave birth to them remains unaddressed, it returns. It always returns. Sometimes it returns angrier, and sometimes it returns wearing a different face. The cockroach, as biology will tell you, is famously difficult to exterminate.

India is at a moment where the young are watching carefully and speaking loudly, even when they are speaking in memes and costumes and irony. Dismissing that as a social media fad would be a serious mistake. Understanding it, and responding to it with genuine institutional reform rather than platform management, is the harder and more necessary task.

The warning signs do not always arrive in the form of marches and manifestos. Sometimes they arrive laughing, trending, and dressed as insects.

These are serious times. We would do well to listen.

The writer is a Sales Professional. Views expressed are personal.

The Strait, the Dollar and the Specter of Strategic Retrenchment

By Patrick P. Sawian

The global economy now finds itself suspended between two converging storms - an increasingly volatile energy market and a rapidly evolving geopolitical order. Across the great maritime arteries of commerce—the Strait of Hormuz, the Bab alMandab, the Suez Canal, and the Indian Ocean sea lanes. The movement of oil, food, fertilizer, manufactured goods, and strategic minerals remains the foudation upon which modern civilization rests. Yet these arteries have become entangled, in widening confrontations, that extend far beyond the Middle East itself.

Recent tensions, involving Iran and renewed threats of military escalation, have reignited fears of a broader disruption to global trade. President Donald Trump's warnings toward Tehran, coupled with military exchanges and the continued uncertainty surrounding maritime transit through the Gulf, have once again placed the world's energy security under strain. Oil prices have responded accordingly, reflecting fears that conflict near the Strait of Hormuz could imperil a route through which a substantial portion of the world's energy supply continues to flow.

To many governments across Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East, the issue is no longer merely Iran. Rather, it is the growing realization that the stability of global commerce remains vulnerable to the strategic calculations of a single power whose domestic political priorities may not always coincide with the interests of the wider world. For decades, the United States acted as the principal guarantor of maritime commerce. Supporters argue that this role enabled the expansion of globalization itself. Critics, however, increasingly contend that the architecture of post-war order is showing signs of strain. What was once perceived as a benevolent security umbrella is now viewed by some as an instrument increasingly deployed in pursuit of narrower geopolitical objectives.

Among certain commentators, a particularly pessimistic interpretation has begun to emerge. They argue that Washington's response to the rise of a de-dollarizing world bears the characteristics of a great power confronting relative decline. As more countries experiment with local-currency settlements, alternative payment systems, and financial arrangements outside traditional Western frameworks, a growing perception has taken root, that the international system is entering a prolonged struggle between an established hegemon and an emerging multipolar order.

Within this interpretation, conflicts involving Iran are seen not merely as disputes over nuclear programs, regional influence, or security concerns. Rather, they are viewed as symptoms of a deeper contest concerning the future of global finance itself. The question becomes, whether the existing architecture of dollar predominance can be preserved indefinitely, or whether an increasingly confident coalition of states can gradually construct alternative mechanisms for trade and settlement. Some critics go even further. They argue that repeated confrontations with Iran, Russia, China, and other challengers, reflect an emerging strategic logic resembling what military historians once described as a scorched-earth mentality— not necessarily just the destruction of territory and infrustructutre, but the willingness to impose substantial costs upon the broader international system rather than permit a rival order to emerge uncontested. Whether this interpretation is fair remains highly debated. Yet the perception itself has become influential. In many capitals throughout the Global South, policymakers increasingly ask why their food security, fuel security, and economic stability should remain hostage to geopolitical rivalries in which they have little direct stake.

For decades, the United States acted as the principal guarantor of maritime commerce. Supporters argue that this role enabled the expansion of globalization itself. Critics, however, increasingly contend that the architecture of post-war order is showing signs of strain. What was once perceived as a benevolent security umbrella is now viewed by some as an instrument increasingly deployed in pursuit of narrower geopolitical objectives.

This sentiment has fuelled calls for a more collective approach to safeguarding maritime trade. Advocates of a multipolar order, argue that the security of international sea lanes should no longer rest primarily upon one power. Instead, they envision broader coalitions of affected nations, sharing responsibility for protecting shipping routes, ensuring freedom of navigation, and insulating critical supply chains from geopolitical turbulence.

Underlying these discussions, is a growing frustration with the recurring pattern through which, regional conflicts generate global economic consequences. A missile launched near Hormuz, raises fuel prices in India. A blockade, affects food costs in Africa. Insurance premiums rise, for shipping companies in Southeast Asia. Inflation spreads across Latin America. The costs are global; the decisions are often local.

Meanwhile, the confrontation itself continues to evolve. Trump has alternated between threatening stronger military action, against Iran and expressing hopes for negotiated settlements. Recent reports indicate both military escalation and simultaneous diplomatic efforts, highlighting the uncertain nature of the current crisis.

The deeper question confronting the twenty-first century, may therefore be neither Iran nor the United States alone. It may be whether the institutions of global commerce, can survive an era in which power is becoming increasingly diffuse, while the mechanisms of international governance, remain concentrated in structures designed for a very different world.

For many nations, the challenge is no longer ideological. It is practical. How does one ensure reliable access to food, energy, and trade when strategic chokepoints are repeatedly transformed into theatres of geopolitical competition? How does one maintain economic stability when reserve currencies, shipping lanes, and financial systems become instruments of strategic rivalry?

The answers remain uncertain. Yet one conclusion grows increasingly difficult to ignore – the emerging international order, will likely be shaped not by those who seek domination, but by those capable of constructing systems resilient enough to withstand the ambitions of every great power — including their own.

Letters to the Editor

An Inspiring Reflection on Education and Social Mobility

Editor,

I recently read the special article, 'The Choices Working-Class People Make: When Education Is a Luxury,' authored by Bhogtoram Mawroh and published in The Shillong Times on June 11, 2026. The article is a deeply moving and thought-provoking account of the author's journey from a modest working-class background to earning a PhD, while also highlighting the challenges faced by countless young people in Meghalaya.

What I found most inspiring was the author's determination to continue his education despite numerous obstacles. At a time when many of his friends believed that education would not necessarily lead to employment and that opportunities were largely reserved for the privileged sections of society, he refused to give up. Instead, he persevered and eventually earned a PhD, becoming the first person from Nongmynsong to achieve that distinction. Such an achievement deserves admiration and respect.

There is certainly some truth in the author's observation that opportunities are often concentrated in the hands of a privileged few and that family background can influence access to education, employment and social mobility. However, his own life story also demonstrates another important truth—that hard work, perseverance and commitment are never wasted. Success may not come easily or quickly, but determination, dedication and self-belief can help overcome even the most difficult circumstances.

The article also sheds light on a serious concern: the growing number of students who discontinue their studies because they do not see education translating into better opportunities and a brighter future. Unless young people are given hope, encouragement and a fair chance to succeed, the problem of school and college dropouts will continue to persist.

I would like to sincerely congratulate the author for such a heart-warming, honest and inspiring write-up. His story is not merely a personal success story; it is a message of hope for every young person who comes from humble beginnings and wonders whether education is worth the sacrifice. The author's life itself provides the answer. While privilege may open doors for some, perseverance and education can still transform lives and create opportunities that once seemed impossible.

I am confident that this article will resonate with many readers and inspire students to continue striving towards their goals despite the odds.

Yours etc,
Jairaj,
Tura

We Need Our BSF Jawans Now More Than Ever

Editor,

It took me a while to decide whether or not to write this appeal through this column. But on behalf of all the Indian villagers residing along the Indo-Bangla border - especially the borderline between Bangladesh and Meghalaya, stretching from the Garo Hills to the West Jaintia Hills—I finally decided to do so. This is an appeal for "the guardians of our border." My thoughts were sparked after I was informed through news outlets about recent clashes along the Indo-Bangla border near Mahendraganj in South West Garo Hills. This, of course, was not the first time it has happened, but it highlighted the frequent, existing tension along the border. We also see through the media a supposedly sane elderly man, along with a group, who were at the center of the clash. But as I have said, that was just a snippet of the overall border tension.

From time to time, Indian people residing along that borderline have experienced various troubles from abroad. From petty theft to missing cattle, and from smartphone snatching to the loss of precious family property, these incidents occur frequently, especially during the rainy season. This is done mostly by Bangladeshi miscreants. But how do they manage to cross the Indian border? You will be surprised to know! The main reason is that the BSF has neglected its custodian duties, alongside other local factors that pave the way for these individuals to enter Indian villages. The common criticism, however, states that our Jawans never really perform their duties to their full potential. Are our Indian border villages being left helpless to these onslaughts? Most likely, the answer is yes. Why does the BSF seem to think the Meghalayan border residents are not worth saving? Is it just because the majority of them are Christians? No, Sirs, that is not how it is supposed to work. Those villagers near the Bangladesh border really need you, in fact, more than ever now. And you also need to be their best ally, and not a stranger to them. Please stand by your oath to protect.

Just a few minutes before penning this piece, I watched a news headline from a leading social media news outlet reporting that a Bangladeshi right-wing political group is calling for an alliance to form a 'Human Shield Border March' on June 12 and June 15, possibly along the Meghalayan border, to protest BSF actions against those attempting to cross into India. It might sound reasonable to them, but we all know it is just a teasing opportunity created by those groups to trouble our people and further escalate border tensions. These miscreants are confident in whatever plots they made against our people because their own Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) supports them. I even saw a Facebook video yesterday where a BGB personnel was arguing and shouting at some Indian border fencing officials at an unnamed location. I didn't understand what he said, but I do know he was trying to act bossy around our officials to show power. Such audacity is unbelievable and should not be tolerated.

A friend of mine who lives near the border told me that just a few weeks ago, a group of Bangladeshis, along with the BGB, came with lathis (sticks) to halt the construction of a border road from Amsku to Dawki - a road that legally belongs inside Indian territory! When irritating situations like this occur, we are left asking questions like: "Where is our BSF that is supposed to protect us from these morons?" "Has our BSF forgotten how to use its power?" "Do our BSF does not know how to use their weapons, or have their bullets rusted?" Or do they still think of Bangladesh as a weak nation that poses no threat to India, particularly to the residents of our border villages? Simply sitting for hours without patrolling the borderline will not save the border or the surrounding Indian villages. This has only created a rather comical situation where while the BSF is at a watch-camp on the lower side of a village, a Bangladeshi smuggling team simultaneously shows up on the other side. It is funny, yet deeply concerning. Therefore, through these snippets, I urge our BSF Jawans to be diligent in their duty to guard our border. We count on you. We count on you for the safety of our children, our villages, our region, and our country. We need you now more than ever. Respect. Jai Hind. Blessed be our Mother India!

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*

Time to rewrite the rules on how we eat our greens

Fruits and vegetables are an important part of our diet. They provide nutrients and fibre, and many contain additional compounds (known as bioactives) that can improve health. But not all foods are created equal – with big differences in the amount of bioactives we get from cabbages, carrots, pulses and peppers.

The well-known "five-a-day" campaign forms the basis of current dietary recommendations for fruit and vegetable consumption. The campaign focuses mainly on reminding people to consume at least five portions of fruits or vegetables each day.

This is a sensible approach, because it's always better to eat some fruits and vegetables instead of none. But could we do better? Could choosing fruits and vegetables more carefully help us to get important bioactives from our foods?

My latest research suggests this is the case. We found that following current dietary recommendations might not be good enough when it comes to getting these important, health-boosting bioactive compounds from fruits and veggies. This could have particularly important implications for heart health.

In the study my colleagues and I conducted, we specifically investigated flavanols. This group of bioactive compounds are found in many plant-based foods, including tea, apples and berries.

Flavanols have been shown to reduce the risk of heart disease. About 500mg of flavanols per day are enough for most people to see health benefits from flavanols.

We wanted to find how many people eat at least 500mg of flavanols per day – and whether these are the people who eat their five-a-day and follow dietary recommendations.

To do this, we did not rely on food diaries or dietary questionnaires – methods that are known to be unreliable. People often forget what they've eaten, and the flavanol content in food is very variable.

Instead, we measured flavanol intake directly, using a biomarker in urine that reflects what the body actually absorbed. We did this in around 30,000 participants across two large studies in the UK and the US.

Our findings revealed there was good and bad news. The good news was that it's perfectly possible to get 500mg of flavanols per day from a normal diet. The bad news was that fewer than one in five participants actually did this – even among those who ate their five a day.

This is not surprising. Many fruits and vegetables do not contain a lot of flavanols. Cauliflower, carrots or cucumber, for instance, don't contain any, while mangoes, medlars and kiwis only very small amounts. When choosing a random selection of five fruits or vegetables, it's very unlikely that they'll add up to 500mg a day.

Another surprising result was that there was a big difference between participants in the US and UK.

US participants were more likely to get their daily flavanol intake if they followed US dietary recommendations (which are similar to the UK's fruit and veg recommendations) – although only one in five did so. Around 20% of US participants consumed 500mg of flavanols daily.

But in the UK, the opposite was true. Only about 10% of those who consumed their recommended five portions a day also consumed 500mg of flavanols. Yet this number was closer to 20% in those who did not follow these recommendations.

We also found that those who reported eating the smallest amount of fruits and vegetables daily had the higher flavanol intake.

There may be a couple of key reasons for these findings.

There are some key differences between the two studies: the UK participants came from the Epic Norfolk study, which was designed to be representative of the general public. The baseline diet data we used was collected in the 1990s. In contrast, the US participants of the Cosmos study were recruited in the 2010s and generally had a better diet than the population average.

But if we look at just the UK cohort alone, the explanation for the disparities in flavanol intake can be found in a cup of tea. Literally.

Tea is a great source of flavanols, and a few cups of tea daily can already provide 200-300mg. In a country where tea is a staple, this can make an important contribution. It's not surprising that the UK has one of the highest flavanol intakes in Europe.

In countries where coffee is the staple drink – such as the US – tea consumption is often associated with an overall healthier diet. But this is not the case in the UK, where tea is not a marker of a particular healthy – or unhealthy – lifestyle. Indeed, people with high tea consumption don't eat more fruits and vegetables than others.

Although tea is not part of any dietary recommendations, it may be the main driver for flavanol intake in the UK. This means that a good cup of tea may do more for flavanol intake than a randomly chosen portion of fruit or veg.

What does this mean?

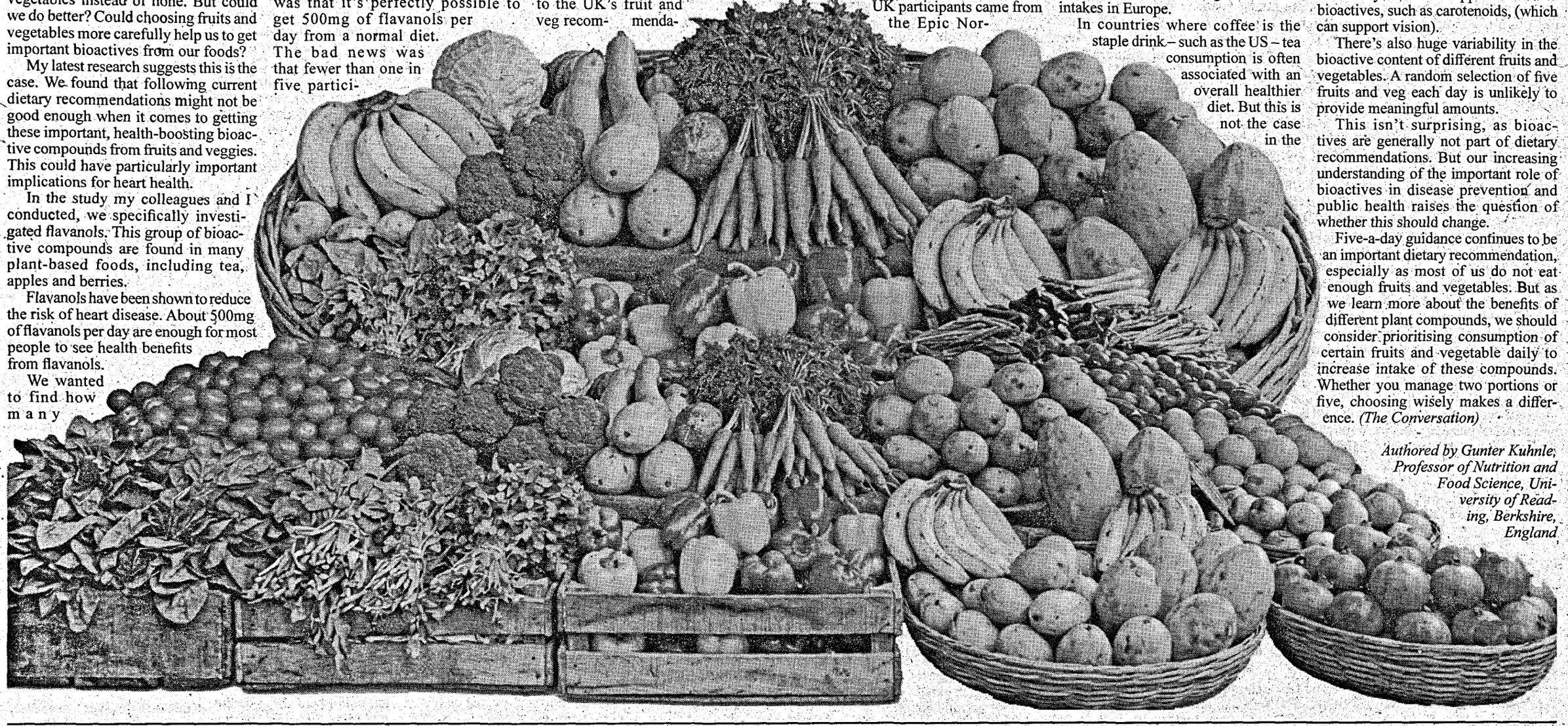
People who follow current dietary recommendations are unlikely to consume a sufficient amount of flavanols. It's likely the same applies to other bioactives, such as carotenoids, (which can support vision).

There's also huge variability in the bioactive content of different fruits and vegetables. A random selection of five fruits and veg each day is unlikely to provide meaningful amounts.

This isn't surprising, as bioactives are generally not part of dietary recommendations. But our increasing understanding of the important role of bioactives in disease prevention and public health raises the question of whether this should change.

Five-a-day guidance continues to be an important dietary recommendation, especially as most of us do not eat enough fruits and vegetables. But as we learn more about the benefits of different plant compounds, we should consider prioritising consumption of certain fruits and vegetable daily to increase intake of these compounds. Whether you manage two portions or five, choosing wisely makes a difference. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Gunter Kuhnle, Professor of Nutrition and Food Science, University of Reading, Berkshire, England



'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi **Sunday, JUNE 14, 2026**

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-square Jupiter on your solar return chart ensures excellent results for you. You will be popular and will be willing to take challenges. Thus, you will become cynosure of all eyes. Your efforts will be appreciated by peers and seniors. Your magnetic personality will draw people towards you. And you will be able to get the work done. You would like to work on your instincts. You enjoy travelling, and will get a lot of chances to travel, especially for leisure. You will be imaginative and show a lot of passion. This will play an important role in attracting the right person in your life. If still single, you will meet your sweetheart. Your financial condition will be stable. You will enjoy good health. You will also think of investing in property or putting your money into fixed deposits, shares & bonds, etc.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) There will be a complete turnaround. Your luck will start favoring you. Your own people will start giving lot of support. You will get lot of positive vibes. A legal matter will get sorted out. You will emerge a much stronger person. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. You will also take your own decisions in business. Your financial position will also get better but suddenly some secret will emerge much to your dislike which will upset you. But you will take life seriously and make progress in general. You will listen to the words of your boss and take it seriously. You will be grateful to God. It is a gainful time for students. They will get success in exams/interviews. You will have profits in partnership.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will suddenly find things turning in your favor. You will have a lot of interest in social activities. Your image will improve and people around you will start giving lot of respect. You will have financial gains. It will appear to your life is simple only we make it complex by our own actions. Yet, you will be much loved person and will help people a lot. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance. You will have good understanding with your spouse/partner. Your influence and fame will increase manifold. You will also refresh old memories. You will also get out of trouble that you were having. It is going to be a pleasant week where you will enjoy wonderful moments with your family.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) It is going to be a week which will bring you lot of happiness and prosperity. You will have financial gains. You will also get work orders from abroad. You will also make plans to travel abroad. People will pay attention to what you say. Your peers and bosses will be happy with your performance. You will be given added responsibility in your job. The graph of your fame and prestige will rise day by day. Matters in court cases will be decided in your favor. Housewives will remain busy in their work, and you will have time for recreation. New plans regarding the future will be made. You will focus on the renovation/decoration of your house. Monetary situations will be strong and favorable.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will be having lot of fun and entertainment this week. You will plan to go out with your family on a short trip for peace and joy. You will have pleasant time in the company of your close ones. You will refresh old memories. You will remain in high spirits. Peace and harmony will prevail in family. You will balance your domestic life and professional life well. Money inflow will be continuous. You will also be given importance in your job/work. But you should desist from interfering in others matters. You will have to pay a heavy price for it otherwise your differences with brothers will get resolved. Your boss will be happy with you. Marriage of a family member will get fixed suddenly. It will completely change the atmosphere of your family for good.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) There will be an increase in your work efficiency. You will plan a major expansion in your business. Those projects which were lying in limbo for a long period will get a kickstart. You will complete your pending issues at work. You will also receive additional bonus, incentives and increments. You will also plan to invest your money. Those who were thinking of buying a new property, house or flat can do so. You will also have a gala time with your family members. You will remain busy with friends and relatives. You will also share same wavelength with your partner. Love birds will have a wonderful time. The work that you have wanted to get done for a long time will get done. Avoid getting into arguments with anyone. Otherwise, you will lose your peace of mind.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is going to be an amazing week for you. The situation at work will remain under your control. Your graph of popularity and respect will rise. Your boss will be happy with your performance. You will bring every matter favorable for yourself. You will also have gains in your business. You will easily obtain your objectives. Avoid tiff with your business partners. You will face your opponents well and will appear stronger. Love birds will decide to get married. In your home and office, the atmosphere will remain congenial. Do take care of your finances. And don't make any decision in a rush. You need to avoid being emotional.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be getting lot of help from colleagues and bosses. Even your family members and friends will support you a lot. You will get lot of success in your work. Victory is written for you in whatever task you undertake and perform. Clearly, you seem to be on a role. You will miss a close and special person and get emotional about him/her. You will also get interested in occult sciences and want to know the truth of life. Life seems be a big puzzle for you with its twists and turns. But you enjoy this fascinating journey which throws new challenges daily. You will make progress in your work with your own efforts. Do not make decisions by being emotional. Your superiors will appreciate you for some great achievement.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) You will move ahead with a positive outlook. Luck also favoring you a lot. You will also make plans to buy and sell property. You will do your work with the utmost dedication and sincerity. A very special and charming person will come into your life all of a sudden. You will receive good news from somewhere. A legal matter will get sorted out. But do not sign any document without reading it. You will take work as if on a mission and complete it with lot of sincerity and dedication. The results of exams and interview will be in your favor. You will extend a hand with help to those in need.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) The planetary situation is very favorable this week. You will gain lot of confidence with your efforts. Your task will also be completed. You will also be lucky in matters of family inheritance and property. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will also enjoy good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will be successful in your love life. You will meet an important personality. He/she will guide you well. You will also clear some major competitive exams. You will also be busy with prayers and meditation. You will get the blessings of your elders. Your professional contacts will expand. You will have success in your business/work. Your financial side will be strong.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) There are strong chances of gains in your profession/work. You will also remain mentally strong and not afraid to face challenges. You will discharge your responsibility well. You will get success in official matters, and your opponents will get defeated. It is time to take a clear stand on an important issue. You will be lucky in love matters. Students will get success in exams. You will also be offered a job of your choice. There will be an increase in your prestige and respect. You will get the support of your colleagues and boss. Money will keep coming. You will also help the needy. You will also do something for society. You will spend your time on yoga, meditation and prayers.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is going to be a week which will give wonderful results. You will come closer to your partner. The misunderstanding of past will get removed. But keep away from controversy otherwise it will create a lot of tension in the family. But you will show a lot of intelligence and maturity. You will also enjoy wonderful relationship with your parents. You will look after them well. Focus on your work, otherwise it will not be finished on time. There will be a change in your daily routine and habits. You will defeat your enemies. You will meet higher officials and somehow get your work done. Situations will be favorable for working women.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is going to be favorable week in terms of money. But health of the elderly person of the family may be a cause of some concern. However, you will manage this with patience. Whatever you do you will get success in it. You will be watched minutely by your bosses. Your conduct will come in for lot of praise and appreciation. Your child will behave nicely with you. You will also make plans to watch movies with your family members. You will perform all your tasks in a new way. Your personality will be fearless and inspiring. These are enlightening days. You will be excited about your career. All the doubts in your mind will be cleared. Take advice of an expert in legal/financial matters. Your spouse will try to come close to you. You will trust the traditional way of doing things.

The afterlife of nature: How death rebuilds ecosystems

People's knee-jerk reaction to seeing death in nature is often not positive. The burn scar left by wildfire on a once-forested hillside, or a ghostly white coral reef, may evoke tragedy and despair. But in nature, most plants and animals are recycled back into new life.

The fallen branches and leaves that crunch under your boots as you step on the forest floor are providing nutrients for new growth as they decompose. Empty shells can become the foundations for new sea life to grow. Dead organic matter left over after a harvest supports soils and the production of food that feeds people worldwide.

These remnants of life can set both the pace and outcome of ecosystem recovery, enabling life to persist and thrive, or preventing it from doing so.

Ecologists, like us, refer to this as ecological memory, where remnants of the past influence how ecosystems look and behave in the present.

Similar to human memories, traumatic events can have the strongest influences in nature: Fires, storms, heat waves and outbreaks of pests or disease can cause widespread death of plants and animals, leaving behind abundant and lasting physical remains.

In a new paper published in Science Advances, working with colleagues around the country, we show how death plays nuanced and powerful roles in nature's afterlife.

In some cases, dead organisms prevent life from returning after an extreme event. In other cases, they make ecosystems more resilient by fueling regeneration of new life and hastening recovery. Understanding this afterlife and its influence on ecosystems will be increasingly valuable for helping ecosystems recover in a changing climate.

Foundation species: Nature's architects

Our study focused on a set of ecologically important organisms, known as foundation species. These are abundant and iconic organisms, such as trees, grasses, oysters and corals, that create the natural infrastructure on which entire communities of organisms exist.

Foundation species can be found everywhere, from the depths of the oceans to the summits of mountains. Because they are so abundant while alive, they can remain abundant after they die. And their influence can carry on in an afterlife that shapes the trajectories of ecosystems, either supporting recovery to the ecosystem's original structure or transforming it into a new one.

To investigate how the dead remains of foundation species affect the ability of their living counterparts to establish, grow and survive, we tapped into a U.S. National Science Foundation network of Long Term Ecological Research. Scientists at these sites track populations of foundation species across a diversity of ecosystems that have experienced different extreme events.

We looked at coral reefs, mangrove forests, salt marshes, kelp forests, oyster reefs, tropical rainforests, temperate rainforests, hemlock forests, tallgrass prairies and boreal forests, ranging from the tropics to just shy of the Arctic Circle. We found that, following extreme events, the dead affect the living more commonly than we expected. The dead foundation species either significantly increased or decreased living foundation species in nine out of the 10 ecosystems we studied — the kelp forest was the only exception.

In roughly half of the cases, dead foundation species hampered the ability of their living counterparts to reestablish, grow and survive after extreme events.

Take the tropical montane rainforest of Puerto Rico. This ecosystem is periodically walloped by hurricanes that strip its canopy and blanket the forest floor with tree branches and leaves. This layer of debris chokes off sunlight needed by the seedlings below and reduces the number that emerge to replace the trees lost during the storm, ultimately slowing the forest's recovery.

The South Pacific coral reefs of Moorea present a more extreme example. Marine heat waves that cause coral bleaching can transform these reefs into something fundamentally different: ghost towns of dead skeletons overgrown by seaweeds. The nooks and crannies of the standing coral skeletons provide an opportunity for the seaweeds, which compete with coral for reef space, to proliferate and take over the reef, preventing the return of corals.

But in the other cases we studied, we found that dead organisms actually promote the regeneration of their living counterparts.

For example, the mangrove forests of the Florida Everglades actually benefit from storm-generated debris. During a hurricane, leaf litter blown or washed out of the canopy ended up in the complex network of roots below, providing a pulse of nutrients that enhanced the production of new roots and hastened mangrove recovery.

In the Eastern hemlock forests of New England, an outbreak of a tree-killing pest — the woolly adelgid — left behind wide swaths of standing dead trees. But unlike the dead skeletons on a bleached reef, these dead trees often help new hemlock saplings grow by maintaining a favorable climate on the ground below.

The question now is, how can humanity use this information to fortify the resilience of ecosystems after extreme events?

How humans can help

As humans, many of us rely on therapy to help manage how traumatic memories affect our lives. We can also help ecosystems manage the remnants of dead organisms after disasters in several ways.

On land, standing dead trees are sometimes felled to create "nurse logs," which release nutrients that nourish living trees. Dead grass litter is removed using prescribed burning to create better conditions for new grass to grow. On the coasts, dead oyster shells are deposited onto mud flats, and the rubble of coral skeletons is either stabilized or removed to create more solid substrates where new oysters and corals can settle, grow and thrive. As rising temperatures create more frequent extreme events and trigger more die-offs, dead foundation species will be useful to help guide ecosystem recoveries afterward.

Where there is life, there is death

When you're in nature, whether hiking in a forest or snorkeling on a tropical reef, your attention is typically drawn to the life that exists in these places. But if you take a closer look, you may notice that death is all around, too.

Death is an integral part of life. The quicker we all learn to embrace its capacity to be a transformative force, and find ways to use the remnants left in its wake, the better we will be able to help nature and ourselves thrive into the future. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Kai Kopecky, University of Colorado Boulder and John Kominoski, Florida International University

"I can have peace of mind only when I forgive rather than judge."

—Gerald Jampolsky

The Shillong Times

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Caught in crossfire

AS the US military engagement continued for the fourth month in the Asia-Middle East region, India gets directly caught in the cross-fire over and above the economic hardships that the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz posed. The US has warned of serious consequences if India violated the US blockade and continued with the "illicit transportation of Iranian oil" – after three Indian marines were killed in a US missile attack on a vessel in the Oman-Gulf region that was suspected to be carrying oil shipments from Iran. Curiously, the standoff between the US and India comes close to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned meeting with President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G-7 summit in France. Trump, on the one hand keeps talking about a peace deal and on the other, continues targeting Iranian installations, while Iran is retaliating in measured tones. Trump's latest hint was that a deal would be signed by Sunday, but Teheran's silence dimmed such hopes.

The rude manner in which US Secretary of State Marco Rubio spoke to external affairs minister S Jaishankar shows the Americans are bent on tightening their grip on the troubled region and beyond. His diktat to India is that all commercial vehicles in and around the Strait should immediately comply with the US writ vis-a-vis passage and the ban on oil deal with Iran. The US that has already hiked tariffs on Indian exports as a counter to India's oil deals with Iran and Russia by circumventing the US sanctions moves to the next level. While a framework for an interim trade deal between India and the US was proposed earlier this year, legal challenges followed there, delaying a final "concessional" agreement. The scenario gets further complicated by the aggressiveness of the US against India as is reflected in the missile attacks on as many as three tankers manned by Indian crew in recent days; and the death of the three sailors in the latest offensive. Significantly, one of these attacks took place some 420 nautical miles away from the Strait.

India, along with other nations across continents and including the US, is faced with a tough economic scenario due to the curbs on movement of crude from the Middle East and other shipments, raising prices and adding to the inflationary pressures. What was initially thought to be an abrupt aggressive offensive against Iran has been dragged by both sides to the fourth month. Iran, having anticipated an American offensive for long, insists that it will not buckle under pressure. Having prepared well for a long-drawn-out-war, the Iranians are taking their sweet time to respond to peace plans mediated by intermediaries like Pakistan and Oman. The Gulf region too keeps facing the hard impact from this war. Several tiny nations in the region, including the UAE, have been repeatedly hit as Iran keeps targeting the American military and other installations in the region. Like Russia's war in Ukraine, how long would this scenario persist is anybody's guess.

H.K. Singh: A Quiet Reformer

By H.H. Mohrmen

Hajom Kissor Singh is widely known as the founder of the Unitarian Church in the Khasi Jaiñtia and Karbi Anglong regions of Assam. However, his greatness lies also in his willingness to contribute to every sphere that could advance literature, education, and even the politics of the region.

Born on 15 June 1865 at Saitsohpen, Sohra, to Bor Singh Malngiang and ka Bida Nongbri and he studies up to the matriculation level. That was a remarkable achievement, considering that formal education in the hills had only begun about two decades earlier with the arrival of the Welsh Presbyterian (Calvinistic Methodist) missionaries in the region.

Sohra or Cherrapunjee was the place where the Mission first began its work with the arrival of Rev. Thomas Jones and his wife on 22 June 1841. He learned the Khasi language and became the first known individual to develop its written form using the Roman script. HK Singh grew up at Cherrapunjee and belonged to the first generation of educated Khasis who benefited from the educational initiatives introduced by the Welsh missionaries.

An Educationist Par Excellence

While still working in the SDO's office; HK Singh started an Upper Primary School in Jowai in 1893 called the Unitarian Free School. Under his leadership a petition was sent to the government requesting that the Khasi Jaiñtia students be allowed to write their Upper Primary school examination in Khasi language. In a letter to the Director of Public Instruction, Assam dated Jowai, the 8th of February 1902 the administrators of the three schools in Jaiñtia hills pleaded that the Khasi Jaiñtia students be allowed to write their exams in Khasi. The application was signed by Hajom Kissor Singh Manager, Unitarian Free School, u Soso Tham Headmaster Shangpung U.P. School and Samuel Challam officiating Headmaster of a School in Jowai.

In response, the Director of Public Instruction, Assam, W. Booth in his letter to the Sub-Inspector of Schools, Jaiñtia hills, Jowai number 7327 dated Shillong the 21st October said that he agreed with the applicants on all points stated in their application and that the children must be taught in their own vernacular to the end of the Upper Primary standard.

Contribution to the early writings of Khasi

Dr Sylvanus Lamare (Mawphor dated 12 July 2006) mentioned about the remarks made by the Editor of u Khasi Mynta when Khasi tracks were sent to the press. U Khasi mynta in its (Nailur) September, 1, 1896 edition praised the beauty and the correct structure of the Khasi language used in the translation of the tracks sent to the newspaper by HK Singh.

In the early part of 1900 when the government constituted a Textbook Committee, U Khasi Mynta, remarked that it was surprised that the Committee only comprises of the DPI of Schools and the Deputy Commissioner and J.C. Evans. Earlier a Khasi, U Babu Jeebon Roy was made member of the Committee but after his demise the government had not appointed any native to the Committee. A petition was made to the Governor to consider the appointment of a member from the local community to the committee. Later U Khasi Mynta in its September 1903 edition reported that the DPI has made some correction and nominated Hajom Kissor Singh as member of the Textbook Committee along with Dr. Roberts.

H.K. Singh has also contributed to production of many important books. He and his brother u Nissor Singh find mention in the preface of the book "The Khasis by PRT Gurdon". They were two of the nine Khasi names mentioned in the preface as people who had helped Gurdon in coming up with the book. H.K.Singh along with Babu Jeebon Roy also wrote the introduction to the book 'Ka Jingsneng Tymmen' by Radhon Sing Berry.

He composed 72 hymns for the Unitarian Church hymnal and translated many hymns published in the hymn book. U Khasi Mynta, the journal appreciated the beauty of the Khasi language used in the book. The only prose that Hajom Kissor Singh wrote was a piece about his journey from Jowai to Jaintiapur which was included as a chapter in the book 'Mawpun Jingtip.'

The completion of the Khasi English Dictionary

The first English Khasi Dictionary by u Nissor Singh was first published in 1906 and later the government ordered the revision of the same. In the preface of the Dictionary the then Deputy Commissioner of Khasi and Jaintia Hills A.W. Dentith remarked that the Government vide letter Number 4445C Dated 30th March 1907 constituted a committee to work on the project which comprised of Mr F.E. Jackson, Mr. L.O. Clark and Mr. B.C. Allen members representing the Deputy Commissioner and the other three members were Rai Sahip Dohory Ropmay, u Hajom Kissor Singh and his brother u Nissor Singh the author of the dictionary.

Later a committee to revise the manuscript was constituted with Rev. Walter Firminges, the Rev. C.L. Stephens, the Rev. J.C. Evans and Khan Sahip Amjad Ali as members. The preface also mentioned that the author u Nissor Singh read the part of the manuscript sent to him from the Printing Press and was able to proof read only from alphabet A to O. Unfortunately Nissor Singh died on the 20th of February 1918 while serving as the Inspector of School in Tura, Garo hills. Dentith concluded that the proof of the remaining letters from P to Z was read by his brother u Hajom Kissor Singh, who also wrote the keys to pronunciation and the list of abbreviation in the dictionary.

Standardizing Khasi using Roman Alphabets

Rev Thomas Jones wrote the Khasi language using Roman alphabets, however later there was a realisation of the need to improve and standardise Khasi writing. Babu Jeebon Roy was the first to recognize the need for standardized alphabets to preserve the Khasi language.

He collaborated with British missionaries and other Khasi intellectuals to refine the Roman script and adapt it to the unique phonetic characteristics of Khasi. U Jeebon Roy and his contemporaries sought to ensure that the script accurately represented the sounds of the language. Jeebon Roy together with other thinkers in Khasi like Babu Hajom Kissor Singh, Radhon Singh Berry and Babu Hormu Rai Diengdoh, introduced the two Khasi Alphabets "ĩ" and "ñ" in the list of alphabets used to write Khasi. The full list of the alphabets which include those introduced by Thomas Jones and the two newly incorporated ones appeared for the first time in printed form in his book, "Ka Pule Khasi Kaba Nyngkong" in 1897.

An Able Administrator

U Khasi Mynta in its November 1905 issue; observed that it is important to have a native appointed as the Head Clerk in the Deputy Commissioner's office and the courts in Jowai and Shillong because local people know the culture, tradition and religion of the locals. The Newspaper appreciated Major Gurdon for appointing Hajom Kissor Singh to replace Babu Radhanath a Bengalee who was transferred for posting in the plain areas with the hope that H.K. Singh would be able to do justice to his work and bring pride to the community.

S.E. Rita in his order dated 23-9-1902 stated that Hajom Kissor Singh was recalled before the expiration of leave and appointed temporarily as Dewan (Prime minister) of Khyrim State by Chief Commissioner of Assam in a letter No. 156 confd dated 15-9-1902, 4219.

Building of the modern Khasi state

At the fag end of his career, U H.K. Singh also participated in the politics of the Khasi state. In the late eighteen hundreds, the Khasi and Jaiñtia hills region as we know now was divided by the British in two segments, the Khasi Jaiñtia which was under the direct British rule and the Khasi States which comprises of the states still ruled by independent Khasi chieftains.

The Khasi Native States sought clarification regarding their future position, as they were concerned about preserving their identity and traditional institutions. To address these concerns, a notice was circulated on 27 July 1923 by the Syiem of Mylliem, Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy, and other traditional leaders. The notice announced that a Khasi Durbar, to be known as the "Khasi National Durbar," would be convened from 4 to 6 September 1923 at the residence of Rev. J.J.M. Nichols Roy at Qualapatty.

The Syiems, Wahadadars, Lyngdohs, Headmen, and others participated in meeting and elected the first office bearers of the durbar, President - u Join Manick, Syiem Sohra, Vice President - Rai Sahib Hormu Rai Diengdoh, Secretary - Rev. J. J.M. Nichols Roy, Assistant Secretary - u Hajom Kissor Singh, Treasurer - u Chandranath Roy and 11 Executive Committee Members.

H.K. Singh quietly laboured for social transformation at a time when the Khasi language as a formal educational milieu and Khasi nationalism were still taking roots. Though the passage of time has obscured much of his work, the imprint of his service endures in the social and intellectual awakening of his people.

The Crown and the Question: Is Pageantry Still Relevant?

By Nimrat Ranhotra

I have always loved pageantry which is perhaps why I question it.

There is something undeniably fascinating about it, the elegance, the confidence, the glamour, the femininity of it all. Watching women command a stage with grace felt powerful to me. It was never merely about beauty; it felt like a celebration of womanhood itself. Like many young women, I admired the crowns, the gowns, and the women who carried themselves with poise under bright lights. Eventually, I found myself on that stage too. And oddly enough, the experience left me with more questions than answers.

The part I remember most vividly is the subtitle round. Best eyes. Best smile. Best hair. Best skin. I won none of them.

Now, this is not an article about losing titles. Beauty is subjective, rationally I knew that a panel of judges could not determine my worth. Yet I would be lying if I said the thought never crossed my mind:

If I wasn't chosen, does that mean I wasn't beautiful enough? I felt that for a moment. But almost immediately, the question stopped being about me.

Instead, I found myself wondering why any woman should have to ask herself that question at all. Why should one woman win and another lose when it comes to something as personal as beauty? Why should eyes, smiles, skin, and hair become categories in which human beings are ranked against one another? Can a smile really be judged against another smile? Can eyes be placed first, second, and third? Can hair be awarded as though beauty exists on a scoreboard?

Perhaps the issue is not that some women win these titles and others do not. Perhaps the issue is the belief that something as deeply personal as beauty can be measured at all.

Of course, pageantry is not only about beauty. That is the argument most people make in its defence, and rightfully so. There are interviews, talent rounds, social initiatives, and tests of knowledge. Modern pageantry often prides itself on rewarding intelligence and substance alongside appearance.

But even that made me question things because how much of it is truly spontaneous?

I know because I participated in it. I rehearsed answers. I prepared responses. I practised speaking in a certain way. Most contestants do. We anticipate questions, memorise structures, and learn how to appear composed under pressure. A part of me was not entirely myself on that stage. Not because I was being fake, but because I was trying to become the version of myself I thought the competition wanted to see.

We perfect our walks. We perfect our smiles. We perfect our answers. We wear carefully selected outfits, professionally styled hair, and makeup designed to make us look our best, not necessarily like ourselves, but like versions of ourselves more likely to be rewarded.

By the time we step onto the stage, almost everything has been refined, rehearsed, and curated. So, what exactly is being judged? Beauty? Intelligence? Confidence? Or simply who can present them most convincingly?

To understand why this question matters, we must understand why pageantry existed in the first place.

When pageants first emerged, women occupied a very different place in society. Their opportunities were limited, and their voices often remained unheard. Public platforms where women could represent themselves, demonstrate confidence, and be celebrated were far rarer than they are today. In that context, pageantry served a purpose beyond appearance. It offered visibility. It gave women a stage in a world that often denied them one.

But societies evolve, and institutions must evolve with them.

The women of today inhabit a world far larger than the one pageantry was originally created for. Women lead companies, conduct research, create art, build businesses, argue cases in courtrooms, and make their mark in spaces that were once closed to them. They have carved out platforms of their own and claimed voices that no longer require validation from a crown.

And perhaps that is why pageantry feels increasingly difficult to reconcile with modern womanhood.

Because somewhere along the way, the purpose seems to have shifted. What may once have been about giving women visibility now appears preoccupied with perfecting visibility itself. In trying to become the most polished version of ourselves, we risk drifting away from the most authentic one.

"When pageants first emerged, women occupied a very different place in society. Their opportunities were limited, and their voices often remained unheard. Public platforms where women could represent themselves, demonstrate confidence, and be celebrated were far rarer than they are today. In that context, pageantry served a purpose beyond appearance. It offered visibility. It gave women a stage in a world that often denied them one."

There is nothing wrong with beauty. There is nothing wrong with makeup, fashion, elegance, or femininity. Being a fashion enthusiast myself, I reject the idea that women must distance themselves from these things to be taken seriously.

But elegance today means something far more expansive than appearance. A woman is elegant when she stands by her convictions even when it is inconvenient. She is elegant when she works tirelessly for a life she wants to build. She is elegant when she refuses to shrink herself, when she speaks with purpose, and when she creates opportunities not only for herself but for others.

The modern woman has witnessed a world beyond beauty and presentation. She has learned that her value cannot be reduced to the symmetry of her features, the quality of her hair, or the brightness of her smile.

And that is why I find myself questioning the relevance of pageantry today. Not because beauty has become irrelevant. But because women have become far too extraordinary to be defined by beauty alone.

Despite all my criticisms, I do not regret participating in pageantry. In fact, I loved the experience. Not because of the titles, the rankings, or the results, but because it pushed me to think beyond them. Standing on that stage exposed me to questions I had never seriously considered before. It forced me to examine ideas about beauty, femininity, confidence, and how women are perceived in society.

Ironically, the most valuable thing pageantry gave me was not a title; it was perspective. It opened the door to a much broader arena of thought, one that extended far beyond the stage itself.

A crown may symbolise achievement. But the crown belongs to a moment. The questions follow you home.

Letters to the Editor

Need to Restore the Rich Legacy of Cricket

Editor,

As a cricket enthusiast and former cricketer from Shillong, I am deeply anguished by the recent controversy surrounding the Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA). This sentiment is shared by many former cricketers and administrators who were once associated with the Shillong Cricket Association (SCA).

In the 1980s and 1990s, cricket in Shillong survived against all odds. With little infrastructure or funding, the game was sustained by the passion of a few selfless and dedicated individuals. Matches were played on modest matting pitches at Polo Ground and players often endured long bus journeys and spent nights on school benches to represent Shillong in the All Assam Inter-District Tournaments.

The perseverance of SCA's office-bearers and the generosity of patrons like the late Ratan Lal Singhania, the then President of the Assam Cricket Association (1986-89) kept the spirit of Shillong cricket alive. Their passion and sacrifices laid the foundation for Meghalaya's eventual full membership in the BCCI.

It is now the responsibility of all sports lovers, former players, and administrators alike to safeguard this rich legacy. The future of cricket in Meghalaya must be guided by the same integrity, dedication, and selfless service that sustained it through its most challenging years.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee,
Shillong-1

Police Bazar Street Vendors & Constitutional Right to Livelihood – A Case for Compassionate Reconsideration

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of the authorities, policymakers and the citizens of Meghalaya to the humanitarian and constitutional concerns arising from the displacement of street vendors from Police Bazar, Shillong, pursuant to the Order dated 03 July 2025 passed by the Hon'ble High Court of Meghalaya in PIL No. 17 of 2021, Philip Khrawbok Shati v. State of Meghalaya & Others.

While the objective of decongesting Police Bazar and ensuring free movement of pedestrians is undoubtedly laudable, such measures must be harmonised with the constitutional rights of economically vulnerable citizens whose sole means of subsistence depend upon street vending. The affected vendors, many of whom are widows, single mothers and daily wage earners, have reportedly suffered a drastic decline in income following their relocation to the MUDA Parking Lots due to inadequate customer footfall and reduced visibility. Consequently, several families are now facing severe economic hardship, thereby transforming an issue of urban management into one of constitutional and social justice.

In Olga Tellis v. Bombay Municipal Corporation, (1985) 3 SCC 545, the Hon'ble Supreme Court recognised the right to livelihood as an integral facet of the Right to Life under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. Likewise, Articles 14 and 19(1)(g) guarantee equality before law and the freedom to carry on any occupation, trade or business, while Articles 38 and 39(a) cast a constitutional obligation upon the State to secure social and economic justice and ensure adequate means of livelihood for all citizens. In furtherance of these constitutional mandates, Parliament enacted the Street Vendors (Protection of Livelihood and Regulation of Street Vending) Act, 2014. Sections 3 and 4 recognise the rights of eligible vendors through statutory surveys and certificates of vending, while Section 18 protects vendors from relocation or eviction except in accordance with the procedure established by law.

The legislative intent is clear that regulation must coexist with protection of livelihood. While decongestion of Police Bazar is necessary, the burden of achieving such objective ought not to fall disproportionately upon those possessing the least resources. Traffic congestion cannot be attributed solely to street vendors, as unrestricted vehicular movement within the commercial hub also contributes significantly to the problem. A more balanced and sustainable solution may lie in declaring the internal roads of Police Bazar as pedestrian-friendly zones between 8:00 A.M. and 9:00 P.M., while permitting licensed vendors to carry on their trade from appropriate and viable vending spaces within the Police Bazar area under a regulated framework. Such an approach would simultaneously promote public convenience and safeguard the livelihood of hundreds of affected families.

In view of the grave hardship presently faced by the vendors, it is respectfully hoped that the consequences flowing from the Order dated 03 July 2025 may receive compassionate reconsideration and that the Hon'ble High Court, the State Government, the Shillong Municipal Board and all concerned stakeholders may evolve an equitable and humane mechanism for accommodating the affected vendors in suitable and economically viable vending spaces within Police Bazar, consistent with the constitutional guarantees under Articles 14, 19(1)(g) and 21 of the Constitution of India and the provisions of the Street Vendors Act, 2014.

The street vendors of Shillong seek neither charity nor privilege; they seek only the opportunity to earn an honest livelihood with dignity, as guaranteed by the Constitution and the laws of the land. It is earnestly requested that this article may kindly be published in the interest of justice, fair play and public awareness.

Yours etc.,
Andrew Lyngdoh
Mawphlang.,
Mawlynrei

Noise Pollution from Amplified Speakers at PB disrupting Emergency Communication

Editor,

I wish to draw urgent attention to a growing public nuisance at Police Bazar. Daily, individuals soliciting alms utilize high-volume loudspeakers and amplifiers. They perform continuously throughout the day, mimicking street artists. This unchecked amplification has created an unbearable acoustic environment in our city's central hub.

This issue extends far beyond mere annoyance. As a professional, I frequently need to answer critical, time-sensitive emergency calls while transit through or working near the area. The deafening volume makes it virtually impossible to hear or communicate effectively during these vital conversations. When crucial details are drowned out by noise pollution, it poses a genuine safety and operational risk. While street performances can add vibrancy, the unregulated use of heavy sound systems for hours on end in a congested public zone violates noise pollution norms. I urge the local Municipal authorities and the Shillong Traffic Police to look into this matter. Enforcing strict decibel limits and restricting the use of amplifiers at this busy intersection is essential to restore civic order.

Yours etc.,
ShanKupar Kharsati
Via email

Overcrowding at MFA Stadium Risks Public Safety

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw urgent attention to the overcrowding and limited capacity at the MFA Stadium, Polo Ground during major football matches.

Last month, during the Shillong Lajong FC vs Aizawl FC match on 15 May 2026, hundreds of fans were seen standing on staircases and near entry gates because the official seating capacity of ~5,000 was exceeded. With World Cup 2026 qualifiers and ISL interest rising, the demand for tickets far exceeds available seats. This creates fire hazards and stampede risks, especially with only 2-3 narrow exit points.

Instead of restricting genuine fans, the Sports Department and MFA should:

1. Publish the certified safe seating capacity before each match,
2. Introduce online ticketing with strict headcount, and
3. Expedite the proposed stadium expansion or temporary stands.

Football is Meghalaya's passion, but passion without safety can turn tragic. I urge the authorities to address this before the monsoon derby season begins.

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*

"Revolution is a trivial shift in the emphasis of suffering."

— Tom Stoppard

The Shillong Times

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Wanted Durable Roads

THE presence of Union Minister for Road Transport and Highways, Nitin Gadkari at the North East Infrastructure Summit in Shillong raises hopes for better roads and highways connecting the state capital and rural habitats. Gadkari has promised to invest Rs 3214 crores for major road infrastructure projects. However, the quality of such highways is what the Union Minister ought to focus on but that's provided the route he took while coming to Shillong is the one through which ordinary citizens use to commute from point A to Point B. Within Shillong city the quality of most roads leaves much to be desired. In Meghalaya it is unheard of that a contractor is blacklisted for constructing roads that last only one season. Large parts of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills is a hilly terrain and road construction on such terrains is a challenge but the state Public Works Department should be having qualified engineers to overcome such challenges. Meghalaya is also known for its heavy monsoons and the India Meteriological Department has just sounded a warning that heavy rainfall within the next few days could result in flash floods in Shillong city with East Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and South West Khasi Hills being more vulnerable. East Khasi Hills also means that the Shillong-Pynursla-Dawki Road currently under construction should see further landslides and pose risks for travelers on that route.

What is noticeable about road construction projects in Meghalaya is that side drains are largely missing, hence rain water flows across the road and creates cracks that lead to further erosion of the road. Storm drains wherever they are built are clogged with plastics and other forms of garbage since civic sense is largely non-existent. In areas beyond the municipality localities are under the traditional heads whose only source of revenue is the meagre collection form households. Much of that money goes towards maintenance of the localities including the managing garbage collection. It is now high time for the Union Ministry for Road Transport and Highways to take stock of the kind of roads and highways built with the sanctioned amounts otherwise large chunks of the money could disappear into private pockets. The problem with the citizenry is that they complain in private and have never come together to demand better roads and highways. The road going towards Union Christian College further up to Mairang etc., has been in a dilapidated state with just some light repairs to appease the residents of Umbir, Umsaw Nongsder etc. This is unacceptable considering that the road leads to one of the oldest colleges and several other institutions, apart from being a potential tourist destination.

Hence while Meghalaya can rejoice over the major road infrastructural boost, it is the quality of those roads that is important and the public should rise to the occasion to demand quality roads and other public infrastructure. For too long the central ministries have funded projects in the north eastern region and boasted about turning an otherwise disconnected periphery into a well-connected hub but without strict monitoring mechanisms in place. If the MoRTH is serious about developing the road infrastructure in the entire North Eastern region which includes roads that connect villages to the state headquarters, it. also has to put in place a rigid monitoring mechanism to ensure that people actually benefit from such projects and that the roads, highways and bridges don't collapse as they have been doing elsewhere.

From Hiatus to Heartbeat: "The Beautiful Game" is Reviving Shillong's Soul

By Banwan Lyngdoh

On a humid World Environment Day (June 5, 2026), Shillong witnessed a massive traffic snarl stretching from Ward's Lake to Polo Ground and beyond. The gridlock was bad enough that Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma had to abandon his vehicle and walk from his official residence to the SSA Stadium. From the Chief Minister to the common man, all roads, quite literally, were leading to the stadium, where the Meghalaya Super League final was set to be played between Langsning F.C. and Nongkseh SSCC.

When this writer reached the stadium entrance, hundreds of football lovers were milling outside, ticketless, but still trying their luck. Tickets, it turned out, had sold like hot cakes and were gone within minutes. Inside, the announcer proudly declared that over 6,000 spectators had packed the stands. It was heartening to see men, women, the elderly, youth, and children—all cheering for their respective teams. The stadium was loud and lively.

Football in Shillong has never been just a sport. It is woven into the cultural fabric of the Hills. From the early 20th century, Shillong became a beacon for football in the Northeast. Clubs emerged organically. Talent flowed. The city produced players who represented state and national teams. Shillong Lajong Football Club, founded in 1983 by a group of passionate locals, was born precisely because standards had begun to slip even then. Their mission was to spot, train and nurture local talent so that Shillong teams could once again compete at the highest levels.

For decades, the passion endured. Packed terraces, fierce local rivalries, and the dream of seeing "our boys" make it big defined weekends. But by the late 1990s, cracks had appeared. Infrastructure stagnated. Organised youth development was patchy. Many promising players left for better opportunities in bigger cities or abandoned the game altogether. Professional clubs struggled with resources. The once-thundering voice of Shillong football grew quieter. A hiatus had set in; not from lack of love for the game, but from lack of sustained support and modern facilities.

But the Friday electrifying match with massive crowd support at the SSA Stadium was not merely a sign of spontaneous revival. It is the consequence of deliberate, sustained, and unprecedented government investment in football over the past eight years, an investment that has grown the state's overall sports budget thirteen times and poured nearly Rs 182 crore directly into the beautiful game. Meghalaya is not merely funding football. It is rebuilding an entire sporting culture from the grassroots with Shillong at its vibrant centre.

The Numbers That Tell a New Story

Government data reveals the scale of the turnaround. In financial year 2018-19, Meghalaya's sports budget was Rs 65 crore. By 2025-26, it had climbed to Rs 415 crore. The budget estimate for 2026-27 stands at Rs 844 crore, a thirteen-fold increase in just eight years. This is not incremental tinkering or routine annual increments. It represents a fundamental shift in priority, placing sports at the heart of youth development, cultural identity, health, discipline and economic opportunity in the state.

Of this broader push, nearly Rs 182 crore has been invested specifically in football-related initiatives over the past eight years. These are not scattered or one-off grants. They form a coherent, multi-layered strategy spanning grassroots development, professional club support, league infrastructure, women's football, international exposure and elite athlete preparation. The scale is unprecedented for a state of Meghalaya's size and resources.

The flagship Chief Minister's Football Mission alone accounts for more than Rs 150 crore. Relaunched in February 2025, it draws inspiration from successful international models of talent development. Today it supports nearly 10,000 young athletes through 125 grassroots coaching centres spread across the state. Children as young as six are now receiving structured training, age-appropriate coaching, nutrition guidance, and regular competitive exposure that simply did not exist in any systematic way before. The mission has created a genuine, visible talent pipeline.

Supporting the Professional Game and Building Pathways

The Meghalaya Football Association (MFA) has received consistent and practical backing. Rs 3 crore has gone toward hosting the Meghalaya State League (MSL) across three seasons (Rs 1 crore per season) ensuring a structured, competitive calendar for senior teams and clubs. The inaugural Meghalaya Women's State League (MWSL) received Rs 0.75 crore in 2025, marking a historic and long-overdue step toward genuine gender equity in the sport. Additional annual grants of Rs 6 lakh (plus earlier smaller amounts totalling around Rs 0.34 crore) have helped the MFA maintain and expand its activities, organise tournaments, and, support affiliated clubs and referees.

Preparation for the 39th National Games received Rs 2.6 crore for both phases, ensuring Meghalaya's athletes could train properly and compete without disadvantage. Another Rs 2.5 crore through the Chief Minister's Special Development Fund has supported various football-related projects and initiatives. These investments have created a multi-layered ecosystem where a talented seven-year-old in a remote village now has a realistic, visible pathway.

From the Grassroots to the Gallery: Real Impact on Real People

The human impact of these investments is already visible on the ground. Across Shillong and the wider state, attendance at local matches and tournaments is rising noticeably. The Shillong Sports Association's 2026 football season launch drew enthusiastic crowds and strong political backing, with the Chief Minister personally participating and reaffirming the vision of making Shillong the "football capital of India".

Local derbies have once again generated genuine excitement and community pride. Clubs that had gone quiet or struggled are finding new life through better organisation, competitive structures and renewed fan interest. Young girls, long on the margins of the sport, now have their own dedicated league and visible support structures. The inaugural MWSL season was more than symbolic; it laid the foundation for a new generation of female footballers who can see a realistic future in the game.

The broader social and economic multiplier effects are equally significant. Football-related activity generates direct and indirect employment for coaches, groundsmen, event staff, kit suppliers, physiotherapists and hospitality workers. Tournaments and matches bring visitors who spend money in local hotels, eateries, shops and transport. Over time, a thriving football ecosystem becomes a soft-power and economic asset for Meghalaya.

A Clear Vision, Backed by Sustained Action

The Chief Minister has consistently placed football at the centre of his government's youth, sports and development agenda. His repeated public articulation of the goal to make Shillong the football capital of India is backed by concrete budgetary allocations, visible infrastructure projects and a holistic strategy. The approach combines immediate grassroots impact (through the CM Football Mission), professional club strengthening, women's football promotion, league development, international exposure and landmark capital infrastructure.

This is not about one-off events, publicity drives or short-term announcements. It is a multi-year, multi-dimensional strategy that recognises football's unique power to engage youth at scale, build discipline and teamwork, foster community pride across different areas and communities, and create tangible pathways out of limited opportunities. In a state where many young people face challenges of unemployment, under-employment and the pressure to migrate, a vibrant and well-supported football ecosystem offers both inspiration and practical routes to meaningful engagement and potential careers.

Challenges Remain - But the Momentum is Unmistakable

No transformation of this scale happens without hurdles and ongoing requirements. Sustaining and continuously improving the quality of 125 grassroots centres requires consistent funding, coach development and monitoring. The new Mawkhanu Stadium, a 40,000-seater dedicated football arena, must be completed on schedule and then maintained and operated to true international standards. Building robust academy systems that reliably feed into ISL clubs and the national team will require continued focus, partnerships and patience.

Yet the overall direction and momentum are unmistakable and irreversible. The thirteen-fold increase in the sports budget, the nearly Rs 182 crore in direct football investment, the support for nearly 10,000 young athletes, the launch of a women's league, the rising Mawkhanu Stadium and the visible return of crowds and excitement together represent the most significant, comprehensive and ambitious state-led football development push in Meghalaya's history.

The Beautiful Game & Shillong

Shillong's football story was never truly over. It was waiting for sustained vision, for serious investment, for modern infrastructure and for the belief that the beautiful game deserves a central place in the state's future. Those elements have now arrived in force and are delivering visible results.

The galleries are filling again. The chants are growing louder and more confident. The beautiful game has returned to Shillong with a force and depth that promises to echo for generations to come.

(And as an aside: with the FIFA World Cup 2026 now upon us, may the best team win. After all, it is O Jogo Bonito. The Beautiful Game.)

Malnutrition Among Children in Assam: What NFHS-6 Tells Us

By Aakash Boral

The sixth National Family Health Survey (NFHS-6, 2023-24) data was released by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare on the 29th of May. As the NFHS 6 reveals--Assam has the highest prevalence of severe wasting among children under five years of age in the country.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines malnutrition as deficiencies, excesses or imbalances in a person's intake of energy and/or nutrient. In children, it encompasses both undernutrition (wasting, stunting, underweight and micronutrient deficiencies) and overnutrition (overweight and obesity). Although overnutrition is an emerging problem—largely due to the nutrition transition occurring in the country with cheap and easy access to refined carbohydrates, sugars and unhealthy fats—for the scope of this discussion, we would specifically be focusing on undernutrition in children, which for Assam, continues to be a pressing challenge.

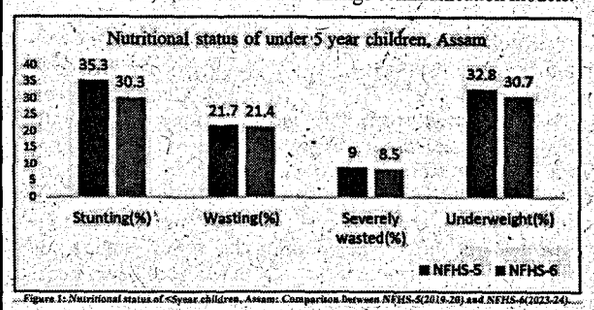

Figure 1: Nutritional status of <5year children, Assam: Comparison between NFHS-5(2019-20) and NFHS-6(2023-24).

The NFHS-6 nutritional indicators for children below 5 years in Assam show marginal improvement. Wasting (low weight for height) and severe wasting (very low weight for height) prevalence stand at 21.4% and 8.5% respectively, and show a marginal drop of .3% and .5% points as compared to NFHS-5-(2019-20). To put this in context, as per NFHS 6, Assam has the highest percentage of severe wasted children in India and has the 4th highest prevalence of wasting among all the states.

Underweight (low weight for age) among children has dropped from 32.8% (NFHS-5) to 30.7%(NFHS-6). Stunting (low height for age) remains the only child health nutritional indicator showing a substantial decline from 35.3% (NFHS-5) to 30.3%(NFHS-6). The reduction in stunting, a measure of chronic malnutrition, despite very little change in acute malnutrition indicators like wasting, requires careful consideration. A conservative estimate of severe wasting using the publicly available data for number of 0-5 years children in Assam and prevalence at 8.5%, translates into 1,57,260 severely wasted children in Assam. This is indeed a significant figure.

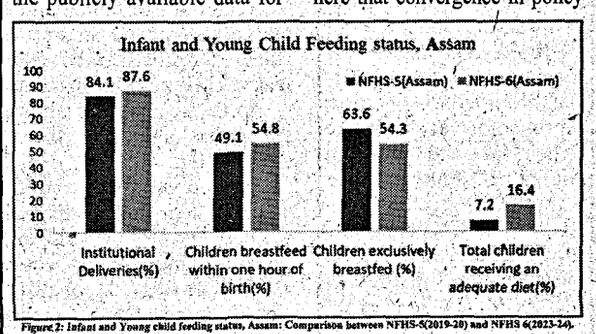

Figure 2: Infant and Young child feeding status, Assam: Comparison between NFHS-5(2019-20) and NFHS 6(2023-24).

Malnutrition follows a vicious inter-generational cycle, where an undernourished society/community risks perpetuating malnutrition across the next generations. Children are the most vulnerable in this loop. For example, a severely wasted child is up to 11 times more likely than a well-nourished child to die of common childhood illness such as Pneumonia. The WHO estimates that nearly half of the death in children under five years are linked to undernutrition and mostly occur in low-and-middle income countries. To bring down the malnutrition figures for Assam would require working on two specific fronts. Firstly, it would require systemic efforts to prevent the onset of malnutrition in children. And the second would entail timely identification of existing malnourished cases and facilitating their management. There is enough evidence which shows that strengthening Infant and Young Child Feeding practices (IYCF) help prevent malnutrition. This includes early and timely initiation of breastfeeding, exclusive breastfeeding till 6 months of age, timely initiation of complementary feeding at six months, and, age appropriate, adequate and diverse complementary feeding.

The NFHS data for Assam shows that proportion of children aged 6-8 months receiving complementary feeding along with breastmilk has increased from 51.7% (NFHS-5) to 66.6%(NFHS-6). The percentage of children aged 6-23 months receiving adequate diet has more than doubled to 16.4%(NFHS-6) from 7.2 %(NFHS-5), a figure that still remains far from satisfactory. Moreover, a lot of ground remains to be covered when it comes to establishing breastfeeding in the early hours of a child's birth.

As, the data indicates, while the institutional deliveries in Assam are around 87.6%, however, the proportion of children breastfed within one hour of birth is only around 55%. Exclusive breastfeeding in 0-6 months children continues to be a challenge and has in fact gone down from 63%(NFHS-5) to 54%(NFHS-6). Taking into account the wide geographical and cultural variations in the state and varying degree of vulnerability in terms of tea garden population, char areas, sixth-schedule areas and forest villages; strengthening IYCF practices in Assam would require community specific approaches with targeted social behavioral change communication models.

Prevention requires a multi-pronged approach. At one level, the quality and quantity of calorie intake and nutrient levels in the population have to be maintained and therefore food and nutrition security becomes a priority. Existing support mechanisms like the Supplementary Nutrition Program (SNP) for children, pregnant and lactating women should be revamped to meet community level acceptance standards. Further, the state can also support nutritionally at-risk mothers by providing extra nutritional support as is the case with severely malnourished children. A holistic approach to prevent malnutrition would require a life cycle perspective with simultaneous interventions across domains of Food and Nutrition, Health, Education, Water and Sanitation among others. With the government already recognizing this, under Mission Saksham Anganwadi and POSHAN 2.0., there is an ongoing effort to work convergently amongst various government departments to address the cross-sectoral determinants of malnutrition. It is imperative here that convergence in policy translates into convergent action and reaches the last mile.

The second way to deal with the problem is to manage or treat the existing malnourished cases. At the population level in Assam, it is the Anganwadi Worker (AWW) who performs growth assessment of under 5-year children and identifies them as malnourished or normal. Identification has to be accurate and timely linkages with health facilities must be ensured. Institutionalizing capacity building exercises for AWWs on Growth Monitoring and related subjects could help improve quality and ensure timely identification. For a State with a prevalence of 8.5% severe wasting, it is also essential that Community Level Management of Malnutrition for medically non-complicated cases, complements facility-based management in Nutrition Rehabilitation Centers (NRC). The National Protocol for Management of Malnutrition, which focuses on community level management, should be prioritized, streamlined, and implemented with equal ownership by Health and WCD Department. A successful implementation of this Protocol could be a significant step towards managing malnutrition in the state.

Over the years, Assam has done particularly well in improving the maternal and child health status of its population. It's time we prioritize nutrition planning and intervention to improve nutrition outcomes of our children in the state.

(The author is a development professional working in the Public Health Nutrition sector in Assam for the last seven years).

Letters to the Editor

Sleeping Beauties in Our Political Fables

Editor,

The BJP-led NDA Government and above all, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have now completed twelve years continuously at the apex of Indian politics. Add to that his long tenure as Chief Minister of Gujarat, and Modi occupies a unique place in India's political history. Much has been written about his years in office. Much more will be written in the future. The shortest summary may be this: Modi survived self-inflicted crises such as demonetisation and the troubled rollout of the GST, while simultaneously navigating challenges not entirely of his own making—the COVID-19 pandemic, Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the disruption of global supply chains, the rise of Trump-style populism across the world, and the recurring tensions around the Strait of Hormuz. Admirers see resilience; critics see missed opportunities. Historians will continue the debate.

The condition of the opposition is hardly worth mentioning. Its weaknesses have been catalogued so often that they now resemble a technical formality. Yet the most intriguing feature of contemporary Indian politics is neither the government nor the opposition. It is the state of the people themselves—the Janata.

The Janata are permanently in election mode. They discuss politics with the enthusiasm of cricket commentators and the memory span of social media feeds. Every scandal becomes a trending topic, every policy a battlefield, every speech a national event. Yet when one looks at electoral outcomes, a curious pattern emerges.

In the 2014 Lok Sabha election, the BJP secured 31.34% of the popular vote and won 282 seats. In 2019, its vote share rose to 37.70%, translating into 303 seats. In 2024, despite a reduced tally of 240 seats, it still secured 36.56% of the vote. Across three elections, the broad contours of political preference have remained remarkably stable. This raises an uncomfortable question: have we, the Janata, achieved such a state of political enlightenment that we no longer concern ourselves with who represents us? Or have we simply become spectators rather than citizens?

Democracy demands more than participation every five years. It requires scrutiny, curiosity, and occasionally the willingness to disappoint our preferred political tribe. Yet increasingly, voters appear to treat politics as fans treat a sporting rivalry. Governments are judged not by whether they govern well, but by whether they defeat the other side. Oppositions are evaluated not by the quality of their alternatives, but by the cleverness of their insults.

The result is a strange political hibernation. Citizens remain awake for campaigns but asleep during governance. We rage over slogans but ignore legislative performance. We debate personalities while neglecting institutions. MPs are elected by millions and then often disappear from public examination until the next election cycle. In between, the citizen retreats into a comfortable slumber, occasionally waking up to repost a viral clip before returning to sleep.

Perhaps this is the great irony of Indian democracy. We are one of the most electorally energetic societies in the world, yet often one of the least demanding between elections. We celebrate voting day as a festival, but rarely treat citizenship as a year-round responsibility.

A Meghalaya Cabinet Minister once famously remarked that he could "sleep at home" and still win elections. The statement was intended as a display of political confidence. Yet it may also serve as an unintended commentary on the state of our democracy. Politicians can afford to sleep because voters often do the same.

If this trend continues, Narendra Modi—or whoever succeeds him—may well discover that campaigning is no longer the difficult part of politics. The electorate has become so accustomed to permanent political theatre that governance itself attracts less attention than the performance surrounding it.

The question before us is not whether any incumbent government succeeds or fails, nor whether the opposition revives itself. The more important question is whether the Janata intends to wake up.

Yours etc.,
Narottam Subedi,
Shillong - 2

How consumers are taken for a ride

Editor,

If people think that buying products online from reputable companies is always guaranteed to be safe, then they are completely wrong. In the past one and a half months, I have had two bitter experiences with online purchases. About a month ago, I bought quite an expensive item from Amazon but received it "underweight" by exactly 100 grams. I put in a complaint, but nothing has come of it to this day.

Similarly in April, thanks to misleading ads on Amazon, I got tempted to buy a Pexpo Flexo 500ml steel flask, even though I didn't really need it. The item arrived within five days. Being tied up with other work, I didn't check it right away. Two weeks later, I opened it and found its stopper was totally defective. It just spun around on its axis. It wouldn't seal, which meant I couldn't keep water or tea hot for even half an hour.

I instantly contacted Amazon. After being kept on hold for about 40 minutes, a customer service representative finally came on the line. He assured me of a replacement and mentioned that the product carried a one-year warranty. To see if the company would honour its word, I called Amazon four more times. Each time the wait was longer, and each time nothing changed. Honestly, it felt like I was stuck in a never-ending game of "hold the line." No replacement ever arrived. I finally "gave up," realizing it was a sheer waste of my precious time.

If a person like me, who knows to raise complaints, is left in the lurch, what about others who do not even know how to seek redressal? My neighbour told me she received a mobile phone worth about Rs 13,000 with a manufacturing defect. She discovered it after three weeks and tried contacting Flipkart, but got nowhere. I am now convinced that warranties in online purchases of small items are nothing more than a mirage.

What I can conclude from this is that every day, millions of customers are let down. What's worse is if one is determined to call the consumer forum whose toll-free number the government advertises periodically, no real solution ever comes. No kidding, I have several frustrating experiences from the past to prove it. In fact, there is practically no authority for poor consumers to turn to for support, not even the police.

For instance, for many years, Jio, Airtel, and Vodafone have been selling "data plans" without providing any service at all. Charging money without providing service is a criminal act right? Isn't it a bitter reality, while all concerned authorities stay completely mum? This is how countless poor consumers in the country are taken for a ride, indeed looted outright, by unscrupulous merchants day after day and hour after hour.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

Needed Street Lights in Jingkieng Nongthymmai

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the tragic incident that occurred on June 14, 2026, when the body of a man and a woman were recovered from a local pan shop at Jingkieng Nongthymmai.

While the circumstances surrounding the deaths are still under investigation, the incident highlights a long-standing issue in the locality—the absence of functional street lights along the main road. As a resident living adjacent to the area where the incident occurred, I have witnessed how the lack of proper street lighting has left the neighbourhood dark and unsafe, particularly during the night.

Adequate street lighting is essential for public safety and can help deter criminal activities. I therefore earnestly request the authorities concerned, particularly the Shillong Smart City Project and the MEPDCL, to take immediate steps to ensure that street lights are repaired and made fully functional.

Yours etc.,
Gracefulness Rymmai
Via email

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

"The hallmark of the human species is great adaptability."

— David Grinspoon

The Shillong Times

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Beating the retreat

THE world heaves a sigh of relief, anticipating a reprieve from the over three-month-military engagement that President Donald Trump led against Iran in the Asia-Middle East region. A peace deal has "almost" been worked out and a final agreement would be expected in 60 days' time. Curiously, however, the contours of the agreement between the US and Iran are still unclear. Claims suggest the two sides signed the deal digitally, and the details will likely release on Friday. A promise is that the blockade on the Strait of Hormuz would end immediately, restoring normalcy for free movement of ships. The first signal of a deal came from intermediary Pakistan, which got a rare opportunity to come up-front and broker a deal of high international significance. By now, both Trump and the Iranian leadership have confirmed this. While this has come as good news to all, a problem remains: the issues that the US raised in starting this war are apparently unaddressed.

By all appearances, the interim agreement only facilitates an extension of the ceasefire that the US announced in April. This gives the contending parties two more months' time to hear each other and forge a consensus. The main issue cited by Trump for militarily striking Iran was his desire to force an end to Iran's nuclear missile pursuits – which naturally poses a threat to the world, especially since Iran is under a dictatorship and could go to any lengths. This issue remains still under discussion. Trump had also stated that the US "wants" Iran's oil, by hook or by crook – his perceived idea being to effect a regime change there and hand-over power to a puppet, who would be more than willing to do America's biddings. For Trump, with an Iranian leadership refusing to budge an inch and the war failing to progress as expected, an abrupt admission of failure would now be disastrous. Obviously, he's seeking a phased pullout without giving Americans an abrupt jolt or jerk. He has that much sense. The 60-day period for the final round of negotiations might or might not result in a comprehensive peace pact.

Trump's palpable failure in Iran, however, bodes well for the world even as people across continents suffered immensely due to the war that killed some 7,000 people, brought untold miseries to Iranians, and raised the price of every item across continents and markets. Once a price spiral occurs, a return to the previous level is unlikely. The US itself is caught in serious inflationary pressures as a result of Trump's misadventure. Hopefully, Trump's failure guarantees global peace to the extent that he will think twice before acting next. Had he had his way in Iran, he would have looked around for the next prey. After all his game in Venezuela for a regime change was such a huge success.

Meghalaya: Catching Up With its Sister NE states

By Harsh Shrivastava

My last article citing official data from the Union Finance Ministry showed that Meghalaya's per capita income is getting poorer relative to the rest of India—falling from 74 percent of the national average to 67 percent of the national average in nine years. Looking at the same per capita income data given in the Economic Survey, I was also surprised to know that Sikkim, Mizoram, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and even Tripura are all richer than Meghalaya. Only Manipur is poorer. In this article, I want to explore how Meghalaya can learn from its sisters and at least figure out how to catch up with them, if not with the rest of India.

Before I start I want to address one comment about my per capita income. It was said that Meghalaya is poorer because it has a lot of migrants. All those migrants are also earning—otherwise why would they come to Meghalaya. When they earn, they contribute to the state's economy, just as residents do. If they are increasing the denominator (number of people), they are also increasing the numerator (Gross State Domestic Product) and would probably make no difference to the per capita income. A thought experiment: if all the migrants—most of whom are equally citizens of India, magically went away, would Meghalaya be richer or poorer.

The latest IMF data show that Bangladesh's per capita income has crossed India's. This implies that Bangladesh is much richer than Meghalaya. In a few years, it will be unlikely that richer Bangladesh citizens will want to come to poorer Meghalaya, and those who did come may start thinking of going back.

Now to the other NE states. Let's start with Sikkim. There's a lot for Meghalaya to learn from Sikkim. It's smaller than Meghalaya but much richer. Why? How? Its literacy rate and other human development indicators are higher than even the rest of India, but that's no excuse for Meghalaya to not invest in schools, hospitals, teachers, and rigorous studies to catch up. That's not just the State Government's job—but also society's, ADCs', parents', and others'.

Sikkim is also rich because it has hydropower projects. But Meghalaya has coal, limestone, and uranium—all three of which could and should generate more wealth. Sikkim has tourism, but so does Shillong. Sikkim has spending by the army, but Shillong has the Air Force, so that cannot be the reason why Sikkim continues to be richer. Lots to learn from the smallest of the eight sisters.

Mizoram next. What does Mizoram have that Meghalaya doesn't have? Meghalaya has more tourists, more well-known culture, football, schools, and colleges. Meghalaya has the minerals, which Mizoram doesn't. And yet, Mizoram is getting richer. Its neighbouring country, Myanmar is poorer than Meghalaya's neighbour, Bangladesh, so there is less trade. What is it about Mizoram's culture, attitude towards work and wealth, peace, education, cleanliness, governance can Meghalaya learn from?

Arunachal Pradesh. Again a state that's less well-connected than Meghalaya, with fewer tourists, yet doing better. Yes, there are mega dams coming up in Arunachal Pradesh and Assam on the Brahmaputra. When ready, they will contribute to the state, but today, there must be something Arunachal is doing right.

If Meghalaya is a complex state, Assam is even more so. It is India's only state which is simultaneously multilingual, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic. And it suffers floods every year. So why is Assam steadily prospering economically—question to ponder.

Nagaland is also richer than Meghalaya. Nagaland is so much like Meghalaya. Proud tribes, strong culture, Christian values. Meghalaya also has richer Bangladesh than Nagaland's poorer Myanmar. Many more tourists. More minerals. And in some ways less complex politically and culturally. Despite all that, Nagaland is richer than Meghalaya. This must be the most urgent task of any well-wisher of Meghalaya. To find out what and how Nagaland prospered more. What business does Nagaland have that Meghalaya doesn't. What does its society do that Meghalaya civil society can learn from? What's Nagaland's secret sauce?

Tripura is more remote than Meghalaya. Poorer connectivity and long distance means the costs of moving material into and out of Tripura is more than Meghalaya. Consequently, Shillong has far more tourists than Agartala, in addition to its refugee problems. There's rubber in Tripura, but as I said Meghalaya has coal and limestone and uranium. There's something happening there that has made the state and its people outperform Meghalaya.

Meghalaya has more natural advantages than every other state, apart from Sikkim; it also has prospering Bangladesh next door. Leaving aside Sikkim, all other NE states have broadly similar health and education. All get roughly the same support from the taxpayers of the rest of the nation as does Meghalaya. Most states have many tribes resident in them. All have vibrant civil societies and relative peace, except Manipur, which is consequentially poorer.

Lastly, politics. Barring Manipur, all other NE states are as stable as Meghalaya. All have hard-working leaders, many of whom have been re-elected, so they are experienced, as are their ministers. Thus, it cannot be said that Mizoram has "better" politicians than Meghalaya or Sikkim or even Tripura. There is no "excuse" for Meghalaya to comfort itself in its relative poverty by blaming other factors.

The answer to what can Meghalaya and its people do better to catch up with their sisters has to come from first understanding each state and drawing appropriate lessons. What are their businesses doing more—since it's business that creates wealth. What are their youth doing more—are they working harder? Why? Is society more cohesive—if so how, especially almost when every state also has tribes and non-tribal fellow citizens. Is governance better? Again, how, when the quality of the executive, legislature, and judiciary—the three pillars of government—is broadly the same in all NE states.

Understanding and learning from other NE states isn't going to easy. First, it requires an acceptance that there is something to learn from others. From that learning comes the next more difficult question. How to convert the learning to a willingness to improve. Business must improve. Society must improve. Government must improve. And they must coordinate better with each other and support the bigger goal of creating wealth and move Meghalaya from second to bottom to second to top, at least in the next ten years.

Willingness to change has to be followed by capacity to change and then actual change. What behaviours do businessmen and employees and entrepreneurs need to learn that their counterparts in other states already have. What should mid and lower level officials in government do more—should they work longer hours? How can they be assisted to do more to meet the increased expectations that everyone else will have of them. What can civil society do that is positive and delivers prosperity, rather than always worrying about dividing the cake in many more ways so that each group gets a more fair share. As societies and individuals get richer, societies will change. What change is to be accepted as desirable, and what change, especially tribal culture that needs to be supported.

What more can migrants from Meghalaya who are working in Gurgaon and Bangalore do to contribute to this proposed "Great Catch-up Plan". Apart from remittances, how to get more investment and more ideas from them. Just as more young Meghalayans are migrating to other parts of our nation, residents from other states are also migrating to the state, as is their right. How to make these so-called outsiders feel welcome and urged to do even more for their new state.

All these are urgent questions and they need to be studied by a representative group of Meghalaya citizens—the proposed independent think-tank that I wrote last time. Studying and then adapting to Meghalaya's unique needs and then taking everyone along in ways that complement what the government is already doing. The other states aren't standing still; they are also growing, as is the rest of our nation. So Meghalaya must grow faster than everyone else to catch up. I'm confident that it will.

Bob's Banter

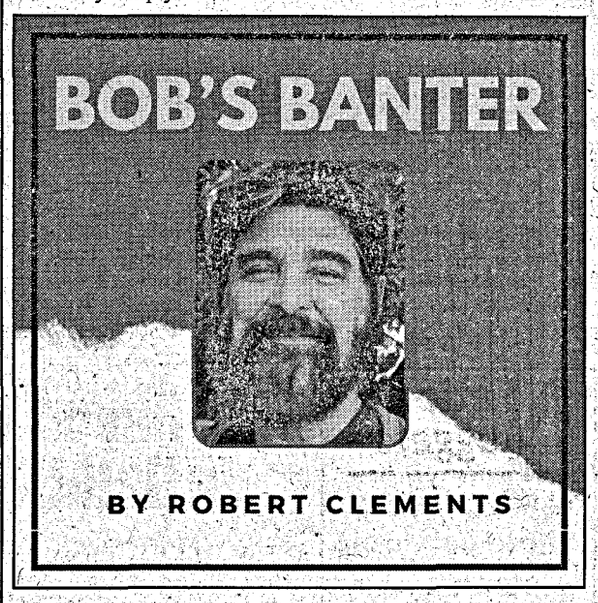
By Robert Clements

Trash..!

Last night at the gymkhana I pressed the lift button to go down. The lift, however, had other ideas. It went up. I stepped out and immediately wondered whether I had accidentally reached the municipal garbage department. The room was covered with paper. Not decorated with paper. Covered with paper.

For one terrifying moment I thought I had stumbled into a secret recycling factory. Then I discovered the truth. A housie game had just ended. The players had vanished. Their slips had not. The floor looked as if a paper cyclone had swept through the room and then decided to retire there permanently. If someone had told me it was modern art titled The Emotional State of a Bingo Player, I might even have believed them.

What amazed me most was that dustbins stood nearby. Not one. Not two. Several. They stood there looking lonely, neglected and deeply offended. I could almost hear one dustbin saying to another, "Do you think we smell?" The other replied sadly, "No. I think they simply don't know what we are for."



Poor fellows. Imagine being built for one noble purpose and then spending your entire life watching people throw rubbish everywhere except inside you. Dustbins must have the lowest self-esteem of any object ever invented.

And that, sadly, is often our national problem. We know how to buy things. We know how to use things. We know how to break things. We even know how to complain when those broken things aren't replaced immediately. But putting rubbish into a dustbin seems to require years of advanced scientific research.

Perhaps there should be a three-year university course. Bachelor of Dustbin Studies. Practical examination included. "Candidate successfully identified the opening of the dustbin and deposited one paper cup without missing the target."

Gold medal guaranteed.

Instead, we throw garbage from moving cars as though distributing free samples to the neighbourhood. We spit on roads with astonishing accuracy. We toss plastic bottles into drains and then express complete surprise when the first heavy shower converts our streets into rivers.

Every monsoon we stand knee deep in water asking, "How did this happen?" The drains would probably answer if they could. "You stuffed us with plastic for eleven months," they would say. "What exactly did you expect us to do?"

Imagine throwing your dinner plate onto your living room floor every night. Your children add a few banana peels. Your spouse contributes empty snack packets. Grandma throws in yesterday's newspaper. Then the entire family sits down and wonders why the house resembles a landfill.

Absurd? Yet that is precisely what we do with our cities. Roads, parks, railway stations, beaches and footpaths are treated as though someone else's mother will come and clean them.

Many years ago I visited a country where people carried an empty chocolate wrapper in their pocket for hours until they found a dustbin. Nobody applauded them. Nobody photographed them. They simply believed that public places belonged to everyone and therefore deserved respect.

Somewhere along the way we have convinced ourselves that public property belongs to nobody. And when something belongs to nobody, we treat it like dirt. The saddest part is that when somebody protests, the reaction is often not gratitude but anger.

"How dare you tell me not to litter?" "Who are you to ask me to stand in a queue?" "Mind your own business." Poor Mr Dastur, the senior citizen from Thane, discovered this the hard way. He merely asked a cab driver not to spit on the road. Instead of receiving a "Thank you, Sir. You're right," he was assaulted.

Imagine that. The criminal was not the man dirtying the city. The criminal became the man asking him not to. How upside down can a society become?

There are many others like Mr Dastur who quietly object when they see wrong being done. Some are abused. Some are threatened. Some decide that silence is safer than speaking up. And every time that happens, bad behaviour grows a little bolder.

Good citizens retreat. Bad citizens advance. That is never a healthy equation. Meanwhile, the outside world is beginning to react.

For years we assumed our behaviour was our private affair. Not anymore. People notice everything. They notice the noise at airports. They notice the pushing in queues. They notice the litter left behind after picnics. They notice passengers throwing food packets from train windows. They notice tourists carving names onto monuments and leaving beaches looking as though a cyclone had passed through.

Slowly, unfairly perhaps, a stereotype begins to form. "Indians are loud." "Indians are dirty." "Indians don't respect public spaces."

Nothing hurts more than being judged because of someone else's behaviour. Millions of decent, thoughtful Indians pay the price for the carelessness of a few thousand. One careless act does not remain personal. It becomes national. Every wrapper thrown from a car window quietly tells the world something about us.

Every plastic bottle left on a beach becomes an ambassador of our manners. Every act of littering writes another sentence in the story others tell about our country.

The tragedy is that India has never lacked great values. Our culture has always spoken about cleanliness, discipline and respect for nature. Mahatma Gandhi repeatedly said that cleanliness was as important as godliness. Our scriptures teach us to care for the earth. Our parents taught us not to dirty our own homes.

Perhaps the next lesson is to realise that the street outside is also our home. The park belongs to us. The railway station belongs to us. The gymkhana belongs to us. The beach belongs to us.

When we dirty them, we are not insulting the municipality. We are insulting ourselves. Because no amount of charm, influence, clever explanations or even a strategically presented box of Melody chocolates can permanently cover up bad manners.

Sooner or later, trash tells the story. And unfortunately, it speaks very loudly while raising quite a stink..!

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

Letters to the Editor

Examining the Parity of Evaluation across Optional Subjects

Editor,

I had been debating whether to write this letter for some time. After all, I do not wish to appear as someone who questions the established processes of our respected Meghalaya Public Service Commission. However, the imbalance taking place in the name of competition compels me to express my views here.

I am referring to certain posts in which the examination pattern requires candidates to choose one optional subject (Mathematics, Statistics, Economics, or Computer Science) to attempt the major portion of the paper (which is worth 200 marks and each question carrying 2 marks), alongside a general paper (which is worth 100 marks). On the surface, this appears fair and flexible. However, through no fault of the candidates, the system has created an imbalance. While these disciplines are all academically rigorous, they differ significantly in their nature, assessment methods, and scoring patterns.

One can easily understand the time difference between solving numerical questions and answering straightforward concept-based questions. Yet both carry the same marks and are judged together for the same post.

To be precise, for subjects like Mathematics, speed and accuracy are critical, as they rely heavily on time-consuming numerical problems. In contrast, based on my analysis of 11 MPSC previous-year question papers (available to me) spanning multiple posts and years (2019–2025), the maximum number of numerical problems found in any single Economics paper was less than 8 out of 100 questions, and the overall average was approximately 2–3 numerical questions per paper, most of which only asked for formulas. On the other hand, Mathematics papers consistently contain 50–90 numerical problems. For Statistics, the pattern is inconsistent; sometimes the paper can be heavily numerical, while at other times it contains a mix of numerical and theoretical questions. Yet candidates from all three subjects are evaluated on the same raw-score scale.

The fault lies neither with candidates who choose a more theoretical paper nor with the question of whether one subject is easier than the other. The real concern is whether direct comparison of marks across fundamentally different disciplines accurately reflects merit. A score of 160 in Mathematics may not represent the same level of difficulty or effort as a score of 160 in Economics. Without careful consideration, candidates may be advantaged or disadvantaged simply because of the subject they selected.

What is to be done? One possible remedy is separate cut-offs for each subject, so that candidates compete only with those who have chosen the same optional subject. However, I acknowledge a limitation: Perhaps the number of aspirants opting for the Statistics paper at present is comparatively lower than the number of aspirants opting for other optional papers; the cut-off mark may become disproportionately low, thus creating a situation where an unsuitable candidate could also be selected.

Therefore, a better approach is the normalisation of raw scores, a practice already followed in many national-level examinations. Alternatively, for posts requiring specific skills, the examination could perhaps give appropriate weightage to those subjects. Ultimately, fairness in competitive examinations is not only about conducting the test properly; it is also about ensuring that candidates from different academic backgrounds are assessed in a genuinely comparable manner.

The objective is not to question the integrity of any examination, but to encourage a constructive conversation on how merit can be assessed as fairly as possible across different disciplines. I raised my concerns, or perhaps the concerns shared by other aspirants as well, with the hope that it reaches the table of the policymakers, educators, and examination authorities for necessary review and discussion of the current system.

To conclude let's accept that the need for individuals capable of carefully assessing, analyzing, and interpreting data in this data-driven world is a topic for another day. However, for today, allow me to take a first step towards that through this message that I'm trying to convey.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Need of the Hour: Proper Bus and Taxi Stands in Shillong City

Editor,

Shillong, the capital city of Meghalaya, is rapidly facing an alarming traffic crisis. Shillong, once known for its peaceful environment and smooth roads has now become a city struggling with heavy traffic congestion every single day. The growing problem has badly affected students, office-goers, shopkeepers, tourists, and ordinary citizens. One of the main reasons behind this worsening condition is the absence of proper bus and taxi embarkation and disembarkation stands across the city for picking up and dropping passengers. Every day, buses, local taxis, shared sumos, and private vehicles stop randomly along roadsides in busy areas such as Police Bazar, Bara Bazar, Laitumkhrah, Dhankheti, and Mawlai. Due to the lack of designated transport stands, vehicles occupy large portions of the roads while waiting for passengers. This results in traffic jams, road blockages, delays, and inconvenience for commuters and pedestrians alike, though the government has tried various means like appointing traffic police in busy areas, but traffic jams still occur.

Shillong's roads were originally built for a much smaller population and fewer vehicles. However, with rapid urban growth, increasing tourism, and rising numbers of private vehicles, the city's infrastructure is no longer able to cope with the growing traffic pressure. During peak hours, like when dropping kids off at school, people often spend long periods stuck in traffic, wasting valuable time and fuel. The situation clearly shows that establishing proper bus stands and taxi stands inside Shillong city is the need of the hour. Organized transport hubs would help regulate traffic movement and prevent vehicles from stopping randomly on roadsides. Separate spaces for buses, local taxis, and shared taxis would ensure smoother transportation and reduce congestion in crowded areas.

Traffic congestion is also affecting the environment. Vehicles trapped in long queues release harmful smoke and increase air pollution, which threatens Shillong's natural beauty and clean atmosphere. Better transport management through proper stands can help reduce pollution and make the city cleaner and more organized.

The people of Shillong have repeatedly expressed their frustration over the worsening traffic problem. Citizens strongly feel that the government must now take the matter seriously and act without delay. The construction of proper bus and taxi stands should not remain only a proposal on paper but must become an urgent developmental mission. The government, urban authorities, and transport departments must work together to identify suitable locations within the city. Timely planning and implementation can greatly improve traffic management and restore convenience for the public.

To conclude, proper bus and taxi stands are an urgent necessity. If immediate action is not taken, traffic congestion will continue to worsen in the coming years. The citizens of Shillong sincerely request the government to look into the matter seriously and take concrete steps towards building an organized, efficient, and commuter-friendly transport system for the future of the city.

Yours etc.,
Dr Rilang Iki Bamon,
Via email

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

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"Intelligence is the ability to adapt to change."

— Stephen Hawking

The Shillong Times

Vol No:LXVIII No.306 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, JUNE 18, 2026

JHADC & Codification of Clans

THE Dorbar Ki Waheh Kur (Dorbar of clan elders) of Jaintia Hills has given the Jaintia Hills District Council an ultimatum to come up with a codified list of clans in Jaintia Hills so that the customary practice of adopting the mother's clan or the matrilineal system is upheld, honoured and not eroded by individuals who in recent times have adopted the father's clan name for various reasons. In a matrilineal society marriage within the kur or clan is taboo. Considering kinship ties exist between different kurs, such as Lamare, Sun Sumer, Papang and Susngi and intermarriage between these clans is prohibited, the chances of intermarriage between these clans cannot be ruled out without proper documentation. In his book, *Khasi Customary Law*, Daniel Stone Lyngdoh lists the clans related through kinship ties and those that exist as a single clan. This extensive research by the author must be acknowledged as it involved significant time and effort. The JHADC should refer to this book if it lacks the wherewithal to codify the matrilineal clans of the Jaintias.

Since the Khasi and Jaintia society claims to be matrilineal it is important that customary laws based on that foundation are upheld at all times. Although the Constitution of India does not mandate such codification of customary laws because cultures evolve and are not set in stone, codification creates a written record, reducing confusion and conflicting interpretations while protecting customs from erosion. The modern age has seen migration and changing lifestyles with younger generations often unfamiliar with oral tradition. Codification would ensure that co-sanguinity or the biological relationship between blood relations, is not violated. Codification enables the present generation to internalise their customary practices. Oral tradition relies on wise elders retelling stories, which is no longer possible today. Consequently, younger generations grow up without knowing or understanding these customary practices, such as recognizing their "Kur" (mother's clan relatives) and "Kha" (father's clan relatives). Recording customary laws helps preserve them for future generations.

It is easier for Courts and traditional institutions to refer to a written code rather than relying solely on memory or differing interpretations. Hence this reduces the possibility of arbitrary decisions. Besides codified practices reduce the chances of discriminatory practices.There has been a long-running debate over whether the Autonomous District Councils should formally codify customary laws relating to clans, inheritance and traditional institutions. The Councils have the constitutional authority to legislate on these matters but they are not under a constitutional obligation to do so. Hence the Dorbar Ki Waheh Kur of Jaintia Hills may claim that the Sixth Schedule requires District Councils to codify clan laws but that claim is not supported by the text of the Constitution. The Schedule grants the power, not a mandatory duty, to legislate on such customary matters. However, now that the matter has reached a point of conflict between traditional institutions and the District Council which is seen as the upholder of traditional and customary practices, a debate on this issue is called for.

Nongjrong: Beyond the Clouds

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

In recent years, Nongjrong has emerged as one of the most sought-after tourist destinations in Meghalaya. Tourists often visit to watch the morning clouds envelop the Umngot Valley, giving the impression of standing above a sea of clouds. Last week I went back to Nongjrong, not to partake in the majestic beauty that the landscape holds, but to understand the importance of the Umngot River for the community. The valley that people come to see from near and far has been carved by the river, which emerges from Lum Shillong, cuts through the tableland creating deep canyons along the way, and ultimately debouches into what is today Bangladesh. In certain areas, such as Nongjrong, the canyon opens up into a broad valley, with the silt deposited by the river creating fertile land suitable for rice cultivation. The process of erosion and deposition would have taken tens of thousands of years, maybe even millions, considering Meghalaya is part of one of the oldest landmasses in the world, Gondwana, which crashed into the Asian plate, giving rise to the Himalayas.

Tourists arrive in Nongjrong to watch the clouds engulfing the valley and see them dissipate as the morning progresses. Every now and then, while standing at the viewpoint and gazing at the spur that juts out from the main ridge on which the village is located, you can watch clouds climb over the canyon walls and settle gently upon the village. In the past, this was a common occurrence, with community members recalling that the sun would remain hidden for several months at a time due to the heavy rain. On the tableland in particular, heavy fog makes visibility very poor. This, as was explained by the community, is the reason rice does not do very well on the tableland.

Although paddy fields are also present in villages such as Umsawwar, Moosakhia, and Samanong, located on either side of the Umngot River, yields are not particularly high. In fact, in Samanong, a farmer told me that because of the decrease in rainfall over the last few years, the number of rain-free days has increased and this has helped farming. One of the side effects of climate change could very well be that rice may make a comeback to the southern part of Meghalaya, where millet was the dominant crop for a long time. I say comeback because rice was brought by the Austroasiatic speakers (today the Khasi are among their descendants) as part of their migration from southern China, after it was first domesticated in the wetlands along the Yangtze River. They carried the crop with them as they migrated through mainland Southeast Asia, and upon reaching South Asia, it was hybridized with the semi-domesticated variety found on the Gangetic Plain, giving rise to the now-common indica variety.

Since the Khasi were part of the ancient group that brought rice to South Asia, it was always surprising that the crop was missing from southern Meghalaya. Most intriguing to me was the case of Sohra, where there is today no indication of rice cultivation. In fact, in Nongtraw, a village in Khat-ar-Shnong, some farmers attempted to cultivate rice, but the crop did not perform well. In contrast, a farmer from Pyrda told me that she had also tried growing rice in her garden and achieved good results. These, however, are recent attempts, and there seemed to be no evidence of rice cultivation in the area in the past, unlike millet, which is still cultivated today. Then, in 2022, a paper was published by Sukanya Sharma titled Cherrapunjee: An Example of Human Impact on Environment, which revealed that evidence of domesticated rice was discovered in the area. Though the dates were not given in the paper, it does appear that there were attempts at rice cultivation in the region, but the very heavy fog meant that it did not do well. Therefore, the community must have decided to switch to millet, as this was also a crop discovered at Lumsohpetbneng, one of the earliest Neolithic sites in the entire Northeast.

So, while millet became an important crop, Nongjrong is still cultivating rice along the banks of the Umngot Valley. Incidentally, millet was an important crop in the hilly parts of the village, while rice was cultivated only in the valley. The suitability of rice cultivation in the village is due to the topography (silt-filled valley) and elevation. The village is located at 1,500 metres above sea level, while the valley is around 1,000 metres, roughly the same elevation as Bhoirymbong, where paddy fields are ubiquitous. Seven varieties of rice are grown by the community, one of which is actually a variety known as Lum Kba, i.e., hill paddy. When asked about paddy cultivation in the village, the residents informed that they had been practising it for a very long time, and the stories surrounding the village's political history suggest that it is itself a very old settlement.

Nongjrong was a flashpoint between the two great Khasi kingdoms of the past, Hima Khyrim (Shillong) and Hima Jaintiapur. In the past, the village fell within the domain of Hima Jaintiapur, and this connection is testified to by the fact that the Syntengs (another name for the Pnars, who make up the majority population of the hill portion of Hima Jaintiapur) would come to the village and collect water from a spring they call Syntu Ksiar. The villagers call it Luwah Shnong. Water from this spring was considered sacred and was used for performing rituals during Behdeinkhlam. Even today, villagers consider the water special and claim that it does not spoil even after being stored for several months. Though the people of Nongjrong do not consider the spring sacred, they ensure that the trees around it are not disturbed and take care to maintain it.

Exactly when it happened, the villagers were not sure, but there was a conflict between Hima Khyrim and Hima Jaintiapur in which the former prevailed, and the Umngot became the boundary between the two Himas. Similar stories are also reported from Umsawwar to the south, which has likewise preserved the memory of the battle between the two rivals. Hima Jaintiapur came into existence when Hima Sutnga conquered Jaintiapur and added it to its domain. This appears to have happened around 1500 CE, after which the names of Khasi rulers began appearing, the first being Parbat Ray Syiem Sutnga, the first non-Hindu ruler of Jaintiapur, which had previously been a Hindu kingdom. In fact, the name Jaintiapur comes from Jayanti Devi, the Hindu patron goddess of the kingdom. Thus, the village existed before the arrival of the British in the early nineteenth century. There is also mention of Madur Maskut, a powerful Hima that predated Hima Jaintiapur and existed alongside Hima Shillong and Hima Sutnga. So, if we go by the chronology preserved in folklore, the village is at least more than 500 years old. Therefore, it is not just a village with a beautiful sunrise but also an ancient settlement with a rich history.

Perhaps the best example of this living history is the ossuaries found throughout some of the most beautiful spots in the village. These are stone structures where the bones of ancestral clans were laid to rest. One of those clans was Marboh, who, according to one of the elders, introduced the cultivation of Khasi mandarin to the village. This happened many generations ago, and today the slopes around Umngot are filled with orchards of the fruit. Incidentally, it is also a crop that originated in the mountains of southern China and may have been brought by the Khasi along with rice. The oranges from Meghalaya were then taken to the Middle East and Europe by traders and crusaders. Today, it is one of the most important cash crops for the community.

The cloud-covered valley, home to some of the most beautiful paddy fields and a rich historical legacy, came under threat when plans for the construction of the Umngot Dam were announced. I was informed by the villagers that they opposed the project because they were afraid they would lose their paddy fields, which were their most precious possession. If the project ever returns, they would be ready to oppose it once again.

Nongjrong and the surrounding area can tell us a great deal about the history, culture, and traditions of the Khasi. It would be a great loss if all of this were to disappear. As for tourists who visit next time, try exploring for more than just the sunrise. It is a very beautiful village, indeed, but it is also an ancient one with a rich and fascinating history.

(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)

Banning Telegram Is Futile and Illegal

By Vedant Choudhary

The Central Government's decision to ban the messaging application "Telegram" till 21st June, 2026 is futile, disproportionate, illegal, and is bound to fail. 21st June is the date on which the re-examination of the National Eligibility cum Entrance Test (NEET) is scheduled to take place. The National Testing Agency (NTA) hopes that banning Telegram will absolutely halt the NEET paper from leaking. Not only is such a belief a stretch of imagination, it is also evasive as it pushes the blame of the paper leak on an application and its features instead of finding flaws in the logistics of the examination. From a legal standpoint this order is in violation of Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000 [IT Act], and falls foul of a line of judicial pronouncements on internet bans.

In Anuradha Bhasin v. Union of India, the Supreme Court was deciding the validity of the indefinite blanket ban on all internet services in the State of Jammu Kashmir in the erstwhile state of Jammu Kashmir. The Supreme Court held that the Government could impose a blanket ban only if such ban (i) has a rational nexus (explained below) to the objective of the ban, (ii) the ban is proportionate, and that (iii) the ban was the least restrictive measure.

Further, the present ban has been imposed under Section 69A of the Information Technology Act, 2000, and is in clear violation of the text of Section 69A. Section 69A confers the Government with the power to block from public access any information only in six conditions, i.e., a threat to the sovereignty, integrity, security, or defence of India, or a threat to public order, or in order to prevent incitement of any cognizable offence relating to the above five grounds.

The NEET paper leak, although it is serious, does not fall within the limited scope of Section 69A. The Government has no power to introduce a ban in order to prevent NEET from leaking. Section 69A is a special power to be exercised in limited circumstances, and cannot be invoked routinely, especially in order to cover up for an ineffective examination mechanism.

In Shreya Singhal v Union of India, the Supreme Court was testing the constitutionality of several sections of the IT Act, including Section 69A. In its judgment the Supreme Court had upheld the constitutionality of Section 69A on the sole ground that the powers conferred under the Section were narrow and to be exercised only in specific, and limited circumstances. Therefore, using Section 69A to ban Telegram is a violation of

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The present Ban fails all three tests. In plain English "rational nexus" means connection. Therefore the Government must establish that the ban has direct connection with objective the ban is trying to achieve. In this case, it is common sense that Telegram is not the "cause" of the paper leak, and therefore, naturally banning telegram will not imply "no paper-leak". The feeble reasoning that the paper was leaked on Telegram, or using telegram does not make it the cause of the problem. Therefore, there is no rational nexus in this ban.

This ban is not even proportional. Telegram's Chief Executive Officer claims that there are about 150 Million users of Telegram in India. It is unclear how widespread the NEET paper leak nexus is, but by any estimate the number of users utilizing Telegram to sell/purchase the leaked paper have to be a miniscule fraction of its total users. Banning the platform entirely, thus compelling all of its users to bear the consequences of the conduct of a handful is plainly disproportionate.

Finally, in every case where an absolute ban is imposed, it must be shown that such "blanket ban" was the least restrictive measure that could be implemented. It is clear that banning the entire application is not the least restrictive measure. Several alternative measures could have been implemented. For example, specific accounts, or channels could have been blocked. Alternatively, channels with keywords such as "NEET", "medical" etc. could have been blocked. It is impossible to accept that banning the entire application was the least restrictive measure. Therefore, clearly the present ban fails on all three tests.

the Section, and a glaring abuse of the law. Using the section for purposes other than those stipulated in the section, a flagrant violation of the Court's judgment in Shreya Singhal.

The NEET paper-leak calls for a reconsideration of the entire framework in place for conducting the examination. Banning an application, or arresting a few accused is far from the solution. Banning Telegram achieves nothing. After all, it was merely a messaging platform. The ban merely closes one window, while leaving several others open. Does the Government intend on playing whack-a-mole with every single messaging application? Telegram could have assisted the propagation of the "leaked paper" but by no means was it the cause. Telegram does not open then vault and retrieve the paper from NTA's safe.

It is frustrating to see a simply worded law being violated and abused. However, one cannot help but sympathize with the Government on its abuse of Section 69A. Through a systematic and routine abuse of Section 69A (be it banning BBC's documentary on the Godhra riots, in 2023; blocking accounts of leaders of Farmers Protests, in 2021; or banning the official account of Reuters on X) the Government has conditioned itself to believe that anything unpleasant on the Internet can be taken down through Section 69A.

While it is comforting to see that the Government finds the NEET paper leak unpleasant, and is desirous of taking action, it cannot be missed that the Government is yet to learn the true meaning, essence, and use of Section 69A.

(Vedant Choudhary is a lawyer practising in Delhi)

Letters to the Editor

MECOFED's Unreliable LPG Distribution

Editor,

The Meghalaya State Co-operative Marketing and Consumers' Federation Limited (MECOFED) was for many years now one of the most reliable LPG agencies in Shillong. Once you have made your LPG booking, you just waited and did not have to worry - once a month, they would come and make the deliveries of the cylinders right to your doorstep. Their delivery boys were courteous and helpful.

Of late, however, this agency seems to have joined ranks with some of the other notorious LPG supply agencies of Shillong. This agency has failed to supply fresh cylinders to many parts of Nongrah, particularly the Nongmarboh area around the Windemere Estate area, now for more than two months, and in the Mawlynrei village. For one, you cannot get through the registered MECOFED landline as it seems to be "unreachable" all the time. The mobile number given is also always "busy," with the result that you have no other contacts to enquire of deliveries or to register your complaints. You are then given the cell number of a manager/delivery boy, and when contacted, you were told that delivery would be made in about two days' time, which of course, never happens. When contacted again, one was then asked to come to a certain point to collect the cylinder – now this is impossible as by that time, all young residents have left for work, and you cannot expect the very senior citizens to lug the cylinders on their own to that pick-up point. It is alleged that while they deliberately do not make the deliveries, they are selling the refill cylinders in the black.

They have also recently come up with another delaying tactic – when they made their last delivery two months back, we were told by the delivery boys not to book in advance but wait and book only when they come to the house for delivery! I found this peculiar. In fact, I know that an announcement was even made through the dorbar's PA system in the adjourning village of Mawlynrei that one should not make a booking in advance. But I was told that when deliveries were attempted yesterday (15.6.26) to the consumers in Mawlynrei, the MECOFED delivery boys refused to supply the refills because the resident consumers had "not booked in advance!" I strongly believe that all these tactics are so that they can profit in the black market.

I, therefore, request the Managing Director of MECOFED to kindly look into this problem of the supply of LPG refills.

Incidentally, the state government (and the central government) have now and again assured its citizens that there is no shortage of LPG. If this is the case, then why do consumers now have to wait for over two months to get their refills? As someone said, we members of the public should not lie – that is the prerogative and right of only the government! And since it is constantly trumpeted that there is no shortage, may I request the new dynamic Deputy Commissioner, East Khasi Hills to take this matter up with MECOFED and stop these illegal activities that inconvenience the public and us senior citizens.

Yours etc.,
Eugene D. Thomas
Shillong – 6

Football- Meghalaya's Pride and Joy

Editor,

After reading the special article titled "From Hiatus to Heartbeat: The Beautiful Game is Reviving Shillong's Soul" authored by Banwan Lyngdoh and published on June 16, 2026, I was delighted and filled with a deep sense of appreciation for Shillong's rich footballing heritage. The vivid description of the Meghalaya Super League final, the packed stands at the SSA Stadium, and the excitement that brought parts of the city to a standstill reminded me that football continues to occupy a special place in the hearts of the people of Shillong and Meghalaya.

As someone from Tura, I could easily relate to the emotions described in the article. Those who witnessed football at the Chandmari Playground during the 1990s would recall the excitement local matches generated. Crowds gathered in large numbers, young footballers played with passion and pride, and the game brought people from different walks of life together. While Shillong has long been recognised as the football capital of the region, football's appeal extended well beyond the city and found an equally enthusiastic following in places like Tura.

For many who were fortunate enough to grow up in Shillong, football was never merely a sport; it was a way of life. The game occupied a special place in the social and cultural fabric of the city. Local tournaments attracted passionate crowds, neighbourhood rivalries generated immense excitement, and football grounds served as gathering places where communities came together in a shared celebration of sporting excellence. It was this unique football culture that earned Shillong its reputation as one of India's most vibrant football centres.

The article rightly highlights the renewed momentum that football is experiencing today. The growing crowds, investments in grassroots development, support for leagues and young players, and the dream of making Shillong the Football Capital of India are all encouraging signs. It is heartening to see the game once again generating the kind of excitement that many thought belonged to an earlier era.

Yet, as we celebrate this resurgence, it is equally important to remember those who kept the flame burning during less promising times. Any discussion on the growth of football in Meghalaya would be incomplete without mentioning the late Kitdor Syiem and P. D. Sawyan, who founded Shillong Lajong Football Club in 1983. Their vision went far beyond establishing another football club. They believed in the immense potential of local talent and sought to create opportunities for young footballers from Meghalaya to compete at the highest levels.

Over the years, Shillong Lajong became a source of pride not only for Shillong but for the entire Northeast. The club inspired countless youngsters to dream of becoming professional footballers and proved that players from this region could hold their own on the national stage. For many football lovers, Lajong represented hope, identity, and the belief that local talent, when nurtured properly, could achieve great things.

The scenes witnessed during the recent Meghalaya Super League final suggest that football's bond with the people remains as strong as ever. The cheers from the galleries, the enthusiasm of young supporters, and the pride associated with local clubs all point to a tradition that has endured through the years.

The future of football in Meghalaya certainly looks bright. However, while looking ahead, it is worth remembering the pioneers, clubs, coaches, administrators, and supporters whose dedication laid the foundation upon which today's revival stands. Their contributions deserve to be celebrated alongside the achievements of the present.

At the same time, I do hope that the current enthusiasm for football is not merely a passing fever generated by the ongoing FIFA World Cup 2026. The true measure of success will not be the size of crowds during a season of global football excitement, but whether this renewed interest can be sustained long after the World Cup has ended. Continued support for grassroots development, local leagues, coaching programmes, and community football will be essential if Meghalaya is to build a lasting football culture rather than experience only a temporary surge of enthusiasm.

The beautiful game has always been an integral part of Meghalaya's story. If the present momentum can be sustained beyond the excitement of international tournaments, football, I feel, will continue to inspire, unite, and nurture talent across the State for generations to come.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Tura

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"Things do not change; we change."

— Henry David Thoreau

The Shillong Times

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Defeated dynasties

REGIONAL political entities across states, where greedy satraps called the shots for many years, are in for a major re-configuration: The recent set of assembly elections and the failures for the satraps are acting as a prompter for a well-deserved rejig. Mamata Banerjee, who challenged the BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi full throttle for years, has fallen flat – and her Trinamool Congress is splitting and decimating itself like ninepins. Banerjee and her clan are speechless. In Maharashtra, the Shiv Sena is facing a similar predicament, with its MPs planning to desert the ship and join hands with others, possibly ending up in the BJP-NDA camp. In Uttar Pradesh, the Samajwadi Party of Akhilesh Yadav, crafted by his seasoned father Mulayam Singh, is facing the prospect of a vertical split, and chances are that the dissidents would end up in the saffron camp. Very likely, the BJP is behind the vertical splits in several political entities. Tamil Nadu, which saw the abrupt rise of TVK, at the behest of popular actor Joseph Vijay, is seeing the likely disintegration of the traditional Dravidian parties-- the AIADMK and possibly the DMK too. The AIADMK was almost rudderless after charismatic J Jayalalithaa passed away, without leaving an able successor to lead the party. DMK, where father Stalin is ailing and in a mood to hand over the baton to his son Udayanidhi, might end up with such a fate as many in the party are not happy with the succession plan.

A similar succession plan charted out by Uddhav Thackery for the Shiv Sena, by having his son, former minister Aditya, at the party's head is causing heartburns for senior Sena leaders. Mulayam Singh who effortlessly hoisted his son Akhilesh Yadav at the head of the party and government had got away with his act. There was no open resentment to this within the party, which was then a powerful entity. Now that the SP is languishing in the sidelines, with the BJP running the state government for consecutive terms, those that are opposed to the family supremacy in the party are biding their time. Lalu Prasad Yadav, who first put his wife into the CM saddle and then handed over leadership to his two sons, lost his upper hand in Bihar politics. Crafty Nitish Kumar stole the wind out of Lalu's sails. The Abdullahs in Kashmir, though they faced odds, are still in circulation. But, the architect of Telangana State, K Chandrashekar Rao who won power for two terms has been sidelined by a resurgent Congress party in Telangana – and he along with his family clan have been driven out of power by people's power. However, in adjoining Andhra Pradesh, chief minister Chandrababu Naidu and son Lokesh are hectoring the scene now.

Hints, overall, are that dynastic politics has its limitations – this, with a rider that the Nehru family remains an exception. The sacrifices of the family for the nation through four generations, including assassinations of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, are fresh in people's memory. The family, it is well acknowledged, is the glue that binds the party together.

Stop Playing the Fool With Education: It's Weighing Us Down

By Patricia Mukhim

When we were young kids in school and got into mischief during class hours the teacher would thunder, "Don't play the fool or I will make you stay back after school." That was the worst threat. No one wanted to be punished and to write 100 times: "I will not talk in class." Now we have come a full circle to circa 2026 and it is not the kids but the system which we call the "Government," that is supposed to run everything to the advantage of the people who voted the 60 "public representatives" in successive elections. We never asked whether those we elected actually "represent" us or their own political and financial interests. Firstly we don't use our goddamned brains during elections. We throw away our thinking caps to the first dustbin and start repeating the rhetoric spouted by political party A, B, C. These political parties know our weaknesses so well and know we can be bribed not by money but by something as cheap as a lilting melody (Remember the song, "Ha U Prah?"Weren't we all singing along each time that vehicle carrying volunteers passed our homes? So that's who we are. Suckers for a song ; a rhetoric; a punchline but never the real thing.

For 50 years we never questioned why the government continued to pay teachers who were not teaching anyone because no students attended their schools? Meghalaya has 206 such schools. One can guess that politicians started them all, yielding to pressure from constituents who wanted teaching jobs for their children or for themselves. With no inspection such schools continued to function with no one any the wiser as to how no Education Minister since 1972 had the moral spine to shut down the schools. Obviously there might have been children who attended the school initially but seeing that teachers were not interested in teaching and attended school only when they felt like, the parents must have admitted the kids to the local missionary school. But even here, there's competition. If the Catholics opened a school the Presbyterian church too would set up one just a little distance away. Then both would compete for students and both would become non-viable. But that's how it has always been in Meghalaya.

So this state that lives largely in the clouds has an astounding total of 14, 582 schools for a population of 29,66,889 people of which only about 30% of the population are in the age group of 6-17 years or the school going age. So 30% of 30 lakh people equals 9 lakh school going children. If we divide 9 lakh by 14,582 schools we get just 62 students per school. Obviously schools like RK Mission and the Catholic and Presbyterian and perhaps a few Government schools must be having over a thousand students. So the rest of the schools that subsist on government funds and whose teachers are paid by the government are the ones that have been functioning in the breach and need to be disbanded.

If Tripura with a population of 36.74 lakh population has only 4929 schools what is Meghalaya with a smaller population of 29.66 lakh people doing with 14,582 schools which is over three times the number in Tripura? Tripura has 36,433 teachers of which only 4262 are paid by Government and only 43 schools are government aided. Compare that to Meghalaya where 7,783 schools are government-run, 4,172 are government-aided, and the teacher strength is 55,160. Yet Tripura is performing far better than Meghalaya in the Performance Grading Index (PGI). The PGI developed by the Union Education Ministry assesses the quality of school education across all states. The PGI assesses (1) Learning Outcomes (2) Access (3) Infrastructure and Facilities (4) Equity (5) Governance processes (6) Teacher Education & Training. Having watched the kids attending schools in rural areas from close quarters where one classroom serves three or more classes (don't ask how teaching is even possible in such situations) and teachers treat their jobs like a part time occupation one is not at all shocked by the PGI rankings. It had to happen. But it is a bit late in the day.

So now that the State Government is well informed about the non-performing schools numbering nearly 2500 (206 with zero enrolment and 2269 with single digit enrolment) where teachers are actually teaching ghosts, what is its immediate plan of action? Well, the Government which dares to close down nearly 2,500 non-functioning schools must be ready to face a backlash. But why should a Government that has the courage of conviction to confront years of deception and manipulation have to pay the price? Should the people of Meghalaya not stand up now and urge the Government to shut down non-performing schools that have only teachers drawing salaries and no students? Is that unfair? Should those who have not taught for decades still be paid salaries? Where is the justice here?

And yet in this land of clouded minds, no Government has had the moral courage to address the issue head on. Now there is a reason why students don't attend government schools. The buildings are dilapidated; the roofs are leaking; the benches and tables are all half broken. That is exactly the situation of the Raibah Government Lower Primary School when Batskhem Thabah was posted there as a teacher post the Covid years. Batskhem was a tour guide before he became a teacher and he was aware of Raibah. Many of us of course heard of this village for the first time when we were invited for the launch of a living library in 2025. When Batskhem arrived at Raibah he found not a single student. So what did he do? He shared his anguish with a few dear friends who helped raise funds to repair the leaking school roof and the broken window panes. Then Batskhem urged the Rangbah Shnong and the parents to send their children to the school, promising that he would give them the education they yearned. In this effort Batskhem was also assisted by the Social Work Department, St Edmunds College and Sociology Department of Williamson Sangma University. Green Hub an NGO based at Tezpur also helped fund the living library where students could actually learn about the environment and the medicinal herbs that grew around the village.

In fact, visitors to the Raibah School were taken on a round of the village by the students who smartly demonstrated their knowledge about the different leaves, plants and roots and their medicinal and nutritional value. That indeed is true education and one is grateful to Batskhem for giving his all to Raibah school which is now functioning well, even after he was transferred out to another Government Upper Primary School in Mawlaiteng, Sohiong Block. It takes a good teacher to turn a school around. The question is whether the system allows the best teachers to enter the teaching "profession," not a salaried job. Some heads of educational institutions have frankly stated that the biggest impediment to a good educational system are the School Managing Committees headed by the local Rangbah Shnongs who pull strings to get teaching jobs for those they favour and the teachers' lobbies who only promote their self-interests. Sadly there's no one to lobby for the students. However, not all Rangbah Shnong are manipulative. There are those who are deeply concerned about the state of education in their area and who collaborate with teachers to upgrade the schools in their areas.

As of now even if 2,500 schools or more are closed down out of the 14,582 schools, Meghalaya still has more schools than it can efficiently run and its resources are still pilfered. It's time now for the MDA Government to take stock and make decisions that will benefit students in the long term. The MDA Government cannot turn around education if it avoids hard decisions. Granted that this is a problem which the MDA Government inherited from past governments but now that all irregularities are exposed, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma must lead from the front and make hard decisions.

It's rather sardonic that the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) which should focus on student welfare, has never made this debilitating educational issue its agenda. We have never heard them discussing the poor PGI ranking and the sad state of affairs of most government run schools. Now that the KSU knows about the ghost schools with no students and only teachers who are regularly paid, will they take up this issue in right earnest?

If not, other activists must rally around this issue. Better still the next election issue in 2028 should harp on the poor state of education in Meghalaya and how it can be remedied. We the people should stop listening to politicians who preach clean governance but lack the courage to tell the Government to shut down the non-functional schools.

The MDA Government has provided school buses for urban school children. It's time to provide school buses to rural kids who have to walk several kilometres to the nearest school. Meanwhile what is irksome is that the MDA Government believes it can solve every problem by coming up with stylish acronyms. Recently the CM launched the "CM LEAD Fellowship" under which 12 fellows will be deployed across districts to strengthen planning, coordination and monitoring of education reforms. May we know who these 12 Fellows are and their expertise? What are the educational reforms that Government has churned out? What are the outcomes expected and what are the timelines? We need to know because we the public are as interested in the state of education as the Government is.

A white stripe exposes new political faultlines in Mumbai

By Jagdish Rattanani

An unseemly and unprecedented divide has sprung up in Mumbai, carrying with it communal overtones and linguistic differences that are dividing communities and sending warning signals of what can go wrong when principles of secularism are compromised and hatred is spread to divide communities for political mileage. The 'them'-versus 'us' divide that has become the staple of majoritarian national politics may have targeted a particular group or community but the hate that feeds the divisions can fan fires in places that will surprise and shock.

This time, the divide has taken the form of an ugly dispute between some members of the Jain community and local Mumbai residents who complain that some Jain customs and practices violate public space sanctity and bring aspects of the Jain religion onto the roads, literally. The Jain community has been so triggered by the developments that it has surprisingly and rather quickly offered an uncannily aggressive view of itself, shaking the long held and much-admired principled position of Jains on strict adherence to non-violence. It is known that Mahatma Gandhi's globally acclaimed philosophy of non-violence and satyagraha was inspired by the Jain ideals of extreme and rigorous non-violence.

"The controversy started when a few Jain followers painted a white stripe in the precincts of a Mumbai residential colony to mark out a pathway on which the Jain munis could walk and therefore be encouraged to visit the building. Moss or algae will not grow on an oil-painted white strip, enabling Jain sadhus and sadhvis to walk without harming life and keeping to their strict vows of non-violence. The white band also keeps the pathway cooler for Jain ascetics who usually walk barefoot."

The controversy started when a few Jain followers painted a white stripe in the precincts of a Mumbai residential colony to mark out a pathway on which the Jain munis could walk and therefore be encouraged to visit the building. Moss or algae will not grow on an oil-painted white strip, enabling Jain sadhus and sadhvis to walk without harming life and keeping to their strict vows of non-violence. The white band also keeps the pathway cooler for Jain ascetics who usually walk barefoot. The trouble is the building compound was marked without asking other non-Jain members, who are up in arms at this affront and have demanded that this unilateralism by the Jains in the housing society must not stand. One protestor asked if it would be okay for him to paint saffron stripes and for another community to paint the compound in green, presenting the dispute in stark terms that highlight how much anger and bitterness has seeped into relations once thought harmonious.

The controversy of painted white stripes began in the North Eastern suburbs (Ghatkopar) and quickly spread to neighbourhoods in North Central and South Mumbai with other complaints added against the Jains and their practices. The dispute has turned more heated as the Jain community has not quite given in or even apologised. In fact, videos have shown a Jain senior dressed in traditional white robes rudely asking the local Maharashtrian protestors to keep their voices down as they speak. In an even uglier turn, a purportedly pro-Hindutva monk who is a Jain asked the protestors to fight other prominent minorities rather than Jains, injecting new communal hatred and targeting other minority groups not involved in this dispute at all. That disturbing video by the monk ended with a warning to local protestors: 'hum ne choodiyan nahi pehni.' (loosely meaning, 'we can fight back'), which only served to display the violence deep inside the non-violence professed by the monk in question.

It is worth noting that the dispute began with a simple ask: any changes in common areas of residential colonies must follow a due process, as is indeed the norm of democratic societal functioning. In that, the local voices of protestors are making a fair point. The initial aggressive response of the Jain community has, however, challenged the foundational tenets of Jainism, which hold that ahimsa is the highest religion and the supreme duty (Ahimsa Paramo Dharma). According to scholar Chakravarthi Ram-Prasad, Mahavira, the founder of Jainism, had the great insight that reality is "many sided" and is realised in a multiplicity of ways that we cannot always reconcile. The Jains are a tiny but very influential community, many of them speak Gujarati or Marwari and a large percentage works in powerful and successful businesses. A Pew survey in 2021 reported that seven-in-ten Jains say they feel closest to the BJP, while just 8% say they feel closest to the Indian National Congress. Pew said Jains are more likely than other religious communities in India, including Hindus, to feel political affinity with the BJP. That highlights another source of friction seen in Mumbai, based on language and political affiliation. Local opposition has been increasingly vociferous against groups from the neighbouring State of Gujarat being awarded key projects in Mumbai. The latest example of this is the growing opposition to a mega redevelopment project awarded to the Adani group in the western suburbs. After securing the redevelopment of the Dharavi area (some 625 acres), followed by Bandra Reclamation (about 24 acres), the group has now won the contract for the Motilal Nagar project in Goregaon in the western suburbs, spread across some 143 acres, according to reports.

Adding to the pressure is another type of discord with objections to shop names displayed in Gujarati, opening a faultline that shows how large capital, local area dissonance and political resentment can spiral out of control. The perceived push from a political leadership rooted in Gujarat, the engineered split in the locally rooted Shiv Sena, the resentment it brewed among ordinary citizens and the history of Maharashtra -- which was born on May 1, 1960 after a bitter struggle that split the erstwhile Bombay State into the distinct linguistic States of Maharashtra and Gujarat -- are all complex and contributory factors to the evolving political unrest.

Broadly, it is clear that anything which breaks social cohesion, encourages crony capitalism or exploits communal divides builds a tinderbox that can burn the entire house down. The answer lies, quite simply, in turning back to the path of non-violence, and standing with Mahatma Gandhi and his principles of satyagraha. This is a path that the nation and the community of Jains will need to re-learn.

(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

Mystery Of The Appearance & Disappearance of Coal in East Jaintia Hills

Editor,

Yarns and myths were perhaps part of our weaning process as a Jaitbynriew. The folklores that we as Khasis love to ruminate about were handed down to the present generation by word of mouth. Our forefathers were great storytellers, concocting legends and fables for fascinated audiences sitting around the fireplace. Today, storytelling platforms have changed, shifting from the humble fireplace to the flickering screens of TV channels/social media news channels. For example there was the astounding revelation by no less than a Minister of the state government about the buoyancy and wispy nature of 4000 MT of seized, illegally mined coal that mysteriously vanished from government-custody storage sites. The Minister claimed it was all washed away by the monsoon rains, and that was that. No one came forth to challenge this absurd fig leaf of an excuse which failed to even convince a 6 year old kid. Nevertheless, a story was born that water can dissolve coal and it will be passed down to future generations as wisdom of our elders. What rot!

Then on June 18, 2026, The Shillong Times carried a story on its front page, about the unexplained mystery of how a cement company - Star Cements to be precise— managed to procure more than 2.9 Lac MT of coal , that it claimed it imported from outside the state. As per the news report the company is unable to substantiate the source of this coal which most probably was transported illegally from local rat-hole mines of East Jaintia Hills. It was a blatant defiance of the ban on coal mining by both the NGT and the Supreme Court. The High Court-appointed committee has now recommended that the State Pollution Board conduct a spot investigation on the coal imported by Star Cements. Now the value of 2.9 lac MT of coal is colossal and the punishment for this fraud can even include fines together with closure of the factory itself. These are the known facts. Now it would be in the company's interest to kill such facts and simply allow the incident to become just another coal myth from Jaintia Hills. No doubt an attractive kickback would be available for anyone who can do this. In short, the temptation for a "Clean Chit" would be massive.

Now to ensure that the investigation by DMR proceeds along the lines of finding out the real truth, and not to be misled down the garden path by company interests, it is suggested that concerned local environmentalists (not government but private individuals with a environmentalist background) also be involved in the investigation. As a suggestion, HH Mohrmen, a prominent naturalist and environmentalist from Jaintia Hills, along with other like-minded people, should also be included in the DMR probe. The people of Meghalaya at least deserve to be told the truth, especially on issues of investments that fraudulently benefit only the 'High Level ' and not the public.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

Sabotage & Persecution

Editor,

Apropos of the news item that appeared in the front page of your newspaper ST, June 10, 2026 captioned "Rs-41.5 Cr fund delay: KHADC accuses MDA of political bias," I am indeed astonished to note the glaring hostility and political vendetta of the NPP led MDA government meted out to VPP currently ruling the KHADC. The CEM of the KHADC rightly accused the State Government of "Politically motivated financial sabotage."

It seems that the inordinate delay to release the funds is a deliberate attempt to cripple the administrative function of the Council. It is unfortunate and beyond my comprehension why the delay to release the legitimate share of Rs 41.5 Cr to KHADC on time whereas the State Government has already released the same to the JHADC and GHADC both headed by the ruling NPP. This is a case of not only discrimination and financial sabotage against VPP but is a strategic tactic to create an image in the minds of the public at large that the VPP is unfit to manage the KHADC and has failed to handle the administration of the Council effectively. In short the idea is to malign the VPP as having failed to run the KHADC well and thereby the message that voters should not vote for the VPP party in the next MLA election lest the State Government will also fail and go bankrupt.

But we are living in the 21st century and not in the era of stone age. People cannot be fooled and be misled just because of motivated and prolonged financial persecution that the VPP is facing in running the Council.

I appeal the people of Hynniewtrep in particular and the people of Meghalaya in general to keep in mind that the spirit of clean politics transparency and accountability committed and advocated by the VPP will fearlessly reign supreme now and in the future be it in the Council or in the state level. This inspiration I do hope will fructify if there is unity, love and understanding to save the future of our generation from the impending danger of a dark and dismal future.

Your etc.
Svetlana Wankhar,
Via email.

Zebra Crossing Imperative in Shillong

Editor,

I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the sorry state of zebra crossings in our city and the urgent need for enforcement of pedestrian safety norms. While zebra crossings are not legally required on every stretch of road in India, they are mandatory at designated intersections under the law. Motorists are legally bound to slow down, yield to pedestrians, and come to a complete stop behind the white stop line, ensuring the painted crossing remains clear for walkers. Under Section 184 of the Motor Vehicles Act, stopping on, parking on, or obstructing a zebra crossing is a punishable offence and attracts fines. In our city, zebra crossing markings and signs exist at a number of locations. Yet, in practice, none of them are truly functional and with no enforcement and little awareness among motorists, pedestrians are left to struggle and dart across busy roads. This not only creates daily hardship but also leads to avoidable accidents and unforeseen situations. Ironically, these faded crossings have become mere "beauty spots" on the road – painted for show rather than safety.

One cannot help but feel that these zebra crossings were installed only to meet the bare minimum obligations under pedestrian safety rules, and not with any real intent to protect lives. If the purpose was genuine, there would be proper signage, functional traffic signals, road markings, public awareness drives, and strict penal action against violators. I therefore earnestly request the authorities especially the traffic control to initiate suitable measures at the earliest. Pedestrian safety should not be treated as a mere statutory obligation to tick off a checklist. It is a fundamental right and a civic necessity. I hope the authorities will act decisively so that zebra crossings serve their intended purpose – saving lives, not just adorning the roads.

Yours etc.,
Krishnendu Deb,
Shillong.

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"The enemy of art is the absence of limitations."
— Orson Welles

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Who Will Enforce the SWM Rules 2026

RECENTLY the State Pollution Control Board organised a meeting at Windermere to announce the launch of the Solid Waste Management (SWM) Rules 2026 which ostensibly enforces stricter rules for waste segregation, stringent tracking via digital audits, and robust "polluter pays" penalties. The 2026 rules supersede the 2016 rules because the latest rules require all urban and rural local bodies to track waste digitally while holding large generators directly accountable for their footprint. The key features of the SWM Rules 2026 are a repeat of the 2016 Rules which speak of waste segregation into wet waste which is usually kitchen waste; dry waste which includes plastics, paper, metal, glass etc which are sent to Material Recovery Facilities (MRFs), sanitary waste which includes diapers, sanitary napkins etc., and special care waste which includes medicines, batteries and other hazardous items which cannot be disposed off with other waste but must be handed over to designated collection centres only.

The rules are fine except that implementation is and always has been the problem. Moreover, Meghalaya is currently generating more waste than its single dumping ground at Marten can handle. The waste collected there has become a hillock resembling those garbage mounds around the National Capital Region. Marten is thronging with crows that pick on the garbage mound, causing it to tumble down and be carried by rainwater to Umiam Lake. Perhaps the officials of the State Pollution Control Board should note this and seek timely action against it. The 2026 Act defines Bulk Waste Generators (BWG) as entities that generate over 100 kg/day, consume 40,000 liters of water per day, or exceed 20,000 sq. meters of floor space. Such entities must process wet waste on-site or obtain an Extended Bulk Waste Generator Responsibility (EBWGR) certificate. This would include in the main the hotels around the city of Shillong and beyond.

The Central Pollution Control Board will work closely with the State Pollution Control Boards to digitally track waste generation, audit what happens to the generated waste, and assess how much waste can be processed. For this a centralised online portal for solid waste management will be put in place. The 2026 rules will also strictly implement the Polluter Pays Principle which imposes specific environmental compensation and penalties for improper dumping or non-compliance. The Rules will also ensure that a circular economy is established where cement industries etc., increase their use of Refuse Derived Fuel from 5% to 15%. The large waste generators in the case of urban hubs in Meghalaya are places such as Iewduh, Police Bazar, Laitumkhrah, Polo and Jail Road markets to name a few and these generate the bulk of the garbage but without a foolproof system of disposing their organic waste most of which is dumped by the roadside or directly into the rivers flowing through Shillong City namely the Umkhrah and Umshyrpi. While the Chief Minister had announced that by the time Meghalaya hosts the National Games the rivers would be cleansed and visitors would walk around those rivers as they would do beside the River Thames in London, the reality is something else. Rivers continue to be dumping grounds for solid waste ranging from clothes to shoes to household garbage and no one is accountable – not the Dorbar Shnong; not the District Council and not the Municipality. All seem to have failed to tackle the solid waste challenge. Rules alone are meaningless if the enforcement is weak or non-existent.

The Roads to a New Meghalaya

By Prof Marco Mitri

Why the North East Infrastructure Summit marks not a moment, but a milestone in a longer story and why one man's name belongs at the centre of it..

Hon'ble Chief Minister Conrad Sangma did something this week that no Chief Minister of Meghalaya has done before him. He made the entire Northeast come to Shillong to talk about its future. And that is not a small thing for a state that, for most of its existence, had to go to Delhi and ask to be noticed. Because this time, Delhi came here. Eight Union ministries were present. All eight Northeastern states participated. And at the centre of it, laying foundation stones for new highways alongside Union Minister Nitin Gadkari, was the man who has spent eight years building toward exactly this moment.

It would be easy to treat Monday's events at Polo Grounds and the Lariti Centre as just another ribbon cutting, the kind every state government produces on a slow news week. But that reading misses what actually happened. The North East India Infrastructure Summit was not handed to Meghalaya. It was earned, the hard way, over years of a Chief Minister proving to the Centre that this state could be trusted with serious money and would actually deliver on it. What unfolded this week is the visible result of that trust. And the man who built it deserves to have his name attached to it, plainly, rather than buried under the vague language of "the government."

Shillong hosted this landmark Infrastructure Summit, not Guwahati, not Imphal, not Agartala. And that is significant, as it reflects Meghalaya's growing stature in the Northeast and at the national level. Under Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma's leadership, Meghalaya has evolved from being a peripheral player in regional development discussions to becoming a state that commands attention, attracts investment and shapes conversations on the future of the Northeast. In less than a decade, Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has transformed Meghalaya from a state often overlooked into one that is helping shape the Northeast's development agenda.

During the event at Polo Grounds, Union Minister Nitin Gadkari laid the foundation stones for four new National Highway projects and inaugurated two completed road projects, together valued at over Rs 3,214 crore. The new projects include the Pynursla Bypass, the Dhubri-Phulbari-Selsella stretch, the Tura Bypass, and the Selsella-Goeragre road, critical corridors that will strengthen connectivity across Meghalaya. Alongside these, two key projects, the upgraded Shillong-Dawki road and the Jowai Bypass, were formally opened after completion. And what makes this remarkable is not merely the investment figure. It is a fact that in a single day, Meghalaya saw four major highway projects move into the construction phase while two others were delivered and opened for public use. These are not promises for the future. They are visible indicators of a development agenda that is already being implemented on the ground. That Rs 3,214 crore, however, is only the smallest layer of what Meghalaya received this week. Nitin Gadkari told the summit that the state currently has 92 highway projects running at once, spanning roughly 1,600 kilometres, worth a combined Rs 52,400 crore and crucially, this is not a wish list. Of that Rs 52,400 crore, Rs 6,200 crore covering 820 kilometres is already built and open and another Rs 6,400 crore across 310 kilometres is under construction right now.

On top of that already moving pipeline, Nitin Gadkari announced fresh commitments worth roughly Rs 90,000 crore for the state: a Rs 23,000 crore greenfield corridor to Silchar, an Rs 8,500 crore expressway expected to cut the Guwahati-Shillong drive from two and a half hours to about one, a Rs 4,000 crore road through the Garo Hills to the Bangladesh border, and a further Rs 40,000 crore in additional commitments across the state. Stack the new Rs 3,214 crore, the existing Rs 52,400 crore pipeline, and the freshly announced Rs 90,000 crore together and Meghalaya has had more highway money put on the table for it in a matter of days than at almost any point in its history as a state.

Sceptics will say what sceptics always say about big numbers. That is a fair challenge and Nitin Gadkari himself acknowledged it on Monday, making clear that no further project moves without land acquisition and environmental clearance. But that caveat is precisely where Meghalaya's own record answers back. Rs 6,200 crore of highway money in this state is not sitting in a press release. It is built and open. Another Rs 6,400 crore is mid-construction. Meghalaya has already cleared the hurdles—land disputes, forest clearances—that routinely stall infrastructure ambition in far larger, far better-resourced states. That is not good fortune. That is the product of a Chief Minister who has spent years doing the unglamorous work of actually pushing approvals through, budget after budget, rather than treating each announcement as the finish line. And the roads are only the most visible layer of what Meghalaya has gained on Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's watch.

The state's economy has nearly doubled from Rs 29,508 crore in 2018 to Rs 59,626 crore in 2025. This expansion has been accompanied by record levels of infrastructure investment, rising state revenues and major improvements in connectivity. The pace of economic growth suggests that Meghalaya is no longer merely keeping pace with the region; it is increasingly setting the pace. What makes this difficult to dismiss as party messaging is that the loudest praise is not coming from Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's own party. Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman travelled to Meghalaya last July and told a public gathering that the state had spent every rupee of its Rs 5,400 crore central capital allocation, something, she pointed out, most states fail to do. She did not have to say that. She went further and wrote it up in the Hindustan Times under the headline "The Meghalaya Story: Realising Aspirations." Prime Minister Narendra Modi then called Meghalaya a "blueprint for a resilient and self-reliant India." Sit with that for a moment: the Prime Minister of India holding up a small hill state, run by a regional party leader, as a model for the rest of the country. That recognition is not handed out as a courtesy. It is earned by a government that has proven, repeatedly, that when Delhi sends money, Meghalaya spends it and shows results.

The pattern repeats across nearly every sector Meghalaya has touched in this period. Road spending is up to nearly Rs 5,000 crore over seven years—more, as Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has pointed out himself, than the previous administration managed in two decades. Umiam Lake received Rs 120 crore to become an actual tourism destination rather than a scenic pass-through. A Rs 162 crore digital library push reached 750 villages that had limited access to books, let alone broadband. Optical fibre coverage is up fivefold since 2014. The state's first rubber processing unit stands in the Garo Hills, giving farmers there a market that simply did not exist before. None of these alone would make a headline. Stacked together, across one continuous eight-year run, they describe a state that has been built sector by sector, not announced sector by sector. An honest piece has to include the part that is less flattering, because leaving it out would insult the reader.

Meghalaya's population has grown fast enough that per capita gains have not matched the headline GSDP numbers. Income per person has risen from roughly Rs 88,954 to Rs 1,57,141, real progress but proportionally smaller than the GSDP growth, moving the state only from 28th to 26th nationally. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma volunteered this himself, in the Assembly, without anyone forcing it out of him. That is worth noting precisely because it cuts against him: a leader confident in his underlying record can afford to admit where it falls short.

Why has this worked for Meghalaya when it didn't in previous years? Start with the unusual fact that the same man running the state also runs its Finance Department and has presented eight Budgets in a row himself. He set a target: Vision 2032, tripling the economy, breaking into India's top ten states on income and development indicators—the kind of target a leader only sets in public if he expects to still be answering for it years from now.

And then there is Delhi: Nitin Gadkari in Shillong this week, Nirmala Sitharaman here last July, DoNER ministers cycling through regularly. And Nirmala Sitharaman is back again in Shillong on Friday. A state that the Centre doesn't trust does not receive that kind of attention. It happens because Meghalaya has spent years building the delivery record that moves it up the queue, ahead of states with bigger populations and louder lobbies. Meghalaya has not solved every challenge and no responsible government would claim otherwise. But there are moments when a state's direction becomes unmistakably clear. This is one of them.

The North East Infrastructure Summit was more than an event. It was recognition of Meghalaya's growing importance in the region and of the development momentum the state has built over the past eight years. The highways announced, the investments committed and the confidence expressed by national leaders are all part of a larger story, one of a state that is no longer content to follow, but is beginning to lead. The roads being built across Meghalaya are not merely infrastructure projects. They are symbols of opportunity, connectivity and ambition. They reflect a vision that has consistently prioritised development and delivery. If Meghalaya's rise continues on its present trajectory, this period will be remembered as a defining chapter in the state's history and Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma will rightly be credited as one of the principal architects of that transformation.

(The author teaches History in NEHU)

Oil's peace dividend is real but no return to pre-war situation

6-12 Months required for Hormuz flows to be fully restored

By K Raveendran

The US-Iran deal marks a genuine easing of one of the most dangerous geopolitical shocks to hit the energy market, but it should not be mistaken for a reset button. The immediate risk of a military breakdown has declined, and that matters for every stakeholder: Washington, Tehran, Gulf producers, Asian importers, shipping insurers and consuming economies already battling inflation. Yet the oil market that existed before the war cannot simply be restored by diplomatic signature. The risk premium has not vanished. It has changed its structure, moving from the visible fear of missiles, mines and naval confrontation to the less dramatic but equally consequential uncertainties of compliance, sequencing and trust.

Before the war, oil prices were already showing a downward tendency. Slowing demand growth, stronger non-OPEC supply, the gradual cooling of speculative positioning and concerns over the durability of consumption in China and Europe had all placed pressure on crude. That bearish environment has not disappeared, but it has been overlaid by a new political memory. Traders, refiners and governments have now priced in the fact that the Strait of Hormuz can again become a pressure point at short notice. That experience has value in the market, and value in oil markets usually translates into a premium.

The most optimistic reading is that the deal opens the way for flows through Hormuz to recover more strongly than many had expected. If sanctions relief proceeds and the ceasefire holds, volumes could rise towards 14 million barrels per day by January, supported by the return of Iranian exports, greater confidence among shipowners and a gradual retreat of the geopolitical premium. That would be a major improvement from the wartime disruption and would ease pressure on import-dependent economies. It would also reduce the urgency of emergency stock releases, shipping escorts and costly rerouting. But even this constructive scenario does not imply a return to pre-war pricing, It implies a transition from acute crisis pricing to conditional normalisation.

The distinction is important. Markets do not only price today's physical barrels; they price the probability that tomorrow's barrels may not arrive. A ceasefire can lower the probability of immediate disruption, but it cannot erase the fact that the region remains crowded with unresolved flashpoints. Lebanon remains one of them. Any escalation involving Iranian-aligned actors, Israel, or Western military assets could quickly test the understanding behind the deal. Even if Tehran and Washington intend to hold the line, regional allies and proxies may not interpret restraint in the same way. Energy markets are particularly sensitive to such ambiguity because a small perceived threat to chokepoint supply can have an outsized impact on price expectations.

Sequencing is another weakness. The deal may be positive in principle, but its durability depends on who moves first, how quickly sanctions are lifted, how nuclear-related commitments are verified, and how maritime guarantees are monitored. If Iran expects immediate economic relief while Washington expects staged compliance, friction is inevitable. If shipowners and insurers believe legal waivers are reversible, they will move cautiously. If banks fear secondary penalties, oil trade will resume more slowly than the political language suggests. Physical flows can recover only when the commercial ecosystem around them feels protected. Tankers, letters of credit, insurance cover, port access and refinery procurement decisions all require confidence that the arrangement will survive beyond the next diplomatic dispute.

That is why the market response is likely to be uneven. The first phase is relief. Prices fall from panic levels as traders remove the most extreme war scenarios. The second phase is scepticism. Buyers ask whether barrels can actually move, whether sanctions waivers are enforceable, whether insurance costs fall, and whether Gulf shipping lanes are secure enough for normal scheduling. The third phase is adjustment. If cargoes move consistently and political messaging remains disciplined, the premium compresses further. But compression is not elimination. The war has created a new baseline of caution.

For Gulf producers, the deal is both stabilising and complicated. It lowers the risk of a regional conflict that could damage infrastructure and trade routes, but it also brings additional Iranian supply into a market already attentive to balance. If Iranian exports rise quickly, other producers may need to calibrate output more carefully to avoid a renewed price slide. The pre-war downward tendency in crude prices could reassert itself if demand remains soft and inventories rebuild. But because the market is no longer operating in a clean macroeconomic frame, every bearish signal will be filtered through geopolitical risk. That makes price formation more volatile than before.

For Asian economies, particularly large importers like India, the deal offers breathing space rather than comfort. Lower risk of immediate conflict helps inflation management, external balances and currency stability. Refiners gain optionality if Iranian grades become more available. Freight and insurance costs may ease. But governments will be reluctant to assume that the Hormuz risk has permanently receded. Strategic reserves, diversified sourcing and long-term supply contracts will remain central policy tools. The lesson of the crisis is not merely that diplomacy can reopen flows; it is that dependence on a narrow maritime corridor remains a structural vulnerability.

For Iran, the economic upside is clear. Access to oil revenue, banking channels and transport services could provide relief after prolonged pressure. But the political bargain is demanding. Tehran will need to show enough compliance to keep the deal alive while avoiding the domestic perception that it has conceded under pressure. Washington faces a parallel problem. It must convince allies, markets and domestic critics that sanctions relief does not reward escalation and that nuclear restrictions are credible. Both sides therefore have incentives to claim victory, but not necessarily the same understanding of what victory means. That gap is where future disputes may emerge.

The consensus that oil will not return to pre-war levels rests on this altered psychology. The market has learned that military risk in the Gulf can escalate faster than diplomacy can contain it. It has also learned that the legal and commercial plumbing of sanctions relief is slower than political announcements. Even if flows recover sharply by January, the memory of disruption will remain embedded in freight rates, inventory strategy and hedging behaviour. The market may stop pricing war, but it will continue pricing relapse.

The most credible outlook is therefore neither a full peace dividend nor a renewed crisis premium. It is a middle path: prices ease from wartime extremes, Iranian supply gradually returns, Hormuz traffic improves, and the largest shock scenarios fade. At the same time, a residual premium persists because the ceasefire is exposed to regional escalation, implementation disputes and mutual suspicion. Oil can fall from fear, but it cannot yet fall back into innocence.

(IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Shillong's irascible traffic

Editor,

It's a wonder how traffic administration in Shillong during VIP visits is so smooth and free of hurdles, given that the city is otherwise choking. The tax-paying "cockroaches" deserve little of this efficient traffic management in their everyday existence. Such enforcement of traffic norms seems to depend solely on VIP involvement.

On the other hand, the government seems to have found "employment" options in allotting parking franchises to the burgeoning urban unemployed who manage such spaces according to their whims and fancies. The stretch between the Assembly Press and the Wards Lake has become a nightmare for residents and passersby, as this space has been transformed into an undesignated Tourist Car zone, with multiple lines of parallel-parked cars making access difficult. Even when huge NO PARKING signs are posted, I was told by parking attendants that the area is a paid parking zone, and they seem to wield more authority than the traffic police.

As a resident of the area, I am not allowed to "park" in these spaces, even for a few minutes, while waiting to pick up an aged patient from the doctor's chamber in the Police Bazar area, which was "cleared" due to a VIP visit to the Marriott.

I do appreciate that urban congestion is a major problem, but transforming major public access roads into undesignated parking spaces with titular attendants acting as autocrats is only a temporary workaround. More importantly, allowing parking autocrats to define and designate parking spaces is a clear sign of institutional failure.

Yours etc.,
R. Dev,
Via email

India's Digital Revolution Ends with the LPG Cylinder

Editor,

The world is solving increasingly complex problems. Robots are performing factory work, artificial intelligence is writing codes, and autonomous systems are transforming industries. Yet many of us still struggle with a far simpler challenge: getting an LPG cylinder delivered on time. Recently, I tried booking a refill only to find the server down. A previous booking had been cancelled. What should have taken minutes became an exercise in repeated calls, uncertainty, and frustration.

Why can't LPG delivery work like modern food delivery or e-commerce platforms? A simple app could allow customers to track deliveries, view available stock, and even choose an express delivery option by paying a small additional fee when urgently required. Such a system would not only improve convenience but also create jobs for delivery personnel.

If we can process billions of digital payments every month and discuss a future driven by robotics and AI, why are we still making people wait and wonder about something as basic as an LPG cylinder and waste so much of time (time is money)

Sometimes progress is not about solving the most complex problems. It is about fixing the simple ones that affect millions every day.

Yours etc.,
Shekhar Singh
Shillong

Controversy over Mohenjo Daro's Dancing Girl

Editor,

The National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) recently found itself in the eye of the storm when it digitally sanitised an image of the iconic 'Dancing Girl' for use in a Class 9 arts textbook, justifying the change later by saying it was "not age-appropriate".

Historian Michel Danino pushed back, arguing that if that was the case, then children should be banned from the National Museum, New Delhi, where the original has been on display since 1947.

Discovered in Mohenjo Daro in 1926, the tiny but spunky, 4,400-year-old bronze sculpture has been the face of the Indus Valley Civilisation since Independence. It has also been celebrated in NCERT textbooks for decades in its authentic, confident, bare-torso form. So when the new Class 9 text-book featured a digitally shaded version that obscured the anatomical details of the Dancing Girl's upper body, effectively drawing clothing onto the figurine, historians and archaeologists sharply criticised the change, likening the modification to censorship rooted in Victorian morality.

The outcry eventually forced NCERT Director Dinesh Prasad Saklani to announce that the Council would restore to the text books the image that had appeared on their pages for more than a quarter of a century ago.

This is, however, not the first time that this historical artifact's appearance has been modified. In May 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi unveiled the mascot for the International Museum Expo at Delhi's Bharat Mandapam till then known as Pragati Maidan, which was an over-five-feet-tall "adaptation" of the Dancing Girl, roughly 15 times the size of the original.

On that occasion too, it had immediately invited a backlash from historians. Unlike the original dark-skinned, largely unclothed bronze statue, the modern mascot sported a lighter complexion, a shocking pink blouse and an off-white waist-coat, displaying simultaneously the government's colour complex, sense of aesthetics as well as prudery not to mention its disregard for authenticity and history.

In a country where over 15 major temples including the famed one at Madhya Pradesh's Khajuraho depict erotic sculptures, why does a tiny little figurine, striking a confident pose, evoke such a shocked response in the government?

However, as the figurine was depicted unclothed, the NCERT clothed it, ostensibly because it would be viewed by children of an impressionable age. A similar concern was raised in May by Solicitor General Tushar Mehta during the Supreme Court's suo motu hearing on the presence of cartoons in some NCERT textbooks. The Solicitor General said that while there was no objection to cartoons in general, their inclusion in school textbooks raised concerns as they would be viewed by children of an impressionable age. On the surface, the anatomical depiction of the figurine, on a standalone basis, is too trivial an issue to discuss nationally. However, if the tendency to alter the past to suit the present becomes the norm, it is too serious an issue for the country to ignore

Unlike the Victorian style, Indian sculpture had, for millennia, been quite open in its pictorial depictions. If the NCERT had its way, a student studying Indian heritage and culture would be seeing India through a Victorian or an Arabic lens — two cultural traditions that do not allow open portrayals of the human body. Education helps people think clearly and solve problems. If children are fed incorrect information, they will arrive at incorrect conclusions, which will undermine the very purpose of education. Governments and other entities responsible for education should therefore allow children access to unfiltered knowledge and enable them to develop into well-rounded individuals

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

Frozen and canned or fresh: What's healthier?

You probably know fruit and vegetables are good for you, and most of us don't eat enough of them.

But amid a cost-of-living crisis, buying more fresh food may not seem like a budget-friendly option.

Enter: canned or frozen fruit and veg.

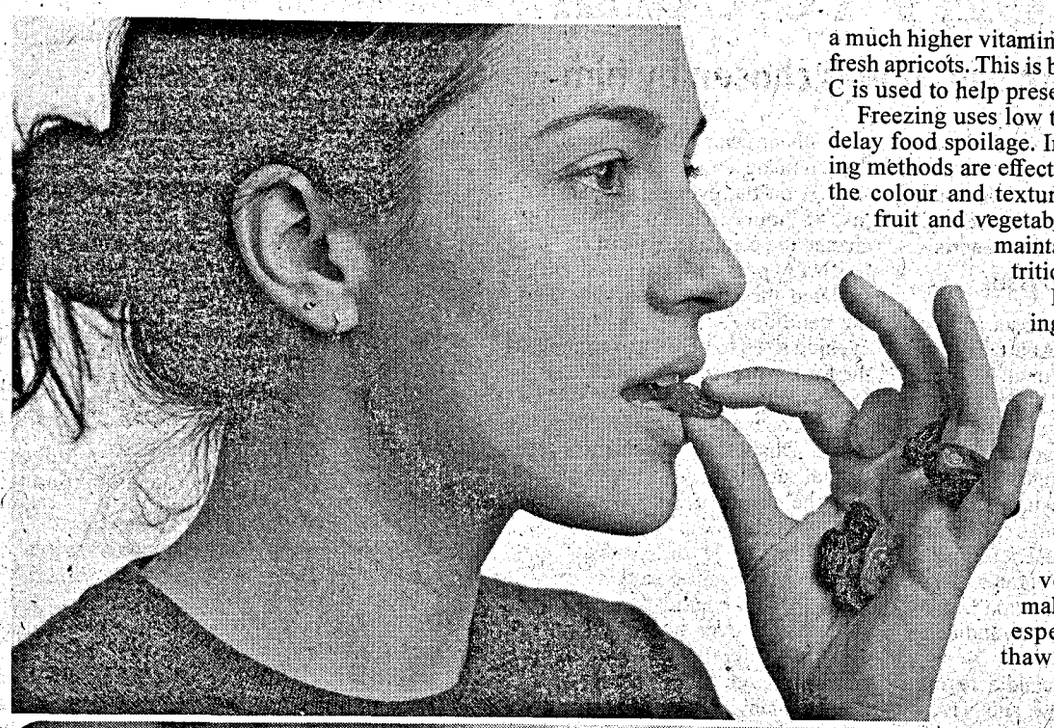
These are usually cheaper and longer-lasting than fresh produce. But are they as healthy? Let's unpack the research.

First, how much should we be aiming for?

Fruit and vegetables contain important vitamins, minerals and fibre. These support overall wellbeing and reduce the risk of illnesses, such as heart disease and some cancers.

The Australian Guide to Healthy Eating recommends adults eat at least two serves of fruit and five serves of vegetables every day. This includes frozen and canned options.

For example, ½ a cup of frozen broccoli or ½ a cup of canned beans equals one serve of vegetables. One cup of canned peaches or one cup of diced, frozen mango equals one serve of fruit.



Cheap, quick... and low waste?

Most canned and frozen fruits and vegetables are cheaper than fresh produce.

As they generally come pre-chopped and ready to cook, they also cut down on preparation time.

Produce that is canned or frozen also has a much longer shelf life than fresh options. This means they are available year-round, and are less likely to spoil and have to be thrown out.

What about nutrition?

Frozen and canned fruit or veg generally retains its original nutritional value – sometimes better than fresh produce.

For example, the nutritional value of most frozen and canned products is equivalent to fresh fruit and vegetables that have been in the fridge for a week.

But the process of preserving certain foods may actually increase their nutrient content. Apricots are one example, with frozen apricots having a much higher vitamin C content than fresh apricots. This is because vitamin C is used to help preserve the fruit.

Freezing uses low temperatures to delay food spoilage. Industrial freezing methods are effective at retaining the colour and textural qualities of fruit and vegetables, while also maintaining their nutritional content.

However, freezing may damage the structure of food if it causes ice crystals to develop. This can reduce the nutrient content of fruits and vegetables and make them mushy, especially if you thaw and re-freeze them. Frozen fruits and vegetables are at risk of being contaminated with the bacteria Listeria monocytogenes, which can cause food poisoning. But cooking fruits or vegetables before eating them reduces this risk.

The canning process involves sterilising foods at high temperatures so they can be safely stored at room temperature for long periods. However, being exposed to high temperatures causes some nutrients in the food to break down, especially water-soluble vitamins such as vitamin C. But advances in canning technology are allowing the process to be done faster and at lower temperatures, meaning less nutrients are lost.

What to keep an eye on

There are some things to look out for when purchasing canned fruit or vegetables.

Canned vegetables can have a high salt content, so it's best to choose products that say "no added salt". You can also check the nutrition information panel and look for options with the lowest sodium content.

Draining and rinsing canned veggies before eating them can also help reduce the amount of salt you eat. For baked beans in sauce, the sauce may contain added sugar and salt. If you eat baked beans regularly, it's worth finding a salt reduced option to help lower your sodium intake.

To help reduce your sugar consumption, choose canned fruit options that are canned in juice rather than syrup. Some may also say "no added sugar" on the package.

How to use them

Canned fruits can be eaten as a snack on their own, or with cereal or yoghurt. In many recipes you can often replace fresh fruit with frozen and canned options.

Frozen veggies are great for whipping up a quick meal. For example, frozen peas and edamame only need a few minutes to cook, so can be added last-minute to a stir-fry or stew.

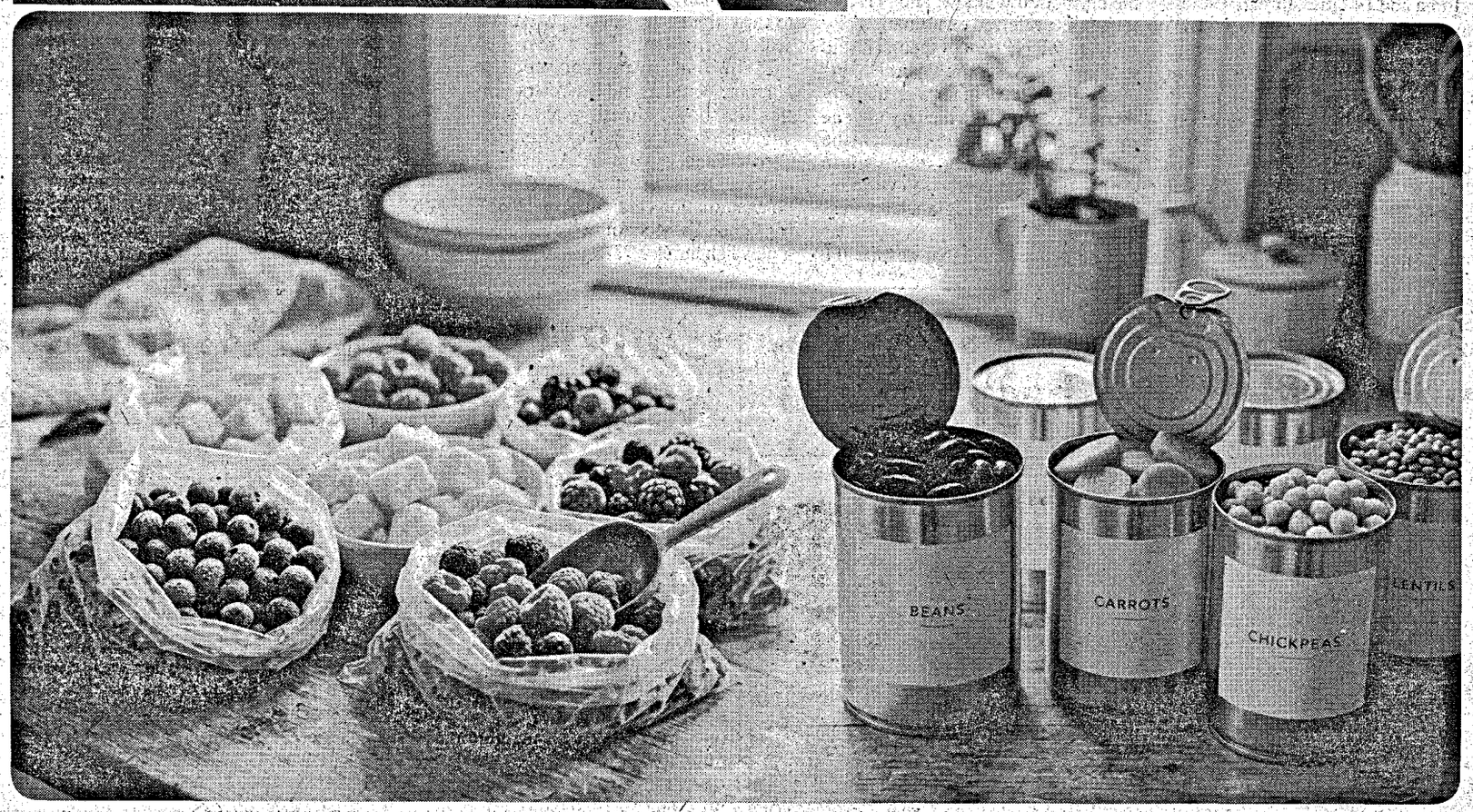
Adding a tin of lentils, chickpeas or beans can bulk out a stew or pasta sauce, while boosting your fibre and protein intake. Given they are already cooked, you can also toss them into a salad that will keep you fuller for longer. Just remember to rinse them first.

What about dried fruit and veg?

Compared to tinned versions, dried beans, chickpeas and lentils – which are all excellent sources of fibre and protein – are even better value and also have a long shelf life. But they can take longer to prepare.

Depending on the product, dried beans, chickpeas and lentils may need soaking prior to cooking or may be ready to add straight to the pot. If in doubt, check the instructions on the back of the packet.

Dried fruits are not recommended as an everyday alternative to fresh, frozen or canned fruit. This is because drying makes them more highly concentrated in sugar. But you can enjoy them as an occasional snack. *(The Conversation)*



Authored by Margaret Murray, Senior Lecturer, Nutrition, Swinburne University of Technology

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi ***Sunday, JUNE 21, 2026***

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Mercury on your solar return chart and it will give exceptional results. You will get good financial gains in your business. You also need to make some tough business decisions. You will also get loan for your business/ projects. Your relations with bosses will remain perfect. But you will face tough competition from business rivals. Your relatives will also cooperate with you. Both husband and wife will take care of each other, and they will have proper coordination. You will also get moral and emotional support from life partner and family. Those who are single will get married. You will be concerned with the education, marriage and career of your child. Everyone will respect you for your cooperative and supportive nature. Elders will keep giving blessings.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) Your own people will support you a lot and prove to be your biggest strength. It is appropriate time to do some productive work. Because of favorable placement of Mars things will keep going smoothly and you will have gains. You need to keep your anger in check. You will get money and will have financial gains. You will make profits in your business. It is time to add a new chapter to your love story. You will think about the possibility of getting married to person you love. Your government related work will be accomplished smoothly. You will have to work hard, but you will also get the results in the same proportion. The problems that students were facing for a long time will get sorted out. They will get success in exams/interviews.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Finally, people will acknowledge your capability and talent. You will get lot of appreciation and will be rewarded for your efforts. You will have monetary gains. The graph of your popularity will also go upwards. You will get support from your seniors. Your business will also prosper and flourish. And you will have good profits. You will also get the blessings of your elders and parents. This is the biggest asset of your life which helps you in coming out of your hurdles. You will be lucky in love and romance. Your spouse/partner will be your biggest strength and will keep guiding you. There are chances of meeting an important personality which will prove beneficial for you. Someone can influence you will their sweet soft talks and get their work done.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Something of great importance will get done. Your popularity will suddenly rise, and you will also enjoy a very favorable phase in your life. People will also have lot of trust and confidence in your words and deeds. It will also send a good message to your competitions and employees. Your confidence level will be high. You will have financial gains. You will also make new investments. You will also have economic gains in your business. You will also receive good news from somewhere. Your hurdles will get removed. You will also have a good time with your family members. Husband and wife will have better understanding. Property related disputes will get resolved. You will take interest in some welfare work.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) Your influence will be high. You will get promotion in your job and your prestige will rise. Your colleagues will also listen to you and cooperate with you. Jupiter will surely bring lot of financial gains. All work related to money and property will be resolved. You will also travel a lot, and they will prove to be tiresome. But you will make lot of money through travel. Amidst hectic work schedule you will also spend some quality time with your family. It will help you to relax, feel happy and cheerful. An important family matter will also come into discussion. You will seek a consensus. You will take important decisions in business and that will be far reacting. You will enjoy wonderful health.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is time to have gains. Your business will prosper and you will make good profit. Income will be good. Your contacts will also prove beneficial. You will also make new contracts. Your gift of gab will help in getting your work done. You will get opportunities to invest your money. You will be able to establish your dominance at your workplace. Your superior skills will be acknowledged by one and all. You will impress people with your skills and efficiency. You will pull yourself up to give final touch to your plans and activities. Love birds will have a wonderful time. You will come closer to your partner. You will be engaged in financial activities like insurance, investment, shares and funds.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) The words of your partner will bring music to your ears. You will have an amazing time with your love mate. You will also plan to get married. People will appreciate your skills. You will do introspection. You will also get some important information and news. You will also plan a major expansion of your business. Matters of dispute will become more complicated, though you will be the winner. Some government related work that had got struck will be resolved with the help of some officials. You will see a major improvement in your health. Your influence on society will be high. You may attend some function / marriage etc.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) There will be an increase in your happiness. Income will be good. Your work will get completed with ease. You will be meeting lot of new contacts. Your time will be well spent with your family members. Your children will listen to you. You will have a good understanding with your spouse. You will also be a lot more creative and develop new interests. Your business will show signs of revival. Those who are unemployed for a large period will get job offers. Your time will be spent travelling, reading and meeting new people. The time is appropriate to start new projects. In your work you will do something that will make everyone praise your efforts. Be careful of your enemies and don't trust strangers.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Your dialogue with people will improve. You will have financial gains. The circle of friends and contacts will increase. You will also spend quality time with your family members. Relations with spouse/partner will be cordial. You will get job/business opportunities. The time is quite appropriate for financial dealings. You will also complete your pending official work. The attitude of your partner will keep your hopes alive. Those you are unmarried plan to get married. In your domestic life you will do something that will make everyone praise you. There will be change in your lifestyle which will make you feel happy. You will also borrow money. You will take a decision on some matters after a lot of serious thoughts.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) it is going to be a week you will fulfill your obligations with diligence. Your involvement in official matters will increase. Your financial position will get better. You will get involved in new projects. You will make contracts with new people. You will also manage the most difficult situation with ease. You will also tackle difficult problems with your self-confidence and willpower. Your misunderstanding with partner will come to an end. You will have gains in business. There can be some new business contracts. You will come out of domestic problems. The tide of time is favorable for you. You will get lot of fame and respect. You will also set a new goal in your life.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) It is time to make best use of a very favorable time. Students will get results according to their expectations. Those who are planning to get married will be able to do so. . Your relations with seniors will become cordial and from time to time you will get good benefits. Do not make any financial decisions in haste. You might remember an old incidence and will be lost in old good memories. It will make you a bit sentimental. You will witness a sudden jump in your luck. New job/business offers will keep coming. Your colleagues will help you in your work. You will also bring about a change in your daily routine and habits.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) The first half of the week is going to be very grand in terms of results. Your tasks will be completed. You will also get your government-related job done with ease. Your health will also get better. You will have financial gains. You will regain your prestige. You will also interact with lot of people. You will also fulfill your commitments made to friends. You will be full of self-confidence. And you will also establish a balance between your earnings and capabilities. You will also help the needy people. People will take your advice seriously. You will discharge your responsibilities with great ease. You will witness general progress in your life. Travels abroad are indicated.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) Special work will get done. It will make you feel happy. You will also feel light at heart. The work that has been planned will be successfully completed. Your professional growth will be phenomenal. Your name and fame will increase. You will have financial gains. You will be lucky in matters of love and romance. Love birds will have a wonderful time. They will develop good understanding. Your superiors will be happy with your work. Your elders will guide you and your path will become easier. The results of works that is done carefully will be great. You will also visit your relatives. You will also enjoy a feast at someone's house. The time will be spent peacefully with loved ones. The youth will be enthused. You will make more profits in business with your intelligence and capability.

The hidden cost of poor sleep

We've all felt the immediate aftermath of a terrible night's sleep—brain fog, irritability, and a desperate craving for caffeine. But beneath the surface, a more alarming process may be unfolding. New research suggests that chronic sleep disturbances are actively dismantling the brain's primary security system: the blood-brain barrier (BBB).

A comprehensive review of published studies, conducted by researchers at Shanghai Jiao Tong University and published in the journal *LabMed Discovery*, has mapped out the precise biological pathways through which poor sleep compromises brain health. The findings offer a sobering look at how sleep disorders might pave the way for long-term cognitive decline, including Alzheimer's disease.

Understanding the brain's gatekeeper

The blood-brain barrier is a highly selective, semi-permeable border of cells that separates circulating blood from the brain's delicate extracellular fluid. Think of it as a strict security guard for your central nervous system. It allows essential nutrients to pass through while ruthlessly blocking toxins, pathogens, and heavy metals from entering brain tissue.

When this barrier is compromised, the consequences are severe. A breach allows harmful substances to leak into intercellular spaces (increasing what scientists call paracellular permeability) and cripples the brain's ability to clear out metabolic waste.

According to the research team, growing evidence links this structural damage to severe cognitive impairment, white matter diseases, and accelerated neurodegeneration.

The biological domino effect

The review outlines several distinct, interconnected mechanisms triggered by disturbed sleep that actively erode the blood-brain barrier: Oxidative Stress & Neuroinflammation — Sleep deprivation triggers a cascade of cellular stress, causing an accumulation of free radicals and cellular inflammation that physically degrades the tight junctions of the BBB; Circadian Disruption — Misalignment of the sleep-wake cycle disrupts the natural, clock-regulated maintenance of the brain's blood vessels; and Gut Microbiota Dysbiosis — Poor sleep causes an imbalance in the gut microbiome. This gut-brain axis disruption sends inflammatory signals from the digestive system straight to the brain, further weakening its defenses.

While general sleep loss is damaging, the researchers highlighted obstructive sleep apnoea (OSA) as the sleep disorder with the strongest, most direct human evidence of causing physical injury to the blood-brain barrier.

A new early warning sign for dementia

One of the study's most significant insights involves the 'hippocampus'—the brain's primary command center for memory and learning.

The researchers noted that a breakdown of the blood-brain barrier in the hippocampus may serve as an early biological marker for cognitive dysfunction.

Crucially, this marker appears to be independent of the traditional "amyloid-beta" and "tau" protein tangles that have long been the primary focus of Alzheimer's research. This means BBB degradation might be an entirely separate, parallel track toward memory loss, offering a fresh window for early detection.

Diagnosing and treating the leak

How do doctors spot a leaky brain barrier? The review evaluates several cutting-edge diagnostic tools, highlighting dynamic contrast-enhanced MRI (DCE-MRI) as a leading candidate biomarker to visualize and measure BBB permeability in real-time.

When it comes to treatment, the researchers emphasize that the most direct approach is treating the root cause: the underlying sleep disorder itself (such as using CPAP machines for sleep apnoea or targeted therapy for chronic insomnia).

However, the team also identified critical gaps in our current medical knowledge. As of now, there is a lack of universally validated blood biomarkers to easily screen for BBB damage in patients with sleep disorders. Furthermore, clinical data is still limited on exactly how much of this brain-barrier damage can be successfully reversed once healthy sleep patterns are restored.

Sleep is often treated as a luxury, but this research underscores it as a biological necessity for structural brain defense. Protecting your sleep isn't just about feeling rested tomorrow; it's about keeping your brain's vital shield intact for a lifetime. *(PTI)*

"When you practice gratefulness, there is a sense of respect toward others."

—Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

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Trains sans speed

IT sounds curious that the Railway ministry has unveiled plans for Bullet Train routes in seven more sectors, while it's still not addressing the real long-distance routes linking any two of the four top metropolitan cities. This is happening even as the first "pilot" project set in motion by the Narendra Modi government in 2016 between Ahmedabad and Mumbai has not materialized 11 years later. The promise now is that a 50 km stretch – one-tenth of the total 500-km distance, between Surat and Billimoria—will be ready by August next year. The plan includes bullet trains between Mumbai-Pune, Pune-Hyderabad, Hyderabad-Bengaluru, Hyderabad-Chennai, Chennai-Bengaluru, Delhi-Varanasi and Varanasi-Siliguri. The North-East sector has not been included, while the long haul routes from the national capital to Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai and vice-versa, or the routes in between these big cities have not been addressed. In other words, Indian Railways is not ready yet to roll out the bullet train project at a wider national level.

The 12 years of Modi governance have not significantly helped the Railway sector grow, while the national highway and roads sector saw impressive modernization. Mass Rapid Rail Systems are equally important between and within cities to reduce pressure on roads and save precious fuel. Instead, the nation pays dearly to purchase crude from abroad to meet road transportation requirements. The proliferation of vehicles – with many families now owning up to five vehicles for domestic use – is the result also of the neglect of the railway sector that continued through successive governments. India has only around 20 mass rapid transport systems, such as Metro Rail, while there are about 8,000 urban settlements. When Modi started his term as PM in 2014, his promise apart from Bullet trains (originally mooted by the UPA-II), was high-speed rail connectivity between six major metropolises. Vande Bharat is a significant improvement in both travel quality and speed, but only around 80 such trains exist, mostly for travel between nearby cities. The operational speed is still no more than around 100km per hour, compared to the promised bullet train speed of 300km. Most Indian trains run at speeds of less than 80km per hour – a shame on the nation that fails to grow with speed, grit and determination.

An inefficient bureaucracy that sits on files and leaders without a sense of purpose or speed join hands to retard the nation's progress; this is spectacularly reflected in matters like railway development. Corruption is coupled with this, resulting in a grim scenario. The long delay suffered by a pilot project like the Ahmedabad-Mumbai initiative is also due to a change of government in Mumbai, in between, when the BJP was removed from power and the NCP-Shiv Sena-Congress dispensation suspended its part of the project work. Its revival came after the BJP regained power there. In Gujarat, where the BJP ruled during all these 12 years, the project's progress was better, but not impressive enough.

The Alphabets From A Woman's Perspective

By Sandra Ramsdam

Thomas Jones Day would simply be a holiday and anglers' chance to have a day off beside fish ponds, if we fail to recognize the huge contributions made by Rev. Thomas Jones I, 185 years back. June 22,1841 was a historic day not just for the Presbyterian Church in the Khasi and Jaintia hills, but for the whole Khasi and Jaintia tribe and for the whole of Meghalaya. For what could a people do without a written script? Not only that the Alphabets gave us the Word, but that it has shaped and reformed the lives of millions of Khasis today.

The pioneer teachers reported how they would woo the enthusiastic children into the learning fold, but how terrified those simple faces would be that they even jumped out of the windows when they saw a roosters' feather used as pen for writing! For that was seen as a sacrilege in the Khasi faith. But painstakingly, the missionary-teachers would draw the shapes of the Alphabets and pronounce the phonetic sounds to create cognition and enthusiasm. They would write the names of the learners and mouth the sound of their names which instinctively drew the learners' attention to the beauty of a name in written form.

From the birth of the Khasi Alphabets, the Khasi-Jaintia tribe has come a long way to earn a place in this diverse country, India. Not forgetting that women had a larger role to play in steering forward a tribe that may seem to be a haven for women because of its matrilineal system, notwithstanding the ubiquitous patriarchal mindset in many formidable ways. From a woman's perspective, sometimes, we would ask, what is there that a woman cannot do what a man can do, now? Yet, 100 years ago among the Khasi-Jaintia and Garo tribes, it was unthinkable that a woman could have her own job, or manage her own affairs. In a culture where all decision-making rests on a male- dominated society, a woman was only expected to bear children, cook food and perform all the domestic duties. Stepping beyond that would be a taboo. However, the alphabets A, B, K, D did not fail to mesmerize the Khasi lasses. History has it that when the missionaries started teaching in the schools, there were a few curious girls who wanted to get a hand with what was called 'pule bad thoh'. Stepping out of the threshold other than family duties was considered blatant disobedience. Worse still, going to a white man's house and sitting next to the boys, was viewed with spite and disgust. How much rantings and arguments must have occurred within the four walls of the huts where girls had broken away from their cultural dogma.

I never fail to marvel at the courage of girls who dared to step out of the confines of their household obligations to learn how to read and write. We can truly say that Anne Jones, the young fragile wife of Rev. Thomas Jones I was the first woman in the Khasi hills who bore that beacon of light in-spite of her ill-health and very short life. Anne Jones extended her weak hands in teaching the locals around her about cleanliness and hygiene when she taught them the use of soap!

It is indeed wonderful to ponder that from a very simplistic worldview, there sprang up Khasi girls like ka Nabon Sawian, who willingly joined the school of the missionaries at Nongsawlia, Sohra and who became the first Khasi woman to be baptized into the Christian faith on July 16,1848. The KJP Assembly has marked the third week of July to be celebrated as Women's Week and Women Sunday since 2005 in honour of this brave and first-fruit among Khasi women who had to face utter rejection from her clan because she chose to become a Christian. Not only that Ka Nabon learned to read and write, but she helped in teaching other girls to explore the new world of learning. She was rightfully regarded as the first teacher among the Khasis. Ka Bir was another girl who contributed to the spreading of knowledge. She was one of the first students of Mrs. William Lewis. The missionaries acknowledged her brilliance and sharp wit as she was a very hardworking learner. Initially, she was reluctant to embrace Christianity, but her meeting with Mrs. Daniel Jones changed her perspective. As expected, her new faith was met with severe opposition and physical abuse. But with undaunted spirit and dedication, Ka Bir sought permission to go, along with ka Phuh, another Christian convert, to Mawsmai to teach other girls how to read and write. The missionary Rev. William Lewis saw that such a step would not be without danger as they had to traverse through dangerous terrains, but the boldness of the girls made possible even the impossible. Such was the thirst for knowledge. Such was a purposeful life; a mission with a vision. From such humble endeavours, more girls joined the world of education, and many succeeded to reach higher studies, even professional courses like nursing and medicine. Quite a number became officers in Government Departments in decades following the humble beginnings.

Miss A.W.Thomas was one of the frontrunners in the field of women's education. She poured out her service through a girls' school which later came to be known as KJP Girls' High School. In "Centenary History ka Balang Presbyterian", Miss A.W.Thomas wrote that the parents would seek divine guidance from 'ka shat ka khein' on whether it would be right for girls to go to school; to which the answer from the gods would be a firm negative, because it was deciphered that girls who go to school would bring heaps of misfortune in addition to being barren and this would wipe out a whole clan! However, Miss Thomas never gave up on the girls, and her efforts did not go in vain. The first woman who cleared the Calcutta Entrance Examination, equivalent to Matriculation, was kong Annamon Tham in the year 1907. KJP Girls' High School through the teaching ministry of Miss A.W. Thomas and other dedicated teachers could produce 3 women doctors who passed the Diploma Sub-Assistant Surgeons from Campbell Medical Institute, Calcutta in the year 1910. These were Kong Flora Mohon Roy, Kong Eribon Passah, and Kong Salin Ryntathiang. Notably, they were the first Khasi-Pnar doctors.

Before the much cliched 'women empowerment', the Church has undeniably empowered women more than a century ago, to be able to stand on their feet, and scale unimaginable heights in the field of learning and professionalism. Women have been given the space for leadership and capacity building, enabling them to toughen up for challenging circumstances, like difficult working conditions or even single parenthood. The main weapon that women have been given is education with all its moral values, ethical responsibilities and deep faith. Education has helped women to pass on their legacy to the future of their children.

Sadly though, while women had recognized the empowerment that comes through education 185 years back, now, here, in Meghalaya, in the 21st century, there are still countless numbers of girls and women who either are illiterate or dropped out of school. Even though Meghalaya is among the top eight states in the country where the female enrolment is significantly more than male enrolment, where gender-gap is quite low compared to the national average, there is still a very high illiteracy rate among girls in very remote rural areas (which presumably accounts for 27.11% illiteracy rate in Meghalaya). Perhaps, one of the reasons that girls and women are still targets of sexual harassment is due to the fact that women are not given that gender equity as they deserve, hence they are subjected to male dominance and domestic violence.

Comparatively, educational institutions are much better equipped today than two or three decades before. But something seems to be amiss in the teaching and learning process. Teachers experience burn-out conditions. Students are so hyper-stressed that they have turned classrooms into trauma centres. Gone are the days when students are learners of the Truth, where work culture was governed by principles rather than personal interests, where students learn to imagine and create rather than be pressurized by theories. While numbers of educational institutions have increased over the years, failure to curb social evils especially crimes against women proves that neither school nor Church has been able to make any major impact in personality and spiritual development. Time to revisit the schools of yore, where students were first introduced to God-fearing education, where they learn about love, grace and godly wisdom. Thomas Jones Day reminds us that education is not just acquiring knowledge and skill development. It is learning to live with a mission for a 'purpose-driven life', to quote a well-known Christian author, Rick Warren.

(The author teaches Communication Skills in Shillong Polytechnic)

To Touch the Roots of the Trees

By Emidaka Rapsang

The mists and the folklore of the mountains always seem to entrance each passerby, each traveller as they set foot into the monsoon-clad hills. These folklores carry more than stories, they carry histories, origins, culture and most importantly, language. The language that has been passed down for centuries conveys its ontos by word of mouth with rarely any script to uphold it. Thus, our language is the biggest bearer of our culture. Hence language becomes important to the tribal dwellers in the Northeast, a region of India. The gravity of our language comes from understanding it—understanding not only its semantics but also its origin.

In the article, "Northeast India as a linguistic area" by Dipankar Moral, Guwahati University, taken from a part of the Mon Khmer Studies Journal, we learn the thread of languages of different tribes. The article does exceptionally well in studying the different families of language that cover the northeastern region of India. Dipankar Moral describes the different tribes and their linguistic links, painting the northeast as a region not only important to India but integral to the cultures of Southeast Asia as well.

The author articulated that we can begin to study the different languages of the different tribes through three linguistic lenses: Sino-Tibetan, Indo-European and Austroasiatic. The author further states the existence of smaller linguistic groups of Tai and Tibeto-Burman, represented by Tai-Ahom and Tai Khamti for the former and Meitei, Tripuri, Ao, Angami, Lotha and more Naga languages for the latter. Yet, the article states that "The sole representative of the Austric family is Khasi" (Moral).

The history of the Khasi people dates back to eons, to 3000-2000 BC, when Austric settlers created a home in what is now called Meghalaya. The influx of Asamiya and Sino-Tibetan speakers into the hills of Meghalaya caused a diffusion in their linguistic thread, tying them close to each other. The closest link in terms of linguistic family is the Mon-Khmer, one of the few early civilisations that covered an immense part of the Southeast Asian region and now primarily dwells in nation-states such as Cambodia, Laos and parts of Vietnam. In an article by Glen Kharkongor, it was mentioned that the Khasi language acts as a "missing link" between the Austro-Asiatic speakers of South Asia (Munda) and Southeast Asia (Mon-Khmer), making it a linguistic continuation of both families and placing it as distinct from the other languages within the Northeastern region.

The Khmer language is a complex linguistic system where the origins of the language revert closer to South China, yet the evolution of this language was predominantly influenced by Pallava and Indian Brahmic script. The language evolution was divided into three main periods: the first dating from the 7th to the 13th centuries, when the slow introduction of Sanskrit scripts was introduced to the speakers. The second was during the 14th to the 18th century, where parts of the language fragmented and gained their own momentum. And thirdly, the current Khmer language or rather semblances of it, has continued from the 19th century till today. Therefore, we can say that the Khasi language then emerged as a member of the Khmer language, influenced by both ancient Indian scripts and neighbouring Tibeto-Burman dialects.

Importantly, the Khasi people are only linked to the Mon-Khmer predecessors solely through language. This leads to the conclusion that the Khasi tribe, including language and ethnicity, is an odd mixture of centuries of cultural diffusions between the descendants of the Tibeto-Burmese and the Austro-Asiatic linguists. The megalithic culture of the Khasi is also tied to that of the Munda Tribe, as we see again in Glen Kharkongor's article, where he placed two comparative pictures of the respective tribes to draw upon similarities. This brings us back to the circle of the vast Austro-Asiatic group of migrants where we can assume that these two tribes arose from the same tree but later branched into different areas of India. It is to say that the Munda tribe settled in the South of the region, leaving their language to be influenced even more heavily by Pallavi Scripts. Whereas, the Khasi tribe settled on the rainy hills of the Northeast and gained their dialect through other Southeast Asian languages.

To understand the complexities of the Khasi language, let's look into a dissection of its grammar and conclude similarities with the age-old Mon-Khmer language. The Khasi language is not compiled of any tonal implications, rather it is made of shorter words that have verbal breaks between them. Although not as prominent in the languages of Southeast Asian countries now, this characteristic was present in the Mon-Khmer tribes prior to fragmentation into different branches. These words include: The Khasi word for "Tiger," which is "Khla," exactly the same in pronunciation and meaning as that of the Mon-Khmer language family. This is just one example, others include the words: "Stomach" (English), which would be "Kpoh" (Khasi) and "Poh" (Mon-Khmer), "Birds" (English), which would be "Sim" (Khasi) and "Chim" (Mon-Khmer).

However, it is also important to note that these similarities extend beyond just the Khasi language to a tribe that has more genetic connection with "Paleo-Mongoloids," which is the Jaintia Tribe. These words would then include: "Children" (English), which would be "Khon" (Jaintia) and "Kaun/Kon" (Mon-Khmer), "Fingers;" (English) which would then be "Preamti" (Jaintia) and "Mreamdai" (Mon-Khmer) and finally, "Toes" (English), which would then be "Preamjat" (Jaintia) and "Mreamcheung" (Mon-Khmer). (CNE NEWS).

These relations are the few traces of our past that one can study and verify. These words are studied after years of interaction with other languages, cultures, dialects, and ethnicities. It is to assume, nay to say, that the Khasi language in itself is a marker of diversity, it is not merely of one kind, but a kaleidoscope of several centuries of co-existence between diverse cultures that eventually formed a whole of itself.

It is important to articulate our histories and our origins, to know where we have come from and to see our folklore with a little more nuance than we already do. It is also important that we know our people and their early histories in order to protect our heritage and to carry on more than just language but all the stories that have made our culture as our own.

CITATIONS: • CNE NEWS. "Khmer Cousins? The Khasi People Of Meghalaya." Community Events, https://cne.wtf/2020/12/13/khmer-cousins-the-khasi-people-of-meghalaya/. • Haokip, T. "Northeast India: Linguistic Diversity and Language Politics." https://idsa.demosl-03.rvsolutions.in/system/files/Ocassional-Paper5.pdf. • Kharkongor, Glennn. "Where did the Khasi people come from? Genetics tell the Story." The Shillong Times, Where did the Khasi people come from? Genetics tell the Story. • Kumar, Vikrant. "Asian and non-Asian origins of Mon-Khmer- and Mundari-speaking Austro-Asiatic populations of India." Academia,

Letters to the Editor

Fathers of the Khasi Script

Editor,

Andrew J May, the great grand-nephew of Thomas Jones 1, in his book " Welsh missionaries and British imperialism," said, "Written Khasi was co-produced by U Juncha, U Doowan Rai and Jones." He also described that U Juncha was from the Ding-doh Tribe and Doowan Rai was from Leihiam. I think it's high time for us the Khasi people to recognized these other two Khasi men who had assisted Reverend Thomas Jones in producing the Khasi script. For 185 years these Khasi men were ignored or left unrecognized, so now it's high time that we recall and recognize their contributions as well.

Yours etc.,
D. Diengdoh,
Sohra

MTET Rescheduled at Inconvenient Time: Teachers Deserve a More Practical Schedule

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the recent decision of the Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT), Meghalaya, to reschedule the Meghalaya Teacher Eligibility Test (MTET), 2026 to 24 July 2026. While the teaching community welcomes the postponement, the revised date unfortunately falls during a period when teachers are already burdened with multiple academic and government-assigned responsibilities, leaving little scope for meaningful preparation. July is traditionally one of the busiest periods in the academic calendar. Schools across the State are engaged in conducting Half-Yearly Examinations, requiring teachers to prepare question papers, supervise examinations, tabulate marks, prepare results and perform numerous related duties. The evaluation of answer scripts, which continues well beyond the examination period, further adds to their work-load. At the same time, a large number of teachers are serving as Booth Level Officers (BLOs) in the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of Electoral Rolls.

As per the notified schedule, house-to-house verification is to be carried out from 30 June to 29 July 2026, almost entirely overlapping with the period preceding the MTET. This assignment involves extensive field visits, verification of records, preparation of reports and attendance at training programmes and review meetings. Many teachers have also been entrusted with Census House Listing duties. Although the current phase may be nearing completion, they are expected to participate in further training and preparatory activities connected with the Population Census proposed for early 2027. These responsibilities come in addition to their regular teaching and school-related administrative work. Consequently, during the very period intended for MTET preparation, teachers are required to balance school examinations, answer-script evaluation, electoral duties, Census-related assignments and various official trainings. Under such circumstances, finding adequate time for focused study and revision becomes extremely challenging. The purpose of postponing an examination is to provide candidates with sufficient time to prepare. Unfortunately, scheduling the MTET on 24 July does not fully serve that objective. Instead, it places thousands of serving teachers under additional pressure at a time when they are already occupied with a combination of academic, electoral and governmental responsibilities. It must be appreciated that teachers are not full-time competitive examination aspirants; they are professionals entrusted with educating children while simultaneously discharging numerous duties assigned by different departments of the Government.

Teachers do not oppose quality benchmarks or professional assessment. On the contrary, they, I believe, strongly support initiatives aimed at improving educational standards. However, such examinations should be conducted at a time when candidates have a reasonable opportunity to prepare adequately. A more practical and equitable approach would have been to schedule the MTET after the completion of Half-Yearly Examination duties, answer-script evaluation and the peak phase of SIR activities. I therefore earnestly appeal to the Government, DERT and the concerned authorities to reconsider the present schedule before finalising the examination date. Any decision affecting thousands of serving teachers should take into account the realities they face at the grassroots level so that the twin objectives of maintaining teacher quality and ensuring fairness can be achieved together.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Cough Syrup Not To Be Sold Over The Counter

Editor,

With effect from June 9, 2026, the word 'syrups' has been omitted from the Schedule K of Drugs Rules, 1945, which lists medicines exempt from certain regulatory conditions under the Drugs and Cosmetics Act, 1940. Earlier, cough syrups and similar liquid medicines were included in Schedule K, allowing them to be sold under relaxed rules, including in some cases without a prescription.

Following consultation with the Drugs Technical Advisory Board, this exemption has now been withdrawn. As a result, cough syrups and other medicinal syrups are no longer freely available and must be purchased only with a doctor's prescription, ensuring safer use and tighter regulation. This will be a big challenge in regulating cough syrups.

The Centre's decision to restrict over-the-counter sales of cough syrups is a positive step, but systemic weaknesses in India's drug regulatory framework continue to undermine effective oversight. India may take pride in earning the tag of the 'pharmacy of the world', but along with it comes the responsibility of ensuring the strictest standards for products that can make the difference between life and death. A series of tragedies in the recent past, involving the deaths of children due to the consumption of adulterated cough syrup manufactured by Indian pharma companies, seriously damaged the country's reputation as a global pharma hub. The Centre's latest decision to end the over-the-counter sale of cough syrups and other syrup-based medicines is a welcome step, but the bigger challenge is ensuring foolproof quality standards. As per the notification issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, a doctor's prescription is mandatory to buy cough syrups or any syrup-based medication

While the move is ostensibly meant to strengthen regulatory oversight of syrup formulations and to align the exemption framework with contemporary public health and safety requirements, it is only a very small step in a series of reforms that are urgently needed in the drug regulatory system. While many consumers have long treated such cough syrups as harmless remedies for seasonal ailments, more serious systemic lapses were exposed when the deaths of children were attributed to the cough syrups manufactured in the country. Indian-made cough syrups were linked to mass child deaths in Gambia, Cameroon and Uzbekistan. Back home, similar tragedies were reported in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. These incidents have exposed serious lapses in drug safety.

The reports of fatalities linked to substandard medicines have repeatedly raised questions about quality control, testing and oversight. A plethora of problems plagues the pharma sector. Manufacturing units operate in unregulated conditions. Apart from rampant corruption, there is chronic understaffing and inconsistent inspections. Licences cancelled after a major incident are quietly reversed once public attention fades. There is no system for doctors to flag clusters of poisoning symptoms, and there is no effective drug recall mechanism. So, contaminated batches remain in circulation and cause repeated.

Despite rules which mandate every batch of raw material and final product be tested, and records maintained, there is no documentation of a chain-of-custody of inputs. Experience shows that tighter rules alone will not guarantee safer outcomes. India has no shortage of regulations governing the sale of medicines, yet prescription drugs often remain easily available without proper scrutiny. The real challenge lies in enforcement. Unless pharmacies are regularly inspected and violations attract meaningful penalties, the latest notification risks becoming another well-intentioned rule with limited impact on the ground. Stronger audits, criminal liability for negligence and swift justice are essential. Without them, every adulteration tragedy chips away at public trust — the most vital ingredient in any medicine. Though the Union Government has been insisting on stricter adherence to revised manufacturing practices and periodic inspections, enforcement remains patchy. State regulators lack manpower, and penalties are rarely effective.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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

"One faces the future with one's past."
— Pearl S. Buck

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Nature Traumatised

WHAT happened along the Shillong–Dawki road near Pynursla—the stretch where hills have been cruelly brought down by JCBs working around the clock—is a disaster that was waiting to happen. The heavy rainstorm that lashed East Khasi Hills last Saturday had inundated large stretches of roads along the Sohra-Shella highway. Every cliff became a waterfall resembling a geyser and water flowed freely on the road carving its own way down the hilly tracts to land in Bangladesh. The scenes are similar along the Shillong-Dawki road expansion project. Local residents say that human intervention through relentless hill cutting in a region known for landslides is asking for trouble. Mounds of soil, sand, and boulders blocked some natural water passages. Since water seeks its own path it cut right through the middle of the road. It would be fair to say that recent landslides along the Pynursla area are human-induced (anthropogenic) and represent a profound, structural trauma inflicted upon the natural ecosystem. Unlike natural slope adjustments, human activities introduce abrupt, violent disruptions that strip the land of its self-healing capabilities, causing severe ecological degradation and permanent topographical scarring.

What is questionable are the environmental impact assessments and geological clearances given to this project. One look at the relentless hill cutting over two years or more makes even ordinary citizens question the logic of road expansion in such a difficult terrain and whether the project was really called for. Human intervention aggressively compromises geological stability through several key practices such as deforestation where deep-rooted trees strip the slopes of natural anchors that bind the soil. Carving roads through fragile mountain terrains, such as those in Meghalaya often removes the natural "toe" or base of a slope. This leaves unsupported vertical walls that inevitably give way under gravity.

It is also true that mining and quarrying using blasting and heavy excavation fracture the deep bedrock. Nature is traumatised when a mountain collapses due to human action. The damage to the whole ecosystem is catastrophic and long-lasting. Indeed landslides pulverise and bury entire ecosystems. Thousands of hectares of native flora, micro-habitats, and wildlife populations are instantly suffocated or crushed under millions of tons of debris. Sadly, such debris flows down to the pristine rivers forming artificial, unstable mud-dams. When these dams burst, they unleash violent down-valley flash floods that permanently alter the river's path and aquatic life. Landslides strip away the nutrient-rich humus layer built over millennia. The exposed subsoil or barren bedrock has negligible water-retention capacity, leading to rapid desertification and making natural reforestation nearly impossible.

It is evident that the hills along Rngain, Pynursla up to Dawki are afflicted by chronic ecological stress. Long after the collapse of hills the fractured mountainside remains in a state of continuous trauma. Recurrent soil creep, erosion, and minor slides prevent the land from stabilizing, locking the ecosystem into a perpetual cycle of stress. How did this project get environmental clearance from the State and Central Environment and Forest Departments? Who is really accountable for these debilitating landslides that have cut off communication between Dawki and Shillong? Can the construction company alone be blamed for this misadventure? Ironically, Meghalaya has no NGO to take up environmental issues that would have a long- term impact on the state's fragile eco-system.

Samanong: Where Conservation, Community and Agri-tourism Meet

By H.H. Mohrmen

In a state where many rivers are increasingly treated as dumping grounds for waste and sewage that makes the water unfit for human consumption, and in a state where destructive fishing practices continue to threaten aquatic life, it is heartening to hear the story of a community-led effort to conserve a river ecosystem.

For over a decade, the villages of Ksanrngi and Umsawar in East Khasi Hills and Samanong in West Jaiñtia Hills have worked together to protect a stretch of the Umngot River that flows through their traditional boundaries. Without government support, these communities established and maintained a fish sanctuary covering approximately two to three kilometres of the river.

The conservation effort balances protecting nature with supporting local livelihoods. Fishermen are allowed to fish using traditional fishing rods, but using nets and other methods of mass fishing is strictly prohibited. Local fishermen also volunteer, watching over the river and preventing illegal activities that threaten fish populations.

This stretch of the Umngot River is particularly important because it is home to various freshwater fish species, including the Chocolate Mahseer (Kha Saw), which Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma recently declared the official state fish of Meghalaya. The conservation efforts of these communities demonstrate how local stewardship can significantly protect biodiversity.

The communities have done their part, but government support can further strengthen these efforts. Any assistance provided for river conservation, habitat protection, and sustainable tourism will go a long way in safeguarding the Chocolate Mahseer and the rich aquatic life of the Umngot River.

Agritourism: A New Model of Rural Development

Tourism has traditionally benefited transport operators, hoteliers, tour promoters, and guides. Farmers, craftsmen, women producers, and local artists have often remained outside the tourism economy. Agritourism seeks to change this reality.

Inspired by the Regeneration Meghalaya Project, Samanong has embarked on a tourism model that is both sustainable and inclusive. Under this model, farmers become active participants in tourism development. Craftsmen and women, local musicians, guides, homestay operators, cooks, and food producers all become stakeholders in the tourism value chain. The objective is to ensure that tourism benefits as many people in the community as possible.

The initiative is closely linked to the agricultural activities that sustain local livelihoods. Rice cultivation, vegetable farming, pig rearing, poultry keeping, beekeeping, and traditional handicrafts form the backbone of the local economy.

Visitors will have the opportunity to learn about the rice ecosystem and understand how farmers interact with it throughout the year. They can participate in farming activities such as ploughing, planting, weeding, and harvesting. Similar experiential learning opportunities can be developed around beekeeping, handicrafts, traditional food systems, and other livelihood activities.

The youth can find employment as guides and homestay managers, while women can be trained in hospitality and food preparation. Local musicians and artists can also showcase their talents and cultural traditions. In short, agritourism aims to create an inclusive development model in which no one is left behind.

A Landscape Rich in Natural Beauty

One of the highlights of the tourism initiative in Samanong is a scenic trek of approximately 6.5 kilometres through forests, meadows, agricultural fields, valleys, and rolling hills surrounding the village. The trek offers visitors an opportunity to experience nature while learning about the traditional way of life of the local people.

A particularly breathtaking point along the trail is a ridge overlooking the spectacular canyon carved by the Umngot River, which forms a natural boundary between East Khasi Hills and West Jaiñtia Hills. Wrapped in mist and cooled by valley winds, the landscape offers visitors a rare opportunity to connect with nature in its purest form.

The trek eventually leads to a naturally formed sandstone cave that serves as an important water source for the community. The cave stands as a reminder of the intimate relationship between the people and their environment.

Conserving Community Forests

Samanong village is also blessed with extensive community forests that continue to be managed under traditional institutions. Several hectares of these forests remain protected, resulting in dense vegetation, healthy undergrowth, and clean water systems.

One encouraging development is that part of the community forest has been brought under the government's Payment for Ecological Services (PES) programme. The community is also exploring the possibility of developing bird and orchid sanctuaries within some of these protected forests.

At the same time, the Dorbar Shnong continues to manage the forests in a practical manner. Since rural households still depend on forest resources for firewood and other domestic needs, the community has identified separate areas from which such resources can be sustainably harvested. This approach reflects a thoughtful balance between conservation and community welfare.

Strengthening the Local Food Economy

An important feature of the agritourism model is its emphasis on the local food system and circular economy. The objective is to ensure that tourism income remains within the village. More than ninety percent of the food and ingredients used for visitors are planned to be sourced directly from village households and local farmers. This will create a stable market for local produce while enhancing the income of farming families.

Community members will also receive training in value addition, product improvement, and packaging. Local products can then be marketed directly to visitors.

The initiative also seeks to promote wild edible plants and other forest-based foods traditionally collected by local people. In doing so, it recognises and values the knowledge of those who continue to depend on the forest for supplementary food and income.

River-Based Tourism and Environmental Education

The crystal clear waters of the upper reaches of the Umngot River are already an attraction in themselves. In the future, carefully planned low impact water-based activities could further enhance the area's appeal while ensuring that conservation remains the top priority.

Apart from trekking to the river, visitors can enjoy recreational fishing in designated areas, swimming in the clean waters of the Umngot, and low impact activities such as bamboo rafting, boating, and river tubing. Guided river walks, fish watching, and educational programmes on river ecology and aquatic biodiversity can further enrich the visitor experience.

If properly managed, these activities can generate additional income for local communities while creating strong incentives to protect the river and its aquatic life. In this way, the Umngot River can serve not only as a source of livelihood and biodiversity but also as a living classroom that inspires visitors to appreciate and conserve freshwater ecosystems.

Waste Management and Responsible Tourism

Any discussion on tourism must also address the issue of waste management. Although waste management is often treated as an afterthought, the Samanong initiative considers it an integral part of responsible tourism.

The first objective is to minimise waste generation by promoting locally sourced foods and reducing dependence on packaged products. However, since some waste generation is unavoidable, the community plans to introduce waste segregation at source and establish a Waste Resource Centre with government support.

Recyclable materials can then be processed and sold to waste traders, turning waste into a resource while keeping the village clean. This approach complements the broader vision of a circular economy where resources are reused, recycled, and kept in productive use for as long as possible.

Towards a More Sustainable Future

The agritourism initiative in Samanong is not merely a tourism project. It is a community-driven effort to build on the strengths that already exist within the village. It seeks to conserve rivers, forests, caves, biodiversity, and traditional farming systems while creating sustainable livelihood opportunities for local people.

The conservation of the Umngot River and the habitat of the Chocolate Mahseer, the protection of community forests, the promotion of local food systems, and the development of experiential tourism all point towards a model of development rooted in local knowledge and community participation.

As Meghalaya continues to explore new pathways for sustainable tourism, Samanong offers a compelling example of how rural communities can shape tourism on their own terms. Any support extended to such initiatives will not only strengthen conservation efforts but will also empower local communities to improve their livelihoods while safeguarding the natural resources that future generations will depend upon.

If we truly wish to develop our state, we must begin by developing our villages. Samanong has already shown the way.

A Gun, A Livestream and a Question Bihar Cannot Ignore

By Divesh Ranjan

Some deaths cease to belong solely to the individual and begin to speak to the anxieties of an entire generation. The killing of 28-year-old Bharat Bhushan Tiwari in Bihar's Bhojpur district appears to have become one such moment.

Nearly a week after the June 17 encounter, the controversy surrounding the young activist's death shows little sign of subsiding. A judicial inquiry has been ordered, political leaders across party lines have raised questions over the official account, and social media continues to replay the final images that transformed a local dispute into a national conversation.

Nothing about the story lends itself to easy conclusions.

By his own choice, Tiwari crossed a line that cannot be ignored. Frustrated by what he considered official indifference, he armed himself and openly challenged the authorities. Any resort to violence against the State stands outside the democratic framework and cannot be justified, irrespective of the cause involved. Yet the questions that followed his death have proved harder to dismiss than the man himself.

According to his family and supporters, Tiwari had already agreed to surrender and had discarded his firearm when he was fatally shot at. Videos from his final Facebook livestream, widely circulated since the encounter, have fueled public suspicion and intensified demands for an impartial investigation. Within days of the encounter, four to five police personnel, including the Shahpur Station House Officer, were suspended after officials cited lapses in the handling of the operation. The circumstances surrounding Tiwari's final moments are now expected to be examined by a judicial panel headed by a retired High Court judge.

Significantly, doubts have not been voiced only by opposition parties. Senior BJP leader and former Union Minister Ashwini Choubey described the incident as "completely wrong and inhuman," while Education Minister Mithilesh Tiwari said the matter would be investigated thoroughly and that whoever was found guilty would be punished. The decision of Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary to order a judicial inquiry reflects the seriousness with which the controversy is now being viewed.

Beyond the encounter itself lies the story that brought Bharat Bhushan Tiwari into conflict with the administration.

For several years, the young resident of Bilauti village had been associated with campaigns concerning rehabilitation and compensation for flood-affected families in the Jawaniya area. He reportedly opposed the allotment of low-lying land without adequate soil-filling and repeatedly sought attention for the grievances of erosion-hit villagers. Those familiar with his activism say he believed that promises made to displaced families remained trapped in files while ordinary people continued to bear the consequences.

It was these frustrations, more than anything else, that shaped the demands he articulated during his final hours. His appeal was neither ideological nor revolutionary. He spoke instead of concerns that millions of Indians, regardless of political affiliation, would readily recognise, namely accountable governance, timely completion of development works and greater responsibility on the part of elected representatives.

Such demands are hardly extraordinary. If anything, they reflect expectations that lie at the heart of democratic politics.

Whether institutions had failed him or whether he had lost faith in them too soon is a question on which opinions will differ. In hindsight, it is easy to argue that more patient and constitutional methods should have prevailed. Yet such arguments inevitably lead to another, equally uncomfortable question: why had a young activist become convinced that a gun and a livestream were the only means left to ensure that his voice would be heard?

That question extends far beyond Bhojpur. Across the country, frustrations among sections of the youth have become increasingly visible. Concerns over unemployment, examination irregularities, delayed public services and the perceived gap between political promises and administrative performance have contributed to a growing sense of alienation. Most young Indians continue to express their aspirations through democratic means. But the anger that periodically surfaces should not be mistaken for mere impatience. More often than not, it reflects a deeper crisis of confidence.

Governments, irrespective of party or ideology, would do well to recognise this. People should not have to resort to confrontation to secure attention for grievances that deserve to be addressed in the ordinary course of governance. Nor should institutions permit a situation in which distrust becomes so profound that citizens begin to believe that no avenue remains open to them.

The judicial inquiry will determine the legality of what happened on June 17. It may establish responsibility and answer some of the questions surrounding the encounter. But it cannot, by itself, address the larger issue that Bharat Bhushan Tiwari's death has brought into focus.

Long after the inquiry report is submitted and political arguments have faded, what may endure in public memory is the image of a young man standing in an open field, speaking into a phone camera and insisting that governments must honour the promises they make. Whether history remembers Bharat Bhushan Tiwari as a misguided rebel, a tragic idealist or something in between, the questions raised by his death are unlikely to disappear with him.

(The author is an independent columnist. Views expressed are personal)

Letters to the Editor

Holding Road Construction Companies Accountable

Editor

It is a blatant fact that the company contracted to widen and construct the National Highway from Shillong up to Dawki via Pynursla has miserably failed to carry out its work responsibly and has no accountability whatsoever if one looks at the deaths that have occurred in these past months since it's construction and the environmental disaster that has plagued this area. The recent damage to the highway after Laitlyngkot connecting to Pynursla, the place from where I belong, had earlier come under judicial scrutiny as well and the question put to NHIDCL and it's contracted firm is how many months - not days as they had stated will it take for the road to be repaired? What kind of expertise and standard procedures does the contracted firm possess? The incident has put the livelihoods of many rural communities in a precarious situation, more so for those residing in distant peripheries along the Bangladesh border who depend for supplies and other commodities to be brought all the way from Shillong. People of Pynursla area and beyond demand answers for this lackadaisical attitude and poor planning by NHIDCL. For now it is noteworthy that the MLA, Prestone Tynsong has visited the place to understand the situation. We hope the answers for the recent calamity will be forthcoming.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar
Via email

A View from the Inside: My Perspective on Politics

Editor,

Politics is often called a dirty game. But I believe it's also a powerful tool for change. It depends on who's wielding it. Growing up, I was taught politics means serving people. As I've grown older, I've seen that isn't always true.

The Crucial Role of Character in Politics

A society moves in the direction its leaders' character points. Leaders with integrity prioritize public welfare, make ethical calls, and build sustainable development, safety, and community. When power is held by those with questionable character, we get corruption, inequality, and broken trust. The damage lasts for generations. That's why good governance, transparency, and ethical leadership matter. Citizens must stay vigilant and hold leaders accountable. Only then do we build a just, equitable future.

Role of Misinformation in Politics

Misinformation shapes opinions, sways elections, and erodes trust. Politicians and interest groups spread false claims, misleading stats, doctored videos to discredit opponents or manipulate sentiment. WhatsApp and social media make it spread faster across Meghalaya's hills. Algorithms push sensational content, so lies travel farther than truth.

The long-term cost is trust. Once citizens doubt institutions, informed decisions become impossible. The fix is media literacy + fact-checking. A well-informed public protects democracy.

How Politicians Use Spin to Shape Public Opinion

Spin is selective facts + emotive language + careful framing. A policy gets wrapped in "development" or "identity" even when the reality is different. Politicians also deflect criticism by downplaying issues or shifting blame. Spin erodes trust. When voters can't tell fact from framing, skepticism grows. The antidote: critical thinking and multiple sources. Check, don't just consume.

The Impact of Fake News on Democracy

Fake news distorts reality. It influences elections, polarizes communities, and kills faith in media. It creates "us vs them" narratives. In the Northeast, where community bonds are strong, this division cuts deeper.

When everything feels fake, people stop trusting real information too. Conspiracy theories fill that gap. Media literacy and verification are the defense. Democracy needs citizens who ask, "Is this true?" before they share.

Unpacking Tactics Used to Mislead the Public

Cherry-picking data is common: show only stats that fit the story, hide the rest. Repetition creates illusion of truth, especially on WhatsApp forwards. Emotional appeals — fear, anger, nostalgia — bypass facts and manufacture urgency. Awareness is protection. When we recognize these tactics, we can evaluate evidence, compare perspectives, and demand accountability.

Importance of Fact-Checking in Politics

Fact-checking holds power accountable. A false claim, once exposed, damages credibility and discourages future lies. It also equips citizens to make decisions based on reality, not rumor. In the 24-hour news cycle, fact-checking cuts viral misinformation before it spreads.

Conclusion

To conclude, politics can create positive change, but only if we use it responsibly. By understanding misleading tactics and committing to fact-checking, we make informed choices and hold leaders accountable. Let's be engaged, critical thinkers and build a better future together.

By staying informed and engaged, we can create a better world for ourselves and future generations."

Yours etc.,
Alban Nongbri,
Shillong

Service License for Genuine Non-Tribal Residents Requires Constitutional & Legal Scrutiny

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to express my deep concern regarding the recently passed amendment bill by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), making it mandatory for every non-tribal employee or agent engaged in trade and business to obtain a Non-Tribal Employee's Service Licence.

At the very outset, one fundamental question arises: What exactly is a "Service License" and why is it necessary? Non-tribal traders, businessmen, employees, and establishments are already required to comply with various laws and regulations, including trade licence, labour clearance certificate, Professional tax, voter card, Aadhaar, PAN, and other statutory obligations. What additional objective does this new licence seek to achieve?

More importantly, why should genuine and permanent non-tribal residents of Meghalaya be subjected to such a requirement? Thousands of non-tribal families have been residing in Meghalaya for generations. They were born here, educated here, pay taxes here, vote here, and have contributed immensely towards the economic, educational, and social development of the State.

If the objective of the legislation is to regulate migrant labourers and workers entering the State from outside, then the law should be restricted to such categories alone. Applying the same provisions to genuine residents who have lived in Meghalaya for decades appears unfair, and discriminatory.

Another matter of serious concern is the provision that the Service Licence will be valid only for one year and must be renewed annually. On what legal and constitutional basis has this period been fixed? A citizen's right to earn a livelihood does not expire every year. If an individual has not been found guilty of any illegal activity, criminal offence, or violation of law, why should he or she be compelled to seek permission repeatedly merely to continue working? It creates uncertainty, inconvenience, and the possibility of unnecessary harassment.

The amendment also raises serious constitutional questions. Articles 14, 19, and 21 of the Constitution of India guarantee equality before law, freedom to practice any profession, and protection of life and personal liberty. Subjecting a particular community to additional licensing requirements solely on the basis of ethnicity may be viewed as inconsistent with these constitutional guarantees.

Before granting assent to this Bill, I respectfully urge the Hon'ble Governor of Meghalaya to examine every provision microscopically and seek comprehensive legal and constitutional scrutiny. This issue should not be viewed merely from a political or administrative perspective. It deserves examination from legal, constitutional, social, and moral standpoints. Any law that affects the livelihood, dignity, and equal treatment of citizens must be subjected to the highest level of scrutiny before being allowed to come into force.

The people of Meghalaya deserve clarity, fairness, and justice. Laws should promote harmony and equal opportunity, not create additional barriers for genuine residents who have contributed to the State for generations.

Yours etc.,
Homnath Gautam,
Shillong-2

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C M K

"Winning isn't everything, but it sure beats anything that comes in second."

—Bear Bryant

The Shillong Times

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Cabinet, Ministers

THE buzz about a Union Cabinet reshuffle is getting shriller by the hour, as a set of Rajya Sabha vacancies are also being filled. Prime Minister Narendra Modi is in the middle of his third five-year term. There has been little resistance to his style of governance both within the ruling alliance and within his own party the BJP. Perceptions are that he will complete this term and might even seek a fourth term. In this context, speculations are rife in the national capital about the form a cabinet reshuffle would take. New faces are bound to come in and Bihar strongman Nitish Kumar, who stepped down from the long-serving CM post and moved to Rajya Sabha, would be accommodated in some top slot. He's likely eyeing the Railway Ministry, which he handled in the past and which currently lacks a full-time minister. Curiously, Ashwini Vaishnav who handles this department has also been saddled with another important ministry: the money-spinning Information Technology. In the age of Artificial Intelligence, it requires a full-time minister. So too with the Railways that criss-crosses states. The Prime Minister has not done justice to both these major segments by entrusting them to one minister. Vaishnav, a Western-educated bureaucrat-turned-minister, has his good qualities but obviously has limitations regarding focused attention.

Notably, another senior figure in the Modi dispensation is S Jaishankar, drawn from the Foreign Service into the political process and handling the External Affairs Ministry. That he has not been saddled with other responsibilities is a saving grace. The likes of Amit Shah, who handles internal security and oversees party affairs from behind, or Rajnath Singh who heads the Defence Ministry, are among the Modi government's principal strengths, as are Roads Minister Nitin Gadkari, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Agriculture Minister Shivar Singh Chouhan. These apart, few among the central ministers are in public reckoning. Dharmendra Pradhan as Education Minister, has found himself in a mess. How nation-building will be carried forward with a team of less-inspiring figures with questionable administrative acumen and perceived lack of vision is a big question. This, however, is linked to the larger question of whether the BJP on its own has sufficient talent with administrative heft and a world vision. Born in the early 1990s as a remodelled version of the Jan Sangh, the BJP is a relatively new party. The Congress, as the grand old party, retained a wealth of talent as had been proven in the past governments. Yet, it zeroed in on Manmohan Singh for the post of Finance Minister—obviously a pick by scholarly PM P.V. Narasimha Rao—in the early 1990s. This helped the nation redraft its economic policy and agenda for the future. Both Rao and Pranab Mukherjee were academicians of high repute. They were held in high esteem. Today, even the Rajya Sabha, through which non-political individuals who proved their worth in various fields were drawn into the governance process, is getting shallower and shallower. The governance process in the world's largest democracy, thereby, suffers from a lack of enlightened minds.

West Bengal voters need the Right to Recall truant lawmakers

By S. N. M. Abdi

Just in case you want to illustrate George Bernard Shaw's famous remark "politics is the last refuge of scoundrels," look no further than the Trinamool Congress' 20 MPs and 65 MLAs who have stabbed Mamata Banerjee in the back after her historic but controversial defeat in the West Bengal legislative assembly elections, and are now shamelessly dancing to the Bharatiya Janata Party's tune in Delhi and Kolkata.

Their betrayal is strikingly similar to the recent defection of seven Aam Aadmi Party MPs to the BJP, but importantly, it is on a much larger scale with bigger and wider implications for elections, democracy, ethical governance and constitutional morality in the country.

All 20 TMC Lok Sabha MPs and 65 MLAs who have virtually crossed over to the BJP were elected on TMC tickets in the 2024 parliamentary polls and the 2026 WB assembly elections, respectively. On the one hand, the 20 MPs who quit the TMC and joined the hitherto unknown Nationalist Citizens Part of India are openly saying they support the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance and would vote for it as a bloc in the future. The Lok Sabha Speaker is most likely to legitimise their blatantly pro-BJP strategy of swelling the NDA numbers needed for pathbreaking constitutional amendments and redrawing India as per the wishes of Narendra Modi-Amit Shah-RSS.

On the other hand, the 65 TMC MLAs who walked out at the BJP's behest, are calling themselves the real TMC! Their ringleader has been officially recognised as the Leader of the Opposition by the Assembly Speaker as well as the Calcutta High Court. Regardless of these farcical goings-on, I can't help but ask in sheer bewilderment whether we will ever witness the so-called LoP and his flock hit the streets against the BJP state government on any issue? Haha!

The ultimate goal of all these machinations and horse-trading is to somehow finish off the TMC and Mamata as they constitute a major hurdle in the path of Modi-Shah-RSS. This is as clear as daylight to one and all. But what's most saddening and disappointing is that there has been no intervention by supposedly upright and neutral figures like the two Speakers in question, or the higher judiciary which could have easily applied the brakes on the shady and unscrupulous goings-on. Speakers are, after all, party animals at the end of the day. But judges? We address them as "My Lord" out of utmost respect and submission. Who should the disenchanted and dispirited citizenry turn to in these trying circumstances?

The media – English, Bengali, print, portals and electronic – is mistakenly calling TMC MPs and MLAs who have crossed over to the BJP "rebels." This is neither accurate nor fair, and therefore unforgivable. Rebels are an honourable lot, propelled by idealism and principles who defy the system and challenge the establishment risking their lives. But the, people's representatives in question are downright turncoats who have switched loyalties to either evade arrest or command a hefty price in the buzzing marketplace that politics has degenerated into. They are perfect examples of Bernard Shaw's cynicism and utter disdain for unprincipled politicians.

If an elected people's representative is dissatisfied or unhappy with the political party which gave him a ticket to contest the polls in the first place, the honourable solution is to resign from the House—whether it is Parliament or Assembly—and fight the by-election, triggered by his resignation, afresh as the candidate of another political party or as an independent. That's why TMC turncoats clinging to membership of the House in order to serve the BJP's interests is morally and ethically repugnant. The Speaker doesn't lack the powers to promptly show turncoats the door -- especially when the party they desert lodges a formal complaint – but he is invariably quick to safeguard the interests of his own political masters, throwing Constitutional propriety to the winds.

It is pertinent to note that the shenanigans of TMC turncoats have also flagged these elected representatives' utter disregard for voters. It seems that most of West Bengal's MPs and MLAs, whether they belong to the TMC or BJP, don't give a damn for those who elect them; they don't hesitate to insult the very people who propel them to victory. They simply don't respect the people's mandate, which is the cornerstone of democracy, and flout it with impunity.

Consider this: in the recent WB Assembly elections, the people voted decisively for the BJP resulting in its thumping victory. The people's verdict was against the TMC. They wanted the BJP to come to power and punish TMC for all its misdeeds. Hence, they voted in as many as 208 BJP MLAs out of 294. But the TMC also harvested a sizeable chunk of votes enabling the TMC to win 80 seats. Those who voted for the TMC obviously didn't want the BJP to come to power.

During the 2024 Lok Sabha elections in WB, those who voted for BJP candidates clearly wanted to see a BJP government at the Centre. And those who didn't want a BJP government at the Centre voted for TMC. Thanks to voters opposed to the BJP, TMC won as many as 29 Lok Sabha seats out of 42.

But no sooner had the BJP won the Assembly polls when as many as 65 out of 80 TMC MLAs did a somersault in the blink of an eye. Reversing their voter mandate, which was obviously in favour of the TMC and against the BJP, they parted ways with Mamata and Abhishek Banerjee and stood openly with the BJP by branding themselves as the real TMC, which is laughable. Similarly, after the regime change in WB, 20 out of 28 TMC Lok Sabha MPs (one seat is vacant at present) sided publicly with the BJP, defying the voters who elected them to keep the BJP out of power at the Centre two years ago.

While MPs and MLAs still loyal to Mamata are being hounded by enforcement agencies and BJP cadres, the so-called TMC "rebels" are safe and sound as the "good" TMC. Nobody is even throwing rotten eggs at them! And all this is blatantly against the wishes of the sizeable electorate which voted the BJP to power so that TMC leaders are brought to justice. But they are going scot-free simply by crossing over to the BJP, underlining both TMC and BJP leaders' characteristic utter disregard for those who vote for them.

As things stand today, MPs and MLAs can brazenly defy for five long years the very voters who catapult them to power. This is the privilege that TMC turncoats are wallowing in at present. Indian voters don't have the power to recall their wayward representatives in Parliament or the Assembly. After casting its vote, the electorate is powerless before elected MPs and MLAs. I know a disgruntled BJP voter who is saying: "Look I voted for a BJP candidate so that the corrupt TMC candidate loses the election. The BJP candidate won and has even become a minister. But now I am appalled to see him and other BJP leaders hobnobbing with the TMC, ostensibly to weaken Mamata. But all this is very disheartening." Another voter said: "I voted for a TMC candidate in the Lok Sabha election so that the BJP doesn't come to power at the Centre. He won with my vote and the votes of many others like me. But now he stands with the BJP. My blood boils but what can we do?"

The answer lies in the Right to Recall provision in some democracies which empowers voters to remove or replace their representatives, but there are no signs of such a law being enacted in West Bengal or anywhere else in India. (END)

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

> ***"The BJP candidate won and has even become a minister. But now I am appalled to see him and other BJP leaders hobnobbing with the TMC, ostensibly to weaken Mamata. But all this is very disheartening." Another voter said: "I voted for a TMC candidate in the Lok Sabha election so that the BJP doesn't come to power at the Centre."***

Women's reservation: What the modern world demands

By Eugene Arnold Jaraine

With each passing day, advances in digital technology, semiconductor innovation, automation, artificial intelligence, adaptive systems and global connectivity continue to reshape human society at an unprecedented pace. These developments have accelerated the emergence of a highly interconnected world in which geographical boundaries, currency differences and traditional barriers increasingly matter less than the universal demand for efficiency, innovation and timely solutions.

The rapid transformation of economies, workplaces and governance structures has also created pressure for new legislation, policy reforms, institutional adaptation and innovative public-private partnerships. In this evolving environment, the value of individuals is increasingly measured by their competence, performance and capacity to deliver results rather than by considerations of gender or age. The challenges of the twenty-first century demand participation, innovation, leadership and problem-solving from all sections of society. Consequently, the case for greater participation of women in legislative bodies is stronger today than at any other time in India's history. This is precisely why the reservation of one-third of seats for women in Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies deserves broad support.

Throughout my professional assignments and official travels, I have observed first-hand the significant responsibilities assumed by women across diverse sectors. Whether in the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs), Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs), the National Institute of Fashion Technology (NIFT), Symbiosis International University, Institutes of Hotel Management (IHMs), administrative training institutions, corporate organisations, information technology hubs or marketing sectors, women are increasingly occupying positions of leadership and influence.

There is a growing pool of highly qualified women with exceptional academic credentials who are actively contributing to academia, administration, technology, management, entrepreneurship and public service. Many have demonstrated remarkable leadership abilities and problem-solving skills, often performing on par with, and sometimes surpassing, their male counterparts.

Yet, despite their capabilities, many talented women remain underrepresented in active politics. The demands of professional careers often divert potential leaders away from public life and political participation. This represents a significant loss for the nation, particularly at a time when India seeks to strengthen its institutions and accelerate its development trajectory.

Recognising this gap, Parliament enacted the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, popularly known as the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam. The legislation provides for the reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha, State Legislative Assemblies and the Legislative Assembly of the National Capital Territory of Delhi.

Why Women's' Reservation Matters

1. Greater Representation

Women constitute nearly half of India's population, yet their representation in legislative bodies has historically remained disproportionately low. Increasing women's participation in elected institutions strengthens the representative character of democracy and ensures that governance reflects the diversity of society.

2. More Inclusive Policymaking

Greater participation of women in legislatures can enrich policymaking by bringing additional perspectives on issues such as healthcare, education, nutrition, sanitation, childcare, social welfare and gender-based violence. Effective governance benefits when policy discussions incorporate the lived experiences of all sections of society.

India's experience over several decades has already demonstrated that women leaders are fully capable of participating effectively in governance, administration and public policy implementation.

3. Removal of Structural Barriers

Politics has traditionally been a male-dominated sphere. Reservation serves as a corrective mechanism to address historical and structural barriers that have limited women's access to electoral politics. It creates opportunities for capable and deserving women to enter public life and contribute meaningfully to governance.

4. The Role-Model Effect

The presence of more women in positions of political leadership can inspire greater participation by women and girls in public affairs. Visible leadership creates aspirations, encourages civic engagement and helps cultivate a culture in which talent and merit are recognised irrespective of gender.

5. Lessons from Local Governance

India already reserves seats for women in Panchayats and Municipal Bodies. The experience of local self-government has demonstrated that reservation can significantly increase women's political participation and leadership. Many women representatives have contributed effectively to local governance, community development and public service delivery.

The Constitutional and Legal Framework

The movement for greater political representation of women did not originate with any single individual or organisation. It emerged through decades of advocacy by women's groups, social reformers, civil society organisations and political leaders seeking a more inclusive democracy.

Several constitutional provisions provide the foundation for affirmative measures aimed at advancing women's participation in public life:

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws. Article 15(3) permits the State to make special provisions for women and children. Article 16 guarantees equality of opportunity in matters of public employment. Article 39(a) directs the State to ensure that men and women equally have the right to an adequate means of livelihood.

Article 39(d) calls for equal pay for equal work for both men and women.

A major milestone was achieved through the 73rd Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992 and the 74th Constitutional Amendment Act, 1992, enacted during the tenure of Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao. These amendments mandated the reservation of not less than one-third of seats for women in Panchayats and Municipalities respectively, significantly expanding women's participation in grassroots democracy.

The first Women's Reservation Bill for Parliament and State Legislative Assemblies was introduced in 1996 by the government led by Prime Minister H. D. Deve Gowda. Although several subsequent attempts were made, the proposal remained pending for nearly three decades.

The breakthrough finally came with the enactment of the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023, which institutionalised the reservation of one-third of seats for women in the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assemblies, including reservation within the quota for women belonging to the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

Conclusion

As India navigates an era defined by rapid technological advancement, economic transformation and global competition, the importance of women's participation in governance cannot be overstated.

Women's reservation is not merely a question of representation; it is a question of national capacity. A nation aspiring to become a leading global power cannot afford to leave untapped the leadership, expertise, innovation and public service potential of half its population.

The Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, 2023 represents a significant step toward ensuring that India's democratic institutions reflect the diversity, talent and aspirations of its people. By expanding opportunities for women in legislative decision-making, India strengthens not only the cause of gender equality but also the quality, inclusiveness and effectiveness of its democracy.

Letters to the Editor

Is VPP Wave on the Wane?

Editor,

The explanation offered by the VPP regarding the modest turnout at its recent outreach programmes merits a balanced examination. It is true that factors such as the monsoon season, ongoing examinations, and the party's preference for smaller, localised meetings may have influenced attendance. However, it would be equally important to acknowledge that the political context today is not the same as it was during the 2024 election campaign.

The remarkable public response witnessed during the last election was widely seen as an expression of the unprecedented expectations that many citizens had placed on the VPP and its promise of a different style of politics. The enthusiasm generated at that time reflected not only effective campaigning but also the aspirations of voters seeking change.

As with any political party that receives a strong public mandate, sustaining that level of enthusiasm requires continuous engagement and the ability to meet public expectations. Therefore, comparisons between the current outreach programmes and the extraordinary momentum of the 2024 campaign are inevitable.

Rather than attributing lower attendance solely to weather conditions or campaign strategy, it may be worthwhile for all stakeholders to reflect on whether public expectations have evolved since the last election. Such introspection is a normal and healthy part of the democratic process.

Ultimately, the electorate will judge every party not only by its promises but also by its performance and its ability to maintain the confidence and trust of the people.

Yours etc.,
Mantre H Dkhar
Via email

Proposed KHADC Bill Unconstitutional

Editor,

The proposed Non-Tribal Employees Service Licence Bill of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), that seeks to make licensing mandatory for every non-tribal employee engaged in trade and business within its jurisdiction, raises significant constitutional and legal concerns. Autonomous District Councils may be constitutional institutions but are not sovereign entities. Paragraph 10 of the Sixth Schedule specifically empowers District Councils to: "Make regulations for the control of money-lending and trading by non-tribals" which does not confer any authority whatsoever to regulate employment relationships between private employers. By trying to extend regulatory control from traders to employees, the Bill clearly exceeds the legislative competence conferred under the said paragraph of the Sixth Schedule. Therefore, the proposed bill appears nothing but legislative overreach and is unconstitutional. There are umpteen judicial pronouncements where the Apex Court has held that delegated or limited constitutional authorities cannot enlarge the scope of their powers beyond what the Constitution expressly permits which appears to have been attempted in this case.

Additionally, the Bill raises substantial concerns under Articles 14, 19(1)(g), and 21 of the Constitution. Any legislation enacted should and must satisfy the tests of equality, reasonableness and proportionality and must operate within the strict framework of fundamental rights and the limited legislative authority granted under the Sixth Schedule both of which appears to have been blatantly disregarded in the proposed bill.

The proposed legislation therefore, warrants the closest constitutional scrutiny by the Hon'ble Governor to ensure that the exercise of legislative power remains within the bounds of the Constitution and that no encroachment is made upon the fundamental rights of any citizen.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar
Shillong-3

Pedestrians' right to footpaths

Editor,

The Supreme Court in a landmark order has stressed upon the importance of providing sufficient footpath facility for pedestrians. Pedestrians are always ignored and they are left to their lot. Although millions of pedestrians walk to work every day in the country, they are not taken as important. They are deprived of their right to walk on safe and well-demarcated foot paths. The Supreme Court has also criticized policies that prioritize vehicles over people. Roads are widened and repaired only for vehicles. While sufficient space is provided for the parking of vehicles, minuscule space is provided to pedestrians and sometimes hardly any space. A large number of pedestrians lose their lives in road accidents. Those who are responsible for road infrastructure development must take into account the safety of pedestrians and provide them the facilities they have a right to. Often footpath vendors are allowed to use space but pedestrians are denied what they require. In many cases vending is given as an excuse for not providing footpath to pedestrians. Policy makers must not think that only carborne people have the right to use road infrastructure. Pedestrians deserve a dignified way of walking and well laid and demarcated footpaths similar to world standards. Policy makers, civic bodies and the traffic policing system must be held accountable for failure to do so.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

Birth of a Mini Marten at Bishop Cotton Road

Editor,

A couple of years ago, opposite the SMB Office, now located at Bishop Cotton Road (next to the residence of the Chief Secretary, Government of Meghalaya), the SMB installed two mobile dumpers for collection of "garbage" for residents living along the locality. In time, it became a collection point for "garbage" for people driving along the route and at times both dumpers would overflow. However, it became a habit.

A few months ago, the dumpers were removed and almost overnight, those people for whom this had become a habit, especially for those who would drive past the location and throw their "garbage" into the dumpers, a problem was created.

The easiest way out – the jungle from the Garo Union School to the housing of SMB has become a mini – Marten. This started from December 2025 and vehicles and pedestrians without shame or fear are dumping garbage into the jungle. At times, plastic bags adorn the trees along the road. With the start of the monsoon season the undergrowth hides this waste. Despite the various initiatives of SMB, local activists, literally mounds of waste, especially plastic waste, is being dumped into the jungle.

I would earnestly urge the SMB to take the strictest action, as per law, on this totally reprehensible practice and the population who blatantly break the law.

Yours etc.,
Carmo Noronha,
Via email

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

Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence.

—Vince Lombardi

The Shillong Times

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Meghalaya BJP Gets a Boost

POLITICS is a strange game where politicians claim allegiance to a political party only as long as it serves their interests. When the party is in the doghouse, attrition begins. Across the country the BJP has been wooing disgruntled Congressmen, TMC MPs and anyone who desires to leave the sinking ship. Meghalaya is no better. Loyalty and politics are incompatible. While some Congressmen have resigned recently, they are yet to join the BJP. Perhaps they are biding their time. The latest to join the BJP is Mohendro Rapsang who earlier won the West Shillong seat in 2018 representing the Congress Party. Before the 2023 assembly elections Rapsang joined the National People's Party (NPP) and contested the assembly elections from that party but lost his seat to Paul Lyngdoh of the United Democratic Party (UDP). Now Rapsang has joined the BJP. What does this reveal about politics and politicians in Meghalaya? That there is no such thing as political ideology here. Each politician calculates their own political future and joins the bandwagon controlling the purse strings in Delhi.

Politicians feel the pressure of being in the Opposition because they claim the ruling party in the state does not pay attention to the welfare of constituents represented by an Opposition MLA. This is visible in constituencies represented by VPP MLAs such as Mawryngkneng, Mawlai, Nongkrem and North Shillong. Naturally aspiring candidates and those without ideology make hay while the sun shines and jump ship with ease. How they convince voters is something that deserves a research paper. Rumours are circulating that the BJP is very keen to run a government on its own in one of the tribal and Christian-majority states, and that Meghalaya is their target. It will not be surprising if senior members of the TMC, NPP, UDP and VPP too join the BJP. After all, their contention is that they contest elections to serve the public and the only way to do so is to be in the ruling party. Speculations are rife about the political future of Paul Lyngdoh who was affronted when his ministerial career was nipped in the bud by the UDP President, Metbah Lyngdoh, at a time when his performance as Tourism Minister was at its peak. Paul Lyngdoh was replaced by Timothy Shira of the NPP. This is what happens in a coalition government. Ministers are not judged by their performance or rewarded for doing well. They are victims of realpolitik which in a coalition government means juggling portfolios so that every MLA in the ruling party gets a chance to become a minister. Meghalaya has experienced this for over 50 years and nothing has changed.

The BJP's cup of woes will run over too very soon when it finds itself being wooed by all manner of wannabe MLAs as 2028 draws closer. It would no longer need to woo people to join the party. They will be knocking at the party's door. West Bengal was the last bastion in the east that the BJP was eyeing. Now that West Bengal is conquered the North Eastern states should not be too challenging to conquer. Assam, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh are BJP-ruled states. Meghalaya, Nagaland and Mizoram are already allies, meaning they have no ideological differences. The regional parties are mere fig leaves that the BJP storm will soon blow away.

Shillong Lok Sabha By-Election: More Than a Contest between Two Teachers

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

I am not really sure if this has ever happened before in the history of the state. But in recent memory, this is the only instance I can recall where two teachers are contesting for the Shillong Lok Sabha seat. The by-election was necessitated because of the sudden demise of Ricky Syngkon, who was also a teacher, just like the present contenders, Batskhem Myrboh from VPP and DRL Nonglait from NPP. Ricky had won the Shillong seat by securing more than 50% of the vote share, and VPP will be hoping that Batskhem can repeat his feat. However, this time around, apart from the sympathy factor, there is not much that the party is presenting to the voters.

The public has seen the VPP dithering over the issue that propelled it to victory, i.e., the agitation for a review of the reservation policy, by refusing to attend official meetings and avoiding going to court to challenge the policy. There is genuine recognition among some that the party has lied to the public on the issue, and this might come back to haunt them.

The party has also created turmoil within the KHADC by bringing it into direct conflict with traditional institutions, namely Hima Sohra and Hima Mylliem, with observations being made that these actions are directed against practitioners of the indigenous faith. While we do not have accurate figures on practitioners of Niam Khasi (known as Niam Tre among the Pnar, a sub-group of the Khasi), the 2011 Census revealed that the percentage of followers of "other religions" in the state was around 8%. Since this statistic applies to the entire state, it means that the number of Niam Khasi adherents is actually over 15% of the Khasi community's population. This is a very large voting bloc, which, if consolidated against the VPP, could prove decisive.

There is also a perception that the VPP wants to change the age-old matrilineal traditions. A recent development that has taken place in the JHADC is the push by the Dorbar Ki Waheh Kur Ri Jaintia to codify and enact laws that protect matrilineal clan traditions and incorporate them into the JHADC's legal framework. If that happens soon, and the VPP-led KHADC succeeds in dismantling matrilineal traditions by putting up a weak defence in court or by introducing legislation that weakens the traditional institutions based on them, namely the Hima, there will be a situation where matrilineal traditions remain strong in the Jaintia Hills but become weakened in the Khasi Hills (including Ri Bhoi). In that situation, there will be a clear division between the residents living under the KHADC and the JHADC. Does that mean there will be two distinct communities: the non-Pnar Khasi, who follow both matrilineal and patrilineal traditions, and the Pnar, who strictly follow matrilineal traditions? If so, the division of the community will be complete, and perhaps in the future we may witness internecine conflicts similar to those seen among different Kuki and Naga groups.

For a party that speaks so much about the love of the "Jaidbynriew," the VPP's actions appear to be having the opposite effect. They are creating divisions between Christians and followers of Niam Khasi, and between the Khasi and one of their sub-groups, the Pnar. The dismantling of customary traditions could also lead to the loss of ST status for the Khasi community, which is another concern that has emerged since the VPP took over power in the KHADC.

For those who can see the implications of the party's actions, it will be difficult to convince them to vote for it again. To make matters worse, there are indications that infighting is becoming increasingly common within the party. It is also very surprising that a "jaidbynriew"-touting party has not yet amended the rules to bar non-indigenous candidates from contesting ADC elections, something that has already happened in the NPP-led GHADC. What is the delay all about? Therefore, the upcoming election may not be the foregone conclusion that the party would like everyone to believe.

Dr. L. Nonglait is emerging as a credible candidate, having worked as a teacher in the Khasi Department at NEHU and having led the Khasi Authors' Society (KAS) in demanding recognition of Khasi as an official language under the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. The NPP-led MDA government has demonstrated its intent by making Khasi and Garo official languages alongside English. The selection of Nonglait was clearly aimed at capitalizing on this sentiment, with the hope that it will be enough to propel the party to victory.

Recently, when Amit Shah visited the state, he announced that a committee of experts would be constituted in the coming months to discuss the inclusion of Khasi and other languages. Personally, I do not think Khasi and Garo will receive the nod because they use the Roman script rather than a Brahmi-derived script. This is the very debate taking place in Tripura right now, where the state government headed by Dr. Manik Saha, a non-indigenous person (I do not know whether he belongs to the immigrant population that arrived from Bangladesh after Partition), is pushing for the use of a Brahmi-derived script, while the majority of indigenous Tripuris, including political groups such as the Tipra Motha Party and student organizations such as the Twipra Students Federation (TSF) and the Tipra Indigenous Students' Federation (TISF), support the Roman script. The BJP government argues that the Roman script is a 'foreign' script, conveniently forgetting that the Brahmi script, on which all modern Indian scripts are based, itself emerged from the Aramaic script, the script of the language that Jesus is believed to have spoken. In other words, Brahmi also has foreign origins. It emerged during the third century BCE and became the script in which Ashoka's edicts were inscribed.

In the world, writing developed independently in four regions: Mesopotamia (modern-day Iraq and Syria), Egypt, Mesoamerica, and China. Every script used today can ultimately be traced back to one of these traditions. There is some debate as to whether the symbols found on seals from the Harappan Civilization actually constitute a script. They may simply have been logos or insignia. Whatever the case, the script remains undeciphered, although occasional claims continue to emerge.

The most recent claim was made by a researcher known as Yajnadevam (a pseudonym), who argued for a connection between the Harappan script and Sanskrit. He was even invited to several television channels to discuss his findings. The problem, however, was that his research was never published in a peer-reviewed journal. In academia, any work claiming to offer a new perspective must be reviewed by peers, that is, experts in the field, who critically assess its methodology and conclusions. Claims of deciphering the Harappan script are nothing new, and there will undoubtedly be others in the future who make similar assertions.

Instead, the Brahmi script is generally believed to have been influenced by the Aramaic script, which itself was adapted from the Phoenician alphabet, the same alphabetic tradition that also gave rise to the Roman script. Thus, the Brahmi script is just as foreign in origin as the Roman script. Moreover, both scripts are foreign to indigenous communities that traditionally relied on oral culture. However, the fact that Khasi and Garo are not written in a Brahmi-derived script may make their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule more difficult, particularly in the context of the Hindutva agenda of creating a Hindu Rashtra.

Even if Nonglait wins and raises the issue of including Khasi in the Eighth Schedule, it will ultimately be political pressure from Conrad Sangma that proves decisive in securing recognition for Khasi and Garo. It is clear that he enjoys a good working relationship with the Union Government, and the many financial packages and projects that have arrived in recent years are due in part to that rapport. This, however, may be a demand that is not particularly palatable to the BJP. I support the demand for the simple reason that the Khasi linguistic tradition in South Asia predates the arrival of Indo-Aryan languages, including Vedic Sanskrit, from which many North Indian languages emerged, many of which have received constitutional recognition, e.g., Hindi. It is a disgrace that Khasi has still not been recognized.

The stakes in the upcoming Lok Sabha by-election are, therefore, very high. The party that wins will be in a strong position heading into the next Assembly elections, which are only two years away. Will the sympathy factor outweigh the growing negative perceptions surrounding the VPP, or will the promise of fulfilling a decades-long demand push the NPP over the line? Could the Congress emerge as a surprise contender and upset the plans of both parties? Let us wait and watch.

(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

NEET Justice and Our Mercy..!

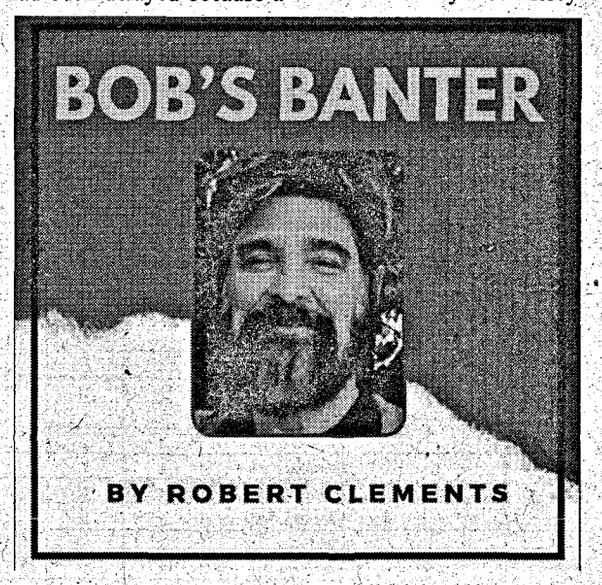
The pictures were heartbreaking.

Young boys and girls stood outside NEET examination centres with tears streaming down their faces. Some stared helplessly at locked gates. Others pleaded with folded hands. Parents argued, begged, explained and pointed to their watches as if somehow time itself would take pity on them and move backwards.

But the gates remained shut. On one side stood students carrying years of dreams in their hands. On the other side stood a rule. And the rule won.

I looked at one photograph for a long time. A young girl sat on the pavement, her face buried in her hands. Beside her sat her father. Not speaking. Not protesting. Just sitting quietly, staring at the ground. It was the look of a man who had tried his best and failed. There is something particularly painful about watching a father suffer because his child is suffering.

Reports said one student had been delayed because a political rally had brought traffic to a standstill. Another because her father's motorcycle got a puncture on the way to the centre. Then rain joined the drama, as if the heavens themselves wanted to test the family further.



There may have been many such stories. Some genuine. Some exaggerated. Some perhaps invented. But that is not really the point. The point is that once the clock crossed a certain minute, every story ceased to matter.

The gate closed. The examination began. The dream ended. Justice had been served. Or had it?

Many years ago I heard somebody explain the difference between justice and mercy in a way I never forgot. Justice is getting exactly what you deserve. Mercy is getting a little better than what you deserve.

Suppose your child breaks an expensive vase while playing cricket in the living room. Justice says punish him because he disobeyed instructions. Mercy says punish him if necessary, but first look at the frightened face standing before you.

Justice looks at the act. Mercy looks at the person. Justice asks, "What happened?" Mercy asks, "Why did it happen?" Society needs both. Without justice there is chaos. Without mercy there is cruelty.

The trouble begins when we become so obsessed with rules that we forget why the rules were created in the first place. Rules are meant to serve people. People are not meant to serve rules. Imagine if every parent applied only justice. Every late return home would attract punishment. Every mistake would be recorded. Every failure would be remembered. Children would grow up terrified.

Imagine if every husband and wife applied only justice. The first argument would become a court case. The second would become an appeal. The third would become a divorce.

Relationships survive because mercy walks hand in hand with justice. And then imagine if God dealt with us only through justice. I suspect most of us would not survive a single day.

Every one of us has been late. Every one of us has failed. Every one of us has made mistakes. Every one of us has depended at some point on somebody else's mercy. The irony in this entire episode is that the nation itself has recently shown enormous mercy.

Let us not forget the controversies surrounding previous NEET examinations. There were allegations. Investigations. Court cases. Accusations of irregularities. Questions about fairness. Questions about administration. Questions about accountability. Confidence in the system was shaken.

Yet what happened? Did the nation erupt into chaos? Did citizens demand that every official responsible be removed immediately? Did people march through the streets demanding revenge?

No. The country showed remarkable restraint. People were angry, yes. Concerned, certainly. But they also exercised patience.

In many ways, they extended mercy to institutions that had stumbled. If an entire nation can show mercy to a system that makes mistakes, can the same system not occasionally show mercy to a child delayed by circumstances beyond his or her control?

I am not suggesting that gates should remain open indefinitely. I am not arguing for disorder. I am not saying every excuse should be accepted. Discipline matters. Timeliness matters. Rules matter. But somewhere inside every rule book there should be a small page reserved for humanity.

A doctor knows medicine heals. But compassion heals faster. A teacher knows discipline improves performance. But encouragement improves confidence. A police officer knows enforcement creates order. But discretion creates respect. An administrator should know that rules create systems. Mercy creates trust. And trust is far more valuable than fear.

When people see compassion, they cooperate willingly. When they see only rigid authority, they comply reluctantly. The greatest institutions in the world are not remembered because they enforced rules perfectly. They are remembered because they knew when to apply wisdom.

Anybody can close a gate. Wisdom lies in knowing when it should remain open for two more minutes. As I looked at those photographs of disappointed students, I wondered what lesson they had learned that day. Was it punctuality? Perhaps. Was it discipline? Possibly.

But I fear many learned something else.

That systems can sometimes become so efficient at enforcing rules that they forget the human beings standing before them. That would be a tragedy. Because while justice is necessary, mercy is what gives justice a heart. And perhaps that is the lesson not just for examination authorities but for all of us.

In our homes. In our offices. In our schools. In our courts. In our friendships. And in our everyday dealings with people who stumble. Apply justice when needed. But leave room for mercy. Because justice may satisfy the law. Mercy heals the soul.

And a society that remembers mercy will always be stronger than one that remembers only rules...!

Letters to the Editor

SCA's Disgraceful Attack on a Respected Player

Editor,

The news report published on June 22 regarding the Shillong Cricket Association's letter to the BCCI concerning MCA Apex Council member Mark Ingty's positions in cricket administration warrants a strong and unambiguous response.

Mark Ingty is not merely an office-bearer. He is a senior figure of considerable standing in Meghalaya cricket, respected by players, administrators, and followers of the game alike. The fact that he has earned a call-up as a Ranji selector within the Assam cricket set-up, while continuing to serve the game at the state level, should by any reasonable measure be celebrated. It reflects well on Meghalaya cricket that one of its own has been entrusted with such a prestigious responsibility. Any administration that genuinely championed the interests of this association and its players would have taken pride in that fact.

Instead, what we witness is something altogether different and deeply troubling.

It is difficult to comprehend, in any straightforward reading of cricket's constitutional or regulatory framework, how Mark Ingty's current positions cause any material prejudice whatsoever to the Shillong Cricket Association or, to anyone else. The SCA's letter, forwarded to the BCCI through MCA Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni himself, raises questions that are as convenient as they are contrived. If there was a genuine concern, whether administrative, constitutional, or otherwise, basic decency and courtesy would have demanded that it first be raised directly with Mark Ingty.

Instead, the matter was escalated without warning, without courtesy, and without conscience, straight to the BCCI, with the press in tow. And even Kharkamni thought it was procedurally right to do so. Utterly shameful. That tells you everything about the intent behind this exercise.

It is now becoming evident that the guns being aimed at respected members of this cricket community are Rayonald Kharkamni's, even if they are being fired from the shoulders of others. SCA President Peter Kharsawian has chosen to lend his office to this campaign seemingly without pausing to consider for even a moment how the players' community of Meghalaya would receive such malicious and undignified an attack on a figure as revered as Mark Ingty.

Let this serve as a clear and candid warning to those who believe they can draw power from an institution while simultaneously undermining the very people who built it: cricket associations exist because of players. They derive their legitimacy, their purpose, and their moral authority from the men and women who have given their sweat and their years to the game.

When administrators begin targeting those very individuals for petty institutional warfare, they do not weaken the players, they hollow out the associations themselves.

Cheap shots of this nature are not governance. They are not accountability. They are not reform. They are the conduct of men who have confused their offices with personal kingdoms and who would sooner tear down a respected name than examine the state of their own standing.

The cricketing community of Meghalaya and Shillong is watching. And it will remember such actions. The players' community should stand together with Mark Ingty and condemn any such attack on a senior sportsperson of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,
L. Kharwanlang,
Via email

SCA Should Point Fingers at Themselves First

Editor,

The recent statements by Shillong Cricket Association President Peter Macdonald Kharsawian in your esteemed publication, positioning himself as a concerned voice on the MCA crisis, deserves a pointed response, a response that members and club owners affiliated with the SCA are perhaps too polite to make openly, but which needs to be said.

Macdonald's public commentary conveniently omits a rather important personal history. It was MCA Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni who facilitated Macdonald's entry into a previous MCA Apex Council, an arrangement widely known within cricket circles to have been gravely irregular, perhaps illegal. That too while Macdonald was already holding a position in the SCA—making it a direct conflict of interest.

The two were close allies. When Macdonald subsequently concluded that he stood no chance of winning the MCA elections, the "beautiful" friendship soured and he rushed to the Meghalaya High Court last December seeking to set aside those very elections and challenged Kharkamni. True drama. This was not for purposes of principle. This was a man who, upon finding the door closed, decided to burn it down and ultimately did not receive a favourable response.

He then repositioned himself as a supporter of James Sangma's side which he acknowledged in the recent press conference. That association perhaps and apparently was not beneficial enough for Macdonald. And so, with the pragmatism that has come to define his career in cricket administration, he has found his way back to Kharkamni, his original patron, in the hope perhaps that old arrangements might be quietly restored.

This reunion deserves particular attention, because Kharkamni is not just a figure of financial controversy at the MCA, which has also been in the media recently. He is the same Secretary under whose watch the sexual harassment of players from the MCA Under-23 Women's team was allegedly covered up, which is a matter that has been raised before the Meghalaya State Commission for Women and is very much alive. Macdonald has chosen this moment, with these facts in public circulation, to publicly align himself once again with Kharkamni and this speaks volumes about where his priorities lie.

It is not with the sport. It is certainly not with the young women who were failed by the very administration Kharkamni presided over. And yet, Macdonald this is the man now presenting himself in the media as a voice of accountability on MCA governance.

The irony will not be lost on anyone who knows how the Shillong Cricket Association is actually run. The SCA has the highest number of registered clubs of any district association in the state. It generates more revenue than any other. Yet Macdonald has stated publicly in the press conference that the SCA does not have money.

Club members are entitled to ask: where is the money gone? Because what club owners of the SCA know — and what has never been discussed openly until now — is that since Macdonald took charge, membership fees have frequently been collected in cash. Not bank transfers. Not cheques. Cash. And the accounts? The bank statements? They have never been placed before member clubs.

There is a saying that those who live in glass houses should not throw stones. Macdonald has chosen to throw quite a few this week. Before he offers any further commentary on governance failures at the MCA, we would ask him to explain, plainly and with documentation, how the SCA's cash collections have been accounted for, and where the money of its member clubs actually sits.

As members of clubs of the Shillong Cricket Association, we have a right to answers. And we are no longer staying silent. The public aren't fools.

Yours etc.,
S. Lyngdoh,
Via email

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

"The discipline of desire is the background of character."

— John Locke

The Shillong Times

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Devotion, embezzlement

IN a secular nation, it is not the government's business to build religious institutions or temples. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the pro-BJP-RSS ruling dispensations across states went overboard constructing the Ram Temple in Ayodhya with much pomp and grandeur. The Prime Minister himself led the rites, along with priests, for the temple's consecration—pictures of which were beamed live across India and to the wider world. This occurred in January 2024, in the run-up to the parliamentary/general elections; obviously, a high-voltage political drama unfolded. To a nation claiming secular credentials, this was too great a deviation from established norms. The event, fulfilling a promise made by pro-RSS entities before and after the demolition of the ancient Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in 1992, apparently stirred religious frenzy. The BJP and Prime Minister Narendra Modi reaped a rich harvest of votes in the subsequent elections – though this did not help them win a majority in Parliament.

And now the anti-climax. Allegations of massive looting of funds collected for the Ram Temple construction are swirling. Prominent temple functionaries as well as those linked to the RSS have been implicated through allegations of their involvement. The RSS was at the forefront of fund collections, in addition to collecting bricks for the grand temple construction. The collections were made from Hindus across regions and states. Now that this scandal has erupted, it is incumbent on not just the RSS but also Prime Minister Narendra Modi to explain how such a situation arose from what was supposed to be a devotional enterprise. Every penny given by Lord Ram's devotees and Hindus as a whole must be accounted for. There is still no clarity regarding the extent of money collected for this purpose. There's no explanation from the higher-ups as to why such misappropriation occurred. The RSS is an organisation known for its discipline. It engaged in fund collections in the past, but always in a fair manner without raising any eyebrows. But, apparently bad blood is creeping into even disciplined entities when they get too close to seats of power. This is unacceptable.

In fact, temples across states now face situations of loot by those entrusted with their governance. The Ayyappa Temple in Sabarimala, for instance, currently faces such a scenario, where a large portion of the gold donated by a business magnate for gold-plating its doors and interiors has gone missing. Another prominent temple in the state also reported the disappearance of precious items from its stock. Political involvement in the governing councils of temples often creates such situations. A dispute over the use of adulterated ghee in preparing ladoos at the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam temple led to court interventions and police investigations. This is emerging as a serious challenge to the cause of faith itself. But it also exposes how using religion for political gain can destroy both.

Obsessed With the Past & With Culture but Lacking Vision for the Future

By Patricia Mukhim

The Khasi people of whom I am a member actually believe we are a special species that landed straight from the land of milk and honey for that is what heaven is supposed to be. As they say a place where neither pain nor sorrow will touch us. No one told us for sure why we were thrown into this troubled earth and why seven families were chosen for this misadventure out of the sixteen families to whom we are tied by the same umbilical cord.

If you are a keen observer of society you cannot miss one societal obsession: a discussion about the past. And the other fixation is to determine who is a "real, "genuine," "pure-blooded" Khasi because anything less would mean betrayal to the cause. What cause one might ask? The cause is what we hear every single day from groups that believe they alone love and care for the well-being of their people. They have internalized the notion that any Khasi born of parents who are not both pure-blooded Khasis are "khun shiteng," a half-breed which is a highly derogatory term and is normally applied to animals. So, I am one among those half-breeds because although my mother was a Khasi my father was not. He was an Assamese Muslim. Normally because we are a matrilineal society meaning that lineage is from the mother's clan line, my Khasi-ness should not have been in question but that's where the rub lies. My intent no matter how genuine are always suspect but if a pure blooded Khasi were to say something ephemeral their words would be worth their weight in gold.

Today I write for all who find themselves in my situation – where our loyalties to the Khasi society or as self-proclaimed patriots call it, "jaitbynriew," are invariably questioned. Facebook if full of such abominations. No matter how well a half-breed performs in their chosen field, they will always be treated like pariahs as if only pure-blooded Khasi individuals add value to the "jaitbynriew."

In recent times there are a few people whose parents are both Khasis but who for their own valid reasons want to take the clan name (jaid) of their father. The society is up in arms against such individuals on the rigid condition that if a person takes the father's clan name (kur) that person should no longer be considered a Khasi. Isn't that a personal choice if that family keeps a clear account of the family tree and does not fall into "ka sang ka ma" (incest) by marrying into the same clan or natal connection (ka kpoh)?

A recent discussion on social media between mostly Khasi males says that if a man marries a non-Khasi, that woman can become a Khasi through the culture of "tang jait" a ceremony whereby a new clan is created for the non-Khasi woman. Her children will henceforth carry her clan name and not that of the father's. We are informed by oral narratives that all the clan (kur) names prefixed with the word "khar" are of children born of a non-Khasi/ non-tribal mother. This also suggests a high number of mixed marriages, specifically men marrying non-Khasi women in the past. But its equally true that because of our interface with non-tribals particularly in Shillong there are many Khasi women who have married non-Khasi men. In the past there was a happy co-existence. But politics has queered the pitch forever. Some groups wanting the limelight pushed the idea that Khasi women are giving leverage to their non-Khasi husbands to do business in their names to evade income tax. If that non-tribal man is looking after his family and putting his earnings to good use for the well-being of the family why should anyone be offended by that? And we know of many such families in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Exceptions don't make the rule and there may be some non-Khasi men who have abandoned/divorced their Khasi wives. Well, there may be an equal number if not more Khasi men too who have left their wives and children high and dry.

Now let me get back to the social media discussion. One social media warrior said that while it is alright to have the tang-jait for a Khasi male marrying a non-Khasi woman so that the offsprings are legitimate Khasis, it is not alright for the offsprings of a Khasi woman marrying a non-Khasi man to be called Khasis. For goodness sakes if the Khasis are a matrilineal society then should children born of a Khasi mother not be Khasi, more so if they adopt the Khasi culture and believe in "ka tip kur, tip kha" (to know the mother's side of the family and also the father's side). There are those who argue that if a person is born of a non-Khasi father the practice of "tip kha" is broken. Hence children born of a non-Khasi father should not be called Khasi and much less Scheduled Tribe.

And these are the issues that occupy our minds for the most part of the day. The next obsession is "culture" and there are attempts to lock up that culture such that it remains stuck at a particular time and space. Now is that really the definition of culture? The Welsh academic, cultural theorist who is widely regarded as one of the founding fathers of the academic discipline of cultural studies says "Culture is "a whole way of life." It is not a museum exhibit frozen in time but a living process through which a community continually defines who it is. Hence culture is neither a relic nor a fashion. It is a living inheritance—constantly changing, yet seeking continuity with its roots. We cannot go back in time because that past is gone. The present and the future are what we are to deal with. Yet Khasis spend considerable time in writing songs that harp on a romantic past and organising functions where young women (supposed to be pure and untouched by sex) perform dances in their traditional dresses and men are dressed in the jainboh (dhoti) – something they have discarded as a daily attire decades ago. Do we really need to delve into the past and what do we derive from obsession with a past that is no longer serving our present needs. Sure we care about identity but that identity is better served by adopting progressive ideas and meeting the future and not skirting it out of fear of the unknown.

The future is daunting no doubt and if one looks at the state of our development indices they are dismal to say the least. I cannot but come back to our educational status which is the worst in the country and I ask myself – What are we doing about this horrifying state of affairs. Should we the public not be having meetings to come up with suggestions to the Government for it to begin to heal the sick educational status? The Government has told us that there 206 schools with zero enrolment in Meghalaya and 2,269 schools with fewer than 10 students out of roughly 14,500 schools in the state. Did any of us among the intelligentsia have anything to say about this abysmal state of things? Did we tell the Government that it should shut down these schools because they are leaching out funds meant for the schools that are functioning? No we went into silent mode as if the matter does not concern us at all; it only concerns the Government!

The moment the PGI report appeared and we were told in no uncertain terms that there are close to 2500 schools that have no children – only teachers twiddling their thumbs and drawing salaries month after month for years, we should have asked the Government to close down such schools. But no, we will remain silent on the most crucial causes that will take the state back decades since most of our rural kids are out of school doing menial jobs and instead beat the drum of culture and tradition until we go blue in the face. One is forced to ask the questions - What's wrong with Khasi society?

True the urban folks are doing well and pursuing their education and other pursuits and going places but Meghalaya is more than Shillong or Jowai or Nongstoin. It lives in the periphery and no one cares about this periphery until one day the periphery rises up in arms and only then perhaps we will awake from our somnolence and stop romancing the past but deal with the present. We don't seem able to envision the future we want for our younger generation. Those who can afford to have parceled off their kids to distant states to pursue education in the best schools. So, who's left holding the baby? Only those rural kids whose parents cannot afford to send them to school because life is tough and single parenting is a curse.

So let's wake up from our reverie and take the bull by the horns. Let's stop focusing on differences arising out of khun-shiteng or khun-Khasi paka. These are intended to divert attention from real issues. Let's deal with the 'Crises in Education'. Or is that asking too much from the traditionalists and the custodians of Khasi culture?

Indian Democracy's Political Dance: Manufacturing Mandate and Opposition

By Antriksh Kar Singh

Edward S. Herman and Noam Chomsky popularised the concept of manufacturing consent in their seminal 1988 work Manufacturing Consent: The Political Economy of the Mass Media. They argued that media institutions often serve elite interests by privileging certain narratives while marginalising others, thereby shaping public opinion and reinforcing existing power structures.

With the rise of Web 2.0 and social media, the phenomenon of manufacturing consent has become increasingly visible across democracies. Platforms that promised greater participation and connectivity have evolved into powerful instruments of political communication. Through algorithmic amplification, targeted messaging, personalised advertisements and micro-targeting of voters, political actors can influence public perceptions with unprecedented precision. While these technologies have expanded political outreach, they have also raised concerns about the quality of information available to citizens and, consequently, about the integrity of democratic decision-making.

At the heart of democracy lies the principle of informed choice. Citizens are expected to evaluate competing political visions and elect representatives accordingly. Yet in contemporary India, a related but distinct phenomenon appears to be emerging—one that goes beyond shaping public opinion. Political actors increasingly seem capable of "manufacturing" both mandate and opposition through strategic exploitation of institutional loopholes.

Recent patterns of political defections have drawn attention to this issue. The Anti-Defection Law, introduced through the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, was intended to curb opportunistic floor-crossing and preserve governmental stability. However, over time, its exceptions have created avenues through which legislative majorities can be reshaped without returning to the electorate.

The most significant of these exceptions permits legislators to avoid disqualification if at least two-thirds of a party's members agree to merge with another party. In addition, decisions regarding disqualification rest with the Speaker or Chairman of the concerned House rather than an independent adjudicatory body.

Together, these provisions have transformed what was designed as a safeguard into a mechanism that can facilitate large-scale political realignment. Through carefully orchestrated defections, parties can increase their numerical strength in legislatures without contesting elections, thereby altering the balance of power while remaining formally within the law.

This process may be described as the "manufacturing of mandate." Electoral mandates are ordinarily acquired through the ballot box. However, when legislators elected under one party banner subsequently join another formation without seeking a fresh mandate, the composition of the legislature changes independently of voter choice. The result is an expansion of political power that derives not from electoral endorsement but from post-election manoeuvring.

Equally concerning is the possibility of what may be termed the "manufacturing of opposition." In parliamentary democracies, opposition parties perform a vital constitutional function. They scrutinise government actions, provide alternative policy perspectives and hold the executive accountable. Yet when breakaway factions claim opposition status while simultaneously aligning themselves with the interests of the ruling establishment, the distinction between government and opposition becomes blurred. Such developments create the appearance of democratic contestation while potentially weakening its substance. A legislature may continue to display all the formal characteristics of democratic competition, but the effectiveness of institutional checks and balances can be significantly diminished.

Beyond the constitutional implications lies an important ethical question. When voters elect an MP or MLA, are they voting solely for an individual candidate, or are they also endorsing a political party, its ideology and its programme?

In many Indian constituencies, party affiliation plays a decisive role in electoral outcomes. Political parties invest substantial organisational resources, build long-term voter loyalty and cultivate ideological identities that often transcend individual candidates. Consequently, when elected representatives switch allegiance without resigning and seeking re-election, it raises legitimate concerns about whether the original mandate has been respected.

The issue becomes even more pronounced in the case of Rajya Sabha members. Unlike Lok Sabha MPs, Rajya Sabha representatives are elected indirectly by state legislators. Political parties devote considerable effort to ensuring party cohesion during these elections. When such representatives later defect, questions arise about whether they continue to reflect the preferences of the political formations responsible for their election.

Defenders of defections often invoke ideological disagreements, leadership disputes or developmental considerations affecting their constituencies. Certainly, political realignment is not inherently undemocratic. Democracies must permit individuals and groups to reassess political affiliations when circumstances change. However, there is a critical distinction between genuine ideological evolution and strategic migration undertaken primarily to secure political advantage.

If large-scale defections become normalised, public trust in electoral processes may gradually erode. Citizens could reasonably question whether their votes genuinely determine legislative outcomes when post-election alignments can substantially alter the political landscape without any further consultation with the electorate.

Addressing this challenge requires institutional reform rather than reliance on judicial intervention or expectations of political self-restraint. Legislators who benefit from existing loopholes are unlikely to close them voluntarily. Consequently, structural solutions become essential.

The first reform should involve removing the authority of the Speaker or Chairman to decide disqualification cases under the Tenth Schedule. Given the inherently political nature of these offices, concerns regarding impartiality are difficult to avoid. Recognising this problem, the Supreme Court in Keisham Meghachandra Singh v. Speaker, Manipur Legislative Assembly (2020) suggested that adjudicatory powers could be transferred to an independent tribunal. Such a body, possibly headed by a retired Supreme Court judge or placed under the Election Commission, would inspire greater confidence in the fairness of the process.

A second reform concerns the merger provision itself. The present framework focuses primarily on the legislative wing of a political party. A more robust approach would require evidence that the organisational structure of the party has also merged, rather than merely a supermajority of legislators in a particular House. This would make opportunistic defections significantly more difficult while preserving the possibility of genuine political mergers.

Ultimately, the health of Indian democracy depends on preserving the integrity of the voter's informed choice. Electoral mandates should be earned through democratic competition rather than assembled through post-election arithmetic. Unless the adjudication of defections is made independent and the merger provisions are tightened, the twin phenomena of manufacturing mandate and manufacturing opposition may continue to weaken democratic accountability from within.

(The author is a research scholar in Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong, Meghalaya, India. His research work focuses on intersection of digital technologies, electoral politics, campaigns and democracy in India.Email Id: antrikshkar1995@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Remembering Kong Spility Lyngdoh and her dedication

Editor,

Long gone but never to be forgotten for her dedication and spirited stand against Uranium Mining in Domiasiat village of West Khasi Hills, Meghalaya is Kong Spility Lyngdoh a well known activist and a revered Indigenous matriarch and environmental activist from Domiasiat. Long before she could see the danger from environmental degradation and health hazards caused by exploratory drilling in her village—where fish started dying in ponds, and cows and goats often fell sick or died without any clue and residents fell ill leaving no trail behind the cause of their sickness—she stood firm. That's when Kong Spility Lyngdoh suspected that these deaths and illnesses were somewhat linked to the uranium mining in her village. From then on until her passing in 2020 she stood her ground against uranium mining. As an active environmental activist, nothing could persuade her to allow uranium mining in Domiasiat – not money or the carrot of development. Her life and dedication is a lesson to be learned and passed on to future generations for the conservation and protection of the environment we live in.

Yours etc.,
Nissar Fazil
Teacher at Oscar M. Memorial Higher Secondary School, Shillong

Why the Resistance to Cadastral Survey?

Editor,

The third page news 'Land Bill amendment by KHADC sparks row" (ST 24th June 3026) made interesting reading. Stripping traditional bodies of consultative roles in land matters will end up in the inability of the KHADC to implement the so-called land ceiling through an amendment of the Act. A land ceiling policy is practically unfeasible without a proper cadastral survey and record of rights, because these are the foundational tools for identifying ownership, measuring holdings, and determining surplus land. Without them, implementation risks arbitrariness, disputes, and failure to achieve redistribution goals.

Why do cadastral surveys and records matter? A cadastral survey provides precise maps and measurements of land parcels, essential for calculating ceiling limits while records of rights establish legal ownership, tenancy and usage rights, preventing fraudulent claims and disputes. There are challenges without proper records as fragmented and outdated records make it unclear who holds excess land. This is followed by a litigation overload as courts face disputes over land ceilings when records are missing or contradictory. Administrative inefficiency will result because authorities cannot enforce ceilings uniformly across the Khasi Hills scheduled areas. Large landholders will exploit loopholes when records are incomplete or inaccurate.

In the current Indian context it is observed that many states attempted ceiling laws (e.g., Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Odisha) but implementation faltered due to poor land records. Modern initiatives like Digital India Land Records Modernization and SVAMITVA Scheme aim to digitize and update cadastral surveys using drones, GNSS and AI. However, without these reforms, the ceiling remains largely symbolic rather than effective.

Implementing a law without the approval of the competent authority is sheer stupidity on the part of the Executive Committee of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council. Furthermore, removing the consultative process envisaged in Section 16 of the Act is a big blunder committed by the present EC of KHADC. Given this state of affairs in the Council, the late B. B. Lyngdoh, the first Finance Minister of Meghalaya and an advocate for the Cadastral Survey of land in Khasi Hills, rightly stated that since Meghalaya has attained Statehood it is time to do away with the District Councils. However, the late Captain Williamson Sangma, the first Chief Minister of Meghalaya suggested retaining the District Council as a training institute for those aspiring to become members of the Legislative Assembly. And thus we are held captive by an institution that is long past its efficacy.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Cricket left Waiting in the Pavilion

Editor,

Based on the reports published in your newspaper over the past several months, one could be forgiven for thinking that the Meghalaya Cricket Association is running everything except cricket.

The headlines have featured election disputes, allegations of sexual harassment, claims of financial irregularities, frozen bank accounts, and a seemingly endless contest between rival camps. To an outsider, MCA coverage increasingly resembles a political drama series where every episode ends with a new controversy and a promise of more to come.

Meanwhile, the actual game appears to have been relegated to a supporting role. District associations have raised concerns about unpaid staff salaries, delayed grants, and other genuine issues affecting cricket at the grassroots level. Yet these matters rarely receive the same attention as the latest administrative standoff.

Disagreements are inevitable in any organisation. Healthy debate is often a sign of a functioning democracy. However, when the battle between the President's camp and the Secretary's camp becomes more competitive than anything taking place on a cricket field, it is fair to ask whether priorities have gone astray. Unfortunately, the players and aspiring cricketers seem to be the ones losing this particular match.

A few months ago, your newspaper reported allegations of financial irregularities potentially involving crores of rupees. What is perhaps most striking is not merely the allegation itself, but the silence that has followed. One would have expected the district associations to demand answers with the same energy and urgency with which they have condemned the present impasse within the MCA. Instead, there has been little public pressure for clarification. Equally concerning has been the absence of a clear and convincing response capable of putting these allegations to rest.

The cricketing community of Meghalaya deserves better. It deserves administrators who remember that they were elected to serve the game, not to turn it into a permanent boardroom contest. If mistakes have been made, those responsible should be held accountable. If the allegations are unfounded, then the facts should be presented openly and without delay.

At present, cricket seems to be stuck in the pavilion while administrators argue over who gets to wear the captain's armband. The score board is flashing disputes, accusations, and uncertainty, while runs for the game itself remain in short supply.

It is time for all stakeholders in Meghalaya cricket—the ex-players, the current players, coaches, support staff, district associations, and administrators alike—to step up to the crease, ask the difficult questions, and demand clear answers from MCA. The interests of the game must come before personal loyalties and factional rivalries. Silence may be the easiest defence, but it will not win this match. Transparency, accountability, and a steadfast commitment to cricket are needed now more than ever, before the spectators drift away and the players lose faith in those entrusted to lead the game.

Yours etc.,
Leonard Wankhar,
Via email

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

"Confidence comes from discipline and training."

— Robert Kiyosaki

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Passport, Citizenship Conundrum

ON the occasion of Passport Seva Diwas, a senior official of the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) created a furore when he stated that that a passport is "a travel document, not proof of citizenship." Naturally the remark became a hot topic of discussion on social media and was also widely reported by different media. It sparked off furious debates from opposition leaders, legal commentators, and public figures because people are now anxious about how to prove their citizenship? Although External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar did not make this specific statement but because he was present at the function and did nothing to correct the official, every Indian is now non-plussed. Across the world the passport is a document to prove one's identity and nationality. In India we have a plethora of documents to prove citizenship ranging from the Aadhar to the EPIC, to the PAN Card and those in service have their Government identity cards too.

According to MEA officials Section 20 of the Passports Act, 1967, states that the Central Government may in exceptional circumstances and in public interest, issue a passport or travel document to a person who is not an Indian citizen. And because the law allows such exceptions, a passport is not considered a conclusive proof of Indian citizenship. This has caused consternation to Indians across the board. Interestingly the government's position is that a passport is primarily a travel document and a strong indication that the passport holder is an Indian citizen. The crux of the matter however is that the Indian passport is not the ultimate legal determination of citizenship status. So if not the passport then what is that document which conclusively determines a person's Indian identity. Until June 25, most Indians who have valid passports lived with the illusion that those passports were enough to prove their citizenship. Now they realise that more documents are needed to prove their citizenship – the birth certificate. Further reading states that India does not have a single universal citizenship certificate for all citizens. Citizenship is usually established through a combination of documents depending on how citizenship was acquired—birth records, parental records, citizenship certificates (for naturalized citizens), and other supporting evidence under the Citizenship Act, 1955.

While the MEA's statement is correct, the ambiguity lies in that most citizens don't read the fine print of the law whether it is the Citizenship Act or the Indian Passports Act 1967. Most citizens possess documents proving identity, residence, voting eligibility, or travel rights, but there is no single universally accepted document that conclusively proves citizenship for every Indian. That gap is what has made the remark so controversial. So what next? It is important for the Government of India to now make public its views on the exact nature of Indian citizenship and to clear all doubts in the minds of citizens as to what is that single document that will be proof of Indian nationality. As of now every Indian who was until June 25th 2026 sure of his/her Indian citizenship is today is groping around in the darkness of uncertainty.

Mawlynnong: "Asia's Cleanest Village" & A Diplomatic Faux Pas

By Patrick P. Sawian

There are occasions in life when humiliation arrives not as an event but as a revelation. It does not strike with the vulgar directness of misfortune, nor does it announce itself with sufficient courtesy to permit defensive preparations. Rather, it descends gradually, like a slow fog creeping across a valley, until one suddenly discovers that one has wandered several miles into absurdity while carrying a lantern of absolute confidence.

Such an awakening befell me circa 2010 in Mawlynnong, that picturesque settlement near Pynursla which generations of Meghalaya's tourism priesthood, pamphleteering aesthetes, public-relations alchemists, signboard propagandists, and otherwise honourable custodians of regional mythology have assiduously elevated into the continental pantheon under the august title of "Asia's Cleanest Village." The occasion seemed entirely innocent. I was accompanying a diplomatic attaché from a foreign embassy in India, a family friend, whose professional life had involved traversing continents, negotiating cultures, and presumably visiting enough airports to qualify as an endangered migratory species. Filled with the righteous certainty of local pride and armed with a fact that I had never once thought to verify, I gestured grandly toward the village and declared, with all the confidence of a medieval astronomer explaining the cosmos, "Welcome to Asia's Cleanest Village."

The diplomat paused. He surveyed the surroundings with the detached composure of a man accustomed to evaluating competing claims of national greatness. Then he looked at me. Then at the village. Then at me once more. His expression was not sceptical. Scepticism would have implied engagement. It was instead the expression one reserves for encountering a gentleman who has just informed you that his household cat has mastered constitutional law. "Are you certain?" he inquired. In retrospect, the question should have alerted me to the presence of danger. Unfortunately, there exists a peculiar intoxication associated with repeating something one has heard since childhood. Familiarity often masquerades as truth. Thus, rather than retreat, I advanced. "Absolutely," I replied. He smiled. Not the smile of mockery. Not even the smile of amusement. Rather, the smile of a surgeon who has realised that the patient remains blissfully unaware of the diagnosis. "You should visit South Korea sometime," he said.

At that precise moment, I experienced one of those rare flashes of self-awareness that philosophers spend entire careers pursuing. For a fleeting moment, it seemed as though the earth had chosen that precise spot and occasion upon which to abandon its structural integrity. I could feel my pulse thundering through my temples as embarrassment painted my face a spectacular shade of crimson, while my confidence evaporated so swiftly that one might reasonably attribute a temporary shift in local weather patterns to its departure.

The realisation was devastating in its simplicity. Asia is not a small geographical entity. It is not, as I had momentarily behaved as though it were, a moderately sized district conveniently situated between Shillong and Pynursla. It is a continent containing more than half of humanity. It includes Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, and numerous municipalities whose standards of public cleanliness, are so advanced that their sterile pavements appear capable of passing medical examinations. Yet here I stood confidently presenting a continental championship to a village because several government signboards had repeated the claim often enough for it to enter public consciousness unchallenged. Inside my head, I immediately began composing an imaginary inquiry commission, tasked with identifying the original author of this slogan. Had nobody travelled? Had nobody compared notes? Had nobody paused to ask whether declaring victory over an entire continent onto a government hoarding might require a little evidence? I felt rather like a boy on a bragfest, about possessing the world's finest violin only to discover that he had never actually attended a concert.

The diplomat, mercifully, chose not to elaborate. There was no need. My credibility had already suffered a fatal encounter with geography. Yet the truly magnificent irony is that Mawlynnong never required such inflated mythology to begin with. Like many genuinely beautiful places, it suffers from an excess of admiration, poorly expressed. Modern tourism appears afflicted by a curious inability to praise anything without immediately promoting it into a world record. Every waterfall must be the tallest. Every cave must be the deepest. Every festival must be the oldest. Every village must apparently defeat an entire continent in a competition nobody knew was taking place.

It is a peculiar affliction of our age that ordinary excellence is deemed insufficient. Yet Mawlynnong possesses more than enough authentic charm to survive entirely upon its own merits. My first encounter with the village occurred more than three decades ago as a chota babu during election duty, long before it became a pilgrimage site for tourists armed with smartphones and an almost religious devotion to photography. In those days the journey possessed a faintly expeditionary quality. The roads were rougher, the vegetation denser, and portions of the landscape seemed determined to reclaim civilisation altogether. There were moments when a machete appeared a more practical instrument than a GPS app. The village emerged from the forest, not as a destination but as a discovery.

At the time, however, I scarcely appreciated where I was. Election duty possesses a remarkable capacity to reduce even paradise into an administrative inconvenience. When one is preoccupied with polling stations, electoral rolls, logistics, and bureaucratic obligations, natural beauty becomes merely another item in the background inventory of existence. Consequently, after my duties concluded, the memory of Mawlynnong retreated into that vast mental archive where forgotten journeys and half-remembered landscapes reside. Years later, when I returned, I initially failed to recognise the place altogether. Only gradually did recollection reassemble itself. A pathway here. A grove of trees there. A particular contour of the hills. Then came the revelation.

This internationally celebrated attraction was the very same village through which I had once wandered, carrying election documents and worrying about voter turnout. The transformation was extraordinary. What had once felt remote had become iconic. What had once seemed secluded had become famous. Yet despite its notoriety, much of its essential character survived. The pathways remained beautifully maintained. The bamboo dustbins continued to embody a quiet civic pride. The gardens bloomed with almost excessive enthusiasm. An added sight - a bamboo skywalk perched precariously on some trees—offered breathtaking views extending across the plains of Bangladesh.

The surrounding attractions remain equally compelling. The balancing rock continues its long-standing campaign against conventional understandings of physics. The living root bridges of the region remain among the most remarkable examples of indigenous engineering anywhere in the world. More than mere infrastructure, they are philosophical statements. They embody a temporal imagination almost incomprehensible to modern societies. One does not construct a living root bridge for immediate use. One begins a process that future generations will complete.

In an age obsessed with quarterly results, instant gratification, and overnight success, such structures stand as rebukes to impatience itself. They remind us that some achievements unfold across decades rather than deadlines. Yet tourism, like every form of success, carries its own complications. Recognition brings prosperity. It also brings visitors. Visitors bring commerce. Commerce brings pressure. Eventually every beautiful destination enters into negotiations with its own popularity. Paradise discovered becomes paradise managed.

Mawlynnong has navigated this transition with admirable grace, but the tension remains visible. The village today resembles a gracious aristocrat, perpetually hosting guests, while privately wondering whether anyone remembers where the exit is. The greatest lesson I carried away from Mawlynnong therefore had little to do with cleanliness and much to do with intellectual caution. We inhabit an age saturated with slogans. Governments manufacture them. Tourism departments amplify them. Influencers circulate them. Eventually they become part of public consciousness. Repetition acquires the authority of evidence. Familiarity masquerades as truth. Yet a statement, repeated a thousand times remains merely a statement until subjected to scrutiny.

The village deserves admiration because it is beautiful. It deserves recognition because its residents have cultivated an admirable culture of community stewardship. It deserves visitors because it offers a genuinely rewarding experience. None of these accomplishments require the burden of defeating an entire continent in an imaginary cleanliness tournament.

Thus, I departed Mawlynnong somewhat wiser than when I arrived. The diplomat undoubtedly departed with a mildly amusing story and I learned a lesson worth preserving - never repeat a claim simply because it appears on a government hoarding, however large the font, however impressive the paintwork, or however frequently it is repeated. Otherwise, one may discover, as I did, that the cleanest thing in Asia is not the village at all, but the efficiency with which one's dignity is swept into the nearest bamboo garbage bin.

Hope of economic resurgence in the northeastern belt

By G N Bajpai

The nation has seen much political heat in the midst of elections particularly in West Bengal (WB). Stepping away from the electoral slugfest, the subsequent political developments seen in the Trinamool Congress and the further hot exchanges that followed, it is time to inquire into economic development issues in West Bengal and their impacts on the integrated development of the entire Northeastern (NE) region.

The BJP now rules all States except Jharkhand from Delhi to WB, including six of the seven NE sisters, either directly or as a major coalition partner. All except Delhi are laggards in economic development, GDP per capita, and human development outcomes. The massive outbound migration from these states—labour in search of a living, talent in search of opportunity and capital in search of returns -- has been a constant source of social and political concern.

At the dawn of India's political independence in 1947, the country's economic geography was markedly different from contemporary paradigms. The eastern belt comprising UP, undivided Bihar, and WB occupied a more prominent position in the country's industrial and commercial economy. This region was endowed with the bulk of industrial infrastructure, mineral resources, railway network, riverine transport, and engineering capabilities.

UP dominated sugar production, textile manufacturing, leather goods, glass and brassware, along with agricultural output. Kanpur was often called the "Manchester of the East" because of its textile mills and leather factories. Cities such as Varanasi, Agra, Meerut, and Moradabad had strong manufacturing traditions. Bihar commanded coal, iron ore, mica, copper, bauxite, limestone production, and steel manufacturing. The cities of Bokaro, Ranchi, Dhanbad, and Hazaribagh formed an integrated industrial ecosystem based on mining, metallurgy, and engineering.

WB was undoubtedly the most industrialised State in the country at the time. Kolkata was India's leading commercial and manufacturing center and a gateway for trade and commerce to a large hinterland spanning the entire NE India, Southeast Asia, and even Europe. The city was a hub of banking, insurance, and shipping. The State dominated jute, engineering goods, railway equipment, heavy machinery, foundries, and chemicals, as well as the tea trade and exports. The industrial belt stretching from Kolkata, Howrah, Durgapur, Asansol, and Burdwan formed the backbone of India's heavy industry. Researchers estimate WB accounted for approximately 27% of India's industrial output in 1950-51. The region's integrated economy delivered higher productivity.

While discussing the decline of NE India, the historical truth of its foundational contribution is forgotten. The industrial infrastructure built in UP, Bihar, and WB during the early decades of independence laid the crucial foundations for India's broader economic transformation. The economic divergence among the NE, Western, and Southern Regions is the result of a series of complex historical events characterised by macroeconomic policy distortions, structural imbalances, and political transitions. The decline began with the Freight Equalisation Policy in 1952, under which the Union Government subsidised the long-distance transport of key industrial inputs using an Equalisation Fund, effectively removing the geographical advantages that naturally belonged to States with abundant mineral deposits.

The broader objective of ensuring balanced regional economic development led to freight subsidies for transporting minerals such as coal and steel to other States. However, the transportation costs of other commodities, such as cotton and oilseeds, were not similarly equalised. In one view, the policy obliterated the NE's natural advantage of lower input costs without compensating for this loss of natural advantage. WB's GDP fell from around 10.5% of India's in 1960-61 to 5.6% in 2023-24.

It is argued that this setback was compounded by several other factors like labour unrest, infrastructure degeneration, misgovernance and the rise of coastal economies. The phenomenon of decline, which economists often refer to as the "great divergence" within the country, converted a structurally forerunner region into one of systemic underdevelopment.

The NE is blessed with the fertile Gangetic plains, an extensive railway and river network, coal and other mineral resources, historical industrial sites, a large and youthful population, and access to the Bay of Bengal. The proximity to Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Southeast Asia opens up significant overseas markets.

Historian and economist Gunnar Myrdal famously said, "Development and underdevelopment are cumulative processes." The revival of NE should be organised as a cumulative process of developing the entire region as an integrated economy, rather than by building the economies of individual States in isolation. This calls for evolving pragmatic policies and a cooperative approach. An ultra-modern high-speed freight and industrial corridor comprising business and industrial parks, warehouses, logistics hubs, and export zones, connecting the cities of Kanpur, Prayagraj, and Varanasi in UP; Patna and Dhanbad in Bihar; and Asansol, Durgapur, and Kolkata in WB, should be developed. The freight and logistics network should be built around an Eastern dedicated freight corridor, inland waterways, container terminals, cold storage chains, and multimodal logistics parks. Kolkata should be revived as Eastern India's gateway through port modernisation, technology parks, logistics hubs, and international trade facilities.

Based on historical experience, special focus should be on the manufacturing of electronics, defense, leather textiles, and food processing in UP; agro-processing, fertiliser, engineering, cement and construction materials, and renewable energy equipment in Bihar; and engineering, petrochemicals, shipbuilding, railway equipment, and heavy industries in WB. The plans should be supplemented by a sharp focus on urban development, investment in human capital, a mandate to realign the Credit-to-Deposit ratio, and institutional coordination. A permanent "Eastern Regional Council" comprising UP, Bihar, Jharkhand, WB, and Assam should be created to reap the benefits of India's 'Develop East Policy'. Economist Albert Hirschman contended, "Development depends not so much upon finding optimal combinations for given resources and factors of production as on calling forth and enlisting for development purposes resources and abilities that are hidden, scattered, or badly utilised." The potential is enormous. A unified corridor-based economic strategy will enable optimal harnessing and a more balanced, prosperous, and inclusive India.

(The writer is a former Chairman of SEBI and LIC. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press)

Letters to the Editor

Reliable Connectivity Urgently Needed in Mawlynnong

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the persistent problem of poor mobile network and internet connectivity in Mawlynnong village.

Despite being one of Meghalaya's leading tourist destinations, Mawlynnong continues to experience unreliable network coverage. This causes inconvenience to tourists who depend on mobile services for communication, navigation, digital payments, emergency assistance, etc. It also affects residents, students, and local businesses that rely on stable internet connectivity for their daily activities.

It is concerning that neighbouring villages enjoy better network coverage despite having far less tourism activity. This highlights the need for improved telecommunications infrastructure in Mawlynnong.

I, therefore, earnestly appeal to the concerned authorities and telecom service providers to take immediate steps to strengthen the network infrastructure and ensure reliable connectivity in the village. Such measures will benefit tourism, support local development, and improve public convenience.

I sincerely hope this matter will receive the urgent attention it deserves.

Yours etc.,
M Dkhar,
Via email

Concern Over Lack of Transparency in Recruitment Processes

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to express a concern shared by many unemployed youths of Meghalaya regarding the manner in which certain recruitments are being carried out in government agencies.

Initially, I was delighted to hear about the initiatives introduced by the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya, namely STEMS School Bus Services and Ka Bus Jong Ngi. These projects not only improve public transportation but also create employment opportunities for the youth of our state.

Motivated by this prospect, my brother and I visited the Employment Exchange and submitted all our required documents with the hope that we would be informed of any vacancies arising under these projects or elsewhere. As per its mandate, the Employment Exchange is expected to collect job vacancies from employers and sponsor suitable registered candidates. Unfortunately, despite being registered and regularly following up, we never received any information regarding available positions and were told to directly go to MUDA and STEMS offices..

Thereafter, we personally approached both MUDA and STEMS directly and formally submitted our documents for consideration for any available vacancy. We were informed that there were no vacancies at the time and that our documents would simply be kept on record.

However, to our surprise, several individuals, including friends and even my own brother, later received direct appointment calls for conductor positions under MUDA and STEMS. What is particularly concerning is that no public advertisement, notification, or recruitment notice was issued for these posts. This raises several questions.

Why are government agencies bypassing the standard recruitment process of advertisement, application, screening, examination (where applicable), and interview? On what basis are candidates being selected? Do these departments not have Human Resource mechanisms to ensure transparent and merit-based recruitment? Are such appointments free from bias and favouritism? Is the roster system being followed in these recruitments?

For unemployed youths who spend years registering with Employment Exchanges, submitting applications, and waiting for opportunities, such practices are deeply discouraging. It creates an impression that many vacancies are filled without giving all eligible candidates an equal chance to compete.

I therefore appeal to organizations such as the Khasi Students' Union (KSU), which have consistently advocated for employment opportunities for local youth, to take up this issue and seek greater transparency in recruitment practices. If necessary, the genuineness and legality of previous recruitments should also be examined through appropriate legal channels.

I also earnestly request the Hon'ble Chief Minister, who has earned a reputation for dynamic governance and youth empowerment, to ensure that transparent and fair recruitment procedures are followed across all government departments and agencies. Equal opportunity must be provided to every deserving youth of Meghalaya, regardless of background or connections.

This concern is not mine alone but reflects the experiences of many unemployed youths across the state. I hope that through your newspaper, the voices of those seeking fairness and transparency will reach the authorities concerned and that corrective measures will be taken. If such issues continue to persist, frustration among the youth may only grow further.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

Toil Without Wages: The Human Cost of Meghalaya's Muster Roll Backlog

Editor,

Muster Roll workers are the invisible hands that keep Meghalaya running. When a water main bursts, they are the ones knee-deep in mud, ensuring that dry taps across the city flow again. When national highways crumble or public buildings require urgent repairs, they provide the sweat, blood, and muscle. Yet, for nearly three to four months now, hundreds of muster roll workers under the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department and the Public Works Department (PWD) Roads and Buildings wings have been forced to work for absolutely nothing. Wages have been completely withheld since March, pushing these essential daily wage earners into a dark, suffocating abyss of unprecedented financial and mental distress. The Question of Survival

For a family dependent on high-salaried government employment, a delayed payment is an inconvenience. For a muster roll worker earning a minimum daily wage, it is a catastrophic emergency. How can a worker survive three to four months without a single rupee? How do they feed their families? The grim reality on the ground answers these questions in heartbreaking ways. Local shopkeepers, who previously provided essential food grains, rice, and dal on credit, are now closing their ledger books. Outstanding ration bills have piled up to heights that small neighborhood vendors can no longer sustain. Families are being forced to compromise on nutrition, cutting down meals just to make the remaining grains last. The crisis knocks heavily on every other door of their lives. Landlords are putting immense pressure on workers over months of unpaid house rent, threatening eviction. School authorities are demanding pending fees for their children, leaving parents with the agonizing choice of letting their children's education lapse or facing public humiliation.

Yours etc.,
Banker Kharkongor,
Via email

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

What's just the right height for a footballer?

It's a Darwinian jungle out there in sportsland. Players with the right stuff are selected, and those without it end up on the sidelines. If you haven't got what it takes, they won't take what you've got.

This certainly applies to skill, grit, stamina and strength, but also to body size and shape.

What researchers call the "Law of Morphological Optimisation" tells us that athletes who have the right bodies for their sport are the ones who succeed. We've recently seen that in the NBA finals in the towering figure of San Antonio Spurs player Victor Wembanyana (224cm).

But what about soccer players? Is there an optimal height for an elite footballer?

Finding just the right height for a soccer player

World Cup players seem to come in all sizes: from XS (Argentina's Diego Maradona, 165cm) and S (Argentina's Lionel Messi, who as a child suffered growth hormone deficiency, is 170cm) to M (Brazil's Pele, 173cm), L (France's Zinedine Zidane, 185cm) and even XL (Norway's Erling Braut Haaland is 195cm).

The winners of the FIFA Ballon d'Or award for the best player in the world have been a whole range of heights. Messi, as mentioned, is just 170cm, while Spain's Rodrigo Hernandez Cascante (better known as Rodri) is 190cm.

There is also no straight-line correlation between average team height and team performance.

World Cup winners Argentina, Spain and Brazil have been among the shorter teams over the years. So parents of aspiring Socceroos needn't worry too much about their height.

There is, however, one unusual thing about the height of World Cup teams: the average height of all the teams is strikingly similar.

In the vast majority of the 48 teams at this year's World Cup, the average height is between 180cm and 185cm.

Media outlets report the two tallest teams -- the Bosnians and the Norwegians -- average 187cm, while the Australian team averages 183cm. The shortest team is the Saudis, at 178cm. Players are, on average, taller than typical men of the same age from the same country.

What's remarkable is that the difference between team height and population height is greater for short countries, and less for tall countries. The data suggest every team is looking for some players about 180â?"185cm tall, which may be just the right height for a soccer player.

To understand why this might be so, we need to look at the dynamics of the game.

The right height for the job

Player height is specific to the demands of the position.

Goalkeepers are by far the tallest (189cm is about the World Cup average) because they need exceptional reach to block shots.

Australia's tallest ever World Cup player was the 202cm goalkeeper Zeljko Kalac. At one point, there was even discussion of enlarging the goals because goalkeepers were getting so big.

The main role of defenders is to get in the way of attackers and compete for aerial balls (especially via headers) so they are also quite tall: 183cm, on average.

Messi has scored just over 30 headers in his career so far, while the much taller Cristiano Ronaldo has scored more than 150. Taller players also perform better in defensive walls when a free kick is awarded.

Attacking players -- midfielders and forwards -- need to be mobile with high acceleration, so they tend to be a little shorter at about 175â?"180cm. Two of the greatest ever attackers -- Maradona (165cm) and Messi (170cm) -- have been quite short.

It seems World Cup teams need at least some players who are large enough to win headers, form defensive walls and block opponents.

And once one team has players of this size, other teams also need to choose players of a similar size to remain competitive -- it's a kind of anthropometric arms race. This can be challenging for generally short nations such as Mexico and Ecuador.

The long and the short of it

Height is certainly not as valuable an asset for a soccer player as other characteristics such as ball skills, stamina, agility, the ability to read the play and sense where players are on the field -- all of which have little to do with height.

For this reason, we only rarely see extremely tall soccer players.

There are far fewer very tall men in the population, and hence fewer very tall men with superb ball skills.

Your guess as to who will win the World Cup is as bad as mine. But I can say with confidence that it will be a team of young men of somewhat above average height.

And it will be France.

Maybe. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Tim Olds, Adelaide University

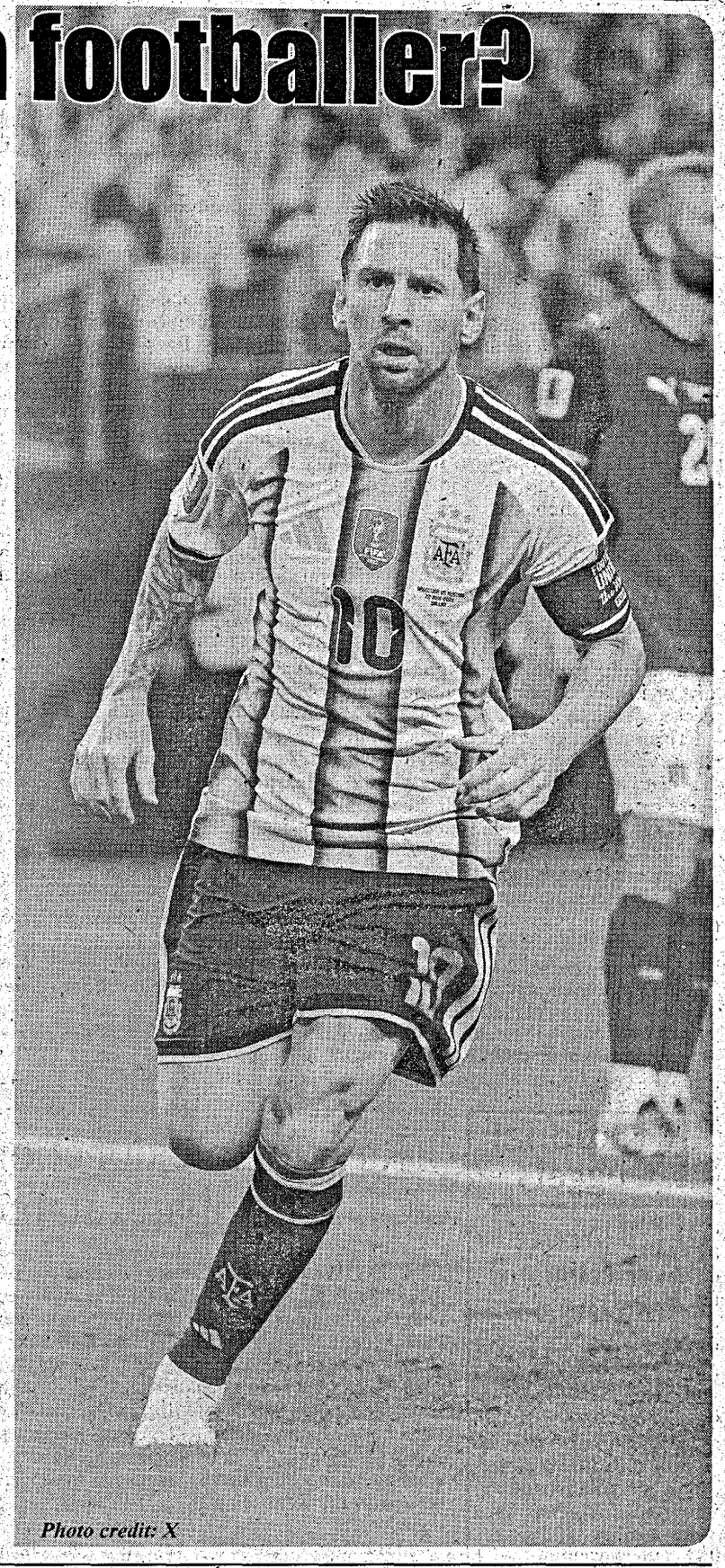


Photo credit: X

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi — **Sunday, JUNE 28, 2026**

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon trine Saturn on your solar return chart and it is going to give fantastic results. You will remain happy in domestic matters and share good bonds with your family members. You will also remain busy with religious ceremonies. You will also complete your work with ease. Money will flow in. There will be radiance in your work, family matters and personal matters. You will take full advantage of your rights and use all the facilities. There will be peace and stability in your personal life. By helping your needy friends, you will be doing welfare work. You will have a wonderful romantic life. Marriage is indicated. You will also get respite from chronic illness. You will behave humbly and take time for entertainment. You will meet people with the same mindset.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a very productive week for you. Your creative skills will come to the fore. You will be strong-willed and determined. You will impress your subordinates and boss. You will go to any extent to achieve your goals. You will be ambitious and not like to be dominated or controlled. Your financial position is going to be good. You will always remain surrounded by friends and well-wishes. Favorable conditions will be created in business and trade. Your health will also improve. You will also share good understanding with your partner/spouse. Your family members will listen to your views and give lot of support. Financially you will achieve new gains regularly.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will show lot of punctuality in your work. money will keep coming but you need to be careful about it. Do not lend money to anyone. It might get struck. Decisions related to property matters in courts will come in your favor. You will get full support of your peers and bosses. You will work hard in your job and get the desired results. You will make best use of modern technology to grow your business. You will also get promoted in your job. You will get good news in love relations and prospects look bright. Husband and wife will have good understanding. Students need to focus on their studies. A situation of any festivity or marriage etc may be created, You will also get a chance to meet an exciting and lively person. He/she will show you proper direction in your life.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Your attitude will impress one and all. Your gentleness and soberly behaviour will win you lot of admirers. You will be able to get your work done with ease. Your communication skills will be second to none. Even some strangers will help you a lot. You will make new investments. You will be person with imagination and a creative bent on mind. You will be able to implement your ideas and bring them into reality. Your dreams will be fulfilled. However, your emotional nature will prove to be biggest weakness which you need to get over. It will prove to be a hindrance in your road to progress. And you could give him/her an expensive gift. You need to put lot of effort into business and work. However, results and benefits will come on expected lines.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It will be an amazing week for you. You will plan for some important projects and give it a kickstart. Initially you will face hurdles but with the passage of time you will be able to achieve your goals. You will also make new contacts. You will also make new contacts. You will work hard and toil to bring business on track. You also need to work sincerely in your job. You will complete your work on time. You need to be careful in financial matters. There are chances of fraud or conspiracy against you. Keep away from strangers. Your relationship with your relatives and dear ones will be cordial and nice. You will also get an opportunity to meet an old friend of yours. You will remain busy with your work and make a short work-related trip.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is time to make gains. You will be in possession of wealth, wisdom and intelligence with family support. You will also shine at your workplace. You will have all the qualities of a hard-working person. You will also win debates and competitions. You will be idealistic, disciplinary and respectful. You will also have monetary gains. Be careful of your foes and opponents. You need to face every kind of situation wisely and fearlessly. You will also make profits in your business. Friends will help you from time to time. Students will work hard and get good results for their efforts. To be helpful, you will take some decisions which will turn out to be beneficial later. You will remain rooted to the ground level and remain very humble and gentle.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) You will be blessed with a unique personality. People will agree with what you suggest. You will get success in your pursuits. You will not say yes to any proposal without giving it proper thought. You will not make friends easily. But once you are committed there is no going back. You will remain loyal to your friends. You will not look for short-term gains. You will purchase some property or vehicle. It is difficult for people to understand what goes inside their mind. You will be successful in love affairs. You will also enjoy marital bliss. Working women will get support from their organization. You will also solve financial problems of your brothers. You will also meet a great and influential person.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) This week will be full of opportunities for you. You will achieve miraculous success in your work. The graph of your opportunities and aspirations will continue to increase day by day. Your financial position will remain stable. Some borrowed or struck up money will come back to you. You will be more energetic. You will work diligently for which you will be rewarded too. Lovebirds will have a very enjoyable time. They will enjoy each other's company. You will not compromise with your principles. Your parents will be very happy with you. They will give their blessings. You will devote some time to your family members. It will be a case of now or never in a business matter. But you will emerge as a winner in the end.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It will be difficult for people to read your inner and outer personality. You will keep them guessing. They will be unable to read what is going inside your mind. But you will go about your task and achieve your goals. Avoid any rigid attitude. They will not get success. You will put a lot of effort into your job and will become a cause of envy for others. You will enjoy a wonderful romantic life. Those who are married will have marital bliss. The understanding between wife and husband will be good. You will also test a close friend of yours. Avoid trusting people in money related matters. Debates of inheriting money with your brothers/sisters will reach a compromise.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will not be afraid of facing any difficult situation. You will face every obstacle boldly. You will be materialistic from the outside, but some corner of your mind will be spiritually inclined. You will pay lot of attention to your family matters. Despite being busy, family will remain your top priority. You will also enjoy good bonding with your spouse/partner. You will have financial gains. It is important you work with lot of patience and dedication. Your friends and relatives will stand with you through all the thick and thin. You will not pay heed to any criticism of yours. Your enemies will get defeated. You will also get full support from your spouse and family in all situations.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) It is a gainful week. The star of your destiny will once again shine and will help all your struck tasks to gain momentum. You will work hard and perform well in your job. As a result, your work will be appreciated a lot and your self –confidence will increase. You will also have monetary gains. You will receive your loaned money back. You will also get a job offer or get a promotion. It is a very favorable phase for your business. You will also undertake business-related trips. The blessings and love of your elders will help you move forward in your life. Your versatility will be proved beyond doubt. You will also receive good news. You will be inclined towards a new special task.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It will prove to be a very fruitful week. You will be a game changer, and your efforts will bring good results. You will perform those tasks which others will be unable to even think of. You will be practical in your approach and will call spade a spade. Put your best efforts to realize your dreams. Planetary position is very favorable. Jupiter and Saturn will give you good results. You can get success in matters related to abroad. You will enjoy a wonderful love life. Those who are married will share amazing bonds with their partners. You will feel more emotional and bonding towards your family. Being close to experienced people will prove to be extremely helpful and beneficial.

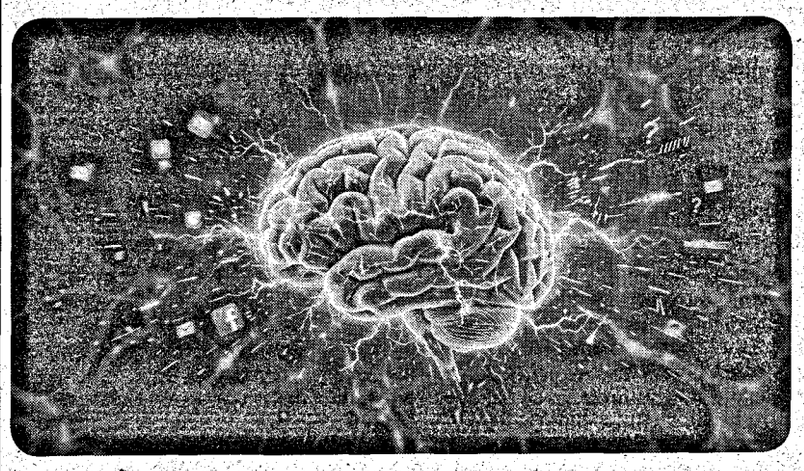
Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) This week your chances of monetary benefits are very strong. You will have good relations with your partners and other businesspeople. Your bosses will support you. There will be disruptions caused to the completion of an extremely important task. Your loved ones will support you. You will have new sources of income. Do not sign any document without reading it. New contracts will be made in your business or job. Your senior officials and boss will be pleased with your work. You will feel elated and on top of the world. Do not waste your time on useless things. Misunderstandings will be cleared up in family ties. Time to look ahead.

How to fix your tiff with attention

Ding — that's an all too familiar sound, designed to instantly capture your attention.

The average adult receives at least 46 push notifications a day from their smartphone — roughly one every 20 minutes during waking hours.

These interruptions might seem like a small price to pay for staying connected. However, research shows these attention-grabbing features increase stress and reduce productivity. They can even have fatal consequences, with phone-related distraction, claiming 29 lives on Australian roads each year.



In our modern world, it can feel impossible to focus on any one task. But science tells us there are ways you can reclaim your attention.

How attention works

A network of areas in the human brain controls our selective attention, the process by which we focus on relevant information and ignore the rest. Where attention goes is a balance between what your goals are and what's happening in the world around you.

This means sudden or urgent events can capture your attention and pull it away from what you're trying to do.

From an evolutionary perspective, this helps keep us safe. Imagine you are foraging for berries, for example, when you hear the rustling of leaves. This sound would capture your attention and shift your focus from foraging to the potential threat — it may be a tiger about to pounce.

Today, however, our modern environments often hijack this same mechanism for things that are far less urgent or important — such as the buzz of a new friend request.

The trouble with tech

Digital platforms are designed to instantly capture and hold your attention by tapping into the brain's reward and motivation systems. This is why you may find it harder to resist distractions that offer some kind of reward, such as a "like" on your post. It also makes it more difficult to stick to tasks that require sustained attention.

Research suggests these frequent interruptions may be reducing our ability to concentrate — not by affecting our fundamental ability to focus, but by increasing how often we switch between activities.

The myth of multitasking is that we can do two demanding tasks at once. However, our attention is capacity-limited, which means we can't simultaneously process everything that's happening around us.

"Multitasking" is actually task switching, or rapidly swapping between tasks rather than doing both at the same time. Research consistently shows that task switching impairs how well we do one or both tasks, no matter how familiar or predictable the task is.

What you can do

Many factors influence your ability to pay attention — ranging from how well you sleep to whether you have certain health conditions, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder.

However, we can build up our "attention muscles" by making some minor lifestyle changes.

1. Limit distractions from devices

You can do this by setting up "focus" modes on your phone. These automatically filter out distractions by limiting how many notifications you get, particularly while working or driving. Or turn off all notifications from apps and schedule specific times to check them — say, for ten minutes before lunch — and set timers to keep yourself accountable.

Apps that track your screen time may help, but avoid those that gamify how much time you spend off your phone. Ironically, these game-like features are also designed to draw in your attention. Instead, opt for tools that discourage use and provide data that can help you reflect on your screen habits.

2. Choose activities that require focus

The evidence is clear that constantly switching between tasks weakens our focus. To combat this, prioritise activities that demand sustained attention.

Research shows that doing immersive activities — such as playing music and competitive sport — a few times a week may improve your ability to pay attention. This could be because these activities require you to pay attention for longer periods to achieve a specific goal.

You can also use tools such as Pomodoro timers, which help you alternate between 25-minute intervals of focused work and five-minute breaks.

3. Reduce your overall tech use:

Research shows people who avoid using devices before bedtime and keep them out of bedrooms sleep better. Studies also show these practices may improve your focus the following day.

And when you have a free moment, don't immediately pick up your device. Research suggests that regularly pausing to let your mind wander allows your brain to process information and form new connections between different concepts and experiences, leaving room for creativity to flourish.

In the end, reclaiming your attention doesn't necessarily require rigid rules or strict routines. It starts with small, intentional acts of presence. Attention is a precious resource, so let's invest it wisely. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Patricia Morada Macabulos and Anina Rich, Macquarie University

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"It is harder to conceal ignorance than to acquire knowledge."

—Arnold H. Glasow

The Shillong Times

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Iran back again

THE situation is back to square one. A tenuous peace pact that was supposed to halt the US-Iran war has fallen apart. Nations are back at war. President Trump warns he would finish off Iran as if he didn't get enough time to do this over the past four months. Iran warns the US of disaster even as it could do no more than make a few hits into sensitive US interests in the nearby Gulf States. Millions of people are caught in the direct frame, and indirectly, the rest of the world – Americans included. The principal objective of the war, as stated by President Trump, was forcing a halt to Iran's nuclear programme. Iran reasserted this week that it would not allow any external inspections on its nuclear facilities. This meant a dead end. The question is: what then was the "deal" fixed through the Pakistani mediators all about? Pakistan lost the sheen it built for itself.

Trump's hidden agenda was obviously to lay his hands on Iran's oil. The Supreme Council told Trump in unmistakable terms that this was his wishful thinking. In the guise of a ceasefire, the US was crafty enough to find time to rework its strategies vis-à-vis Iran. Winning this war is, for Trump and his Republicans, important to retain their credibility. Trump blew hot and cold, sending out confusing signals, as the war did not progress the way he had hoped. He squirmed in his chair even as the battle took the lives of over 7,000 hapless people and put the whole world in deep distress. Oil prices rose, fell and rose again. Inflationary trends made life difficult for Americans themselves. Nations like India, caught in between, faced the odds of this war. Modi, "the good friend," felt slighted because he was not made a mediator—a role he would have cherished to salvage his diminishing reputation back home. Prices of items across the board rose in India -- for inexplicable reasons. Traders built up a frenzy to make a clean cut.

By all outward appearances, it would still be difficult for the US to win this war. Iranians were preparing for this moment just as America was building its military muscles for action abroad. For the Americans, a war is a periodic requirement. They needed an opportunity to test their modern weapons of warfare. Afghanistan fell without a fight. In an extension of this awe, George Bush pounced on Iraq. Trump recently effected a change of regime in Venezuela without dropping any blood. Its president proved to be a sitting duck. In a 'what next', Iran opened up before Trump's greedy eyes. Iran, once Persia and the crown jewel of the geographic region, knew the US would come to grab its oil sooner than later. Iranians were battle-ready. As Trump hesitates to risk deploying his troops on Iranian soil -- what could be killing fields -- Iran would perhaps have the last laugh.

Meghalaya's Electoral Roll and the Politics of Disappearance

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

Critical Questions on Meghalaya's Special Intensive Revision 2026

There is a myth from ancient Greece that most people have forgotten. Sisyphus, that cunning king of Ephyra, was condemned by the gods not simply to suffer—he was condemned to suffer usefully. Every morning he rolled a boulder up a hill. Every evening it rolled back down. The gods called this punishment. But look again. Look more carefully. What the gods truly wanted was for Sisyphus to never arrive. That is the cruelest part. Not the labour. The perpetual almost.

I've been thinking about that myth a lot these past few weeks, sitting here in my village , watching the Special Intensive Revision unfold like a familiar play in an unfamiliar language. The Election Commission of India, exercising its powers under Article 324 of the Constitution and Section 21 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, has directed a comprehensive revision of Meghalaya's electoral rolls—with the qualifying date set at October 1, 2026, house-to-house visits by Booth Level Officers running from June 30 to July 29, and the final electoral roll to be published on October 7, 2026. On paper, it sounds clean. Democratic. Almost noble. A state taking care of its citizenry, ensuring every legitimate voter is counted, every ghost voter expunged. The Chief Electoral Officer, Dr. B.D.R. Tiwari, declared the state "fully prepared" for a "smooth, transparent, inclusive, and error-free" exercise. He urged political parties to appoint Booth Level Agents. He spoke about grassroots transparency.

But here's the thing Socrates understood, that question the old man kept asking in the Agora until they gave him hemlock for it: what does a word actually mean when you peel it down to the bone? What does "inclusive" mean when the very design of the exercise has been shown, across Bihar, West Bengal, and Madhya Pradesh, to disproportionately exclude migrants, tribals, Muslims, and women? What does "error-free" mean when in West Bengal alone, 27 lakh voters—twenty-seven lakh breathing, voting, taxpaying human beings—were deleted from the rolls, with 11.62% of the entire state's voter base simply... gone? You don't get to call something error-free after that. You don't get to wave the word "inclusive" like a flag when the ground underneath it is scorched.

Let me be precise about what's happening in Meghalaya, because precision matters here. The SIR is being conducted in Phase III, covering 16 states and three Union Territories. The BLOs—Booth Level Officers—are going from door to door. They're handing every existing elector an Enumeration Form. Electors fill it, return a copy, and an online portal is also available. Sounds reasonable. But here, I want readers to slow down and think with me for a moment. Those whose names appeared in the last Special Intensive Revision—which in some contexts means rolls from 2003 or 2005—are treated as a baseline. Those who don't appear there? They must establish their lineage. Those born after 1987 must prove at least one parent holds Indian citizenship. Those born after 2004 must prove both parents hold citizenship.

Now ask yourself this honestly: how many of our people - our grandmothers and young men and women who migrated to find work and returned—have documents legally tracing their parents' citizenship? Ambedkar, who perhaps understood better than any Indian intellectual what it means to be asked to prove your humanity to a system that designed your exclusion, wrote in Annihilation of Caste that the worst form of subjugation is the one that wears the mask of procedure. It doesn't say you don't belong. It just says: show your papers. And when you can't—not because you are foreign, but because the state never gave you those papers in the first place—it shrugs.

The situation is not hypothetical. In Madhya Pradesh, over 3 lakh forest rights claims had been rejected by the state government as of early 2025. This meant tribal voters holding no forest rights certificate—one of the 13 listed documents for SIR eligibility—found themselves caught between a state that refused to recognise their land rights and an electoral body that needed proof of those rights. Meghalaya is overwhelmingly tribal. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo communities have customary landholding structures, oral traditions, and community-based identification systems that don't always translate neatly into the bureaucratic grammar the ECI is demanding. The question you need to sit with—the genuinely uncomfortable Socratic question—is this: was this mismatch accidental?

The ECI says: we are revising rolls for accuracy. What is done by this revision—what it performs, what it enacts—is a citizenship audit. Former Chief Election Commissioner O.P. Rawat himself acknowledged in January 2026 that the SIR has led to "unusually high voter deletions," that the burden placed on BLOs is extraordinary, and that the "fear and confusion" generated among ordinary citizens is a real and serious democratic problem. This is not the opposition speaking. This is a former CEC.

The BLA question deserves our attention too. Dr Tiwari "strongly urged" political parties to appoint Booth Level Agents. Urged. Not ensured. Not mandated. Urged. The BLA is theoretically the citizen's representative in the SIR process—the person who can stand beside the BLO during house visits, flag discrepancies, advocate for voters who might otherwise be quietly deleted. Without BLAs, the BLO operates essentially unsupervised at the household level. In a state like Meghalaya, where many villages are remote, where road connectivity during the June-July monsoon is genuinely terrible, where a BLO might be covering dozens of villages across difficult terrain—the absence of BLAs is not a bureaucratic detail. It's the difference between accountability and its performance.

The ECI tells us SIR is about accuracy and inclusion. The text of Bihar's experience pushes back. The text of West Bengal's 27 lakh deletions pushes back. The text of Kerala's Legislative Assembly unanimously passing a resolution against the SIR, warning of "politics of exclusion," pushes back. What deeper understanding are we being pushed toward? What does Meghalaya's SIR really mean—for tribal identity, for voter rights, for the relationship between the citizen and the state in the northeast?

Ambedkar once said—and I'm paraphrasing, but the spirit is exact—that constitutional morality is not a natural sentiment. It has to be cultivated. It has to be consciously maintained against the grain of social and political convenience. The SIR, as currently designed and implemented, does not cultivate constitutional morality in its treatment of vulnerable voters. It demands that citizens cultivate it — that they find documents, navigate portals, locate BLOs, understand forms — and if they cannot, they vanish from the democratic record. Not with cruelty. With paperwork.

The questions are real. Will the enumeration forms reach every household in East Khasi Hills, West Khasi Hills, and Ri Bhoi before July 29? Will BLOs operating in flood-prone Garo Hills actually complete house-to-house visits, or will forms be distributed at central points, disadvantaging the elderly and the isolated? What safeguards exist for the elector who fills the form but whose name still disappears from the draft roll on August 5? When claims and objections open from August 5 to September 4, what infrastructure exists for a villager in a remote area to actually file one? These are not trick questions. They're the questions a democracy owes its citizens before it moves boulders on their behalf.

The answer that destroys a destructive power is always simpler than the power expected. In this case, the riddle isn't complex. It's this: does a revision that deletes legitimate voters serve democracy, or does it merely serve the state's need to appear orderly? The answer is not comfortable for anyone in official position. But it is the only honest one. And in Meghalaya, where tribal identity, residency patterns, customary law, and documentary poverty intersect in ways no enumeration form can fully capture, the stakes of getting this wrong are not administrative. They're constitutional. They're human.

The boulder is already rolling. The question is whether, this time, anyone will catch it.

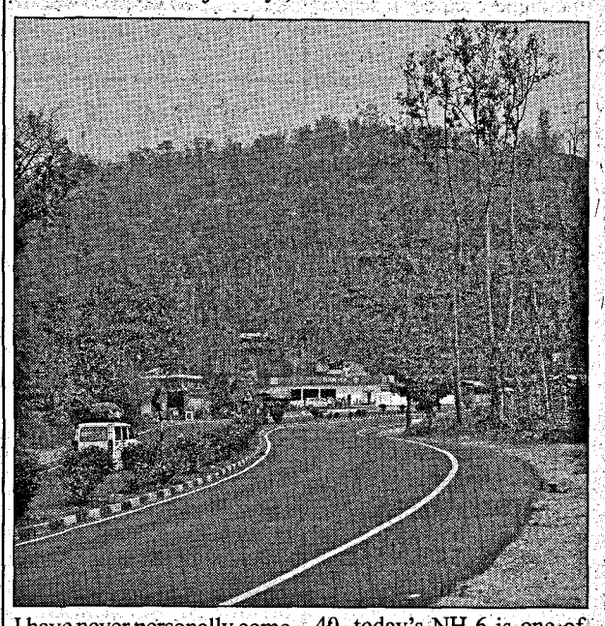
(The writer is an advocate and rights activist)

Miles of Beauty, Nowhere to Stop

By Balakmen Suting

I have lived near this highway most of my life. My home sits close to what was once nationally known as NH-40, today redesignated NH-6, a road whose sounds formed the backdrop of my growing up. The pre-dawn rumble of trucks, the weekend surge of tourist vehicles climbing toward Shillong, the unceasing movement of a corridor that has long connected Assam to the heartland of Meghalaya.

I have travelled this road more times than I can count. And across all those journeys,



I have never personally come across a single government-built rest area, truck lay-by, or wayside facility along this stretch.

I offer that as a personal observation, not an accusation. Perhaps such a facility exists somewhere along NH-6 that I have not encountered. But as a frequent traveller who has genuinely looked, I have not seen one. The only stop available to the tired driver, the travelling family, or the tourist arriving from Guwahati has been the petrol pump accessed not by right, but by the courteous discretion of its staff.

That quiet reality led me to ask a question most commuters never think to ask: what exactly is NHAI supposed to provide, and are we receiving it?

A Mandate Most People Do Not Know Exists

The National Highways Authority of India (NHAI) has a formal programme called Wayside Amenities (WSA). Many regular users of this highway are simply unaware it exists. These are not petrol pumps. They are dedicated rest facilities, mandated by government policy, to be built every 40 to 60 kilometres along national highways across India. Each facility is designed to include a food court, clean toilets with shower facilities, a medical clinic, an ATM, a children's play area, a vehicle repair workshop, a driver dormitory, electric vehicle charging points, and a village haat promoting local handicrafts and produce.

This is not a Wishlist. It is a committed, funded programme of the Government of India meant for every commuter, truck driver, tourist, and family travelling our national highways.

Nationally, delivery has been slow. As of late 2025, of more than 700 sites planned and 510 awarded across India, only 110 wayside amenities are operational. For Meghalaya, the number is not 110, not 10, not even one.

An RTI response from NHAI's own Project Implementation Unit in Shillong confirmed what personal experience already suggested: not a single wayside amenity has been developed anywhere in Meghalaya, despite more than eleven years of continuous toll collection since the Diengpasoh plaza opened in 2014. During FY 2024–25 alone, Meghalaya's four toll plazas collectively recorded ₹96.05 crore in toll revenue. Every vehicle on this corridor contributed to that figure. The amenities it was meant to help build never came.

What This Means for Road Tourism

With my background in Tourism, I write this with conviction beyond personal inconvenience. The old NH-40, today's NH-6 is one of the most scenic highway corridors in Northeast India, winding through rain-sculpted highlands, living root bridge country, and the ancestral landscapes of the Khasi and Jaiñtia peoples. For the growing number of travellers choosing road journeys to experience rural India at their own pace, this highway holds remarkable potential.

But road tourism needs infrastructure to breathe. A traveller with nowhere safe to stop, no clean facility to use, and no space to taste local food or buy local crafts is a traveller whose experience is diminished before it has fully begun. NHAI's own vision for wayside amenities included village haats offering area-specific handicrafts, handlooms, and local food, spaces designed to bring direct economic benefit to surrounding communities. On NH-6, that vision has not left the page.

For rural communities living along this corridor, a functional wayside amenity is not merely a tourist convenience. It is a marketplace, a livelihood, and a dignified point of connection between traveller and landscape. Its absence is their loss as much as anyone's.

In Closing

This article is, first, information because most people on this road do not know that wayside amenities are a policy entitlement, not a luxury. The petrol pump has been generous. It was never meant to carry this responsibility alone.

It is also a respectful reminder to NHAI and to policymakers: a mandate long deferred is a traveller long underserved.

If I have missed an existing facility along this highway, I stand gladly corrected. But if the RTI record and lived experience together reflect the truth, the question must be asked simply and clearly: after eleven years and crores collected at our toll plazas, when does Meghalaya's share of this promise arrive?

The miles on this highway are beautiful. The people who travel them deserve a road that knows where to stop.

"An RTI response from NHAI's own Project Implementation Unit in Shillong confirmed what personal experience already suggested: not a single wayside amenity has been developed anywhere in Meghalaya, despite more than eleven years of continuous toll collection since the Diengpasoh plaza opened in 2014."

Letters to the Editor

A Woman Cricketer's Gratitude, & Plea for Justice to Go Deeper into MCA Affairs

Editor,

As a woman who has represented Meghalaya in cricket, I wish to express my sincere thanks to MCA President James Sangma for the decisive actions he has recently taken, dismissing the Head Coach and Assistant Manager Sanjay Mondal, and the suspension of Honorary Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni. For those of us who have worn the Meghalaya jersey, these are deeply meaningful steps that we had begun to believe would never come in all these years that we suffered.

For years now, women cricketers in the MCA have operated in an environment that was indifferent to our safety, and at worst actively hostile to our dignity. Leave aside hygiene, health or nutrition. Those seated in positions of power and administration gave zero importance to making the experience of representing Meghalaya one of pride and security. We were expected to perform on the field as professionals while enduring conditions off it that no professional sporting body should ever allow.

The findings of the Meghalaya State Commission for Women have now confirmed what many of us already knew and wanted for the public to know. The MSCW report, which found the Honorary Secretary guilty of negligence and cover-up in the matter of harassment, is a validation that is both welcome and painful. Welcome because the truth has been formally recorded, and painful because it took this long to arrive. But I would like to commend the U23 Women's Team for showing this level of courage while speaking truth to power.

I urge the authorities through your esteemed daily, to not stop here. The MSCW report is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of one which will reveal many more dark secrets if investigated.

Other wrongdoings have been happening within the MCA for years, and one name has been common across many of them: that of Secretary Kharkamni. I will speak of one matter that I know to be true from my own experience and from the experience of fellow players. During training camps held ahead of tournaments, women players were often coerced into having alcohol and attending so-called social gatherings to "relax" and "enjoy". This was done at the direction of or with the knowledge of the Honorary Secretary who attended these events himself. When we hesitated and pushed back; when we said that we were preparing for a tournament and that this was not appropriate, the response we received was dismissive: that it was MCA money being spent, not the Secretary's personal funds, and therefore no one was really losing anything. The implication was that our objections were irrelevant. That our bodies, our preparation, our athletic discipline - none of it mattered. More inappropriate was MCA money being used for alcohol.

This is not the environment in which sportspersons can be expected to perform. How are players supposed to give their best on the field when they are being psychologically broken by the very environment in which they are supposed to be developing as athletes?

And it was not only the alcohol. During camps in the Ri-Bhoi district, players were put up in hotels that were, to put it politely, entirely unsuitable for any decent person to stay. The MSCW report has corroborated this and spoken about the questionable activities that take place in these hotels where players were put up. This is absolutely accurate. The conditions were troubling. Complaints were raised and they went all the way to the Honorary Secretary's level. No action was ever taken. And on more than one occasion, Secretary Sir himself was present in these establishments. The complaints therefore were not merely unaddressed; they were ignored by the very person to whom they were directed, in the very locations where the problems were occurring.

Our lived experiences as women cricketers in the MCA have been terrible and traumatic. And the cost of this has been borne not by those who created it, but by those who endured it. By young women who loved cricket, who wanted to represent their state, and who found themselves navigating a system broken at its foundations.

I am grateful that this is beginning to change. The MCA under its new President James Sangma has made a fresh start, and the disciplinary actions already taken are proof that the new leadership takes its responsibilities seriously. We who suffered for so long because of bad administration hope that the investigation does not stop at the surface so that it does not affect current and future players. A deeper inquiry into the full range of irregularities within the MCA is necessary if genuine reform is to take root. There is too much noise and misinformation out there, but for those of us who have been associated with MCA, we have known and seen the truth for years now and we know who is responsible.

All players should have reasons to be proud of the jersey they wear. We hope that what has begun will not falter, and that the MCA never sinks again to the depths it had sunk to before.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request (A concerned woman cricketer of MCA)
Via email

What Single Document Makes Me an Indian Citizen?

Editor,

I had just today cancelled an international hotel reservation I made through Booking.com. Thank goodness, I had not gone through booking my air tickets for my proposed foreign travel! And the reason for this cancellation is very, very serious. What I feared was that on my return to my country (I still hope it's my country), I may not be allowed to re-enter by the Indian immigration officials at the airport counter, as my Indian citizenship may be in question! All I have to produce, by way of documents, is my Aadhaar card, my voter ID, my PAN card, my Retiree ID card, my Driving Licence, and even my CKYC card - all of them put together do not prove that I am a citizen of India as per the Government of India and the Supreme Court!

I wonder if our PM, our External Affairs Minister, and other members of the ministry have other documents, unknown to us, to prove that they are citizens of this country?

Yours etc.,
Eugene D. Thomas,
Shillong - 6.

El Nino Effect is Happening

Editor

This year's El Nino is one of the strongest in history and it is likely to have a tremendous impact on the monsoon in India. India being a tropical country, has always had a severe summer season with scorching heat. If the following monsoon is not effective, people will have to bear the brunt. Over the years, El Nino has tightened its grip and consequently many parts of the country do not get sufficient rain. In India lakhs of hectares of cropland depend on rain. Deficit rainfall leads to crop failure and farmers suffer huge losses. June is slowly passing by without good rain and it is a clear indication of El Nino's impact. In such a crisis, the Central and State governments must take people into confidence and convince them of El Nino's impact and its consequences. As rivers dry up and the requirement of water increases, it may lead to conflicts. Inter-state conflicts over river water sharing may intensify. Given that El Nino's impact may continue till February 2027, how the country is preparing and planning to face it is a significant matter. Questions like how people will cope with water scarcity and how it will affect people's health and food production remain unanswered. As there is no solution to climate change, people need to face it and governments need to find ways to mitigate it.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS
Kollam

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"Power without a nation's confidence is nothing."

— Catherine the Great

The Shillong Times

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Matriliny Brutalised

THIS is not the first time that Meghalaya's much-romanticised matrilineal legacy has been shown up for what it is: a cover-up for many wrongs and injustices faced by women in this society. Matriliny covers a multitude of unabashed attacks on women's character: the clothes they wear, how they behave in public, who they go around with and finally who they choose to marry. Everything is dictated by the male members of this much touted matrilineal culture where ostensibly women enjoy rights that others of their ilk elsewhere in this country and the world are deprived of. It's time to call out this sardonic attitude which only sounds good in songs and poetry, because real life is not a joyride for women in this matrilineal society.

Let's start with the sordid goings-on in the Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA) where young and aspiring women cricketers are treated more like sex objects than professional players aspiring to demonstrate their prowess on the national stage. The MCA violated the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) Act 2013 by not constituting an Internal Complaints Committee (ICC) which is mandatory for any institution with 10 or more employees, whether permanent or contractual. The committee must include a senior woman employee as Presiding Officer, at least two employee members with relevant experience or commitment to women's issues, and one external member from an NGO or someone familiar with sexual harassment issues. The series of actions taken by the incoming MCA President, James Sangma—against the violators of the women cricketers' decency and morality (who include the Head Coach and Assistant Manager)—and the suspension of the Honorary Secretary are what's required to cleanse the Association. Is it surprising that certain MCA members find fault with these actions. Is this the sensitivity towards the assault on women's dignity and sensibility? This also exposes the gender insensitivity of the average Khasi male.

At a time when all eyes are on the MCA and the allegations of sexual harassment spanning a long period, a video surfaced showing a young woman being publicly assaulted and kicked on the head as she collapsed on the road near the Nongstoin bypass on June 28. The video was perhaps uploaded on June 29. It appears the attacker is the young woman's estranged husband. But what should shame the society is that there were many onlookers to that brutal scene but none to take on the attacker. The fact that someone recorded this heinous act and later posted it on Instagram is indicative of where our empathy lies. The comments following thereafter also blame the woman for her manner of dressing etc. And that's where the rub lies. This is a society that judges women harshly and believes that women dressed in a certain way deserve to be kicked around and shamed publicly. Both cases – the MCA women's team and the woman assaulted in full public view highlight a broader concern in Meghalaya that violence against women in intimate relationships often remains unreported until a particularly serious incident—or, as in this case, a video—brings it into public view. The legal process will now depend on the evidence collected by investigators and the victim's statement, rather than on the viral video alone. Matriliny deserves a reality check!

Ïung Blai: The Sacred Institution of the Pnar

By H.H. Mohrmen

Niamtre religion is not an organized religion and does not have a place of worship like the church of Christians, the temple of Hindus, the mosque of Muslims, the gurdwara of Sikhs, or the synagogue of Jews, or sacred spaces like those found in many organised religions. Yet, it has its *Ïung Blai*, or the House of God. The *Ïung Blai*, however, is not the only sacred place. As per tradition sacred groves are also revered; rivers and even natural phenomena are considered holy. However, *Ïung Blai* occupies a unique place in the tradition.

What is a Ïung Blai?

The general understanding is that the *Ïung Blai* is the ancestral house where the youngest daughter resides with her parents. In reality, however, it is much more than merely a dwelling place or an ancestral house. The *Ïung Blai* is not only the dwelling place of the *rap ïung* or *ka khadduh/wa kham*, the different terms used for the youngest daughter in the family who usually preserves the tradition, but it is also the place where important decisions concerning the affairs of the clan are made.

It is not necessary that only the youngest daughter has the right to be the keeper of the *Ïung Blai*. The clan can decide who will be the keeper of the *Ïung Blai*, and she may not necessarily be the khadduh. There is one very important condition to keep: if the keeper of the *Ïung Blai* is married, she has to be *dei Kynsai*, which means that the marriage has to be proper and in accordance with tradition.

It is also mandatory that the maternal uncle conducts all clan meetings and the family's rites of passage at the *Ïung Blai*. The *Ïung Blai* is also the sanctum sanctorum of the entire family, particularly of those families belonging to that particular branch of the clan. From *Sib syiñ or bam syieiñ/chat lane*, the naming ceremony of a child, to *i bia i khap or ka Lam ïutang*, the marriage ceremony, and finally to *ka niam ïap*, the last rites of a person, all these ceremonies are performed at the *Ïung Blai*.

Ka Siang ka Pha, like *ka Chyllap ka Chylliang* and *Ka Siang Thakur*, are also clan activities and are offered only at the clan's *Ïung Blai* or *Kmai Ïung*. Only *Ka Siang Ïap*, which forms part of the final rites of a deceased person, is offered at the cremation ground. *Ka Siang Ïap* is performed at the cremation ground, while *ka phur ka leiñ* is offered at the clan's mootylleiñ before the charred bones are interred in the ossuary.

Composition of the *Ïung Blai*

There are no hard and fast rules concerning the number of families that may belong to a single *Ïung Blai*. There may be one or many families under one *Ïung Blai/Kmai Ïung;* as long as they belong to the same clan and are descended from a common grandmother.

Generally, a clan can have its own *Ïung Blai*, and the number of families, or *ki trep ki skum*, varies from one *Ïung Blai* to another. Normally, a *Ïung Blai* comprises families that trace their origin to the same great-great-grandmother, and all her descendants owe their allegiance to the *Ïung Blai (Laloo Mina)*.

Perhaps the family system, with the *Ïung Blai* at the centre of the clan, also affirms that the traditional marriage system among the Pnar and the War of the Jaiñtia Hills follows the uxorilocal pattern. A marriage system also known as matrilocal is a marital custom in which a married couple resides with or near the bride's family rather than the groom's. The preferred household arrangement among the Pnar, with the *Ïung Blai* at the centre and *ki trep ki skum* (the houses of clan members) surrounding it, is a classic example of uxorilocal marriage. This practice serves multiple social and economic functions, including ensuring the continuity of the family lineage, providing agricultural labour, and maintaining the family's economic stability. In the case of the Pnar of Jwai, it strengthens the matrilineal system and ensures that the tribe's culture and traditions are maintained.

A clan can have many Ïung Blai, depending on the size of the clan. An *Ïung Blai* is not only a place where the rites of passage of the clan members are performed. It is also the place where the body of a deceased clan member is kept lying in state before being taken for cremation.

The only exception is in the case of people who die as a result of an accident or an unnatural death. The rites for such deaths are performed outside the *Ïung Blai*, and the body is not taken there to lie in state. Instead, the body is cremated without being taken to the clan's house, and it is not cremated in the designated cremation ground.

Herein lies the crux of the matrilineal family system: just as a person's life begins in the clan, it also ends in the clan. A person lives and dies within the clan. The mortal remains of the deceased also find their final resting place in the clan's ossuary. The *Ïung Blai* perhaps best illustrates the essence of the matrilineal family system. It reminds us that a clan is not merely a title or surname that follows a person's name, but a living institution that shapes one's identity and relationship with both the living and the ancestors.

The Design of the *Ïung Blai*

The *Ïung Blai* is a very important institution in the Niamtre religion, and it cannot be constructed at the whims and fancies of the owner of the house. The people of Raid Jwai believe that the *Ïung Blai/Kmai Ïung* must be constructed according to the instructions of *U Tre Kirot*, and the first and most important instruction is that the house should face east. The *Ïung Blai* is always constructed according to the directives of *U Tre Kirot*, and each room has its own significance. According to these directives, a *Ïung Blai* should always have six rooms: (1) *i Chloor*, (2) *i Kyndur*, (3) *i Tre Thlong*, (4) *i Rakut*, (5) *i Palat Kyndur*, and (6) *i Dahari* (*Lamar Dawmanchuh*).

It is not that the number of rooms in the house should be restricted to six only. Rather, these six rooms are compulsory because each has its own significance and is connected with the life of the members of the clan. Without them, certain rites of passage and ceremonies cannot be performed.

The significance of each room is: *I Rakut, or Ïung Chetja* (the kitchen), is the room where *ka Siang ka Pha* is offered. *Chloor* is where the body of a deceased clan member lies in state during bereavement. *Tre Thlong* is where prayers and oblations are offered. It is also the room where *U Biskurom*, or *U Blai Diñ*, the Fire God, dwells.

Tre Thlong is also the room where *ka duwan*, the altar, and *u chrot skit*, the main pillar, are located. Above the wooden post are the *ki buh tula*, the sacred objects, and it is also where the *ki weit ki stieh* (swords and shields) are kept. The sacredness of *u chrot skit* is evident from the fact that only the *kñi*, the maternal uncle, may sit beside it. The maternal uncle occupies this position whenever he presides over clan meetings, performs rituals, or conducts other important ceremonies. *Tre Thlong* is also the room from which the sacred fire is taken for the final rites of a deceased family member. It is also the room where wedding ceremonies are performed.

According to D. Lamar, there is a difference between the *Ïung Blai* and the *Kmai Ïung*. The *Ïung Blai* is built according to the divine directives, and the rooms must be arranged accordingly. It should always face east, and there must also be a *Sniriang Ksiar* adjacent to it. *A Kmai Ïung*, however, does not necessarily have a *Sniriang Ksiar*, nor is it always built according to the divine directives. Despite these differences, all the necessary rituals and rites of passage of the family members can be performed in the Kmai Ïung.

There is a saying that home is where the heart is. In the Niamtre tradition, however, the *Ïung Blai* is much more than a home. It is the hearth that binds the clan together, providing warmth and light —the sacred space where the living honour their ancestors, perform rites of passage, and reaffirm their shared lineage. It is, in every sense, the sanctum sanctorum of the clan.

As Behdieñkhlam festival approaches, every *Ïung Blai* comes alive with preparations. The ancestral house once again becomes the centre of religious and social life, reminding every member of the clan of their common heritage, responsibilities, and enduring bond with their relatives and their ancestors.

The Reality Behind Meghalaya's Education Crisis

By Ibanriakor D Pakma

I would like to express my agreement with Patricia Mukhim's article, "Stop Playing the Fool With Education: It's Weighing Us Down," published on June 19 last. Her article highlights the harsh reality of Meghalaya's education system, and after visiting a few government schools across different districts in our state, I can say that her concerns are real.

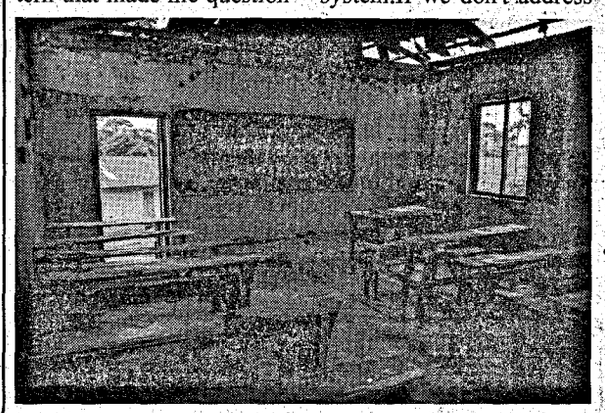
As part of a research project focusing on adolescent wellbeing, I had the opportunity to visit some government schools in different districts of Meghalaya. These visits were both eye-opening, thought-provoking and heart-rending too. During one visit to a school in one of the districts, I witnessed a recurring pattern that made me question the state of our education system. We interacted with students from diverse backgrounds, and the experience revealed challenges that go far beyond the classroom. It exposed educational inequality, limited aspirations, and deeply rooted social attitudes that continue to affect the lives of many young people in our state.

These visits were both eye-opening, thought-provoking and heart-rending too. During one visit to a school in one of the districts, I witnessed a recurring pattern that made me question the state of our education system. We interacted with students from diverse backgrounds, and the experience revealed challenges that go far beyond the classroom.

As someone who strongly believes in women's empowerment, it deeply saddened me to hear children speak as though their dreams were already limited before they had the chance to explore their potential. During one discussion, when students were asked what they hoped to become, several adolescents expressed the desire to complete only the lower levels of education before settling into traditional domestic roles. It made me wonder what messages are being instilled into their minds that discourage them from dreaming bigger. Why do so many children hesitate to imagine themselves becoming doctors, teachers, engineers, entrepreneurs, researchers, or leaders? Is it because they are unaware of the many career opportunities available to them? Or have they already come to believe that such professions are "not for people like us?" Education and wellbeing are closely linked. While many government initiatives are important steps towards promoting adolescent mental wellbeing, they also remind us that emotional wellbeing cannot be separated from educational opportunity. A child who is not encouraged to learn, dream, and believe in their own potential is unlikely to develop the confidence and resilience needed to thrive.

The educational challenges were equally alarming. Many students in Classes 6, 7, and 8 struggled with concepts and skills that should have been mastered much earlier. The gaps in foundational learning were clear. As students move into higher classes, these gaps become even more difficult to overcome. Many lose confidence, struggle academically, and are unable to keep up with the expected standard. Patricia Mukhim rightly pointed out that poor governance, lack of accountability, and weak implementation have contributed to the decline of education in our state.

My brief encounters with the educational experiences in these schools has opened my eyes to the many deficits plaguing our educational system.If we don't address these deficiencies upfront, we cannot expect change to happen. The issue is not that our students lack talent or determination. The issue is that they have not been given the support, quality teaching, and opportunities they deserve. Another concerning observation was the difficulty many students face simply in reaching school. During our visits, we met students who walked long distances, often crossing two or three villages each day to attend classes. Such journeys are physically exhausting and inevitably affect attendance, punctuality, and learning. In this regard, I fully support Patricia Mukhim's suggestion to extend reliable school bus services to remote areas. Access to education begins with access to schools.



The issue is that they have not been given the support, quality teaching, and opportunities they deserve. Another concerning observation was the difficulty many students face simply in reaching school. During our visits, we met students who walked long distances, often crossing two or three villages each day to attend classes. Such journeys are physically exhausting and inevitably affect attendance, punctuality, and learning.

Our children deserve more than classrooms that merely exist. They deserve classrooms that inspire them to dream, learn, and succeed. I hope the Education Department and all concerned authorities take these concerns seriously and work towards meaningful change. The future of Meghalaya depends on the education we provide today. It is also important at this juncture for communities that either benefit from local schools or whose children show a lack of interest in attending their schools. Silence is no longer golden in Meghalaya's education sector. The Government will only act if there are public discussions and voices of concern regarding the matter. Education must become the sine qua non of Meghalaya's political economy. It's now or never.

(The writer is Student Council President, Martin Luther Christian University).

Letters to the Editor

Justice for Women Hides Behind the Law at MCA

Editor,

I write as a parent of a daughter who has represented Meghalaya in cricket - young women who took to the game with dreams of making it a career, and who deserve far better than what they have been subjected to in all these years.

In recent days, we have watched with growing dismay as the matter of sexual harassment within the Meghalaya Cricket Association, a matter of the gravest seriousness, is now being quietly reframed into a procedural dispute. MCA Secretary Rayonald Kharkamni and those rallying behind him are now changing the real issue to the legality of a suspension order. It is a shameful deflection.

When a person in authority faces accountability for enabling or overlooking sexual misconduct, and his first instinct is to reach for procedural arguments, the public is entitled to draw its own conclusions.

A suspension pending inquiry is not a punishment. It is the most basic, instinctive response that any responsible institution owes to the women who have come forward. Employers across every sector, public and private, understand this. The fact that this elementary step has been resisted with such aggression tells us something deeply uncomfortable about Kharkamni's actions and priorities.

What is being lost in this noise is the substance of what the Women's Commission found - findings that reflect badly not only on individuals named in the report but also on a culture of institutional apathy that our daughters have been quietly enduring for years.

We say quietly, because many of us know that it did not begin here. Some parents among us came together sometime last year after our daughters shared deeply troubling accounts of what they had experienced and witnessed. We approached Kharkamni. We were not received. Our concerns were not entertained. There was no attempt to understand what we were raising or to offer any assurance of safety or redress.

We now understand why.

Kharkamni is not alone in this failure. There are other individuals who now don't hold formal office, who showed the same indifference when we and our daughters tried to speak up. The pattern was consistent. The Commission's report, along with the voices now finding the courage to speak publicly, has made that pattern impossible to ignore. The MCA's problems in this regard were not accidental. They were systemic, sustained by individuals who had neither the will nor the interest to act differently.

We are not naive about the politics of cricket administration. We are aware that the current President carries his own political associations and that the MCA does not exist outside of Meghalaya's broader landscape. But whatever one may think of James Sangma, what is self-evident is that something is being attempted—a cleaning up, however imperfect—and the desperation with which Kharkamni is resisting it speaks volumes. A man with nothing to hide does not fight this hard against accountability.

Our daughters chose cricket. They gave years of their youth, their physical effort, and their belief to this game and to this state. They deserve officials who take their safety seriously, who would sooner resign than become an obstacle to justice. Until individuals such as Kharkamni are removed from positions of authority, we fear that the environment our daughters play in will remain hostile to their dignity, however many Commissions report and however many orders are passed.

Yours etc.,
RP Dkhar
Via email

The Jaintia Are Not a Footnote of Khasi History

Editor,

Bhogtoram Mawroh's article, "Shillong Lok Sabha By-Election: More Than a Contest between Two Teachers," may focus on electoral politics, but it also reflects a wider issue that often appears in public discussions of Meghalaya's history: the way the identity of the Jaintia people is sometimes presented as secondary, or absorbed into a broader Khasi framework.

This raises a simple but important question: are we accurately representing the distinct historical identities of the peoples of Meghalaya, or are we slowly narrowing them through selective interpretation?

The Jaintia people are not a subgroup of the Khasi, as Bhogtoram has mentioned in the above article and has frequently argued elsewhere in his writings. They are a distinct indigenous community with their own language, religion, customs, traditions, social systems, and historical record. Reducing this identity into a subset of another community does not reflect historical complexity.

Long before the formation of Meghalaya, the Jaintia Kingdom existed as an independent political entity with its own rulers, administration, laws, and governance structures. The British annexation of the Jaintia Kingdom in 1835 marks a separate and clearly defined historical trajectory. These are not interpretations. They are established historical facts.

While the Khasi and Jaintia peoples share ancient cultural and linguistic connections and have lived side by side for centuries, shared roots do not mean identical histories. Over time, each developed its own political institutions, cultural practices, and social traditions. Recognising this is not about division; it is about historical accuracy.

The term "Jaintia" is not merely a geographic label. It is the name of a people who built a kingdom, shaped institutions, and preserved a rich cultural heritage. The British did not invent the Jaintia identity; they encountered an already established polity with its own structures and traditions.

This is why historical writing and public commentary require care. When key parts of a people's history are consistently underemphasised or merged into another narrative, it creates an incomplete understanding of the past.

When the unique history of the Jaintia people is repeatedly overlooked, readers have every right to question that narrative. Bhogtoram Mawroh's readers have seen this pattern often enough to notice it. In discussion after discussion, the Jaintia historical experience is subtly folded into a broader Khasi framework, as though centuries of separate political and cultural development can be merged into a single storyline. One is left wondering whether this is careful historical analysis or selective framing. Good scholarship is built on evidence, not assumptions, and certainly not on repetition that gradually replaces fact with convenience.

This is not an attack on Khasi identity, nor an attempt to divide indigenous communities. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo peoples together form the foundation of Meghalaya. Their unity, however, must rest on mutual recognition; not on the absorption of one identity into another. Unity does not mean uniformity. Respecting the distinct identity of the Jaintia people is not regionalism. It is historical honesty.

Bhogtoram Mawroh, like any public intellectual, has every right to interpret and analyse. But public influence carries responsibility. Readers also have the right to critically examine narratives that do not fully reflect historical evidence. No interpretation of history should be beyond scrutiny.

The histories of Meghalaya's peoples belong equally to all its communities. Any account that consistently fails to reflect this balance remains incomplete.

History cannot be written by leaving one people out. The Jaintia are not a footnote in Khasi history- they are one of the founding indigenous peoples of Meghalaya, with their own long and independent historical legacy. That reality is not a matter of opinion. It is a matter of historical record.

Yours etc.,
Mantre H Dkhar,
Via email

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