

Raincoat no longer waterproof? Scientist explains how to fix it

You pull on your rain jacket, step out into the storm, and within half an hour your undershirt is soaked. The jacket you purchased as "waterproof" seems to have stopped working, and all the marketing claims feel a bit suspect.

In reality, the jacket probably hasn't failed overnight: a mix of how it's built, the exact level of water protection it offers, and years of sweat, skin oil and dirt have all played a part.

But there are a few simple ways you can care for your rain jacket to ensure you stay dry, even when it's pouring.

The science behind rain jackets

Most proper rain jackets are built around a waterproof "membrane" sandwiched inside the fabric. Gore-Tex is the most popular technology used which includes a very thin layer of chemicals known as PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene) or expanded PTFE (ePTFE) which are full of microscopic pores.

Those pores are much smaller than liquid water droplets. But they're big enough for individual water vapour molecules, so rain on the outside can't push through, but sweat vapour from your body can escape outwards.

Other fabrics use solid, non-porous membranes made from polyurethane or polyester that move water vapour by absorbing it and passing it through the material molecule by molecule rather than via tiny holes. This can make them a bit more tolerant of dirt.

The outer fabric is sometimes treated with a very thin chemical finish that makes water roll off the surface instead of soaking into the fibres. It's a bit like wax on a car. This finish is known as "Durable Water Repellent" and helps to reduce saturation of water in the exterior of the jacket.

In the past, many of these chemical finishes used "forever chemicals" (PFAS) that repelled both water and oil, but persist in the environment and build up in wildlife and people.

Because of this, brands and regulators have started using alternatives based on silicones or hydrocarbons. These still repel water but are generally less hazardous.



It's also useful to understand the words you see on labels.

A waterproof jacket is built to stop rain coming through, even in heavy or prolonged downpours, and usually has a membrane, a chemical finish plus fully taped seams.

"Water resistant" means the fabric slows water down and copes with light showers but will eventually let water through. It often relies on a tight weave and a chemical finish but no true membrane.

"Water repellent" just describes that beading effect from the chemical finish. It can apply to both waterproof and non-waterproof fabrics.

Some brands also say rainproof or weatherproof as a friendlier way of saying "pretty much waterproof", but there's rarely a separate test behind that word.

Why do rain jackets degrade over time?

When you realise your jacket isn't waterproof anymore, the first thing that has usually gone wrong isn't the membrane. It's the chemical finish on the outside.

That ultra thin surface layer gets scuffed by backpack straps and seat belts, baked by sun, and contaminated

by mud, smoke and city grime.

These coatings can gradually lose their water repellent properties through abrasion and washing if harsh detergents and washing cycles are used, and bits of them are shed into the environment over time.

Body oils, sunscreen and insect repellent also play a role, as they build up in the fabric over time. Outdoor gear care guides and lab work on waterproof fabrics both point out that these oily contaminants can damage the chemical finish and clog the pores of the membrane, making it harder both for rain to be repelled and for sweat vapour to escape.

Over many years, slow physical ageing also takes a toll. Constant flexing can cause a membrane to thin or develop tiny cracks and the finish to deteriorate. Seam tapes can also start to peel away, especially on shoulders where backpack straps press.

How to keep a jacket waterproof

The single best thing you can do for both your comfort and the planet is to keep a good jacket working for as long as possible, because making new technical fabrics has a significant environmental footprint.

Gentle washing will help extend the

life of your rain jacket, as it removes the build up of contamination such as dirt and body oils. Brands and care guides recommend closing zips and Velcro, then washing on a gentle cycle with a cleaner designed for waterproof fabrics or a very mild soap, avoiding normal detergents and softeners that leave residues.

Depending on the type of chemical finish, this coat can be re-applied through spray-on or wash-in products found commercially. Some finishes can be re-activated by exposure to low heat (low dryer heat or low ironing heat). Heat makes the water-repelling molecules stand back up after they have been "flattened" by use and contamination.

Although the above will help you to keep your jacket waterproof, it is best to follow the care instructions given by the manufacturer as they change according to the type of composition of the fabric.

In any case, it is important to avoid leaving the jacket wet and 'scrunched up' for weeks, and be mindful of heavy sunscreens and repellents. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Carolina Quintero Rodriguez, RMIT University

Why waking early will not make you more successful

At 5am, social media fills with proof that the early risers have already won the day. Cold plunges. Journals. Sunrise runs.

Productivity gurus insist this is the routine that separates high performers from everyone else, reinforced by high-profile early risers such as Apple CEO Tim Cook, entrepreneur Richard Branson and Hollywood actor Jennifer Aniston.

The message is simple: wake earlier, perform better. But the science tells a more complicated story. For many people, a 5am routine clashes with their biology and can undermine both health and productivity. Much depends on your individual biological rhythm, or "chronotype".

Chronotypes reflect when people naturally feel alert or sleepy, and genetics play a major role in shaping them. Research shows that sleep timing is partly rooted in our genes, and chronotype is heritable.

Chronotype also shifts across the lifespan, with adolescents tending toward later sleep pattern and older adults often shifting earlier. Most people are not extreme larks or owls, but fall somewhere in between.

Morning types, often called larks, wake early and feel alert soon after. They tend to rise early even at weekends without needing an alarm. Evening types, or owls, feel more energetic later in the day and may perform best at night. Many people fall somewhere in between as intermediate types.

Chronotypes in daily life

Studies often find differences between chronotypes. Morning types tend to report better academic outcomes, including better school and university performance.

They are also less likely to report substance use, including lower rates of smoking, alcohol and drug use, and they are more likely to exercise regularly. Evening types, on average, show higher rates of burnout and are more likely to report poorer mental and physical health. One explanation is chronic misalignment.

Evening types are more likely to live out of sync with work and school schedules, leading to repeated sleep restriction, fatigue and accumulated

stress. Chronotype also appears to relate to broader behavioural tendencies, including differences in political attitudes, conscientiousness, procrastination and adherence to schedules. These patterns reinforce how chronotype shapes daily behaviour, not just sleep.

A common belief is that adopting an early routine will deliver the same benefits seen in natural morning types. However, chronotypes are not easily changed. They are shaped by genetics and circadian biology. For many evening or intermediate types, waking earlier than their natural rhythm can lead to sleep debt, reduced concentration and poorer mood over time.

This is the key point: early rising itself does not create success. People tend to perform best when their daily schedules align with their biological rhythms.

Morning-oriented people often thrive in systems structured around early starts, while evening types may struggle not because they are less capable, but because their peak alertness occurs later.

Early-rising experiments can feel effective at first. The initial boost often reflects motivation and attention rather than lasting biological change, similar to what happens after life changes such as starting a new job. As routines stabilise, the mismatch between biology and schedule can become harder to sustain.

Biological clocks vs social clocks

The gap between a person's natural rhythm and their social schedule is known as social jetlag. It reflects how far daily life pushes people away from their biological clock.

Social jetlag has been associated with poorer academic performance and wellbeing. Living out of sync with natural sleep patterns has also been linked to higher rates of diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and obesity. Forcing early rising may increase this mismatch for some people, particularly evening types. *(The Conversation)*

Authored by Christoph Randler, Professor, Department of Biology, University of Tübingen

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 1, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Sun on your solar return chart, and it will give fantastic results for the whole year. Your behaviour will be very good. Some new work will be completed. You will make progress in your work. Your financial condition will get better. Love matters will enjoy wonderful bonding. You will also get marriage proposals. Students will perform well in studies. You will also make plans to buy a new house/vehicle. You will add new clothes. You might take leave and go to some nearby place for a holiday. You will try your best to achieve your objectives. There will be happiness in family life. Property disputes will get resolved with ease. You will do the right thing and achieve your objective. You will buy something nice and expensive for your house. There will be lot of peace at home...

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will plan for something big in your life. You will also be a lot more enthusiastic and will have the zest and zeal to complete your work. The situation at workplace is going to be very favorable. You will make good progress in your job/business. The people whom you will trust will stand with you in time of need. You will have good understanding with your spouse/partner. Your hands will be free in financial matters. You will spend wisely. You will also receive good news about a relative. Domestic activities will continue as usual. Do not tell your secrets to anyone. Otherwise, people whom you trust will take advantage of your gentle nature. It can harm you in the long run.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will enjoy domestic bliss. You will also plan to earn money at any cost. Business related activities will gather momentum. You will also do some new work. You will see a major improvement in your health. Your marital life will be pleasant. You will pay attention to contracts. You will also be full of enthusiasm to work and complete your task. Your financial position is good. You will get success in love matters. But you need to find a balance between family life and professional matters. You should be very careful in financial matters. And drive vehicle carefully. You will also start taking life from a positive perspective and make adequate changes accordingly.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You may sign a new contract. You will also reap good financial benefits. Your time will be spent reading interesting and knowledge enhancing literature. You will also develop interest in creative arts. You will also make best use of every opportunity. You will also find a solution to all problems with your knowledge and discretion. Your talent will be appreciated by the people. You will also develop new romantic relationship that could lead to marriage. Peace and harmony will prevail at home. You could get a chance to meet an influential person. There are also chances for studies, research and news. You might also get criticized for your conduct. It won't bother you much.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will make an important decision at work. Your luck will be on your side. Despite obstacles and burdens, you will complete all important tasks. A dispute in your family will get resolved. A third person might try to create a wedge in the family. Your power and self-confidence will help a lot. Your relationship with friends will become stronger. You will get mixed results in your studies. There are chances that you will start a new job. Initially it will not bring any success. But you need to wait and not get disappointed. You might also have to listen to your boss or seniors at the workplace. Your health will be good. There is nothing much to worry about. Take things easy.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is going to be a productive week. You will get a new job/business offer. There can be a new contract or pact. Your talent and capabilities will come before the people. With the union of Moon and Mars your fame will increase. Your financial position is going to be good. New sources of money will open. You will take intelligent measures to increase your income. Keep away from unknown people and strangers. You can become a victim of some conspiracy. Your romantic life is good. You will enjoy good bonding with your mate and family members. Some unexpected guests too can arrive all of a sudden. They will keep you busy and involved. You will feel happy.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) You will have a hard time. Your health may pose a problem or two. You will have heated arguments with your closed ones over a trivial matter. You will be kept busy with religious activities. Those who are working women may decide to do something big. Time and planets are favorable for them. The blessings of elders will put you on the

path of success. You will be the centre of attraction in some function. Your financial position will also get better. Students will concentrate on their studies. You will meet a friend of yours. The plans you had for expansion of your business will finally get under way. It will prove advantageous for you in the long run. You will not let the opportunity go.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be getting favorable results in exams/interviews. Due to your hard work and efforts, you will win confidence and appreciation of your bosses. Yet you need to put a little more effort and be more focused now. Students will put in lot of effort, and their mind will not get distracted from studies. A person may try to act against you in job/business. An argument cannot be ruled out. But you need to show a wise head. You will win confidence of your people with your good behavior. You will also enjoy a wonderful love life. Your mate will give you good company and will come closer. Those who are single may propose someone. You could get promoted in your job.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The favorable placement of Venus is indicating success in love matters. A very special person will come into your life suddenly. You will be successful in romantic ties and endeavors, but you need to show a wise head. You will gift an expensive item to your beloved. The situation is very favorable at your work front. You will get promoted too. Your business will also prosper and flourish. You will have good financial gains. Work related hurdles will get over. They will near its completion. Most of the time will be spent on fun, frolic and entertainment. You will also be inclined towards spiritual matters. You will also maintain a balance between work and family.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) Here you will be having lot of gains. There are yogas for promotions and profit in work/business. You will have monetary benefits. You will also get back money that was stuck up somewhere for a long time. You will find yourself financially strong and in a better position this week. It is also time to speak clearly with your family members clearly on a matter of vital importance. Your spouse/partner will share wonderful bonds with you. You will also get respect from younger siblings. Plans for an auspicious ceremony will be made. You will get blessings from your elders. Your creative potential will come out before everyone. You will win praise from everyone.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The week will start on a pleasant note. You will get good news from somewhere. You will be happy and cheerful. These are good days in terms of money and finances. You will also plan to buy a valuable item. Due to your strong will power you will start moving towards the path of success. Your enemies and opponents will be unable to harm you. You will be empathetic. You will do all your work seriously. You will be able to establish harmony among people around you. Prepare well for interviews. You will be mentally peaceful. You will be spending quality time with your family. Your spouse will prove a source of strength. Even your family members will listen to you. And give you a lot of respect.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) Your importance at your workplace will increase. Your work conditions will be better, and you will spend time enjoying yourself. However, you need to be careful in matters related to health. At your workplace keep your important documents safely so that your enemies cannot harm you in any way. You also need to limit your expenses. These are the days you will succeed in government-related matters. Your subordinates will also fully support you. You will also receive full support from your parents. The graph of your popularity will also move upward. You will also be able to complete your pending work with the help of someone. Your name and fame will rise further.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) These are enlightening days you will have the desire to do something new for yourself for which you need to learn a lot of things. The star of your destiny will become strong and help you move forward. Partnerships will be extremely favorable during this phase. The time will be very peaceful. You will work full of energy on receiving a desired task. You will also start doing good deeds. New romantic opportunities will come. Love mates will have a good time. There are possibilities of you spending money on luxury. You will also get new opportunities for work. You will also take a vital decision. Your bosses will support you and keep encouraging you.

How China is betting cheap AI will get the world hooked on its tech

Artificial intelligence (AI) is at a very Chinese time in its life. Recent moves from Chinese AI labs are throwing the dominance of American "frontier labs" such as Google and OpenAI into question.

Last week ByteDance, the company behind TikTok, released an AI video-generating tool called Seedance 2.0 which produces high-quality film-like clips from text prompts, with a casual disregard for copyright concerns.

This week Anthropic, the US company behind the chatbot Claude, said three Chinese AI labs created thousands of fake accounts to harvest Claude's answers in a practice called "distillation" which can be used to improve AI models.

These events have led to suggestions that China may be gaining the upper hand in the battle to dominate AI. So, is China winning the "AI race"?

Cheap, widely used tools

While most advanced frontier models are still made by American companies, China is pushing hard to develop cheap, widely used AI tools, which could create global dependence on Chinese platforms.

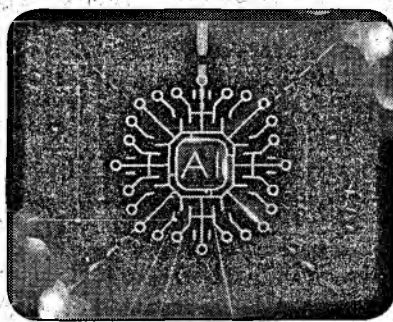
Reuters reports the industry is bracing for a "flurry" of low-cost Chinese AI models, with Chinese systems repeatedly driving usage costs down.

What's the plan? China's official AI policy documents suggest China sees AI as "a new engine for building China into both a manufacturing and cyber superpower", and "a new engine of economic development".

Since 2017, China has recognised that the technology is at the centre of "international competition". "By 2030," one key policy document says, China's AI "technology and application should achieve world-leading levels, making China the world's primary AI innovation center".

This focus on becoming the dominant player in AI helps explain why Chinese firms are pushing hard on price. If you can make your AI cheap enough, you might just make it globally ubiquitous.

Cost helps determine who adopts AI first, and which models are first implemented in software and



services.

Even if the United States remains ahead on most elite benchmarks, Chinese products could still become globally influential if they are widely used and widely depended upon.

High-tech soft power

But China does not present its AI technology to the world as only benefiting itself. Instead, it's pitched as a contribution to humanity.

A 2019 statement of "governance principles" from a national AI governance expert committee argues that AI development should enhance "the common well-being of humanity" and "serve the progress of human civilization".

These phrases portray AI as a technology that advances the human story itself, rather than only serving Chinese interests. It suggests Chinese AI leadership is good for everyone.

This is an example of Chinese soft power. Tools such as Seedance may threaten Hollywood's business model, but they do something else too. High-quality, low-cost generative media can spread quickly.

If Chinese systems become widespread, they can influence creators, developer habits, and platform dependencies, especially in non-Western markets that need affordable tools and may dislike American tech dominance.

The spread of the 'Chinese model'

For liberal democracies such as the United Kingdom, Australia and Canada, the growth of Chinese AI tools creates a strategic headache. It will not be easy to manage security concerns about Chinese technology while avoiding technological isolation if Chinese AI tools become

widely adopted.

There is a darker side to China's AI tools. US think-tank Freedom House describes China as having the world's "worst conditions for internet freedom", and suggests other nations are now "embracing the 'Chinese model' of extensive censorship and automated surveillance".

In 2022, the Cyberspace Administration of China issued rules for the algorithms that curate news feeds and short video platforms.

Providers are required to "uphold mainstream value orientations" and "vigorously disseminate positive energy".

These algorithms are important because they shape what people see and what is suppressed. As a result, these rules suggest the Chinese government is deeply concerned with controlling information across its social media platforms and AI tools.

A dilemma for third parties

Not every Chinese AI tool is a propaganda weapon. Rather, China is building world-class AI technology within an authoritarian system that prioritises the control of information.

This means China's ability to make generative AI commercially powerful will likely also, despite its claims about serving "human civilisation", make censorship and narrative management cheaper and easier.

China's business and soft-power model is a much bigger story than just Seedance's cavalier attitude towards copyright or Anthropic's concerns about intellectual property.

China's goal is to build AI tools that rival those created by America's tech giants, and to make them inexpensive and adopted globally.

For other countries, this may create a dilemma. Once a technology becomes a standard, it can be difficult to justify using a different product.

The question that remains is whether liberal democracies can adopt China's low-cost products without drifting into dependence on systems shaped by an authoritarian political model. *(The Conversation)*

What is Aspergillus, the fungus behind recent hospital deaths?

A common mould has killed two people, and left four others seriously ill, at one of Sydney's largest hospitals.

Health authorities are investigating a cluster of fungal infections at the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital's transplant unit.

Six patients developed infections between October and December 2025 after being exposed to Aspergillus, a common mould found in soil, plants, dust and damp environments.

In a statement, a hospital spokesperson suggested the mould may have been present at nearby construction sites, part of the hospital's A\$940 million-redevelopment.

So what is Aspergillus?

And should you be concerned? It's a common mould?

Yes. Aspergillus moulds are a type of filamentous fungi, meaning they form long chains, and are usually found in soil, plants and damp areas.

This type of mould is usually harmless to healthy people. But it can cause a severe respiratory disease called aspergillosis.

Aspergillosis affects about 250,000 people around the world.

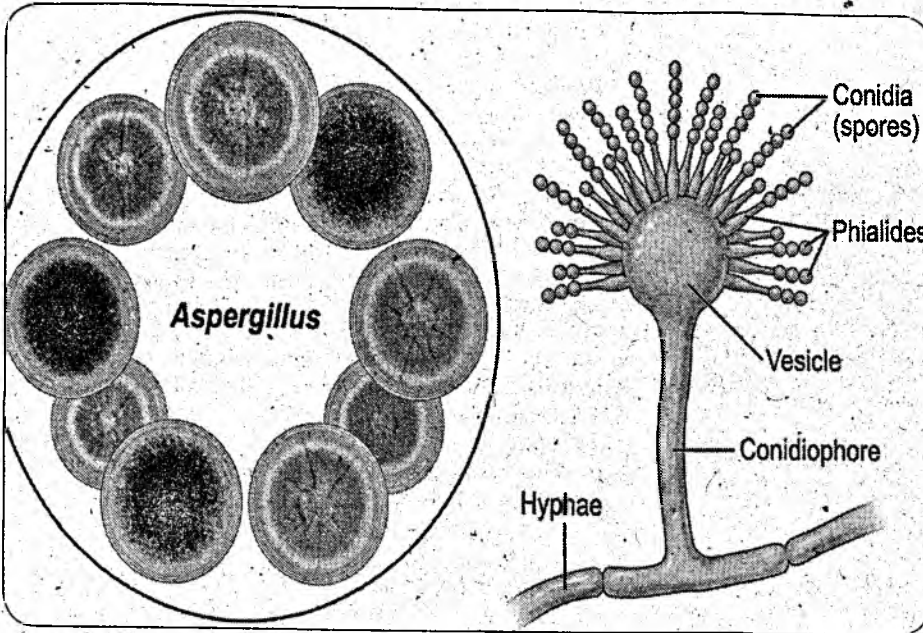
How can Aspergillus harm?

This type of mould produces airborne spores, which people may inhale into their lungs.

There, these spores can cause an infection in the smallest chambers of the lungs.

This is because they release toxins and enzymes that damage lung tissue.

These spores can spread to other parts of the body such as the brain, kidneys,



heart or skin, causing further infection.

Symptoms of an infection include fever, cough and chest pain.

You may have trouble breathing or might start coughing up blood. Aspergillus can also cause skin and eye infections.

Who is most vulnerable?

Our immune systems can generally fight Aspergillus infections. But people with weakened immune systems have a much higher risk of developing an infection.

These include people having chemotherapy, corticosteroid treatment, or organ or stem cell transplants. Transplant patients are particularly vulnerable.

This is because their immune system must be deliberately weakened to stop their body rejecting the transplanted organ.

If they somehow inhale Aspergillus spores, the fungus can more easily take hold in their lungs.

Dormant spores in the lungs of transplant patients

may also cause infection when the spores are activated.

But health authorities did not indicate this occurred at the Sydney hospital.

One large US study found just 59% of organ transplant recipients and 25% of stem cell transplant patients were still alive one year after developing invasive aspergillosis.

People with asthma may develop allergies to Aspergillus even if their immune systems are healthy.

And it can cause severe allergic reactions in people with cystic fibrosis, a genetic condition in which sticky mucus blocks their airways.

People with other lung conditions such as tuberculosis, influenza or COVID are also at a higher risk of developing an Aspergillus infection.

What are the treatment options?

Aspergillus can be treated with antifungal drugs such as itraconazole and corticosteroids.

This treatment is most effective when we detect the infection early.

But researchers have identified strains of Aspergillus that don't respond to this kind of treatment. So antifungal resistance is an urgent problem.

What else do I need to know?

Aspergillus infections are relatively uncommon in the general population. And they are rare in hospitals, where wards and rooms are usually fitted with high-efficiency particulate air, or HEPA, filters.

These filters capture and remove potentially harmful particles from the air. However, construction work may disturb the soil near or around the hospital, releasing a high number of Aspergillus spores into the air.

This increases the risk of hospitals having clusters of infection. It remains unclear whether this is what happened at The Royal Prince Alfred Hospital. *(The Conversation)*

Using AI tools for self treatment matter of concern

A growing tendency towards using AI-generated tools for self-diagnosis and self-treatment is a matter of major concern, said a senior health expert, stressing that such tools are not substitutes for human intervention in clinical judgement.

Dr Jitender Nagpal, the deputy medical director of Sitarum Bhartiya Institute of Science and Research here, said artificial intelligence is increasingly becoming an enabling layer in healthcare delivery rather than a replacement for human decision-making.

In India, where healthcare systems operate under constraints of time, workforce, and scale, AI has the potential to improve efficiency, consistency, and safety across the continuum of care, he said.

One of the most visible transformations has been in the speed and accuracy of administrative and clinical processes, such as record keeping, documentation, audits, and reporting, which have traditionally consumed a substantial proportion of clinicians' time.

By assisting with structured documentation, summarisation, and review, AI allows healthcare professionals to focus more on direct patient care. On areas where caution needs to be adopted, Dr Nagal said that while AI has shown significant promise, its adoption must be cautious, ethical, and context-appropriate.

"A major concern is the growing tendency toward self-diagnosis and self-treatment based on AI-generated outputs, which can be unsafe and misleading.

AI tools are not substitutes for clinical judgement, physical examination, or contextual understanding of a patient's social and medical background," he said.

Overconfidence in AI outputs, by both patients and healthcare professionals, can lead to errors if limitations are not clearly understood, he cautioned. *(PTI)*

Why you can't tie knots in four dimensions

We all know we live in three-dimensional space. But what does it mean when people talk about four dimensions? Is it just a bigger kind of space? Is it "space-time", the popular idea which emerged from Einstein's theory of relativity?

If you have wondered what four dimensions really look like, you may have come across drawings of a "four-dimensional cube". But our brains are wired to interpret drawings on flat paper as two- or at most three-dimensional, not four-dimensional.

The almost insurmountable difficulty of visualising the fourth dimension has inspired mathematicians, physicists, writers and even some artists for centuries. But even if we can't quite imagine it, we can understand it.

What is dimension?

The dimension of a space captures the number of independent directions in it.

A line is one-dimensional. We can move along it forwards and backwards, but these are opposite, not independent, directions. You can also think of a string or piece of rope as practically one-dimensional, as the thickness is negligible compared with the length.

A surface, such as a soccer field or the skin of a balloon, is two-dimensional. There are independent directions forwards and sideways.

You can move diagonally on a surface, but this is not an independent direction because you can get to the same place by moving forwards, then sideways. The space we live in is three-dimensional: in addition to moving forwards and sideways, we can also jump up and down.

Four-dimensional space has yet another independent direction. This is why space-time is considered four-dimensional: you have the three dimensions of space,

but moving forward or backward in time counts as a new direction.

One way to imagine four-dimensional space is as an immersive three-dimensional movie, where each "frame" is three-dimensional and you can also fast-forward and rewind in time.

Consider the cube

A powerful tool for understanding higher dimensions is through analogies in lower dimensions. An example of this technique is drawing cubes in more dimensions.

A "two-dimensional cube" is just a square. To draw a three-dimensional cube, we draw two squares, then connect their corner to corner to make a cube. So, to draw a four-dimensional cube, start by drawing two three-dimensional cubes, then connect them corner to corner.

You can even continue doing this to draw cubes in five or more dimensions. (You will need a large piece of paper and need to keep your lines neat!) This experiment can help accurately determine how many corners and edges a higher-dimensional cube has. But for most of us, it will not help us "see" one. Our brains will only interpret the images as complex webs of lines in two or at most three dimensions.

Knots

We can tie knots in three dimensions because one-dimensional ropes "catch on each other". This is why a long rope wound around itself, if done right, won't come apart. We trust knots with our lives when we're sailing or climbing.

But in four dimensions, knots would instantly come apart. We can understand why by using an example in fewer dimensions, like we did with cubes. Imagine a colony of two-dimensional ants living on a flat surface divided by a line. The ants

can't cross the line: it's an impassable barrier for them, and they don't even know the other side of the line exists. But if one day an ant, and its world, becomes three-dimensional, that ant will step over the line with ease. To step over, it needs to move just a tiny bit in the new, vertical direction.

Now, instead of an ant and a line on a flat surface, imagine a horizontal and a vertical piece of rope in three dimensions. These will catch on each other if pulled in opposite directions.

But if the space became four-dimensional, it would be enough for the horizontal piece of rope to move just a little bit in the new, fourth direction, to avoid the other entirely. Thinking of four dimensions as a movie, the pieces of rope live in a single, three-dimensional frame. If the horizontal piece of rope shifts just slightly into a future frame, in that frame there is no vertical piece, so it can easily move to the other side of the vertical piece before shifting back.

Knots in more dimensions

Is it impossible, then, to knot a rope in higher dimensions? Yes: any knot tied on a rope will come apart.

But not all is lost: In four-dimensional space you can knot two-dimensional surfaces, such as balloons, large picnic blankets or long tubes. There is a mathematical formula that determines when knots can stay knotted: take the dimension of the object you want to knot, double it, and add one. According to the formula, this is the maximum dimension of a space where knotting is possible.

The formula implies, for example, that a rope (one-dimensional) can be knotted in at most three dimensions. A (two-dimensional) balloon surface can be knotted in at most five dimensions. *(The Conversation)*

CAG tells govt to address...

(Contd from P-1) Shortage of 90 per cent of essential drugs was observed in the selected CHCs and PHCs with respect to 1,329 numbers of drugs on the State Essential Drugs List. Non availability of essential diagnostic services in the selected CHCs ranged from 33 per cent (Serology) to 100 per cent (Ophthalmology).

During the period from 2017-18 to 2021-22, altogether 13,893 out of the total registered 11,32,394 patients had been referred out from the CHCs/PHCs. Common reasons for referral were mainly shortage of manpower, equipment, drugs, diagnostic services and absence of required treatment facilities, etc.

As per SDG India Index 2020-21, Meghalaya ranked 19th out of 37 states and Union Territories in SDG-3 Index score.

The 100-bed prefab centres at Shillong and Tura, constructed at a total cost of Rs 5.18 crore, remained unutilised due to non-availability of water supply in case of Shillong centre and absence of electricity connection and water supply connection in respect of Tura centre.

Installation/construction of 18 oxygen generation plants was completed at a cost of Rs 3.53 crore. However, 10 plants constructed at a total cost of Rs 2.46 crore were not utilised from the date of their completion mainly due to non-availability of transformer or pipeline connection issues or low transformer load.

Eight AYUSH facilities, constructed at a cost of Rs 1.77 crore, were handed over during May 2019 to December 2020. However, they remained non-functional till September 2022.

A total of 755 non-medical items were lying idle at the stores of five Corona Care centres as of July 2022. However, as item-wise expenditure for the items lying idle was not made available, the quantum of expenditure involved in the procurement of these items could not be ascertained in Audit.

The report recommended that keeping in view that Health is a state subject, it is imperative that the state government address gaps in human resources.

"To be able to administer quality health care services, medical equipment must always be available and function effectively," the report said, adding that a comprehensive arrangement should be in place according to the need of hospitals to ensure all-time availability of essential drugs in each health facility.

According to the report, it should be ensured that each health facility prepares a formulary of drugs based on disease patterns and patient inflow, the State Essential Drug List is updated accordingly, and that stock-outs of required drugs are prevented.

"Necessary action may be taken to make all idle medical infrastructure functional for better health services," the report stated.

Concerns over labour welfare schemes execution

The Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG) has raised serious concerns over the execution of labour welfare schemes in Meghalaya, pointing to irregular fund transfers, denial of approved benefits and weak administrative oversight.

The findings are part of the Report on Social and Economic Sectors and Urban Local Bodies for the year ended March 31, 2023. The report was tabled in the Assembly on Friday by Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma.

According to the audit, instances of multiple transfers were detected in the database of beneficiaries. The report recorded four transfers made in 15 cases, three transfers in 60 cases and two transfers in 381 cases to individuals bearing identical names. The audit flagged these transactions as indicative of deficiencies in verification and monitoring mechanisms.

The CAG also highlighted lapses in the disbursement of maternity benefits. Although 156 beneficiaries were approved under the scheme, they were collectively deprived of Rs 4.68 lakh.

The report noted that maternity benefits amounting to Rs 4.41 lakh were credited to only 147 beneficiaries in their respective bank accounts.

No reasons were furnished by the Labour department for the failure to transfer the remaining sanctioned amounts.

Further scrutiny revealed that 64 beneficiaries did not receive death benefits totalling Rs 1.28 crore, despite the Welfare Board having sanctioned the payments. The Board informed the audit authority that the beneficiaries lacked proper documentation and that the claims would be reconsidered upon submission of the required papers.

The audit report also drew attention to the ineffective implementation of the cash award scheme meant for meritorious children of registered labourers. None of the 12 applicants received assistance.

The CAG observed that the Welfare Board had not framed clear eligibility guidelines and failed to conduct information, education and communication activities to create awareness among registered workers.

The Labour department did not offer clarifications in response to the audit queries, the report stated, raising broader concerns over transparency and the delivery of welfare benefits to intended recipients.

Jowai vendors give JHADC...

(Contd from P-3) over 600 vendors in lawmusiang who currently hold valid permits.

Najiar stated that the association had written to the JHADC on several occasions regarding the shortage of space and the criteria for allotment, but the Council was yet to respond.

The association warned that if the JHADC fails to provide a clear answer within the 14-day period, the vendors will stage a public protest and march to the JHADC office to demand a resolution.

Union min to begin 3-day...

(Contd from P-3) care institutions. He will also lead a district review meeting to assess the implementation of schemes under his ministry and other related welfare initiatives in the state.

The visit is primarily aimed at evaluating ongoing initiatives for skill development, rehabilitation and the empowerment of persons with disabilities in the region.

870 GH farmers supply...

(Contd from P-3) ginger and Rs 25 per kilogram for fresh turmeric. Multiple consignments have already been dispatched, taking the total procurement to 150 metric tonnes.

According to officials, the initiative seeks to address issues related to market access, price fluctuations and dependence on intermediaries, which have affected farmers in remote areas of Garo Hills. The structured procurement model involves aggregation at the village level, packaging, loading and coordination of transportation.

MNREDA Director Dr. Joram Beda stated that price fluctuation in cash crops remains a concern for farmers in the state and that the objective of the initiative is to connect farmers directly with exporters and companies to create a more stable marketing system.

On the other hand, MNREDA Chairman Rupat Momin said direct procurement creates multiple selling platforms and that efforts are being made to connect farmers with large companies and exporters through B2B systems. He also indicated that companies dealing in organic and high-value products are being approached.

Dijako Agro Farmer Producer Company has acted as the aggregator, collecting produce from individual farmers and consolidating it for bulk supply to buyers. The model enables farmers with smaller quantities of produce to participate in larger transactions.

Officials informed that the programme will continue to explore expansion of market linkages, quality standards and potential export avenues as part of ongoing efforts to strengthen supply chains in the region.

Rs 1.34 cr excess COVID-19 relief...

(Contd from P-1) involving identical bank accounts, and 262 cases where beneficiaries with the same names received duplicate payments.

In financial terms, the audit quantified the excess at Rs 20,000 for cases linked to identical registration numbers and Rs 80,000 for those involving the same bank accounts.

The CAG observed that the discrepancies stemmed from a lack of proper data verification prior to fund transfers, leading to payments that exceeded entitlements under the notified relief scheme.

JNC rebuts BJP leader's remarks...

(Contd from P-1) Lyngdoh also recalled the conversion of the Apostle Paul, who was once a persecutor of the faith, as an example of spiritual transformation. He appealed to organisations such as the RSS and other Hindu groups to allow Christians to live in peace and to refrain from dividing indigenous tribes along religious lines.

He concluded by stating that national unity should be built on mutual respect rather than the dominance of a single religion, reiterating that Christianity promotes peace and is not a threat to the country.

No meningococcal outbreak...

(Contd from P-1) The suspected infection recently led to the deaths of two Agniveer trainees at the ARC. Several other trainees remain under observation at the Military Hospital, where their condition is reported to be stable.

In a statement on Saturday, the Defence PRO said no fresh cases have been detected. "Army medical authorities continue close monitoring, and a vaccination drive has commenced for all Agniveers, healthcare workers, and primary contacts at the ARC, 58 GTC, and the Military Hospital," it said.

Authorities reiterated that the situation is under control and there is no cause for public concern.

AHAM welcomes move to mandate ST certificate for GHADC elections

From Our Correspondent

TURA, Feb 28: The A.chik Holistic Awakening Movement (AHAM) has welcomed the decision of the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) to make it mandatory for all candidates contesting council elections to produce a valid Scheduled Tribe (ST) certificate.

The resolution, adopted by the Executive Committee on February 9 and notified on February 17, requires candidates in any general or by-election to submit an ST certificate issued by the state government while filing nomination papers.

The certificate will serve as primary proof of tribal status during scrutiny. Returning Officers have been directed to treat the failure to produce the document as

a "defect of substantial character", rendering the nomination liable for rejection.

The order takes effect immediately and applies to all future elections under the GHADC.

Following the decision, the AHAM commended the Executive Committee, stating the decision strengthens tribal self-governance and safeguards the indigenous identity and customary laws of the Garo Hills under the Sixth Schedule.

The organisation also urged the District Council Affairs department to ensure the immediate publication of the notification in the Meghalaya Gazette to grant it full legal force. The organisation added that this reform is essential for maintaining democratic integrity and protecting tribal identity.

Govt honours retiring...

(Contd from P-3) He noted that the unit has played a vital role in protecting lives—from detecting explosives in sensitive areas across the Garo Hills to carrying out major narcotics seizures, including a heroin haul worth Rs 5 crore in Ri-Bhoi in 2023 and the recovery of 691.54 grams in Shillong this year.

He further announced that under the DREAM mission, the K9 Unit's strength has increased from seven to 37 dogs.

The expanded force now comprises trackers, narcotics detectors, explosive detectors and assault dogs, which will be deployed across different parts of the state.

The retiring K9 heroes honoured on the occasion were Remor and Rester, both 11-year-old Labradors who served for ten years in narcotics and explosive detection respectively, and Cairo, a 10-year-old Belgian Malinois tracking expert who was unable to attend due to ill health. Medals were awarded in recognition of their dedicated years of service.

European cavers visit...

(Contd from P-3) exploration, environmental conservation and sustainable tourism. The VC noted the significance of international collaboration in speleological research and knowledge-sharing. The cavers also visited the Umsawli campus for an interactive session with students.

They shared insights from their expeditions, discussed technical safety aspects and spoke on the importance of preserving fragile subterranean ecosystems.

Students engaged with the explorers on various topics, including expedition challenges, specialised equipment and scientific discoveries made underground.

"The roots of education are bitter,
but the fruit is sweet."
—Aristotle

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXVIII No. 199 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 2, 2026

Trump's new normal
SUPREME Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has been exterminated in a joint US-Israeli airstrikes on Teheran. He has been replaced by Ayatollah Alireza Araf as interim leader. A new head of state, a Shia cleric, needs to be elected by an assembly of religious experts as per the provisions of the Iranian Constitution. Having gone to this length in a matter of two days of aerial hits, the US and Israel have achieved their first goal – the hope that this could lead to a wholesale regime change. Military commanders have been exterminated too as missiles rained down on Teheran and other strategic locations. Yet, by swiftly appointing a new head of state, Iran has warned that it would make Uncle Sam and bitter enemy Israel accountable for this grave provocation. Iran has targeted Israel as also the US bases in the Middle East region through missile attacks, causing significant damage. With the US rattling the power edifice in Teheran, how the present combat progresses is anybody's guess. No ground forces have landed in Iran from the US-Israel combine to force a 'meaningful' regime change. Around 200,000 US troops had landed in Iraq in 2003 in the US offensive against Saddam Hussein.

The Iranian military is strong, much stronger than Saddam's demoralized forces in Iraq then, and might not run away from action. Yet, the assassination of Khomeini and the commanders is now bound to affect their morale. How the situation develops in the Middle East, where several other nations have been put on the defensive by Iran at this hour in the guise of missile attacks on US bases, remains to be seen. Trump's exhortation to Iranians to take over their nation's governance after the US hits end should be taken with a pinch of salt. He would rather try and install a regime that's aligned with US interests.

At the same time, the footloose aggressiveness of Donald Trump after he took charge as President for a second term has increasingly been a matter of grave worry for dispensations near and far. Having effected a swift and effortless regime change in Venezuela, Trump saw an opportunity in Iran. While he and Israel cite the failure of the talks on Iran's nuclear programme as an excuse, it's clear that the 'Americans' eyes are fixed on the vast oil reserves of both Iran and Venezuela. This, Trump found, was the time to strike – and strike hard. Vladimir Putin had shown him the way – by Russia's abrupt invasion of Ukraine. China is in no mood to confront the US as long as its own interests are not directly hurt. Venezuelan president Nicolas Maduro was 'abducted' to the US two months ago, with Trump citing his alleged role in 'narco-terrorism', leading to the formation of a pro-US dispensation there. Now, Iran's Supreme Leader has been done to death. This, for Trump, has become the new normal in global engagements. India, the fourth largest military power, is already facing arm-twisting from Trump in the form of a huge tariff hike, not to ignore his still-unexplained intervention or interference in the military engagement between India and Pakistan in Operation Sindoor.

He was everything that we want in a politician: humble, sincere, hardworking, simple, and down to earth. He was praised not only by his friends and near and dear ones but even by his adversaries. Unfortunately, he died too soon, and most of us mourned the loss. He is a living example of what Kahlil Gibran had wished in his life when he said: "When I was born, I was the only one crying, but everybody around me laughed in joy and happiness. I want to live in such a way that when I die everybody around me will cry, while I smile my way to eternity."

The Person I Knew
I had the opportunity to know him when Dr. Ricky A.J. Syngkon was a co-member of a committee of which I was a part; we later became friends. Dr. Ricky was an expert member of the RBI-mandated Board of Management (BOM) of the Jowai Cooperative Urban Bank for the year 2023-24. As a Professor at North Eastern Hill University, we were fortunate to have him as a member of the BOM.

I recall that he was very sincere in his work, and whenever he was unable to attend a meeting in person, he would even insist that we send him a link to enable him to join online. The advantage of technology was that he would join the meeting even while travelling to visit rural areas. Such was his dedication to the work entrusted to him. However, I have two stories that, in my opinion, define who Dr. Syngkon truly was.

After one meeting of the BOM in Jowai, he wanted to give me something, so I accompanied him to the car he was driving at the time. He opened the dickey of the car to collect the item he wanted to give me. When he opened it, I saw something unusual inside and could not help asking him what those items were for. He told me that he used those tools during his free time to conduct Bible classes in churches in rural areas. The items I saw inside the car were a whiteboard and a projector.

The second story is from after he had won the election to represent the people as

a Member of Parliament of the Shillong Parliamentary Constituency. Along with some friends, we arranged to visit and congratulate him on his victory. He suggested that we come in the morning. We reached his residence at Nongsder, and he invited us into his kitchen. To our embarrassment, we were surprised to see that he himself prepared tea and toasted bread for all of us. We had our breakfast, and before we left, I told my friend that I could not and would not let him wash my cup and plate. He tried to prevent us from doing so, but we insisted and prevailed. We took the cutlery to the wash basin and washed all the cups and plates. These two stories tell me about his approach to work and his humility as a human being.

Politics Is a Dirty Game
Even today, people are skeptical about whether clean politics is really possible. They question whether an honest and upright person can join politics and maintain his or her integrity. Many of us have been fed with the notion that politics is dirty and that honest and upright people will not be able to withstand the test. Honest and upright people refuse to join politics for fear lest they will not be able to maintain their integrity and would succumb to pressure. People have a preconceived notion that if a good, honest person joins politics, they ultimately change once they become muddled in it.

Like me, there are many citizens of this great country who remain hopeless because their view of politics is shaped by the common saying that politics is a dirty game. My view of politics was shaped by Khushwant Singh in a joke that he wrote in one of his books. The joke goes that there was a father who had a five-year-old son, and he wanted to know what his son would become when he grew up. So he decided to put him to the test. One day he kept three things in the living room and said to himself, "My son will become the person associated with the item he touches first."

By H.H. Mohrmen

He kept a sacred book, a gun, and a bottle of liquor on the table and said, "If my son touches the holy book, he will become a priest; if he touches the gun, he will be a criminal; and if he touches the bottle of alcohol, he will be a drunkard." The day came, and he ushered his son into the living room. The son was initially a little perplexed. Anyway, he took the holy book and put it under his arm; he took the gun and shoved it down his waist; and finally, he took the bottle of alcohol and drank from it. The father, who was watching his son from a secret corner, said to himself, "Damn! He is going to be a politician."

With apologies to Khushwant Singh and the politicians, I am not saying that this is a general representation of all politicians. But I think I am also not wrong in saying that we all agree we have this notion that politics is not clean, or that those who are involved in politics are not honest.

How Is He Able to Touch So Many Lives?

Why did people connect with Dr. Ricky Syngkon? The reason is that he was the opposite of almost all the politicians we see now. In a world where the goal of every politician is to accumulate wealth and drive the latest and most expensive vehicle available in the market, we had Dr. Ricky, who rode a scooter even to attend official functions. In a world where every important person wishes to have a cavalcade of vehicles following him or her there was Dr. Ricky, who always travelled alone and whose only goal was to reach his destination on time. Or even the not-so-important people like relatives or supporters of politicians who wish to travel in a vehicle with tinted glass, a beacon light and blaring siren, we have Dr. Syngkon who remains an ordinary person to the last.

One thing that is obvious is that Dr. Ricky was clear in his mind about the kind of politician he wanted to be—a politician led by his faith as a Christian. He wanted to be a politician with a difference,

and he became one. This is a true example of a life defined by the religion he followed and, above all, guided by his faith in the Lord whom he so faithfully served. He lived a Christ-like life, and he served the people as he served his Master.

Is Clean Politics Possible?

In a world where a politician's main goal is to enrich themselves and their supporters and to usurp power to acquire a status that is not due to them, we often ask: Can a politician be clean, or is there such a thing as clean politics?

If there is any lesson that we learn from his life, it is the fact that Dr. Ricky showed us that it is possible to be a politician and remain truthful to one's principles. Some may say that he was a politician by accident, but if we care to watch his videos, we would see that he was very clear in his intention that he joined politics to counter the popular narrative that politics is a dirty game. His humility was experienced by all those who had the chance to meet him, and this remained even after he became an MP. He did not have a PSO, nor did he require a guard to watch his house; as he said in one of his interviews, he placed his trust for his safety in the hands of God.

Dr. Ricky Syngkon's short stint in politics is a testimony that a person can be both a politician and remain true to himself. He was indeed a model that a person can be clean and still remain an effective politician. In him, we saw how a politician led by strong and deep faith became a politician with a difference. Dr. Ricky's political tenure, though brief, made him a role model of a clean and effective politician. We have many Christian politicians in our midst, but what made him stand out was that he lived by his faith, and the foundation of his politics was his faith. He is a shining example that clean politics is possible if we have honest and upright people with good intentions joining politics. But the important question is: how many leaders like Dr. Ricky A.J. Syngkon do we have in the state, and how many does VPP have?

and Garo together: equal in identity, equal in dignity, and equal in constitutional recognition. Anything less weakens the very foundation on which the State was built.

I would also urge the VPP leadership to reconsider and correct their narrative of "unity." True unity in Meghalaya cannot be selective or limited to just Khasi and Jaintia. By excluding the Garos, such a narrative risks creating division rather than harmony. The VPP, as a political voice in the State, has a responsibility to promote solidarity that respects all three indigenous communities—Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo equally. A narrative that embraces only part of Meghalaya's diversity undermines the very principles of inclusion, equality, and constitutional recognition that the State was founded upon.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang L Rymbai,
Via email

Concern over the Quality of MERB's Latest Examination
Editor,

The recent State examination conducted by the Meghalaya Education Recruitment Board has raised several concerns regarding its procedural standards. The exam was MCQ-based, yet candidates had to write their answers on regular paper instead of marking them on an OMR sheet, significantly reducing the reliability and security of the assessment process.

Additionally, there were no clear instructions regarding the overwriting of answers, leaving answer scripts susceptible to tampering after

submission.

Another major issue was the distribution of unsealed question papers, which added to candidates' concerns, particularly in light of repeated worries about exam confidentiality. Compounding this was the use of the application code as the candidate identifier. Because this information is publicly available online, examiners can easily know the identity of the candidates while manually correcting the papers. This lack of anonymity undermines the impartiality that competitive examinations should maintain.

Moreover, the exam schedule and centre allocation were published online only on the evening before the exam, creating unnecessary confusion and anxiety for candidates. Considering that applicants pay fees comparable to those charged by the State MPSC, it is reasonable to expect a system that meets basic standards of security, confidentiality, and fairness.

Yours etc.
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Healthcare Crisis at the Border
Editor,

I am writing to draw the immediate attention of the state health authorities and the public to the dire healthcare crisis currently unfolding in the border region of Dawki. For more than two weeks now, the Dawki Primary Health Centre (PHC)—the only medical lifeline for many border villages has been left without a single Medical Officer.

Since the transfer of the previous doctor, no replacement has been dispatched,

This administrative lapse has effectively shuttered the primary source of emergency care for a community that consists largely of hard-working, low-income agrarian families.

The human cost of this vacancy is heart-wrenching. When a medical emergency strikes at midnight in a remote border village, every minute is the difference between life and death. Expectant mothers, the elderly and victims of accidents are now forced to undertake gruelling, expensive journeys to Amlarem, Jowai or Shillong to see a doctor. For a daily wage earner, the cost of hiring a private vehicle for such a trip is often equivalent to a week's earnings.

Dawki is not just a cluster of villages, it is a vital international transit point. To leave such a strategic and populated area without a medical professional is a gamble with human lives that we simply cannot afford. Health is a fundamental right, yet the people of the Dawki border feel abandoned by the very system meant to protect them. I earnestly urge the Health Department to prioritize the immediate deputation of a Medical Officer to the Dawki PHC. It is imperative that we proactively address the critical need for medical personnel in our public healthcare facilities. We cannot wait for a tragedy to occur before we recognize that a PHC without a doctor is a building without hope.

Yours etc.,
Chanmiki Lamin,
Via email

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

Beyond the ILP Blame Game

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

The recent Budget Session of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly witnessed a scene that has become all too familiar in our democracy: heated rhetoric, crossed lines of decorum, and a debate that raised more questions than answers. At the centre of the storm was the Inner Line Permit (ILP), a colonial-era regulatory system that continues to divide opinion in our state. When VPP legislator Ardent M. Basiaawmoit questioned whether the government was "playing with the emotions of the people" on ILP, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma's sharp retort about opposition legislators never meeting the Prime Minister or Home Minister turned the House into an arena of accusations rather than solutions. As a citizen watching this unfold, one cannot help but ask: Are we debating ILP to protect our people, or to score political points?

Let us be clear about what is at stake. Meghalaya stands at the crossroads. Our indigenous communities—the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo harbour genuine fears about demographic change and land rights. These anxieties are not unfounded. Across the Northeast, states like Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, and Mizoram operate under ILP systems, and even Manipur recently adopted it. The question is not whether Meghalaya's concerns are valid. The question is whether ILP is the right tool, and whether our political leaders are serious about implementation or merely using it as a rallying cry. Here is where it gets complicated. India's Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to move freely and reside anywhere in the country. Yet, it also makes special provisions for protecting tribal communities and their lands through the Sixth Schedule—provisions that Meghalaya already enjoys. Legal experts argue that ILP could be justified as a "reasonable restriction" to protect indigenous identity. But critics counter that it creates a two-tier citizenship system within our own country. The courts have generally sided with protective measures for tribal areas, but they have also emphasised that such measures must be practical, non-discriminatory, and properly implemented. This is not just legal terminology. It affects real people, the young entrepreneur who wants to start a tourism business and the student who travels to neighbouring states for education.

Meghalaya has emerged as one of India's premier tourist destinations. From the living root bridges of Cherrapunji to the pristine waters of Dawki, from the caves of Mawsynram to the urban charm of Shillong, Tourism is no longer just an industry; it is a lifeline for thousands of families. It can be argued that concerns about ILP affecting tourism are valid and deserve attention. However, instead of dismissing them outright, they should be carefully examined with facts, data, and thoughtful discussion. The government insists that a well-structured ILP framework need not deter visitors, emphasising that regulatory systems and travel flows can coexist. Reference has been made to examples like Israel, where visa requirements operate alongside a vibrant, growing tourism sector. We must acknowledge that domestic tourists and international travellers are not comparable. They are families from Delhi, Kolkata, backpackers from Bangalore, pilgrims from Tamil Nadu etc. The people who expect to travel freely within their own country. Will they fill out permit forms? Will they wait at checkpoints? Will they choose destinations without such requirements instead? These are not rhetorical questions. They are economic realities that demand honest answers. But perhaps what troubles me most is not the ILP debate itself. It is how it was conducted.

When a Chief Minister raises questions about the opposition's engagement with the Union Government on a matter as critical as ILP, it reflects less a slide into political theatre and more a legitimate call for shared responsibility. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's reference to his own sustained efforts—multiple letters and meetings with the Prime Minister and Home Minister underscores a government actively pursuing the issue through appropriate constitutional channels. In a federal structure where ILP implementation requires Centre-state coordination, such questioning invites the opposition to demonstrate its own commitment beyond rhetorical critique.

While spirited exchanges are inevitable in a vibrant democracy, framing them as mere "theatre" risks overlooking the substantive point: that protecting Meghalaya's interests demands collective, action-oriented engagement with New Delhi, not just impassioned speeches within the Assembly. The Chief Minister's emphasis on documented engagement signals a governance approach grounded in procedure and persistence qualities essential for navigating complex federal negotiations. Yes, the ILP issue is emotional. It touches the core of identity and survival. But that is precisely why we need cooler heads, not hotter tempers. Our people deserve real action, not political showmanship.

So where do we go from here? First, let us acknowledge that ILP is not a complete answer to our challenges. It is one tool among many. The government's mention of exploring "other mechanisms" and the proposed Immigration and Foreigners Act, 2025 suggests there may be more balanced and carefully considered approaches that protect indigenous rights. Second, if ILP is implemented, it must be smart ILP. Online permits. Fast-track systems for tourists. Facilitation centres. The technology exists. The question is political will and administrative capacity. Third, let us have inclusive consultations not just between political parties, but with civil society, student organisations, tourism operators, tribal bodies, and ordinary citizens. This is not an elite debate; it is a people's issue.

At the same time, such a consultative process must also recognise those genuine non-tribal residents who have lived in Meghalaya for many years, contributed to its economy, respected its customs, and raised their families here. A mature policy discussion need not dilute constitutional protections for indigenous communities; rather, it should reflect confidence in them. Listening to long-settled residents does not weaken tribal rights; it strengthens the legitimacy of any final decision by ensuring that it is informed, balanced, and rooted in ground realities.

Fourth, our legislators must remember that the Assembly is a temple of democracy, not a boxing ring. Robust debate is essential; personal attacks have no place in it.

Meghalaya does not need politicians who play with emotions. It needs leaders who channel emotions into effective policy. The fear of cultural dilution is real. The need for economic development is urgent. The potential of tourism is significant. Bringing these realities together requires wisdom, not conflict; dialogue, not angry speeches. As the ILP debate continues, let us demand more from our representatives. Let us ask not just whether they support ILP, but how they plan to implement it without harming our economy. Let us ask not just about protecting our identity, but about building our future.

(The views expressed here are entirely personal and made in my individual capacity. They bear no connection to my profession or to any institution with which I am associated. These reflections are offered in good faith, as a citizen concerned about public policy and the health of our democratic discourse not as a partisan intervention in any political contest.)

call for shared responsibility. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma's reference to his own sustained efforts—multiple letters and meetings with the Prime Minister and Home Minister underscores a government actively pursuing the issue through appropriate constitutional channels. In a federal structure where ILP implementation requires Centre-state coordination, such questioning invites the opposition to demonstrate its own commitment beyond rhetorical critique.

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Letters to the Editor

A Correction Please

Editor,
I wish to refer to the special article titled "The Inspiring Journey of Sourya, a Boy originally from Tura" published on February 28, 2026 in your esteemed newspaper. At the outset, I sincerely appreciate the author for thoughtfully capturing my son's journey, struggles and aspirations. As a mother, it was deeply touching to see his dedication and perseverance expressed with such sensitivity and respect. Such encouragement means a great deal to a young boy who continues to work hard towards his dreams.

However, I would like to gently clarify that my son's correct name is "Mourya", not "Sourya" as printed in the article. It appears to have been a simple typographical oversight. A name carries a child's identity and the story of his journey, and therefore this small correction is important to us.

I kindly request the respected readers to read "Mourya" instead of "Sourya." Our gratitude towards the author and your esteemed newspaper remains unchanged.

Yours etc.,
Minakashi Chhetry Panikar
(mother of Mourya),
Via email

True Unity Cannot Come from Erasing Identity

Editor,
The recent proceedings in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly concerning the review of the State's Job Reservation Policy raise an issue that deserves careful public attention.

During the debate on the Expert Committee's report, Ardent M. Basiaawmoit repeatedly referred to the 40 percent reservation category as belonging to the "Khasi community," omitting the officially recognised composite classification "Khasi-Jaintia." A Point of Order was raised by Deputy Chief Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar, and the Hon'ble Speaker rightly ruled that the correct terminology is "Khasi-Jaintia," not "Khasi" alone.

In defending his usage, the member stated that he preferred to use "Khasi" in order to "unify" the sub-tribes. This explanation, however, reveals a fundamental confusion between the words unify and unite.

To unify means to combine different parts or components into a single whole often implying structural merging. To unite, on the other hand, generally means bringing people together for a common purpose while allowing them to retain their distinct identities. The distinction is not merely a matter of wording; it reflects an important difference in meaning and intent.

If the intention is to unite, then the correct approach is to acknowledge and respect the existence of Khasi and Jaintia as distinct communities standing together in cooperation. However, using only "Khasi" while claiming inclusivity suggests an attempt to unify by linguistic absorption combining components into one term and thereby blurring established distinctions.

Meghalaya was formed upon the recognition of three separate tribal identities: Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo. The administrative category "Khasi-Jaintia" exists for reservation purposes; it does

not convert one group into a subset of the other. The Jaintias possess their own recorded political history, traditional institutions, territorial legacy, and linguistic development. To imply that they are merely a sub-tribe of the Khasis is historically inaccurate.

Unity must be built on clarity, not conflation. Bringing communities together does not require renaming or subsuming them. On the contrary, genuine unity grows stronger when distinct identities are acknowledged and respected.

Legislative language carries constitutional weight. Words used in the Assembly are entered into official record. The Speaker's ruling reaffirming "Khasi-Jaintia" was therefore necessary to preserve both procedural correctness and tribal equity.

This is not a matter of emotion, but of being correct. If we want solidarity among the people of Meghalaya, we must come together while respecting our differences and not merge identities by ignoring them.

It is also important to question what kind of "unity" is being promoted. If unity is spoken of only between Khasi and Jaintia, then it is incomplete and selective. Meghalaya is not made up of two tribes alone. The Garo community is an equal and foundational partner in the making of this State. Any idea of unity that leaves out one of the three recognised tribes is not unity; it is division in another form.

A divisive mindset does not always shout; sometimes it quietly narrows the definition of who belongs. True unity in Meghalaya must be the unity of Khasi, Jaintia,

"Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present."
—Albert Camus

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 200 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 3, 2026

Meghalaya's Failing Last Mile HealthCare

TO hear of healthcare facilities not being available for people in Dawki area is an unpardonable lapse. Dawki is a border area and is supposed to be better served because of the distance involved in reaching the nearest health care centre. Sadly, last mile health care facilities are sorely wanting in Meghalaya. Meghalaya's healthcare crisis is not only about infrastructure it is about the lack of medical professionals where they are most needed. More so their absence at the last mile. In a state where roughly 80 percent of the population lives in rural areas, access to a health centre with a doctor present depends on so many factors like geography, the weather and luck. For many villages in the Garo Hills, Jaintia Hills and even remote pockets of East Khasi Hills, the nearest government doctor may be several hours away. Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs) frequently function without full-time medical officers, and some operate with skeletal staff or contractual doctors who do not stay long.

Let's face it—most doctors are unwilling to serve in remote areas. Official data over the years has consistently shown vacancies in sanctioned posts for doctors and specialists. Even when recruitment drives are announced, postings in remote blocks such as those in South Garo Hills or East Jaintia Hills remain unattractive. Poor road connectivity, limited housing, lack of educational facilities for children, and minimal professional growth opportunities discourage young doctors from serving in rural Meghalaya. Most medical graduates from the state prefer to work in urban centres like Shillong or move outside the state for better pay and exposure. Without adequate incentives, compulsory rural service becomes a paper mandate rather than a lived reality. The health system in rural Meghalaya rests heavily on Accredited Social Health Activists (ASHAs), Auxiliary Nurse Midwives (ANMs), and nurses. They are the first responders for maternal health, immunisation drives, tuberculosis monitoring and even mental health referrals. But they are not doctors. They cannot diagnose complex conditions, manage emergencies, or handle complications during childbirth.

In medical emergencies families often have to transport patients to district hospitals in Tura or Shillong. Critical cases are referral to facilities outside the state, further increasing cost and delay. The shortage is even more acute in specialist care. District hospitals struggle to retain surgeons, paediatricians, anaesthetists and gynaecologists. This leads to irregular surgeries, postponed procedures and preventable complications. In a geographically challenging state like Meghalaya, where monsoons can cut off entire regions, the absence of specialists at district level can be life-threatening. Over the years, buildings have been constructed and schemes announced under national programmes. However, infrastructure without human resources is a mockery. A well-equipped PHC without a doctor is merely a structure. Telemedicine has been introduced in some areas, but digital consultations cannot replace physical examination, especially, where internet connectivity is unreliable. The Government has to prioritise health care which is a right and not a privilege. If the last mile citizen cannot access a doctor, the state has failed in its constitutional duty. The health of a state is not measured by the number of hospitals in its capital, but by whether a mother in a remote village can see a qualified doctor when she needs one most. The ASHA and nurses are no substitute for a doctor.

Meghalaya State Budget : No Road to Financial Freedom or Self Sufficiency

By Kitor H. Blah

The Meghalaya 2026-27 budget walks a tightrope. It keeps its fiscal deficit to 3.5% of GSDP, within the limit of the Meghalaya Fiscal Responsibility & Budget Management Act but beyond the recommendation of the 16th Finance Commission, which capped it at 3% of GSDP. Hence while this is not sustainable in the long run, it is not excessive either. The interest payments to revenue receipts ratio is projected at 5.8%, higher than the 5.3% & 5.2% of 2025-26 and 2024-25, but lower than the 6% of 2023-24, 6.9% of 2022-23 and 7.2% of 2021-22. This is not excessive either, with anything under 10% being seen as manageable in the long run. The discontinuation of Revenue Deficit grant has not affected Revenue Surplus. The State has projected a Revenue Surplus of Rs. 4771 crore, which is 6.25% of GSDP, as against the 2025-26 Revenue Surplus of Rs. 5035 crore which was 7.6% of GSDP. So, the revenue surplus has decreased in actual numbers and as a percentage of GSDP even though it has increased. The budget is not controversial in itself. But the one fact that looms over the budget is that we are still totally dependent on Tax Devolution and central grants to meet any healthy parameters in Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management. Tax devolution by the Centre is constitutional, but changes in the Centre's policy will affect our receipts. The growth of the state's own revenue is also disproportionately lower than the growth of GSDP which signifies revenue leakage. And the GSDP growth is disproportionately high in the service sector, which shows rising inequality.

The 16th Finance Commission has reduced the weight of criteria that are favourable to the state in the share of Central Taxes. Meghalaya's share of Central Taxes has gone down from 0.77% to 0.63%. Meghalaya had made submissions to the 16th Finance Commission (FC) to increase rate of Forest Cover from 10 to 15%, and to add another criterion, "Rural dispersion of population." But the 16th FC did not implement these submissions. The 16th FC has given more advantage in shares of central taxes to high population states, increasing the weight of population size from 15% to 17.5% and reducing the weight of population control from 12.50% to 10%. Contribution to GDP has been added with 10% weight, benefitting states with high GDP. Income distance has been reduced, reducing shares of lower GSDP states like Meghalaya. Fiscal responsibility has been removed as a parameter. This tells us that the policy of the Centre is to reward high

population, high spending, reduce assistance for lower GSDP states, assisting those states who have not increased their tax revenue and who have not kept their borrowing in check. If this policy continues for the next 10 years, states like Meghalaya will have to borrow more to spend more in order to keep up with other states for share of central taxes.

Further, the states' share in the Divisible Pool of Taxes (which is now 41%) might decrease in the future. This is unlikely, but not impossible. But what is highly likely is that the value of the divisible portion of taxes itself will be reduced by increase in central cess and surcharges? After all, the Centre's Interest Payment to Revenue Receipts continues to grow steadily from 37% to 40% this fiscal year. The Centre itself is neck deep in debt. What will happen to our State's Revenue Surplus, our Fiscal Deficit, the Debt to GDP ratio, Interest Payments to Revenue Receipts, then?

The 10 billion dollar economy is not just possible, but probable, except for some unforeseen crisis. It is a number that will be reached in the next 2 to 3 years - Rs. 86,000 crore of money being transacted in the state. But by all measurements, the State is not on the road to financial freedom. It will continue to depend on Central Transfers. I am wary of this because if any financial hiccup happens in the Centre, we will be totally dependent on debt.

The growth of GSDP in the last 6 years, from Rs. 37,877 crore to Rs. 76,320 crore, has not resulted in an increase in the State's Own Revenue as percentage of Revenue Receipts (own revenue plus central transfers). In fact, this year it has gone down from the usual 20% to 18%, even though our share of central taxes has reduced. This tells us that we are increasingly dependent on Central Transfers. Despite the growth in economic output, the State is not on the road to financial freedom. Despite a growth in GSDP of 101%, the State's own revenue has grown less proportionately at 89%. Moreover, the State's own revenue as a percentage of GSDP keeps hovering at 7%. I feel that the opposition needed to have pressed the Treasury Bench on this. Why is the growth of revenue low in response to the growth in economic output? Because this may be due to leakage of revenue.

While the state's GSDP has grown 101% in the last six years, its own revenue has grown disproportionately lower at 89% - hardly a road to self sufficiency. But if you look into this revenue, it is

Tax revenue that has grown 100%. This is expected in the least, that as the volume of goods and services being transacted increases, the Tax revenue on these transactions should also increase. Moreover, some of this growth in Tax revenue may simply be due to hikes in excise duties, or tax rates. State GST comprises the majority of tax revenue, around 50%. But if you look at the non-tax revenue - collection from the services provided by the state and return on its investments and loans - we see that it has grown only 50%. In the same period, Revenue Expenditure has grown by 60%. In simple words, the cost of the government's operations of its social and economic services has grown by 60% but the collection on these services has grown only 50%. Moreover, any increase in Total Revenue is offset by Interest payments and debt repayment. Debt repayment is a good thing, but this is also offset by new borrowings. Our capital expenditure has grown from 15% to 23% of total expenditure, but this has not created a path to financial freedom. The state's expenditure on PSU's has resulted in a drain of wealth. The Power Sector continues to drain our wealth and the Government continues to infuse money into it through long term borrowings. The Power Sector has been the major recipient of the state's investment, over 90%, and it has also been the main contributor towards the losses on investments.

But the biggest wealth drain is that we still import 80% of our food. The growth in GSDP does not mean that the money stays in the state. The high food import means that money is not retained in the state. It is a loss of both financial capital and human capital. This 80% food import is still not enough to meet the state's needs; as 40% of children are stunted due to malnutrition, according to National Family Health Survey 5, although state's data in 2025 shows it to be 20%. The reliance on high food import also means that food inflation is high. The Chief Minister announced that the new minimum wage in Meghalaya is Rs. 525, down from Rs. 541 in 2025 but higher than in the preceding years. It is the second highest in the country after Karnataka. But this wage rate is offset by high food inflation. High food inflation drains the pocket of the people, which means they have fewer savings to invest in other meaningful growth. While GSDP has grown 101%, this is 61% in the service sector, and only 21% is in the agricultural sector. But 80% of the people

of the state are employed in agriculture. The service sector is also more capital intensive while agriculture and manufacturing are more labour intensive. So the disproportionately high concentration of growth in the service sector and disproportionately low growth in agriculture means that Meghalaya's economic growth is wildly unequal. And we do not need data to see the ground reality that even land and housing inflation is high, and this itself is a big sign of rising inequality.

Manufacturing is also low, with only 18% of GSDP being in this sector. With low growth in manufacturing, it does not seem that we will be on the road to self sufficiency any time soon. The disproportionately high growth of the service sector, when seen with disproportionately low growth of agriculture, low growth of manufacturing sector, and unequal economic growth, tells us that the state, is increasingly reliant on external capital to fuel its growth. This is very harmful to our tribal indigenous state, when investment interests conflict with tribal interests. An example of this was the expunged Land Bank clause in the Meghalaya Investment Promotion & Facilitation Amendment Bill, 2025. But the Government does not need the Investment Act to allot revenue land to investors, as we can see that it has allotted 66 acres of land to Tata Group for a luxury resort. But why would the government allot land to outside investors and franchises, when 80% of the people subsist on agriculture and most of these farmers do not own land? Because this is the growth model of the state.

The question to be asked then is, whether the State's priorities are wrong? The State's investment in PSU's is 90% in the power sector but only 2.45% in the agricultural sector. The Youth Budget & Gender Budget that aims at human capital amounts to Rs. 11,673 crore, but 20 - 40% of our children - the human capital - is affected by malnutrition. Agriculture in the state affects all human capital, including youth and women. Besides land allotment, the State also provides subsidies on power, interest payment, capital investment, etc. to industries. The Climate Action Budget amounts to Rs. 5,572 crore, yet the allocation towards agriculture is a paltry Rs. 664 crore. The budget that is due towards Climate Action would be better redirected towards agriculture. Had the state not subsidized the cement factories and other industries that affect the climate, the air quality, and that erode the size and quality of agricultural lands, the climate would not have changed so drastically.

Hynniewtrep people! Beware of the RSS's divisive agenda

By Lakshon Kma

The comments made by the BJP leader who is a former RSS Pracharak-Sunil Vishwanath Deodhar against Christians in Meghalaya at the Indigenous Faith Conference in Pynther village, Pynursla Sub-Division East Khasi Hills, is highly venomous, toxic, dangerous and utterly disturbing for the Hynniewtrep people. Although he has apologized under pressure after being cornered, his mindset reflects the divisive nature of RSS at its core and the central BJP leadership.

I don't understand what neglect and disparities are faced by followers of indigenous faith which others are not facing in Meghalaya? His complete ignorance of how churches work in Meghalaya is baffling and yet he dares to make comments with zero knowledge of it. As a practicing Christian, I go to church when I feel like and have never faced any punishment for lack of attendance because no attendance is taken inside any church in Meghalaya. Catechism or any religious teaching is never mandatory in schools run by Christian Missionaries. I challenge Sunil Deodhar to show proof of a single instance of a non-Christian student studying in schools and colleges run by Christian denominations in Meghalaya where they got converted to Christianity forcefully.

Our churches, schools and colleges are places to impart education and produce righteous, responsible citizens and good human beings and not a place for conversion. The Constitution of India provides you the right to choose your religion as you wish. I choose Christianity out of my free will and because of the love and understanding of the goodness of the religion and rest assured, no one can ever dare to force anything on me in this world. So there is no better person than me to testify that there is no forced conversion in Meghalaya to the best of my knowledge and belief.

We, in Meghalaya, have close family members across religions and that has never been a cause of concern in any social gatherings. The statements of Deodhar are totally baseless and with malafide intentions to bring a divide among the Hynniewtrep people based on religious beliefs. The fact is that tribals in Meghalaya or anywhere in the NE Region have never been differentiated on the basis of religion for any purpose whatsoever and it should and will stay that way. I would like to warn everyone not to fall prey to such divisive forces. My worry is-what is Deodhar trying to do in Meghalaya or specifically in Khasi-Jaintia Hills and what he represents? I hope he is not contributing towards establishing a brahmanical hegemony that thrives on exploitation of fellow human beings? I would have appreciated if he could direct the RSS and BJP towards the teachings of eminent social reformers such as Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahansa, Swami Vivekananda, Mahatma Gandhi, etc. who have spent their entire life preaching against the evils of the caste system and advocated for equality among all individuals, irrespective of their social background.

All of them promoted the idea that all humans are equal in the eyes of God and spread the message of the harmony of religions throughout their lives. What one has to know is that the Brahmanical mind-set stems from the teaching of Manu in the book of Brahmanism, written by Maharishi Manu. Leave aside unity among

different religions; this so-called 'Maharishi' does not consider lower castes (Shudras, now called Scheduled Castes) as humans and rather compares them to cows, elephants, horses, etc. (Reference: International Journal of Sanskrit Research 2017; 3(6):152-154; a Hindi journal). They created the caste system and codified it in Manusmriti to spread false beliefs and deny the lower castes the basic human rights such as equality, education, employment and the right to visit temples, etc. for centuries till the Constitution of India came into force to protect these rights.

There are several references in Manusmriti which indicate how toxic and discriminatory these texts are. It says that if a 'Kshatriya' says anything unpleasant to a 'Brahman', he should be whipped 100 times; if a 'Vaishya' does it, he will be given 150 strokes and if a 'Shudra' says anything unpleasant to a Brahman, he should be killed (International Journal of Sanskrit Research 2017; 3(6):152-154).

Further, Manusmriti propagated what they believe is written in the scriptures of Rig-Veda which states that Brahmins originated from the mouth, Kshatriyas from the shoulders, Vaishyas from the thighs and the Shudras originated from the legs. Can you believe it? We all know how all humans come out in this world through a scientific and biological process which is well-understood. The Manusmriti's evilness and discriminatory nature is openly highlighted where it stated that if a Shudra recites the Vedas, his tongue should be cut and if he hears the Vedas, molten lead should be poured in his ears (Manusmriti-Chapter 8, Sloka 272-272). It even mentions that the Shudras are not even allowed to touch a dead body which will prevent the dead from reaching heaven and there are many more such evil writings in this book.

Has the RSS ever denounced this horrid Brahmanical hegemony and condemned the Manusmriti which discriminates between fellow Hindus as lowly and non-humans and meant to only toil for them? Or are they surreptitiously propagating a medieval Brahmanical mind-set in our institutions and the country in general? Can we trust RSS to protect the tribes and spread religious harmony? Certainly not! I don't expect them to love the tribals when they discriminate against their own kind.

Coming back to Deodhar's statements, they only indicate a desperate attempt of social engineering meant to divide our society on religious lines for political gains and someone had rightly filed an FIR. Such a person should be behind bars. As far as the contributions of Christianity in the well-being of Meghalaya is concerned, I would like to openly challenge Sunil Deodhar or anyone from the RSS or central BJP leadership in camera on any given day. Deodhar would have got my support and sympathy had he said that most of our political leaders in Meghalaya have not lived up to the teachings of Jesus Christ or the key Khasi maxims - "Ka tip brier ka tip Blei" (Know God but know man first); "Ka kamai ia ka hok" (Earn righteously); "Ka bhalang ka inlang" (What you do for the common good); and all of us, irrespective of religious beliefs, are suffering because of it and that is where change is urgently needed rather than religious divisions.

85 Seconds to Midnight - A Dangerous Timing

Editor,
The Doomsday Clock, created in 1947 by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, is not merely a symbolic timepiece, it is a stark moral gauge of humanity's proximity to self-destruction. Midnight represents global catastrophe. Every movement of its hands is a warning to the world. Today, at 85 seconds to midnight, we stand at one of the most perilous moments in modern history.

Originally conceived in the shadow of nuclear warfare, the Clock has evolved to reflect a broader spectrum of existential threats. Nuclear tensions remain deeply troubling, with fragile diplomatic frameworks and rising geopolitical hostilities increasing the risk of miscalculation. Climate change continues to accelerate, manifesting in record-breaking temperatures, extreme weather events, and ecological instability that threaten food

security, economies, and human lives. Meanwhile, the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence and other disruptive technologies has outpaced global governance, creating vulnerabilities in security, information integrity, and international stability.

What makes this moment uniquely dangerous is not a single crisis, but the convergence of many. Climate stress can intensify conflict and conflict can escalate nuclear risk. Unregulated technologies can amplify misinformation and destabilize societies. The setting of 85 seconds to midnight reflects this dangerous intersection.

The Doomsday Clock is not a prophecy of inevitable doom. It is a call to responsibility. It urges leaders to prioritize diplomacy over aggression, meaningful climate action over rhetoric, and ethical technological governance over unchecked competition. The question before us is simple yet profound: will we treat this warning as symbolic or as the urgent call to action it truly is?

Your's etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

Political Education & Training Imperative for MLAs/MDCs/MPs

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw attention to an important concern in our democracy—the urgent need for structured and formal training in political leadership.

In a nation as vast and complex as India, governance requires deep understanding of law, public administration, economics, media, and effective communication. Yet, unlike other professions such as medicine, engineering, or law, politics does not require systematic academic preparation. While democracy rightfully allows every citizen to participate, the responsibilities of leadership demand knowledge, ethical grounding, and practical competence.

It is time we consider institutions dedicated to preparing aspiring public leaders through rigorous study of constitutional law, governance, media communication, political theory, and language

proficiency. Such institutions should emphasize real-world exposure—observing legislative proceedings, assisting policymakers, engaging in community projects, and analyzing current national issues—rather than relying solely on traditional examinations.

A structured, experiential model of political education would not restrict democracy, but rather strengthen it by ensuring that those who seek leadership are informed, capable, and ethically trained. By raising standards in political preparation, we can enhance the quality of public discourse and governance in our country.

I hope this idea encourages discussion on building a more educated and responsible political leadership for the future.

Yours etc.,
Sudarshan Dasgupta
Via email

One Year of Advocacy

Editor,
A year and five days ago, on February 25, 2025, a collective voice was raised through a public petition to

restore The North Eastern Service (NES) Of Akashvani back on shortwave radio. As we mark this anniversary, it is a moment to both celebrate our progress and confront the silence that still lingers on the shortwave radio bands. We rightfully celebrated the restoration of Akashvani FM Jong Phi on April 27, 2025, which brought back the local FM radio frequency, 103.6MHz, and the local content to the listeners of the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. However, NES, founded on January 3, 1990, as a bridge for the whole of Northeast India, remains confined to a mere 100W FM radio transmitter, despite the recent improvement of its FM radio audio quality.

This is a far cry from the 50kW Brown, Boveri and Cie (BBC) SK45F3 shortwave radio transmitter that once allowed our regional radio identity to give their voices. While the "Ghost of Centralisation" continues to haunt our airwaves, the systematic dismantling of regional radio identity remains an unaddressed grievance. Shortwave radio is not a "funeral" to be attended, it

is a vital infrastructure for hilly terrains where FM radio cannot reach. On this anniversary, I urge Prasar Bharati (PB) and the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) to look beyond the "formula force-fed dreams" of pure digitalisation and recognise that for Northeast India, shortwave radio is a necessity, not a relic. We have to replace that old and decommissioned shortwave radio transmitter with a new 100kW (reduced to 50kW) Ampegon TSW2100 shortwave radio transmitter.

Let us not wait for another year of silence. It is time to "break" the machine of bureaucratic delay and return NES to its rightful place on shortwave radio, on the 60m and 41m shortwave radio bands (4970kHz and 7315kHz).

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh
Lawai
Via email

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

Relevance of Rahul

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi, currently the Leader of Opposition in Parliament, has hinted that he's not averse to being the Prime Minister in future. His response came to a suggestion by the Telangana chief minister Revant Reddy at a party meeting. Rahul Gandhi is the unquestioned leader of the nation's top political establishment that has a history of making huge sacrifices for the nation. But the fact is also that the Congress party is down and out in most states and does not have the wherewithal to take on the nation's ruling class led by the BJP. Herein lies the rub.

NO leader in the Opposition today enjoys as much clout as Rahul Gandhi. The popularity of those like Mamata Banerjee or Nitish Kumar is limited mostly to their own states. People in every nook and corner of the country know Rahul Gandhi just as the Congress has its network even in the remotest village across states. The Hindutva plank of the BJP, at the behest of the RSS, has won it massive support in the northern states — the Hindi belt — since the 1990s, which proved to be the undoing of the Congress. The Congress as a party drew its support from all segments of the society for decades; more so from the poor and the backward communities. While the Ram Janambhoomi temple issue was projected as the rallying point for the Hindus, the Mandalization of politics in the northern states by a set of regional leaders like Mulayam Singh and Lalu Prasad drew the poor and backward communities to their fold. The Congress party was caught in between these two political tumults. It failed to reinvent itself and take centre-stage as a people's movement. A lack of aggressiveness on the part of both Sonia Gandhi and Rahul Gandhi was taken full advantage of by the BJP and the Modi establishment. Perhaps they used the National Herald case etc., to browbeat the "first family." At the same time, the BJP now draws its sustenance more from the image that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has built for himself. Modi, a shrewd politician, projected himself as a representative of the poor. Under his governance, the poor got very little. Wealth keeps getting concentrated in the hands of the elite, which run the government from behind the Modi façade.

The 70 crore of India's poor would have had a better time had the Congress been in power. Despite all its flaws, including a failure to control corruption, the Congress cared for all. The food security bill, for instance, which ensures supply of foodgrains to the BPL families at free or cheap rates, was one example. Beneficiaries of the rural and urban job guarantee schemes for the poor owe their thanks to the Congress-led government. This helped reach tiny sums into the hands of crores of poor families round the year. These keep public tensions under control. The BJP governments instead sulked for the most part, across states, just as Modi ignored the poor. Operation Sindoor too exposed the limitations of the Modi establishment. In this backdrop, the relevance of Rahul Gandhi and the Congress cannot be wished away.

Faith, Identity and Rights: Rethinking Indigenous Rights in India

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

territories, and despite the FRA giving them the right to habitation, their claims are still being denied. In 2019, the Supreme Court of India ordered the eviction of 1 million indigenous tribal households across 20 states whose claims under the Forest Rights Act 2006 had been rejected. So, despite the Act, they were still being denied their rights.

The pressure on indigenous groups is not just loss of territory but also identity, with both of them being linked. One of the demands being put forward by them is that there should be a category to indicate their indigenous faiths. For long, they have complained that they have been clubbed with Hindus, Christians, Muslims and other groups. However, these are foreign faiths and in Khasi would be termed as 'Niam Dkhar'. In fact, the word for outsiders in the Munda languages is Diko, which is actually the name of one of the lost tribes among the Khasi. This raises the possibility that the lost tribe among the Khasi in the origin myth actually referred to all the non-Khasi groups in the world, who, after having arrived on earth with the original six clans/families, lost their way from the sacred site of Lum Sohpetbeng and are today residing elsewhere. Once these 'Niam Dkhars' start taking root, indigenous groups felt that their culture was getting eroded. But it was not only their cultural identity which was under threat. In particular, the spread of Hinduism among some indigenous groups was raised by many in the workshop as a big problem.

According to some community members, accepting a Niam Dkhar like Hinduism creates a special kind of danger for them. As long as they follow their indigenous faith, the lives of the people are governed by their customary law. But once they convert to Hinduism, they are then governed by the Hindu Marriage Act. This is then used to transfer indigenous tribal land to the non-indigenous non-tribal population. To prevent this, many therefore wanted that in the upcoming Census there should be a separate category for recording their indigenous faith, so that conversion of indigenous people to Niam Dkhar like Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam can be stopped and their land and identity protected.

When I was in Darjeeling

a few weeks ago for another workshop, I came to learn that some of the Nepali-speaking groups were also dissatisfied that they were not included in the ST list. I was informed by a member of one such group that they do not practice Hindu rituals or the caste system, and therefore are eligible for ST status. However, they were upset that they had not received the status yet. In 2024, the Darjeeling MP Raju Bista urged the Union Government in Parliament to grant ST status to 11 Nepali-speaking groups. There is also a political dimension to the demand for ST status. Once the majority of the communities in Darjeeling are considered tribal, it will also help the district get Sixth Schedule status.

In a recent press conference, Bhanu Lama, a former GNLFF (Gorkha National Liberation Front) leader who is now the Convenor of Gorkha National Liberation Front (Subashbadi), stated that "the 6th Schedule will protect our land. We need the 6th Schedule to save Darjeeling, for industry, environment, tourism and our geographical boundaries". Incidentally, the Sixth Schedule Constitutional (Amendment) Bill 2007 and the Constitutional (One Hundred and Seventh Amendment) Bill 2007 had been tabled in the Lok Sabha but due to the objections of the BJP, the bill was referred to the Standing Committee on Home Affairs.

So, converting to a Niam Dkhar has immense repercussions for indigenous communities, not just for their identity but also their political rights. For some, it is also a violation of their history since indigenous faiths like those followed by the Khasi, Munda and other groups are older than these Niam Dkhars: Christianity is a 2000-year-old religion which emerged from Judaism, which itself has a history of 4000 years. Hinduism arrived in South Asia with the migrating Indo-Aryan groups around 3500 years ago. On the other hand, Austro-Asiatic groups like the Khasi and Munda were already settled in the region around 5000 years ago. Their original distribution was in fact much wider.

In the 2025 book 'India: 5000 Years of History on the Subcontinent' by Audrey Truschke, there is a suggestion that multiple languages were spoken in the Indus Valley Civilization, includ-

ing Dravidian and Munda languages, the linguistic families that preceded Indo-Aryan languages found today in North Indian tongues. Both Dravidian and Munda (Austro-Asiatic) words appear in the Vedas, including the Rig Veda (the earliest of the four Vedas), indicating communication between Indo-Aryan migrants and the already existing communities. In fact, Sanskrit's retroflex sounds were borrowed from Dravidian languages. Peggy Mohan's 2021 book 'Wanderers, Kings, Merchants: The Story of India through Its Languages' describes the process in great detail and its implications for the linguistic landscape of the country. Punjabi and Marathi are classified as Indo-Aryan languages but their Dravidian foundation is still strongly visible.

Today, Dravidian and Munda languages have all but disappeared from areas where they were previously spoken, i.e., North and West India, and are confined to South India and the Chota Nagpur Plateau of Central India. So, if one were to travel to North India 5000 years back in history, we would find people speaking languages related to Khasi, practicing matrilineal customs and sharing a story similar to Lum Sohpetbeng. If history had turned out differently, today Khasi would have been the national language of India, something which is being argued for Hindi, an Indo-Aryan language.

Religion is a personal matter and should not be used for granting political rights. Imagine if many of the Bodo, Karbi, Tripuri, Rabha, Hajong are today deprived of their ST status because they have converted from their indigenous faith to Hinduism; it would be highly unfair. For me, they are still indigenous because they are part of the group that arrived in South Asia around 4000 years ago and, along with the Austro-Asiatic groups like the Khasi and Munda, are among the first settlers. They are the same people despite having changed their religion. This is the same dilemma faced by indigenous groups throughout the country. Religion, therefore, should not determine identity. Attempts to do so will create problems which will make things very dangerous. So, whether you accept Niam Dkhar or Niam Tynrai, indigenous people will remain indigenous people.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution).

Beyond Certification What Quality Really Means for Meghalaya's Health System

By Jasmine Maringmei & Dr Tiameraen Jamir

Across India, and increasingly in Meghalaya, National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS) certification has become synonymous with "quality" in public health facilities. While certification creates measurable benchmarks and signals reform, an important policy question remains: does compliance with standards translate into better care for the mothers, children, and citizens who depend on the public system? Meghalaya's commitment to strengthening its health system is evident. Significant administrative and financial investments are being made to ensure that public health facilities meet the National Quality Assurance Standards (NQAS). While the journey towards quality assurance continues, notable progress has been made under the NQAS framework.

In 2025, ten public health facilities, including several PHCs and a district hospital, secured NQAS certification. Moreover, a total of 91 Health and Wellness Centers (HWCs) across Meghalaya have achieved NQAS certification, marking a significant step in institutionalizing quality in primary care. This represents approximately 19.4% of the state's HWCs,

geography and remoteness amplify their impact.

Quality Is Also About People, Not Just Processes

Health care is delivered by health workers, which makes them central to any quality improvement program. District teams have observed that many MLHPs and ANMs, despite knowing protocols and standards, struggle during external NQAS assessments. Hesitation and limited communication during assessments often mask their competence. This is not a technical failure. It is a human one. Even the most rigorous quality frameworks rarely account for the emotional and professional pressures frontline workers face. When quality is reduced to checklists and documentation, it does not capture all the contextual constraints that affect quality care.

Encouragingly, some districts in Meghalaya are already finding ways around this. Facilities that have achieved NQAS certification are informally mentoring those still in the process. Peer-to-peer hand-holding, shared mock assessments, and exposure visits are building confidence more effectively than formal training alone. Tools and handbooks exist, developed by technical

While meeting such standards is necessary for providing good-quality care, they do not automatically translate into better care, higher utilization, or greater patient trust. A facility can meet every checklist requirement and still fail the community it serves. This matters because a large share of Meghalaya's population depends on the public system. Nearly half of all institutional births occur in government facilities, and over 93% of children receive vaccinations there (NFHS-5, 2019–20).

paving the way for broader system strengthening. These accomplishments are not limited to infrastructure upgrades but also reflect the sustained efforts of district teams, quality managers, frontline workers, and state-level leadership. Yet certification is only the beginning of the quality journey. NQAS requires facilities to meet standards across eight domains — service provision, patient rights, inputs, support services, clinical care, infection control, quality management, and outcomes.

While meeting such standards is necessary for providing good-quality care, they do not automatically translate into better care, higher utilization, or greater patient trust. A facility can meet every checklist requirement and still fail the community it serves. This matters because a large share of Meghalaya's population depends on the public system. Nearly half of all institutional births occur in government facilities, and over 93% of children receive vaccinations there (NFHS-5, 2019–20). In rural areas, the dependence is even higher: 93% of hospitalizations and more than half of outpatient visits are managed by the public system (NSSO, 2019). When such a significant proportion of maternal and child health services flows through PHCs and HWCs, certification cannot remain a symbolic exercise. It must translate into better care on the ground.

This gap is particularly visible at the HWC level in Meghalaya. Many centres continue to face shortages of medicines, limited diagnostics, unreliable power supply, and chronic human resource gaps. Vacancies in Mid-Level Health Provider (MLHP) posts, frequent transfers, and resignations disrupt continuity of care. These challenges are not unique to Meghalaya, but

partners, but uptake remains uneven, highlighting the need for facilitation, not just availability.

Sustaining Quality: A Policy Imperative

The real policy challenge, then, is not how many facilities get certified, but how many continue to improve after certification. Without sustained mentoring, supportive supervision, and investment in soft skills, facilities risk stagnation. Documentation is maintained for audits, while patient experience remains unchanged. If Meghalaya is serious about quality, it must do at least five things differently:

- Treat NQAS as a continuous improvement process, not a one-time achievement.

- Institutionalize mentorship between certified and non-certified facilities.

- Invest in communication, confidence, and leadership for frontline providers.

- Align infrastructure upgrades with workforce stability, especially in remote districts.

- Measure success not only through scores, but also through service utilization, patient experience, and staff retention.

The next phase must move beyond celebrating certificates to asking harder questions about sustainability, patient centeredness, and trust. Quality is not a plaque on the wall; it is a continuous conversation between the health system and the people it serves. If Meghalaya can keep that conversation alive, NQAS can move from a compliance badge to a catalyst for lasting health system reform.

(Jasmine Maringmei is a Consultant-Senior Project Officer, Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong. Dr Tiameraen Jamir is Faculty, Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong. Contact: tiameraen.jamir@iiphs.ac.in)

Letters to the Editor

Culture, Politics, and the Power of Words

Editor,
There is always a certain charm in political storytelling, especially when it arrives with dramatic lighting, selective memory, and a carefully chosen villain. Listening to the assertions linked to Sunil Deodhar, one might believe Pynter existed in suspended animation until the mid-1990s.

We are told that before the mid-1990s, an entire village existed in near darkness, no roads, no opportunity, no dignity, as though history itself had taken a long tea break. And then, suddenly, awareness dawned. Identity was rediscovered. Culture was "protected." Education was reimagined.

It makes for excellent theatre.

The narrative paints a picture of systematic discrimination, of indigenous believers denied opportunity while church-run institutions allegedly controlled the gateways to progress. It certainly makes for a compelling narrative. Yet compelling narratives tend to smooth out the rough edges. Meghalaya's social fabric, shaped over decades of shared spaces and layered histories, rarely fits neatly into a simple script of villains and victors.

At one point, it is suggested that education itself led people toward a particular

faith, almost as if belief came along with the textbooks. The message seems to be that education must be handled carefully so it does not shape personal choices too much. The solution offered is schools without obvious religious pressure, but still guided by one clear spiritual outlook. In other words, religion is not described as forced, just presented as the natural direction to take.

Then comes the moment of triumphant return, a ceremonial homecoming where many who had once left the indigenous fold reportedly came back. It was described not as a personal choice, but as if something had been "set right." The tone sounded calm, even respectful, but the message was clear. Instead of treating faith as a private and deeply individual decision, it was spoken about like a correction that needed to happen. When belief is presented this way, it stops being about conscience and starts sounding like a scorecard. That is where the problem lies.

Naturally, the arc of the story bends toward national validation.

Then comes the delicate distancing act: not working for any external organisation, "especially not the RSS" while acknowledging support from it and allied groups. It takes considerable political balance to keep one foot outside the door while accepting help from inside the house.

Naturally, credit is extended to Narendra Modi for

giving recognition to indigenous faiths. Recognition is welcome. Yet one wonders whether Niam Tynrai truly required certification from Delhi to validate centuries of existence.

The speech ends with strong words about unity, pride, and protecting culture. It also repeats the idea that some beliefs came "from outside," along with the line "Khasi by blood, Indian by accident." It is a powerful phrase meant to create emotion and draw a clear line about identity.

But history is not that simple. Every culture has grown over time through contact with others. New ideas, religions and influences have always shaped societies. Nothing develops in complete isolation.

Indigenous traditions absolutely deserve respect and support. That is not the issue. The concern arises when protection of culture starts sounding more like a political message than a genuine effort to preserve heritage. When identity becomes a slogan, it is fair to question the intention behind it.

After all, the village did not wait for speeches to build its school. It did not need ideological supervision to strengthen its children's future. It improved through effort, not echo chambers.

Identity, when secure, does not need dramatic retelling. It simply endures.

Yours etc;
Jack Syiemlieh,
Via email

Concerns Regarding the Newly Launched Bus service

Editor,
Through your esteemed column, I wish to draw the kind attention of the Hon'ble Chief Minister of Meghalaya, Conrad K. Sangma, to an incident that raises serious concerns about the recently launched public transportation system, "Ka Bus Jong Ngi."

It was shocking and disappointing to witness a brand-new bus break down in the middle of the road at Upper Shillong, resulting in a massive traffic jam. How is it that a newly acquired vehicle is already malfunctioning? This naturally raises questions about the quality of procurement, inspection, and preparedness before unveiling such a project to the public.

Moreover, one wonders why such large-sized buses and air-conditioned models were selected for routes running through narrow roads where traffic congestion is already a daily challenge. An AC bus not only increases operational costs but is also unnecessarily in our naturally cool climate. A smaller, simpler, and more agile bus would have served the purpose far more effectively while easing congestion

instead of adding to it.

Another concern is whether adequate consultations were held with local bodies, community representatives, and stakeholders. Or is the government simply relying on the recommendations of hired consultants—consultants who have a track record of questionable proposals, such as the failed "ride-a-cycle" scheme introduced earlier in Police Bazar to name a few.

The choice of routes—particularly the IIM Shillong to Upper Shillong stretch, as reported—appears poorly thought out. How was this route selected, and on what basis? The entire exercise gives an impression of being rushed for publicity rather than grounded in practical planning and a genuine understanding of local commuting needs.

We have seen in the past how the once-introduced JN-NURM buses eventually became defunct due to similar issues. It is disheartening to think that "Ka Bus Jong Ngi" may go down the same path if corrective measures are not taken immediately.

I sincerely request the Hon'ble Chief Minister and concerned authorities to look into the matter, review the operational and planning flaws, and ensure that this promising initiative does not become yet another failed experiment.

Yours etc.,
Maitshaphrang Lyngdoh,
Via email

How Sustainable is the Newly Launched Bus System

Editor,
84 brand-new tech upgrade buses for the state capital is an attempt on the part of the government to unclog the narrow streets of Shillong. The question that comes to mind is will these 84 new buses really address and solve traffic jams and parking space as well? The way things are now, public transports like the red buses have not managed to convince private vehicle owners to leave their vehicles at home and switch over to public transport. The need of the hour is certainly not the air conditioning, individual charging point, etc. but to ease traffic jams and provide space for parking. In fact, it will be a very good example set by our representatives and the higher echelons if they could use the newly launched buses and ditch their swanky SUVs and experience the kind of trouble that we ordinary people go through daily. Their doing so will help reduce the number of vehicles plying on the road to a certain extent.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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"Power is dangerous unless you have humility."

—Richard J. Daley

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.202 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 5, 2026

Meghalaya's Disdain for CAG Reports

THE institution of Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) is not superfluous. It is meant to keep a strict eye on the use of public funds by state and central authorities. In its latest report on Meghalaya, the CAG has pointed out that utilisation certificates are pending for funds amounting to Rs 5,428.54 crore up to the end of the 2024-25 financial year. Of these, 369 UCs amounting to Rs 2,489.19 crore were already overdue by March 2024, while another 408 UCs amounting to Rs 2,939.35 crore are due by March 2025. In another violation even Covid funds amounting to Rs 1.3 crore were paid in excess to Covid workers. What's worse is that the CAG has also detected that funds unutilised by state level drawal and disbursement officials (DDOs) in a particular financial year are deposited into private accounts that then remain untraceable. They are the proverbial black hole from where public funds are siphoned off to private coffers. Sadly, this aspect is not new. It has been a repeated complaint but since the CAG has no punitive powers except to point out these excesses repeatedly, state government officials cock a snook at such CAG audit paras. At times it's possible that projects are not completed within the stipulated time and the amount has to be carried over to the next financial year. In that case this needs clear explanation and must be backed by utilisation certificates. But such is not the case. What then is the point of the institution of the CAG?

Apart from technical delay this is also a clear case of institutional indifference. CAG reports are regularly tabled before the State Assembly, after which the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) is expected to examine the findings and call departments to account. But the PAC often comprises MLAs who have themselves been violators when they were in the government. Hence, they feel that if they have been complicit in not adhering to rules then they have no locus standi to point their fingers at the government today. Moreover, the PAC comprises legislators with vested interests and meetings are not held regularly. But even if the PAC does make its observations, government departments fail to respond meaningfully. Hence audit observations pile up year after year. As a result we have a dangerous culture where individual accountability is not fixed and financial management which is a crucial part of good governance becomes a casual piece of work since there are no penalties for wrongdoing. Persistent non-submission of utilisation certificates (UCs) by the Government of Meghalaya therefore raises serious concerns about fiscal discipline, transparency, and accountability.

The CAG is a constitutional authority tasked with auditing the receipts and expenditures of the Union and State governments. Its reports cannot therefore be treated as mere bureaucratic formalities. In fact they are instruments of legislative oversight. When CAG findings are ignored, delayed, or brushed aside, it weakens the very foundation of democratic accountability. Unfortunately for Meghalaya even those in the Opposition don't spend too much time reading CAG reports and nor do they raise relevant issues in the Assembly with the intention of bringing accountability in public spending. What could happen in the long term is that the Centre may withhold further funding since there is no proof that public money has reached the target beneficiaries. It also becomes difficult to track outcomes and impacts of centrally sponsored schemes. Failure to submit UCs means only two things - administrative inefficiency and misuse of public money which means corruption. A time has come for civic movements to seek accountability in the use of public funds and thereby make the CAG reports relevant.

Letters to the Editor

The World's on Fire, But At Least My Straw is Dissolving

Editor,

I was looking out of my window today, staring at a crow eating a cigarette butt, and marvelling at the age we're living in. It's a time of great "progress" I am told. By the way, "Progress" is a word I despise with all of my heart, because what it really means is that "things are getting worse, but faster".

We have all been bullied into believing that we can save the world by declaring war on plastic, because plastic is very durable and holds a grudge. So, the first one on the cancel list was the straw. What did we do with them? We replaced them with paper, and I must confess, there is nothing quite like the sensation of saving the planet by drinking iced latte through a tube of dissolving wet cardboard. It feels righteous..... and damp..... and mucky..... and bloody annoying.

The hypocrisy doesn't end with the straw, it follows you to the checkout (after you've bought stuff) where you are politely asked to either produce or buy your "Bag for Life" (since plastics bags are no longer available). Honestly, if you ask me, this sounds threatening. It implies that if you lose the bag, your life is over. I must confess, I have thirty-seven "Bags for Life" under my sink. Theoretically, this makes me immortal, yet I still feel anxious. I wonder why that is?

Once you have loaded your immortal bags, you

have to transport them, and that is where you see the REAL hypocrisy. We are made to feel terribly guilty because we are using petrol cars, because petrol is made of hydrocarbon, and burning hydrocarbon will make the sky angry. Instead, we must drive a better alternative, the silent cars that run on batteries, which is what "Going Green" is all about. Have any of us ever questioned how the batteries are made? I will tell you...we have to dig up half the earth to find lithium, using big diggers that run on.....PETROL. Yep!

So, while we are panicking about our rubbish, trying to remember which bin the cardboard straw goes in, and driving our green cars, a world war is going on (probably our last and final one).

It makes you wonder sometimes about the dude at the top of the chain who decides who gets to save the world and who gets to destroy it. Do we have a say, because it seems unfair that I am strictly forbidden from using a cotton bud with a plastic stick because it might hurt a seahorse, yet the Masters of War are allowed to fire missiles at everyone else?

Missiles are technically single-use metal, if you think about it. They are the ultimate throwaway culture. You don't see soldiers running back onto the battlefield after a war to recycle the casings into park benches, do you? But we let them do it because they are dropping bombs for "peace". That is a very confusing strategy if you ask me, but what do I know about military tactics, I am only an English teacher.

We, the little people are trying hard to save the environment so that we can live in a future where we don't have an environment because we blew it up.

So, my advice to you people, is to keep separating your recycling, it is very very important work. Because while we panic about the planet warming up by one degree, the men in charge are getting ready to warm it up by four thousand. Honestly, at that temperature, it won't really matter which bin you throw the cardboard in.

Inspired by: <https://www.instagram.com/reel/DVYGitQEJeB?igsh=MTFjbNjZGhhalfo2ag%3D%3D>

Yours etc.,
Ellerine Diengdoh,
Via email

Respectable Men with Disreputable Secrets

Editor,

There is something almost theatrical about respectability in our times. It dresses well, speaks Scripture fluently, salutes the flag, upholds the law, and then—when the lights dim—participates in acts it publicly condemns with rehearsed indignation.

The Epstein Files have ripped a hole through this global masquerade of virtue, revealing not merely individual depravity but a recurring pattern: power misbehaving while respectability rushes in to provide cover. This is not a scandal confined to foreign shores. As Joseph M. Kharkongor argues in the article "The Naked Truth" published in The Shillong

Times a few months back, rot does not respect geography. It thrives wherever silence is cultivated and reputations are treated as sacred.

What makes this moment especially corrosive is not the existence of moral failure. Human beings have always failed; history is an archive of such collapses. What is intolerable is hypocrisy institutionalised—the conversion of moral authority into a convenient disguise.

Consider the figures society is trained to trust without hesitation: pastors, policemen, judicial magistrates. These roles are not merely professional appointments; they are moral symbols. They derive legitimacy from trust, from the presumption of ethical restraint. When such figures secretly engage in acts they publicly condemn as sinful, illegal, or obscene, the betrayal is not private—it is collective.

In Meghalaya, a state that proudly identifies itself as Christian, this contradiction cuts particularly deep. Churches thunder about righteousness while some shepherds, cloaked in piety, allegedly wander far from the pastures they preach about. Law enforcers sermonise on order while selectively averting their gaze. Courts speak the language of justice while procedure, delay, and discretion quietly cushion the influential.

This is not about isolated sinners. It is about systems that discipline the powerless and protect the respectable. Kharkongor's essay strips away the comforting illusion that moral authority naturally

be reduced to a later district name. Material evidence supports this as well. A stone boundary pillar marking the limits of the old Jaintia Kingdom was found near Jamunagaon and is preserved in Nagaon. Such boundary pillars mark political authority. Land does not create such markers, organised communities do.

Oral traditions further preserve Jaintia identity. Stories of migration and shared origins have passed down the name and memory of the Jaintia people for generations. These traditions are about a community, not a district. In spite of this rich body of historical, linguistic, material, and oral sources, there are still attempts to subsume or dilute the identity of a people with such a long and distinguished past. Such efforts reflect not scholarship but superficial reasoning. Throughout world history, attempts to erase or absorb distinct identities under broader political or cultural labels have led not to unity but to resentment and resistance.

One may recall how the suppression of Irish language and identity under British rule only strengthened Irish nationalism, or how indigenous communities across continents have struggled to reclaim names and traditions once dismissed as "local" or "tribal." History consistently shows that identity cannot be erased by mere assertion. Those who casually question or diminish Jaintia identity would do well to learn that communities with deep historical roots do not disappear because someone redefines them; they endure, and they respond with clarity, scholarship, and collective resolve.

It must also be remembered that attempts to sideline or subsume the Jaintia identity are not new. In the 1950s, there was an attempt to have the Jaintia Programme scrapped from All India Radio Shillong. This move was strongly and vehemently opposed by Sein Jaintia Shillong, whose members stood firm in defence of the community's rightful cultural recognition and representation. Because of their resistance, the attempt did not succeed. This episode clearly shows that efforts to dilute or erase Jaintia identity have surfaced before, and each time, the community has responded with vigilance and unity.

A few years ago, there was

also concern within the community regarding an initiative by certain organisations to subsume the Jaintia indigenous faith, Niamtre, under the broader label of Niam Khasi. While unity among indigenous communities is important, identity cannot be preserved by erasing distinctions. Niamtre has its own rituals, priesthood, sacred narratives, and heritage within the Jaintia tradition. To merge it under another name raises legitimate questions: what is the need for such consolidation, and does unity require uniformity? The Jaintias are not a threat to the wider tribal community of Meghalaya; they are an integral and respected part of it. However, safeguarding one's distinct religious and cultural identity is not an act of division—it is an assertion of heritage. Mutual respect must allow each community to retain its name, history, and tradition without fear of dilution.

It must also be said that many Facebook commentators, without engaging in proper research, have tried to dismiss Jaintia history. Real history requires careful study of sources, language, archaeology, and comparison of evidence. Quick posts and emotional opinions cannot change centuries of documented research. Repeating a claim online does not make it true. Jaintia history has been studied by historians, linguists, and researchers for decades and cannot be dismissed casually.

Later names such as Jayantiapur or Jaintia Parganas came after the identity was already established. These names were built upon an existing ethnonym. The name Jaintia came first; the places were named after it.

In simple terms, the people came before the district. The identity existed before the boundaries. Jaintia is not just a place on a map. It is a historically rooted community with language, culture, political organisation, and legacy. The land carries the name because the people carried it first. To reduce Jaintia to geography is not only wrong; it risks erasing a long and deeply rooted identity that deserves recognition and respect.

It must also be firmly stated that attempts to erase or subsume the Jaintia identity whether through statements in the Assembly or misleading posts by Facebook scholars are not merely

careless remarks; they reflect a deliberate and premeditated effort, and will not be tolerated. Jaintia is a distinct people with a history, culture, and lineage that demand recognition. Just as no one would dare to mislabel the Khasis as "Jaintia," it is equally unacceptable to treat the Jaintias as a mere subset of another community or reduce their identity to a geographical label. The time for correcting this misconception is now, and the responsibility lies with both elected leaders and public commentators to respect, preserve, and speak the truth of Jaintia identity.

History has shown the consequences of cultural and political interference. The Jaintia Revolt of 1860-62, led by U Kiang Nangbah, occurred because colonial rulers interfered with the community's cultural and religious life. The people resisted not for violence itself, but to defend their identity, traditions, and dignity. That spirit of preserving Jaintia identity remains as relevant today as it was then, reminding us of the importance of safeguarding heritage, respecting communities, and addressing differences through awareness, dialogue, and lawful action.

To the Facebook scholars who continue to question or distort Jaintia history: your speculation and half-understood posts cannot erase centuries of documented evidence. History is not shaped by likes, shares, or viral opinions. Engage with real scholarship, respect primary sources, and stop spreading misleading interpretations. The Jaintias will not accept attempts to rewrite their identity, and your casual dismissal of their history only exposes ignorance, not expertise.

Let this serve as a clear warning and an earnest appeal. An attempt to distort, oversimplify, or erase Jaintia history are not harmless debate, in fact they undermine the dignity, identity, and rights of a living community. Scholars, commentators, and public figures must exercise responsibility and rigor when engaging with history. The Jaintias will vigilantly defend the truth of their heritage, and any deliberate misrepresentation will be met not with silence, but with informed correction and insistence on respect. We appeal to all who speak about Jaintia history to ground their words in evidence, acknowledge the community's voice, and recognise that heritage is not a topic for speculation or casual dismissal.

Yours etc,
Dr. Jason Lyngdoh, (General Physician)
Guwahati

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insists, almost inconveniently, that what is hidden will be brought to light. Light, in the Biblical sense, is not polite. It interrogates. It exposes. It refuses to compromise.

The real obscenity, then, is not transgression alone. It is moral duplicity: the sermon by day, the secrecy by night; the arrest of the poor, the insulation of the powerful; the prayer meeting above, the silence below. When institutions meant to restrain wrongdoing instead learn to manage it discreetly, society does not become stable—it becomes dishonest.

The Epstein Files disturb us not simply because they reveal depravity, but because they confirm a more unsettling truth: that respectability can be staged, that holiness can be performed, and that corruption often wears the uniform of authority.

If Meghalaya truly wishes to call itself a Christian society, it must choose revelation over reputation, truth over tidiness. Otherwise, faith becomes theatre, law becomes selective, and justice becomes a performance delivered without conviction. And history—patient, unsentimental, and allergic to secrecy—will eventually remove the masks.

Because secrets do not disappear. They wait.

Yours etc,
Dr. Jason Lyngdoh, (General Physician)
Guwahati

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The Hills Are Moving: Are We Listening?

On seismic risk, ecological recklessness, and Meghalaya's uncertain future

By Danny K. Rajee

It was just past midnight when I felt my bed shift. Not the rolling, drawn-out kind of shake that gives you a moment to think — this was sharp, abrupt, like something massive had exhaled beneath the house. I ran to the doorway. Outside, a neighbour was already in the street, barefoot on the wet tarmac. Neither of them said anything. There was nothing to say. The tremor — a 4.2-magnitude event recorded in East Khasi Hills in late 2023 — caused no deaths. A few cracked walls, a toppled water tank, the usual three days of anxious WhatsApp forwards. Then, as always, life resumed. "We forget very quickly," Mr. Lyngdoh, a schoolteacher in Shillong's Mawlai neighbourhood, told me. "Until the next one." The next one, geologists will tell you, is not a matter of if. It is when — and how prepared we are when it arrives.

"The plateau looks calm. But if you study the fault lines, you understand that calm is not the same as safe." Meghalaya sits at one of the most seismically restless corners of the Indian subcontinent. The Shillong Plateau, which most residents regard as ancient and immovable, is in geological terms a relatively recent uplift — thrust upward by the same slow-motion collision between the Indian and Eurasian plates that built the Himalayas. Fault lines run beneath the plateau like hairline fractures in porcelain.

A seismologist at the Institute of Advanced Study in Science and Technology in Guwahati, has spent decades studying these faults. He said, "The plateau looks calm. But if you study the fault lines, you understand that calm is not the same as safe." Districts including East Khasi Hills, West Jaintia Hills, and Ri-Bhoi fall within Seismic Zone V — India's highest risk category. In 1897, the Great Assam Earthquake, believed to exceed magnitude 8, physically reshaped the landscape here. Hills collapsed. An entire town sank.

That earthquake is a century and a quarter behind us. But Shillong has grown enormously since, and it has grown upward — into the hillsides, onto ridges that were once forested, in buildings that predate any meaningful seismic code. Nobody could not tell me which seismic zone they lived in.

What Shakes With the Ground

The earthquake itself is rarely the whole story. In a landscape like Meghalaya's — steep slopes saturated by some of the heaviest rainfall on earth, limestone riddled with cave systems, hillsides already stressed by quarrying and road-cutting — the secondary effects can be as devastating as the initial tremor.

Landslides are the most immediate risk. The road from Shillong to — the wettest inhabited place on the planet — passes through terrain that collapses routinely even without seismic provocation. Deforestation has stripped away the root systems that once held these slopes together. A moderate quake during monsoon season on such ground would be catastrophic. Debris would choke the rivers, and the damage would not stop at Meghalaya's borders: the Umkhrah and Myntdu drain into the Brahmaputra basin, carrying whatever the hills release down into Assam and Bangladesh.

Then there is the water. Rural Meghalaya runs on springs — the quiet, cold seeps that emerge from limestone aquifers and have sustained villages for generations. Seismic activity can disrupt these underground systems without warning, drying up springs in one area while causing sudden surges in another. Cracked urban sewage lines in Shillong would contaminate what remains. In communities already battling water scarcity in dry months, the consequences could last long after the tremor is forgotten.

In Jaintia Hills, there is an additional, largely unacknowledged hazard. Decades of rat-hole coal mining have left the earth beneath parts of the district honeycombed with abandoned tunnels. What happens to those voids when the

ground shakes? Subsidence, sinkholes, and toxic mine water discharged into rivers are all possible outcomes. The Supreme Court banned rat-hole mining in 2014, but the landscape it left behind will carry that instability for decades. "We cannot keep building as if the ground beneath us is permanent. It has never been permanent."

Building on the Edge
Walking through upper Shillong on a clear morning, you see the city's ambition written on the hillsides: apartment complexes cantilevered over slopes, retaining walls of uncertain vintage, construction sites where the bedrock has been blasted back to accommodate another floor. There is money here, and optimism. There is also a great deal of risk.

Meghalaya adopted its building bylaws based on national seismic codes, but enforcement is uneven. "The code exists on paper," one structural engineer told me bluntly. "Whether it exists in the building is another question." Heritage homes in the older quarters, built for a different era and a different risk calculation, are particularly exposed. But so are many newer structures, where speed and cost have trumped structural rigor.

A civil society advocate who has campaigned for stricter building regulation in Shillong for over a decade, is not optimistic. "Every time there is a tremor, politicians promise reviews. Then it passes and nothing changes." She believes the solution lies not only in stricter enforcement but in a fundamental rethink of land use — mapping the city's actual geological risk and refusing permits in areas that simply cannot safely bear the weight of development. "We cannot keep building as if the ground beneath us is permanent," she said. "It has never been permanent."

The Knowledge That Was Already There

There is a tendency in disaster preparedness discussions to speak as though all the relevant knowledge is waiting to be created — new maps to be drawn, new codes to be written, new institutions to be built. But in Meghalaya, some of the most important knowledge is already here, embedded in practice.

Sacred groves — the 'Law Kyntang' of the Khasis — have survived for centuries through community protection. They represent not just biodiversity but functioning ecological buffers: forested slopes that hold soil, absorb rainfall, and reduce the landslide risk that a tremor would otherwise amplify. The Dorbar Shnong, the traditional village governance structures, have demonstrated an ability to mobilise communities for collective ends that formal municipal institutions often cannot match. The question is whether these institutions will be treated as partners in preparedness — or sidelined, as they too often are, in favour of top-down programmes that arrive after the disaster rather than before it.

"Shops that had been on the left now turned up on the right and vice-versa... The cow had vanished and so had the policeman. A motorcycle had disappeared into a hole in the ground, while a car had mounted the steps of the town hall. A Tonga pony galloped down the middle of the road." Earthquake, Ruskin Bond

Back in Mawlai, Mr. Lyngdoh has started doing something small but deliberate: talking to his students about earthquakes. Not just the science — the fault lines, the magnitudes, the Richter scale — but what to do. Where to go. What not to do. He does it because nobody did it for him. "When that tremor came, I ran to the doorway because I remembered something from television," he said. "But my students — they just freeze. They don't know. And not knowing is its own kind of danger."

The hills will shake again. That is not alarmism — it is geology. The harder question, the one that Meghalaya's planners, builders, and communities will have to answer together, is what will be standing when they do.

Nitish in new role

SHREWD politician Nitish Kumar ran Bihar as its chief minister for around two decades, but with periodic interruptions and change of political colours. A survivor against recurring odds, he provided political stability to Bihar for the most part, kept law and order under reasonable control in a state known for its chaotic styles, and facilitated limited progress on multiple fronts. He's hanging up his boots, not in retirement as one would have expected, but to don a different role. He would go to Rajya Sabha in April, obviously to step in as a senior cabinet minister in the Modi dispensation. With no retirement age for politicians, he would go on and on. Speculations are that his son would step in as deputy chief minister while a BJP leader would be the next chief minister.

The BJP is taking direct control of one more Hindi-belt state, where it never had a chief minister. Being the largest party in the Bihar Assembly, the post should have gone to the saffron party after the last polls in 2025, but Kumar fancied himself to be CM for a while more. Even as chief minister, the BJP called many shots from behind as a major partner of the state's alliance government. The party would directly lead the state from now. Notably, the BJP is steadily strengthening itself, rarely accepting defeat in the iterations of assembly polls in the North. The south is mostly out of the BJP's reach. It lost Karnataka, where it repeatedly held the reins. Both Tamil Nadu and Kerala are no-go areas for the party, while it is part of the Telugu Desam-led alliance government in Andhra Pradesh. Both Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are ruled by the Congress. BJP runs governments in most states in the North and three states in the North-East, as also in Odisha. Nothing goes to show its supremacy would erode in the near future.

Nitish Kumar, Bihar's longest-serving chief minister, first took on that role in 2000, albeit briefly, and has been the CM from 2005 to 2014 and from 2015 till now. He earned praise for restoring law and order in the state after the alleged goonda raj of Lalu Prasad. Tens of thousands of muscle-flexers were put behind the bars during the initial phase of the Nitish rule. He also ensured Sadak and Pani (roads and water) to even the remotest villages. Yet, with less backing from the Centre, and due to Nitish's lack of an eminent vision for the future, Bihar had limited economic progress. Bihar has the lowest per capita income among all states though there's palpable affluence in certain pockets. The precious mining sector did not help much in the overall growth of Bihar. Now, Bihar claims to have a double-engine sarkaar, with generous support from the Centre; more so with the prospect of the state having a BJP chief minister to guide its destiny. Nitish Kumar's positive side is also that his image is not tainted by corruption. He won praise in the past for not encouraging his family to come upfront—which could now be an old story. The BJP would ensure as much for Kumar.

Governor & Chief Minister's February Speeches: Masterclasses in Looking us in the Eye and Lying

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

There is a peculiar ritual that unfolds every February in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly — a performance so rehearsed, so architecturally polished in its language, that the uninitiated might mistake it for governance. This year was no different. On February 16, 2026, Governor C.H. Vijayashankar took his place and proclaimed that Meghalaya remains "united in upholding the Constitution and ensuring that progress reaches every citizen." Eight days later, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, who doubles as Finance Minister, stood at the same rostrum and declared with studied confidence that Meghalaya is "the second fastest-growing state in India after Tamil Nadu" — "the only state to sustain a real GSDP growth rate of nearly 10% for three consecutive years after the Covid-19 pandemic." The applause was, no doubt, enthusiastic.

Now, walk out of that assembly hall. Drive past Mawlai, Nongstoin, and Ampati. Ask the mother who has been boiling rice for the third consecutive night without vegetables. Ask the university graduate who is counting the months since his last job application went unanswered. Inquire about the 10% growth rate. You won't receive a rebuttal but silence — the kind that communicates entire dissertations.

Noam Chomsky, in his landmark work *Manufacturing Consent* (1988, co-authored with Edward S. Herman), identified the central mechanism by which power perpetuates itself: not through overt suppression, but through the careful manufacture of a narrative so dominant that alternatives become unthinkable. The state, argued Chomsky, does not need to silence dissent if it can make dissent appear irrational. What we witnessed in the Meghalaya Assembly this February was precisely this: a budget speech so laden with macro-statistics, capital expenditure projections, and Vision 2032 sloganeering that the lived experience of ordinary Meghalayans was effectively crowded out of the conversation.

Chief Minister Sangma projected total expenditure for 2026-27 at Rs 32,023 crore — described as "more than a three-fold increase in expenditure over the nine-year period, one of the highest growth rates in the country." Capital expenditure, he noted with audible pride, has

for the first time crossed Rs 10,000 crore. These are large numbers. They are meant to be large numbers. Large numbers perform a specific ideological function — they substitute for accountability. A government that throws ten thousand crores at a screen expects the citizenry to be too dazzled to ask where, precisely, those crores are going.

Meghalaya's own Budget Speech of 2025-26 — a document produced by the same administration — contained a quietly damning admission: a comparative analysis of the Multi-dimensional Poverty Index (MPI) between Assam and Meghalaya "shows how both states had similar poverty rates at the start of the period, and how Assam reduced its multi-dimensionally poor population by 13%, whereas Meghalaya reduced by only 4.8%." Let that number sit. While the Chief Minister celebrated growth rates that rival Tamil Nadu, a state with similar resources reduced poverty nearly three times more effectively.

Writing in *The Shillong Times* just days before this year's Budget Session, researcher Bhogtoram Mawroh published a devastating diagnosis titled "Growth Without Welfare? Rethinking Meghalaya's GDP Story." He described the grotesque circularity of infrastructure GDP: "A road is built by the PWD, and after a few weeks the PHED digs it up to lay pipes. The road is repaired, and the cycle continues. Even if the same road is dug up and remade repeatedly, GDP will at least remain the same, if not grow. In reality, however, there has been no actual improvement in people's lives." This is not an ideological complaint. It is elementary economics. GDP measures activity, not well-being. A state can grow economically while its people wither.

The employment figures confirm as much. According to the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) 2022-23, Meghalaya has the highest unemployment rate in the Northeast at 6.0%. Urban areas have a troubling rate of 12.3%, much higher than the national urban average of 5.4%. More than 74% of Meghalaya's population is under the age of 35. The government's response to their joblessness is apparently to announce more schemes, more portals, more "incubation hubs" — while the PRIME initiative, celebrated in the budget, has thus far placed 1,777 individuals in jobs out of 18,800 trained. That is a placement rate of approximately 9.5%. A private training institute would be shuttered for such a performance.

When citizens sense the gap between official rhetoric and lived reality, Indian democracy provides one constitutional remedy: the Right to Information Act, 2005. In Meghalaya, the state RTI portal at megtri.gov.in promises that "the application filed through this Web Portal would reach electronically to the Nodal Officer of the concerned Department, maybe who would transmit the RTI application electronically to the concerned State Public Information Officer (SPIO)." What this clinical description omits is what happens next — what the writer-citizen filing that application actually encounters.

Across India, PIOs have developed a sophisticated arsenal of non-disclosure. Citing exemptions under Section 8(1) of the RTI Act — covering national security, cabinet deliberations, personal privacy — PIOs routinely deny information that belongs in the public domain. In cases involving fund diversion and scheme implementation, the shield of sub-judice status, or "third-party information" is routinely deployed. In Meghalaya, where a VPP legislator has already filed a complaint before the Lokayukta against ten former officials for misappropriating Rs 156.14 crore under the Saubhagya electrification scheme — a finding documented by the Comptroller and Auditor General of India — one might reasonably ask: how many RTI applicants who inquired into the Saubhagya irregularities were told the matter was "under investigation" and therefore not disclosable? The CAG found it. Lokayukta received it. But the citizen asking through RTI is told: diversion of resources, deny information.

René Girard's theory of mimetic desire teaches us that communities often converge around a sacrificial object — a scapegoat — to discharge collective frustration and restore the illusion of social peace. In the political economy of Meghalaya, that scapegoat has always been "the previous government," "the Centre's delayed funds," "the difficult terrain," "the lack of industry culture." These are the explanatory frameworks that governments reach for whenever citizens press too close to the question of accountability. The terrain has not changed in nine years of National People's Party governance. The culture of industrial reluctance has not been seriously confronted. What has changed is the language used to describe inaction — it has become shinier, more data-heavy, more densely acronym-populated: PRIME, FOCUS, CM FARM+, SAS-CI, MEF. The scapegoat has simply been relabelled.

India's post-independence history is, in many ways, a long archive of this phenomenon. From the Planning Commission's Five-Year Plans that produced impressive documents but resulted in modest outcomes, for example the MGNREGA funds that vanished between the signboard and the field; the Indian state has a long history of substituting announcements for action. Meghalaya, as a small state entirely dependent on central transfers — with Rs 21,229 crore expected from Delhi in 2026-27 — is particularly vulnerable to this pathology. When nearly two-thirds of your budget is someone else's money, accountability becomes a question of whose name goes on the plaque.

The Governor told the House that "progress reaches every citizen." The Chief Minister told the House about a "three-fold increase in expenditure." But... as James Dikhar wrote in *The Shillong Times* in 2024 with unmistakable urgency: "The time for rhetoric has passed; now is the time for action." When the language of the Assembly is measured against the arithmetic of poverty reduction, against 12.3% urban unemployment, against a CAG-documented Rs 156 crore scam in electricity funds — the gap is not a rounding error. It is a verdict.

File your RTI. Expect the PIO to delay. File your first appeal. Write your letters. Remember that in a constitutional democracy, the burden of proof does not rest with the citizen who has doubts; no — it lies with the state that makes claims. The assembly hall can applaud as much as it wants. The silence outside is even louder.

The author is *Advocate, Trade Unionist Ethicist & the Humanist Architect*.

When Morning Becomes a Struggle: The Hidden Cost of Meghalaya's Missing Basics

By Divesh Ranjan

In Meghalaya, mornings often begin not with calm or opportunity but with waiting. Waiting for water.

In several localities, including areas such as Mawlai constituency, water in the public supply system often begins flowing around 7:15 am. Schools and offices start at 9. Many places start even earlier at 8. To reach on time, most people need to leave home at least an hour before. Instead, people line up at community taps, rushing to fill containers before the supply stops, leaving almost no time for bathing, cooking, or household chores.

And sometimes it does run dry. Supply breaks down for days at a stretch, sometimes beyond a week. When that happens, buying water from private vendors becomes the only option, quietly bleeding already stretched household budgets. For families living on the margins, this is not a small disruption. It is a recurring crisis that arrives without notice and leaves without apology. This is not about comfort. It is about basic dignity.

Children rush with half-filled buckets because there is not enough time to wait longer. Some miss classes because collecting water takes too long. Parents juggle impossible choices between bathing, cooking, and reaching work on time.

And even when water is secured, the daily battle continues with heavy traffic delaying arrival at schools, colleges, and offices, wasting precious time no one can afford to lose.

The Overcrowded Taxis Nobody Regulates and the Strain They Leave Behind

Beyond congestion, there is a quieter and more uncomfortable problem that most people have simply stopped questioning. In shared taxis across Meghalaya, commuters are routinely packed beyond any reasonable limit, two people folded into the front seat alongside the driver and four more squeezed into the back. This has become so normalised that few speak against it, but normalization is not the same as acceptability.

Students heading to class, workers making their way to offices, and elderly passengers travelling for essential needs all share the same daily ordeal of cramped and draining journeys that should never have become routine. It is physically exhausting and quietly demoralising. The journey to earn a living or pursue an education should not feel like an endurance test before the day has even properly begun.

Permitted seating capacity is already clearly defined, one passenger alongside the driver and three in the rear, even indicated on several vehicles. Yet these norms are routinely ignored. Most metro cities and state capitals across India enforce strict monitoring of these standards. Meghalaya, as a growing tourism destination, can and should do the same. What is needed now is simple. Political will to make passenger safety non-negotiable.

Beyond Water and Transport

This is not a problem confined to water and transport alone. According to recent Meghalaya Budget Session, 154 villages in the state are yet to receive electricity. In health centers, doctors are often absent and infrastructure is limited. A particularly troubling incident occurred in February 2026 when a sitting Member of Parliament passed away after being rushed to a Community Health Centre that reportedly had no doctor on duty. The incident did not just make headlines. It made the public ask whether their nearest health facility would be ready when they needed it most. Meanwhile, educated youth continue scanning newspapers for jobs that rarely appear. These are not isolated gaps. Together they

form the invisible ceiling that keeps Meghalaya's economic story from reaching its own people.

A Booming Economy That Many Cannot Feel
According to the Meghalaya State Budget 2026-27, the state recorded a Real GSDP growth rate of 9.66%, ranking second highest among all Indian states. Yet millions of households still struggle daily for reliable water and safe transportation. True growth must be felt on the ground, not only in government reports.

When students reach school late or stay absent because they were filling water or struggling with daily transportation, they gradually lose interest and that lost interest quietly turns into a dropout. Meghalaya already ranks among the highest in the country for school dropouts at both secondary and higher secondary levels, and is among the lowest performing states in school education nationally. What follows is even more alarming. Disconnected youth become vulnerable to drug dependency and behavioural deterioration, and according to the India HIV Estimation 2025 Technical Report, Meghalaya already records placing it among the eight most affected states in the country. These are not separate crises. These are consequences of the same root failure in basic utilities.

Despite the Chief Minister's Budget Speech 2026-27 reporting the creation of 3.6 lakh job opportunities through numerous schemes and initiatives over the last eight years, unemployment continues to grow. Schemes alone cannot substitute for a functioning foundation. Serving the approximately 18 lakh young people who make up more than 50 percent of the state's population demands a holistic approach covering basic utilities, reliable infrastructure, regulated mining, and conditions that attract serious industrial and IT investment. No single sector solution will be enough.

The Patience That Power Must Not Exploit

The people of Meghalaya are remarkably patient and quietly resilient. Even in difficult circumstances, many choose to find the positive, adapting to hardship rather than raising their voices against it. This silence reflects their dignity and inner strength. But it has also, perhaps unintentionally, worked in favour of those in power. A population that endures without demanding rarely compels urgent action from its leaders. And while that patience keeps the peace today, it is silently eroding the state's most valuable asset, its human capital, in a way no government scheme can easily recover.

Accountability Belongs to Everyone

The responsibility for fixing this does not rest with the government alone. Opposition parties must raise the basic problems that define ordinary lives. The media must carry the voice of common people to lawmakers and encourage citizens to assert their rights. If all these avenues fail, the judiciary must apply serious pressure on the executive, because a state more than half a century old simply cannot afford to keep sliding backward. Common people do not read GDP reports. They measure development in the language of their own lives. Did the tap run this morning? Did my child make it to school on time? Did the road hold after the monsoon?

Water, power, healthcare, and safe transportation are not luxuries. They are the building blocks of education, employment, and human dignity. The queue is still there. The question is how much longer people are expected to wait.

The author is an Independent Columnist and Policy Analyst.

Letters to the Editor

MPSC: Where Files Drag and Appointments Hang Fire

Editor,

There's an old saying often attributed to Benjamin Franklin: "Justice delayed is justice denied." In the realm of public recruitment, this could very well be rewritten as: "Results delayed are opportunities denied." The Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC), an institution entrusted with selecting the best talent for the state's public services, now finds itself facing an uncomfortable but unavoidable question: Why has the recruitment process slowed down so drastically?

Not very long ago, the Commission demonstrated that efficiency was possible. Under the previous leadership, the JDA (Junior Divisional Accountant) mains examination results were declared to approximately three and a half months. The process, while not perfect, at least respected the time and aspirations of the candidates.

Contrast this with the present situation. The JDA mains examination this year has crossed five months without results. Even more perplexing is the case of the Assistant Engineer examination, which was purely MCQ-based and involved

only a few thousand candidates, yet the result took more than 4 months to be declared. This raises a simple but critical question: What has changed? If a process that once took three months now takes five or more, one of two things must be true: either the system has become more complex, or the system has become less efficient.

As Albert Einstein famously remarked, "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." Recruitment examinations, particularly those involving objective papers and limited candidates, should not stretch indefinitely. For the candidates, these delays are not just administrative inconveniences. They are months of anxiety, lost preparation cycles, and uncertainty about their careers. Many aspirants plan their lives around these timelines — further studies, other examinations, or employment opportunities are all placed on hold while they wait for results that should reasonably have been declared much earlier. A Public Service Commission does not merely conduct examinations; it sets the tempo of governance recruitment in the state. When the tempo slows unnecessarily, it signals inefficiency to thousands of young aspirants.

The purpose of this letter is not to undermine the institution of the MPSC, which remains vital to the state's

administrative framework. Rather, it is to call for transparency and accountability. Therefore, the Chairman and Members of the Meghalaya Public Service Commission owe the public a clear explanation on:

(a) What factors have caused the needless delay in result declaration?

Have new evaluation procedures been introduced?

(b) Is there a shortage of examiners or administrative capacity within the Commission?

(c) Most importantly, what timeline reforms will be implemented to ensure future recruitments are not similarly delayed?

As Abraham Lincoln once said, "Public sentiment is everything." Institutions that serve the public must also answer to the public. The youth of Meghalaya deserve a recruitment system that is efficient, predictable, and transparent. If the Commission could deliver results faster in the past, there is little justification for the present slowdown.

The Chairman and Members of the MPSC should therefore address these concerns openly through a public statement or forum, reassuring candidates that their time, effort, and aspirations are not being lost in bureaucratic inertia. After all, in the words of Peter Drucker, "Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things." The

candidates of Meghalaya deserve both.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,
Via email

Call for Separate Reservation Category for the Jaintia Tribe

Editor

Through your esteemed daily, I wish to express deep concern regarding the continued grouping of the Jaintia community with the Khasi under a single reservation category in Meghalaya.

The Jaintias are a distinct people with their own language, customs, traditional institutions, and historical legacy rooted in the former Jaintia Kingdom. While we share certain affinities with the Khasi community, administrative clubbing under one category overlooks demographic realities and risks political and institutional marginalisation of the smaller Jaintia population. Recent statements made by the VPP President in the Assembly have further heightened concerns about possible subsuming of our distinct identity within a broader majoritarian narrative.

Reservation policies must ensure not only opportunity but also equitable representation and protection of unique

identities. In this context, I urge Jaintia leaders, civil society organisations, and intellectuals to seriously explore the available legal and constitutional frameworks to examine the feasibility of creating a separate reservation category for the Jaintia community. Provisions under the Constitution that safeguard tribal rights and ensure equality before law provide avenues for dialogue, review, and reform.

Such a move would not divide communities but would strengthen the plural and inclusive fabric of our state by acknowledging its internal diversity. Protecting identity through lawful and democratic means is essential for long-term harmony and balanced development.

I hope our leaders will take proactive and constructive steps in this direction.

Yours etc.,

Marbiang L Rymbai
Via email

The IoA Betrayal: Why Meghalaya's "ILP - Like" Laws are a Historical Insult

Editor,

In 1948 the 25 Khasi States (Himas) signed the Instrument Of Accession (IOA) with a clear under-

standing: Our identity, land and customs would be sacrosanct. Fast forward to 2026, and the sacred pact is being traded for a series of legislative "alternatives" that offer the shadow of protection without the substance.

The Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act MRSSA and the proposed Immigration and Foreigners Act 2025 are being marketed as "ILP Like" solutions. However to the indigenous population these are not solutions, they are insults. While the Inner Line Permit (ILP) under the 1873 regulation provides a legal "No Entry" sign for those without permits, the MRSSA is merely a digital guestbook. It registers visitors but lacks the constitutional "teeth" to stop the relentless influx.

Look at our infiltration checkpoints without the ILP, places like Umiling have become symbolic theatres. The Infiltration Branch is tasked with a "wise check," yet they are legally handcuffed. They can observe, but they cannot exclude. This administrative comedy is a direct betrayal of the IOA's spirit. The State Government must stop "exploring" weak alternatives and demand the real ILP. Anything less is a surrender of our birth right.

Yours etc.,

H.Umdor
Shillong-8

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

“Every day brings new choices.”
— Martha Beck

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.203 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 7, 2026

Land the Source of Conflict

THE contentious land issue in Garo Hills threatens to blow up big time. This is an issue that is affecting other parts of Meghalaya too. The growing need for land due to road and urban expansion, mining and a plethora of development projects also means that land acquisition is a continuous process. Land is a finite entity. Populations grow but land does not and in the latest case the Government has ostensibly given out land pattas to people in West Garo Hills even while the matter is sub-judice. The very fact that there is currently a growing landlessness among the tribal communities in Meghalaya, more particularly the Khasi Hills suggests that land distribution by those vested with the authority to do so namely the Syiems, Dorbar Raid, Dorbar Shnong the Nokmas etc., has not proceeded along equitable lines. While forest lands have been cleared for quarrying and mining without any thought for the future, not much thought has gone into giving out land for the landless indigenous community of Meghalaya and they are a growing number.

While people want development there is also the fear of ancestral lands being taken away without proper consultation or compensation. Indeed, during land acquisition the negotiations happen at the level of the traditional heads and not with individual land-owners who actually have very little say in the matter. So the question of fair compensation for land is also a subject of discord. Since there is no single system or compulsion for land registration there is also concern that without clear title deeds communities can become vulnerable to illegal transfers or encroachments. In places like Ri Bhoi for instance, land is often sold twice over. In light of these controversies there is now a genuine need for land registration. This will also bring to light the number of people owning land; how much land and the number of landless tribals in Meghalaya. A time has come for a public debate on the need for a land ceiling act. It cannot be that the rich and powerful take over swathes of land for commercial purposes, largely for quarrying and mining at the cost of the destruction and pollution of water sources.

Land is also not merely an economic asset. It is linked to identity, governance, traditional rights and development. The challenge is not merely about land ownership but about the intersection between customary practices and modern administrative systems. Much of the land in Meghalaya falls under customary or community ownership. But the word “community” is fraught. Who in the community actually controls the transactional part? The community is hardly consulted. It is the traditional heads who take decisions in the name of the community. This too needs to change into a transparent process where collective decision making is followed. It's ironic that the Sixth Schedule whose sole intent is to protect tribal land in Meghalaya does not seem to have much say in land deals between individuals other than registering such land. Translating these protections into clear land policies has been difficult. Traditional leaders, district councils and the state government often operate under overlapping jurisdictions, making land administration complicated. It's time to come up with legislation to streamline land ownership.

Why Garo village heads matter

By Erik de Maaker

A couple of weeks ago, I was in a jeep on a slow road with long time friends. Both are involved with the Council of Nokmas, a society aimed at uniting and supporting Garo village heads. We had a lot to talk about, since I have been a regular visitor to Garo Hills for more than two decades, and our memories recalled times long gone. Amidst all this nostalgia, my friends brought up some poignant questions. “Increasingly, our village heads (nokmas) find themselves in the midst of people competing for land, how are they supposed to handle that?” And, “If village relationships continue to become strained, what will their role be, in two or three decades from now?” These are difficult questions, to which there are no easy answers. Village heads are very important in Garo Hills, and it is not an exaggeration to say that in Garo Hills the land management as enabled by the 6th schedule of the Indian Constitution, revolves around them. The village head is not just a legal signatory for matters relating to the usage and ownership of land and the residence of its inhabitants, but also key to the cultural fabric which shapes Garo villages.

The questions of my friends made me think about the responsibilities of the village heads, as I had experienced them. My thoughts went back to a rainy afternoon, more than twenty years ago, when I was still a very recent arrival in the village which would later for two years become my home. At the time, I was a PhD student in Anthropology. It was the month of June, and the combination of heat and high humidity made me feel hot and sticky. I was at the time staying in a government office which had been temporarily vacated, somewhere away from the village in which I hoped to live. I felt isolated and vulnerable there. But to shift to the village, I needed permission from the village head, a middle aged man.

A meeting was called for, in which my request was discussed. The village head asked me, when he heard me out in my (at that time) rather broken Garo: “Will you depend on our rice? Or

will you acquire your own rice?” When I answered that I would not be a burden on him, or on anyone else in the village, he readily agreed. The meeting included many people, notably men, but also a few women. It was only much later that I came to understand that all these people present there, most of whom had stayed siled throughout the short quizzing to which I was subjected, were close relatives of the village head. They were not just onlookers, but their (silent) consent was essential for the decision being taken. The village head may have been the person who formally allowed me to reside in the village, it was his larger group of relatives, which empowered him in that decision.

Perhaps the village head had little choice in the matter, since an elderly woman who had offered herself as my adoptive mother had made clear that she wanted to provide a place to me at which I could make a small temporary house. She was being kind to me, in the resolute kind of friendliness which I would come to greatly appreciate in the months that followed. Yet, in those early days I did not understand why her gesture carried so much weight. The village head with whom I had the meeting had his name, and that of his wife, registered with the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council. This made this couple the legal signatories in all matters official as far as this District Council was concerned. Village heads are typically male, as public offices such as these are usually fulfilled by men. My to-be adoptive mother's name was not in any of the ledgers of the Council. Yet she did hold title to a lot of land, located within the boundaries of the village domain, and it was on this land that she suggested I would live. Again, this was not just about my to-be adoptive mother. She was a widow, and the mere figurehead of a large clan which encompassed her many daughters and their husbands, her sons and their wives, as well as many more maternal uncles,

From Sacred Stones to Sky Towers

Tourism & the Transformation of Meghalaya's Cultural Identity

By Evangeline Dkhar

Reflecting on the proposed Monolith Towers and what they mean for culture, tourism and development in Meghalaya.

For centuries, the hills of Meghalaya have spoken through silent stones. Across Khasi and Jaintia villages stand monoliths that honour ancestors, commemorate events and symbolise the collective identity of communities. Today, these cultural symbols are being reimagined in a strikingly modern form with the announcement of the proposed Monolith Towers in New Shillong. Recently unveiled by Meghalaya Chief Min-

ister Conrad K. Sangma, the ambitious project proposes the construction of two monumental towers rising to a height of 123 metres at Mawkhanu in New Shillong. If completed, the structures would become the second tallest in India after the Statue of Unity in Gujarat. The towers are envisioned as a state-of-the-art tourism attraction featuring elevators, restaurants and a circular glass skywalk at the summit, offering panoramic views of the surrounding hills. Evening laser shows are also planned to narrate the history, culture and traditions of Meghalaya.

tourism can have a powerful multiplier effect on the economy. A single landmark attraction can stimulate multiple sectors, including hospitality, transportation, handicrafts and local food businesses. For young people in the state, tourism development can open new pathways for employment and entrepreneurship that extend beyond traditional livelihoods. However, the success of such projects will depend on how closely they remain connected to the communities and traditions they seek to represent. Cultural heritage cannot be recreated solely through architecture or technology; it must remain rooted in the stories, practices and lived experiences of the people themselves.

If traditional monoliths were raised collectively by communities to honour ancestors and shared memory, an important question arises: what does it mean when a similar symbol is recreated today as a large-scale tourism landmark? Can such a monument fully capture the spirit of a tradition that once emerged from communal effort, or will its meaning evolve as it becomes part of the tourism economy?

The proposal reflects the government's effort to strengthen tourism as a key driver of economic development. Tourism has increasingly become one of Meghalaya's most promising sectors, creating employment opportunities and encouraging the growth of local enterprises such as homestays, handicrafts and cultural performances. However, beyond the excitement surrounding this ambitious project, the proposal also invites a deeper sociological reflection on culture, identity and the transformation of heritage in a rapidly modern-

They are not merely physical structures placed in the landscape; rather, they represent the continuity of lineage, memory and community solidarity. In many villages across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, monoliths continue to stand as powerful reminders of the past. Their presence reflects a society where history is preserved not through written monuments alone but through shared rituals, collective memory and cultural practices.

nising society.

Traditionally, the monoliths of the Khasi and Jaintia communities—known locally as Mawbryna—have carried profound cultural and social meaning. Erected collectively by clans or communities, these stones commemorate important events, honour ancestors and symbolise social prestige. They are not merely physical structures placed in the landscape; rather, they represent the continuity of lineage, memory and community solidarity. In many villages across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, monoliths continue to stand as powerful reminders of the past. Their presence reflects a society where history is preserved not through written monuments alone but through shared rituals, collective memory and cultural practices.

In this context, the proposed Monolith Towers represent a fascinating shift in how cultural symbols are interpreted and presented. A structure that once emerged from community tradition is now being recreated through modern architecture and tourism development. Sociologists often describe

As the state moves forward with ambitious tourism projects, the challenge will be ensuring that while these new structures rise high above the hills, the traditions and identities that inspire them remain firmly grounded in the lives of its people.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Sociology)

Letters to the Editor

Concern regarding academic pressure under NEHU Semester Schedule

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to bring attention to an issue that many students across colleges affiliated with North-Eastern Hill University are currently facing.

As a fourth semester undergraduate student, I find the present academic schedule extremely challenging and, at times, overwhelming. Under the framework of the National Education Policy 2020, students are required to study multiple major papers with extensive syllabi. In my case alone, there are four major papers, each containing a vast amount of material that requires sufficient time for proper understanding, discussion, and academic engagement.

However, the current academic calendar leaves very little room for meaningful learning. Classes typically begin only around mid February, yet the end-semester examinations are scheduled as early as May. This effectively leaves students and teachers with barely a few months to cover large portions of the syllabus.

As a result, lectures are often rushed in an attempt to complete the syllabus before examinations arrive. Instead of being able to engage with the subject matter in depth, students frequently find themselves memorising information simply to keep up with the pace of the semester. Learning, which should ideally be a process of curiosity and intellectual exploration, is reduced to a hurried exercise of completing chapters within a limited timeframe.

The pressure becomes even greater when we consider the many other responsibilities and activities that occur within the semester. College programmes, institutional events, academic seminars, internal assessments, holidays, and other commitments are all important aspects of campus life. While these activities enrich the student experience, they also consume valuable time within an already short academic term.

It is important to clarify that this concern is not directed at our teachers. They are doing their best within the constraints of a limited timeframe. In fact, they too face immense pressure to complete large portions of the syllabus in a short span of time while simultaneously preparing students for examinations. The problem, therefore, lies not with individual educators but with the broader structure of the academic calendar.

Education should not feel like a hurried checklist. University learning is meant to encourage understanding, discussion, critical thinking, and intellectual growth. When time becomes the primary constraint, the quality of education inevitably suffers.

In light of these concerns, I would like to humbly suggest a few reforms that may help improve the academic experience for both students and teachers. Firstly, the academic calendar could be structured in such a way that classes begin earlier and provide a longer teaching period before examinations. A more balanced distribution of teaching weeks would allow instructors to cover the syllabus without rushing and give students the opportunity to properly absorb the material.

Secondly, the university could consider reviewing the volume of the syllabus in relation to the available teaching time. If multiple major papers with extensive content are required under the present system, then the timeframe

for teaching must realistically reflect that demand.

Thirdly, there should be greater coordination between academic schedules and institutional activities so that essential academic time is not frequently disrupted. While college events and programmes are valuable for student development, they should ideally be planned in a manner that does not unintentionally reduce effective classroom time.

Finally, establishing a formal platform for student feedback on academic scheduling could allow the university administration to better understand the practical challenges students face during each semester.

These suggestions are offered with the hope of encouraging constructive dialogue rather than criticism. Many students share these concerns but often do not have the opportunity or platform to express them publicly. Addressing these issues would not only reduce unnecessary stress for both students and teachers but would also strengthen the quality of higher education in our state.

I sincerely hope that the concerned authorities will take these concerns into consideration and work towards creating a more balanced and effective academic system for the benefit of both students and educators.

Yours etc.,
Leman Phawa
Via Email

Historically, the term was used by world leaders to describe major geopolitical shifts. After the Cold War, then U.S. President George H. W. Bush spoke of a “new world order” grounded in multilateral cooperation and the strengthening of institutions like the United Nations. Today, however, the phrase has taken on darker undertones.

We are undeniably witnessing structural global change. The economic and strategic rise of China, the assertive posture of Russia, and the expanding influence of blocs such as BRICS indicate that power is no longer unipolar.

Simultaneously, technology companies and artificial intelligence platforms are reshaping economies, labour markets, information flows, and even political narratives.

This is where the real transformation lies.

While conspiracy theories claim the existence of a hidden centralized authority engineering global crises, there is no credible evidence of a singular secret government orchestrating world events. Yet public anxiety is not entirely irrational. Rising inequality, digital surveillance capabilities, data monopolies, and rapid AI deployment without comprehensive global regulation create a perception that decision-making is increasingly removed from democratic oversight.

If there is a “new world order,” it is not a secret council in a hidden chamber. It is a systemic shift driven by technology, economic realignment, and institutional fragility. The danger is not in imagined shadows, it is in our failure to demand transparency, accountability, and ethical governance in an era of unprecedented technological power.

Rather than surrender to fear-driven narratives, we must cultivate informed civic engagement. The world is indeed changing. The question is whether citizens will remain

passive spectators or active participants in shaping what comes next.

Yours etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

Beware of Fake Academic Awards

Editor,

The rise of the predatory award industry poses a serious threat to the integrity of higher education. These platforms offer so-called “academic awards” that appear prestigious but are, in reality, pay-to-receive recognitions with no genuine merit-based evaluation. Nominees can select titles such as “Best Academician,” “Outstanding Researcher,” or even “Nobel Research Award” from pre-set menus, pay a mandatory fee, and obtain certificates that are publicly displayed. Many of these platforms try to look credible by showing ISO certifications, company registrations, or other official-looking credentials. However, such registrations do not confer academic recognition from UGC, NAAC, DST, or any other recognised academic authority.

The risks go beyond individual recipients. When these certificates show the names of respected institutions, they make the platforms look more credible than they really are, which can hurt both faculty and institutional reputations. Listing these awards in CVs or official reports provides no formal academic value and can negatively affect evaluations under systems such as NAAC or the UGC Academic Performance Indicator (API). Testimonials and public announcements often exaggerate achievement, sometimes using prestigious names, giving the false impression of scholarly distinction.

It is therefore imperative

that the teaching community exercises vigilance and caution. Faculty and academic leaders must recognise that accepting or promoting commercially manufactured awards does not reflect scholarly excellence and can inadvertently harm both personal and institutional credibility. Faculty awareness programs should highlight the hallmarks of predatory awards such as: mandatory payments for receipt, absence of independent peer review, self-selected titles, and lack of recognition by legitimate academic authorities.

Institutions, too, have a critical role to play. They must implement systematic verification process to distinguish legitimate awards from predatory recognitions. This includes refusing to list unverified awards in faculty portfolios, self-study reports, or public communications, and educating students about the difference between genuine scholarly recognition and commercialised certificates. Public vigilance, coupled with institutional safeguards, will help protect the credibility of the academic system as a whole.

In conclusion, the predatory award industry is not just a minor issue; it directly threatens academic integrity. Teachers and institutions must act proactively by raising awareness, checking awards carefully. This will protect genuine scholarship, maintain high standards, and stop mediocrity from being mistaken for excellence. By doing so, faculty and institutions can make sure that academic recognition reflects real achievement, not paid ones.

Yours etc.,
Tynshain K Lyngdoh
Via email

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

Pollution, climate stress pose threat to heart health

In an unprecedented collaboration, the European Society of Cardiology, the American College of Cardiology, the American Heart Association and the World Heart Federation have issued a joint statement calling for immediate action against environmental stressors – pollution, noise, climate stress – to reduce cardiovascular mortality.

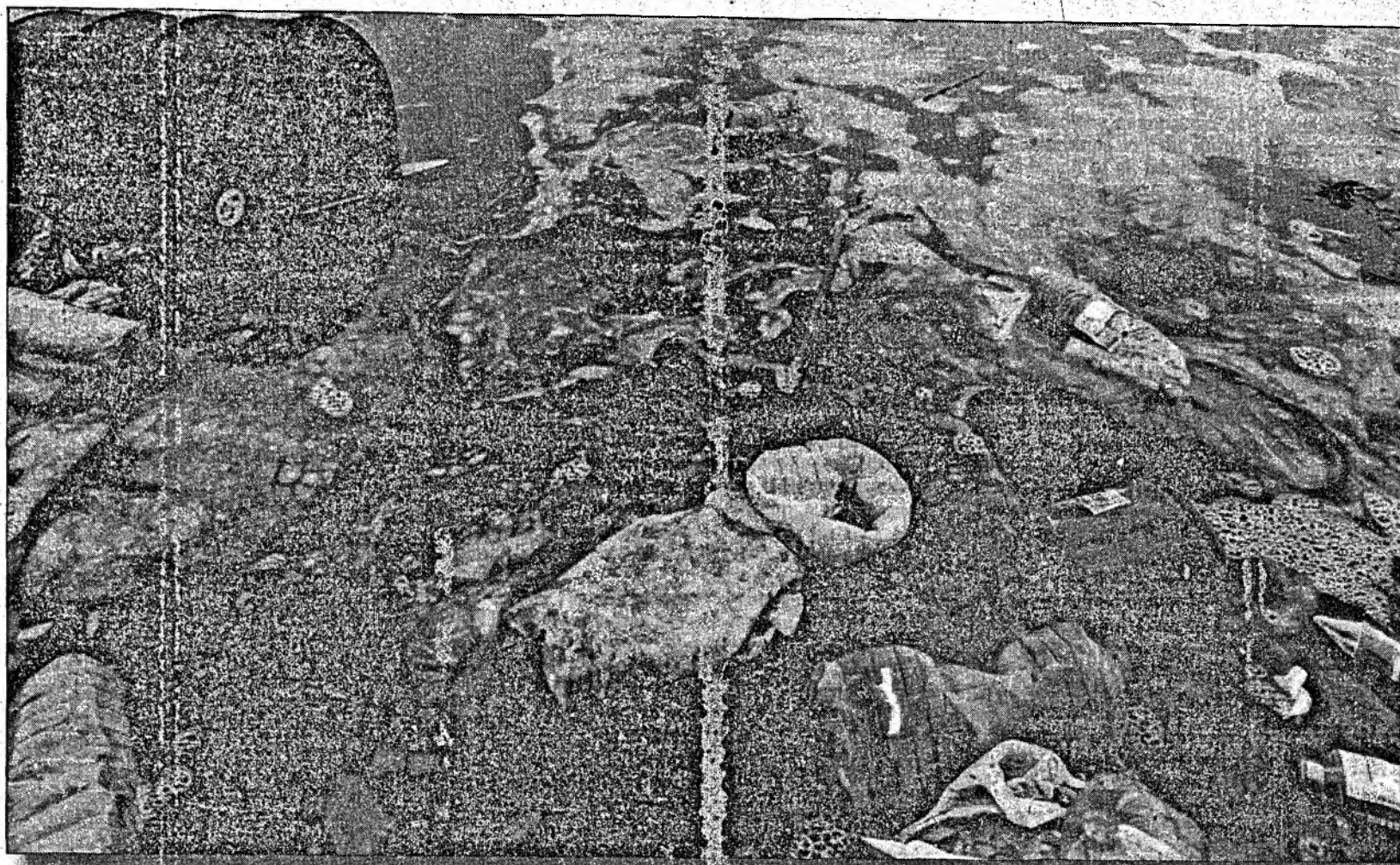
The article, which was published simultaneously in the European Heart Journal and other leading publications, warns that we must address climate change and pollution in order to combat the leading cause of death worldwide: cardiovascular disease (CVD). The text proposes local actions to achieve global impact. It also calls for the integration of pollution, noise, chemical compounds and climate stress into CVD prevention, putting it on the same level as cholesterol, hypertension and tobacco use.

Over 13 millions deaths per year

For decades, cardiologists have developed treatments and prevention measures that focus solely on the individual: controlling blood pressure, lowering cholesterol, quitting smoking, and so on. Environment is also a key determinant of CVD risk, but it has been persistently overlooked. Environmental risk factors are estimated to contribute to more than 13 million deaths annually, exceeding the burden of many well-established risk factors.

According to the World Health Organisation, 99% of the world's population breathes air that exceeds its recommended pollution levels. But air pollution is not the only risk factor – chronic exposure to noise, night-time light pollution, chemical pollutants, poor water and soil quality, and the increasingly frequent impacts of climate change such as heatwaves and fires all play a fundamental role in heart health.

The combined impacts of environmental factors accumulate over the years, affecting our overall cardiovascular health. The



joint article by the cardiology societies emphasises that these factors do not act in isolation – they interact through shared biological pathways such as inflammation and oxidative stress.

Global data show us that the impacts are far from marginal. The 2019 Global Burden of Disease analysis ranked hypertension as the leading risk factor for mortality, followed by tobacco use. Air pollution was one of the leading risk factors for mortality in 4th place, and exposure to non-optimal temperatures also ranked high in 11th place.

Reducing pollution, noise and urban heat is therefore not just a matter of ecology – it literally prevents heart disease. It is also a question of justice, as these risk

factors tend to disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, concentrating in neighbourhoods with more traffic, poorer housing infrastructure and less capacity for protection.

What we can do

Given the forecast that 70% of the world's population will live in cities by 2050, the joint article proposes designing heart-healthy cities with active transport and green spaces. It presents an action plan, based on four key points:

Policy advocacy: Align climate policies with cardiovascular health and seek funding for the most affected countries. Implement more ambitious urban standards. Ensure cities have fewer

combustion engines and more active transport and green spaces.

Education: Integrate environmental health into medical curricula at the same level as traditional risk factors such as cholesterol or smoking. Record this information during consultations using simple tools, such as asking about exposures (traffic, heat, smoke, noise). Teach realistic protective measures and use environmental alerts when making decisions about vulnerable patients.

Research: Create global observatories to monitor the relationship between pollution metrics (air quality, temperature, fires, noise) and disease in real time. By quantifying impacts, we can identify

inequalities and figure out which policies are most effective.

New guidelines: Develop harmonised recommendations for levels of particulate matter, extreme heat, noise, ozone and chemical exposures. These can be converted into operational indicators that enable early action, both for public health and in clinical settings.

Legislative setbacks

The article highlights a stark gap between scientific knowledge of environmental risks and its translation into clear, personalised and usable tools for the general population and health professionals.

At this point, the main obstacle

is not scientific uncertainty, but the direct conflict between protecting our health and sustaining certain models of mobility, production and consumption. In some cases this is not just a matter of inaction, but of active regression.

On February 12, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) revoked the 2009 endangerment finding, which classed greenhouse gases as a threat to public health and underpinned emissions regulation under the Clean Air Act. This has a clear consequence: the legal basis for emissions standards, starting with those for vehicles, has been weakened, and the door opened to broader deregulation.

Reversing these standards means emissions will increase over the coming decades, with impacts on our climate, air quality, and cardiovascular health.

Scientific organisations (such as the Spanish Society of Epidemiology, which the authors of this article are members of) cannot limit themselves to generating technical consensus.

To prevent CVD in the 21st century, we need to broaden the focus from the individual patient to the system and environment in which they live. Reducing pollution is not just an environmental measure, it is a high-priority preventative intervention, with rapid, measurable and equitable benefits.

The field of cardiovascular epidemiology has amply demonstrated its ability to quantify risks, attributable deaths, and years of life lost. The challenge now is to turn that knowledge into a clear, compelling and politically relevant narrative.

The question is no longer whether pollution causes cardiovascular disease, but how much additional harm we are willing to accept knowing that it is, to a large extent, preventable. (*The Conversation*)

[This article was written in consultation with the Spanish Epidemiological Society]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 8, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon trine Rahu on your solar return chart and it will give wonderful results. Time will be gently passed. You will enjoy a sudden change in fortunes. Your popularity graph will go up. You will be promoted in your job. Whatever new work you start, people will support you. You will also increase your knowledge and skills. Your creativity level will be high. You will have more responsibilities towards your work and family. But you will manage that. You will have high self-confidence and courage. Your love life is good. You could get married to a person of your liking. Financial position is good. You will get result of your hard work and efforts. With your qualities and abilities, you will increase your profit. You will meet ex-colleagues, neighbours and relatives. You will plan about the future. The ambition of the business will be fulfilled.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) The week will bring excellent results. Your legal and financial problems will get resolved. It is an important time to develop new contacts, dialogues and correspondence. You will reach extraordinary heights of your being. Your efforts will bring in good money. You will have the natural tendency to attract people to yourself. You will also get your work done. You will be able to achieve objectives at work. You will also spend time with friends and share your feelings with them. You will be successful in settling your children's career. Those who do higher studies will get good opportunities. There will be expenditure on auspicious work. You will enjoy this phase of life.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Your difficulties will get resolved. You will gain new experiences in business and increase your profits. There are chances of promotion in your job. You will also accept difficult challenges at work. You will also be proud of completing your work nicely. Your romantic life is going to be good. You will share excellent bonding with your mate. Do not give loans to anybody otherwise you will have a tough time in recovering them. You should not expect a lot from your relatives. They will just disappoint you. Your health is going to be perfect. You will have no worries at all.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) The time will be in your favor. There will be improvement in relationships with in-laws. You can arrange a party or gathering at home and some special people will be there. It will cheer you up. You will also be able to get your work done. Your work will be slow, but there are chances of the work being nicely completed. You will also pay attention to your family and domestic responsibilities. You will also avail ourselves of some government facilities. You will also work for your progress. There will be peace and happiness in family relations. You will spend quality time with your spouse/partner. It may seem to you that life is presenting itself in a totally different manner and you are enjoying this phase.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will be happy at the completion of your work. If you are making plans of going out somewhere the time is suitable. The problem of property disputes will be settled with the mediation of someone. You will get your work done by talking softly. The time will be auspicious and fortunate. Money will keep coming. You will excel in your business. You will also make profits in ample quantity. Your worries regarding children will come to an end. It will be a knowledge enhancing day. Some guests will arrive during latter part of the week. You will be in delighted mood and have peace of mind. You will be successful in solving different problems with your intelligence and wisdom.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will make excellent progress in your career. You will also finish all pending works. You will be getting excellent results. You will also focus on financial related work. You will be full of energy and enthusiasm. You will also take the pleasure of eating good food. You will have peaceful days and will enjoy yourself a lot. You will harbor feelings of humanity and kindness. You will also have good time with your children. Some new work might begin. The unemployed will get job opportunities. Instead of adopting a stubborn attitude, behave softly and get better results. It is time to enjoy good things and take advantage of an intelligent person. You will enhance your skill.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) You will earn lot of respect for your efforts. There is possibility of some gain in business/profession. You will be miles ahead of people in terms of achievements and thoughts. New doors of opportunities will open for you. You will also have wonderful time with your family. The time will be joyful for you. You will get success in whatever you

do. Money that was blocked will come to you. Your life partner will walk shoulder to shoulder with you. Your fame will increase manifold. You will learn better manners of behavior. Your daily life will proceed smoothly. If you make decision at the right time, you will get lot of name and fame. Your intelligence will be acknowledged by one and all.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It is going to be a wonderful week. You will complete all your work with efficiency and sincerity. And will be able to buy things without spending too much. The advice of the elderly in the family will be useful. Unnecessary problems will come to an end. Your efforts will bring good results. Your self-confidence will increase. All your work will be completed on time. There are chances of small journeys. There will be improvements in your business. You will be happy and will also get a chance to meet your near and dear ones. You can go on a trip with family. There will be unity in the family. Luck will favor you a lot. You will also show lot of determination and courage.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It is going to be a turning point in your life. You will get a new post in your job. Jupiter's orbit in your horoscope will keep your health in the best condition. Your persistence will pay off. A chance meeting with a powerful person will open the doors of fate for you. If you do not try to understand the opinion of your life partner, there are chances of serious differences. You will get victory in legal matters. You will also be kept occupied by different matters. You will also adopt a helpful attitude in your office and with your colleagues. The time is perfect to take advantage of it. You will indulge in all your interest. You will enjoy gardening, walking and talking with family members.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will do the best of work now. It is going to be a favorable time for property matters. You will work with dedication and get the desired success. You will also be satisfied to know that all your work is going according to your wish. Your bank balance will also be added on. You will have to do tours due to your job/business purpose. Some problems will be resolved with the help of a friend. Officials will be happy with your work. This will increase your influence and prestige. You will collect some good memories. Your financial position will be strong and stable. You will get better opportunities in job/business. You will make progress in life. All your dreams will be fulfilled.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The week will be well spent. You will introspect and analyze yourself. You will also bring about a change in your communication and behavior. You will also get attached to some special person in a warm and fulfilling relationship. New job/business can come. Your eligibility will be revealed to everyone. You will also plan a business trip. Your financial position will be satisfactory. You will also gain in your partnership. You will establish yourself in your office or workplace. Your efforts will bring in good money. You can receive a valuable gift from someone. You will remain disciplined and teach your children same.

Aquarius : (January 19 - February 18) It is going to be a good week in all respects. You will spend it happily. You will also keep your anger under control. Differences between brothers and sisters will get resolved. You might miss a train/plane. Your image in the other person's mind will improve. You will have financial gains. Spring will return to the life of married people. You will do a tour of nearby places. You will also fulfill your responsibility well. You will also decorate your house. You will have the desire to move ahead in life. You will be able to win over the circumstances with your hard work and determination. Your efforts will pay off well.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) These are favorable days for you. Physical health will be good. You will try and keep your family away from all problems. You will also adopt a positive attitude towards life. You will also be able to complete your work by running here and there. Business deals will be successful. Changes in plans will be helpful. Students will be on the lookout for various alternatives in career. You should desist from interfering in other people's matters. You will do some good work in the memory of a closed one. You will have a positive aura. The obstacles in your career will get removed. Luck is by your side. The arrival of guests will make you happy.

Epstein files reveal power and peril of online sleuths doing govt's work

A large release of important documents once meant teams of journalists staying back, working through piles of records late into the night.

Today, it triggers something closer to a public audit. The January 30 publication of more than three million documents related to convicted child sex offender Jeffrey Epstein has mobilised thousands of online users into doing their own digging.

They range from massively popular political livestreamers such as Hasan Piker and Dean Withers, to crowdsourced intelligence communities on Reddit.

These netizens are combing through documents, comparing excerpts and trying to piece together what the archive does (and does not) reveal.

Part of the scrutiny comes from the legal framework behind the release. The Epstein Files Transparency Act largely focuses on protecting victims' identities.

However, the US Department of Justice says it also excluded duplicate records, privileged material and other categories during its review.

Whether those additional filters align with the law's intended limits has itself become part of the story. So people are examining not only the documents that were published, but the gaps around them.

By pooling their time and expertise, online communities can reveal patterns and contradictions that may otherwise go unreported. The same mechanism, however, can flip into something darker.

Massive, legally mandated document releases—such as the millions of pages declassified under the 1992 John F Kennedy Assassination Records Collection Act—are routinely heavily redacted to protect intelligence sources or privacy.

But rather than settling public doubts, visible gaps often act as a catalyst for further suspicion and distrust. This creates the feeling that the public must audit for itself.

When thousands of people scan the same archive, patterns emerge quickly. Duplicate records surface. Chronologies begin to form. And inconsistencies are noticed that might otherwise remain buried.

A prime example was when open-source intelligence communities

successfully cross-referenced early releases of the Epstein flight logs with public charity and event schedules. In doing so, they reliably mapped out passenger associations and timelines days before official media could verify them.

But this capacity has limits. The crowd is often better at saying "look here" than "this proves that". And when victims' privacy and other people's reputations are at risk, incorrect inferences can cause lasting harm.

Moreover, our desire for closure in conditions of uncertainty makes us more susceptible to "apophenia" — the tendency to perceive connections between unrelated data points.

The Epstein file dump stands in stark contrast to the document releases of the early WikiLeaks era, beginning in 2006.

At that time, interpretation was slower and more journalist-mediated. For massive drops such as the 2010 Cablegate release, WikiLeaks initially partnered with media outlets such as The Guardian, The New York Times and Der Spiegel to process the data. (Although they did later publish the full unredacted archive, putting thousands of named individuals at risk).

Journalists reviewed hundreds of thousands of diplomatic cables, redacting sensitive names to protect sources, and providing extensive editorial framing before the public saw the findings.

The infrastructure of the internet operates differently today. Social media algorithms reward outrage, and information travels as screenshots, fragments and threads. Context is easily lost as content moves further away from its source.

Artificial intelligence tools further complicate things by introducing synthetic "evidence" into the public record. A number of AI-generated images, video and audio clips have been debunked since the Epstein files release. One of the most prominent is a viral AI image that claims to show Epstein alive in Israel.

Large archives often contain partial names, common names or ambiguous references. When those fragments circulate online, innocent people can become attached to viral claims through little more than coincidence.

For instance, ordinary IT professionals and random citizens whose photos appeared in old FBI photo lineups included in the archive have been falsely accused by online mobs, and politicians who assumed anyone listed in the vicinity of the dump was a co-conspirator.

Narrative lock-in is another risk. Once a particular explanation gains momentum, later corrections or clarifications often struggle to travel as far as the original claim.

In one example, a spreadsheet summarising public calls to an FBI tip line went viral, with the false claim that it was Epstein's official "client list". Even after journalists clarified the document's true nature, the initial framing had locked in across social media.

A related phenomenon is information laundering. A claim may begin as speculation in a forum or social media post, but then reappear as something "people are saying" and, over time, can be framed as having been verified.

One example involves "redaction matching", wherein online sleuths are baselessly asserting that the length of black censor bars on the files perfectly match the character counts of specific politicians' names.

The Epstein case has also highlighted a different risk: technical mistakes within the release itself. A number of key failures in how the DOJ redacted data has led to victims' names and details being found out.

None of this means people should stop asking questions. Public scrutiny is the bedrock of accountability. But scrutiny works best when it follows clear standards. Viral interpretations of files should be treated as starting points for inquiry — not conclusions.

The deeper lesson from the Epstein files is about institutional trust. When institutions fail to resolve serious allegations, judgement does not disappear; it moves outward into the public sphere.

And a public that feels compelled to investigate its own institutions is not merely asking questions about a set of documents. It is signalling that confidence in the official process has eroded. (*The Conversation*)

[By Oliver Alfred Guidetti, University of Wollongong]

Australia's AI safety plan isn't much more than single dot point

Last week, one of Australia's leading artificial intelligence (AI) researchers, Toby Walsh, warned Australia's lack of guardrails for AI is putting young people at risk of being "sacrificed for the profits of big tech".

Walsh's remarks came after the government scrapped its own proposal to establish an advisory body of AI experts.

Instead, the government offered its National AI Plan, which, among others, stresses investment in data centres, telecommunications infrastructure, and workforce training.

The plan also envisages an "AI Safety Institute" (currently recruiting staff), and also some internal AI transparency measures for the public sector. Transparency results so far have not been great. What does it all add up to for AI regulation in Australia?

What are other countries doing?

The European Union has attracted attention for its AI Act, which already prohibits such things as using AI systems to exploit vulnerable groups or individuals. However, Europe is struggling to implement rules on high-risk AI uses that are not prohibited.

Several governments in Australia's region are also passing AI laws, mainly to give themselves the powers to respond when they deem it necessary. South Korea, Japan and Taiwan—none of them minor AI players—have all have newly minted laws, which are meeting the expected pushback from industry.

Not everyone has comprehensive rules

There are countries without any kind of comprehensive AI regulation, including the United States and the United Kingdom.

In the US, president Donald Trump has even prohibited most state-based regulation in relation to private AI uses. Despite the anti-safeguards language, the government has quietly

retained strong safeguards for federal use of AI.

The UK has followed an even more erratic path, to end up in a similar place to Australia. Incapable of deciding what to do, it has tried to provide technical (non-legal) safeguards. This has been done through the creation of the first AI Safety (now Security) Agency, hailed by some, derided by others.

The dilemma of control

The differences in approach between countries are not surprising. Governments face the dilemma of control described by English technology scholar David Collingridge almost 50 years ago: when (regulatory) change is easy, the need for it cannot be foreseen; when the need for change is apparent, change has become expensive, difficult and time consuming.

What's more, Australia has limited regulatory clout regarding AI. It is not a significant global AI player in the way it is, for example, in mining, so its influence is limited. Facing these uncertainties, what should Australia be doing?

Australia's plan for AI safety

One certainty is that erratic behaviour is not a great option. We have good evidence that regulatory predictability matters for innovation.

In a recent speech, Australia's Assistant Minister for Science, Technology and the Digital Economy, Andrew Charlton acknowledged this: one of the important insurance policies we have is regulatory certainty, underpinned by clear principles with broad buy-in.

So, what is the government's plan?

The official plan to keep Australians safe is a section (action 7) in the National AI Plan. It argues existing Australian frameworks "can apply to AI and other emerging technologies". In other words, AI systems and tools can be covered by the rules we already have, such as consumer protections against all misleading and deceptive

practices.

The government suggested this option back in 2024. (We have previously argued this view, favoured by the Productivity Commission, is not well supported and was not our preferred option.)

Problems with the plan

However, the challenges for applying existing laws, which the government identified years ago, have not gone away. As we identified in 2023, the existing regulatory frameworks have limitations when it comes to AI. AI systems are complex, they can act semi-autonomously, and it can be difficult to understand why they do what they do. This makes it very hard to effectively attribute liability or responsibility for AI risks or harms using existing laws and processes. Regrettably, those limitations have not been addressed systematically—if at all.

Fragmented rules and limited resources

As things stand, the regulatory landscape is highly fragmented and uncertain. For instance, there are at least 21 mandatory (or quasi-mandatory) state and federal policies about the use of AI in government. Courts have so far had little opportunity to clear things up, with almost no test cases in crucial areas of existing law, including negligence, administrative law, discrimination law, and consumer law.

The new plan is accompanied by a clear commitment to monitor the development and deployment of AI "and respond to challenges as they arise, and as our understanding of the strengths and limitations of AI evolves".

The issue is: how will that monitoring happen? Will the government really "empower every existing agency across government to take responsibility for AI"? Dealing with issues such as privacy, consumer protection, anti-discrimination will take money and commitment and a degree of coordination between agencies we have not witnessed to date. (*The Conversation*)

Resilient Uvena Fernandes's tale of leadership, inspiration

As India celebrates International Women's Day, the remarkable journey of Uvena Fernandes stands as a powerful testament to resilience, determination and the boundless potential of women.

From a young girl growing up in the coastal village of Palolem in Goa to becoming an international footballer, a historic-World Cup official, a decorated officer in the Indian Air Force and a devoted mother, Fernandes' life story reflects courage, perseverance and an unwavering pursuit of excellence.

Her achievements send a strong message to young girls across India—that dreams and responsibilities can coexist, and that true leadership lies not only in reaching the top but also in inspiring others along the way.

Born on May 8, 1981, in Palolem village in Canacona, Fernandes faced adversity early in life. She lost her father at the age of two, and with her mother working abroad to support the family, she was raised by her maternal aunt. Her sporting talent became evident during her school years at Pope John XXIII High School, where she emerged as one of the fastest sprinters in the state. While athletics brought her early recognition, football soon became her true calling.

Fernandes went on to represent Goa at the state level and India internationally as a footballer. During her school, she also excelled in several other sports, including basketball, handball, volleyball, tennis and athletics.

Her football career saw her represent the iconic Mohun Bagan club and play for India in major tournaments, including the AFC Women's Asian Cup. In 2003, she began a new chapter in the sport as a referee—a role demanding authority, discipline and composure. Her dedication led to a historic milestone in



2016 when she became the first Indian, man or woman, to officiate the final of a FIFA World Cup tournament. She also became the first Indian woman to officiate at the FIFA U-17 Women's World Cup and the FIFA U-20 Women's World Cup, achievements that brought global recognition to Indian football.

After illustrious 11-year tenure as a FIFA Assistant Referee, Fernandes retired from international refereeing in July 2024. She now serves as a mentor, referee instructor and assessor, guiding the next generation of football officials in India.

Parallel to her sporting achievements, Fernandes built an equally distinguished professional career in the armed forces. She was commissioned into the Indian Air Force on December 15, 2006, as an Administrative and Air Traffic Control Officer.

During her training at the Air Force Academy, she made history by becoming the first woman cadet to be appointed Academy Cadet Captain, the highest cadet appointment, and also won the award for best performance in Outdoor Training for two consecutive terms.

As an Air Traffic Control Officer, she has served at several key stations including Allahabad, Bagdogra, Chabua and Ambala, and is currently posted at Air Force Station Yelahanka.

Fernandes has also played

a significant role in sports administration within the armed forces. As the Air Force Sports Nodal Officer at Hindan, she led teams in athletics, golf and shooting. Later, as an instructor at the Airmen Training School in Belagavi, she trained the first batches of Agniveerayau personnel, including women.

Academically accomplished, she holds degrees in B.Com, LL.B, B.P.Ed and a Master's in Human Resource Management, and is currently pursuing a PhD. She has also completed the NIS Football Coaching Certificate Course and a Diploma in Sports Nutrition. Since 2007, she has also been part of the organising team of the prestigious Subroto Cup football tournament and has contributed to the organisation of the World Military Games.

Her contributions have been widely recognised. She received the Chief of Air Staff Commendation in 2021 and was felicitated by the Raksha Mantri and the Chief of the Air Staff in 2023. She was also honoured by the Delhi Commission for Women for inspiring and empowering women.

Among her other honours are special recognition from the All India Football Federation in 2017, appreciation from the Asian Football Confederation in 2016 and the prestigious Bakshi Bahadur Jivabadda Kerkar State Award from the Government of Goa in 2018. (*IAF*)

Meghalaya Nuggets

City college signs MoU for global placements

SHILLONG, March 7: St. Anthony's College, Shillong, on Friday signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Emporium Training & Consultancy Pvt. Ltd. (ETCPL) to provide skill development and global placement opportunities for graduates and unemployed youths in Meghalaya. ETCPL is a leading training institute specialising in aviation, hospitality and cruise line careers. It is accredited under the Ministry of Skill Development and Entrepreneurship and is associated with the National Skill Development Corporation and the Skill India initiative. Under the agreement, the ETCPL will serve as the official placement partner for the college. The institute will provide professional skills training and recruitment opportunities in more than 20 countries, focusing on sectors such as luxury hospitality, international cruise lines and aviation. As part of the collaboration, ETCPL will organise campus interviews with leading airlines, international airports and global hotel chains in association with the college. Aspirants interested in careers as cabin crew, ground staff or hospitality professionals can contact the ETCPL office at the Don Bosco Youth Centre for further details.

Don Bosco College hosts youth debate and mock parliament

SHILLONG, March 7: Don Bosco College Bynidihati on Friday hosted the District-level Yuva Connect Debate Competition and the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament, drawing participants from across the district to deliberate on national issues. During the inaugural session, filmmaker Simi Khongtiang was felicitated as a 'Youth Icon.' Khongtiang, recently named Best Director at the North-east Prag Cine Awards 2024 for her film Ka Chithi, delivered a keynote on the themes of "Vande Mataram" and "Viksit Bharat @2047." She urged students to integrate their cultural heritage with modern aspirations during an interactive session. In the Yuva Connect Debate, Sunanda Das was declared the winner, with Wandaphi Pala securing the runner-up position. The afternoon session featured the Viksit Bharat Youth Parliament, a simulation of legislative procedures. Shri Krisan Langtang, MDC of 26-Sumer Constituency, attended as the Chief Guest. Addressing the gathering, Langtang emphasized the importance of public speaking and encouraged students to overcome stage fright to contribute effectively to public discourse. Ten performers were selected to advance to the state-level competition. Duniwanyoo Lamare secured first place, followed by Juliana Lyngdoh in second and Avirginia Dkhar in third.

Governor unveils four books authored by NEHU professors

SHILLONG, March 7: Governor CH Vijayashankar on Saturday released four books authored by Prof Bikika Laloo Tariang and Prof Andriana Pyngrope of North Eastern Hill University (NEHU) at Lok Bhavan. The event was attended by the Principal Secretary to the Governor, H.C. Chaudhary. The titles include *Dad and the Salesman* by Bikika Laloo Tariang; *Indigenous Games Played in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills of Meghalaya* co-authored by Andriana Pyngrope, Bikika Laloo Tariang, and Rumika Talang; *Mandatory Poison and Other Shilling Things* by Bikika Laloo Tariang; and *Shilling: Glimpses of a City Through the Lens of an Amateur Photographer* by Bikika Laloo Tariang. The Governor congratulated the authors for documenting the culture, traditions, and daily life of the state. He noted that such works are essential for preserving Meghalaya's heritage and identity for future generations. He added that recording indigenous practices and local experiences helps strengthen cultural awareness and keeps the youth connected to their roots. Prof Tariang expressed gratitude to the Governor for supporting scholarly and creative pursuits in the state.

EJH hosts science exhibition

KHLEHRIAT, March 7: The Office of the District School Education Officer (DSEO), East Jaintia Hills, organised a district-level Science, Mathematics, and Environment Exhibition at Jaintia Eastern College on Thursday. Held under the theme "STEM for Viksit and Atmanirbhar Bharat," the exhibition aimed to encourage critical thinking, creativity, and the practical application of innovative ideas among secondary school students. Addressing the gathering, DSEO R Diengdoh described the event as a reflection of the students' curiosity and passion for learning. He emphasised the role of educators in nurturing young minds and providing opportunities for innovation, noting that education is fundamental to shaping the nation's future. Students from various schools across the district presented models on diverse topics, including bricks made from melted plastic and sand, integrated solar-wind energy systems, automated traffic management for trucks, laser security systems, and rainwater harvesting. Suhana Paul of Ambrose Memorial Secondary School, Khliehriat, was declared the winner of the exhibition. Peter Arsalann Pyngrope of Khliehriat Higher Secondary School and Benaiah Gaddiel Sutnga of Little Star Secondary School, Ladrymbai, secured the second and third prizes, respectively. The programme was attended by e-District Manager Roibok Pohmen, Assistant Professor Nishwa Rymbai, and other district officials who distributed certificates, mementos, and cash awards to the participants and winners.

EJH launches HPV vax drive

KHLEHRIAT, March 7: The Office of the District Medical and Health Officer (DMHO), East Jaintia Hills, launched the Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination campaign and organised a community health camp at Pamra-Paitlu PHC on Saturday. Held under the theme "Every Mother Matters, Every Child Counts," the programme was attended by Additional Deputy Commissioner A Nongbri, District Immunisation Officer Dr NP Suchiang, and other health officials. In his address, Nongbri urged the public to utilise government healthcare services and advocated for the HPV vaccine as a preventive measure against cervical cancer. He also advised residents to remain vigilant regarding food safety and contamination. Suchiang stated that the outreach programme aims to bring essential healthcare directly to rural areas to help reduce maternal and infant mortality rates. She explained that the HPV vaccine is primarily administered to girls aged 14 to protect them from cervical cancer, adding that the vaccination drive will continue for the next three months. The health camp provided a range of services, including HIV/STI testing, NCD screening, Ayushman Bharat registration, and RBSK screenings. Awareness sessions on food adulteration were also conducted for the local residents, ASHAs, and Anganwadi workers in attendance.

Ahmedabad drowns in T20 WC frenzy...

(Contd from P-1) Association, forecasted 80% occupancy across 10,000 rooms.

"Fans from abroad and every corner are flooding in," he said.

With hotel prices climbing sharply, many visitors are opting for alternative arrangements instead of staying overnight in the city.

Somani said some people choose to stay in Gandhinagar, located about 25 km from Ahmedabad. A significant number of fans are also travelling to the city only for the match and returning the same day, he said.

"What many people do, especially people from Bombay, is they leave in the morning by road. They arrive here by four or five o'clock and go straight to the match. They bring a driver and leave at night," Somani said.

Visitors from other parts of Gujarat are following a similar pattern. "They do the same thing; they come in their car and leave in their car. Let's say, from Rajkot or Porbandar," Somani said.

Apart from domestic travellers, foreign visitors are also arriving in the city for the match, he added.

Amid the frenzy, airfares have seen a massive spike. The Mumbai-Ahmedabad airfares, which usually hover around Rs 3,000, have surged to Rs 15,000-Rs 17,000. Flights from New Delhi to Ahmedabad are currently priced at around Rs 14,000, while Bengaluru-Ahmedabad fares have also spiked to nearly Rs 13,000.

To manage the rush, Western Railways announced special trains from Mumbai to Ahmedabad. The Divisional Railway Manager (DRM) at Mumbai Central confirmed the arrangements.

"To clear the extra rush of passengers during the T20 Men's World Cup Final, AC Superfast Special Trains on Demand (TOD) on Special Fare will run between Bandra Terminus-Ahmedabad," the DRM wrote.

The railways has announced that Train No. 09029, an AC Superfast Special, will run one trip on March 8 (Sunday). The train will depart from Bandra Terminus at 00:05 hrs and arrive in Ahmedabad at 08:40 hrs, halting at Surat and Vadodara along the way, the DRM said.

Meanwhile, the Northern Railway has also announced a special train service (number 04062) to help fans travelling from the national capital.

The additional services are expected to provide relief to thousands of fans planning last-minute travel to Ahmedabad for the much-anticipated cricket final, said officials. (*PTI*)

City event celebrates women...

(Contd from P-3) An interactive installation titled "Letter to My Younger Self" invited attendees to reflect on their personal and professional growth.

The central segment of the programme included moderated discussions with Daphimanroi Warjri, Janessaline Pynrope, Mayfereen Rynthiang, Pinky Maring, and Rifness Warjri. The speakers discussed resilience, leadership, and the evolving role of women within their respective fields and communities.

The event concluded with an evening session featuring live music by Rosaria L Kharmih, accompanied by storytelling and poetry. The gathering served as a platform for networking and celebrating the diverse contributions of women across the region.

Three-day women's fitness prog

A three-day fitness programme aimed at promoting health and empowering women through grassroots sports began here on Friday as part of International Women's Day celebrations.

The opening session was attended by the Sports Officer of the Directorate of Sports and Youth Affairs and officials from the Meghalaya Yogasana Sports Association. The initiative focuses on encouraging women's participation in physical activities and raising awareness regarding health and well-being.

Officials described the first day as productive, highlighting the programme's role in addressing physical fitness and empowerment issues among women and girls.

CM distributes FOCUS+, Green Meghalaya+ cheques at Ampati

From Our Correspondent

AMPATI, March 7: Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Saturday distributed cheques to beneficiaries of the FOCUS+ and Green Meghalaya+ schemes during a programme organised by the South West Garo Hills district administration at Student's Field, Ampati.

Addressing the gathering, the chief minister stated that the FOCUS+ programme, launched in 2022, provides Rs 5,000 annual financial support to producer households to strengthen rural livelihoods. He noted that the government has adopted a "one beneficiary per household" rule to ensure fairness.

Following a verification process through the Meghalaya One Portal, the total number of households supported under FOCUS+ has reached 1,04,418. For the 2024-25 period, the government is releasing the first tranche of Rs 2,500. In the Garo Hills region, this tranche benefits 81,046 households with a total release of Rs 20.26 crore. Specifically, in South West Garo Hills, 14,017 beneficiaries will receive a total of Rs 3.50 crore. To date,

Rs 148.08 crore has been disbursed under the scheme across the state.

Regarding the Green Meghalaya+ initiative, the Chief Minister explained that the programme incentivises forest conservation through the Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES) model, offering Rs 10,000 to Rs 20,000 per hectare. With 17,000 sq km of forest cover in the state, the government aims to bring one lakh hectares under conservation.

So far, over 2,800 beneficiaries have conserved nearly 40,000 hectares statewide. A total of Rs 77.21 crore has been disbursed under the initiative, including Rs 34.73 crore in Garo Hills. In South West Garo Hills, incentives amounting to Rs 48.23 lakh are being distributed to beneficiaries across Rerapara, Zikzak, and Betasing blocks for conserving over 551 hectares.

Rangsakona MLA Subir M Marak and Deputy Commissioner Anendya Raajshre also spoke at the event, which was attended by Salmanpara MLA Ian Botham K Sangma, Mahendraganj MLA Sanjay A Sangma, and several district officials and community leaders.

Focus on sustainable agri in...

(Contd from P-3) Despite these contradictions, she said such forums remain important as they help stakeholders reflect on local challenges within a global framework and identify ways to support vulnerable communities, particularly farmers who form the backbone of the food system.

She also pointed to several challenges in the sector, including increasing market dependence, the persistence of traditional farming practices, limited access to extension services and technology, and inadequate dissemination of information among farmers. Laloo emphasised the need for stronger support systems to assist farmers where support is most needed.

Stressing the importance of collaboration with academic and research institutions, Laloo observed that although Meghalaya does not have a dedicated agricultural university, institutions such as the Central Agricultural University and the College of Post-Graduate Studies in Agricultural Sciences continue to play a key role in research, knowledge dissemination and the development of improved farming practices.

She further stated that policies and programmes must be localised and aligned with regional realities, adding that direct engagement with farmers and grassroots practitioners is essential to understand their needs and challenges better.

Among those present at the consultation were SV Nagachan, Jai C Rana, Maqbool Lyngdoh, R Nainamalai, Anupam Mishra, and Sonal Dsouza, along with participants from different government departments and organisations.

The consultation brought together experts and policymakers to deliberate on strategies to strengthen sustainable agriculture and build resilient food systems across the Himalayan region.

20 Meghalaya villages declared...

(Contd from P-3) A representative of the centre stated that community collaboration and timely intervention were essential to the project's success, adding that the programme aims to include more villages in the near future.

Bansara Eye Care Centre confirmed it will continue expanding its outreach and screening programmes to ensure wider access to regular eye check-ups across the state.

"It is health that is real wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."
—Mahatma Gandhi

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXVIII No. 206 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 9, 2026

Nepal, youth power

NEPAL would see the formation of a new government following the elections that handed down an impressive victory to the Rastriya Swatantra Party. That a 35-year-old youth, rapper Balendra Shah, is at the head of this victory demonstrates the people's strong disenchantment with the established political parties and their leaders who had let their nation down badly. This electoral verdict, significantly, forms into a pattern as was evident in Sri Lanka in 2024 when the then President Gotabaya's residence was stormed by Leftist youths. They unseated him from power, leading to elections that subsequently President Dissanayake's Leftist coalition won handsomely. It was a verdict against corrupt politics and the sharp downturn in Sri Lanka's economy. The people were disenchanted with old parties and old faces.

In Bangladesh, Sheikh Hasina was overthrown from her position as prime minister, a post she held for many years. Students and Islamists joined hands to end her governance in 2024. An interim government was formed, after which elections were held to the Bangladesh parliament, leading to the formation of a normal government by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party of Tarique Rahman last month. The 60-year-old Tarique Rahman, son of BNP leader and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, had been living in exile for years, but his word carried weight with the electorate. Through these, politics in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh experienced a tectonic shift. A new generation of leaders came centre-stage. So too with Nepal now, where the people put their trust in a young rapper. India and Pakistan are however being ruled by traditional politicians, many of them past their prime. Pakistan's prime minister Shehbaz Sharif, from a traditional ruling family, is aged around 75; PM Modi is of the same age; and several of the senior ministers in the central government are around Modi's age. A generational shift here is still a far cry.

Nepal has been through turbulence after the 2001 palace coup and assassination of King Birendra, the benevolent ruler who maintained fraternal ties with India. The Communists or Maoists have held power following the elections there, and militant leader Prachanda occupied top positions in government. But the people were not satisfied with these rulers, who failed to win respect matching what Birendra had commanded. They indulged in unprincipled power politics – a bane of democracy in the footloose third world countries. At the same time, they built bridges with China, and distanced Nepal from India. Anti-India feelings were being whipped up in Nepal at the behest of China. Some of the controversial, tough actions of the Modi government – vis-à-vis Nepal also came in the way of the fraternal ties. Notably, Balendra Shah whose party has been swept to power in the polls is expected to re-adjust Nepal's ties with its neighbours. Shah has made clear; similar to what Tarique Rahman of Bangladesh has said on assumption of power – that the interests of his nation are paramount. Yet, an equidistance policy with neighbours is easier said than done. For both Bangladesh and Nepal, as also for Sri Lanka, their close ties with India in the past helped them immensely; and this was much more than the help India got from them.

How Sustainable is the State's \$10 Billion Economy

By H H Mohrmen

The Meghalaya Democratic Alliance Government's goal of achieving a \$10 billion economy is enticing and welcomed by the citizens of the state. Everyone would like to see the state's economy grow by leaps and bounds, and people are waiting with bated breath for Meghalaya to become a developed state. But ultimately, is it just about achieving the goal? Efforts have to be made, resources have to be used, and these will come with consequences that the state will have to bear. The question is about the approach, the overall impact of the efforts to reach this gigantic goal, and the consequences it will have on the state and its people.

The State's Achievements on the 17 SDGs

Countries around the world have arrived at a set of goals that countries should achieve for development to be sustainable. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are indicators that the countries of the world have agreed upon as a framework for responsible development. The important question to ask is: what is the state's current score on the various SDGs?

The 17 SDGs include: No Poverty, Zero Hunger, Good Health and Well-being, Quality Education, Gender Equality, Clean Water and Sanitation, Affordable and Clean Energy, Decent Work and Economic Growth, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, Sustainable Cities and Communities, Reduced Inequality, Responsible Consumption and Production, Climate Action, Life Below Water, Life on Land, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and Partnership for the Goals. Of the 17 SDGs, if we include Reduced Inequality, which can also be affected by unsustainable activities, we can say that at least nine goals are directly related to environmental protection.

No doubt the only goal in which the state may fare well is the Gender Equality index because the people of the state follow the matrilineal lineage system, and by default there is respect for the fairer sex. Your guess on the state's achievement on the SDGs is as good as mine.

Many rivers flowing from coal mining areas are polluted by Acid Mine Drainage (AMD), and in some cases aquatic life has disappeared completely. This situation is clearly in violation of laws meant to protect water bodies and biodiversity. We also have no effective policy on waste disposal, and there are hardly any serious efforts to protect forests and water resources. Towns and cities continue to grow organically with little urban planning, except perhaps in the case of New Shillong.

Mining remains the major activity which drags the state down in the SDG rankings, and there appears to be little effort to improve the state's performance in these critical areas.

Traditional Coal Mining in the State

The state-sponsored narrative now being promoted is that coal mining is a traditional livelihood activity of the people. It is claimed that coal mining has been practised for more than 200 years. The Chief Minister was even heard asking a podcaster who interviewed him, "Do you know how old coal mining is in the state?" to which he himself answered as being more than a hundred years old.

Contrary to this claim, historical records only mention of plans to supply limestone, but not coal during the colonial period. British officers recorded limestone extraction and even planned railway lines to transport limestone from the foothills. If coal mining had truly been a long-standing tradition, we would expect to find references to it in folk stories or other cultural expressions of the people. Such references are absent.

The Khasi and Jaintia people were well known in the past for iron production, which shows that iron smelting was once an important activity in the hills. However, historical accounts suggest that iron smelting relied on charcoal rather than coal. Therefore, the claim that coal mining was an ancient tradition does not hold water.

The practice of rat-hole mining cannot be described as a traditional livelihood. Historical evidence suggests that the extraction of coal for domestic use began during the colonial period when the British introduced the practice. The British themselves used coal for heating during their stay in the hills.

After coal was nationalised in India, the late G.G. Swell advanced the argument that coal mining in the state should be treated as a cottage industry. He wrote to K.C. Pant requesting that the government allow the state to continue the prevailing system of mining on the grounds that it was a cottage industry.

It is also important to remember that coal mining in the state was never carried out exclusively by indigenous people. Labourers came from outside the state and even from neighbouring countries. When coal from Meghalaya was sold in both national and international markets can we continue to claim that it is a cottage industry?

Some people claim that the box-cutting method of coal mining is scientific and less harmful to the environment. However, I had already addressed this argument in my article published in the Shillong Times on July 7, 2014, titled "A Hole by Any Name Still Smells a Rat."

The larger legal issue is whether the provisions of the Sixth Schedule can override Article 21 of the Constitution of India, which guarantees the right to life. The courts have been clear on this matter: constitutional rights cannot be undermined.

Mining Today and the Worth of Human Life

Sometimes one hears the Chief Minister speaking about the Sustainable Development Goals, yet at the same time the government encourages sand and stone quarrying and often looks the other way when allegations of illegal coal mining are raised.

How can the state hope to achieve the SDGs while permitting widespread mining activities that harm the environment? It is clear that the state is far from meeting these global development goals.

Article 21 of the Constitution gives the highest importance to the right to life. Sadly, this principle has often been ignored in the context of mining. The rights of miners and labourers have been neglected, and even the value of a miner's life is often disregarded by those engaged in illegal mining activities. The Supreme Court of India has repeatedly held that the state cannot justify the violation of fundamental rights on the grounds of economic limitations. Yet the dignity and safety of miners have rarely been given the importance they deserve.

The Cause of the NGT Ban

Many people have forgotten that the National Green Tribunal imposed a ban on rat-hole mining in 2014 following petitions filed by the All Dimas Students' Union of Assam. The organisation alleged that polluted water from the River Kupli, which flows from the Jaintia Hills into the Dima Hasao district of Assam, had severely affected the people who depended on the river for their livelihood.

Mining has caused extensive damage to air, water and forests in the mining areas in the state. A report published in 1997 by the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board revealed that the pH level in some rivers and streams had fallen to as low as 2.4, indicating extremely high acidity caused by mining activities. Acidic run-offs from coal storage areas were also found to have contaminated groundwater. These findings highlight the serious environmental consequences of unregulated mining.

Growth and Pollution

Gita Gopinath, Deputy Managing Director of the IMF, recently raised concerns about India's growth story by linking it to environmental degradation. Speaking at the World Economic Forum in Davos, she described pollution as a "hidden tax" on citizens and warned that it poses a far more serious threat to economic growth than trade tariffs.

According to studies she cited, pollution costs India nearly nine percent of its GDP each year through healthcare expenses and lost productivity. World Bank data also indicate that about 1.7 million people die annually in India due to pollution-related causes, accounting for around 18 percent of all deaths in the country.

Another major concern is investor confidence. Poor air quality and deteriorating environmental conditions can discourage international investors from establishing operations in a country. Environmental quality is increasingly becoming a factor in global economic competitiveness.

\$10 Billion Economy and Sustainability

The same question can be asked of Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma and the MDA government. Are we so blinded by the ambition of achieving a \$10 billion economy that we ignore the environmental consequences? The million-dollar question is this: can we build a \$10 billion economy by destroying our forests and natural resources? Is it worth having such an economy while leaving our rivers polluted?

What is the point of achieving high economic growth if the state is left with barren hills, degraded forests and polluted rivers? What is the use of accumulating billions of dollars if there is no clean water and no healthy environment to sustain life? In the end, we must ask ourselves a simple question: can we truly prosper by destroying the very natural resources on which our survival depends?

How is this Middle-East War 2026 different?

By H. Srikanth

Since the first Arab-Israeli War of 1948, the Gulf and the Middle-East regions have witnessed several wars involving Israel, the US, Western powers, Iran, and different Arab countries in the region. Factors that compelled the wars are varied. The wars were fought and justified in the name of the liberation of Palestine, control of oil resources, destruction of weapons of mass destruction, or for the restoration of democracy. The US and Israel, which seek political hegemony and economic control in the region, were involved in almost all wars that took place in the region. Over the decades, different Arab and Gulf countries became allies of America and gave up confrontation with Israel. America and its allies engineered regime change in countries like Iraq, Libya, and Syria, where the leaders defied US hegemony. Iran is the only remaining power in the region which could resist the efforts to subvert the regime in power till date.

Iran, a Persian, Shia-majoritarian country, remains a hard nut to crack. Since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which toppled the Shah of Iran and established an Islamic Republic, Iran has emerged as an economic and military power in the region. It withstood all kinds of international pressure and refused to bow down to US interests. While most Arab countries virtually gave up the cause of Palestine in return for security and development, Iran openly supported the Palestine cause and started lending support to Islamic militant groups in the region fighting Israel. Iran strengthened its military and economy with the help of Russia and China. Iran has made considerable progress in nuclear research, much against the wishes of America and its allies. It is therefore natural that the US and Israel view Iran as their greatest enemy in the region. Both the US and Israel have been making efforts to destabilize Iran. The US and Western powers have imposed economic sanctions on Iran. Apart from encouraging dissent within Iran, they have been pitting the Kurds against Iran.

Despite its allegiance to Islam, Iran is not like a backward Afghanistan ruled by the Taliban. Iran is no doubt a theocratic and authoritarian state where civil rights are considerably restricted. In recent years, Iran has witnessed social movements challenging patriarchy and theocracy. But Iran's foresighted leaders have shaped Iran as a centralized nation-state which is not averse to modern education, science, and economic progress. In recent years, the Iranians have made considerable progress in sports and have made a mark in the film industry. Iran is not as conservative as it was during the period of its first Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ali Khomeini (1979-89). After him, there has been a gradual change in the perception of leadership. Some sections in Iran feel the change has been too little and too slow. The people of Iran have every right to decide what reforms they need and who should rule in Iran. But it becomes problematic when outside powers whose humanitarian and democratic credentials are in doubt intervene in the politics of Iran and advocating regime change, killing its leaders and trying to create a puppet government in Iran to eliminate dissent and ensure control over the oil resources in the country.

When Israel and the US bombed Iran and killed Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and other top leaders of Iran on February 28, Donald Trump triumphantly declared that the war would end in four days. But that did not happen. It has been more than one week now. The war is still on. No regime change has taken place yet. After the bombing of a school building which killed over 160 innocent children, the Iranian people came out in lakhs mourning the deaths and denouncing the US-Israel attacks. Those who wanted regime change went into hiding. The second-rung leadership consolidated and swung into action to take revenge and fight an asymmetric war against the more powerful enemy.

The war strategies that Iran has been adopting have surprised many military experts. Iran's air force and navy are no match for Israel, and America's military power. Hence, Iran relied heavily on home-made missiles and drone which it produced in abundance. Instead of focusing only on Israel and the US, it dragged the Gulf into the war by attacking American military bases and US economic establishments in the GCC countries. Using cluster bombs, Iran destroyed the radar systems and expensive receptors in Israel and the Gulf countries. By attacking oil refineries and commercial establishments, Iran caused heavy financial losses to the Gulf countries and also to America. Iran could create panic among the Gulf states about the ability to provide security to the region. Restrictions on the movement of vessels passing through the Strait of Hormuz, have already increased the oil prices. As business is affected, the stock markets are plummeting. Through bombing, Iran showed its capacity to influence air traffic between Gulf countries and the rest of the world. By attacking different cities in Israel, Iran forced the Jews in Iran to take shelter in bomb shelters, underground parking areas, subway stations, etc. Israel could not fly its aircraft since the beginning of the war. The US expressed its inability to pull out all its citizens holed up in Israel and other Gulf countries. As such, the initial plans that Trump and Netanyahu had have gone awry, and there is panic and confusion in the Western world.

These developments are not adequate to conclude that Iran is winning the war. Through the conventional superiority, the US and Israel have destroyed many key areas in Iran and killed thousands of people. But all this destruction did not appear to have deterred the leaders and the people of Iran. Taking advantage of geography and its decentralized military establishment system, Iran is fighting a valiant battle for survival. In some respects, the Iranian resistance reminds us of the glorious Vietnamese resistance war in the 1960s. The only difference is that there are no strong socialist countries to stand by. After one week of war, the US has realized that airstrikes alone will not ensure regime change. Trump's regime is planning to deploy American soldiers on the ground to fight the war in Iran. It means the war will continue for a longer period. Who blinks first is not yet clear. But in the end, there will be no clear victors. The effects of this war will not be confined only to the actors involved in the war. The war will worsen the global recession and affect all the countries in the world, preparing the ground for more crises and wars.

Letters to the Editor

Problems faced by Students in the Meghalaya Police Public School

Editor,

I write this letter with a grave sense of responsibility and anguish about the prevailing situation in the Meghalaya Police Public School, Shillong. The school reopened for the 2026 academic session in mid-February. However, I am concerned and disturbed to learn from my son, who studies in Class VII A, that for the last three weeks, there has been no teacher to impart Mathematics lessons. After enquiry, I came to learn that the school suffers from shortage of teachers as vacant positions were not filled. This is a serious matter. How can the school management be so casual and irresponsible as to deprive students of the right to learn after the parents have paid for them? The school is not run on a charity basis. The monthly tuition fee and other charges for each student is more than Rupees 3000.

We admitted our children with the hope that the school would provide the best teaching and learning environment according to the fees we pay. But our trust in the school is being betrayed. Though the school is run in the name of the Police Wives' Welfare Association for Care (POWAC), it is the officers from the Meghalaya Police Department who actually run the show. The Director General of Police (DGP) is the Chief Patron of the school. The school's Administrator is also a senior police officer

who has the greatest, if not the total say in the school's overall management. Therefore, the prevailing situation in the school directly reflects a negative image of the Police Department.

Also, I would like to state that the school needs to upgrade its infrastructure and hygiene for the welfare of the students. On a positive note, I sincerely appreciate the efforts of the principal and the teaching and non-teaching staff in the school for providing the best services in spite of many shortcomings, including heavy workload. What stands out in the school is the independent learning skills that the teachers are able to impart to the students.

Yours etc,
Dr. Batskhem Myrboh
Shillong-14

Are Rented Home Seekers Surveying Our Homes?

Editor,

Through the columns your esteemed newspaper, I wish to raise a matter of concern for residents in several localities over a suspicious pattern of individuals claiming to search for rental houses while appearing to gather personal information about households instead. During these visits they often ask detailed questions about the household, such as how many people live in the house, whether men or women stay there, the number of children, and who remains at home during the day.

In some cases, they claim to represent non-governmental organizations (NGOs)

conducting surveys but fail to produce proper identification. However, when residents ask for proper identification or official documents, these individuals either fail to provide valid credentials or leave quickly without explanation. Residents are encouraged to immediately contact local community leaders, local authorities or police if anything appears suspicious.

Such incidents may appear minor, but collecting information about households can potentially be misused for criminal activities such as theft, burglary or targeted scams. Information about family members, particularly the presence of elderly people, women, or children, could make certain households vulnerable. In an age where safety and privacy are increasingly fragile, the act of gathering household details can easily become a blueprint for exploitation. Criminal networks often rely on exactly this type of information to identify vulnerable households.

Such incidents may appear minor at first glance. But they raise an important and uncomfortable question: Who is collecting this information, and for what purpose?

While these inquiries may seem harmless, such information could potentially be misused. Community vigilance and timely action can help prevent potential misuse of such deceptive tactics and practices.

Residents are therefore urged to remain cautious and avoid sharing personal details with strangers without verifying their identity. At the

same time, it is important for the concerned authorities to take note of these reports and increase public awareness and monitoring in residential areas. Security does not always come with loud alarms or dramatic events. Sometimes it begins with small, quiet questions asked at our front doors.

The responsibility now lies with both citizens and authorities to ensure that curiosity about renting a house does not become a convenient disguise for something far more troubling. This is therefore a strong appeal to the concerned authorities including local police, municipal bodies, and district administration to investigate such activities and issue public advisories if necessary.

Yours etc,
Augusten Blah
Shillong -2

When Everyday Technology Becomes a Tool of War

Editor,

In the last few days, the Middle East has been passing through a period of serious tension and uncertainty. Relations between some countries in that region have become strained, and news of missile attacks and military actions is appearing frequently in the media. Along with these developments, another worrying trend has come to light which shows how modern conflicts are changing.

A recent report by the cyber security agency Check

Point Research, a cyber security research team, says that cyber groups believed to be linked to Iran have been trying to hack internet-connected CCTV and IP cameras in several countries of the Middle East. These attempts increased sharply around 28 February when military tension in the region was also rising. The report says that cameras connected to the internet in countries such as Israel, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Lebanon and Cyprus were scanned and targeted. Experts believe that the purpose of hacking these cameras may not only be for spying but also helping military operations.

If someone gets access to the live video of these cameras, they can watch what is happening in an area before an attack. After a missile or drone strike, the same cameras can show how much damage has been caused. In military language this is called 'Battle Damage Assessment'.

Today millions of CCTV cameras are installed in homes, offices, markets and public places across the world. Most of them are connected to the internet so that people can watch the footage from their phones or computers. But this convenience, I feel, also makes us vulnerable. Cyber attackers usually search the internet for cameras that are poorly protected. They take advantage of known security weaknesses in the system. Popular surveillance brands such as Hikvision and Dahua were among those that researchers say were targeted because of

some known security flaws. Once hackers enter the system, they can watch the live video and observe activities on the ground. Hikvision and Dahua Technology are companies that manufacture CCTV cameras and video-surveillance equipments.

The report also mentions that the attackers tried to hide their identity by using VPN services and virtual private servers so that their real location could not be traced easily. All this shows how the nature of conflict is changing in today's world. Earlier wars were fought mainly with soldiers, tanks and weapons. Now digital technology and cyber networks are also becoming part of the battlefield. Devices that are meant to keep people safe can sometimes be turned into tools for gathering information during conflicts. This should be a wake-up call for everyone. Governments need stronger cyber security rules, companies that manufacture such devices must build better security systems, and ordinary users should also take simple precautions like changing default passwords and updating their software regularly.

Technology has made life easier for us in many ways. But if we do not use it carefully and keep it secure, the same technology can also create new risks.

Yours etc.,
Jaiaj,
Via email

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"Strength and growth come only through continuous effort and struggle."

— Napoleon Hill

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 207 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026

Give to Gain: IWD Slogan

THIS year International Women's Day was a quiet affair, falling as it did on a Sunday. Most institutions observed it a day earlier on March 7 and others on March 6. Many women intellectuals who have gone through their own travails see the observance of this day as sardonic since nothing has changed in their lives and the lives of many other women who don't come from positions of privilege. So, what do women give and what do they have to gain? Conversely, women have to be given adequate opportunities, equitable access to all resources and their voices must be amplified. Women give enough of themselves to run the home, the family while also attending to their work to bring food to the table. Also, what about the thousands of single-women parents who do not have time to even breathe? Senior journalist Mrinal Pande in a special article in one of the dailies asks very perceptively, "What do women really want?" She found out from her research that most women want "time" just to do their own thing and not be burdened with responsibility after another until they are too fatigued to look after their needs; their health included.

Women have given enough over centuries. Now it's the state and other institutions that should give women their due share of resources so that society and the economy gains. However, women can do better by building solidarity around issues that affect them. Unless women make themselves heard over the din of politics and other so-called important issues of governance which are all very male-centric they cannot get too far in addressing their issues of better livelihood with wages that will give them a sense of dignity and respect. Think of the ASHA workers who have done much to create awareness on health issues and assisted pregnant women to come in for regular check-ups to take care of their nutritional levels and blood count, considering that nearly 56% of women in Meghalaya are anaemic. ASHA workers are now the supporting pillars of the healthcare system. And they are just one category. Women in self help groups learn the value of co-operation as opposed to working alone.

The Mudra Loan initiated by the Modi Government to enable entrepreneurs to get collateral free loans from banks of up to Rs 10 lakhs has unfortunately benefitted only 14,000 beneficiaries in Meghalaya. Hence much more needs to be done by banks to create awareness so that more women take advantage of this economic opportunity. So far, the repayment for MUDRA loans has been quite successful. It's true that meaningful change for women can come through a collective contribution of time, resources and mutual support. What women give benefits the entire society and not just the household and it also has a domino effect. All institutions, and governments should design their systems in ways that women are not eliminated at the entry point itself because they have much to gain from women's participation. Women must also be given respect and recognition for their contribution. That boosts their morale and makes them work harder. When the system gives women fair wages and dignity, they are able to give their best. Hence this system of mutual give and take is what can truly empower women.

Always with Women: Lakadong's Prosperity in Shangpung Pohshnong

By Anna Notsu

From culinary scenes to medicinal healing, turmeric has long been a beloved everyday product across India. Its colour, flavour and health properties render it less a mere spice than a necessity. Yet turmeric is not all the same. Over the past decade, Lakadong turmeric, a one-season crop known for its exceptionally high curcumin content, has drawn renewed attention to Meghalaya, particularly the Jaintia Hills. Today, buyers across India recognise that most turmeric varieties rarely exceed five percent curcumin—while Lakadong, cultivated in selected pockets of the Jaintia region, can reach nearly double that.

The recent acquisition of a Geographical Indication (GI) tag has added further value to the crop, formalising its uniqueness in legal and commercial terms. Lakadong turmeric can only bear its name if it is cultivated in designated areas and meets specific curcumin standards. As demand from outside the state has skyrocketed, funding schemes and agricultural initiatives have increasingly envisioned Lakadong as a pathway to regional prosperity, a Lakadong economy that only the Jaintia Hills can produce. Under the Cluster Development Programme initiated by the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers' Welfare, farmers in Shangpung village recently made a remarkable history when their first large-scale commercial order of Lakadong turmeric powder was dispatched beyond Meghalaya. In moments like these, Lakadong appears not merely as a crop but as an emblem of development, expressing quality and possibility.

Yet translating development schemes into everyday practice is rarely straightforward. Accessing funds and institutional support often involves lengthy procedures, repeated documentation and coordination between multiple departments as well as farmers. While funding promises faster and more efficient production, the reality is not quite simple. The very initiatives meant to reduce hurdles can sometimes create new pressures, especially when Lakadong is a one-season crop. The Farmers' Union must navigate administrative processes while maintaining constant and transparent communication with farmers, ensuring that both demands are met while remaining compliant with programme requirements. The success story of Lakadong production therefore depends not only on agricultural labour but also on the careful negotiation of bureaucratic pathways.

As I observed in Shangpung Pohshnong, behind the story of "high curcumin" and export-ready packaging lies

a quieter narrative of endless paperwork, mounting pressure and unpredictable weather. Much of this labour rests on the shoulders of women. Turmeric must be planted, weeded, harvested, cleaned, sliced, dried and powdered—and then packaged, boxed and shipped. Every single step of this long process requires careful labour. During the preparation of the first commercial dispatch, even the making and assembling of cardboard boxes for shipment was handled by female members of the Farmers' Union.

Even with improved technology and more standardised processes made possible through government schemes, practical challenges remain. Machines wear out. Suitable open spaces for sun-drying are limited. Sudden rainfalls frequently interrupt the crucial drying process. As demand increases, so too does the pressure to balance supply with uncertain weather conditions.

Following the agricultural cycle, late February brought an intense period of activity in Shangpung Pohshnong. The Farmers' Union was inundated with the simultaneous processes of cleaning raw turmeric, slicing and spreading them out for drying. On one such weekend, I joined a group of union members led by Kong Anjelina S. Manar to help prepare their first commercial dispatch.

Dozens of empty carton boxes were stacked on the concrete ground in the courtyard outside their Union office. Nearby, a handful of women sat on low wooden stools, methodically placing neatly sealed packets of Lakadong powder into a box, one by one. Strictly following the buyer's instructions, their turmeric-stained fingers carefully ensured that no packet was damaged. Thirty-six packets filled each carton box, weighing about nine kilograms. The repetitive and intensive labour of preparing the shipment, carried out with meticulous care, continued until dusk, when we could hardly see each other's turmeric-coloured faces.

To assemble more boxes, to sweep the floor, to measure the powder, to fill carefully designed packets and to seal them with an iron machine required constant bending and concentration. After only a couple of hours, our fingers became dry, our legs numb and our backs stiff and aching. Yet no one complained of fatigue. At one point, my host sister briefly lay down on the floor and closed her eyes for a minute, sparking laughter among us. We joked and chatted as we worked, never stopping our hands or compromising the

quality of the product. Our Lakadong-coloured hands and faces created a warm and comical scene.

Outside, despite the morning sunlight, grey clouds obscured the sky. A sudden gust of cold wind passed through the courtyard. "U slap! (Rain!)" one of the workers shouted. In an instant, we jumped and rushed towards the tarpaulin sheets covered with half-dried turmeric slices. Not only the courtyard but also the back of the office and the rooftop of a nearby school required our urgent attention. The sliced turmeric had to be completely dried before moving to the final processing stage. Protection from the rain was crucial.

Within minutes, raindrops began to darken the rugged concrete ground. When we reached the school rooftop, where orange-golden Lakadong slices covered the surface, my Shangpung sister immediately removed her sandal and began sweeping the turmeric into piles. I followed her lead. There was no time to fetch brooms or dustpans. As thunder rolled in the distance, my thoughts went to the story of Blai Pyrthat, the Thunder God. Half-jokingly, someone said, "You should pray to Blai Pyrthat for no more rain."

Not long before joining this Lakadong labour, I had visited the altar of Blai Pyrthat in Shangpung. In addition to their annual ritual dedicated to Blai Pyrthat, the Phadong clan performs sacrificial ceremonies at this altar whenever necessary. According to local folklore, the altar commemorates a man who once disappeared while playing his flute, leaving behind only his knup (Khasi-Jaintia traditional umbrella). Villagers believe that he later became Blai Pyrthat. His sudden mysterious disappearance and the arrival of thunder in Shangpung were seen as connected events. While too much or too little rain is always a serious concern, thunder itself carries layered meanings. It may signal both blessing and warning—life-giving rain or divine punishment.

One time, when I asked whether Blai Pyrthat appears only during summer, my Shangpung companion replied, "Of course not. You will see. He also comes in winter. He comes whenever necessary." Here, nothing happens without purpose. Rituals are never performed without intention. And just like the rain, Lakadong itself has its own explanation for its existence.

In Shangpung Pohshnong, Lakadong's significance extends far beyond the language of curcumin percentages and market expansion. Home

to followers of the Niamtre faith, the village narrates an ancient past in which turmeric once grew wild in the forest, asking humans to care for it in exchange for supporting their rites and ceremonies. Even today, Lakadong continues to play a role in ritual settings, its colour and vitality embedded in divine engagement.

Lakadong therefore does not belong solely to the development future imagined by government schemes. It also carries traces of ancestral relationships between humans, land and the divine. It stands at the intersection of religious continuity and commercial aspiration.

On one side stands development—cluster schemes, GI certification and promises of rural prosperity supported by funding and growing market demand. Through these initiatives, Lakadong turmeric has become inseparable from the stories of modernity and future prosperity in the Jaintia Hills. Its geographically unique status and the establishment of a Farmer's Union bring hope that it can secure livelihoods and protect those who work for it. On the other side stands lived tradition: ritual practice, inherited knowledge and women's everyday labour. In the rush towards Lakadong's commercial expansion, its deeper significance cannot be reduced to a single chemical percentage.

Researchers who visit Meghalaya often describe the state as 'matrilineal but not matriarchal.' On the surface, within political institutions, religious authority and formal decision-making, this observation may hold some truth. Yet my stay in Shangpung Pohshnong complicates such a simple conclusion.

In the stories of Lakadong—its cultivation, its presence in ritual scenes and its journey to markets beyond the hills of Meghalaya—women stand at the centre. They bend their backs every day to cultivate the soil, manage the labour, sustain ritual continuity and ensure the quality that makes Lakadong renowned. In Shangpung, the curcumin content of Lakadong turmeric now consistently reaches around 10 percent. Its prosperity rests just as much on the strength, decisions and dedication of women who are shaping a new narrative of development.

Lakadong's prosperity is often measured in curcumin percentages. But in Shangpung Pohshnong, it is the women who make its sustained prosperity possible.

(The author is a PhD researcher at the Institute of Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology at Leiden University (Netherlands) and project researcher of the research project *Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas*.)

Meghalaya's Lost Decade in the Civil Services

By Roy Kupar Synrem

For over a decade, a disturbing silence has hung over Meghalaya's representation in India's most powerful administrative institutions. While young men and women from across the country enter the elite ranks of the Indian Administrative Service, Indian Police Service and other central services through the examinations conducted by the Union Public Service Commission, Meghalaya has watched largely from the side-lines. This is not merely an academic concern. It is a crisis of leadership, opportunity, and representation. For twelve long years, the state has struggled to produce a consistent stream of successful candidates in the Civil Services Examination. The last widely acknowledged tribal candidate from the state to break through this formidable examination was Isawanda Laloo in 2012.

The Civil Services Examination is not just another competitive test. It is the gateway to the institutions that run the Indian state. Officers trained through this system eventually become district administrators, policy makers, diplomats, and national decision-makers. When a state fails to produce candidates, it slowly loses its voice within the system. Neighbouring states in the Northeast have recognised this reality. States like Assam and Manipur consistently produce several successful candidates every year. Their youth compete with confidence and ambition. Meanwhile, Meghalaya has allowed a culture of complacency to settle in. The question must be asked honestly: How did a state filled with talented youth reach this point?

The first answer lies in the declining strength of the education system. Schools in Meghalaya have for too long prioritised rote learning over critical thinking. Students graduate with degrees but often without the analytical skills, writing ability, and intellectual discipline required to face one of the toughest examinations in the world. Universities have also failed to become centres of intellectual challenge. Debate, research, policy discussions, and academic competitiveness remain limited. A generation of young people grows up without being pushed to test their limits.

In cities like Delhi, Hyderabad and even Guwahati, civil services preparation has become an ecosystem. In Meghalaya, this ecosystem is almost nonexistent. A serious aspirant must leave the state, spend

lakhs of rupees, and survive years of uncertainty just to compete. For many families, this is simply impossible. The result is predictable: dreams die before they even begin.

Perhaps the most troubling aspect of this crisis is the lack of urgency shown by policymakers. Successive governments have spoken about youth empowerment, education reform, and employment generation. Yet very little has been done to systematically prepare Meghalaya's youth for national-level competitive examinations. Other states have established dedicated civil services academies, provided stipends to aspirants, and built mentorship networks involving serving officers. If a state does not invest in its future administrators, how can it expect its youth to compete with the rest of the country?

The consequences of this neglect are profound. When a state lacks representation in national services, its concerns risk being misunderstood or overlooked in policy discussions. Officers who understand the social, cultural and geographic realities of the region become fewer within the system. Equally damaging is the psychological effect on the youth. When young people rarely see someone from their own state succeeding in national examinations, ambition begins to shrink. Aspirations become smaller and the horizon of possibility narrows.

Meghalaya cannot afford another decade of absence. The state must act with urgency and determination. A fully funded civil services academy must be established immediately, with experienced mentors and rigorous training programmes. Scholarships and stipends should support deserving aspirants from economically weaker backgrounds. Schools and colleges must begin career guidance programmes that introduce students to the possibility of national service. Above all, the youth of Meghalaya must rediscover their confidence.

The state has never lacked intelligence or talent. What it lacks is a system that encourages ambition and rewards hard work. The challenge is not beyond us. But it requires a collective awakening—from government, educators, civil society and young people themselves. Meghalaya must reclaim its place in India's civil services. Not tomorrow but now.

(The writer is Advocate & President, Hynniewtrep Youths' Council)

Letters to the Editor

When Simplicity is Lost in the Cacophony

Editor,

There is a peculiar talent some writers possess: the ability to take a simple subject and inflate it into a grand philosophical crisis. The recent letter titled "The World's on Fire, But At Least My Straw is Dissolving" by Ellerine Diengdoh, (ST March 5, 2026), is a masterpiece in this unnecessary acrobatics.

At its core, the issue being discussed is embarrassingly simple - plastic waste and the small lifestyle adjustments society is making to reduce it. Instead of engaging with the matter in good faith, the writer performs an elaborate intellectual circus by comparing paper straws to global warfare, lithium mining to moral hypocrisy, and recycling bins to the decisions of "Masters of War." One almost expects the next paragraph to blame melting ice caps on wet cardboard.

The reader is asked to believe that because global environmental problems are complex, every small measure is automatically

pointless. This is a curious argument. By that logic, one might as well stop sweeping the floor because dust storms exist in deserts. The inability to solve everything at once does not render incremental improvements meaningless, it merely exposes the impotence of those who prefer complaining to contributing.

What makes the piece particularly amusing is its dramatic tone. The agony of sipping iced coffee through a paper straw is described with such theatrical misery that one might assume the author had been sentenced to medieval torture rather than mild inconvenience. If dissolving straws are truly among the gravest burdens of modern life, we must congratulate ourselves for living in remarkably comfortable times.

The most glaring flaw, however, lies in the argument's structure. Instead of addressing the actual purpose of reducing single-use plastics, the writer constructs a towering straw man, ironically enough, suggesting that environmental responsibility is a conspiracy of hypocrisy because larger problems still exist. This is less a critique and more a distraction dressed in clever prose.

Environmental policy,

like most public issues, is rarely perfect. But dismissing small practical measures simply because they are not world-saving miracles is intellectually lazy. Progress is often made through modest steps, not grand gestures or sarcastic monologues about soggy straws.

In short, the letter confuses inconvenience with injustice and exaggeration with insight. If the aim was to spark serious discussion, clarity would have served better than theatrical indignation. Not every cup of coffee requires a philosophical crisis.

Yours etc.,
Name Withheld on Request
Via email

A Balanced View of Meghalaya's Economic Journey

Editor,
Recent discussions about the Meghalaya Budget 2026-27 have raised concerns about the State's finances and its dependence on funds from the Centre. Public debate on such matters is healthy. However, it

is also important to look at the full picture and understand the challenges faced by a small hill state like Meghalaya.

To begin with, the fiscal deficit of 3.5% of GSDP remains within the legal limit set by the Meghalaya Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act. While the Sixteenth Finance Commission of India suggested that states keep the deficit closer to 3%, this is a recommendation and not a strict rule. Many states temporarily operate within the 3-4% range in order to invest in development and infrastructure. It is also important to note that Meghalaya continues to maintain a revenue surplus, which means the government is able to meet its regular expenses without borrowing money. This is generally seen as a positive sign of responsible financial management.

Some critics have pointed out that Meghalaya depends heavily on tax devolution and grants from the Centre. In reality, this is the case for many smaller states across India. The federal system is designed in such a way that states with limited revenue sources receive support through recommendations made by the Finance Commission of India. Meghalaya has a small industrial base

and limited manufacturing, and a large part of its population still depends on rural livelihoods. Because of these structural realities, the path towards becoming a fully self-sustaining economy is naturally more challenging.

Despite these challenges, the State's economy has grown steadily in recent years. Meghalaya's Gross State Domestic Product has almost doubled from around Rs 37,000 crore six years ago to more than Rs 76,000 crore today. This growth has been possible because the government has focused on sectors that suit the State's strengths, such as tourism, services, and improving infrastructure.

Some have also argued that State revenue has not grown as quickly as the overall economy. However, the figures themselves show that State revenues have increased by about 89% over the past six years, which is a significant improvement. This growth reflects better tax collection, expanding economic activity, and improved systems under GST.

Concerns have also been raised about the government's investment in the power sector. It is important to understand that electricity infrastructure is essential for development. Reliable power supply supports homes,

businesses, tourism, and future industries. While such investments may not give immediate financial returns, they are necessary for long-term economic progress.

Similarly, attracting private investment is an important step in creating jobs and strengthening the economy. Partnerships with major organisations, can help develop tourism, hospitality, and other service sectors that are well suited to Meghalaya's economy. This does not mean that challenges do not exist. Meghalaya still has limited sectors that generate large internal revenue. Agriculture remains the main source of livelihood for many people, but it needs greater productivity, better market access, and stronger value chains. Building industries, improving agriculture, and expanding tourism will take time.

However, the overall direction of the State's economy is encouraging. GSDP has grown steadily, the State continues to maintain a revenue surplus, and capital spending on infrastructure has increased. These steps show that the government is trying to build a stronger foundation for future growth.

Rather than viewing the current situation as a crisis, it may be more accurate to see

it as a period of transition. For a small and geographically unique state like Meghalaya, economic progress will naturally take time.

The real goal is not only to grow the economy, but to ensure that growth benefits the people of the State. By strengthening key sectors, improving revenue collection, and continuing to invest in development, Meghalaya can gradually move towards greater financial strength and stability in the years ahead.

Yours etc;
Jack Syiemlieh
Via email

Commendable anti-poaching efforts in Kaziranga

Editor,

The successful recovery of greater one-horned rhinoceros at Assam's Kaziranga National Park is an ample testimony to systematic conservation of wildlife. A rare species of rhinoceros which was close to extinction now shows a steep rise in its population. This success conveys the message of the importance of concerted efforts for a good cause. Stupendous efforts of all

involved in this mission paid off. Through strict anti-poaching measures, habitat protection and rehabilitation the species which was on the verge of extinction has been brought back to a normal state. Now Kaziranga National Park protects 80% of the species in the world. If it had not been for the political will, dedication of officials and efforts of local people, the rhino species would have faced extinction.

The relentless efforts of local people are commendable. They have proved to be real conservationists. They act as community guardians and promptly report poaching. Through human efforts anything that seems unachievable becomes achievable. This successful story of wildlife conservation serves as a template for other conservation efforts. Our natural resources and wildlife must be protected at any cost. Stringent punitive measures must be taken against the perpetrators involved in poaching.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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"Time will heal everything."

— Sabrina Carpenter

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.208 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 11, 2026

War hurting life

THE Iran war has come to seriously hurt the world, mainly in terms of oil supplies following the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, an important maritime route along the West Asia region. For a nation that imports some 90 per cent of its crude oil for the refineries and meets 60 per cent of the LPG demand, as also much of the LNG demand through supplies majorly from the Gulf region, the unfolding scenario could eventually turn critical. The central government has stated that it has strong reserves to meet the requirements of nearly two months. This is some comfort even as US President Donald Trump is not in a mood for an early end to the conflict. Unlike Saddam Hussein's Iraq, nothing goes to show yet that Iran would accept defeat in the immediate future. Trump would not be satisfied with anything less than a regime change and installation of a pro-US power edifice there. The clergy that runs Iran has already zeroed in on a new leader in place of the deceased Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, namely his son Mojtaba Khamenei, and Iran's strong military is engaged in a robust resistance to the joint US-Israeli offensive. With the United Nations not having the capacity to cry a halt, and both Russia and China being tentative, the conflict could go on for an indefinite period. The present phase of the Ukraine war is about four years in the running.

Under the circumstances, it's natural that traders take advantage of the gathering gloom in India too. As the hoarding and black marketing of fuel, mainly LPG cylinders, have started in some cities, hotels, eateries and households are bound to suffer. The government has announced that it maintains a strategic underground petroleum reserve of nearly five million tonnes. Officials also explain that India has, as part of its energy diplomacy, buys crude from as many as 40 countries across six continents now — and that it is not dependent only on supplies that pass through the Strait of Hormuz. India has also increased its Russian crude oil procurement. All these must suffice to tide over the present war-related crisis in the near future. Overall, fuel stations could meet the requirements of motorists and public transport, but the prices seem to be showing an upward trend. LPG-refill supplies are hit in some cities and this scenario could worsen due mainly to the greed of traders to take advantage of the situation.

The aviation sector remains largely hit by the war. Worse, airlines are in a mood to increase their fares, citing a rise in aviation fuel prices as a consequence of the war. Jet fuel prices have climbed from \$90 per barrel before the war up to \$200 per barrel now, which could be bad news for air travellers. Prices of several products meant for the domestic sector across the Gulf region have also seen a sharp rise in recent days. Its echo could be felt here too in multiple ways. Any war is bad news for all, especially so in the present largely inter-connected world. The earlier the Iran war ends, the better for all.

A Cyclist's Paradise: Discovering Meghalaya on two wheels

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Although the e-bike sharing scheme has come under some criticism recently, I completely agree with the idea that Shillong should be made into a more walkable and cycle-friendly city. Guwahati is trying to solve its traffic problem by building new flyovers. But in the long run, the infrastructure will again become overwhelmed and it is not a sustainable solution. In the long run, moving away from four-wheelers has to be the solution not just to the traffic problem but also to a host of other issues, like pollution. Cycling, in fact, should be leveraged not just for improved transportation within the city but also as a means to attract a certain kind of tourism, which would be immersive and ultimately more sustainable for the state.

Meghalaya is a plateau and, contrary to public perception or the official narrative, does not belong to the Himalayan region. It is actually part of the Deccan Plateau, which is still part of the ancient landmass of Gondwana and has some of the oldest rocks in the world—more than 500 million years old—going back to the early beginnings of life on the planet. Since it is a plateau, it is not as hilly as the other states in the region. This makes the state an ideal location for long-distance cycling—rides that are more than 100 km with an elevation gain of 2,000 metres a day. The surrounding environs of Shillong, in fact, have many locations within a radius of 100 km that can be reached by cycle, and they make some of the most fun rides around.

There are two climbs out of the city—one from the Umshyphih Bridge to ML05 Café and the other from Fire Brigade to Ksehbilat. Both are ascents of almost 7 km with an elevation gain of 500 metres or more, challenging for amateurs like me but a breeze for professionals. Once you reach ML05 Café and Ksehbilat, there are multiple routes that one can take.

From Ksehbilat, one can turn right and take the Pomlakrai road, which ends at Laitylyngkot. The road is very good and the landscape is breathtaking, especially during the rainy season. Hills

covered in a carpet of fresh green, dotted with patches of forest, and a bridge over a clear stream are some of the highlights of this route.

From Laitylyngkot, there are again a few options. One can continue on the road to Pynursla, which I will not suggest at this time because of the ongoing construction. Another route from Laitylyngkot, which I usually take, is the one to Laitlum, which brings one to a hidden valley (there are in fact many such hidden valleys, with the most spectacular one located between Sohiong and Mawngap, a route I often take). From the junction that leads to Laitlum, one can take the main road and ride back to Shillong. All of this can be done within a few hours. For those who are more adventurous, they can continue riding until they reach the junction after Jongksha, where a road diverges to Nongrong. It's a descent of almost 600 metres which reveals some spectacular landscapes—a treeless grassland giving way to rich tropical forest alongside mesmerizing rice terraces and orchard-covered slopes. If one is lucky, they will find scores of pumpkins lying on the side of the road ready to be transported to the market.

At the bottom there are again two options: either continue until Umngot or climb to Nongrong. I tried reaching the bridge on the Umngot but couldn't do so because my tire got punctured. By the time I fixed it, it was getting late and I had to return to Shillong. I did climb to Nongrong, though, and stood on top of the viewpoint with my cycle, overlooking the valley where clouds come to rest in the morning. It was a most beautiful sight.

There are many other routes around the area that can be taken. Syntung is not very far, but for those who cannot ride more than 100 km a day they may have to spend the night. For stronger riders, Jowai is a good option, which is within 150 km. It took me more than 10 hours of riding and I was completely destroyed in the end. The return journey is especially grueling—over 50 km of deceptively difficult

climbs that take a heavy toll. One trip I hope to make in the future is to ride to Nartiang (an important site in Khasi history in the Jaintia Hills) and return through Mawlasnai. That would be just as challenging. Sutnga, the birthplace of Hima Sutnga—an important Khasi Hima that later became Hima Jaintiapur—is another ride I hope to do one day, especially since new roads are being built that will make the journey easier. In fact, there are many important sites related to Khasi history in the Jaintia Hills that I would like to explore someday.

For those who want to stick to 100 km, there are many options from ML05 Café. One can continue on the road to Sohra; although it is around 120 km, the ride is not very difficult. From Mawjrong, one can also take the road to Kongthong. Another option is to skip the ride to Sohra and take the road to Banium instead. From there, one can either take the road to Mawphlang, from where roads diverge towards Mawsynram and Sohiong, or continue along the Mairang-Nongstong road.

Riding to Mawsynram is an adventure because of the dismal road condition. This is where an MTB becomes the cycle of choice. The view of the deep gorges is absolutely stunning and rivals the one from Mawdok Bridge. During the rainy season, multiple waterfalls appear on the side of the road where one can wash up. But maybe the most magical moment is when clouds drift from the valley and settle on the landscape like a white blanket.

The most challenging ride, however, is the one to Mairang. There are more than half a dozen climbs which have to be negotiated to reach the town. From there one can continue to Kynshi or take a diversion to Kynlang. The road to the latter is in bad shape and, if the way is not known, one can easily get lost. To reach Kynshi, one just has to follow the main road, crossing a series of ponds where the prize money for the fishing competitions exceeds 10 lakhs. Stronger riders can also go

all the way to Markham, a well-known tourist destination. The return journey, however, is absolutely brutal; with several tough climbs, the most difficult being the one at Traw. More than the distance, it's the gradient that is challenging—more than 5 degrees for a long stretch. But the pain and fatigue are precisely what make cycling such a fascinating sport. The suffering is part of what makes it enjoyable.

Meghalaya has many top-class athletes in cycling with well-known names like Anis-a-Lamare, Titus Ch. Marak, Meban Aiboklang Suaim, and many others. They are mostly downhill riders, but I do believe that long-distance endurance races are something that the state can offer to many interested athletes. In fact, there was one race that was organized last year in Nongnah in which a friend of mine took part. I don't take part in such races because I am not strong enough, and I enjoy riding because it allows me to experience the landscape and not just fight against it. And I am sure there are many others who feel the same.

In the last few years since I have taken up cycling, I have come across many cyclists on my rides. Quite a few were foreigners. With roads improving rapidly but traffic still light, the surrounding areas of Shillong within a radius of 100 km offer great opportunities for rides. One doesn't even have to carry any food since there are numerous Kong Shops on the way, many of which are now open on Sundays as well.

The state, therefore, can be a destination for amateur cyclists who can come to Shillong, hire a bike from shops like Pro Cycling and Pedal Compass, travel to the tourist spots on a cycle, and come back on the same day. Those who are stronger can go for longer rides. Meghalaya is already being billed as a tourist destination. This could be another package that can be offered. I, for one, would be very excited about it.

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

Jaintia: A Tribe in Its Own Right

By Sajiarmiki Dhar

In recent discussions about identity in Meghalaya, one claim often appears: that the Jaintias are simply a sub-tribe of the Khasi. At first this may seem like a small issue of terminology. But words matter. The way we describe communities influences how their history and identity are understood.

For a long time, I believed that the Pnar were simply a branch of the Khasi tribe. This assumption seemed natural because administrative and political language often groups communities together under the term "Khasi-Jaintia." However, when I started reading more carefully about the history, language, and culture of the region, I realised that this common belief hides a much deeper and more complex story.

The Jaintia people are a distinct tribal community with their own history, social institutions, political traditions, and cultural practices. Within the Jaintia community there are several internal groups. One of the most prominent among them is the Pnar, who form an important cultural and linguistic subgroup of the Jaintia people. Understanding this distinction is important because it explains why many within the Jaintia community do not see themselves as a sub-tribe of the Khasi.

Like the Khasi and some other related communities living on the Meghalaya plateau, the Jaintia people belong to the Austroasiatic linguistic family. Scholars believe that this language family has its roots in mainland Southeast Asia. Linguistic and genetic studies suggest that the ancestors of Khasi and Pnar speaking peoples gradually migrated from regions around present-day Cambodia and Myanmar into the northeastern part of the Indian subcontinent many centuries ago.

This movement did not happen all at once. It was a slow migration that took place over many generations. Early communities first settled around the fertile areas of the Brahmaputra Valley and nearby foothills. Over time, some groups slowly moved further into the upland plateau that today forms the state of Meghalaya.

As these communities spread across the hills, they began to settle in different areas. Some groups occupied the western plateau, while others moved toward the eastern highlands that today form the Jaintia Hills region. Over time, these eastern settlements developed their own social structures and political organisation.

Across several centuries, networks of villages and communities in this region gradually evolved into a more organised political system that later became known as the Jaintia Kingdom. Historical records and regional traditions suggest that this kingdom connected the hill areas with parts of the surrounding plains, including regions in present-day Assam and Sylhet. Important centres such as Nartiang and Jowai became major political and cultural centres of this kingdom. These places were not only centres of governance but also hubs where trade, religious life, and social activities flourished.

Within this wider Jaintia society, the Pnar community emerged as one of the major groups living in the upland valleys of the region. Over time, Pnar settlements spread across areas that today include Lasekin, Amlarem, and Saipung. These communities also maintained connections with neighbouring regions through trade routes that linked the hills with the plains.

Historical records also show that the Jaintia Kingdom played a role in the wider politics of the region. References to Jaintia rulers can be found in the Ahom chronicles, which recorded political developments in the Brahmaputra Valley. Ahom chronicles and oral regional histories record Pnar kingdoms long before colonial classifications, located across the Assam plains between the Kupili and Kalang rivers and extending into Sylhet and Jaintiapur with organised administration, permanent settlements, and trade routes linking Tibet, Bengal and the Brahmaputra valley. When political conflicts and invasions reshaped the region between the 13th–15th centuries, Pnar rulers and clans gradually moved into eastern Meghalaya, establishing centres around Sutnga and Jowai. Early historical records also indicate the presence of the

Jaintia Kingdom in regional political affairs. According to Hiram Ring in A Grammar of Pnar, the Ahom Buranjis chronicles mention the Jaintia kingdom in the context of mutual assistance in repelling Mughal invasions during the seventeenth century. The emergence of this polity shows that the Pnar were not simply an offshoot of another group, but a community that had already established its own homeland, institutions, and historical trajectory in the eastern hills of Meghalaya.

According to linguistic scholar Anne Daladier and other researchers who study the languages of the region, Khasi and Pnar belong to a related language group but developed separately as communities settled in different geographical areas. In fact, Daladier's work argues that Pnar might have been the "central language" of the group, with Khasi branching off.

Language itself offers an important clue to understanding the identity of the Pnar and the wider Jaintia community. The Pnar language, belongs to the Austroasiatic or Mon-Khmer language family. Although it shares some similarities with Khasi and other regional languages such as War and Lyncngam, it is still clearly distinct. In fact, Khasi speakers usually cannot fully understand Pnar without learning the language.

This difference in language reflects the historical fact that these communities developed in separate directions over time, even though they share older cultural roots.

Cultural traditions also show these differences. The Pnar community preserves its own oral traditions, rituals, and festivals, which form an important part of Jaintia cultural life. One well-known example is the festival Behdeinkham, which reflects the spiritual beliefs and historical memory of the Pnar people.

Communities across the Meghalaya plateau have long preserved their own traditions, stories, and practices. While some themes may appear similar across different groups, each community has developed its own ways of interpreting these traditions. These differences in belief systems and rituals highlight the unique cultural development of the Jaintia people within the wider cultural landscape of the hills.

For this reason, many within the Jaintia community prefer not to describe their people as a sub-tribe of the Khasi. The Khasi and Jaintia peoples certainly share historical connections and may have distant common ancestry. However, historical records, linguistic evidence, and political traditions all show that the Jaintia people developed as a distinct tribal community.

Within this broader Jaintia community, the Pnar represent one important cultural group among several others that together form the wider Jaintia identity. Recognising this distinction is not about creating division or rivalry. Rather, it is about recognising historical accuracy. When communities are described carefully and respectfully, it allows each group to preserve its own history while still acknowledging shared heritage.

The history of the Meghalaya plateau is rich precisely because it contains many cultures that are connected yet distinct from one another. Understanding this diversity helps us appreciate the past of the region more clearly. History should help us understand identities more clearly, not reduce them into simplified labels. The Jaintia people are not simply an extension of another tribe. They are a community with their own history, institutions, and cultural identity. Recognising this fact does not weaken the shared heritage of the region. Instead, it strengthens our understanding of the many different threads that together shape the history of the hills.

At a time when public discussions increasingly use the term "Khasi-Jaintia," it is important to remember that administrative convenience should not blur historical realities. Recognising the Jaintia as a distinct tribe, with communities such as the Pnar within it, is therefore not merely a matter of terminology, it is a matter of respecting history and identity.

(The writer is currently pursuing M.A. in Sociology at Savitribai Phule Pune University.)

Letters to the Editor

Replace the hyphen in "Khasi-Jaintia" with "&"

Editor,
I wish to draw attention to a matter of terminology in Meghalaya's reservation policy that deserves reconsideration. Meghalaya is home to three major indigenous tribes — Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo. However, for administrative convenience, particularly in the categorisation of the State's reservation policy, the Jaintia are hyphenated with the Khasi under the term "Khasi-Jaintia."

While this may appear to be a minor technical expression, the use of the hyphen has gradually created a perception that the Jaintia are merely a sub-tribe of the Khasi. This is historically and culturally inaccurate. The Jaintia community has its own distinct identity, traditions, and rich history, just as the Khasi and Garo do. Language used in official classifications carries symbolic as well as practical significance. When two communities are joined with a hyphen, it can unintentionally suggest subordination or assimilation of one into the other. Over time, such usage risks blurring the distinct identity of the Jaintia people.

A simple corrective step would be to replace the hyphen with the symbol "&," thereby writing the category as "Khasi & Jaintia." This small but meaningful change would preserve administrative convenience while clearly recognising that the Khasi and Jaintia are two separate tribes within the same reservation category. In a state that prides itself on respecting the identity

and dignity of its indigenous communities, clarity in official terminology is important and should not be overlooked. Recognising each tribe with due respect strengthens the spirit of inclusiveness and mutual recognition that Meghalaya stands for.

I hope the concerned authorities will consider this suggestion and initiate the necessary correction in official documents and classifications.

Yours etc.,
Manpre Hame Dkhar,
Via email

Iran's Ferocious Retaliation

Editor,
The United States of America and the Israel have now become self-appointed sheriff of the global order. For 70 years, the empire pumped bullshit into the world. "We're the good guys." "We spread democracy." "We protect human rights." The fan is now spinning at maximum RPM after Iran's retaliation. And like they say, the shit has hit the ceiling and exploded it.

I hate this two-letter word INTERNATIONAL LAW; it was never meant to restrain the powerful, it was built to legitimize their power and to silence everyone else. Netanyahu has been given free reign to bomb whoever he likes, attack whenever he wants. He pointed his finger and the USA saluted and reached for its wallet. The whole rotten crew thinks human rights begin and end at Israel's border. The faces of the 165 school girls they killed are remembered. Their blood cries out from the earth. Smallest coffins are the heaviest. Before its attack, the US

had spent years trying to starve the people of Iran but the strategy failed. Why? Because it ignored the simplest of facts: that the people being abused are human beings, who will always choose freedom and dignity over degradation and subordination.

Khamenei is now a martyr characterized by his courage and loyalty to his people. He did not hide in a bunker as the cowardly Netanyahu does every time a siren goes off. Nor did the Khamenei hide for cover — he worked where he always did for his people. According to sources deep within Iran's security structure, Khamenei issued a series of classified directives in the weeks before the strike. Not panicked memos. Not desperate calls. Calm, methodical instructions on exactly what would happen when they killed him. Khamenei had built a hydra. Cut off one head, and a dozen more grow back. Every key military and government role had multiple layers of succession. Not just names on paper—actual, trained, ready-to-go replacements. The system was designed to continue operating without pause even if the entire leadership was eliminated in one blow.

What Iran Has Achieved in 10 days:

12 countries have been touched by Iranian retaliation. 30 American bases are burning or damaged, 2 THAAD systems worth billions are now scrap metal. Oil prices at \$92.69 and climbing The Strait of Hormuz effectively closed. Global shipping in cardiac arrest.

Iran is fighting a rearguard action to restore a little geopolitical sanity. If Iran loses, or the US succeeds without paying a fearsome price, God only knows where Israel

and Washington will drag the world next. The world's fate, in a real sense, is in Tehran's hands. The martyrs of the first 10 days; the 165 schoolgirls of Minab; the scientists; the commanders; the leader. They are watching. They are waiting. They are witnessing.

Yours etc.,
M.Haque,
Shillong 6

GHADC Needs Urgent Reforms; Not Just Elections

Editor,
With the elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) scheduled for next month, this moment offers an important opportunity for both the electorate and aspiring representatives to reflect on the institutional health of the council and the reforms it urgently requires.

The district councils were established under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India with the noble objective of safeguarding the customs, traditions and self-governance of the indigenous tribal communities. However, for this vision to be realised in practice, the functioning of the GHADC must evolve to become more transparent, structured and accountable.

One important reform that deserves serious consideration is the introduction of live streaming of council sessions. In an era, where transparency in governance is increasingly expected, the people of the Garo Hills should be able to witness the proceedings and debates of their elected representatives. Broadcasting the sessions would not only keep citizens informed but would

also enhance accountability and public trust in the institution.

Equally important is the need to ensure that council proceedings are conducted in a fair and orderly manner. There have been instances where the conduct of sessions appears to depend largely on the whims and fancies of the Chairman. To address this, the council should consider constituting an advisory or procedural committee that would guide the conduct of proceedings and ensure that institutional rules and democratic principles are consistently upheld.

Another significant issue that requires attention is the preservation of the cultural and social identity of the Garo people. In this regard, the Council could explore the enactment of a lineage protection law similar to that adopted by the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC). Such legislation could serve as an alternative institutional mechanism to safeguard and preserve the identity and lineage of the Garos for generations to come. This becomes particularly relevant in the present context where there has been considerable public debate and a growing demand for codification of Garo customary laws. Much of the concern expressed by the public stems from the belief that such legal measures are necessary to ensure that the identity and traditional lineage of the community remain protected.

A well codified lineage act would also help address the growing misuse of Garo identity in certain instances. There have been concerns that individuals adopt or assume Garo surnames to avail the benefits of ST reservation or to gain access to land rights that are otherwise

protected for indigenous communities. Furthermore, in a society that traditionally follows a matrilineal system, there have been cases where individuals claim Garo identity through their fathers rather than their mothers, which runs contrary to the established customary practices. Clear legal provisions defining lineage and identity would therefore help prevent such misuse while safeguarding the integrity of Garo customs and traditions.

At the same time, aspiring representatives must also reflect on the true purpose of the council. The GHADC should not be viewed merely as a political stepping stone for individuals seeking to build their profile in preparation for future legislative assembly elections. Rather, those who seek the mandate of the people must enter the council with a genuine commitment to reforming and strengthening the institution itself. The focus must be on improving governance, protecting indigenous identity and ensuring that the council fulfills the responsibilities entrusted to it.

As voters prepare to cast their ballots, it is essential that candidates present not only promises but also a clear vision for institutional reform. The upcoming elections should therefore be seen not merely as a political contest but as an opportunity to restore public confidence and improve the functioning of the GHADC.

Yours etc.,
Asher M. Marak
Via email

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"Sound is the vocabulary of nature."

— Pierre Schaeffer

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 209 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 12, 2026

GHADC Election Controversy

THE Sixth Schedule which gave birth to the autonomous district councils was essentially a form of self governance by tribals in the tribal areas of the north eastern states of Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. The primary aim is to protect tribal land and resources and prohibit the transfer of such resources to non-tribal individuals or communities. It was also to ensure that the tribal communities are not exploited or marginalized by non-tribal populations and that their cultural and social identities are preserved and promoted. The dichotomy lies in the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils), Rules 1951 which says that any person who is a permanent resident of a district is eligible to vote and contest elections to the District Council. Interestingly for the longest time this aspect was ignored because in the two councils of Khasi and Jaintia Hills, non-tribals never asserted their right to vote in the Council elections, much less to contest the elections. Even the seats reserved for non-tribals in the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly in the Khasi Hills have now gone to tribal MLAs.

Considering that the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution was enacted primarily to safeguard tribal customary practices, their traditions and more particularly their land holding system it would have been appropriate that the District Councils be run by tribals themselves for themselves. That is the reason why they are called "autonomous" meaning that they would be free to run their affairs largely based on their customary practices. Having non-tribals as Councillors would upset this arrangement which was created for minority tribes of this nation. Unfortunately those elected to the Councils from the time of their creation never bothered to read the fine print and to bring in the necessary amendments to Rules 128 (1) and 128(3) both of which define who can be a voter and who can contest elections to the District Councils. Hence the tribal leaders themselves have been remiss. The law has been correctly interpreted as defined in the 1951 Rules. The contention of the people of Garo Hills that their contestation comes from the fact that there has been substantial demographic change within the Council areas is also a serious matter, especially in the light of consistent illegal migration from across the porous borders of Bangladesh. Land is a scarce commodity and is linked to the very identity of tribals and when people migrate to a place they need land to settle on. And since land is a finite resource there are constant fears of being overwhelmed by aggressive non-tribal settlers who are largely migrants.

Meghalaya's problem has been the absence of pragmatic, visionary leaders who should have addressed these issues at the time they were included in the Rules, through proper procedural methods which is that any change in the rules must first be approved by the District Council and then receive the consent of the Governor under Rule 72 before it can come into force. That the non-tribals have been voting and contesting in the GHADC elections for decades without any glitch is not their fault but the lack of foresight of the tribal leaders.

Rock-Bottom: Meghalaya Cricket's Crisis and a Hope for Redemption

By Patrick Kurbah

When Meghalaya Cricket Association received full recognition from the BCCI in 2018, it was supposed to be the dawn of a new era. The state's cricketers, who were either playing locally or for Assam, would finally compete in their own team on the national stage. Talent would be nurtured, and the beautiful game would flourish in the hills. Instead, what followed over the years has been nothing short of a catastrophic descent into sporting irrelevance, corruption allegations, and administrative chaos that has left Meghalaya cricket gasping for survival. The numbers tell a story so brutal that it requires no embellishment.

The men's team has had a win rate of less than 14% over the last two years. This translates to the team losing roughly 4 out of every 5 games. But even this dismal figure is generous compared to what the women's team has endured: a soul-crushing win rate of below 3%, a data-point which translates to the team hardly winning any matches.

Is the team to be blamed for this poor performance? When even basic facilities of equipment and adequate practice are scarce for talented players, and when an administration feels like they are bigger than the game itself, what we finally add up to is a total systematic failure. This has been the story of Meghalaya's cricket over the years.

From Promise to Perdition

The fall has been precipitous. There was a time, not long ago, when Meghalaya showed some promise. In 2019, in the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy, Meghalaya had defeated the might of Mumbai in a T20 game, chasing down a target of 158 with 6 wickets in hand.

This our state's team achieved with players like Shreyas Iyer, Suryakumar Yadav, Shardul Thakur and Dhawal Kulkarni — who regularly feature in the Indian cricket team — playing for Mumbai. A historic feat by any regard.

The downward trajectory slowly began soon after, but some grace was still saved when the men's team earned promotion to the Elite Group of the Ranji Trophy in 2023-24, to compete with other veteran state teams. That moment should have been a springboard. Instead, it became a downfall.

The 2024-25 Elite Group campaign was nothing less than humiliation on a national scale. Seven matches played, seven losses, zero points, immediate relegation.

They didn't just lose, they were demolished, suffering defeats by innings margins five times, including an infamous thrashing by Mumbai (Innings & 456 runs), the third-biggest defeat in Ranji Trophy history.

How does a team collapse so completely after achieving promotion? How do batting line-ups get bowled out for 73, 78, 86, and 103 in a single season?

Even in the ongoing

2025-26 CK Nayudu Trophy, Jharkhand put up a score of 700, with a batsman making history scoring 400+ runs individually. In comparison, our team put up scores of 102 & 261 in the first and second innings respectively, losing by an innings and 337 runs. Again, one of the largest defeats of CK Nayudu Trophy.

The answer lies not in the talent. Meghalaya has always had cricketers with potential. The answer lies in what has rotted the system from within. The answer lies in the absolute, presumably deliberate, administrative mismanagement.

The Stench of Corruption

For years, whispers have circulated around Meghalaya cricket that must no longer be ignored. Allegations of unfair selections, where merit takes a backseat to connections and favouritism. Stories of personal vendettas played out through team and managerial selection, where talented players and experienced professionals are side-lined not because they lack skill but because they lack the right relationships.

Most disturbing are the claims of money changing hands for selection, a pay-to-play system that would be laughable if it weren't so destructive.

Beyond selection controversies, there are persistent murmurs of financial malpractices, with questions about how funds meant for player development and infrastructure have been utilized.

The high-handedness of previous administrations, operating with an iron fist that brooked no dissent or accountability, created an environment where questioning anything was career suicide for players and officials alike.

Even the electoral processes have not been free from suspicion, with allegations of malpractices in how leadership has been chosen.

Are these allegations proven? No. Because every time there is an allegation, the administration has come out in defence, instead of genuinely looking into concerns and mending their ways. Not to mention, the ones alleging are never to be found close to the cricketing fraternity soon after. However, when you look at the performance data — a men's team with a more than 75% loss rate; a women's team that is hardly given practice and training and therefore cannot win, youth development systems producing players who lose by innings defeats in Under-23 cricket — the circumstantial evidence is overwhelming and speaks for itself.

You cannot systematically destroy cricket to this extent through incompetence alone. One cannot simply say players are not capable when they have never been tried and trained for their potential sufficiently. This level of failure of Meghalaya's cricket requires conscious corruption, mismanagement, and a complete abandonment of meritocracy.

The Data Doesn't Lie

The performance analysis reveals five systemic failures: batting fragility (chronic collapses below 100), bowling inadequacy (conceding 400+ regularly while unable to defend even small totals), tactical deficiencies, youth development collapse, and competitive unreadiness. These aren't just technical failures, they're symptoms of a diseased system which has never prioritised its players.

Consider this: Meghalaya's batting average dropped 36% over five seasons. The team's group standing fell from 2nd place to dead last (8th of 8). The Ranji Trophy average win rate plummeted from 50% to 10% (not to mention 0% in the last season). The T20 win rate declined by 30% over seven seasons. These aren't fluctuations, this is freefall.

The women's team presents an even grimmer picture. Relegated from Elite Group to Plate Group after failing to win a single match. All out for 43 runs. All out for 60 runs. Losing while chasing 75. This is not cricket, this is humiliation dressed up as sport.

Enter James Sangma: Opportunity or More of the Same?

Into this toxic wasteland steps James Sangma, the new President of the Meghalaya Cricket Association. His appointment brings both hope and skepticism. Hope, because anything is better than what came before. Skepticism, because Sangma carries baggage from the old administration and, as a politician, his own share of controversies.

But here's the paradox. Sangma's political background might be exactly what Meghalaya cricket needs right now. Politics teaches you how to navigate complex power structures, how to build coalitions, how to secure resources, and how to get things done in bureaucratic systems. If Sangma can channel his political acumen and network towards cleaning up the Meghalaya Cricket Association, he could be the catalyst for transformation.

This is his chance. When you're at rock bottom, the only direction is up. Every small improvement will be visible. Every honest selection will be noticed. Every rupee properly spent on player development will show results.

A Strategy Is Not As Complicated

First, the administrative dirt must be cleaned. Transparent financial audits. Merit-based selection committees with accountability. Follow the all rules laid out, constitutionally, legally and administratively. Clear performance metrics for coaches and administrators. An end to the culture of fear and favouritism that has poisoned the association.

Second, invest in talent development. Meghalaya has always had cricketers with raw ability. What they lack is proper coaching, infrastructure, competitive exposure,

and a pathway to progress based purely on performance. The state needs specialised coaches, modern training facilities, sports science support, and most critically, an environment where talent is rewarded, not connections.

Third, restore credibility through results. The new administration must set realistic targets because change takes time. Win 30-35% of matches in the first year, 40% in the second. Build from the Plate Group back to Elite, not through luck but through systematic improvement. Give the women's team resources, support, practice games and a genuine chance to compete.

Fourth, transparency. Every selection, every financial decision, every administrative appointment must be open to scrutiny. Publish detailed annual reports. Make MCA answerable to the public and to the players whose lives it affects. Decisions must not be arbitrary, person or position based. It needs to be collective and in the best interest of the association.

The Last Chance

James Sangma has inherited a cricket association that some have treated as a money-making opportunity rather than a sporting institution. Previous administrations allegedly operated with an oppressive hand, crushing dissent and accountability in equal measure. The new leadership must decisively break from this past.

If Sangma uses this opportunity to genuinely reform MCA, to put cricket and cricketers first, to build systems based on merit rather than money or connections, he could transform his political legacy. He could be remembered not just as another politician who headed a sports body, but as the person who saved Meghalaya cricket from complete extinction.

But if this becomes business as usual — if selections remain opaque, if funds continue to mysteriously vanish, if talent continues to be ignored in favour of those who pay or please — then Sangma will preside over the final death throes of competitive cricket in Meghalaya.

The talent exists. The desire exists. The infrastructure can be built. What has been missing is honest, accountable leadership that actually cares about the game more than about what they can extract from it.

After years of oppressive mismanagement, a breath of fresh air was desperately needed. That air has arrived. Whether it revives the patient or merely postpones the inevitable depends entirely on whether this new administration has the courage to be different, to be better, to be what Meghalaya cricket deserves.

The clock is ticking. The data is damning. The opportunity is now. Rock bottom is where we are. The only question is, do we have what it takes to climb back up? Or will Meghalaya's cricket ultimately die a painful death?

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

Nitish Kumar's Exit: The Quiet Coup in Bihar

By Rajdeep Sardesai

"I allied with the BJP of Vajpayee ji which believed in constitutional values. As a secular leader, I cannot be part of a BJP led by Narendra Modi which wants to win votes by creating a Hindu-Muslim divide." Nitish Kumar in June 2013 after breaking his alliance with the BJP.

"When I started my political career, I had a desire to become a member of both Houses of the state legislature as well as both Houses of 'Parliament.' Nitish Kumar in March 2026 after announcing his decision to enter the Rajya Sabha.

Thirteen years is a long time in Indian politics. In this period, the descent of Nitish Kumar from being seen as a potential challenger to Modi a decade ago to now being pushed into a Marg Darshak Mandal-like 'retirement home' in a Modi-centric political universe exemplifies the dramatic power and ideological shift in which the secular-communal vocabulary no longer carries any moral weight.

In the winter of 2005, a soft-spoken engineer-turned-politician from Bakhtapur took charge of a state widely dismissed as India's symbol of political decay. Over the next two decades, Nitish Kumar would reinvent Bihar's politics and, even more impressively, reinvent himself multiple times to stay in power. Few leaders in contemporary India have switched alliances as often and survived. Yet the latest twist in the Nitish Kumar saga may finally signal the end of that remarkable exercise in political gymnastics.

The manner in which he has been nudged towards the Rajya Sabha and away from Patna's power corridors marks the quietest of exits for a man who dominated Bihar politics for nearly twenty years. More importantly, it underlines how decisively the balance of power within the ruling coalition has shifted in the age of Narendra Modi.

For the Bharatiya Janata Party, Bihar has long been unfinished business. Despite its national dominance, the party never quite managed to control the state on its own terms, largely because the BJP could never shake off its upper caste image in a 'Mandalised' political milieu. As a symbol of backward caste assertion, Nitish Kumar was both an asset and a limitation: a credible governance-focused ally who expanded the coalition's social base, but also a regional leader whose stature prevented the BJP from fully claiming the political space.

Over time, however, the numbers began to change. Election after election, the BJP's vote share in Bihar crept upward. The party that once played junior partner to Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) gradually emerged as the bigger force within the alliance. The 2020 assembly election was the turning point: the BJP won significantly more seats than the JD(U), even though Nitish Kumar continued as chief minister. From that moment, the equation had shifted.

For the BJP leadership, the long-term objective was clear—turn Bihar into a state where the party could eventually stand on its own feet. But removing Nitish Kumar abruptly was politically risky. His support amongst Extremely Backward Castes (EBCs) and women were crucial to guaranteeing a sweeping election victory in November 2025. When Nitish teamed up with his original Mandal co-traveller Lalu Prasad in 2015, the BJP was pushed to the margins.

Now, by gently easing Nitish Kumar into the Rajya Sabha—a dignified but largely peripheral role in state politics—the BJP achieves two goals simultaneously. It paves the way for the BJP to dominate Bihar's power structure while avoiding the spectacle of a messy exit.

In effect, it resembles a soft political coup.

Such manoeuvres are hardly new in Indian politics. Leaders who outlive their strategic usefulness are often offered graceful exits—governorships, parliamentary positions or advisory roles.

But the Bihar episode carries a wider significance because it reflects the operating style of the BJP under Narendra Modi and Amit Shah.

The party today functions as a highly centralised electoral machine anchored in a powerful national leadership. Regional allies are welcome, even necessary at times. But they are rarely treated as permanent stakeholders in power.

Instead, alliances tend to follow a predictable arc. First comes partnership. Then comes organisational expansion by the larger party. Eventually, when the balance of power shifts, the partner is quietly edged aside. From the Assam Gano Parishad in Assam to Shiv Sena in Maharashtra and the Maharashtra Gomantak Party in Goa, the BJP has exploited and then diminished regional parties for its own growth.

Nitish Kumar's Janata Dal (United) illustrates this pattern. Ironically, he once believed he could outmanoeuvre the BJP in this game of thrones, breaking with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance on more than one occasion.

Each move reinforced his reputation as Indian politics' ultimate survivor. But constant realignment also came with a cost: trust gradually eroded on all sides. By the time he rejoined the NDA most recently, the BJP leadership seemed less interested in accommodating him and more focused on managing him. And management, in politics, often precedes marginalisation. Having won the 2025 elections riding on the Nitish leadership brand, the BJP believes it no longer needs an ageing leader with serious health concerns.

The larger question now is what message this sends to other allies within the ruling coalition. Today's NDA includes powerful regional players—from Chandrababu Naidu in Andhra Pradesh to AIADMK in poll-bound Tamil Nadu and other smaller but strategically important partners across the country. Many of them are vital for parliamentary arithmetic. Yet they also understand that the BJP's long-term ambition is to grow at the expense of its allies wherever possible. That creates an uneasy equilibrium.

For regional leaders, aligning with the BJP offers immediate advantages: access to the political authority of the central government and the formidable electoral machinery that accompanies it. And more contentiously, protection from enforcement action by central agencies. But it also carries an inherent risk—that the alliance may gradually shrink their own political space. Nitish Kumar is simply the latest illustration of this "use and expand" strategy.

But beyond the electoral arithmetic lies a larger political moment. For two decades, Nitish Kumar represented a model of regional leadership that could negotiate with national parties from a position of strength. His exit from Bihar's political stage via the Rajya Sabha, symbolises the fading of that era.

In today's politics, the centre of gravity has clearly shifted toward the national party with the bigger machine, the deeper resources and the stronger central leadership. Which is why, Nitish Kumar's quiet relocation to Delhi will not just be the retirement of a veteran chief minister. It is only another reminder that in the BJP's power calculus, alliances are useful—but rarely permanent.

And in the end, even the most seasoned survivors can find themselves gently shown the door.

Post-script: No one has summed up Nitish Kumar's amoral politics of serial betrayals and compromise better than the late Sankarshan Thakur, a celebrated chronicler of contemporary Bihar. "Where once his politics evoked a call to conscience, in the end his conscience was on call," wrote Thakur. Tragic but true.

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

Letters to the Editor

Unlawful Act of Mawkhar group(Non Presbyterian)

Editor,
I wish to draw your attention to a serious matter concerning the recent circulation of the names and signatures of the members of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church(Synod Sepngi) by a rebellious group that has dissociated itself from the Presbyterian denomination and does not belong to any Synod till date.

It has come to my notice that this group has publicly displayed and circulated the names and signatures of the Mawkhar Presbyterian Church members on the notice board and on their WhatsApp, accompanied by defamatory remarks. This act amounts to a breach of confidentiality, falling under section 72 of the Information Technology Act, 2000 as well as relevant provision of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) related to unauthorized disclosure of personal information.

The unauthorized sharing of signatures poses a grave security risk as such information can be misused for

fraudulent purposes. To illustrate this - consider a situation where a member who is in the list loses a cheque book; an ill-intentioned person could easily forge the signature by referring to the circulated list, leading to serious theft under Section 66C of the IT Act.

Through this letter, I strongly urge the members of the said rebellious group to refrain from engaging in such irresponsible and unethical behaviour in the future. Before sharing or publishing any personal information of individuals they should seek proper legal guidance, as such actions may expose them to legal consequences under the relevant laws of the country.

Yours etc.,
Tony Anderson,
Via email

Internet Curfew in Garo Hills

Editor,
The recent imposition of a 48-hour internet suspension and a 24-hour curfew in West Garo Hills serves as a grim reminder of our communication vulnerability. While the state government's intent is to curb misinformation, the collateral damage is a total information

vacuum for the common citizen. In times of civil unrest or "internet curfews", the digital divide becomes a dangerous chasm. This is exactly why the shutdown of The North Eastern Service (NES) Of Akashvani on shortwave radio was a strategic error.

As I have argued in these columns before, shortwave radio is "un-killable" by local administrative orders. It does not require a tower in the immediate vicinity or a data packet, it only requires a simple radio receiver and a signal from a distant radio transmitter. If NES were still active on shortwave radio, residents in the Garo Hills, even those in the most remote "shadow zones" where FM radio signals cannot reach, would still have access to verified news and official instructions, regardless of whether their mobile data was cut off.

The passing of our Lok Sabha Member of Parliament (MP), the late Dr. Ricky Andrew J. Syngkon, has left a void in this advocacy, but the situation in West Garo Hills proves that his support for regional shortwave radio was not just about nostalgia, it was about emergency resilience. I urge, Prasar Bharati and the Ministry of Information and

Broadcasting to look at the silence in Garo Hills today and realise that "Digital India" must be backed by "Analogue Resilience". It is time to restore regional Akashvani shortwave radio transmitters before the next crisis leaves us in the dark again.

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh
Lawai,
Via email

The Silent Invasion; Illegal Immigration & Threat to Indigenous Autonomy

Editor,
For decades, the misty hills of Meghalaya have been more than just a geographical marvel; they have been a constitutional sanctuary for the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo people. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution, these lands were designated as "Autonomous," ensuring that the indigenous tribes would remain the masters of their own destiny. However, today, a "Silent Invasion" is unfolding—one that threatens to turn the 6th Schedule into

a hollow shell and the indigenous people into a minority in their own ancestral home.

Unlike a traditional conflict, this invasion does not happen overnight. It is a slow, steady demographic shift driven by unchecked illegal immigration across porous borders. From the plain belts of the Garo Hills to the mining hubs of Jaintia and the urban corridors of the Khasi Hills, the presence of illegal settlers is no longer a mere suspicion; it is a visible reality. This influx is not just an administrative failure; it is a direct assault on Indigenous Autonomy.

The primary fuel for this silent invasion is political greed. For years, certain politicians have viewed illegal immigrants not as a threat to national security, but as a loyal "vote bank." By providing administrative protection and including these settlers in electoral rolls, politicians trade the long-term survival of the tribal community for a five-year term in power.

When a politician protects an illegal settler for a vote, they are effectively selling a piece of the 6th Schedule. This "vote-bank" culture has given outsiders the "guts" to challenge tribal authority, as seen in recent clashes in Garo

The Autonomous District

Councils (KHADC, JHADC, and GHADC) were created to protect tribal land, language, and customary laws. They are not mere municipalities. The future of Meghalaya depends on the balance between modern administrative needs and the preservation of ancestral traditions. Protecting the autonomy of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo people involves more than just policy; it requires a collective respect for the unique cultural landscape of the region. By upholding the spirit of the Sixth Schedule and ensuring that local institutions remain focused on tribal welfare, the state can address demographic concerns through peaceful, constitutional means.

Ensuring that indigenous voices remain central to the decision-making processes in their traditional lands is the most effective way to honour the social and historical commitments made to the tribal communities of the Northeast.

Yours etc.,
H.Umdor,
Shillong-8

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“Liberty, when it begins to take root, is a plant of rapid growth.”
— George Washington

The Shillong Times
Vol No: LXVIII No.210 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 13, 2026

Systems, individuals

MORAL strength is superior to the rights that individuals and institutions hold under a Constitution. This is more so with those holding high offices such as the elected leaders. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has extricated himself from a no-confidence motion against him in Parliament and is back in his august chair. With the treasury benches having a clear majority in the lower house, the defeat of the opposition motion was only to be expected. Yet, it raised an accusing finger against the Speaker. This was a rare scenario in Parliament. Those who have occupied the Speaker's chair in the past conducted themselves with dignity and carried both sides with them. Tackling uproarious situations in Parliament, or even state assemblies, is not an easy task. The Watch and Ward would step in occasionally to even physically remove agitated members. The intention is to maintain the decorum and normalcy of the respective houses.

The task for the Speaker was easy in the last parliament, when the Opposition voice had been decimated to a whimper due to their abysmally low strength in the Lok Sabha. The Congress party as the principal opposition could not rightfully claim the Leader of Opposition status at one time due to their lack of sufficient numbers in the Lok Sabha. This time, however, in the last two years of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third consecutive term, the Congress party itself has substantially increased its strength. This gave Leader of Opposition Rahul Gandhi the platform to hold forth on various issues with more vigour. So with his attempted speech in February, relating to the memoirs written by former army chief MM Naravane. The Speaker's rejection of permission for the Leader of Opposition to speak on this sensitive subject led to the introduction of the no-trust motion against him. Allegations were that the Speaker went out of his way and sought to protect the Prime Minister and Defence Minister, against whom some critical references were made by Naravane in his "unpublished" book. In such serious matters, the nation and the Parliament have a right to know.

It should be the concern of every government in a democracy to zealously uphold the dignity of the systems and the positions that public representatives hold. Om Birla has caused embarrassment. Notably, in another instance, in August last, the Chief Election Commissioner came under a cloud vis-à-vis some of his actions. Gyaneshi Kumar faced a test of his credibility and has not acquitted himself in a laudable manner. The Opposition in Parliament had accused him of election fraud, including tacit support to the ruling BJP for electoral malpractices in Bihar as also Karnataka and elsewhere. The irregularities in electoral rolls invited sharp comments against the CEC from the Supreme Court, which famously was seen as a "rap on his knuckles." Worse, he showed the audacity to dub criticism against him as a criticism against the Indian Constitution! The Opposition had attempted an impeachment motion against him in Parliament, but did not proceed with that due to lack of sufficient numbers. These, thus, are testing times.

Letters to the Editor

Nonchalant attitude of the Management of Meghalaya Police Public School

Editor,
As a rejoinder to what Dr Batskhem Myrboh had written in these columns (ST March 9, 2026) on "Problems faced by students in the Meghalaya Police Public School, I would also like to reiterate similar concerns. After discussing and making further enquiries, it has been brought to light that there are serious issues that need to be addressed by the Management of the school. Apart from what Dr Myrboh had mentioned, there are still some more subjects which do not have any teachers. Class 1 does not have an EVS teacher nor is anyone teaching the students Arts and Craft. Till date, no one has taught English literature to the Class 2 students. Also, due to the shortage of teachers, many of the classes are left unattended. Students at the junior level are at an impressionable age and leaving out important subjects due to a dearth of teachers cannot be accepted. This lackadaisical attitude on the part of the Management needs to be checked. As

parents, we urge the management to be accountable by addressing the problems at the earliest. Once again we applaud the teachers for their tireless efforts in taking the extra mile for the students in the school.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

War for Petro-Dollar dominance

Editor,
Apropos of the editorial "War hurting life" (ST 11th March 2026), people seem to get this conflict completely wrong. When they watch the news, they think the war is between Iran and Israel. They think the battlefield is in Gaza or Lebanon or in Israeli soil. And yes, those are active fronts and real places where real fighting is happening. But they are not the main events. The real battlefield, the one that actually matters in the grand scheme of things, is the Gulf. Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait. These are places that matter most in this conflict and most people do not even realize it. They are critical nodes of the global financial system. They are the infrastructure of the petrodollar. The oil they produce, the money they generate, the

The world today is in chaos like never before. Social media has added to the pandemonium with news coming to us by the minute. No one really knows what news is credible and what isn't. The India television media and news portals can hardly be trusted to give us accurate news of the war in the Middle East. Most are peddling news that suit the Indian establishment. While LPG gas is going low and small businesses have stopped functioning owing to non-availability of commercial LPG cylinders the Prime Minister keeps assuring us Indians that everything is under control and we need not panic. Why, is it that even at this critical juncture the Prime Minister is not giving a press conference where media persons can ask pointed questions about India's position on this war and why India, formerly a non-aligned nation is now siding with Israel a country that has carried out genocide in Palestine? Many argue that Hamas started the war with their attack on Israel in October 2023. The reason? Palestinians were fighting against Israeli military occupation of Palestinian territories and its hunger for more land. The occupation of the West Bank and Gaza began with the Six Day War of June 1967. They still are under Israeli occupation.

The inequities of the past have led to the rivalries of the present and the emergence of Islamist terror groups whose belief is that if they are too weak to fight a just war and if the world order doesn't pay attention to their concerns then they have to launch a different kind of surreptitious warfare. In the Middle East today the war is about Islam versus Zionism. Islamic terror has spread worldwide and some countries are known to aid and abet such terror. The precision attack by the US which killed Osama Bin Laden at his Pakistan hideout dealt a body blow to Islamic terror but we have not seen the last of it. In an unequal world terrorism seems to thrive to overcome the inequities seemingly dealt out by the forces of democracy.

Ironically, the country calling itself the world's superpower which believes it is the only custodian of democratic principles, long after they have been dismantled brick by brick, has in the present case teamed up with a dictator who sees himself as the sole warden of the Middle-Eastern Countries.

World in a Tailspin and the Garo Hills Erupts

By Patricia Mukhim

That India too has in many unspoken gestures such as the Prime Minister accepting an award from Israel two days before the country launched a full-fledged war against Iran, becoming an ally of the US and Israel is what the world assumes. Back home there was a similar inferno in the Garo Hills over what is a matter that has been left unattended since 1951. People in conflict situations seem to enjoy seeing buildings going up in flames. The cost of rebuilding these structures will finally come from the taxpayers' pockets if such buildings are for commercial use. What is really at the

So where does that leave the GHADC election or even the KHADC and JHADC for that matter. Both these Councils too have not amended the above act. The only saving grace is that permanent non-tribals residents in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills have not asserted their rights to vote in the Council elections and much less to contest such elections. They know the fall-out only too well. After the violence of 1979 and the years following it which saw several non-tribals being uprooted from their hearts and homes and many leaving the state for good, no one really wants to assert their constitutional right. They

"The inequities of the past have led to the rivalries of the present and the emergence of Islamist terror groups whose belief is that if they are too weak to fight a just war and if the world order doesn't pay attention to their concerns then they have to launch a different kind of surreptitious warfare. In the Middle East today the war is about Islam versus Zionism. Islamic terror has spread worldwide and some countries are known to aid and abet such terror. The precision attack by the US which killed Osama Bin Laden at his Pakistan hideout dealt a body blow to Islamic terror but we have not seen the last of it."

heart of the matter and is the protest by groups against the filing of nominations to the Garo Hills District Council election, legitimate? Not if one goes by the existing legal framework governing Autonomous District Councils under the Sixth Schedule and the election rules framed in 1951. According to these rules non-tribals who are permanent residents of an area within the Council and whose names are in the electoral rolls as voters to the state assembly are also able to vote and even contest elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC). This happened because the law never clearly restricted the franchise only to Scheduled Tribes in Garo Hills.

The Meghalaya High Court has upheld the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951 and stated upfront that unless this rule is duly amended by the Councils and ratified by the Governor it cannot be wished away.

have decided to live and let live. Even the seats reserved for non-tribals in the state legislature have now gone to tribal MLAs.

The question to ask today is - what have the state leaders done to ensure that the Sixth Schedule remains a protective mechanism for tribal customary practices and their land holding systems. Despite the many flaws in the customary land holding practices, the fact is that even if land is alienated it continues to be held by fellow tribals. Today the capture of land by elite tribals threatens to turn large swathes of tribals in the rural outback into a landless class. But there is as yet no movement against such injustices perpetrated by fellow tribals on their disempowered brethren. The District Councils have existed since 1951 but have the Councils really worked to uplift the tribal population by putting an embargo on the transfer of community land to individuals thereby turning Ri Raid into Ri Kynti? The Siyems or Nokmas often

in their personal capacity and not vide the decision of the Dorbar-in Council continue to do this on the plea that they are the real custodians of community land. The question therefore is whether the District Councils are asserting their rights to defend the powerless and landless tribal?

Having said that, the Sixth Schedule which was created to specifically protect the rights of the tribals who were then under the rule of the Assam Government where tribals were a minority, it would have been prescient for the tribal leaders then to foresee that the District Council was exclusively a tribal institution meant to protect their customary practices but more than that their land rights so that the same rules applied for land acquisition in non-tribal areas are not adopted in scheduled areas. It's intriguing that someone like JJM Nichols Roy or later Capt Williamson Sangma the first chief minister of Meghalaya did not detect these flagrant loopholes in the 1951 election to District Council rules. Or did they leave the rules untouched because sections of non-tribals were their dedicated voters during the legislative assembly elections and so they did not want to stir the hornet's nest?

Well, after decades this ominous disregard for the Rules which now allows a non-tribal to contest an election to a Council designed specifically to uplift and defend tribal interests, has come to haunt us. If the non-tribals have been in the voters' list of the GHADC since 1952, how do they become outliers without the 1951 rules being amended? Asking the non-tribal voter and candidate for a Schedule Tribe certificate at this juncture too is non-sequitur. If non-tribals have been on the voters' list since the council's inception and some non-tribals have even served as Members of District Council (MDCs) in the past then what were the tribal leaders who made loud claims about protecting the land and identity of the tribes doing? Why were they sleep-walking for so many decades? This gap between constitutional intent (tribal protection) and actual electoral rules is what lies at the heart of the present controversy in Garo Hills. The earlier this is addressed constitutionally and not through violent upheavals the better it is for all concerned. Violence pays very short-term dividends.

Protecting Children From The Menace of Digital Pollution

By Salil Gewali

"If Australia can ban mobile phone use among children, why can't India?" This has become quite a fervent question on the lips of countless parents these days. Those who truly understand how the human mind works, especially amid constant sensory surges triggered by "digital stimuli", are now steeped in regret. They genuinely do not wish their children to be affected by harmful virtual influencers. There is an overwhelming flood of YouTube influencers with millions of followers, who stoop too low to make quick money. In fact, the lure of monetisation has auctioned off their conscience to whoever pays most.

What is painfully obvious is that the wrong kind of celebrity influence holds sway in the virtual world. The concern is that our children and youth are too drawn to copy

gkneng a few months ago. She took her own life after her parents did not allow her to use a mobile phone. The incident sent a chill down the spines of the people of Meghalaya. Should we not learn from this tragedy? What's more, in Tripura, a class nine student had killed his mother, younger sister, grandfather, and a neighbour after his mother denied him her smartphone. Does it not clearly show that an "intense desire" for something can drive even a child to commit such a horrendous crime? What if this boy were not obsessed with mobile use? He would not at all be driven to this terrifying madness.

I do not wish to brush aside the horrifying incident in Nongrah. A 13-year-old boy deliberately pushed a 4-year-old girl into a pond and killed her. Was this tragic act not linked to the

"What is painfully obvious is that the wrong kind of celebrity influence holds sway in the virtual world. The concern is that our children and youth are too drawn to copy them. This fact is reflected strongly in the kinds of reels they post with any remorse to social media platforms. To attract more eyeballs or to make their posts go viral, they adopt tactics that are often unmentionable. Spicing content with vulgarity has become their common practice. They are so lost in the habit that they practically fail to distinguish between right and wrong."

them. This fact is reflected strongly in the kinds of reels they post with any remorse to social media platforms. To attract more eyeballs or to make their posts go viral, they adopt tactics that are often unmentionable. Spicing content with vulgarity has become their common practice. They are so lost in the habit that they practically fail to distinguish between right and wrong.

Frankly speaking, how do we have the right to blame our children now? Why did we allow them to use smartphones without restriction in the first place? Was it not the responsibility of parents to be watchful so that the children do not fall into bad habits? Moreover, why did we fail to realise that an unchecked habit, like an untamed pet, would bite back?

No wonder that when we, as parents, try to speak gently about their indul-

boy's exposure to obscene content on a smartphone? Sadly, no one has raised a voice in support of banning such content to safeguard our younger generation. Is this not the grim reality of modern society? Nevertheless, I think we, too, partly bear responsibility for drowning society in grief.

Thankfully, at least people in Australia have awakened. They have consistently raised their voices against the menace of "digital pollution". As a result, a serious study was undertaken. I believe what the experts on the island continent finally revealed should also be an eye-opener for the global population. They observed that excessive mobile use among children leads to diminished mental focus, distorted thought patterns, growing anxiety, depression, loss of memory, emotional balance and much more. Will Mark Zuckerberg, Elon

"One concerned teacher laments that a child who watches cartoons at an early age can be drawn into "addictive games" or filthy content as soon as they turn ten or eleven. Once they get a taste of such content, it becomes almost impossible for parents to put the brakes on mobile use because the child is already enslaved by the device. If a parent somehow tries to stop them, the reaction can be shockingly extreme."

gences, the children turn their anger on us. Why does this happen? Just look at the widening distance between children and parents these days. Notice their growing preference for isolation. They shut themselves in their rooms and stay up with their handsets until the early hours of the morning. Has it not become dangerous, not just for them, but for the family as a whole? It is, in fact, a threat to society at large.

One concerned teacher laments that a child who watches cartoons at an early age can be drawn into "addictive games" or filthy content as soon as they turn ten or eleven. Once they get a taste of such content, it becomes almost impossible for parents to put the brakes on mobile use because the child is already enslaved by the device. If a parent somehow tries to stop them, the reaction can be shockingly extreme: Some may even think of committing suicide.

It is indeed very difficult to erase from our memory a tragic incident involving a young girl from Mawryn-

Musk, and Sundar Pichai agree to this?

I daresay, it is not just children who are enslaved to mobiles; adults are too. With addiction, many of us have lost the ability to feel inner peace, and we tend to lose our cool at the drop of a hat. My friend, about fifty, is so fidgety that he can't sit still until he checks every few minutes how many likes his recent post has received. This "syndrome" is a new sickness, an addiction as bad as drugs.

Imagine if adults' minds can be corrupted by dopamine kicks from digital scrolling, what will become of our tender children? What future awaits them? Yes, unless we judiciously restrict children's digital consumption from an early age, educate parents to raise awareness, and create strong societal safeguards, future generations may be pushed into the gutter. Whether one agrees or not, the human "subconscious mind" hugs filth and frivolities more quickly and more passionately than pearls of wisdom.

Ensure mandatory presence of emergency-trained doctors and nurses at all times.

Install defibrillators, oxygen support, cardiac monitors, and basic ICU facilities in every CHC.

Strengthen ambulance networks and rapid referral systems to reduce delays during emergencies.

Conduct regular emergency response training including CPR and cardiac life support for healthcare staff.

Establish strict monitoring and accountability systems to ensure doctors and equipment are available.

Strengthen linkages between CHCs, district hospitals, and tertiary care centres.

Healthcare is not a luxury — it is a fundamental right. The loss of even a single life due to preventable gaps in emergency care is unacceptable. This tragic incident must not pass as just another headline. It must become a turning point for urgent reforms in Meghalaya's healthcare system.

"No life should be lost because a hospital was unprepared."

Yours etc.,
Dr OS Jyrcw,
Via email

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it exposes the fragility of dollar dominance and accelerates experiments with alternative currencies. The petrodollar is less as collapse, more as erosion and transition in a multipolar world.

Yours etc:
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

Emergency HealthCare in Meghalaya

Editor,
The tragic loss of a life after a sudden cardiac arrest exposes the dangerous gaps in emergency healthcare services in Meghalaya. The unfortunate and deeply saddening incident that occurred on the evening of 19/02/2026 has once again exposed the fragile and inadequate state of our healthcare system in Meghalaya.

Our sitting Member of Parliament (L) Dr Ricky A.J Syngkon, suffered a severe cardiac arrest while playing football at a local futsal ground. In a desperate attempt to save his life, he was rushed to the nearest health facility — Mawiong Community Health Centre (CHC). However, due to poor infrastructure, lack of emergency equipment, and absence of doctors on duty, immediate life-saving treatment and revival could not

be provided. Precious golden minutes were lost.

He was then shifted to H. Gordon Roberts Hospital, where despite sincere and dedicated efforts by the medical team, he could not be revived. This tragic loss is not just a personal or political loss — it is a wake-up call for the entire state.

If such a situation can happen to a public representative, one can only imagine the plight of ordinary citizens living in rural and semi-urban areas who depend entirely on government health centres during emergencies.

This incident exposes serious loopholes in our healthcare system:

- Many CHCs and PHCs lack functional emergency care units and cardiac response systems.

- Shortage and absence of doctors and trained emergency staff, especially during evening hours.

- Lack of basic life-saving equipment such as defibrillators, oxygen support systems, and cardiac monitors.

- Delayed ambulance and referral systems, causing loss of the critical golden hour.

- Inadequate emergency preparedness for cardiac arrest, trauma, and sudden medical crises.

Immediate steps that must be taken:

- Upgrade all CHCs and major PHCs into fully functional 24x7 emergency cen-

*"All change is not growth,
as all movement is not forward."*

— Ellen Glasgow

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.211 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 2026

Whither CM's Advisers

AS per the Constitution (Ninety First Amendment) Act 2003, the total number of Ministers, including the Chief Minister, in the Council of Ministers in a State shall not exceed fifteen percent of the total number of members of the Legislative Assembly of that State: Provided that the number of Ministers, including Chief Minister in a State shall not be less than twelve. Ever since that amendment, Meghalaya has had to cut down its ministerial berth to 12 but political appointments with ministerial statuses continued. In the past the Meghalaya cabinet was top heavy with as many as 20-25 ministers without any visible results of their work. Meghalaya is infamous for its coalition governments where each of the supporting parties would want ministers appointed from their party. The same continues to date except that the word 'minister' has given way to "Advisers to the Chief Minister." Considering that the CM has nine advisers the question to ask is what are they advising him on.

These advisers are supposed to be on their toes to take stock of the situation in the state and to warn the Chief Minister of any possible law and order fall-out and to give advance warning to diffuse the situation through pre-emptive action. The Chief Minister is burdened with more than he can handle. The advisers are paid to assist him with prior information on a host of issues. But it would appear that these 'Advisers' only enjoy their statuses and perks without delivering anything substantial. Considering that each of these advisers are paid from the public exchequer it is time to seek accountability from them and to ask them to publicly inform the voters how they have contributed towards improving the governance system. It is common to hear remarks that the Meghalaya Chief Minister has "many advisers but gets no advice." The public perception is that the quality of decision-making and policy direction often does not reflect the benefit of expert counsel. In the present NPP-led government advisers have been appointed in different sectors—ranging from finance and political affairs to infrastructure and development. The primary role of advisers is to provide policy inputs, help anticipate problems, and bring specialised knowledge into governance. They can also act as a bridge between government and civil society stakeholders, business groups and local communities. But that can happen if the advisers possess expertise in their respective fields. For instance, an adviser in the Education Department should be an academician with experience considering Meghalaya's abysmal performance in the education sector. But do we have such an expert guiding the Education Department?

Also, what is lacking is transparency. Advisers rarely have clearly defined responsibilities that are publicly known. The public therefore finds it difficult to see how their advice translates into better policy outcomes. If the Chief Minister needs so many advisers in every sector of governance, then what is the bureaucracy there for? If advisers simply duplicate what the bureaucracy already does—or if their recommendations are not formally integrated into the decision-making process—their presence adds little value. It only burdens the public exchequer. Also, if policies are reactive rather than strategic, the existence of multiple advisers serves no purpose. An effective advisory team should provide evidence-based policy recommendations, and long-term planning. But in Meghalaya advisers have become a symbol of political patronage rather than good governance. Time for the public to question this unnecessary level of governance.

Recognition and realisation of the reality and truth of the indigenous faiths of Meghalaya

By Hammarsing L Kharhmar

On December 12th 2025, the Union Cabinet chaired by Prime Minister Modi, approved the proposal for conducting the Census of India 2027. The census, a decennial exercise, was not conducted in 2021 due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The last nationwide census was released in 2011. Fifteen years have since passed and there is great anticipation for Census 2027. A census provides important data on a number of critical fields such as population, demography changes, representation and socio-economic conditions, to name a few. It is a crucial for policy making and planning. Our country has the second largest population in the world, but it is the world's largest democracy. Therefore, it is imperative that up-to-date figures and statistics be available, both at the macro and micro level.

The 2027 census will be the first to be conducted in digital mode. It will also be the first time since 1931 that a comprehensive Caste census will be conducted. The new census is predicted to bring massive change in political and social spheres. India is arguably the most diverse country in the world with myriad diverse cultures that have co-existed over millennia, apart from being home to the largest number of religions in the world. It is in this particular field that the real figures of the Population by Religion in Meghalaya is important, more specifically the percentage of the Indigenous Faiths which in 2011, was only 8.7%.

Other religions & persuasions

The 2011 census was a great wake up call to all, especially to leaders and members of indigenous faith organisations like the Seng Khasi and Seif Raij. Many were aware of the decline in numbers, but the actual scale of the departure from indigenous faith was not known. To add to the dismay, Niam Khasi Niamtre & Songsarek were listed yet again as "Other Religions & Persuasions" in the Population by Religion table. This has been the norm since 1991, despite the oldest and most prominent indigenous faith organisations repeatedly requesting that unique recognition be granted for census purposes.

Necessary changes and updates must be made to census 2027. The digital mode in which it will be conducted will hopefully bring a more foolproof system. The 2011 census and the ones before

That were collected the old fashioned way, with enumerators going from door to door, and writing down on paper the information they were given by the respondents. It has been expressed by several adherents of Niam Khasi Niamtre that their faith was not known to the enumerators. I sincerely hope that this time around, adequate workshops and training sessions will be conducted much beforehand, to properly brief and sensitise the census takers or self enumerators. The exercise, to be conducted in phases, is set to begin in May 2026.

Niam Khasi, Niamtre
In the 'Census of India 2011

Household Schedule' (which is downloadable from the Census of India website), there were 29 sections or questionnaires. In this form which was used to collect household data nationwide, Q7 was the column dedicated to the religion of the household. At the top "Write name of the religion in full" was printed and below that there was another instruction that read "For other religions, write name of the religion in full but do not give any code number." At the very bottom of the column, there were only six religions listed: Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Sikh, Buddhist, Jain. The absence of Niam Khasi Niamtre in the form and the alleged lack of awareness of the enumerators, might have led to errors in the collection of very sensitive and important data.

A number of Niam Khasi Niamtre members who recall the census collection of 2011, have described how despite telling the enumerator the name of their faith, the relevant section was entered as "Non Christian". It has been reported that when collecting data on religion, especially in rural areas, the enumerator would ask "Phi lah long Niam ne em?" (Do you belong to any religion?) This is a unique yet insensitive way of asking "Are you a Christian?" If a person answered in the negative, there is a high possibility the enumerator would have listed them down as "Non Christian". There was also confusion among the indigenous faith concerning the nomenclature to be given. All of the above may have led to inaccuracies in census data. Most worryingly, some have even recollected that a pencil and not a pen was used to make the entry. I would like to assume that these irregularities stem from a lack of proper briefing and training. This time around I am sure certain irregularities, if any would not be repeated.

It must be stated that things have also changed substantially since 2011. There is massive awareness and a strong resurgence of pride within the indigenous faith communities. I know for a fact that most of the youth in particular are very firm about their identity as "Niam Khasi Niamtre". Niam Khasi translates as "Religion of the Khasi" while "Niamtre" means "Indigenous Faith". Together, in keeping with the unique tradition of words having collocates or complements, "Niam Khasi Niamtre" evokes Oneness and preserves the sanctity of Indianness. For, it is a deep faith with unique and diverse practices, which is why we often hear the words "Kawel ka Niam, Shibun ki Rukom" (One Faith, Many Ways).

Love thyself, respect others

The Indigenous Faith population in 1991 was 16.82%, which declined steadily down to 11.52% in 2001 and then further down to 8.71% in 2011. The process actually began post independence. It is not a secret that for many tribal communities, in the North East and even across the country, embracing

Christianity is seen as a form of upgradation and a necessary path to progress in the modern world. To the Christian majority of the state, religion and culture are separate. There is no doubt that global religions like Christianity (the largest in the world) have contributed immensely in the field of education, health care and social reform to tribal societies. In recent years, Islam has brought increasing numbers of indigenous people into their fold. The Khasi Muslim population is a prime example. It remains yet to be seen if there will be any loss of culture or identity for those who have embraced Islam, here.

Over the last decade and a half, there has been a growing fear that the indigenous faiths might get subsumed into the Hindutva fold that is perceived and projected widely here as a colonial juggernaut, aimed at uprooting the indigenous belief systems. A deep worry is injected regularly despite the fact that the only conversions that have happened and continue to happen, are to Christianity and Islam. Nevertheless, it is a fact that some units of indigenous faith organisations have relations with groups that are dedicated to keeping alive the cultures and religions that have evolved and developed in this sub continent, for over thousands of years. Sangh Parivar affiliates like the Akhil Bharati Vanvasi Kalyan Ashram have helped immensely in setting up rural schools and the Seva Bharati has done outstanding work in distributing medical aid and supplies to the poorest of the poor regardless of religion. These are the same activities that missionaries conduct. The only difference is there is no conversion, either before or after. That being said, it is very important that the indigenous faith organisations and all their adherents continue to build upon their internal strength, without over dependence on anyone or any organisation.

Indigenous affairs department

The Indigenous Faiths of Meghalaya, despite being religious minorities within the state are not recognised by the Ministry of Minority Affairs, Government of India, which provides scholarships and conducts welfare programs, specifically for Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains and Parsis. As of today Niam Khasi Niamtre & Songsarek are not even recognised officially by the state government. This must change immediately, at least at the state level. The members of the indigenous faith communities must not hesitate to demand that some scales be balanced. In this regard, I strongly believe that a 'Department of Indigenous Affairs' is the need of the hour in Meghalaya.

This new branch can help create scholarships, grants and schemes specifically for indigenous faith students and educational institutions run by organisations like the Seng Khasi Seif Raij. It can also help maintain and nurture heritage sites, many of which are left uncared for. In many traditional states, the

heads of governance and clan leaders are finding it difficult to build sacred centres of both administrative and spiritual significance, such as the Iing Sad, Iung Blai, Iing Lyngdoh etc. The Department can oversee the planning and construction of these much needed traditional meeting places and encourage development of vernacular architectural forms.

Indigenous festivals can be supported directly, with emphasis on maintaining their essence, whilst also encouraging movement with the times. Elders who are keepers of indigenous spiritual wisdom and medicinal practices can be aided and assisted through special schemes developed by the department. In addition, there can also be Centres of Indigenous Learning (Shlem Hikai Tynrai) that can be set up across the state, which will impart training and workshops not only on traditional dances and music, but also on the significance and the meaning of these unique forms of expression. Through these centres there can also be exchange programs with other indigenous communities that have kept alive their spiritual ancestral beliefs.

Resilience and resurgence.

8.7% is a very low number and if the decline were to continue the indigenous faith community would disappear within the next decade. However, if one were to analyse the population figures solely for the Khasi Jaintia region, the Niam Khasi Niamtre population is actually around 17% percent. Unfortunately, in the Garo Hills, the Songsarek numbers have plummeted exponentially since statehood. On the contrary, in these hills, the Seng Khasi, Seif Raij and Seng Khlhlang and other indigenous faith units, have accomplished a great deal. The intense storms that threatened to completely deracinate the spiritual roots of the land have been weathered. The last ten years in particular have seen a massive resurgence. Many are being awakened to the wisdom and beauty of their heritage. The world is also looking deeper within and the indigenous communities that have kept intact, the sacred link that connects culture and faith, are now being revered. Even so, many will still firmly say that religion does not affect culture and that indigenous culture will survive even if indigenous faiths were to disappear, citing examples from across the region and even the world. However, to the Niam Khasi Niamtre, religion and culture are deeply connected, and this must be respected. Indigenous faiths have existed alongside other beliefs since the dawn of man, rooted in a belief that all paths lead to God. Despite this universality in outlook, they continue to disappear across the world. It is only in our country that there is great hope for survival and growth.

An accurate census and an Indigenous Affairs Department of Meghalaya is a right that must not be fought for. It is a necessity, long overdue. (This article is based on figures drawn from Statistical Handbook Meghalaya 2025 & Statistical Abstract Meghalaya 2023).

Teaching the World Cricket..!

By Robert Clements

India won. Not in kabaddi. Not in gilli danda. Not in kabaddi or kho kho, where our childhood training would have given us a natural advantage. No. India won in cricket. We defeated New Zealand. A few days earlier we had comfortably brushed aside England. The television commentators spoke with the careful politeness of people who are trying not to sound too surprised. But the rest of us were not surprised at all. We were sitting comfortably on our sofas saying, "Of course we won."

And that is where the comedy of history begins. Because cricket, in case we have conveniently forgotten, is a colonial game. It did not originate in the lanes of Kanpur or the maidans of Mumbai. It arrived here with the British along with railways, woollen trousers, stiff collars, and the curious habit of drinking tea at four o'clock in the afternoon as if the fate of civilisation, depended on it.

The British brought cricket with great seriousness. They believed it built character, it taught discipline, fairness, and gentlemanly conduct. They played it in their clubs while the rest of us watched from outside the fence and wondered why grown men were wearing white clothes to roll a red ball around a field for five days.

But Indians are wonderfully practical people.

We did not waste time arguing about colonialism while standing on the boundary line. We simply watched carefully, understood the rules, and quietly started playing the game ourselves.

And then something remarkable happened. We improved it.

The British played straight drives with elegance and dignity. Indians added wristy flicks that sent the ball racing to the boundary like it had urgent business elsewhere. The British believed in classical batting. Indians invented the reverse sweep, which looks suspiciously like a man who has suddenly realised he is holding the bat the wrong way but decides to continue anyway.

And then there is our national speciality. Arguing with umpires.

No country in the world debates an umpire's decision with such passion, creativity, and historical references. A simple LBW appeal in India can become a philosophical discussion about angles, destiny, and the moral rights of the batsman.

But somewhere along the way we became masters of the game.

Today the inventors of cricket sit in commentary boxes explaining Indian batting techniques with scholarly seriousness while Indian batsmen send their bowlers searching for the ball in the stands.

It is a beautiful thing to watch. Which makes one wonder. If we can do this with cricket, why stop there?

Why not beat them at courtsey?

Because if we are honest with ourselves, courtsey is not currently our national strength. Once upon a time visitors to India wrote long letters home describing how polite Indians were. Today visitors write about

traffic.

And honking. In India the horn is not merely a device attached to a vehicle. It is a philosophical instrument used to express emotion. Drivers honk to say hello, goodbye, move aside, wake up, hurry up, and occasionally simply because the horn works.

Then there are queues. Queues in India are fascinating social experiments. Stand patiently in a line for five minutes and watch human creativity unfold. Within a short time someone will quietly appear from nowhere and slide into the front as smoothly as a magician producing a rabbit from a hat.

If challenged, the person will look deeply offended and say, "I was always here."

Always here. Possibly since the Indus Valley civilisation. But imagine a different India.

Imagine drivers stopping patiently at pedestrian crossings. Imagine people waiting calmly in queues without attempting to overtake the entire population. Imagine citizens who do not treat public walls as personal spittoons.

Foreign tourists would faint from shock.

And why stop there? Why not beat the world at democracy, justice, and fairness?

Not by shouting louder than everyone else. The world already has enough shouting. What it needs is an example. Cricket teaches a simple lesson.

You do not win matches by reminding the opposition that your ancestors once played magnificent cricket in the year 3000 BC. No batsman walks onto the field and announces that his great grandfather once played a glorious cover drive against a coconut tree.

The bowler would remove his stumps in about three seconds.

Cricket is wonderfully practical. You win by scoring runs today. You win by fielding well today. You win by behaving like a team today.

And that may be the real lesson from these cricket victories. Our cricketers did not spend their time complaining about where the game came from. Our politicians are quick to pull down anything colonial. But here, our cricketers learned it, practised it, improved it, and then quietly became better than the people who invented it.

There is something wonderfully Indian about that.

Take something foreign. Understand it.

Improve it. And then defeat the original owners.

Which is why perhaps cricket is not just a game.

It is a national philosophy. And if we can master colonial cricket so brilliantly, there is absolutely no reason why we cannot master colonial courtesy, democracy, fairness, and good manners as well.

After all, if we can teach the world cricket, teaching the world how to go back to good colonial habits like how to behave should be quite easy...

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

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya cricket needs competitive exposure beyond Administrative Reform

Editor,

The article "Rock-Bottom: Meghalaya Cricket's Crisis and a Hope for Redemption" by Patrick Kurbah (ST March 13, 2026) rightly exposes the alarming decline of cricket in Meghalaya since the state gained full recognition from the Board of Control for Cricket in India in 2018. The statistics presented—particularly the men's team losing nearly four out of every five matches and the women's team struggling to register even a single win—are deeply troubling and reflect systemic issues that go beyond just player performance.

While administrative reforms, transparency, and merit-based selections are indeed critical, another important dimension that deserves attention is the lack of a strong competitive cricket culture within the state.

Historically, Indian cricket has thrived on a vibrant

ecosystem of local tournaments played throughout the year. In many states, community-based tournaments using the traditional deuce ball format—such as Muslim League, Hindu League, or neighbourhood club competitions—have existed for decades. While these tournaments may begin with community affiliations, the competition eventually becomes open and intense, with players from different backgrounds competing regularly. This constant exposure to competitive cricket produces resilient players capable of performing at the national level.

Unfortunately, Meghalaya does not have such a widespread cricketing ecosystem. Due to climatic conditions, the state effectively has only seven to eight months of playable cricket each year, as heavy rains dominate the remaining months. Within this limited window, opportunities for open competitive cricket are extremely scarce.

At present, the Shillong Cricket League organised by the Shillong Cricket Association during the winter months remains the primary organised competition. Beyond this, only a handful of

local tournaments are held, many of which are structured along restrictive community lines. For example, certain tournaments permit only one non-tribal player in a team, while others allow a limited number of non-tribal players but impose further restrictions—such as preventing them from being players from higher divisions. In some competitions, only tribal players are allowed to represent higher divisions.

While community tournaments are part of local sporting culture and should be respected, excessively restrictive participation rules inevitably limit the level of competition. When the player pool is artificially restricted, teams are unable to field the strongest possible combinations, and players lose the opportunity to compete against the best talent available.

Competitive sport thrives on merit, diversity of talent, and constant high-level competition. If young cricketers in Meghalaya rarely face strong opposition within the state, it becomes extremely difficult for them to suddenly compete against established teams from cricketing powerhouses such as Mumbai or Jharkhand in national

tournaments like the Ranji Trophy or the Syed Mushtaq Ali Trophy.

Another major concern is the lack of "Open-to-All" deuce ball tournaments throughout the year. In many cricketing states, local clubs organise open tournaments where any player can participate irrespective of background. These competitions often attract talented players from different districts and divisions, raising the overall standard of play. Meghalaya urgently needs such tournaments to create a wider and more competitive talent pool.

If the state is serious about rebuilding its cricketing future, several steps are necessary:

First, encourage open inter-district and open-club tournaments where participation is based purely on ability.

Second, increase the number of competitive matches played within the limited dry months.

Third, ensure that promising players regularly face stronger opposition, even if it means inviting teams from neighbouring states.

Fourth, build a cricketing culture where players are constantly competing at

higher standards rather than within restricted circles.

Administrative reform within the Meghalaya Cricket Association is undoubtedly necessary, but cricketing ecosystems are built from the grassroots upward. Without a robust competitive structure at the local level, even the most talented players will struggle to bridge the enormous gap between local cricket and national-level domestic tournaments.

Meghalaya has passionate cricketers and enthusiastic fans. What it lacks is a truly competitive cricketing environment that allows talent to flourish without artificial limitations.

Unless these structural issues are addressed alongside administrative reforms, the gap between Meghalaya and established domestic teams will unfortunately continue to widen.

Yours faithfully,
Peter Kharsyntiew,
Shillong – 4

Back to square one!

Editor,

The recent announcement by the State government to retain the status quo on the Job Reservation Policy has

indubitably caused much heartburn among the unemployed tribal youth. This was affirmed by the MDA 2.0 led government on February 25th, 2026. This has by and large come as a wake up call to the people of the Hynniewtrep clan at large, who have been keenly speculating for a refreshingly new Job Reservation Policy after more than fifty years of its framing. However, their hope has belied all expectations!

From the very start of the protest when Ardent Basawiamoit resorted to indefinite fast a few years ago in the vicinity of the Additional Secretariat for a fresh review of the extant job-reservation architecture I had the hunch that the then huge public support would end up nowhere given the fact that the Garo Committees would never, come what may, decrease their share of 40% Job Reservation nor would our Government allow the Hynniewtrep schedule tribes to hike their prevalent share of 40% attributed to them as laid down in the Meghalaya's 1972 Job Reservation Policy. Basawiamoit was, reportedly in favour of increasing the current Reservation for the Khasi-Jaintia communities from 40% to

47% without derailing the quota of 40% as assigned to Garo tribes, but the same was flatly rejected by the Government.

Hence the result of any further agitation on this premise may end up in a zero sum game! Right from the inception of Meghalaya in 1972 the quota of Job Reservation amongst the Garos vis-a-vis the Hynniewtrep tribes had metaphorically become 'a die that is cast' and there is no question of turning back, come hell or high water.

Readers may recall that in one of my letters appearing in these columns, entitled, 'Lum Shyllong blunder' (ST May 12, 2022), I had squarely laid the liability on our then Hynniewtrep elected MLAs/social leaders for not leveraging even a semblance of dissension over the framework of this Reservation Policy when it was at its drafting stage, which would have telling ramifications on their incoming generations. Furthermore, I had expressly maintained that the said Reservation regimen has turned out to be a fault-line among the major tribes of our State, and the same will sustain as an abiding benchmark hereinafter. Hence, I had

opined, by citing cogent and practical rationales, that the only viable option could be the bifurcation of Meghalaya into Achik and Hynniewtrep states respectively. Such a structural split could prove to be a boon for both the tribes in the long run as people from Garo Hills will not need to take arduous journey to the State's Capital, Shillong for their mandatory-driven official/personal exigencies as they will have their State capital in Tura. Hence, it shall be a win-win situation for the Garo vis-a-vis the Hynniewtrep people in particular and for all and sundry in general.

To put it in a nutshell, the sense of being separated from our Garo brethren with whom we have been closely knitted in association for more than half a century, the resultant effects could be heart-wrenching! Nevertheless, desperate necessities, need desperate demands.

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

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

Strong contenders for Best Picture Oscars: Here's which film should win

Film critics – myself included – love to bemoan the death of high-quality cinema in the age of streaming, pointing to mediocre Best Picture Oscar nominees as evidence that the production of great (or even good) films is on the wane.

But perhaps things are changing. Are people sick of being inundated with short videos on TikTok and YouTube, and once again hankering for a cinematic experience? The quality of this year's nominees suggests they are.

For the first time in a while, most of the nominated films are excellent – and nearly all of them are watchable.

My top pick: *Sentimental Value*

Joachim Trier's *Sentimental Value* is my pick for the Best Picture Oscar. It's the kind of meticulously crafted film in which the naturalism seems effortless.

The narrative follows acclaimed filmmaker Gustav Borg (Stellan Skarsgård), a quintessential Euro-auteur, who comes back into the lives of his estranged daughters Nora (Renate Reinsve) and Agnes (Inga Isdottir Lilleaas) following their mother's death.

Gustav is making a new film, and wants his daughter Nora – an acclaimed theatre actress who has her own demons to battle (stage fright among them) – to star in it.

Nora assumes it's a cynical manoeuvre for funding on her father's part and refuses. So Gustav casts American star Rachel Kemp (Elle Fanning) instead, who is immediately out of her depth.

The drama unfolds around the family home in Oslo, interweaving narratives of the home's history across generations with the tensions plaguing its current inhabitants.

Sentimental Value has a strikingly lyrical quality. Some may say it's overdone, but every element is so perfectly executed that it doesn't come across as pretentious or laboured. It is, in many respects, thoroughly sentimental – yet never feels like it's performing this as some kind of effect.

Despite its considerable formal and narrative complexity, it plays in a starkly simple fashion, thanks to the light touch of Trier, coupled with stunning cinematography by Kasper

Tuxen Andersen.

The lead performances by Reinsve, Lilleaas and Skarsgård are extraordinarily convincing and, perhaps more surprisingly, Fanning is awesome as the uncomfortable American trying to please the European artist.

Sentimental Value brilliantly weaves a sense of European social and cultural history with carefully observed character moments, becoming, by the end, a kind of treatise on the affirmative potential of art to transcend and transform interpersonal barriers.

Despite the difficulties of life, the detritus of broken promises and hearts, and the disappointments minor and not so minor, we can still come together – beautifully and wholeheartedly – through the practice of that abstract dream that is called art.

Other excellent contenders

There are a few other strong contenders – films which, any other year, would have stood out above the pack.

Bugonia

Yorgos Lanthimos is one of the most acclaimed filmmakers of the past decade, and yet his films have been hit and miss. After his last great film, the 2015 black comedy *The Lobster*, *Bugonia* marks a return to form.

The film follows bumbling paranoiac conspiracy nut Teddy (Jesse Plemons) as he and his half-witted cousin Don (Aidan Delbis) kidnap Michelle Fuller (Emma Stone), the CEO of pharmaceutical company Auxolth.

Fuller is the kind of ruthless business leader who appears on the cover of *Forbes* magazine with the caption "Breaking Barriers" and who spouts endless nonsense about diversity while her company wreaks havoc on the planet and the people around them.

According to Teddy, she is also an "Andromedon" alien sent to Earth to enslave and exploit the human population, bringing death to humans as it has been brought to the bees.

The brilliance of the film largely revolves around its manipulation of our identification with the two leads. At times Teddy seems like a lunatic serial killer, and Fuller a heroic victim.

At times we empathise with Teddy, while Fuller looks like a manipulative, cold-hearted sociopath.

The whole thing builds up to an immensely satisfying resolution, suitably nihilistic and absurd in equal measure.

As is often the case with Lanthimos' films, the figures are caricatured, but the comedic timing – and the oscillation between humour and

Their cousin Sammie (Miles Catton), a cotton picker and bluesman – with Charley Patton's guitar – steals the show at the hugely successful opening night, fulfilling the legend of a musician who can play so well the barriers between the living and the dead come down. Everything seems to be going well – until some redneck vampires decide to assail the venue.

The whole thing is rather gaudy and

into the mix. But it's well worth its more than two-hour runtime.

Marty Supreme

It would be hard to think of a stupider premise for a movie. In the 1950s, fast-talking entrepreneurial New York hustler Marty Mauser (Timothée Chalamet) has to raise money so he can make it to Japan to beat world number one Koto Endo (Koto Kawaguchi) in the table tennis showdown of the century.

Yet, director/co-writer Josh Safdie treats the premise with enough seriousness that we end up with a high-octane sports film to rival *Rocky IV*. This is helped by the stunning cinematography by Darius Khondji. Shot on 35mm film, the images have a rich colour and texture rarely matched in digital cinematography.

There's also a dynamite score from Daniel Lopatin, and an anachronistic soundtrack featuring several stellar 1980s pop tunes from the likes of Public Image Limited, New Order and Tears for Fears, to name a few.

Despite Marty's arrogance, sweet-talking, womanising, con-artistry and generally bad behaviour, Chalamet invests the character with enough pathos and humour that he comes across as a thoroughly loveable – or at least likeable – rogue.

He is a crackpot whose self-belief and willingness to do anything to achieve his dream tricks the viewer into becoming equally invested in his absurd quest as he (and the film) bounce around New York and the world like a bright ping pong ball.

Marty Supreme is an odd – and oddly arresting – film capturing something of the madness at the heart of the American dream. Mauser does whatever he can to make it to Japan. And after several escapades – and some downright brutal scenes featuring cult director Abel Ferrara as an ageing gangster – he does make it.

The rest

Unusually for the Oscars, the pack of 2026 nominees is rounded out by several other good films.

Although not as good as some of his other films, such as *Neighbouring Sounds* (2012) and *Bacurau* (2019), Brazilian director Kleber Mendonça Filho's *The Secret Agent* is a rollick-

ing political thriller. Set in the 1970s, it features a standout performance by Wagner Moura as a dissident academic evading persecution from a brutal dictatorship.

Paul Thomas Anderson's *One Battle After Another* is a wacky comedy occasionally masquerading as a serious political action thriller. It follows the burnt out leftist Pat Calhoun (Leonardo DiCaprio) as, with his daughter Willa (Chase Infiniti), he evades capture by police and a militia led by the moronic Steven J. Lockjaw (Sean Penn). The whole thing is pretty silly, but like its inspiration – Thomas Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland* – it is fun nonetheless.

F1 is likewise good. This finely wrought-racing flick follows all of the delightfully dumb clichés of the genre. Hard-boiled and burnt-out old timer Sonny Hayes (Brad Pitt) makes it to Formula One for the first time, and contends with a new era of racing epitomised by his nemesis, the brash young gun Joshua Pearce (Damson Idris).

It's hard to imagine such a film being nominated for Best Picture in any other era; Tony Scott's *Days of Thunder* (1990) is equally stupid, but better made, and has been universally lampooned by critics.

However, people seem to be craving (and appreciating) big-screen popcorn films in an era where streaming and second-screen viewing has all but destroyed commercial narrative cinema.

Only three nominees

stick out as dreary
Clint Bentley's *Train Dreams* is an earnest but visually unappealing Netflix film, following a ho-hum period love story about class, racism and the American Dream.

In *Frankenstein*, director Guillermo del Toro takes one of the duller, more proselytising novels in the Gothic canon and gives it a suitably ponderous treatment.

It is difficult to treat *Hamnet* – the unbearably pretentious latest film from director Chloe Zhao – seriously, because the filmmakers do it for you. (*The Conversation*)

[Authored by Ari Mattes, Lecturer in Communications and Media, University of Notre Dame Australia]



discomfort for the viewer – is spot on, so it works.

Sinners

Ryan Coogler's *Sinners* is a great yarn: a well-executed rock 'n' roll fable slash vampire siege, full of electrifying music.

It's 1932. Twin gangster brothers Smoke and Stack (a dual role played by Michael B. Jordan) return from working for Al Capone in Chicago to Clarksdale, Mississippi, to open up a juke joint.

silly. But like its forebear *From Dusk Till Dawn* (1996) – it's so energetically (and pleurably) handled that it doesn't matter.

Michael B. Jordan is brilliant in the two roles, and the end result is a muscular, satisfying film that feels like a good pulp novel or comic book – capped off with a Buddy Guy jam session in the final moments.

Sinners is a delicious dream. It's unlikely to win Best Picture; there was a time, not so long ago, when this kind of genre film wouldn't have made it

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 15, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Saturn on your solar return chart and it will provide exceptional results. You will find solution to the most difficult problems with the cooperation of your colleagues. You will also make progress in your job. Your self-confidence will be high. And you will be much loved. You will also work on improving your relations with everyone. You will make difficult tasks look easy with the help of your willpower. You will also socialize a lot. Those in politics and media will get lot of name and fame. Your meeting with an important person will prove meaningful. Your romantic life is filled with colours and joy. You will come close to your mate. Senior officials will be pleased and satisfied with your work. Your influence in society will increase. You will be busy with your work. Your health will remain perfect.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is a very satisfying week. Your dignity will be high. You will make progress in your job. Your business will flourish and prosper. Your work will gain momentum. Your task will be completed quickly and smoothly. Your peers and bosses will support you. This is the time to enjoy quality time with your friends. You will also become busy with fun and entertaining activities. You will have financial gains. You will achieve victory over your enemies. You will take decisions with your intelligence and patience. Students will spend their time learning something new. You will complete all your tasks with cooperation of colleagues.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is a peaceful week. You will be successful in completing all your tasks before their due dates. You will also receive inspiration for new tasks. You will have new ideas and they will get executed. Your financial position is going to be good. And you will be busy shopping. Some pleasant encounter can lead to a romantic affair leading to marriage. The atmosphere at home will be good. You will be tense about your children's future, but you need to take it easy. There will be joy and cheer in family ties. There will be betterment in your destiny. You will be interested in your work and religion. You will be relaxed all the time. Your bosses will support you a lot.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will have a favorable week. Your dreams will get fulfilled and you will get your desired things. There will be an atmosphere of bliss and joy all around in your family. Your creative capabilities will prove your imaginative skills to everyone. Talking to several people will be fruitful for your business. You will also behave well with others. You will also spare time for your family and have fun, relaxation and entertainment. You will feel happy and receive profits. You will listen to people's problems and try to help them. You will implement new ideas to expand your business. You will also buy new things for your household. With your attention and concentration something positive will come out for you.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) Your earnings will rise. But your expenses too will increase. During this time your health will be in better condition. But you will have to tackle problems even at your workplace. You will do well in your business/job without any troubles. You will have fun shopping. The latter part of the week is going to be wonderful. There will be a miraculous change to your behavior and personality problems that had been going on for a long time will get resolved. Despite several attempts your enemies will not be able to cause any harm to you. You will have good time with your brothers. You will also enjoy wonderful bonding with your mate. Your bosses will expect a lot from you. You may receive and set some tough targets for yourself.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) It is an extremely fruitful week. You will make progress in your job. You will receive materialistic pleasure. You will also give importance to your favorite tasks. You will also make plans to visit your closed ones. Your financial position will get better. Those who are in jobs will get bonus. You will also make plans to repair or renovate your house. You will have good romantic life. Your partner will be a source of pleasure for you. You will also get your money back that was given to someone. You will spend this time leisurely. You will also spend this time on fun and entertainment. You will share burden of your work well. The time will be spent swiftly. You will be in a comfortable position. Your financial situation will become stable. You will share happiness and joy with your friends.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) You will be full of fun and excitement this week. You will be able to fulfill your desires. You will also spend your time with your loved ones. In order to reduce the pressure and stress of your job, you may take a short break to visit some picnic spot near you. You will also be able to fulfill

your wishes. These are extremely favorable days. The star of your destiny will start sparkling. You will also get a promotion in your job. You will be ahead of others in terms of knowledge. You will keep working hard. Your health will get better. You will meet people nicely and carry out your duties well. You will be ready to accept any kind of challenge. And rise to the occasion.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It is a wonderful week for you. You will have favorable days. You will manage to keep your family happy and fulfill their material needs. Your physical health will be very good. You will also try to keep your bosses and colleagues satisfied with your hard work and dedication. You will have good financial gains. You will also keep a positive approach towards life. Your work will get done with ease. You will also be able to get your official work done by running here and there. Your business deals will be successful. You can buy some gifts for your dear ones. Youth/students will be on the lookout for various alternatives in careers. Beware of interfering in other people's matters. You will also perform some noble deeds.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) You will work with a lot of dedication and bring about a betterment in your work. You will be inclined towards spirituality too. This will bring you happiness and spiritual peace. You will also bring about a betterment in your work. And you will not rest till your work is complete. You will also enjoy good relationship with your partner. And you will spend quality time with your family. Love mates will have a wonderful time. You will have the desire to move ahead in life. You will also be good at making contacts with people. Students will achieve success through their hard work. They will get admission in college/institute of their choice. Small problems will keep cropping up in your mind. Your hands will remain tied in monetary matters. Your work related to land and building will be completed.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It is going to be an exceptional week in all aspects. You will have financial gains. You will also spend it with open hands. Your time will be spent happily. You also need to keep your anger under control. You will work with lot of dedication and your image in the eyes of others will improve. Spring will return to the life of married people. You will also do a tour of nearby places. You will also decorate your house. Love mates will have an amazing time. You will share good bonding with your mate. You will get sudden gains. Your efforts will also bear fruit. You will meet people with the same thinking. You will also remain busy with sports and entertainment. You need to be careful about your diet. You will be tired of hard work.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) A dispute that has been going on for a long time will get resolved. You will undertake a business journey with gains. Your popularity will rise at your workplace. You will be appreciated for your contributions in society and workplace. Your opponents will be active but will not be able to face you. You will fulfill your family responsibility very well. The time is in your favor. You will also receive money that was struck somewhere. You will also develop close affinity with a person known to you. You will also enhance your knowledge. It is time to make efforts for your dreams and ambitions. The atmosphere at home will improve. You will seek new alternatives in business.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) The beginning of the week will start with money inflow. Couples will have cordial relations. Those who are single will plan to get married. The family will receive some good news. You will also be able to establish yourself in office with your hard work. There will be plans to expand your business. Your financial position is good. There will be peaceful atmosphere and calmness at home. Everyone will take advice from you. You will have a feeling of dedication. Your career struggle will come to an end. You will be successful. Your boss will be happy with your performance. Do not let your objective get out of sight. It may affect your earnings. You will get success in your work. You will face opposing things with confidence.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) All your worries will be over. Your boss will adopt a helpful attitude towards you. He will praise your work, and you will become enthusiastic about it. Your meetings with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you. Your romantic life is going to be good. You could be promoted in your job. Your days will be spent on earnings money. If you control your extravagance, you will be able to save good amounts and can invest. You will feel like going on a pilgrimage with your family. You will get much needed emotional support. Your time will be spent on reading knowledge enhancing literature. You will remain healthy and fit.

What is the 'acid rain' in the wake of US bombings in Iran?

Reports are emerging of black rain falling over parts of Iran in the hours after US-Israeli airstrikes on oil depots on the weekend, with some outlets describing it as "acid rain".

Iranian residents have reported headaches, difficulty breathing, and oil-contaminated rain settling on buildings and cars. Iran's Red Crescent Society warned rainfall following the strikes could be "highly dangerous and acidic."

As an atmospheric chemist and chemical engineer who researches air pollution, these reports are very worrying, and indicate much more than just acid rain.

This rain would include acids but also likely a host of other pollutants that are harmful to humans and the environment in the short and long term. It may even be worse than the term "acid rain" conveys.

More broadly, the thick clouds of toxic smoke over densely populated areas in Iran are also a major problem for anyone breathing this air right now.

What could this 'acid rain' be?

One of the primary ways air pollutants are removed from the atmosphere is through rain. When you have significant levels of pollutants in air they will be collected by falling water droplets and "rain out" of the atmosphere.

That's why we are getting these reports of black rain falling from the sky after the oil depots were struck – evidence of just how contaminated the local air must be.

To me, this black rain indicates toxic pollutants such as hydrocarbons, ultrafine particles known as PM2.5, and carcinogenic compounds called polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAHs) have made their way into the rain.

On top of this there would be a mix of other unknown chemicals, likely including heavy metals and inorganic compounds from the building materials and everything else caught up in the initial explosions and the ensuing fires. The smoke from the bombed oil depots would also contain sulfur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, which are precursors to forming sulfuric acid and nitric acid in the air. This acid then makes its way into water droplets, and is responsible for what we conventionally label acid rain.

The acid rain we heard so much about in past decades was primarily caused by sulfur dioxide produced by burning fossil fuels. Sulfur is naturally present in crude oil but is now mostly removed at the refining stage.

Aside from the rain, it's worth remembering that all smoke is toxic; if you can smell it, it can be at

levels that are harming you.

So that level of black smoke seen over densely populated areas in Iran is extremely worrying and can cause chronic short- and long-term health problems.

What are the potential health risks?

In the short term, people exposed to this black smoke in Iran might have headaches or difficulty breathing, especially if they have asthma or lung disease.

Vulnerable populations – such as older people, young children and people with disabilities – are more at risk. Exposure to toxic air pollution during pregnancy can also lead to lower birth weights.

In the longer term, exposure to the compounds in the air and in this black rain is potentially increasing people's cancer risk. When ultrafine particles (PM2.5) are inhaled, they can get into your bloodstream. This has been linked to a range of health impacts including cancers, neurological conditions (such as cognitive impairment), and various cardiovascular conditions.

Once these heavily polluted plumes of air have their pollutants rained into natural waterways, they can also start to affect aquatic life, as well as human drinking water sources.

Another issue is that this black rain is depositing these compounds on buildings, roads and surfaces, which means they can make their way back into the air when disturbed by strong winds.

A legacy of war

There has been growing attention on the environmental impact of conflict worldwide. Part of this has emerged in the wake of past wars in Iraq and Kuwait, where there was large-scale deconstruction of oil wells and the use of burn pits. We now know there are long-term health impacts on returning service people, including Australians. So we can assume local populations are also profoundly affected.

In the short term, people exposed to this smoke and black rain in Iran should try to wear masks or face coverings, seek refuge from it, stay indoors, close doors and windows, and try to keep the air out. It is also important to clean hard surfaces where possible, particularly indoors, to reduce exposure to deposited pollutants.

On the ground, of course, this may be very difficult to achieve in the chaos of war. (*The Conversation*)

[Authored by Gabriel da Silva, Associate Professor of Chemical Engineering, The University of Melbourne]



"Great works are performed not by strength but by perseverance."

—Samuel Johnson

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 213 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 16, 2026

Season of polls

THE bugle has been sounded for assembly polls in five states – Assam, West Bengal, Puducherry, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. The fate of incumbent governments and aspiring opposition parties hangs in the balance – even while a frenetic election campaign participated by top national and regional leaders is underway – till the time the counting takes place on May 4 and results of all the five states are declared at one go. The sense of suspense lasting nearly two months is the beauty of democracy. This, even as the leadership profiles of various national and regional parties hardly inspires people in general. For the people, whoever wins makes little difference. Politicians across the spectrum are corrupt and loudmouths without stuff but they are able to carry the people with them.

Notably, the BJP may stand a chance to win only Assam among the five states up for polls. Bengal under the charismatic leadership of Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamool Congress has proven again and again that other political parties – the BJP, the Congress and the CPIM – do not stand a chance at outwitting Banerjee, the people's leader. She stands with the people and is not given to showing off, unlike most other politicians of the day. Tamil Nadu is also a no-go area for the BJP for most part. It has tried and tested several leaders, some of them from the Dravidian stable, but they could not challenge the DMK in the past elections. When Jayalithaa led the AIADMK, it had a name and fame, and the BJP too basked under her glory. Now, AIADMK is led by faceless leaders, and some of them have crossed over to the DMK to be in greener pastures. Kerala remains a Left bastion. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan managed to retain power for himself and the left in the last assembly polls, granting the Left a steady uninterrupted 10 years in power. This time, chances are that the anti-incumbency factor would work against the CPI-M led LDF while the Congress is waiting in the wings to grab power. In Kerala too, the BJP is in a weak position. It has no representatives in the state assembly but would likely get a few seats.

In this round of polls, the Congress has hope principally in Kerala, but there too the problem is that it is a divided house. CM-aspirants are one too many; and they are seeking to undercut each other. This is the reason why Rahul Gandhi, in one of his recent public addresses in the state, advised his party leaders to "dance together" and not dance solo, if they intended to win power in the state. The Left is flushed with funds. Funds for the BJP would flow like water from Delhi to all the election-bound states, as has been the case. The Congress, having power only in a few states, is handicapped by funds for a full-fledged campaign anywhere. The Election Commission's special cell that spreads its dragnet in all election-bound territories and announces a few seizures of "unaccounted" cash transportation cases – for election campaign or other purposes – is a damp squib.

Prospect of Commercialisation of Sadhiar

By H H Mohrmen

dhiaar as a commercial product while ensuring that its ritual importance is safeguarded. Discussions centred on hygiene standards, improved production methods, branding, regulatory requirements, and market positioning.

A Drink Rooted in Community Life

For the Jaintia community, Sadhiar is intertwined with the rhythm of life. It is present during community gatherings, family celebrations, agricultural activities, and most importantly, in religious ceremonies performed by those who continue to follow indigenous faith traditions. In these settings, Sadhiar is not consumed casually; it is offered with intention and respect. It accompanies prayers, seals social bonds, and reinforces the shared heritage of the people.

Sadhiar has its own distinctive identity, particularly because it is prepared from red rice and follows a specific traditional process. The making of Sadhiar is knowledge preserved within households, often led by women who have learned the craft from elders. The process reflects a sophisticated understanding of fermentation, hygiene, timing, and the use of natural ingredients, long before modern food science attempted to standardise such techniques.

The Traditional Process

The preparation of Sadhiar follows three distinct stages. The first stage begins with the fermentation of red rice mixed with yeast, locally known as thiat. The yeast itself is traditionally prepared from natural ingredients and embodies accumulated local knowledge about fermentation.

After the initial fermentation, the first by-product that emerges is known as yndem. However, the process does not end here. Through further refinement and careful handling, the final and more purified product, Sadhiar, is obtained. This refined stage is the one most commonly associated with ritual use and ceremonial importance.

Cultural and Ritual Significance

To understand Sadhiar purely as a beverage would be to misunderstand its essence. Traditionally it is known as 'i pyrnai i pyrnai' it is offered during ancestor veneration, used in rites of passage, and other sacred observances. In such contexts, the drink carries symbolic meaning; it represents continuity, gratitude, and the connection between the living and the ancestral world.

Because of this sacred dimension, any discussion about expanding its production beyond household or village levels must proceed with sensitivity. The question is not simply whether Sadhiar can be marketed; the deeper question is how it can be promoted without eroding its ritual importance.

Women, and Informal Economies

The making of Sadhiar highlights the role of women in preserving cultural and economic traditions. Sadhiar is brewed in households for local consumption and production has been small-scale and community-based. Transactions, where they occur, are informal rather than governed by formal contracts or branding strategies. Any proposed model of enterprise must build upon existing knowledge systems, women participation and ensure that benefits flow back to those who have safeguarded the tradition.

The Question of Commercialisation

The rationale of promoting Sadhiar as a commercial is increasing interest in indigenous foods and beverages, both within the region and beyond. Consumers are seeking authentic, locally rooted products that reflect cultural diversity. Sadhiar, with its distinct taste and heritage value, could potentially find a niche market.

Now regulatory to production of rice beer in the state has been lifted, however compliance with licensing, taxation, and food safety standards requires careful planning and institutional support. There is also the issue of standardization, because traditional brewing methods vary slightly from household to household, giving each batch its own character. While this diversity is culturally meaningful, commercial markets often demand consistency in taste, packaging, and shelf life.

More importantly, there is the cultural dimension and if Sadhiar becomes widely marketed, how can its ritual use be protected from dilution or misrepresentation? How can branding avoid trivialising a drink that holds sacred meaning for many? These questions do not suggest that commercialisation is impossible. Rather, they indicate that it must be approached with deliberation and respect.

Hygiene, Packaging, and Market Access

One of the practical areas where improvement can be made without compromising tradition is hygiene. Traditional brewers already observe careful practices, but systematic training in sanitation, storage, and handling could enhance product safety and ensure consumer confidence.

Packaging is another area of innovation. If it is to reach wider markets, appropriate packaging that preserves flavour while ensuring durability during transport will be necessary. Such packaging should reflect cultural identity rather than mimic generic commercial designs. Market access also requires thoughtful positioning. Instead of presenting Sadhiar as merely an alcoholic beverage, it could be framed as a heritage product, which is part of a broader narrative about indigenous agricul-

ture, red rice cultivation, and community-based production. This approach would align economic goals with cultural preservation.

Balancing Tradition and Innovation

At the heart of promoting Sadhiar lies the challenge of balancing tradition with innovation. On one hand, there is the legitimate aspiration to create livelihood opportunities, especially for rural households seeking supplementary income. On the other hand, there is a responsibility to protect the integrity of a practice that is deeply embedded in social and spiritual life.

Decisions about scaling up production, establishing cooperatives, or seeking market linkages must emerge from within the community rather than being imposed externally. Transparent benefit-sharing mechanisms and clear guidelines regarding ritual use would help maintain trust.

Younger generations, who may be increasingly drawn to urban employment, need to see value in preserving traditional knowledge. If Sadhiar can be positioned as both a cultural treasure and a viable livelihood option, it may inspire renewed interest among youth in sustaining ancestral practices.

Sadhiar in a Changing World

Meghalaya is experiencing rapid social and economic change. Urbanisation, migration, and exposure to global markets are reshaping aspirations and consumption patterns. In such a context, traditions can either fade quietly or adapt creatively. Sadhiar stands at this crossroads.

Its future does not necessarily lie in large-scale industrial production. Rather, it may find strength in small, community-owned enterprises that maintain authenticity while meeting basic quality standards. By integrating traditional brewing techniques with modern insights on hygiene, branding, and cooperative management, it is possible to craft a model that honours both heritage and progress.

Finally

The study found that Sadhiar is more than a drink brewed from red rice. It is a repository of memory, a symbol of identity, and a testament to the ingenuity of indigenous knowledge systems. In the conversations about livelihood promotion, Sadhiar presents both opportunity and responsibility. The opportunity lies in creating income for rural households and showcasing the cultural richness of the Jaintia people. The responsibility lies in ensuring that economic ambition does not erode ritual significance or community ownership.

If approached thoughtfully, Sadhiar can become an example of how tradition and enterprise need not be adversaries. Instead, they can complement each other, allowing a sacred heritage to thrive in contemporary contexts while remaining firmly rooted in the soil from which it emerges.

Why India doesn't condemn the US aggression on Iran

By H. Srikanth

The developments in the Middle East started haunting India after Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Israel, where in the PM addressed Israel as fatherland; hugged Netanyahu, and accepted the highest Israeli civilian award with great pride. We are not sure if Modi had any hint of the US-Israeli attack on Iran two days after his return to India. But India's diplomatic silence over the brutal assassination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei; and the government's hesitation to express concern over inhuman bombing of the school that killed more than 160 innocent school children, put India in the dock.

India may not be responsible for the American torpedo attack on the Iranian warship, Iris Dena, but not condemning the US again left a shadow of suspicion. Modi was quick to criticize Iran's attacks on the Gulf countries. But he said nothing about Israel's attack on Chabahar, where India invested nearly \$500 million for creating a corridor that seeks to connect India to Central Asia and Europe, via Afghanistan and Iran, bypassing Pakistan. India remained silent for one week after the outbreak of the war. Indian authorities started talking to the Iranian counterpart when it started feeling the pinch of the war after Iran took control of the Strait of Hormuz and stopped the movement of all commercial ships. Any delay in the movement of the ships carrying oil and gas from the Gulf is likely to exacerbate the energy crisis in India.

The Opposition parties in India took advantage of the government's failures. The protests are likely to intensify as the public feels the scarcity of cooking gas and oil. Congress and other opposition parties assert that the problems could have been avoided had the Modi government remained neutral in the war, and condemned even the US and Israel for their immoral and illegal aggression against a sovereign nation. Several theories are floating in the public domain on the actions and inactions of the Indian government. Rahul Gandhi, the Leader of the Opposition, thinks the Epstein Files and Adani's legal troubles in the US are forcing the Modi government to refrain from saying anything unpleasant to America and Israel. One may not completely overlook personal interests, but what determines most in the making or unmaking of foreign policies is the national interest as perceived by the political and economic elite ruling the country. To know why India has meekly accepted the US directives not to purchase oil from Iran and Russia, and hesitates to condemn the US-Israeli aggression against Iran, amply demonstrates the changing nature of India's political economy.

When India became politically independent, it chose the mixed economic model and developed the public sector alongside the private sector. The USSR helped India develop the public sector and helped it withstand imperialist pressures. Indian national leaders who had a first-hand experience of colonialism boldly stood against imperialism and supported anti-colonial movements. They dared to take a moral stand on the issues of war and peace. The non-alignment policy that it pursued enabled India to maintain a balance between the imperialist and the socialist powers. But that autonomy that India once exercised has now vanished with the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The reassertion of market forces compelled India to adopt the policies of privatization, liberalization, and globalization. All restrictions on the entry of Indian and foreign monopolies were removed. Several public sector undertakings were dismantled or privatised. Giant MNCs found an easy way into the Indian markets and began collaborating with Indian monopolies. The IT sector developed rapidly in India, serving the interests of foreign clients. External markets and foreign investments became indispensable to the growth of the Indian economy. As India turned to an export-led growth model, it encouraged earning revenue from the export of commodities and services.

The growing unemployment and desire for a better life compelled millions of Indians to migrate to different countries. Taking advantage of liberalization, some Indian monopolies became billionaires and expanded their private empires in different countries and continents. These private monopolies can easily influence the government's policies. No mainstream political parties can survive in India without financial support from the corporate sector. The growing clout of the likes of the Ambanis and the Adanis in Indian politics weakens India's ability to fight imperialist forces.

Some startling facts about the Indian economy help us understand why India cannot dare to antagonize the US. The share of exports as a percentage of India's GDP stands somewhere around 21% of GDP. The US is the largest market for Indian goods and services. India exports some \$79 to 85 billion worth of goods and services to America every year, which accounts for 18% of its total exports. All Indian-based IT industries heavily depend on US clients. Fifty to sixty percent of the revenue of companies like Infosys and TCS comes from the US. There are over 5 million Indian citizens working in the US, and their remittances to India account for 27% of total remittances from Indian expatriates. Further, Indian business tycoons like the Ambanis and the Adanis have investments in the US and countries close to the US. They are all heavily dependent on the US financial system for loans, permissions and concessions. Any changes in tariffs and investment policies will affect Indian companies. This apart, India, which views China as its enemy and competitor, requires US support at the international level. All these factors compel India to bear with Trump's tantrums.

Subsidized oil imports from Iran and Russia benefited the Indian oil companies and helped India overcome the energy crisis. But only for that sake, India cannot antagonize the US and invite sanctions. Similarly, notwithstanding its Hindutva politics at home, the Modi government can't ignore the Gulf countries on whom they depend for the import of oil and gas. Apart from oil, the Gulf becomes important for India as several leading Indian companies such as L&T, TCS, Wipro, Infosys, Adani Ports, Indigo, etc., are engaged in business in the Gulf countries. They have invested millions of dollars in different businesses and infrastructure ventures. This apart, over 10 million Indian citizens are working in different Gulf countries. The remittances from Indian expatriates in Gulf countries account for 40 percent of total remittances. The war near the Gulf is therefore not in the interest of the Indian economy. But India does not have the resources or credibility to influence the US and Iran to stop the ongoing war in the Middle-East.

Most citizens in India don't support the imperialistic aggression. The US threats dictating when India should stop war; what India should buy and from whom irritate patriotic Indians. They expect the Indian government to assert its national autonomy and not yield to US blackmail. They want India to be a Vishwaguru in a positive sense. However, the people's aspirations have little influence on government policies. As the Indian economy finds itself so entangled with the US economy, the government cannot take an upright stand on the US aggression against Iran and other developing countries. The private monopoly interests within India compel the Indian government not to do anything that affects their business interests. The Indian government gives priority to the concerns of the business elite more than the views of its ordinary citizens. As its economy is intertwined with the global economy, the government considers protecting the interests of Indian businesses as more important than standing up against unjust wars. In the process, India ceases to be a moral force in international relations.

Letters to the Editor

Jaintia people never identified themselves as Khasis

Editor
In recent days, I have come across in this news daily, the topic about the Jaintia people. For a long time, many Jaintia intellectuals and Jaintia people never identified themselves as Khasis or as a sub-tribe of the Khasi tribe because of their identity and culture that are different from the majority Khasis. They are deeply connected to their Jaintia identity and Jaintia culture and I respect that. However, I would like to request my fellow Khasis to understand that we the Khasis and the Jaintias (Pnars) are not the same. We are different in origin, culture, traditions and customs. We are different tribes.

Therefore, I would like to request the Seng Khasi (Kmie) not to organize Seng Khlilang gathering or any other gathering with the Seng Raji, and not to welcome the Seng Raji and the Niamtre followers to the sacred mountain, U Lum Sohpetbneng, and also not to welcome them to the Shad Suk Mynsiem and to the Seng Kut Snem.
In conclusion, u Khyn-

riam, u Maram, u War, u Lyngngam, u War Jaintia bad u Bhoi, Ki dei u paid Khasi baia.

Yours etc.,
Wallambi Rani (A Khasi)
Via email

Relentless Assault on the Environment

Editor,
I had written a letter to the editor which was published in this newspaper in February 2025. It was regarding the severe assault being faced by a small patch of forested area between Topovan and the official residence of the Chief Secretary, Meghalaya. After my letter was published, everything went quiet for some time, although not a single clarification came forth from the State authorities or the Forest Department.

Surprisingly, after a year, the assaulters are back. Trees are being mercilessly cut down, and an encroachment from the eastern side (Bishop Cotton Road) is gradually making its way up. It is there for anyone to see. Trees have been chopped down, the land leveled, and marking work is in progress. Already, the forest which existed from near Orchid Hotel in Polo till the Chief Secretary's Residence

has been reduced to this small patch, and that too is now being destroyed.

Why are we systematically destroying what nature has given us? What is this craze for building more and more? Why is forest land being diverted right under the nose of the Forest Department? Surely they are complicit in the matter; otherwise, how can this be happening right in the heart of the city and next to places where some of the most influential people of the state reside?

While the whole world is feeling the effects of global warming and climate change brought about by human activities, we in the state are merrily reducing our forest cover, assuming that the effects of global warming will not affect us. It is time to wake up and put a stop to the destruction of our forests.

Yours etc.,
Emica Nongkynrhi,
Via email

When War Affects the Kitchen: How West Asia Conflict Hits India's Wallet

Editor,
Wars are often thought of as distant, far-off events happening on battlefields, borders and diplomatic tables. In today's connected world

geopolitics affects more than just these areas. The ongoing conflict in West Asia is proving this. Thousands of miles away from the destruction and bombing, households in India are feeling the effects in their kitchens.

For years experts have warned that politics doesn't just stay in governments or war rooms. It eventually affects people's lives. Today this is very real. Decisions made by leaders in power centres even in Washington, D.C. affect our grocery bills and cooking expenses. Politics has now literally entered our kitchens.

India uses a lot of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG). Most of it is imported. In January 2026 India produced 1.158 million tonnes of LPG and imported 2.192 million tonnes. This shows how much India relies on supply. 62-65 percent of India's LPG demand is met through imports and most of these imports come from West Asia. These shipments usually go through the Strait of Hormuz, an energy route.

The current conflict has made it riskier for ships to travel through this passage between Iran and Oman. Insurers have stopped covering these ships or raised premiums by over 1,000 percent. This makes it more expensive for vessels to transport LPG from the Gulf. As a

result freight rates have risen. Fewer ships are willing to take the risk. This causes delays and reduces cargo shipments. When supply chains slow down thousands of kilometres away, India feels the effects.

The impact is already visible. Restaurants across India are reporting shortages of LPG cylinders. They are forced to cut menus or reduce operations. Industry groups warn that 50-60 percent of restaurants could temporarily shut down if supplies don't stabilise. In some places panic buying has made things worse. Customers are rushing to refill cylinders and some black-market activity has started.

Prices have also started to rise. Domestic LPG cylinders have increased by ₹60 while commercial cylinders have seen a hike of ₹114.5. For middle-class households this is an inconvenience. For low-income families it can be devastating. I wonder how families with a monthly income of ₹6,000 will cope when the price of basic cooking fuel keeps rising.

I live in Bengaluru and have seen this disruption firsthand. Restaurants are limiting menus; small eateries are struggling and people are talking about rising costs. A geopolitical crisis quickly turns into an economic bur-

den.

India's vulnerability also lies in its storage capacity. Unlike oil, LPG must be stored under pressure in specialised tanks. The country currently has storage capacity for about 22 days of LPG supply. This leaves room for error during global disruptions.

The government has taken steps to prioritise household supply. They have directed refiners to maximise LPG production and invoked provisions, under the Essential Commodities Act. However these measures can only soften the blow. They cannot fully shield the country from energy shocks. The lesson is clear. In an era of globalised energy networks, wars are no longer far-off events. They affect life. They affect the price of a meal; the operation of a small restaurant and the monthly budget of a struggling family.

The fires of war may burn thousands of miles away. Their heat is now felt in the Indian kitchen.

Yours etc.,
Krish Marwein,
St Joseph's College,
Bengaluru,
Via email

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"Life is rarely a rose without thorns."

— Will Leamon

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.214 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 17, 2026

A Silent PAC & Audit Reports

WHEN was the last time that the findings of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) were discussed in the Meghalaya Assembly? Why are the paragraphs pointed out by the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) on misutilisation of funds; non-submission of utilisation certificates, non-utilisation of funds within a financial year and non-disclosure about where such funds are parked, never taken seriously by the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly? Year after year the CAG points out to what can be interpreted as wrong use of public funds by different departments of the government but it is met with a stunning silence. The PAC as we know is one of the most important oversight bodies in a parliamentary democracy. Its primary role is to ensure that public money voted by the legislature is spent properly, legally, and efficiently by the government.

The present members of the PAC are MLA Miani D Shira who is also the chairperson of the Committee on Public Accounts. Other members of the committee include Rupert Momin, Lahkmen Rymbui, Balajied Synrem, Jimmy D Sangma, Dr Celestine Lyngdoh, Gavin Miguel Mylliem, Rupa M Marak, Sengchhim N Sangma, and Brightstarwell Marbaniang. The primary functions of the Public Accounts Committee are (1) to examine Audit Reports submitted by the CAG because these reports highlight financial irregularities, wasteful expenditure, violations of rules, and poor financial management by government departments. (2) The PAC is to ensure accountability. Hence when the CAG points out irregularities, the PAC calls government officials to explain, why funds were misused or diverted, why procedures were violated and whether corrective steps have been taken. Having done due diligence on the above the PAC recommends corrective actions. (3) The PAC prepares reports for the legislature recommending recovery of misused funds, necessary and urgent administrative reforms and disciplinary action against the errant officials. Also, the PAC recommends changes in procedures to prevent future lapses.

The legislature approves expenditure through the annual budget and it is the fundamental duty of the PAC to check whether the Government spent the money for the purpose for which it was approved and with due diligence. Since the PAC is headed by a member of the Opposition, party the public expects it to do its work as the custodian of public accounts. Unfortunately, the PAC often fails to act promptly on audit findings because the CAG produces volumes of reports every year but the PAC lacks the time and technical staff to examine them all. Besides, members of the PAC are politicians some of whom are part of the government coalition hence they dither from implicating their own party or government. Moreover, audit reports involve complex financial and administrative details. Without adequate research staff or experts, PAC members may struggle to fully understand the financials and to interrogate respective departments. PACs in Meghalaya don't meet regularly and that shows a certain laxity to hold the Government accountable. When PACs fail to act decisively on CAG findings, financial accountability weakens. Audit reports may expose irregularities, but without PAC scrutiny, the findings rarely translate into administrative reform or punishment for wrongdoing. In a robust and functioning democracy, the CAG exposes problems, but the PAC is the body that forces the government to answer for them. If the PAC becomes inactive, the entire system of legislative financial oversight becomes ineffective.

Sixth Schedule & the Slow Erasure of Tribal Identity in Meghalaya: Broken Promises & a People on The Edge

By Danny K. Rajee

I have spent more years in the archives of Shillong. I know the smell of the old colonial records, the particular frustration of a folder gone missing, the quiet satisfaction of finding a Constituent Assembly note you had given up on. I have watched Meghalaya grow into itself, make its mistakes, and argue loudly about who it is and what it owes its people. But I will say plainly: in all those years, nothing has troubled me quite as much as the question of what is happening to the Sixth Schedule — and whether anyone in power is paying honest attention.

How the Sixth Schedule Came to Be
The Sixth Schedule was not the product of tidy constitutional philosophy. It came from fear — a reasonable, historically grounded fear. The Garos, the Khasis, the Jaintias: these were peoples who had lived on their hills, governed their own affairs, and buried their dead according to their own customs for as long as memory runs. When the prospect of a unified Indian republic took shape, many of them looked at the plains majority and felt, not unreasonably, that their way of life would be absorbed without trace inside a generation.

Gopinath Bordoloi understood this. As Premier of Assam and Chairman of the North-East India Sub-Committee, he fought for something more than voting rights for the hill peoples. Voting rights in a majoritarian system, he recognised, were not protection — they were the illusion of protection. What was needed was a protected democratic space, a constitutional enclosure in which smaller communities could govern themselves without being outbid by sheer numbers. The Autonomous District Councils that emerged from this thinking were given genuine powers: over land, forests, customary law, education, justice. The restriction that non-tribals could neither vote nor contest in-council elections was deliberate. It was not bigotry. It was architecture.

In Meghalaya, three councils — the Khasi Hills, the Jaintia Hills, and the Garo Hills — became the institutional expression of this vision. I have spent years reading what Bordoloi and his colleagues wrote about these protections. They were not sentimental about it. They were practical. They

knew what demographic pressure could do to a minority community within a democracy, and they built accordingly.

On the Question of Non-Tribal Voting Rights
There is an argument I keep encountering, in drawing rooms in Laitumkhrak and in parliamentary debates alike, that excluding non-tribals from council elections is undemocratic. I understand why people make this argument. Universal franchise is a genuine achievement, and it deserves to be defended. But it is not an absolute principle that admits no qualification. International frameworks on indigenous rights — the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples being the most significant — are explicit that indigenous communities possess a right to self-governance, and that this right cannot be reduced to the right to participate in a majority vote that they will always lose.

The demography matters here, and it is not abstract. The 2011 census figures for Shillong and its surrounds showed the tribal share of population in several urban areas declining to the point where, in an open franchise, tribal candidates would face a near-impossible arithmetic. If you open the councils to non-tribal voters and candidates, you do not reform the Sixth Schedule — you end it. The protection and the restriction are not separable. You cannot keep one and discard the other.

What Our Governments Have Actually Done
I want to be fair here, which means I have to be harsh across the board. Every government that has held power in Meghalaya since 1972 — Congress, PDF, MUA, UDP, NPP, the coalitions and the counter-coalitions — has contributed to what I can only call the managed decline of the Sixth Schedule. This is not a partisan point. It is a historical one.

The Councils have been starved of funds and stripped of operational independence so gradually and so consistently that most people under forty in this state have never seen them function as they were intended to. They have become, in the public imagination, vehicles for political patronage rather than the governing institu-

tions Bordoloi envisioned. Land — which is the irreducible core of any indigenous rights framework — has hemorrhaged from tribal ownership for decades. The Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act of 1971 prohibits the transfer of tribal land to non-tribals. In practice, this prohibition has been treated as a nuisance to be managed rather than a law to be enforced. Entire localities in Shillong that I knew as overwhelmingly Khasi neighbourhoods have been transformed through arrangements that the law was designed to prevent.

Language has suffered in parallel. Khasi, Garo, Pnar: they are local languages, acknowledged and theoretically protected. But acknowledgment without investment is a formality. When a language cannot give a young person a career, families make calculations. The children grow up in English. The grandparents speak a tongue the grandchildren understand imperfectly. This is not catastrophe in the melodramatic sense. It is erosion — quiet, incremental, and very difficult to reverse.

A Word About Extinction
I am careful with strong words. But demographic extinction is not only a physical phenomenon. It is the dissolution of a community's political agency, its cultural continuity, its relationship to ancestral land. A people can persist biologically while losing everything that made them a distinct people. That is the threat I see advancing in Meghalaya, not with dramatic suddenness but with the steadiness of water over stone.

The young Khasi or Garo today inherits dysfunctional Councils, a state government that treats the Schedule as bureaucratic furniture, and a national government that directs its attention northward mainly when there is an election or a security concern. The Sixth Schedule was meant to give these young people a political home, a set of institutions through which they could exercise real power over their own lives. What they have instead is a framework whose form is intact while its substance has been quietly hollowed.

What Needs to Happen
The answer is not complicated, even if the politics of it are. The restrictions

on non-tribal participation in the Autonomous District Councils must be maintained without compromise. The Councils themselves must be genuinely funded and operationally independent of state government interference. The land protection laws must be enforced with a seriousness that no government here has yet summoned. The Inner Line Permit debate — which has dragged on with remarkable persistence and equally remarkable inconsequence — must be resolved. The question of who qualifies as a tribal, which has become a subject of dangerous manipulation in some quarters, must be settled through transparent, community-led processes.

None of this is new. These arguments have been made before, in more distinguished venues than this one, by people with more authority than I possess. The problem is not diagnosis. The problem is will. And will, in my experience, does not arrive on its own. It arrives when the people who stand to lose most make it politically costly for governments to do nothing.

Bordoloi, by various accounts, believed that if the hill peoples were not given genuine autonomy, the republic would have failed its own promise. Looking at the record of the past five decades, one has to conclude that the failure he feared has arrived — not all at once, but steadily, governmentally, through ten thousand small decisions to look the other way. The question now is not reversal; you cannot reverse history. The question is whether we still have enough of what Bordoloi built to work with, and whether anyone in a position of power is prepared to actually use it.

The tribal peoples of Meghalaya did not ask for constitutional protection out of arrogance or separatism. They asked because they understood, from experience rather than theory, that without structural protection the majority overwhelms the minority, that without land a community has no future, and that without political voice a people become strangers in the place where their great-grandparents are buried. The Sixth Schedule was India's answer to that understanding. Successive governments have treated it as an inconvenience. It is long past time for that to change.

Insights from a State-Wide Inventory

Arecanut Cultivation in Meghalaya and Its Role in Rural Livelihoods

By Dr Subhash Ashutosh

Arecanut cultivation has quietly become one of the most important pillars of Meghalaya's rural economy. Across the hills and valleys of the state, millions of slender arecanut palms stand as testimony to a farming tradition that has sustained communities for generations. Today, the crop not only supports household incomes but is also transforming the state's horticultural landscape.

A recent state-wide inventory of horticulture plantations in Meghalaya offers valuable insights into the scale and significance of arecanut cultivation. The survey provides the first scientifically validated estimate of plantation resources in the state and reveals the dominant position of arecanut in Meghalaya's horticulture sector. The findings underline the crop's importance not only as a source of income but also as a component of sustainable land use in the hill ecosystem.

Arecanut cultivation in Meghalaya is deeply rooted in the agricultural traditions of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo Hills. Historically, the palm was grown in homestead gardens and mixed agroforestry systems surrounding villages. Farmers planted arecanut alongside banana, citrus, jackfruit, betel vine and bamboo, creating highly diversified farming systems well adapted to the ecological conditions of the region.

The crop is also closely intertwined with the cultural life of the state. The practice of consuming betel nut with betel leaf remains an enduring social tradition across communities. Offering betel nut and betel leaf continues to symbolize hospitality and respect in social interactions and ceremonies. This cultural significance has helped sustain the cultivation of arecanut over generations.

Traditional farming systems in Meghalaya also combined arecanut cultivation with shifting cultivation, locally known as jhum. While annual crops were grown in shifting fields, perennial crops such as arecanut were planted in permanent locations near settlements. This combination allowed farmers to maintain subsistence production while also cultivating tree crops that generated stable income over the long term.

Nature itself has been generous in creating conditions favourable for arecanut cultivation in Meghalaya. The state's humid climate, abundant rainfall and fertile soils provide ideal conditions for the crop. Arecanut palms thrive in well-drained soils and moderate shade, and they adapt well to the sloping terrain that characterizes much of the state. In many places, plantations have emerged as a productive land use option in areas where conventional wet rice cultivation is difficult.

Beyond its economic value, the crop also provides ecological benefits. Being a perennial tree, arecanut helps maintain vegetation cover and reduces soil erosion on hill slopes. When grown in mixed cropping systems, it supports diversified agroforestry landscapes that contribute to ecological stability and biodiversity.

However, like any rapidly expanding agricultural activity, arecanut cultivation also raises ecological concerns if not managed carefully. Large-scale monoculture plantations can reduce biodiversity, weaken soil health and increase vulnerability to pests and diseases. On fragile hill slopes, poorly managed plantations may even contribute to soil erosion.

The solution lies not in discouraging the crop but in promoting sustainable cultivation practices. Mixed cropping, agroforestry approaches, soil conservation measures and organic nutrient management can ensure that arecanut cultivation remains environmentally sustainable while continuing to support rural livelihoods.

For Meghalaya's farmers, the economic importance of arecanut is unmistak-

able. Agriculture remains the backbone of the state's rural economy, and the crop provides one of the most-reliable sources of income for farming households. Estimates from the recent inventory suggest that arecanut cultivation can generate annual earnings of roughly Rs 4-5 lakh per hectare under favourable conditions.

Beyond direct income from nut production, the crop supports a range of related economic activities including harvesting, processing, transportation and trade. Many farmers also intercrop arecanut with black pepper, banana, citrus, ginger and turmeric. Such diversified systems increase land productivity and reduce the risks associated with single-crop farming.

The scale of arecanut cultivation in Meghalaya is striking. According to the state-wide inventory, horticulture and rubber plantations together cover around 172,300 hectares in the state, occupying nearly 4% of the state's geographical area. Of this, more than 92,300 hectares are under arecanut cultivation—accounting for more than half of the plantation area.

In terms of tree population, the state is estimated to have around 301 million horticulture trees, including about 229 million arecanut palms. West Garo Hills accounts for the largest area under arecanut cultivation, followed by Ri Bhoi and North Garo Hills.

In several districts, productivity levels are also encouraging. In parts of East Khasi Hills and Ri Bhoi, yields have been estimated at nearly 15 tonnes per hectare, with sale proceeds sometimes exceeding Rs 6 lakh per hectare.

Yet the economic potential of the arecanut palm extends far beyond the nut itself. Every part of the tree has value. The leaf sheath is increasingly used to manufacture biodegradable plates and food containers that offer an environmentally friendly alternative to plastic disposables. Small rural enterprises based on leaf sheath processing can generate employment, especially for women and youth. The leaves are traditionally used for thatching and fencing, while the husk of the fruit can be converted into compost, fiber products and biodegradable materials.

The husk is also emerging as a feedstock for biochar, which improves soil fertility and contributes to carbon sequestration. Even the slender stems of arecanut palms find use in rural construction and as support poles for climbing crops such as pepper and betel vine.

Taken together, these diverse uses illustrate the potential for building a circular rural bioeconomy around arecanut plantations—one in which agricultural residues are converted into valuable products rather than treated as waste. The recent plantation inventory provides an important evidence base for policy and planning. It highlights the scale of Meghalaya's horticulture resources and offers valuable insights for improving productivity, strengthening value chains and expanding rural entrepreneurship.

With appropriate investments in processing, market linkages and farmer organizations, the economic potential of arecanut cultivation can be significantly enhanced. Equally important is the need to encourage agroforestry-based plantation systems that balance economic gains with ecological sustainability.

Arecanut cultivation already occupies a central place in Meghalaya's rural landscape. If nurtured with the right policies and sustainable practices, it can continue to serve as a powerful driver of rural prosperity while supporting environmentally responsible land management in the hills of the Northeast.

(The author is a retired Indian Forest Service officer and presently heading the Centre of Excellence for NRM& Sustainable Livelihoods under MBDA)

Letters to the Editor

Responding Firmly to Misleading Cricket Narrative

Editor,
Apropos of the article which appeared in your esteemed daily on March 12, 2026 entitled "Rock-Bottom: Meghalaya Cricket's Crisis and Hope for Redemption" by Patrick Kurbah, we would like to clarify, for the greater interest of our readers especially the cricket lovers of the state, since the said article is nothing short of lies, malice and a motivated attempt to defame our past members who had struggled and managed the association over the years. The struggles that the Association had to go through to achieve its present affiliation with the BCCI and achievements thereafter is too long a narrative for this reply. The past office bearers like our Honorable Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma, Danny Marak, DP Wahlang, IAS, Marcuse Marak, Dikki Shira, I. Syiemlieh, Dr. Andrew Warjari and many others had gone beyond their way to work hard with commitment to obtain first affiliate membership of BCCI in 2009 followed by full membership in 2018, overcoming strong oppositions from mainstream states. Former proficient cricketers, like Peter J Lamare, Asa Warjari, Iohbor Blah, Mark Ingty, Manik Das, Bharat Roy, late Mawlynai Marbaniang, Saibal Dasgupta, Biswajit Dasgupta etc., to name a few among many more,

added to the journey with cricketing support and active involvement. The above office bearers together with the undersigned held, office either before or after BCCI affiliation.

The writer has emerged as an over-night cricket analyst for the state by working out the success and failure percentage over the last season. He was never heard of when the state was performing well and we could only sense that he was instigated and pushed by those 'sour grapes' people who were never selected nor considered for the state team at different categories. With the popularity that the game has attained in the state and with its stakes going high, it is only natural, that many aspirants would vie their place in the team, whether deserving or otherwise. When the state selects, the selection committee of all age categories, with full autonomy, select the best performers available to represent the state. The non-performers vent out their frustrations to the media through such enthusiastic writer like Patrick Kurbah. On selection issues, the selectors are free to give their retort in details, if felt necessary by them.

We would not like to delve briefly point to point on what the writer had, from the beginning to the end, illustrated such 'fabricated truths' but there are a few very serious allegations that the writer had mentioned which demand proper documented proof. The contents of the article appear to be "influenced works" of fiction and mostly defamatory in nature. The process of players' selection for all categories is very transparent and fair with

performance-based index taking via the score sheet or the mobile application-based software besides selectors' note sheets. At times, the selectors would take video recordings as proof for such inclusion or exclusion from the squad. Selecting a squad of 15 members in a team out of a few hundred will never be easy. It is on such occasions that players who are not selected spit venom at the selectors and the association.

The writer's accusation of 'money changing hands' is a serious allegation because the Association has a strong policy against corruption going right up to the Anti-Doping and Anti-Corruption Cell of the BCCI. If there were shortcomings our teams, to cite an example, among many, would not have qualified for the Elite Group of BCCI without Guest Players, both in the Senior and U-23 category during 2022-2023 season and holding the position in the latter till last season.

The next serious allegation is the 'misuse' of BCCI funds where the writer knows nothing of how funds are managed and utilised by the Association. It should be noted that every penny of the sanctioned amount is scrutinised by a reputed firm recommended by the BCCI for internal auditing before it is submitted to the BCCI for necessary action and audit. The infrastructure that MCA has built up over the last few years since grants have been received are not matched by any other state receiving such funds. Only when one can move around every nook and corner of the different affiliated districts

can one conclude how funds are utilised.

We do agree that this particular season, unlike the other previous seasons, the state did not do well in most of the categories and we need to be concerned. As an Association we will do a post-mortem and find ways and means to improve in various fronts. As the writer has great hope in the new dispensation, we too look forward that the new body led by a very able and experienced person as the President will be able to wriggle it out from the 'rock bottom' situation that we are in today.

Yours etc,
Naba Bhattacharjee & Gideon Kharkongor
Via email

Changing Scenario of War Intelligence

Editor,
As of now, the nature of warfare across the world is changing very rapidly. Earlier, wars were mostly decided by the strength of armies, weapons and battlefield strategies. But over time, it has become clear that information and intelligence often play an even more crucial role. Knowing the enemy's plans, movements and positions can sometimes decide the outcome of a conflict even before a battle actually begins. In the past, intelligence gathering depended largely on human spies and ground scouts. Later, technology brought new tools such as surveillance aircraft, satellites and drones. But as of now, science seems to

be moving towards an even more unusual direction.

Recent reports suggest that scientists in Germany are experimenting with a rather surprising idea—using cockroaches for intelligence purposes. A German start-up company called SWARM Biotactics is reportedly developing a system in which small electronic devices are placed on real cockroaches. These tiny "backpacks" contain sensors, small cameras and communication systems that can send information back to operators sitting far away.

At first hearing, the idea may sound strange, but there is a simple reason behind it. Cockroaches are among the toughest insects found in nature. They can crawl into extremely narrow spaces, survive in difficult conditions and move quickly across uneven surfaces. Because of these abilities, scientists believe they could be useful in places where humans, drones or robots cannot easily reach—such as narrow tunnels, damaged buildings or underground hideouts.

The small devices attached to the insects can collect images and other environmental information. Scientists have also reportedly developed ways to guide the movement of these insects by sending mild electrical signals. In other words, a person sitting at a control station may be able to influence the direction in which the insect moves.

As of now, this research is still developing, but similar experiments have also been carried out in other countries. In the United States, scientists have worked on projects involving beetles

and moths fitted with small electronic components. Japan has experimented with remote-controlled cockroaches carrying tiny solar-powered devices, while China has been investing in miniature drones and insect-like robots designed for surveillance.

All these developments clearly show that the methods of gathering war intelligence are changing with time. Earlier, there were human spies. Later it became satellites and drones. In the coming years, it may also include extremely small machines—or even insects carrying electronic sensors—that can quietly enter places where humans cannot safely go.

At the same time, such technology may not remain limited only to military purposes. As of now, scientists also believe that these tiny devices could help rescue teams during earthquakes or building collapses. They could move through narrow gaps in debris and help locate people trapped inside.

Of course, such developments also raise certain questions about how far science should go in mixing living creatures with machines. Nevertheless, one thing appears certain: technology is moving very fast, and the methods of intelligence gathering in future conflicts may look very different from what we see today.

What once seemed like the imagination of science fiction is slowly becoming part of reality.

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

"The true art of memory is the art of attention."
— Samuel Johnson
The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.215 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 18, 2026

Battle in Afghanistan

PAKISTAN is fighting battles on more than one front. It's infamously using home-bred terrorists to inflict a thousand wounds on India through the Kashmir Valley and beyond; and engages in border skirmishes with Indian forces every now and again along the international border and along the Line of Control. It waged wars with India repeatedly – from the very start of Independence and till recently on the Operation Sindoor front. Now, Pakistan's generals are concentrating their attention more on Afghanistan, targeting both terrorists and key installations there. An air-strike on Kabul has resulted in the death of more than 400 innocent persons in a rehabilitation-cum-medical facility and injuries to around 250 more there. Possibly, the generals missed their target and hit the large number of hapless people.

Curiously, when the Americans left Afghanistan after a long period of their military presence there, in 2021, and the Taliban took control of the nation, the Pakistani generals were the first to attempt to cozy up to them. Their aim was to wean Afghanistan's new rulers from the likely influence of India, and collectively take on India thereafter. But the script did not progress that way. Indians engaged in various developmental and humanitarian activities there faced major trouble, and the new rulers thought they could dictate terms with New Delhi. Soon, word went from here that military jets were waiting to take off from here if the Taliban did not behave. With no airpower, and practically no military to back them, the Taliban sensed trouble ahead. Eventually, their honeymoon with the Pakistani establishment lasted only a few months. Terrorists from Afghanistan caused mayhem in Pakistan repeatedly, which Pakistan alleged was done at the behest of India's military intelligence network. Pakistan sent its own terror gangs to cause destruction to life and property in Afghanistan. The proxy war continued. In recent weeks, a war-like situation developed between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pakistan should not be allowed to get away with the heinous act of striking at a rehabilitation centre and killing innocent people by the hundreds. This amounts to a war crime and the generals should be held accountable for their reckless acts.

It is common knowledge that the generals rule Pakistan and cause disturbances to the entire sub-continent through repeated play of mischief. The political leadership there is weak and at the beck and call of the generals. The government does not have any voice in matters of security. The United States deals directly with the generals and through them gets its things done through overt or covert operations in the region and beyond. The beauty of India's democracy is the power that the elected representatives hold in their hands. The military takes orders from the elected leaders. It's another thing that the political leadership is found wanting when serious situations emerge – as in Operation Sindoor, wherein India could not do a fraction of what it was capable of, and suffered major losses. That gave a new clout to Pakistan's army chief, Asim Munir, who eventually was catapulted to the status of Field Marshal. It's a pity that he's now setting his sights on hapless Afghans.

Letters to the Editor

War & the so-called 'Big Boys' Toys

Editor,
War is often presented as inevitable, a recurring feature of human history, shaped by conflict and necessity. Yet a closer examination suggests otherwise. The largest wars of the modern era were not accidents of fate, but outcomes of decisions, calculated, deliberate, and made within confined circles of power. They reflect choices, not destiny, and reveal how authority, when concentrated, can shape the course of entire nations and generations.

The evolution of weapons across these conflicts reveals a parallel story. From trench warfare to atomic devastation, instruments of war have grown not only in scale, but in their capacity to distance those who wield authority from the realities they unleash. These are not mere tools of defence, they are manifestations of control, shaped and maintained by those who rarely stand in their direct path. Their increasing sophistication does not simply reflect progress, but a deepening divide between decision and consequence.

What emerges is a persistent imbalance. The authority to initiate conflict and the burden of enduring it remain divided. Those who design strategies and command outcomes are seldom those

who face the immediate consequences of their decisions. Instead, it is individuals, often young, often without influence, who are sent to bear the cost, carrying the weight of choices they did not make.

War, then, is not simply a matter of opposing nations, but of unequal proximity to its consequences. It is shaped in rooms far removed from the battlefield, yet executed in places where its realities cannot be ignored. It continues not because it is unavoidable, but because it is permitted.

War is started by old men, but young men die.

Your's etc.,
Shivani Pde,
Via email

We Cannot Support the Warlike Ambitions of World Leaders

Editor,
One who truly has a logical mind and a human heart can empathise with how most Iranians have lived under constant fear and persecution for several decades. Just about two months ago, nearly thirty-five thousand innocent lives were brutally taken by their own government. Families were torn apart, parents buried their children, and millions were left scarred with wounds that may never heal. When the news broke of Ayatollah Khamenei's death, some-

thing remarkable happened. Amid grief and silence, a spark of hope lit up the hearts of many.

In the streets of Iran, people gathered not to mourn but to celebrate. Women, who had long borne the brunt of systematic cruelty, came forward with songs, laughter, and tears of relief. For them, this was not merely the fall of a leader, it was the collapse of a symbol of oppression. Even graveyards, places of mourning, turned into sites of jubilation, as videos that popped up on social media showed. The celebrations reflected not hatred alone but years of suppressed pain, especially among women who had endured "unspeakable torture" and humiliation.

However, the contrast was striking. In India, countless women wept and beat their chests, grieving the loss of a leader they revered. Honestly, what's most disturbing is that they seemed to have no empathy for the oppressed Iranians who were mercilessly tortured or shot dead only weeks earlier.

My inner conscience says one should stand with the Iranian people who are now daring to speak out, saying that rule by an iron fist has utterly wasted their lives in every aspect. It has crushed their talents, and it silenced their aspirations. No exaggeration, it has strangled their ambitions to live freely and to become something truly meaningful in life.

I am not here to offer an iota of praise for what Donald Trump has done to

Iran or Venezuela. Let's be real, the revelations from the Epstein files have only added to the disgust people feel worldwide.

Therefore, my hope is that people everywhere will not get carried away by leaders who sell their souls to satisfy their base desires and fuel their "warlike ambitions". We must stand up and speak out before humanity is brought to its knees.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gwali,
Shillong

West Bengal Elections & Impending Violence

Editor,
The announcement of Assembly elections in West Bengal, alongside other states, has once again revived grave concerns about the spectre of violence that has historically accompanied polls in the state. For over five decades, Bengal has carried a disturbing legacy of bloodshed during elections, unmatched anywhere else in India. In the 2021 Assembly elections, violence before, during, and after polling claimed at least 20 lives and left hundreds injured in clashes between rival political groups.

This grim reality underscores a troubling truth: no other Indian state witnesses such systematic electoral violence. While isolated incidents occur elsewhere, West Bengal's elections have

consistently been marred by killings, intimidation, and destruction of property. The persistence of this sequence raises serious questions about the state's political culture and raises question whether people of West Bengal are fit to have democracy as a polity or not.

It is imperative that the Election Commission of India act decisively to ensure free and fair elections in Bengal but if the people are against democratic ethos such measure can hardly reverse this distasteful trend. Thus, onus rests entirely on the people of West Bengal to break this vicious cycle. The nation cannot afford to normalize electoral violence. West Bengal must reclaim its democratic spirit and prove that ballots, not bullets, decide the future of its people.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

High End Tourism Investment

Editor,
Recently the state government announced the handing over on lease approximately sixty acres of land to the renowned Taj Group Hotels and Resorts which can be described as a prime investment by a reputed brand in this state of ours all thanks to those who had facilitated the process. Coming to the hospitality sector the State Tourism Policy has to keep abreast with the changes and market dynamics if we are looking towards promoting

Sangma, the Chief Minister, has also claimed that his house was the target of arson during the violence. What should concern him, however, is the potential change in the political landscape that this issue could bring about.

Conrad Sangma's claim of using the "One North East" (ONE) initiative to unite regional parties and leaders across Northeast India to create a single, strong voice for indigenous rights, land protection, and regional identity will come under suspicion if he is seen to be working in the interest of his own indigenous community. And if the issue snowballs into a major election issue in 2028, this could cost him seats in the Garo Hills. With the Khasi Hills predicted to deliver a fractured mandate, failing to perform well in the Garo Hills could mean that the NPP may not be able to form the government. If that happens, the "One North East" will also die a premature death.

Personally, I am concerned about the increase in the non-indigenous population in the Garo Hills. But unless one can prove that these are illegal immigrants, they are legitimate Indian citizens. Therefore, I am not sure that they can be barred from voting and contesting elections. However, in the manner of the BTR, there could be a provision made whereby only one or two seats are kept as general seats, where everyone can vote and contest, while the rest are reserved for the local indigenous community. Over time, especially with the new proposal prohibiting the new ownership of land by the non-indigenous community in areas under the district council—which I think will stand in a court of law—the non-indigenous population will also see a decrease. With limited opportunities, they will have little choice but to migrate and sell their land to the local indigenous community. This is the blueprint that has worked in the Khasi Hills and could be repeated in the Garo Hills as well.

Therefore, there is no need for violence, as there are already laws in place (existing ones or new ones that can be proposed) to protect the interests of the indigenous community. What is required is political will. And that will ultimately decide the future of the Garo Hills and Meghalaya.

(The views expressed in the article are those of the author's and do not reflect in any way his affiliation to any organisation or institution)

Meghalaya as one of the country's prime destination. We cannot compare ourselves to states where revenue and flow of guests are constant for example Agra, Chandigarh, Shimla even Gangtok but here we need to tap into marketing rural tourism better than what they are today. People would want to explore more than just Sohra or Mawlynnong. Lest we forget, even West Khasi Hills and South West Khasi Hills hold their own identity of rural tourism and so too East Jaintia Hills district.

Important policy matters must be taken from the grassroots in collaboration with the local district administration and village authorities making all of them as real stakeholders not just top-down planning at the Secretariat. We have to understand that the tourism sector holds a lot of opportunities right from the farmer who would supply fresh organic vegetables and fruits upwards to those who are in the procurement and vending process. So basically the entire value-chain is triggered by prime investments which create employment for our local youth. Hopefully even those protesting against the so-called "sell out" would see the fruits of development in the long run.

Yours etc.,
Dominic Wankhar,
Via email

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

ILP: A Shield for Our Roots or a Wall for Our Future?

By Victory Paul Basaiawmoit

Over the years, I have heard the same three letters repeated in many everyday conversations: ILP.

I hear it in community meetings, in crowded tea stalls, and in the back seats of shared taxis where strangers talk freely about the worries on their minds. Sometimes the word is spoken with anger, sometimes with hope, and sometimes with quiet concern.

I remember once listening to an elderly man say that the town he grew up in no longer feels the same. I have heard young activists speak passionately about the Inner Line Permit as the final shield that will protect our identity. And I still remember a taxi driver who said something that has stayed with me ever since: "If we don't control who comes in, one day we will become strangers in our own land."

These conversations are not policy seminars or political speeches. They are the everyday anxieties and hopes of ordinary people who care deeply about the future of this land.

For decades now, the Inner Line Permit has become more than just a policy demand in Meghalaya. It has grown into a powerful symbol—a rallying cry repeated in protests, student gatherings, and memorandums submitted by pressure groups. Many people speak of it as the silver bullet, the one measure that will finally regulate influx and secure the land, culture, and future of the Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo people.

But after hearing these conversations repeated over the years, I sometimes feel that we also have a responsibility to ask a quieter and more difficult question:

Do we truly understand what the ILP is, or have we simply fallen in love with the idea of it?

To answer that honestly, we must first look at where the ILP comes from.

The ILP is not a modern creation. It is a legacy from the colonial period, introduced through the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation of 1873 during British rule. At that time, the British were not trying to protect indigenous cultures or traditions. Their primary concern was protecting their economic interests—particularly tea plantations, timber, and other colonial enterprises—from outside traders and settlers.

There is a certain irony in this history. Today, in independent India, many of us look toward a colonial-era instrument in the hope that it will safeguard our identity and our future.

In some parts of the Northeast, the ILP operates as a regulatory system. Visitors are required to obtain permits that record who they are, why they are entering the state, and how long they intend to stay. In practical terms, the system creates a record of movement and allows authorities to monitor entry and exit.

The demand for ILP in Meghalaya, however, does not come from nowhere. It comes from a very real and deeply felt fear.

Our communities are small. The Khasi, Jaintia, and Garo populations together make up only a tiny fraction of India's vast population. When people observe how quickly demographic changes can occur in other regions of the country, it is natural that anxieties begin to grow.

Parents worry about whether their children will inherit the same cultural landscape that they grew up with. Elders worry that traditions carefully preserved over generations might slowly weaken under the pressures of migration and urban expansion. At its heart, the demand for ILP reflects a desire for a filter—a way to ensure that those who enter our hills do so as guests, not as permanent settlers who might bypass local land protections or gradually reshape the demographic balance.

Many people also feel that while constitutional safeguards—especially the Sixth Schedule—protect land ownership and customary governance, they do not fully address the question of who enters and stays. Land may be protected on paper, but the question people often ask is simple: Who is walking on that land? Yet if we are serious about protecting our future, we

must also be honest enough to examine the complexities involved.

The long delay from authorities in New Delhi suggests that implementing ILP in Meghalaya is not a simple administrative step. The issue lies at the intersection of two constitutional principles.

On one hand, Article 19(1) (d) of the Indian Constitution guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to move freely throughout the country. On the other hand, Article 19(5) allows the state to impose reasonable restrictions in order to protect the interests of Scheduled Tribes.

Balancing these two provisions is not easy. There are also practical realities that must be considered. Meghalaya is not an isolated corner cut off from the rest of the region. It lies along important transport routes that connect different parts of the Northeast. Goods, workers, and travelers move through the state regularly.

If a strict permit regime were introduced at the borders, there could be wider ripple effects. The cost of transporting goods might increase. Small businesses could face additional challenges. Even the tourism sector—one of the few growing opportunities for many young people—could slow down if visitors find the process of entering the state complicated.

None of this means that the concerns of our people are misplaced. Far from it. Protection of identity, culture, and land is a legitimate and deeply important concern. But perhaps the real challenge before us is not choosing between a completely closed wall and a completely open door. The more realistic path may lie somewhere in between.

Instead of relying entirely on the ILP as the ultimate solution, we could also focus on strengthening mechanisms that already exist. One such framework is the Meghalaya Residents Safety and Security Act (MRSSA). If implemented effectively and modernized through digital systems, it could create a transparent way of recording who enters and resides in the state. Such a system could allow authorities to maintain a clear record of presence without encountering some of the constitutional and federal hurdles associated with ILP implementation.

At the same time, Autonomous District Councils can play a more active role not only as guardians of customary law but also as regulators of local economic activity. By tightening trade licenses, regulating labour permits, and prioritizing indigenous employment, local institutions could reduce some of the economic pull factors that encourage unchecked migration. When local economies grow, when indigenous youth find meaningful opportunities, and when traditional institutions actively regulate economic participation, the pressure that drives migration may gradually decrease.

Our identity is not negotiable. Our culture, language, and traditions are the living heartbeat of these hills. But we must also ensure that the solutions we pursue are thoughtful, sustainable, and grounded in reality.

The concerns expressed by the indigenous communities deserve more than easy answers. They deserve careful thinking, honest debate, and policies that are strong enough to protect our people without closing the door on the future. Often I think of the taxi driver who said, "One day we may become strangers in our own land." That sentence carries a fear that many people quietly share. But fear alone cannot guide the future of a society. What will guide us is our ability to listen to one another, to question our assumptions, and to build institutions that are wiser than our anxieties because the future of Meghalaya will not be secured by a slogan alone. It will be secured by the difficult work of balancing protection with openness, identity with opportunity, and tradition with the realities of a changing world.

The responsibility of those of us who have heard these conversations is not simply to repeat them, but to ensure that they lead to clearer thinking, wiser policies, and a future in which no one who belongs to these hills ever feels like a stranger in their own home.

"Prediction is very difficult, especially if it's about the future."

—Niels Bohr

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 216 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2026

New Challenges in Counter-terrorism

THE news that six Ukrainians and one American citizen were arrested from Kolkata, Delhi and Lucknow airports by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) and booked under anti-terror laws, as they are allegedly linked to terror-related activities and were using the North Eastern states to reach out to insurgent outfits in Myanmar is troubling. That these foreigners entered Mizoram and then Myanmar exposes a vital security lapse as these foreigners can only enter the states of Mizoram, Nagaland and Manipur after obtaining Inner Line Permits (ILP).

The allegations against these foreign nationals are that they are involved in a transnational network with links to Northeast India and Myanmar and that they were training and assisting the armed groups operating at the Indo-Myanmar border. What is more troubling is that these 7 persons are part of a groups that provide drone warfare training and equipment to insurgents and that the drones are being smuggled from Europe into Myanmar, using India as the trafficking route. It stands to reason that these foreigners would not have been able to operate without the assistance of the ethnic armed groups that operate along the Indo-Myanmar border. Perhaps the existence of the 1600 kilometres Free Movement Regime (FMR) across the border between Manipur and Myanmar is what makes it easier for easy border crossing. The ethnic communities of Manipur and Nagaland have been opposing the fencing of the FMR on the plea that it would cut off the umbilical cord of the ethnic groups that are resident on both sides of the border as a result of what is defined as a crude and ignorant dissection of borders by the British colonialists. Matthew VanDyke the US national was a former mercenary who has participated in conflicts in war zones like Libya. He is alleged to have been providing training and giving operational support to insurgents in the North East and the Kachin states on the use of drones.

While the Ukrainian government has protested the arrests and is seeking consular access and release of its citizens, the US has not yet commented on the arrest of VanDyke. This arrest should draw the attention of Delhi to the vulnerabilities of the India's North East which is connected to the country only through a narrow corridor of 27 kilometres which is only 1% of the border that the region shares with the rest of the country. 99% of the North Eastern region share borders with China, Myanmar, Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. The Indo-Myanmar and Indo-Bangladesh borders are known to be the outlets for the North-Eastern region to trade with the outside world but with both these countries now in a state of flux the possibilities of trade from the India's north-east with South East Asia has entered a no-go zone. Now if terror outfits in the region are being trained by international mercenaries then there is reason for concern and a better security apparatus has to be in place in the North Eastern states. The India-Myanmar border is also a critical space as it is a safe haven for armed groups after the 2021 military coup in Myanmar. North East insurgent outfits are known to have training camps especially in the Sagaing region. While Meghalaya stands apart from the core insurgency belt it is not completely insulated since its borders with Bangladesh are porous and are often used for arms smuggling and militant outfits like HNLC and ANVC have used Bangladesh as a safe haven and transit route even while the former continues to recruit cadres.

UPSC Results and Meghalaya

By Toki Blah

The Oped page of the Shillong Times of March 10, 2026 carried quite a pleasant surprise, at least for me as I hope it did for other readers. The surprise was over the write-up titled "Meghalaya's Lost Decade in the Civil Services" by Roy Kuper Synnem who signed off as the President, Hynniewtrep Youth Council (The HYC). My gratification was over the fact that at long last, a pressure group consisting of youthful individuals; youngsters often considered as rabble rousing trouble makers than anything productive; more at home in projecting themselves as muscular self appointed saviours of the community; people more inclined with public policy of "either our way or the highway", has produced a young educated leader who is not only able to express his concern at a disturbing aspect in Meghalaya society but is also quite capable of articulating his views with logic and reason.

Again, as a welcome change, the article does not take any moral high ground but simply states things as they exist. It reflects how our youth wish to highlight social drawbacks through sensible communication and hence encourages, aged people like me, to join issues; engage in meaningful debates and discussions (verbal or in writing) on how to come up with workable solutions for the benefit of one and all. Meghalaya faces a host of socio-economic-political related hurdles that can be solved only through evocative participation of all. Sustainable solutions to such problems will lie in our ability to work unitedly towards a pre-determined goal and not by pulling each other in opposite directions. It is here that I wish to thank Synnem for providing people from outside his organization the opportunity to chip in with their respective views and opinions on issues that concern and affect Meghalaya and its people.

Let me also admit that I went through the article twice, looking for a particular word and was once again pleased when I failed to find it. The word I was looking for was "Jaibynriew" and in its stead, the word Meghalaya was mentioned many times. Once again the writer has managed to stay focused on what he has to say – the annual dearth of Meghalaya youth who failed to make it to the All India Services for the last 14 and a half years. It is not an embarrassment for the Khasi Jaintia com-

munity alone but for the entire State as a whole. The inability to produce All India Service Officers for nearly 15 years cannot be remedied by parochial cries of "Khasi by blood; Indian by accident." That won't work. For the Jaibynriew to progress, Meghalaya as a state within the Indian Union has to grow and keep pace with the rest of the country. Withdrawing into a shell; shutting off the world around us will only help increase our socio-economic anemia as a minority.

Synnem is correct in identifying "rote learning" as the main stumbling block in Meghalaya's effort to produce successful UPSC candidates. Rote learning kills initiative; Meghalaya students (except for those from the few elite Shillong based institutions) find it quite difficult to connect ideas with innovation; to cultivate critical thinking; to develop intellectual discipline for processed thinking and evaluation. It's not that it isn't there. It's just that the mind hasn't been trained to do so. That was his take and he is correct. All India Competitive exam results show it. The main stakeholder in promoting Education is the Government and here we have to admit lies the main problem. Experience has shown us that the Educational focus of the Government lies more on the interest of teachers than imparting valuable education to students. Teachers are adults; they vote and so are seen as political assets. Students on the other hand don't possess a political voice. They can afford to be ignored! It is not hard therefore to understand why politicians ignore Education and that Meghalaya scores zero every year in the PGI rankings. Politicians find no interest in promoting student welfare! Period.

The key to cracking the UPSC has to be through a well thought out coordinated strategy, that should start right from the household, the entire educational system as well as a focused psyche of the prospective candidate himself/herself. Unfortunately it's something we just don't have and need to start from scratch. To me the Reservation Policy, of the State too plays a role in the mass production of mediocrity. If this is hard to believe, simply attend NEHU organised debates. The performance of our PG students was simply shocking. Reservation kills the urge and need to compete and when this happens, merit

is the first casualty. The need to struggle and compete is just not there. Prior to 1978 these hills managed to produce a regular stream of IAS; IPS and Central Service Officers who served all over the country. Tribal IAS and IPS officers from Meghalaya were to be found in almost every state of the country and they did very well. Today, like a species on the verge of extinction they manage to exist only in their endemic environment- Meghalaya and even in their own home state, as stated above, they are becoming more of a rarity than anything else.

So what do we do now? To my mind there are two solutions to the problem- one, long term, the other to fill up an immediate need. Lets deal with the long term solution first as it has more to do on how we prepare our scholars for competitive examinations. On this score MBOSE has much to answer for as the pedagogy preferred by this Oracle of Learning is "Rote Learning". The outcome from such modes of learning is the student's dislike for anything that has to do with analytical or critical thinking; a dislike for problem solving; it discourages reading habits (a vital pastime that encourages acquisition of knowledge); of keeping abreast on current affairs. All of the above are traits that any serious candidate, keen in cracking the UPSC, has to develop. They are qualities a student has to discipline himself/herself as preparation for the toughest exam on earth. Sadly our students fail to do so simply because MBOSE, the institution that is supposed to instill knowledge in its recipients, has failed to encourage the inquisitive spirit in its progenies. If Meghalaya is genuinely keen in producing intellectuals capable of emerging as meritorious contenders of UPSC exams, it will have to give a serious thought on how to refashion MBOSE as a center of excellence from the inconsequential institution of learning it is today.

The results for a reinvigorated MBOSE spoken of above will take time. An immediate positive result to our pressing concerns can however be initiated to produce immediate effect. We are all aware of the efforts of the State Government to help aspiring UPSC candidates through coaching and training facilities available at the All India Services Pre-Examination Training Centre (AISPETC) at MATI,

Mawdiangdiang. Sadly, so far the initiative has failed to produce results. The reasons for this failure are not far to seek. Meghalaya lacks the proper infrastructure and resources, especially human resources in the form of experts, who can act as coaches, tutors and guides for both Mains as well as Prelims. Private coaching centers at Delhi etc are far too expensive for most of our local aspirants. Perhaps at this juncture it would be welcome news for most to know that the Central Government is also aware of such difficulties and that the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment has tried to redress it by setting up Training and Coaching centers for ST/SC candidates in major Indian cities where both infrastructure and expert human resource are available - Free. Free classes together with boarding and lodging for ST candidates are there on offer. Aspirants can on their own or through the State Govt apply to the following :-

(1) All India Civil Services Coaching Centre (AICSCC), Chennai

Address: 163/1, Kanchi, P.S. Kumarasamy Raja Salai, Greenways Road, Raja Annamalaiapuram, Chennai, Tamil Nadu 600028

Phone: 24621475, 24621909

email: aicscc.gov@gmail.com

Specialty: Government-run UPSC coaching with subsidized fees and hostel facilities for SC/ST candidates.

Programs: Prelims, Mains, and Interview guidance.

(2). Dr. Ambedkar Centres of Excellence (DACE)

Run by: Dr. Ambedkar Foundation under the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment.

Spread across: Central universities and major state universities in India.

Focus: Free UPSC coaching for SC candidates; advocacy ongoing to extend to ST candidates.

In conclusion The Government of Meghalaya can perhaps immediately move the Ministry of Social Justice & Empowerment for reserving ST seats for candidates from the state in the above named coaching institutions. Meghalaya does have some bright and serious candidates from the state capable of cracking the UPSC exams provided they are given access to coaching centers with the wherewithal to hone their talents and ambitions. Perhaps the time to put an end to this famine for UPSC products has finally arrived.

Khasi? Jaintia? Much ado about nothing

By Dominick Dauni Roising Rymbai

On February 28th, 2026, Day 10 of the Budget Session of the Legislative Assembly of Meghalaya, a Point of Order was raised by the Deputy Chief Minister, Sniawbhalang Dhar regarding a speech made by an Opposition member in the Short Duration Discussion on the Report of the Expert Committee of the Reservation Policy of Meghalaya on February 25, 2026. The Point of Order is as per Rule 300 of the Rules of Procedure and Conduct of Business in Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The aforementioned Rules were made as per the constitutional provisions empowered by Article 208 of the Constitution of India.

The Point of Order related to the usage of the official terminology of "Khasi and Jaintia" and not just Khasi alone as spoken by the said Opposition member. The request was to incorporate the correct terminology in the official records of the proceedings of the Legislative Assembly. The same was restated by the Minister i/c Health and Family Welfare, Sports and Youth Affairs, etc, Wailadmi Shylla. There was no mention of divisions, separateness or, sub-classifications of each of the sub-tribes of the Hynniewtrep tribe, by the concerned Ministers. Just the correct usage of officially notified words. That's it.

Assembly proceedings are live-streamed. Hence MLAs see them as opportunities for scoring brownie points. From a lay person's point of view, it is unbecoming of the leader of a fast-growing political start-up to make scathing remarks on the emotional intelligence or EQ of the Deputy Chief Minister. There was no necessity to make grandstanding statements of being a 'mature' statesman and also some kind of a messianic unifier of the Hynniewtrep tribe. The august house is not Madan Jewrynghep (Fire Brigade field), Madan Malki or Madan Student. YouTube-based local news channels carried out the concerned Point of Order. The next thing, social media explodes, for and against the motion.

Unity what? We are one! In the Khasi language, its Hynniewtrep, and in Pnar its Nlaw Wasa. The indigenous people of the present-day Khasi & Jaintia Hills Division of the state of Meghalaya accepts that we are the Hynniewtrep tribe, with common culture, customs, traditions and folk tales. Two best examples are our unique matrilineal system and the clans' relations (jingieah ki kur ki jaid). Growing up in the Jaintia Hills, the importance of clans was practically monolithic in one. On reaching adolescence (khie samla or khai khynroo khyllod) and plans to move to Shillong city or Ramakrishna Mission Sohra for higher education, the writer was advised, actually warned, not to have any 'crush' or romantic relationship with four specific clans of the Khasi Hills – the Nongrum, the Rumnong, the Nongneng and the Nengnong. Interestingly, the said clans are considered the original inhabitants of the erstwhile Hima Shyllong (present-day Khyrim Syiemship and Mylliem Syiemship) and Hima Sohra. One can just imagine the 'limited' choices available, when other related "no-means-no" clans from the Khasi & Jaintia Hills are added up - the Le Kyllung (Rymbai, Najiar and Toi) clan grouping, Lyngdoh (Rymbai Bahkhal), Bang, Chynret, Khai, Kyndait, Kyndiah, Ksoo, Lato, Nangti, Pdein, Rymbui, Rynghkhem, Sana, Siangbood and Thma.

Another unique clan grouping is the lawchibidi; the clans that make up this closely-related grouping are domiciled in various parts of the Khasi & Jaintia Hills including parts of present-day Assam and Bangladesh. They include Diengdoh, Gassah, Gashnga, Gadew, Hek, Lamin, Lalo, Marnag, Mohmen, Nartiang, Pariong, Pyrbot, Syngngai, etc. Through historical intramigration for various reasons, the related clans of our indigenous people became original inhabitants in different parts of Ka Bri U Hynniewtrep.

Generally, the introductory question asked when the Hynniewtrep people meet one another, is Phi dei jaid aiu or Yong kur pha doi (To which clan do you belong). Language: Through the efforts of Reverend Thomas

Jones, our Poet Laureate U Myllung Soso Tham and many others, the Khasi language (Ktien Sohra) has become the official lingua franca of the Hynniewtrep people. In highly diverse countries or regions like India, dialects differ every 10-15 km. Similar is the case with culture. Potato, the humble vegetable so ubiquitous in our diet, was imported from South America into the Western coast of our country by the Portuguese and introduced into our north-eastern hilly home by the British. Along the National Highway from Shillong to Jowai, it is phan in Shillong, sohlah in Smit and Nongkrem, and finally becomes salah at the historical border of the erstwhile Hima Shyllong and the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom. If one travels by train across the Hindi heartland states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and pays attention to the spoken language, one realises many native spoken languages besides the official Hindi and/or Urdu. They include Bhojpuri, Maithili, Magahi, Santali, Awadhi, Braj, Bhasha, Bundeli, etc. In our hills, most non-Shillong and non-Sohra indigenous people are bi-lingual, in their own native mother tongue as well as the official Khasi. Irrespective of the native mother tongue, the Hynniewtrep indigenous music lovers can relate to and enjoy the songs Jainsam a Cjawdeng (Maram), Os'te (Pnar) and Shynnam Shynnam (War-Pynursla). The Jaintia Language and Literary Association was formed in 1975 by luminaries like the late Dr. Barrister Pakem, a Pnar speaker from Elaka Sutnga married to a War-Amwi speaker from Elaka Nongtalang. With language as a form of identity, the Association's success in building a standardised alphabet for the Jaintias (Pnar and War-Amwi native speakers) is commendable. Documentation helps prevent gradual loss in the future. Among the indigenous people of Jaintia Hills, the words Khasi and Khyrniam are used interchangeably for the brethren to the east; just as Khasi and Hynniewtrep are used interchangeably in these ancient hills we call home.

Conclusion: What should be alarming is the polarisation of a small tribal community (barely 20 lakhs) like ours on religious and co-religious denominational lines. Imagine the number of broken hearts in our modern version of the sad love-lost folktale of Ka Sohlyngngem and U Rynniaw? To reiterate, religion is private, culture is public! Similarities and differences are to be celebrated and respected. It is very important to talk to and understand one another, in a respectful manner. Queries and differences can be ironed out by dialogues. Most times, discussions do lead to the truth. We do not live in an era of constant warfare, or quick to violence (smat rah wait) for settling disputes. Let us remind ourselves that all our traditional politico-administrative entities like Raid/Raij, Elaka and Hima were formed by voluntary association and consensus of the founding clans. Decisions of the durbar are usually by consensus.

In independent and sovereign India's democratic elections, people from the same village, Raid, Elaka and Hima can vote for different political parties. A legal or illegal forceful unification process to bring about homogeneity in culture or religion, spells disaster for the future. Enveloped by larger population of Sino-Tibetan and Indo-Aryan speakers, we, the Hynniewtrep people speaking an Austro-Asiatic Mon Khmer school of languages, have lasted at least 3500 to 4000 years. We will and should survive, till the end of time. Unless, of course, we allow ourselves to be divided?

PS: Officially speaking, most terminology and names in our Meghalaya dates back to those used during the British Raj. Topping it all, IQ and EQ are judged solely based on proficiency of the spoken and written English language. Worse, no Disprin has been discovered as yet for complete cure of the colonial hangover.

(Disclaimer: Views expressed are strictly personal. Email: dauni.roising@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

MCA Does Not Need Defence, But Strategy

Editor,

Apologies to the letter 'Responding Firmly to Misleading Cricket Narrative' published on March 17, 2026, it is, to put it mildly, surprising that two former office bearers of the Meghalaya Cricket Association (MCA), with such evident emotion, have chosen to come out in complete defence and defiance when my initial article, 'Rock-Bottom: Meghalaya Cricket's Crisis and a Hope for Redemption', did not in fact point to any particular individual with respect to the overall mismanagement of the Association. One is left genuinely puzzled as to why the authors appear to have taken such personal offence, and what it is in the article that so specifically wounded and targeted them. That question, perhaps, is worth mulling over.

I would, somewhat ironically, like to thank the authors because in their letter, they have done more to prove my point than I ever could have on my own. The article was, at its heart, a commentary on the culture of the MCA: the lack of openness to feedback, the hostility toward any form of constructive engagement, and a certain institutional disdain for accountability. The authors' response, high-

ly dismissive, combative, and lacking any genuine introspection, points exactly towards that culture.

It should be noted that the MCA is not a private limited company. The public has every right to engage with it, question it, and scrutinise it. One does not need to become an "over-night cricket analyst," as the authors rather condescendingly and defamingly put it, to access publicly available data and draw reasonable conclusions from it.

And since the authors have been generous enough to credit me with analytical abilities, let me present a few more facts, because their letter appears to rest on the claim that the team has performed admirably over the years, and that this past season was merely an anomaly.

In the 2024-25 season, when Meghalaya did qualify for the Ranji Trophy Elite Group, an achievement the authors cite with great pride, the team played 7 matches and lost all 7. They finished with the lowest team quotient across all 32 teams in the Elite Groups.

More strikingly, in the match against Mumbai, Meghalaya suffered the third-largest defeat in the entire history of the Ranji Trophy, and recorded the second-worst start to an innings in first-class cricket history, across the world. This has even been cited by Wisden. I

would gently ask the authors, had they paused to reflect on even a fraction of this before putting pen to paper, might they have arrived at a different conclusion? Might that reflection, over years and not just one season, have prompted some kind of systemic overhaul that the situation so evidently demands?

The authors even take considerable pride in recounting the journey to BCCI affiliation. The full affiliation of 2018 was secured when our current Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, held the presidency of MCA. It requires no special analytical skill to recognise that no other individual within the Association at that time had the network, the political capital, or the negotiating bandwidth to deliver that outcome for Meghalaya cricket. The effort to claim collective credit, however well-intentioned it may be, does not sit comfortably alongside the facts and it does not serve the cause of humility particularly well either.

If the authors genuinely care for Meghalaya cricket, and I have no reason to doubt that they do, then a public platform in a widely circulated daily is a valuable thing. It ought not to be used to discredit a sports enthusiast who engaged with nothing more than publicly available information and an honest concern for the game's future in this state.

It would serve the sport far better if that same platform, and whatever institutional knowledge and experience the authors carry, were directed instead toward offering the current administration concrete suggestions, measured counsel, and constructive engagement. That, ultimately, is what Meghalaya cricket needs right now. Not a defence of the past, but a hand in building what comes next. Things will not change "overnight" but "analysis" is definitely important for the required change.

Yours etc.,
Patrick Kurbah,
Via email

Protecting the Core Spirit of the 6Th Schedule

Editor,

This is with reference to the ongoing public discourse on the Sixth Schedule and the question of electoral participation in Autonomous District Councils.

While it is true that non-tribal participation in voting may be legally permissible within the broader framework of democratic rights, it is essential not to lose sight of the original intent behind the Sixth Schedule. The constitutional design was not merely administrative. It was protective, aimed at preserving tribal self-governance, identity, and control over local institutions.

Any interpretation or reform of the electoral system must therefore place this foundational objective at its centre. The structure of the Autonomous District Councils should continue to prioritise tribal control and decision-making, ensuring that the political future of these areas remains firmly in the hands of the indigenous communities for whom these safeguards were created.

Diluting this principle, even in the name of procedural inclusiveness, risks undermining the very purpose of constitutional protection.

Yours etc.,
Marbiang L Rymbai
Via email

Presence over Optics

Editor,

When unrest hit Garo Hills, Conrad K. Sangma chose to remain in Tura despite security advice to relocate after reports of possible attacks. He visited affected areas, met residents, and engaged with communities dealing with the aftermath of violence.

Alongside this, residents, youth groups, and local organizations were seen coming together to clear debris and clean up parts of Tura after the clashes. These were modest but visible efforts to restore a sense of normalcy in areas that had just experienced disruption.

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

"A right delayed is a right denied."

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No 217 SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 20, 2026

Unhappy nation

CURIOUSLY, but not unexpectedly, India ranks 116th in a global happiness report that surveyed the scene in 147 nations. Holding the top rank, repeatedly for the ninth year, is Finland, a Nordic nation of nearly half a crore people, set in north Europe, bordering Russia and close to the Arctic. A part of the Russian empire, Finland declared Independence following the 1917 Russian Revolution; breaking away from the Communist mould. Finland was the first country in Europe to grant universal suffrage, and the first nation to give all adults the right to run for public offices. Finland's transformation from an agrarian economy to an industrialised nation since the 1950s helped in the fast-paced growth of its economy. Tiny Finland's Nokia phones were a rage in the initial phase of the cell phone revolution. The nation ranks high in education, prosperity, and competitiveness; the net result being that a happy society has been shaped with great success. Curiously again, all the five Nordic countries found themselves in the top six positions in the happiness index. Among them were Sweden and Norway.

Notably, the global happiness index list compiled by University of Oxford's Wellbeing Research Centre with UN support linked the happiness to mainly four factors – GDP per capita, life expectancy, individual freedom, and levels of corruption. The GDP per capita of Finland is in the range of around \$55,000. Aspiring economic super power India's GDP per capita is in the range of \$2,700. Life expectancy for Finland is at 80 plus, while for India, it's 70 plus. Corruption at both political and bureaucratic levels is sky-high, mind boggling; and the scenario keeps worsening due to lack of competent leadership at the helm, and resultant freewheeling subversion of the systems. This is the result when politics is the turf for a semi-literate bunch that lacks discipline.

As for the level of happiness, the quality of the leadership matters. Every time a government changes here, the new rulers follow the same pattern set by the previous leaders and governments. Bold reforms and a progressive reduction of state controls are the way forward to change the quality of life. Here, laws are being made at the drop of a hat, as politicians elected to representative bodies think this is their only job. They carry the tag of lawmakers. A former Supreme Court chief justice had openly stated that the surfeit of laws had reached a level that judges are confused. One law contradicts the other. A society, over a course of time, should become more liberal and progressive. The reverse is happening here. Fundamentalist streaks are getting stronger; and in some cases, the scenario has turned worse than that of Saudi Arabia. The ageing anachronisms who fashion themselves as leaders, who are past their prime, are a curse on any nation. Implicit in this argument is that the leadership profile of the nation must be more youthful. Under the existing scenario, no individual here can lead a happy life, other than of course the corrupt creed who loot the public exchequer or take bribes at every turn, or traders who flout rules, act like Shylocks and fleece the people.

Letters to the Editor

Beyond Blame: Understanding the Garo Hills Unrest and the Limits of Leadership

Editor,

In moments of unrest, public anger often looks for a single individual to hold responsible. The recent violence in the Garo Hills, linked to the now-postponed elections to the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC), has followed a similar pattern, with much of the criticism directed at Chief Minister Conrad Sangma. However, a closer and more balanced examination shows that the situation is far more complex and cannot be reduced to the actions of one leader.

At a time when tensions were high and emotions were running deep, the Chief Minister's response stood out for its restraint. In circumstances where many would have resorted to aggressive or heavy-handed measures, Conrad Sangma chose a different path. He went to the streets, met people directly, and assessed the damage caused by the violence. This approach reflected calmness and humility rather than authority alone, and it sent an important message of reassurance during a period of uncertainty.

While criticism is a natural part of any democracy, it must be grounded in context. It is worth asking whether it is reasonable to place

the blame for such a crisis entirely on the present government when the roots of the issue go back several decades. The question of non-tribal participation in GHADC elections is not a recent development. It has existed since the framing of the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951, under which non-tribals have been allowed to contest elections since the very inception of the Council. This framework has continued unchanged across successive governments and political phases.

There is, of course, a genuine and understandable concern among many that Autonomous District Councils, created under the Sixth Schedule, are meant to safeguard tribal self-governance and identity. From that perspective, the demand to restrict electoral participation to tribal communities has its own merit. However, such a change must follow the proper constitutional route. It requires an amendment of the existing rules through the District Council itself, followed by the approval of the Governor. It cannot be addressed through immediate reactions or by attributing responsibility to the state government alone.

This is where it becomes important to recognise the distinction between institutional responsibility and political accountability. The rules governing GHADC elections are not framed by the present state government, and any modification must

What Happens When Entrepreneurs Fail: Not All Enterprises Succeed

By Patricia Mukhim

This article is an attempt to discuss something that very few dare to share. Failure and how to cope with it. It is the result of a programme I attended at the Bosco Institute, Jorhat, Assam which offers a Masters Course in Social Work and is also an incubation hub for young entrepreneurs. According to Fr Jerry Thomas the founder-director of the Institution, the aim is to retain human capital from the North Eastern Region within the region instead of pushing them to look for jobs in unfriendly environs outside the region where they face racial discrimination and are stereotyped as being good only for working at salons or the hospitality industry. The North East is rich in natural resources but its human resources have not been developed to use those resources in a sustainable manner without reckless exploitation.

The Meghalaya Government has been promoting entrepreneurs and their startups but one wonders whether those young and budding entrepreneurs have enough hands-on training, mentoring and counselling to withstand the rigours of the trade. There is so much to know about the world of business such as conducting market surveys to find out what the market demand is. A young lady entrepreneur Fatima Bint Mazid while in a conversation said she and her husband one day during the Covid period had this dream of starting a business dealing with jute bags. While she tried to manage the materials such as buying the first 25 metres of jute from Kolkata and a machine to stitch the bags and then design them, her husband was exploring markets. They tried to sell their products through Amazon and Flipkart but found the commission too high. Later they sold the bags through India Mart and then got orders from Starbucks and other bigger brands. And their journey was made but they had to constantly innovate to make their product better. For the initial investment Fatima and her mother-in-law had to take a loan against gold ornaments. And that is the crux of the matter! What happens if one has no collateral to offer?

Commercial banks offer loans to those who already run businesses and would not invest in a brand new entrepreneur in case the business fails. And yet it is the entrepreneur who is most

in need of seed money. The Meghalaya Government has promoted quite a number of entrepreneurs with seed money. Four or five years down the line it is important to find out if those who have availed the seed money are progressing on the right track and have expanded their businesses and how many have dropped out due to failure to run the business.

A gentleman by name YR Wilson Maria Doss who had a Masters Degree in Social Work and a management degree from IIM Calcutta and was working for a corporate firm as a Human Resource (HR) personnel shared his amazing story. Wilson had a sudden calling to step out of a well-paying corporate job and to become an entrepreneur. He set up a departmental store but before long another more swanky store selling the same stuff came up next to his and he started losing business. By the time he could salvage the business he had lost 10 crore rupees and the banks and other debtors were after his life. At the time his children were still studying and they asked their father why he took such a reckless decision to quit a secure job. Wilson went into depression and was hospitalised in Bangalore. After due treatment he found his feet and went back to the corporate world where he was offered a job. Now both his children and son and daughter are well-placed professionals in the US. The lesson that Wilson was trying to drive at while addressing the bright young women entrepreneurs who had gathered at the Bosco Hub for the 7th North East Vent which is an annual gathering of entrepreneurs who have received their training from there.

Speaking to me earlier that day, Wilson said that the biggest shock for any entrepreneur is to fail at the business because no one has taught us how to cope with failure. This is so true. We are taught many things from books but there is no school or college book and nor are there teachers who can mentor students to cope with failure and what the coping mechanisms are. Many entrepreneurs who fall by the wayside are never able to pick up the threads. It is in this context that Wilson Maria Doss's experience is a great learning for all entre-

preneurs.

On another note it is also important to deeply analyse how disconnected our education has been from our ecosystem. It has never taught us the importance of value addition but has made us sell out everything in their raw form. Look at the hundreds of trucks selling limestone to Bangladesh instead of adding value through properly run cement companies that could have created employment for so many youth. In fact, value addition of raw products, sourced from our land is what entrepreneurship is all about. But the expertise for value addition can only come about if the youth are mentored and learn both about success and also failure.

Wilson told the young start-up owners who displayed their wares at the Bosco Incubation Hub that entrepreneurship is a vocation and it needs passion because one is responsible for how the start-up runs. There is no easy route, he said and an entrepreneur has no choice but to wake up at 4 am and start working. It's not an easy job but if the start-up succeeds it can offer jobs to many others and that in itself should trigger many more youth to actually become entrepreneurs since the job market in the government sector is in a state of drought.

What is heartening about the Bosco Institute is that there is a mix of students from the North East including about 7 from Meghalaya (quite a few from Ri Bhoi district) who are doing their Masters in Social Work (under Dibrugarh University) but they are very grounded and have outreach programmes such as organising communities around issues which is what Social Work as a subject is all about. Many of these students then step into the world of work with a range of practical lessons in their kits.

The Bosco Institute has an innovation centre called a Makers Room – It says there, "Making is the process of cutting and joining materials and giving it a final finishing." Here anyone with an idea of designing and making anything is free to come and try to design anything and get those printed in a 3-D printer.

One witnessed first hand how education is tuned to the real world needs and is not

just dry and boring academics and the students seem to enjoy their time at the Institute. They do stuff late into the night and can be heard making noise but that's what learning is all about.

Fr Jerry Thomas, says, "The institute aims at grooming young people into confident, competent and passionate professionals who would be harbingers of positive change at the individual, community and at the larger societal level. But he is also aware that mental health is something that can assault anyone at any time especially when young people or even their teachers and the entrepreneurs in the Hub are under stress. So the Institute has a beautiful building of a single room with a pool that makes a soothing sound to heal the mind. People who need healing come there to just talk and there is someone to listen to them. Just listen.. because listening itself is a healing process.

With so many mentors coming to the Institute from time to time the students are exposed to the best minds. Like Wilson said, "Everything begins in the mind and that directs the body. If the mind says something will fail people are automatically led to that path of failure unless someone catches hold of them at a critical juncture and pulls them back from that downward journey. To me that is real education. It is an education that brings out the best in every individual and which has created an ambience where collaboration and solidarity building around issues comes naturally.

PRIME Meghalaya has never publicly shared as to how many entrepreneurs it has incubated so far and whether all of them have succeeded. There is nothing wrong with failure provided there's someone to help pull the person out of the abyss. Perhaps the Meghalaya Basin Management Authority (MBMA) could be more open about sharing its experiences over the years and how successful its endeavour has been to create entrepreneurs.

As a society we are too gung-ho about politics and society and even the many write-ups appearing here don't really give us an insight into what really drives our youth and if there are role models that have beaten all odds to succeed in scaling up their businesses. It is in sharing stories that we build up one another.

Iranian Women Recast As Helpless Victims

By Zaid Taimur

This has reference to a letter written by Salil Gwali on March 18, 2026 titled "We cannot support the war-like ambitions of World leaders." The writer is relentlessly pushing the false image of Iranian women as oppressed, passive victims, silenced by mandatory hijab and desperate for rescue by the "free world." while

ing compulsory education with rural outreach, have narrowed urban-rural gaps to under 5 percentage points for young women, per Iran's Statistical Centre (2025). In contrast, India's rural female literacy lags at 64 per cent, hampered by dropout rates exceeding 20 per cent post-primary (ASER 2023).

Iranian women comprise

"Western media and Godi media perpetuate this narrative, that Iranian women and daughters are suddenly recast as helpless victims in desperate need of American missiles for salvation as if freedom is born from the fire of invading bombs."

ignoring empirical strides in education and professional fields. Western media and Godi media perpetuate this narrative, that Iranian women and daughters are suddenly recast as helpless victims in desperate need of American missiles for salvation as if freedom is born from the fire of invading bombs. An Iranian woman who resists, who stands firm against foreign intervention, who declares "No to humiliation, no to occupation, no to colonialism!" cannot be used as an excuse for sanctions or invasion. So they must paint her as voiceless, oppressed, surrounded, and as victims, waiting for Western and saffron salvation.

56-63 per cent of university students, as per Ministry of Science data (2024-2025), with peaks at 65 per cent in some public institutions. This surpasses the 56-58 per cent female enrolment (National Student Clearinghouse, 2024) in the US and dwarfs India's 47-49 per cent (AISHE 2022-23). Iran's affirmative policies, including scholarships and quotas, have funnelled women into higher education since the 1980s. Over 2.5 million women enrol annually across 2,500+ universities, outpacing male counterparts in entry rates. In the US, rising costs deter 40 per cent of low-income women (College Board, 2024); in



This selective lens, amplified by figures like Donald Trump, Benjamin Netanyahu and saffron hoodlums overlooks data revealing Iranian women outperforming peers in the US and India across key metrics. A closer examination dismantles the plight narrative, spotlighting undeniable achievements. This erasure is deliberate. A woman who teaches at universities, defends her coun-

India, cultural barriers and safety concerns limit access, with only 24 per cent rural women pursuing tertiary education (NFHS-5).

Beyond academia, Iranian women excel in judiciary (33 per cent judges) and even piloting (10 percent of Iran's air force trainees). Iran's model, rooted in prioritising female literacy amid adversity, offers lessons for the Global South, challenging

"Iran's female literacy stands as a testament to systemic investment post-1979 Revolution. UNESCO and World Bank data for 2022-2024 peg adult female literacy at 85.5-86.2 per cent, surging to 98.9-99.2 per cent for women aged 15-24."

try, withstands sanctions, and exposes Western lies has no place in BBC, VOA, or The New York Times and Godi Media. Why? Because she destroys their narrative—the fairy tale that freedom comes from war and liberation falls from the sky.

Writers like Salil Gwali ostensibly defenders of women's rights and human rights, have been conspicuously silent on the sufferings of Palestinian women and 165 Iranian school girls torn apart by joint Israeli and US air strikes. His writings chime well with egregious twaddle propagated by the western imperialist and saffron brigade.

Iran's female literacy stands as a testament to systemic investment post-1979 Revolution. UNESCO and World Bank data for 2022-2024 peg adult female literacy at 85.5-86.2 per cent, surging to 98.9-99.2 per cent for women aged 15-24. These figures eclipse India's 70.3 per cent adult female literacy (NFHS-5, 2021; World Bank 2024). Engineering reinforces the trend: women account for 35-42 per cent of graduates, higher than India's 29 per cent (AISHE 2023) and closing on the US's 22 per cent (NSF, 2024).

This isn't rhetoric—it's measurable. Iran's national literacy campaigns, blend-

both American individualism and Indian patriarchy. As data affirms, Iranian women aren't victims; they're vanguard achievers. Western and saffron discourse must evolve beyond propaganda to engage this reality.

In India not only countless women wept and beat their chest but also men mourned his death, seeing him as a religious martyr. He was not only the political leader of Iran but also a religious authority. Khamenei is regarded as a Marja-e-Taqlid, or "Source of Emulation," meaning many look to such figures for spiritual and religious guidance. However, this moment of mourning has quickly turned into yet another loyalty test on social media for Indian Muslims. How can we forget the horrifying Nepalese royal family massacre of King Birendra who ruled for 29 years until his death had become popular amongst the Nepalese populace in Shillong despite his brutal repression of democracy rallies in the 1990s. Countless Nepalese men in adjoining areas of Jhalupara, Barapathar and Mawprew shared their heads and avoided consuming salts for 13 days. People have the right to mourn even when the figure being mourned is controversial. Grief does not always follow neat political logic.

ership is best judged not only by the challenges it faces but by the manner in which it responds. By choosing to engage directly with people and maintain a calm approach in the face of unrest, Conrad Sangma has demonstrated a willingness to lead with responsibility and composure. The way forward lies in building on that approach and working collectively towards lasting solutions, rather than reducing complex issues to simple conclusions.

Yours etc;
Jack Syiemlieh
Via email

Dealing With Traffic Congestion in Shillong

Editor,

The growing number of vehicles and inability to build or widen the roads, add to the chaos of traffic issues in any city and our beautiful city, Shillong is no exception. Suggestions like construction of flyovers in Shillong or any part of Meghalaya is absurd as the entire region falls under seismic zone VI.

Still if we collectively (Government, Locality Heads, Public) address the issue it can be solved to a great extent.

Firstly, the Government has to provide enough parking places in and around the city particularly in/near the market places. Road side au-

thorized/unauthorized parking should be completely done away with.

Secondly, the Dorbar Shnong and Headmen of respective localities should identify places for community parking, if possible and also ensure no vehicle is parked by the roadside, particularly at night, so that in case of any emergency, ambulance and/or fire-brigade can reach the spot without any hassle.

Thirdly, the public should strictly follow the rules and regulations regarding traffic and parking as laid by the Government, Local Dorbar Shnong and Police department from time to time and adhere to the required reforms.

Together we can surely bring the much needed change without spoiling the natural beauty of this city.

Yours etc.,
Dr Deepankar Dutt,
Via email

On Saving Kids from the Mobile Trap

Editor,

I fully agree with Salil Gwali's thought provoking article under caption, "Protecting Children from the Menace of Digital Pollution," (ST March 13, 2026). Over the past few years I have seen many parents struggle to limit their children's mobile phone use, but their efforts often fail. Their children's addiction to mobile games, as I have

observed, has disrupted the peace at home. Parents feel at ease only when their children are at school. As soon as they return home, the children take their phones and go to their rooms. They often ignore their parents. When schools recommend using phones for study and homework, children take that as an excuse to use them for other purposes.

The most worrying effect on our younger generation is a loss of concentration, which harms their studies. Another serious problem is exposure to explicit digital content, which is taking a heavy toll on young people.

I think a government ban on mobile phones for children is necessary. To steer children away from harmful habits, parents also should encourage hobbies such as sports, gardening, and reading, which many children currently avoid. I completely agree with Mr Gwali that excessive mobile phone use among children has led to diminished mental focus, distorted thought patterns, increased anxiety and depression, memory loss, and emotional imbalance. Therefore, we see that the younger generation today is losing their mental balance quickly, and a series of problems follow.

Yours etc.,
Rupesh Nath
Via email

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"I believe in being an innovator."

— Walt Disney

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.218 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 21, 2026

ADC Rules - Delayed Awakening

THE Voice of the People Party (VPP) has at last risen to the occasion. The Meghalaya High Court order was a wake-up call because until then no Member of the District Council had read the 222 page Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Council) Rules, 1951. Now the VPP has decided to constitute a special committee to examine possible amendments to the above Rules, more specifically Rule 8 and 128(1). It took 75 years for the people running the State of Meghalaya and those who have occupied the sacred portals of the District Council to realise that the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Council) Rules, 1951 were inherently flawed in terms of allowing non-tribals to contest election to a body that seeks to protect tribal interests.

Rule 8 says, "a person shall not be qualified to be elected as a member of the District Council unless he (a) is a citizen of India (b) is not less than 25 years of age and (c) is entitled to vote at the election of members of the District Council of that autonomous district." Under the Section - Franchise - Electoral Rolls, Rule 128(1) says "Save insofar as or otherwise provided in these rules every person who is- (a) a citizen of India and ordinary (this should have been ordinarily) resident in a constituency for not less than 180 days during the qualifying period. (b) not below the age of 18 years on the qualifying date (c) not of unsound mind and does not stand to be declared by a competent court or such authority as may be empowered by the Governor on this behalf. (d) for the time being not disqualified from voting under the provisions of any law relating to corrupt or illegal practices and other offences in connection with elections, shall be entitled to vote at any election of the District Council of an autonomous district."

Provided that a person not belonging to a Scheduled Tribe specified in part XI - Meghalaya of the Schedule to the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) order 1950, as amended up to date, shall not be entitled to vote unless he is a permanent resident within the territorial limits of the said autonomous district. The Rule also says that a person who can vote can also contest the elections and it is this clause which is causing all the violence right now in the Garo Hills. The question that arises - why was this not contested since 1951 when the Rules were made. In the Khasi Hills, leaders like BB Lyngdoh and others preferred to appeal to the non-tribals not to vote for the Council elections and much less to contest because they knew what the repercussions would be. Also, leaders like BB Lyngdoh, Capt WA Sangma, PR Kyndiah etc., were much aware that there were several non-tribal leaders who joined the statehood movement and were members of the All Party Hill Leaders Conference (APHLIC) then. They might have felt at the time that amending Rule 128 (1) of Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Council) Rules, 1951, to disallow non tribals to vote or contest elections to the ADCs would have alienated the genuine non-tribal residents of a District Council constituency, since their names are in the electoral rolls of the legislative assembly too. Now after 75 years this omission has come to haunt the tribals of Meghalaya.

"Dogs of war" enter the Enchanted Frontiers

By Lt Gen (Dr) Shokin Chauhan & Jaideep Saikia

tected Area Permit, and not registering within 24 hours of their arrival with the Foreigners Registration Office which is mandatory for all foreign nationals. Despite these violations, their presence did not initiate any law-enforcement response.

To be sure, the paradox lies in the fact that the 510-km India-Myanmar border in Mizoram is largely unfenced in order to accommodate the Free Movement Regime. The international border is with Myanmar's Chin State and it runs along six districts of Mizoram, namely Champhai, Saitual, Lawngtlai, Hnahthial, Saitual, and Serchhip. In all likelihood, VanDyke's group exploited these clandestine tribal transit routes, which may be occasionally monitored for entry-exit of contraband, but not fortified to detect high-tech "war tourists."

Finally, detection occurred at airports in Kolkata, Delhi and Lucknow—the most unyielding points in the security grid—rather than the fluid land borders. This suggests that their movements were completely in the dark until the end of the three-month window period which the "dogs of war" needed to train Myanmar's Ethnic Armed Organisations (and possibly the Kuki insurgent groups operating in Manipur) in sophisticated drone assembly and Electronic Warfare.

The long and short of the vicious cycle is that the Indian internal intelligence was able to track them down only after their mission to impart knowledge to their consumers was successfully completed. Indeed, a stray report seems to suggest that it was the Russians who tipped-off the Indian intelligence which led to the arrests. If it is indeed so, then it suggests that India's domestic "eyes and ears" completely failed to independently detect a group of seven foreign military veterans making their way through a highly militarised zone. Indeed, observers of the event have pointed to the gross failure of the Intel-

ligence Bureau. The ongoing ethnic unrest in Manipur and the volatile situation in Myanmar, they maintain, should have ordained a high order vigilance by the law-enforcement agencies. The entry of a known international mercenary under such circumstances makes the plot even more glaring.

At a deeper level, the incident signals a shift in the very nature of insurgency in India's North East. The involvement of foreign veterans, particularly those exposed to modern battlefields like Ukraine, introduces the risk of advanced tactical knowledge entering local insurgent ecosystems. This includes the potential adoption of drone warfare, decentralised operations, improvised combat innovations and developments that could significantly alter the security landscape. Beyond immediate tactical threats, the presence of such actors' risk internationalising local conflicts, opening pathways for external funding, influence, and strategic complications. What emerges, therefore, is not merely an internal security concern but a hybrid threat, where local grievances intersect with global conflict dynamics, demanding a far more coordinated, anticipatory, and robust response from the Indian state.

The manner of occurrence that jeopardised Indian security cannot be written off as a one-off breach or even a dramatic intelligence fiasco. It was a measured, trusted collapse of the system. A sequence of trivial, independently manageable security lapses—spanning immigration, cross-country movement, faux pas in restricted-area regulations—came clinically together to allow the anti-India foreign operatives to move, function, and (almost) depart with no interference whatsoever. The period in question was from the onset of December 2025 until their custody on 13 March 2026. Indeed, one

of the most critical questions that needs to be raised is as to why did an intervention occur only at the end of the cycle—after, as aforesaid, alleged training and capability transfer had already been imparted—rather than at an earlier stage where tactical disruption might have been possible?

These are not procedural gaps that can be dismissed as mere organisational oversights. They raise serious issues pertaining to India's national security: the integrity of India's North East, the possibility of spillover from Myanmar's ongoing conflict into the region, and the disturbing prospect that external actors may be exploiting the country's systemic feebleness in ways that can have serious security ramifications for the nation. In fact, this column expresses its concern about whether there are other VanDykes on the lurk, not only in the trouble-torn sectors of the Indo-Myanmar border, but elsewhere in India. Indeed, one of the authors (Jaideep Saikia) has been circumspect about the manner in which certain overground think tanks in India have been, of late, collaborating with foreign countries with a view to the North East. It is his considered view that bypassing New Delhi in order to "reach out" to the North East directly is not desirable.

The episode necessitates an immediate course correction exercise. It is hoped that the competent authorities in New Delhi are listening and are seriously contemplating a comprehensive overhaul of the agencies that oversee the nation's security. Such serious security gaffes are unacceptable.

(Lt Gen (Dr) Shokin Chauhan is a former Director General, Assam Rifles and Chairman, Ceasefire Monitoring Group. Jaideep Saikia is a celebrated Conflict Theorist and Bestselling Author. He has recently been selected as Member, Counterterrorism Advisory Board, Homeland Security Today, George Mason University, USA)

Beware these dangerous liaisons

By Jagdish Rattanani

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel is a much-despised figure in many parts of the world with an arrest warrant against him from the UN-backed International Criminal Court for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Since he went to war in response to a Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, the Israeli war machine has killed over 72,000 people, half of them women, children and the elderly in Gaza. The killing apparatus has taken the life of a child every 52 minutes on average for the last 28 months. The death toll and numbers of injured at over 170,000 are widely accepted globally, including by the perpetrators of these killings, Israel. The "indiscriminate, limitless, cruel and criminal killing of civilians (as) government policy—knowingly, evilly, maliciously, irresponsibly dictated" in the words of a former Israeli Prime Minister from Netanyahu's party, Ehud Olmert, has turned Israel into a pariah

of the naval fleet and not in combat mode.

All of these individually and most certainly when taken together paint a picture of an India pushed to the wall, genuflecting to world bullies and unable or unwilling to stand up as a proud nation with an independent voice. While Modi's presence in Israel can be said to have boosted Netanyahu, who is shunned by world leaders given his shameful record of war crimes, India got nothing in return but defence or trade deals that are of questionable value, given that they will likely push India deeper into an Israeli embrace that may well curb India's freedom of choice in upcoming deals and relations. The Netanyahu-Trump axis will not last long. By getting too cosy with a leadership whose signature call is narcissism and atrocities, India risks long term damage to its standing and will be seen from here on as a legitimate target for all manner of pressure tactics

A similar playbook is now unfolding in Iran, which has been turned into a killing field with the joint Israeli-US war offensive that has already killed the Iranian leader

Ali Khamenei and is now raining more death and destruction as the offensive picks up. Note that the war does not enjoy widespread support in the US itself, and President Donald Trump will likely pay a heavy political price for it in the mid-terms.

State.

A similar playbook is now unfolding in Iran, which has been turned into a killing field with the joint Israeli-US war offensive that has already killed the Iranian leader Ali Khamenei and is now raining more death and destruction as the offensive picks up. Note that the war does not enjoy widespread support in the US itself, and President Donald Trump will likely pay a heavy political price for it in the mid-terms. Many speculate that the war-mongering Netanyahu, who faces charges of corruption domestically, finally got his chance by playing an egotistic Trump who is in the grip of neocons and trapped in the Epstein files that are waiting to be unmasked.

How did it come to be that India with its rich history, a clear stance against imperialism forces for the most part since gaining Independence and respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity with a commitment to peace and stability in the world, got entangled with this ogre of imperialism that is spreading havoc around the globe? Consider how quickly events

by other players.

That these are short term interests at play and not friendships being built is also clear. Consider remarks like that of US deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau that it would not allow India the economic advantages it gave China and so build a competitor for itself, or a well-circulated clip from a television show in Israel where a commentator boasts that Israel would be busy selling defence systems to the world after the war and that while they have no production lines, "we took over all of India", whose 1.4 billion people will make these systems for Israel to sell!

From an Indian perspective, it should be clear now that these are dangerous liaisons that the nation must quickly exit to reassert its independence and reclaim its standing based not only on policies dictated by realism but by working within the frame of principles and values that will outlast shorter term power equations in a world order that is changing fast. The Indian Council of World Affairs publication on 75 years of Indian foreign

While Modi's presence in Israel can be said to have boosted Netanyahu, who is shunned by world leaders given his shameful record of war crimes, India got nothing in return but defence or trade deals that are of questionable value, given that they will likely push India deeper into an Israeli embrace that may well curb India's freedom of choice in upcoming deals and relations.

have stacked up to present an unhappy picture for India and the nation's position of "strategic autonomy": The signing of the Indo-US trade deal with its many onerous clauses for India in return for lower US tariffs on India; the ill-timed visit of the Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel and his speech to the Knesset just two days before Israel attacked Iran, with which India has had extraordinarily good relations; Netanyahu's reported claim citing a phone conversation with Modi after the attack on Iran that India stands with Israel though India offered no such statement on record (and indeed reiterated "the need for an early cessation of hostilities"); the US waiver to India allowing the import of Russian crude for a month in the wake of supply disruptions caused by the war; a certificate of good conduct implicit in remarks by the US treasury secretary Scott Bessent that Indians have been "good actors"; the sinking in the Indian Ocean of an Iranian frigate that was a guest of India for the Presidential Review

policy offers voices that emphasise the moral dimension that India can and must bring to world affairs. For example, a former ambassador to the Russian Federation said India must "step on to the world stage and play its part in filling up the strategic and intellectual deficit, as well as the moral deficit". A former principal adviser to the defence ministry said India looks at national interest and the "good of humanity". Another voice in the publication wrote that India must build a "vocabulary which essentially projects to the world the moral values to which Indian foreign policy works". While the remarks were offered by diplomats and experts in specific contexts, they also point to aspirations for reaching higher ground, of India taking on a larger role based on its ideas of values and principles that lie at the core of the Indian civilizational ethos.

(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

Review of the Job Reservation Policy

Editor,

The letter to the editor, "Back to square one!" by Jerome K. Diengdoh (ST, dt. 14.3.26) is not only a wake up call for the Hynniewtrep people but it is also high time to stand united to get rid of this most controversial, chronic and vexed problem of the present Reservation Policy.

Right from the time the report of the Expert Committee was published on the front page of this newspaper on February 19, 2026, it really hurt our sentiments and caused deep frustration. It belied our expectations. It is like asking for bread and a fish but instead the Committee and the Government of the day has given us stones and snakes respectively which is indeed disdainfully insulting. Coming back to the write up of JK Diengdoh, I fully endorse and support his views that the only option to end this problem of a skewed Job Reservation Policy is to bifurcate Meghalaya into Achik and Hynniewtrep States respectively. This is imperative. This separation will prove to be a blessing for both the tribes in the long run. Otherwise, the impact of the Reservation Policy in its present form will greatly affect the future of the Hynniewtrep people especially the promising educated youth and job seekers. Therefore, it may be reiterated that peaceful separation is the best solution.

Both our Garo brethren and Hynniewtrep people (Khasi, Pnar, Bhoi and War) will be happy and satisfied and hold no grudge or regret whatsoever as both tribes will reap the benefits and advantages in all respects.

It may be pointed out that the State Reservation Policy vide its Notification, No. PER/22/71/138 dt. 12th January 1972 specifically stipulated that, "In terms of population the Reservation earmarked 40% for the Khasi and Jaintia and 40% for the Garo." This equal percentage is wrong considering the fact that since the year 1972, the population of Khasi and Jaintia was much higher in number than the Garos. But sadly the Committee report recommended that the Reservation Policy should not be determined on the basis of population. This is the first assault to the Khasi and Jaintia people and the Government Notification quoted above has been inequitable right from the start.

Secondly, Clause 2 clearly stipulated that, "If sufficient number of suitable candidates for filling up the reserved vacancies are not available from the respective classes in any particular year, then such vacancies will be available to others." It implies that if there are no suitable or qualified Garo candidates, the quota should be filled up by the Hynniewtrep qualified candidate and vice versa. However, in the same clause it is also stipulated that deficiency in S.T. and S.C. will be carried forward to next recruitment year but not more than a year. After expiry of one year, the shortage of either Garo or Khasi and Jaintia shall be treated as

"lapsed." Despite the above clauses of the notification, the Committee of the present regime of Meghalaya recommended that the Reservation Policy should be retained in the present form which means a status quo. The carry forward should be extended to three years instead of only one year. The Roster System should be strongly emphasized. It implies that the backlog or shortage should be strictly followed. As pointed out by Prof Lakshmi Kma in his article in this newspaper (S.T. dated April 5, 2023) captioned "Short-sightedness of predecessors impacts Khasi-Jaintia youth today", the Hon'ble High Court never asked for the cut-off date or how far back the Roster System would be made applicable. Apparently, the State Government had in 2022 mischievously attempted to apply the Roster System retrospectively ignoring the provisions of Clause 2 of the State Reservation Policy which clearly stated otherwise. Prof. Kma further stated that unless Clause 2 of the Reservation Policy is amended by the State Assembly, how can the roster be prepared because both contradict each other. The article of Prof. Kma indeed exposed the serious flaws in the State Reservation Policy and subsequent Office Memorandum particularly the one dated May 10, 2022 where it states that the Roster System to be implemented retrospectively.

The above observations coupled with the recommendations of the Committee and affirmed by the present government (MDA), have dealt a fatal blow to the Hynniewtrep people

particularly the students and qualified job seekers. Their futures are one of doom and gloom and all are at the brink of a precipice. The Hynniewtrep people are at the point of total collapse. Therefore, I appeal to wake up before it is too late.

Yours etc.

Svetlana Wankhar,
Via email

A Humane Step towards Recognising Adoptive Motherhood

Editor,

It was March 17, 2026 — a day that may quietly mark a meaningful change in how we understand parenthood in our country — when the Supreme Court of India delivered a decision that feels both timely and much needed. The Court has said that an adoptive mother should get 12 weeks of maternity leave, no matter how old the child is. Earlier, this benefit was only for those who adopted babies below three months. That never really added up. A child doesn't stop needing care, love and attention just because he or she is older. The judgment clearly brings out a simple reality — when a child enters a new family, both sides need time to adjust. In fact, older children may need even more emotional support as they are stepping into a completely new environment.

If we look around the world, countries like the UK, Canada and Sweden already follow a more inclusive ap-

proach. Even in the United States, adoptive parents are given leave without such age limits. So, in a way, this decision puts India on the right track.

In my view, this is definitely a welcome move. It puts the focus where it should be — on the child and the family. It may also encourage more people to consider adoption, which is a positive sign for society. That said, we also need to look at the ground reality. For many workplaces, especially smaller ones, managing longer leave periods can be challenging. There could also be confusion if clear rules are not put in place. So while the intent is absolutely right, the execution will matter a lot. The government should come up with proper guidelines and maybe even support systems so that both employees and employers are not put under pressure. Also, it's high time we seriously think about paternity leave, because parenting is a shared responsibility.

All in all, this decision feels like a step in the right direction — fairer, more practical and more humane. If implemented well, it can truly make a difference.

Yours etc,

Jairaj,

Via email

Menstrual Leave Policy

Editor,

The Supreme Court declined to mandate a national menstrual leave policy and it has triggered a debate on it. In fact, it is not the responsibility of the Supreme Court to lay down such a

policy. It should be discussed in Parliament and state assemblies and at workplaces. Menstruation is a biological process which affects millions of women across the world. However, its impact varies from person to person. In some women that time passes without complications whereas in others it becomes a tough time. It is not practical to mandate a national menstrual leave policy. As it is a personal problem, only the person concerned knows her physical condition. Women already face several challenges at the workplace. The work force participation rate for women in India is the lowest in the world. Making menstrual leave compulsory could put women at a disadvantage. It could harm their employment prospects. Similarly, reliable data about how many women need leave and how many times a month, is required. Women may avail leave on the pretext of menstruation. Admittedly, women need care and rest during their period. Menstruating women must not be ignored. Equality at the workplace cannot be achieved by disregarding women's well-being. Some states in India have offered menstrual leave for government employees. Given that making menstrual leave compulsory is not feasible, the onus is on workplaces to put the policy in place.

Yours etc.,

Venu GS,

Via email

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

Why some people still believe that aliens shaped ancient civilisations

Could ancient humans really have built the pyramids without extraterrestrial help? Or do such questions reveal more about modern anxieties than the past itself?

The idea that aliens assisted the builders of ancient monuments was promoted by the Swiss author Erich von Däniken in his bestselling book *Chariot of the Gods* published in 1968. Von Däniken died in January 2026, but his vision of ancient astronauts still captivates millions.

The author had pointed to ancient structures such as the pyramids, along with enigmatic ancient artefacts, as supposed evidence that beings from beyond Earth shaped the civilisations of the past.

Though these ideas have been repeatedly debunked, television shows such as the History Channel's *Ancient Aliens* continue to air similar narratives.

Erich von Däniken's theories emerged at a distinct historical moment. They crystallised during the cold war, amid fears of nuclear annihilation, the space race and rapid technological change.

As humans prepared to leave Earth, while simultaneously confronting their own destructive power, the idea of ancient astronauts offered both cosmic reassurance and existential drama. The past became a stage for modern hopes and anxieties.

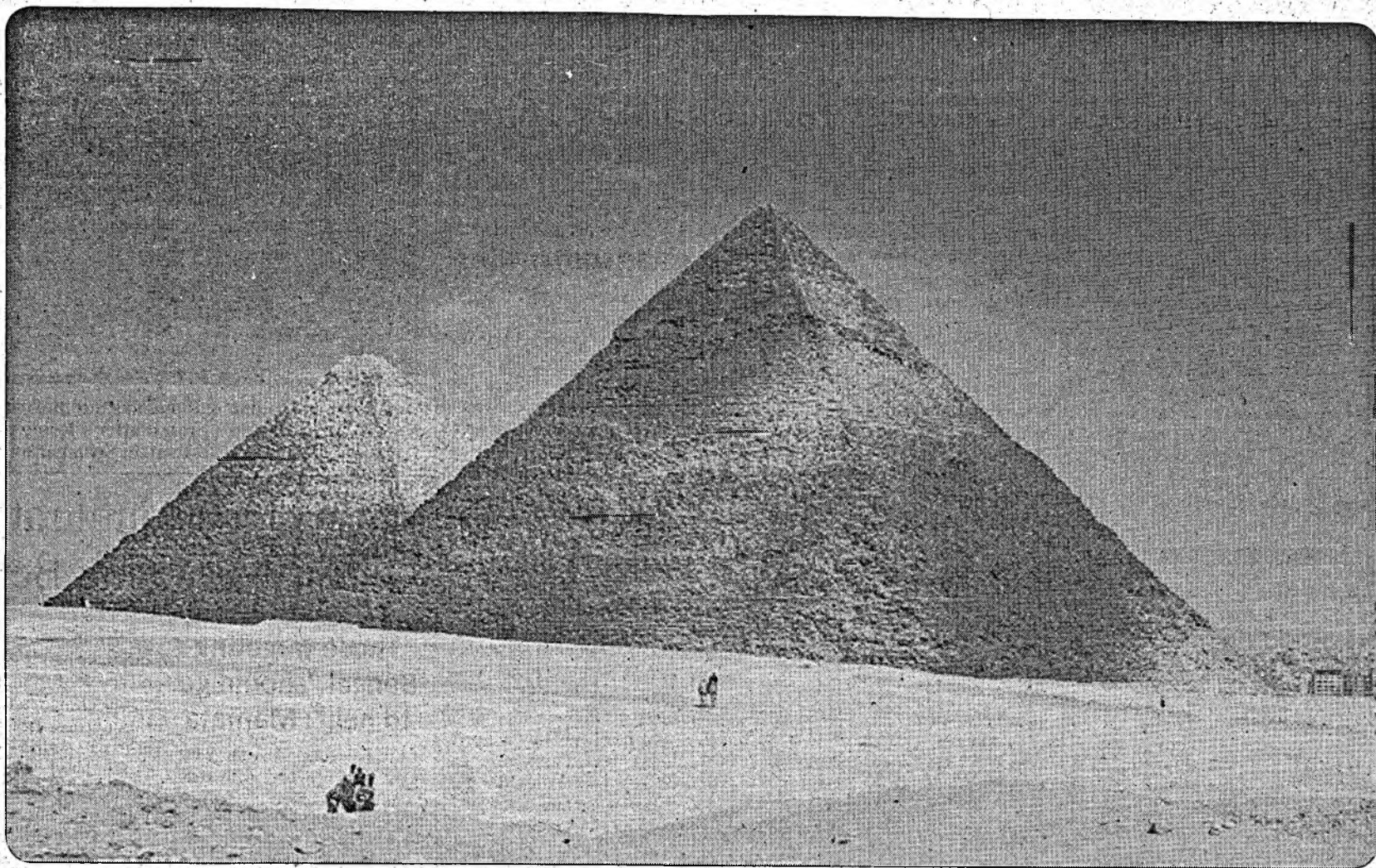
The reason some people feel able to believe in completely unfounded theories relates to the nature of archaeology itself.

The discipline works with fragmentary evidence, layered deposits, and interpretations that rarely yield simple conclusions.

Sites such as Giza in Egypt, Göbekli Tepe (a Neolithic settlement in modern Turkey known for its monumental pillars decorated with sculptural reliefs), and Troy – also in Turkey – are not unsolved enigmas but the result of decades of systematic excavation and analysis.

At Giza, archaeologists have uncovered planned worker settlements, bakeries and organised food supply systems, demonstrating how thousands of labourers could construct the pyramids over decades.

Göbekli Tepe shows that its monumental stone pillars were erected by hunter-gatherer communities millennia before the invention of writing – not through alien intervention, but through



coordinated labour and ritual innovation.

At Troy, successive settlement layers reveal centuries of rebuilding, adaptation and regional exchange rather than a sudden technological anomaly.

Archaeological conclusions are cautious, probabilistic and grounded in material evidence. To outsiders, however, caution can resemble hesitation.

Pseudoscience fills that perceived gap with spectacle: aliens built the pyramids; mysterious forces raised Göbekli Tepe; forgotten super-technologies shaped Troy's walls. Stripped of context, evidence becomes entertainment. Complexity is flattened into insinuation.

A typical "ancient aliens" argument illustrates the pattern: the pyramids are extraordinarily precise.

Precision, the claim goes, requires

advanced technology; therefore, humans without modern machines could not have built them.

The reasoning sounds logical – but it rests on a false dilemma. What disappears from view is precisely what archaeology studies: logistics, labour organisation, tool assemblages, accumulated craft knowledge – and small imperfections that reveal human hands at work.

The lure of the extraordinary

Such explanations satisfy a deep psychological impulse. Where once religion explained purpose, science explains process. The "ancient astronauts" hypothesis exploits proportionality bias – the intuition that extraordinary achievements must have extraordinary causes.

Just as medieval legends framed the

pyramids as protection against cosmic catastrophe, modern narratives cast humanity as part of a grand design guided by superior beings. Archaeological sites become props in a cosmic drama.

Humans cease to be creators; the past becomes extraordinary because it was "helped". The appeal is not confined to fringe audiences. Surveys suggest that many people consider extraterrestrial life possible or even likely.

Many scientists agree that, given the vast scale of the universe, such life is statistically plausible. But plausibility is not proof – and it is certainly not evidence for alien intervention in antiquity.

Distrust amplifies the effect. Universities, museums and academic journals are often portrayed as gatekeepers suppressing inconvenient truths. Scientific refutation becomes evidence of conspir-

acy. Academic prose – careful, qualified and precise – struggles to compete with dramatic certainty.

Questions such as: "How could humans have built this without modern technology?" already contain the insinuation. Digital media turbocharge the pattern: visually striking claims circulate faster than methodological explanations.

Archaeology emphasises gradual change and cumulative knowledge; pseudoscience promises revelation.

Pseudoscientific archaeology is not just a set of beliefs – it is a lucrative industry. Books on ancient astronauts sell millions of copies worldwide. Television franchises generate steady revenue, and leading figures attract audiences in the hundreds of thousands online.

By contrast, scholarly work circulates in a radically different economy:

monographs are printed in small runs and generate little profit. This is not only a battle of ideas but a battle for attention: spectacle is rewarded more visibly than caution.

Von Däniken's rhetorical genius lay in ambiguity. He rarely made definitive claims, preferring suggestive questions and selective juxtapositions that turned uncertainty into insinuation.

As he once remarked: "Chariots of the Gods was full of speculation – I had 238 question marks. Nobody read the question marks. They said: Mr von Däniken is saying ... I did not say – I asked." The strategy is disarmingly simple: frame speculation as inquiry and criticism as misunderstanding.

Reclaiming the story

The popularity of pseudoscience is not simply ignorance. It reflects the difficulty of interpreting fragmentary evidence, a hunger for meaning, declining institutional trust and the dynamics of digital amplification.

Yet dismissal alone is not enough. Archaeology does more than recover artefacts; it constructs narratives about how humans organised labour, shared beliefs and transformed landscapes. Those narratives are shaped by contemporary questions – and acknowledging this strengthens rather than weakens the discipline.

Debunking alien claims matters. But so does telling richer, more compelling stories about how humans shaped their own past. Archaeology shows that uncertainty is intellectual honesty, that incremental knowledge is cumulative achievement, and that context deepens wonder rather than diminishes it.

Monuments, cities, and human creativity are achievements of our own making, not traces of lost cosmic visitors. Through cooperation, experimentation and resilience, humans created the extraordinary – without any extraterrestrial assistance.

Through rigorous scholarship and compelling storytelling, archaeology shows that the extraordinary was never alien. It was always human. (*The Conversation*)

[This article was written by Stephan Blum, Research Associate, Institute for Prehistory and Early History and Medieval Archaeology, University of Tübingen and Stefan Baumann Professor, KU Leuven]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 22, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Mass trine Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give wonderful results. Your income will be good. Money will come in. You will also impress your boss with your attitude and dedication. You will throw yourself into work and will not rest till you get the desired results. You could be promoted suddenly. You will also make profit in your business. You will make good use of your money. The time will be extremely good and happy. You will also be successful in some interviews of competitive exams. Your wonderful advice given to a close friend will change his/her life forever. Family happiness will increase. You will behave well with others. You will support social work, colleagues and subordinates. You will get the pleasure of great wealth. There is also a great possibility of meeting your wishes.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is an exceptional week from all angles. You will get benefits from many sources. You will be able to realize your dreams. New job/business offers will come. It is a period in which you will realize that you have found something from your hard work or even more than you were entitled to. Your financial position will get better. Your peers and bosses will support you. You will be imaginative and creative in your job. Your love life is going to be wonderful. You will understand the thoughts of your partner and will have amazing bonding. It could turn out to be a lifetime experience. You will also earn good money. You will find your friends very helpful. Some auspicious functions will take place at your house.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Your views will get lot of acceptance, and your family will respect you very much. You will become a role model for others to follow. Those who are in politics and media will enjoy unprecedented success. Your supporters and well-wishers will rise. Your financial part will be stronger. You will also develop contact with people living far away from you. Your business trips will prove beneficial. You will also enhance your personality and will have a desire to work inside you. You will also make successful efforts to earn more. You will be a great parent and become part of your children's school, college or work field meetings and issues. You should look after your health and consult the doctor on time.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will be getting wonderful results this week. You will behave well with others. You will also support your family members, social work, colleagues and subordinates. They will be impressed by your behavior and attitude. Your monetary position will keep getting better. You will get the pleasure of great wealth. You will also make plans to buy a new property or vehicle. You also need not trust others blindly and should protect your own interests. There is also great possibility of meeting your wishes. Your dreams will be fulfilled. Your partner will support you fully. You will make progress in your work and personal relationship. You will discharge your obligations and responsibilities well.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a good week. It is ideal time for introspection and thinking. You will perform a great deal of skill and understanding and you will get the results that give pleasure to you. Your financial position will get better. Your colleagues will obey your orders. New job/business opportunities will come to you. Your children, family and relatives will be closer to you. Money inflow will be very fast. You will have good bonding with your spouse/partner. There will be joy and cheer in family relations. You will be confident and so strong that every impossible task will be done. You will get the benefit of your professional contacts. You will also plan to undertake renovation at your home. Some new tasks will be planned.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You are heading for success this week. New job/business offers will come. You will have all the qualities to prove your work well. Excellent results will come. Your financial conditions will get better. Additional sources of income will be tapped. Love birds will have an amazing time. You will meet an important personality too. You will work hard and will be busy working on your own. You will not be scared of criticism, as you must reach greater heights in your life. You need not worry about your health. At the end of the week, happiness, relaxation and comfort will be found. From friends to life partner, there will be more openness in your behavior. Your work efficiency will increase. You will also feel good changes in yourself.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is going to be a mentally satisfying week. With the help of friends, you will complete your incomprehensible work. Friends and family will be helpful to you. Your siblings will listen to your views and give you the respect that you deserve. Even your spouse/partner will remain loyal to

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will have good earnings this week. You will also be interested in doing new tasks. You will also do some new work as per planning. You will receive awards for this too. You will also make plans to buy property or vehicle. Your financial position is quite satisfactory. Your investment too will give good results. You will recover money given to some person. You will have issues with your colleagues. Matter may blow out of proportion. You will share good relations with your partner and will spend some quality time together. Love will bloom and you may get attracted to a person you know. Your mood will remain good. And you will discuss something important with your family members. You will continue having good conversations with them.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Your life is turning for good. You will move forward after making a balance between your work life and family. You will also carry your duty towards society nicely. During this time, you will also make courageous decisions. The conditions of your work will not be so easy. You will work very hard and put in a lot of effort to expand your job. You will also be successful in it. Lovebirds will have a nice time. You can go to a romantic place for holidays. Success will be in your reach in competition or contest. A meeting with an influential personality will open the doors of destiny for you. In tasks involving teamwork and group activities success will follow you wherever you go. You will be interested in your work and hobbies.

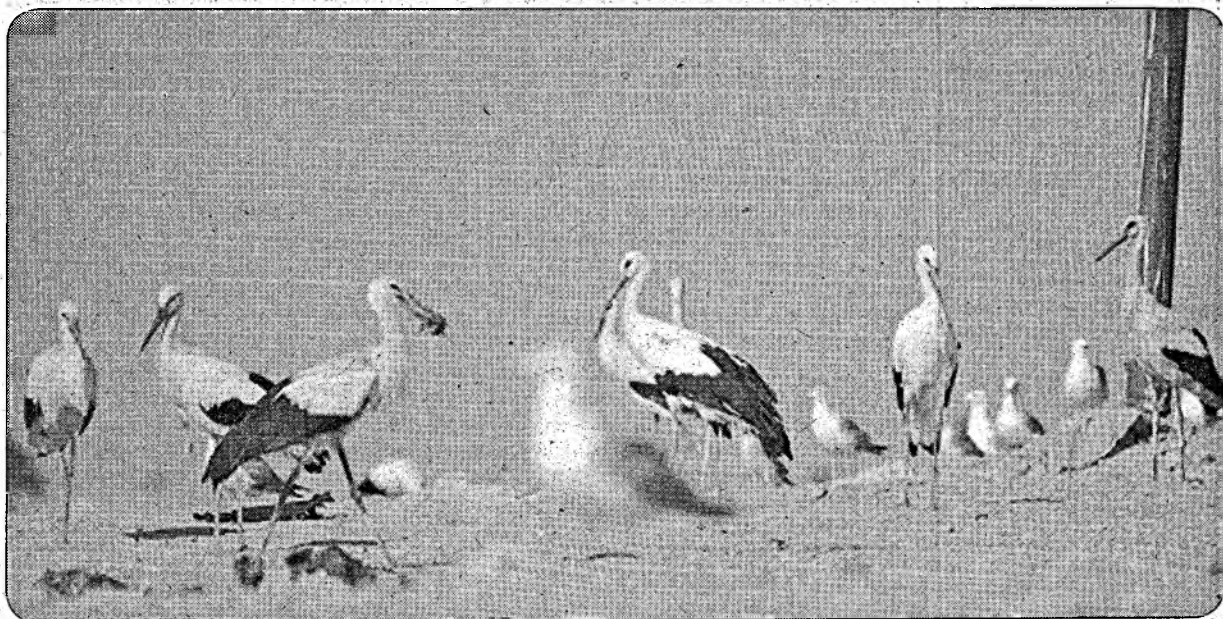
Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will feel more energetic than usual. New job/business offer will come. You will maintain a timetable for your daily activities. You will also feel mental peace. Troubles that have been worrying you for some time will come to an end. Despite efforts by your opponents, they will not get success. The time is fruitful for you. You will receive positive results. Your financial status will be better than before. Matters for property division will be solved with the help of a third person. You will put your best efforts into the achievements of your targets. You will have good time with your spouse. You will also be interested in matters related to spirituality. Your noble needs will bring name and fame.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will make good progress in your work. Your potential and capabilities will be highlighted in front of everyone. People will be impressed by your skills. You could get promoted too. The loved ones will come closer. The brother, sister, spouse and family members will pour emotion of love for each other. Your romantic life is going to be good. You will meet old acquaintances, new friends and loved ones, and happiness will enter your life. You will utilize your free time to improve yourself or in reading literature. You can also be active or social media. The situation in your family will be better. Due to your good nature and kindness your opponents will become your friends.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will be welcomed with brilliant success in financial matters. You will take strong and important decisions in your business whose effects and results will benefit you for a long time. You will receive money that had been lent some time ago or some struck money. Your family will continue to be your top priority. Think seriously about future plans. The work for which you were excited for a long time will get struck because of obstacles due to which you will become upset. Maximum time will be spent on fun and enjoyment. Students will work hard. Mutual relations between husband and wife will remain cordial. You will have monetary gains.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will work very hard at your job and get satisfactory results. You will have monetary gains. You will make profit from your work. In trying to expand your social contacts, you may have to spend a lot. You will have gains in matters related to land, property, assets etc. You will be very diligent to achieve your targets. Your financial struggle will get over. From financial point of view, you will be strong and stable. The talks on marriage will move further, for people eligible for marriage. Your activities will continue in many fields. You will feel better than before. You will be transparent in your dealings with others. You will turn new ideas into reality.

How birds are spreading plastic pollution



Hungry gulls do not only steal our chips and sandwiches. They learn our habits, and look for reliable sources of food.

That includes waste treatment centres, landfill or anywhere food waste is concentrated. Many gull populations have moved inland from the coast to exploit these sources of food.

Wherever our waste is processed, gulls and other birds can forage. At landfills, gulls feed on waste before it is covered up. If there are plastic or glass pieces covered in food that are small enough, gulls will swallow them whole. Only the food itself gets digested, and when the gull flies back to its roost site, the waste gets regurgitated, polluting that site. This movement of pollutants is known as "biorecycling".

For the first time, scientists like me are now quantifying just how much plastic and other waste is being leaked into important nature areas through the daily movements of birds.

Many lesser black-backed gulls breeding in the UK and other parts of northern Europe migrate to Andalusia in southern Spain, where they form a wintering population of over 100,000 feeding mainly in rice fields and landfills. Fortunately, many of these birds are fitted with GPS tags while breeding. This enables detailed tracking of their movements.

Fuente de Piedra lake in Málaga is a hotspot for migrating lesser black-backed gulls.

This wetland has such special natural significance, it's designated as an inter-

nationally important site under a global convention known as Ramsar.

It's most famous for the largest breeding colony of flamingos in Spain. Gulls fly up to 50 miles to landfills to feed, then fly back to roost.

By combining GPS data with waterbird counts, and analyses of regurgitated pellets, scientists have estimated that an average of 400kg of plastics, plus more than two tonnes of other debris such as glass, textiles or ceramics, are deposited by this gull species into the lake each year.

This lake has no outflow, making it salty and hence flamingo friendly.

Those imported plastics remain in the lake, breaking down into microplastics. They can be ingested by flamingo chicks, aquatic insects and other animals.

In coastal Andalusia, these gulls join the resident yellow-legged gulls (equivalent to our herring gulls) and a mixture of migratory and resident white storks as the three major waterbird visitors to landfills.

In the Cadiz Bay wetlands (another Ramsar site), surrounding the historical city that is now a favourite stop for cruise ships, the three species combine to spread different types and sizes of plastics into different microhabitats.

Annually, 530kg of plastics are deposited into wetlands via regurgitated pellets. Although a stork is bigger, so transports more waste per bird, most of the plastic is again moved by the lesser black-backed gulls that winter there in larger numbers.

This waste ingestion has strong ef-

fects on the birds themselves, through direct mortality from diseases, choking or becoming entangled with plastics, and toxic effects of the additives within them.

Then after regurgitation in pellets, those plastics are a threat to all fauna and readily enter our food supply through aquaculture and table salt production, both important in Cadiz Bay.

These studies in Spain address a problem that is ongoing all over Europe. There are no comparable quantitative studies yet in the UK, but similar problems occur wherever gulls concentrate to feed on our waste.

If white storks become abundant in the UK future, they will probably visit our landfills, together with gulls and perhaps cattle egrets.

The sealing of many landfills, and improvements in waste management may have contributed to recent declines in many gull populations in the UK and elsewhere.

But these problems of plastic leakage will continue so long as our consumer society generates so much waste. Reducing waste, and reusing things is better than recycling, partly because food containers may get eaten by birds before they can be recycled.

Cleaning our food containers before we bin them, and composting our own food waste, can also help to reduce this phenomenon. (*The Conversation*)

[By Andy J. Green, Professor of Freshwater Ecology, Estación Biológica de Doñana (EBD-CSIC), Manchester Metropolitan University]

"Always stay positive and keep positive people around you."

—Jeff Green

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 220 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 23, 2026

Modi's claim to fame

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has ostensibly achieved a major feat — by remaining the longest-serving head of government in a nation where political volatility remained pronounced for decades. Braving all odds, he remained first as chief minister of Gujarat state and since 2014 as the Prime Minister without any interruption. By Sunday, he completed 8931 days in office through these two positions, exceeding the record of Sikkim's chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling, who boasts of 8,930 days. This, for both, are remarkable achievements — and more so for Modi in a nation where he has to contend with a strong Opposition. Luckily for Modi the Opposition currently is deeply divided, with a significant number of states being controlled by regional chieftains through their individual political establishments; some of them in dynastic mode. With their swings to one or the other sides, opposition unity is a far cry. Currently, the Congress party has failed to lead the other opposition political parties which have now splintered. Modi took advantage of the situation, despite his serious administrative flaws.

Modi has the advantage of running the government at the Centre for three consecutive terms as prime minister, and he has three more years to go consequent upon the NDA allies remaining intact. Chances are that they would remain with the BJP as the Congress is not in a position yet to catch the fancy of the people in most states. It lacks an agenda that would impress people. Rahul Gandhi being a young leader should have better inspired the large mass of youths by virtue of his identification with the new generation. Rather, the old lot continues to rule the roost in national politics under Modi's leadership. The Prime Minister has his good sides, like ensuring both political and economic stability during the course of his 12 years at the helm. By now, it is a moot point whether he retains the ability to woo the people — as was evident in the 2024 parliament polls, where he could not gather enough numbers to form the next government. Yet, the BJP remains a formidable presence in the Hindi-belt, by virtue also of its resort to religion as a means to whip up the emotions of people through eminent prompting from the RSS. Once the RSS pulls the plug, Modi could be in trouble.

Other positive sides to Modi include him not overstepping his limits. His experience as the Chief Minister of Gujarat helped him run the administration with a good political and administrative grounding. Yet, worse things happened under his leadership — like the epic 2002 Gujarat riots, and the note demonetization exercise in 2016 that caused immense trouble to the people because of a lack of proper planning. He got away with these. The Operation Sindoor itself, or the surgical strikes before that, on Pakistan did not meet with the desired results. Operation Sindoor was allegedly a flop, as the nation is believed to have lost heavily. Claims that some 11 fighter jets were downed in the military action have not been denied. Silence cannot be an answer. Leadership is about both successes and failures.

Matrilineal System: More than Lineage

By H H Mohrmen

While the debate about the unique identity of the tribes continues, the pertinent question is: what truly defines a tribe's identity? What are the distinctive aspects of our lives that differentiate us from others and give shape to our identity? When we claim to be unique, what exactly is it that we possess that sets us apart from others?

Clan and Lineage from the Mother

The two unique aspects that define the identity of the tribe are the clan system that we follow and the lineage through the mother. These two social characteristics are not only still followed by the majority of the population, but they are also interconnected, and one cannot exist without the other.

The beauty of the system is that though lineage is from the mother, kinship is taken from both the mother's and the father's sides. These two aspects of society, namely the clan system and lineage from the mother, do not ignore the father's side. The principle called 'tip kur tip kha' clearly encompasses and ensures that relations on both the mother's and the father's sides are respected. Though 'kur', the maternal clan, is the centre of a person's life, relationships with those on the father's side also occupy a special place in the life of a person. Besides that, a person is also related to the sub-clans that are connected to the mother clan.

Clan is not just a Surname
Clan is not just the second or third part of a person's name; it identifies and determines to which clan and sub-clan a person belongs. There are two allegories I used to share in trying to elucidate the essence of the clan system among the Khasis and the Jaintias.

The first one was when I tried to explain it to Dr. Richard Ford of Clark University. I asked him, "Dr. Ford, is there any chance that you and Henry Ford of Ford Motors are related?" He said, "Not by any stretch of imagination." Then I responded, "That is precisely the difference right there. If there is a Mohrmen, Myrmen, Lamin, Laloo, or Diengdoh anywhere in the world, and if he is from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, I am certain that he is my relative whereas a Ford and another Ford, or two Mr. Browns, do not necessarily have to be

related."

Another story is related to my visit to Salt Lake City, Utah in 2009. Before I visited the place, my friends in Fairfax, Virginia, and Boston asked me, "What are you going to do in Salt Lake City?" I told them that I was going to see my relatives in the city. They were surprised and asked me, "You have relatives in Salt Lake City?" I said, "Yes, in fact, a lot of them." I added, "Well, the Mormons, you know." Then a very humorous friend, John Gibbon, said, "Oh yes, you go and visit your relatives, and they will give you a few more wives and you will never return to India." The Mormons practice polygamy by the way.

Jokes apart, I only use the name of the religious denomination, "the Mormons" or the "Church of the Latter Day Saints," which is popular in Utah and sounds similar to Mohrmen, to explain the significance of a clan in society in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills.

It all begins from the Progenitor of the Clan
Every clan has a genesis that revolves around ka Seihjet or lawbei, the progenitor, from whom the clan originated. By tradition all the original clans would have their own origin story. I believe even the clans in the Khasi Hills that were established by the Tangjait tradition have their designated progenitors. Unfortunately, there are many clans that have lost their stories and do not know how their clans originated.

In the Jaintia Hills, the few clan stories that we still have are preserved because they are connected with certain religious rites performed by followers of Niamtre. We know about ka Bon, ka Tein, ka Wet, and ka Doh, who are the progenitors of the Sookpoh clan in Jowai; about the San Syngkong, the Shylla, the Pariat, the Pde, the Blah, and the Thangkiew; and about the Challam, the Mukhim, and the Shabong, because they are connected with traditions followed in Raid Jwai.

Similarly, the story of ka Bor Kupli and u Iale, the progenitors of the Passah clan; the story of ka lawchibidi,

the progenitor of the Lamin, Laloo, Diengdoh, Pariang, and Mangar; and ka Talang Basiah, the progenitor of the Talang, Nongtdu, Buam, Nialang, and Suting, are still preserved because these stories remain part of the traditions followed by the Niam Tynrai in Raid Nongtalang and Nongbareh.

The importance of clans
To understand the significance of the clan in a matrilineal family society, one must understand not only the status and role of the maternal uncle, but also the importance of the lungblai or Kmai lung. Lungblai is not only the hub of the clan, but it is also the sacred space where the sanctum of the clan is situated. The rites and passages of every member of the clan are performed at the lungblai. Perhaps, among those who no longer follow indigenous religion, the clan and the Seng Kur is the heart that binds the members together.

The final place that unites the clan is the clan's Mooty-lein, Mootymoh, ki Muija ki Mukan, or the clan's ossuary. In the matrilineal family system, a person belongs to the clan and is identified with his or her clan from birth till death and beyond. Not only ka niam rin ka niam thang, or the member's final rites, are performed by the clan, but even ka Siang ka Pha, or ancestor veneration, is continued by the clan. What tradition establishes is the fact that a person is known by the clan to which one belongs, and even death cannot divide them, because the charred bones of all those who belong to the same clan are kept in the same ossuary.

The Tangjait tradition
Tangjait is not only a tradition in which a new clan is established when a male Khasi marries a non Khasi female, but it also ensures that there is no contradiction in the matrilineal family system. When children take their father's surname, there is confusion in relationships; the entire concept of ki kur ki kha collapses, and there is no distinction between the two. The Tangjait tradition ensures that kur remains kur and kha remains kha, and the two are never confused.

About Relationship in Marriages and Kinship

The clan is again not just a surname, but a foundation of relationships that begins with marriage and dictates who marries whom in subsequent unions between clans. The most preferred marriage is dei kysai dei pangrai, and dei lai paruid is another layer of marriage through which relationships between clans are considered. Marriage is not only about love, but more about building a right relationship between the clans.

Marriage is not only about relationships between clans, but it is also about responsibility. Tradition prescribes that both ki chong kha and the ki khon kha have their own duties to perform during cremation or other ceremonies in their ki kha ki man. There was an incident when one of my father's cousins died in an accident, and according to Niamtre tradition, he cannot be cremated at the cremation ground and should be cremated immediately. I was the only khon kha present then, and it was my duty to collect water needed for the cremation. The source of water was quite a distance away, and he was cremated at night, yet it was an obligation I had to fulfill.

It also reminds me of my father's advice that I should respect my kha and that I should visit and support them, especially in their time of sorrow. He said it should not be an issue if I fail to visit them during their times of joy, but I must never fail them when they are in grief. Then there is ka Siang Pa, Siang Men and i Pynnam during ancestor veneration. These are acts through which children show respect to their father and to his family long after they have passed on.

It is about relationship
Tip kur tip kha is not just a phrase but a principle of life that one should imbibe in a matrilineal society. The foundation of a person's identity is rooted in one's clan, but tip kur tip kha ensures that kinship strengthens the relationship between the kur and the kha.

Clan and lineage through the mother is like two sides of the same coin, one cannot exist without the other. Without a clan, a person has no relationship and no identity in a matrilineal society. It is like a keystone in a wall; once it is removed, the wall will collapse.

When Every Minute Counts: What the Passing of Dr. Ricky A. J. Syngkon Should Teach Us About Emergency Preparedness

By Dr Tiamera Jamir

On February 19, Meghalaya woke up to the shocking news of the sudden passing of Dr. Ricky A. J. Syngkon, who collapsed during a football game. Reports say he fell on the field, was quickly taken to a nearby health facility, and later declared dead at a city hospital, likely due to a cardiac arrest. Much of the discussion since then has focused on the availability of doctors and preparedness of the health facility he was taken to — and rightly so. Health facilities must be prepared and ready for any eventuality. But beyond that, Dr Syngkon's passing also forces us to ask a harder question: what actually happens in those first few minutes when someone collapses like this in our communities? In this article I try to argue that the case was lost in the first few minutes of the incident.

Around the world, out-of-hospital cardiac arrest (OHCA) is a leading cause of sudden death. But survival is not decided only in hospitals. It often depends on what happens before medical help arrives. Every minute without action reduces the chances of survival. Sometimes, that action can be as simple as calling for help quickly. At other times, it means starting CPR or using a machine to shock the heart (Automated External Defibrillator - AED) if one is available.

Over the years, studies have consistently shown

and in Meghalaya — those crucial minutes are often lost without any action. Ambulances take time to reach, especially in crowded areas or remote locations. In that gap, the only people who can help are those already there — friends, colleagues, or even strangers nearby.

The problem is that most people are not trained in CPR. Even when someone collapses in front of them, many hesitate. Fear, confusion, or simply not knowing what to do hold people back. And even when CPR is attempted, it is sometimes done incorrectly, with long pauses that reduce its effectiveness. It is likely that some of these challenges played out in those critical moments when Dr. Ricky A. J. Syngkon collapsed on the football field — uncertainty, panic, and a lack of immediate action, not because bystanders did not want to help but because they did not know how. This was made worse by the absence of an AED at the sport facility and delays in the ambulance reaching in time.

This is why Dr. Syngkon's passing should not just be seen as an isolated tragedy. It should make us think about whether we, as a community, are ready to respond in such moments.

Several countries have shown that change is possible. Many have introduced CPR training in schools

The Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong has also been training volunteers, doctors and nurses in health facilities and various other institutions for the last 2 years. The BLS training is also a part of the Masters in Public Health (MPH) and Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BScPH) curriculum to ensure that every student enrolled is equipped with these essential lifesaving skills.

that people who receive CPR immediately from someone nearby are far more likely to survive and recover well than those who do not (Chen, 2025). Put simply, it often comes down to whether someone present knows what to do — and is willing to step in. Doctors often talk about something called the "chain of survival." According to the American Heart Association, this includes recognizing a collapse early, starting CPR immediately, using an AED as soon as possible, getting emergency services involved, and ensuring good hospital care. If any one of these steps is delayed, the chance of survival greatly diminishes.

What is important to understand is that the first few steps depend almost entirely on bystanders: early recognition, early call for help, early CPR, early use of an AED. In some cases, just starting CPR early can double or even triple the chances of survival.

There is also clear evidence that communities can do better when people are trained and aware. Public awareness drives, CPR training programs have been shown to increase the likelihood that someone nearby will step in to help (Yu et al., 2020). Places that invest in such training see more people responding to emergencies and more lives saved.

Using an AED can also make a huge difference. Many cardiac arrests are caused by abnormal heart rhythms, and a timely electric shock can restart the heart. Studies show that when AEDs are available and used quickly, survival improves significantly (Elhussain et al., 2023). The use of an AED is now taught as a part of the First Responder (FR) and Basic Life Support (BLS) programs. The newer devices have become more user friendly and trained lay persons are encouraged to use them in an emergency.

All of this points to a simple reality: what is done in the first few minutes can decide whether a person lives or dies.

In many parts of India —

and workplaces, leading to more people stepping in during emergencies. Even schoolchildren are taught these basic skills. The Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong has also been training volunteers, doctors and nurses in health facilities and various other institutions for the last 2 years. The BLS training is also a part of the Masters in Public Health (MPH) and Bachelor of Science in Public Health (BScPH) curriculum to ensure that every student enrolled is equipped with these essential lifesaving skills.

For Meghalaya, the message is clear. We need to build a culture where people are prepared to help. This could mean introducing BLS training in schools, colleges, and workplaces. It could also mean public campaigns to help people recognize cardiac arrest and understand what to do. Placing AEDs in busy public areas — like markets, sports grounds, and government offices — could also be extremely helpful.

These efforts do not require huge investments. What matters most is awareness and readiness. One person who knows what to do can make all the difference. The loss of Dr. Ricky A. J. Syngkon is deeply felt, not just by his family, but by the wider community. But it also reminds us of something important. Cardiac arrest can happen to anyone, anywhere. And when it does, survival often depends not on doctors or hospitals alone, but on the people standing nearby.

If this moment pushes us to learn, prepare, and act, it may yet leave behind a legacy that saves countless lives in the future. Because when emergency strikes, the most important responders are often the people standing just a few feet away — and the first few minutes may be the only ones that truly matter.

(The writer, Dr Tiamera Jamir is a faculty at the Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong. Email tiamera.jamir@iiphs.ac.in)

Letters to the Editor

Dirty songs and cheap shows harm society

Editor,
There was a time when most Bollywood songs were like poetry. They carried profound meaning and deeper insight. They were so deeply soothing to the heart that they stirred listeners to dream of heavenly romance and beauty. Songs such as "Neele gagan ke tale, dharti ka pyaar pale" or "Kora kagaz ka yeh man mera" still stir the imagination and emotion, urging one to become the Majnu of his Laila or the Romeo of his Juliet. But let's be honest, today things look completely different. It's like a shift from the divine to the devil!

When social media suddenly erupted in uproar against Nora Fatehi, I initially thought it might be linked to the same old money-laundering case involving the most dreaded conman, Sukesh Chandrashekar. Only later did I realise the true reason. The "item number" from the newly released film KD: The Devil, in which she performs, became the lightning rod for mass outrage. It was so raw and brazenly vulgar that anyone who happened to hear it could not listen to it twice. Indeed, if someone were to dare to perform this song in public, they might even face immediate arrest.

One cannot help but wonder why Bollywood stoops so low. Why does the film industry deliberately pander to raw carnality, jolting the collective conscience? Why

does it tear apart the sanctity of family values with such reckless abandon? While most of the Bollywood fraternity remained silent amid this uproar, Armaan Malik, a playback singer, spoke out — "Sad to see commercial songwriting hit a new low. I am genuinely at a loss for words. Wish I could unhear it."

Besides, condemnation from many other organisations, the National Commission for Women (NCW), in their summons to Nora Fatehi, Sanjay Dutt, and the makers of the film, stated that the song's content, "prima facie appears to be sexually suggestive, objectionable, and violative of provisions, under the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, IT Act, and POCSO Act."

The first question that arises is why the censor board approved the release of a film containing such an explicitly vulgar song. The CBFC is equally accountable, though now the dirty item has been clipped out. It seems the authorities on this Board have lost their moral compass and their sense of what is harmful to society. One gentleman even wrote on social media that, "the big shots in the CBFC should be made to stand alongside the irresponsible film's actors and makers and be put behind bars." Whether one agrees or not, such explicit films contribute to corrupting the younger generation, turning them into nothing less than "deviants and lechers."

Incidentally, Nora Fatehi was graciously invited by the Government of Megha-

laya. Perhaps she was paid handsomely to glamourise the Shillong Cherry Blossom Festival. Now, doesn't that send a mixed message? On one hand, she is celebrated on a public stage, and on the other, she is linked to content that trivialises the dignity of womanhood itself. What if tomorrow, some misguided youth from our state enacts something similar to her performance in KD: The Devil at marriage parties, birthday celebrations, or even Teachers' Day events? Let's not be hypocritical. What elders or people in high positions do is often "thoughtlessly imitated" by followers further down the line.

Yours etc.,
Saili Gwali,
Shillong

Different RTI Modes in Different Departments

Editor,
A few days ago, I lodged an RTI pertaining to the death certificate of a person in connection with pension matters. The deceased had passed away in a district different from East Khasi Hills. Since the matter pertains to a mortality-related issue, I therefore, approached the Directorate of Health Services (MI), Government of Meghalaya with the RTI application. Here, the dealing official promptly accepted the said RTI application even before my paying the mandatory fee of Rs10. I was handed over a cash receipt as per RTI provisions. Within a short

time I received a letter that a notice was duly conveyed to the Public Information Officer of the District concerned to reply to the said RTI application within the given stipulated time-frame. Thus, the swift action taken by the Directorate of Health Services (MI) must be commended!

Given that this issue in question relates to pension payment, I had simultaneously approached the head Office in Shillong that deals specifically with pension matters with the same RTI. However, that RTI was not accepted there. According to the Dealing Assistant, since the application relates to another district it was not acceptable in East Khasi Hills. Hence I was advised by the District Officer concerned to travel to the said district at my own cost and inconvenience to file the RTI.

In this context, I had assumed that this establishment could have gracefully taken the accountability to forward that RTI, as done by the Directorate of Health Services (MI), to the Public Information Officer of the District Office concerned, to do the needful within the deadline. This assertion is being made in case the RTI applicants are senior citizens or are not in a healthy state physically/mentally and thereby their undertaking a long journey to another District file an RTI becomes next to impossible. Will the different government departments care to explain what the rules are in such cases and why different departments have different rules about handling RTI matters?

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Keys to Equality: Access to Quality Healthcare & Education

Editor,
In the month of September last year, I suffered an ankle fracture and I was admitted to a government hospital. An ORIF surgery was performed and as expected the cost of the surgery was manageable. Had the surgery been performed in a private hospital the expenses would have definitely been much more. The cost of the surgery would have been minimal had I had access to the MHIS card. It made me realize that people who belong to lower income groups have access to medical care primarily because of the existence of government healthcare facilities and government health schemes, otherwise they would have been priced out of medical care.

India's Gini-coefficient score based on the Household Consumer Expenditure Survey of 2023-24 is 0.237 for rural areas and 0.284 for urban areas; this puts India in a favourable position when it comes to income equality. According to 2022 World Bank data, India's combined Gini score of 0.255 makes India the fourth most equal country globally. This is something to be proud of but a well-documented limitation of Consumption based Gini scores is the under-representation of the top 10 percent income earners.

The Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation through its Statistics wing, the National Statistics Office will conduct the National Household Income Survey for the first time from April 2026. This will give a comprehensive overview of the distribution of income in the country and a Gini score calculated based on an Income survey will therefore be more accurate. Another positive outcome of the National Household Income Survey is that it will address the leakages from the Public Distribution System. Once the leakages are addressed, more focus can be given to the core sectors primarily health and education.

As mentioned earlier, India's healthcare system is one of the most affordable in the world primarily because of government investment but more needs to be done to improve the healthcare facilities and access to quality healthcare. As far as education is concerned too, it is because of government funding that most of us can afford higher education but more needs to be done to improve the standard of education especially at the school level. The Nordic Countries have shown the world how a high public investment in health and education transformed society at large and ultimately led to a more egalitarian society.

Yours etc.,
Gary Marbanang,
Via email

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"Loneliness is the ultimate poverty."

— Pauline Phillips

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 221 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 24, 2026

Congress's Unnecessary Squabble

THE Meghalaya Congress is in slumber most times. With all the MLAs having deserted the sinking ship and joining the ruling party cohort its voice in the Assembly is muted. It has never happened in the past that the Congress has been reduced to a cipher in Meghalaya. This should have pushed the remaining members to do a soul searching and branch out to the different corners of Meghalaya to revive the Primary Units and Blocks but there is complete silence on this score. The Congress now appears to have a presence only in Shillong city and in the Garo Hills. Hence when the Meghalaya Pradesh Chief, Vincent Pala starts accusing the NPP and BJP of starting the Garo Hills fire that led to violence and arson, it sounds banal. BJP leader from Garo Hills, Bernard Marak has rightly castigated Pala for blaming his Party and the NPP for what happened in Garo Hills. The violence started on March 9 when former Phulbari legislator Esmatur Mominin was allegedly assaulted by protesters when he reached the deputy commissioner's office in Tura to file his nomination for the GHADC polls scheduled for April 10. That two people died in police firing on that fateful day is an agonising matter.

In a state and country where political affiliations are fluid and there are no permanent friends or foes in politics, Mominin too began his political career with the Congress because at the time that was the opportunistic thing to do. Later he shifted to the NPP from where he contested the Assembly elections in 2018 and won. Ahead of the 2023 elections Mominin shifted to the All India Trinamool Congress (TMC) but lost his seat. The only party that Mominin has not joined is the BJP. Other than that, he has flirted with all parties and remained loyal to none. No wonder the leaders of different political parties are filing cases against him for creating violence. This sort of party-switching is not unusual in Meghalaya politics, especially in regions like Garo Hills where local alliances and leadership dynamics often shape political decisions more than rigid party loyalty. In the present context Mominin was going to file his nomination to the GHADC as an Independent candidate. Tempers were already high in Garo Hills on the right of non-tribals to contest and also vote in the District Council Elections. The rapid change in the demographic profile of Garo Hills has caused consternation and such fears tend to flare up before elections. Going with the flow, political parties of all shades too are against non-tribals participating in the Council elections. Hence Vincent Pala's allegations that the NPP and BJP had tried to foment the violence and prevented Mominin from filing his nomination papers to the GHADC is far-fetched.

For the Congress now is the time to rejuvenate its laid-back cadres. The Bye-election to the Shillong Lok Sabha seat will be happening shortly following the untimely demise of Dr Ricky AJ Syngkon and the Party has to toil to get some MDCs elected at least to the GHADC. Now is not the time for trading charges. Rather it's time to gear up for two elections. In Garo Hills, fortunately Saleng Sangma is a force to contend with. He commands a sizable following. The same cannot be said of Khasi-Jaintia Hills. It's time for young leadership to take the reins of the Congress Party and take it forward.

Shillong is Choking — And We're Pretending?

By Danny K. Rajee

The fix isn't complicated in theory — small electric buses on fixed timetables would do the job — but it's politically messy. Taxi unions are powerful here. Any serious proposal to reform public transport in Shillong will immediately run into the question of livelihoods; and that's a real concern that deserves real answers, not the usual government handwage. Shimla managed some ver-

tion of where everything is concentrated. Police Bazaar, Lewduh, the Secretariat area — if you need to do anything official or commercial in this city, you're going to end up in one of three places. That's a recipe for exactly the kind of gridlock we're living with. New Shillong Township was supposed to ease this. It hasn't, not really, mostly because government offices haven't moved, businesses



sion of this reform. Gangtok too. Neither of those cities is much larger or richer than Shillong. We should stop treating this as an impossible problem.

Parking is where the city is, perhaps most obviously failing itself.

Walk down any commercial street in Shillong and what you'll see, routinely, are vehicles parked on both sides, sometimes three-deep near the market areas, with narrow gaps left for actual traffic. Nobody gets fined. Or when they do, it's occasional enough to be treated as bad luck rather than a consequence. The traffic police are understaffed, the roads are ambiguous, and enforcement is wildly inconsistent depending on what part of the city you're in and who you know.

Shillong inaugurated its first automated multi-level parking facility near the Additional Secretariat. Will it alone ease acute traffic congestion?

Recently Our Chief Minister has informed the House that the State government is planning to shift the Meghalaya Secretariat to its new Complex at Mawkhanu in New Shillong by the end of the next financial year (March 2027). A big transformation. Are we prepared?

There's also the ques-

haven't followed, and connectivity to the new area is still poor. The idea was right, the follow-through was not.

If more government services moved online — genuinely online, not the current patchwork of half-functional portals — you'd see a measurable drop in the number of people making daily trips to the Secretariat just to submit a form or collect a certificate. This isn't a bold vision. It's just catching up to what most Indian cities have managed to do.

Then there's the tourist question, which locals have complicated feelings about.

Shillong's popularity has grown enormously over the past decade. More visitors means more revenue and more exposure for local businesses, and that's genuinely good. But it also means convoys of tourist buses trying to park on streets that were never designed for them, and private cars from out of state driven by people who have no mental map of the city's quirks. During Christmas week or the Shillong Autumn Festival, parts of the city become nearly impassable.

Designated parking hubs outside the city centre, with shuttle transport to the main areas, would help. Not revolutionary, just practical. Several tourist-heavy hill towns have done this successfully.

The resistance here seems to be partly commercial — vendors near the markets don't want visitors to park far away — but that short-term thinking is hurting the long-term experience for everyone.

I want to be careful not to fall into the trap of making this all sound like a policy paper with a neat list of solutions. Real change in Shillong will be messier than any checklist. It will require taxi unions to be brought into genuine negotiation rather than being steamrolled or ignored. It will require consistent enforcement that doesn't let well-connected vehicle owners park wherever they like. It will require politicians to prioritise infrastructure that isn't visible enough to photograph for an inauguration. And it will require citizens — all of us — to stop treating the traffic as someone else's problem.

That last part is the hardest. The same people who complain loudest about Shillong's traffic are often the ones who jump queues at junctions, park on pavements because it's five minutes more convenient, or oppose any development that might change the character of their neighbourhood.

Urban discipline isn't a lecture. It's just what a functioning city requires from its people.

I'm not pessimistic about Shillong. The city still has enormous goodwill from its own residents, and that matters more than any infrastructure plan. People here actually care about this place — its music, its culture, its architecture, its air. That care can translate into civic pressure if it's pointed in the right direction.

But we've been shrugging at this problem for too long. My cousin's shrug in that traffic jam wasn't resignation — I know him well enough to know it was frustration wearing a mask. That frustration is widespread and legitimate.

Shillong deserves better than what its roads currently offer. All-weather road? The question is whether anyone in charge is ready to do the boring, difficult, incremental work of actually fixing it, rather than announcing another committee to study it.

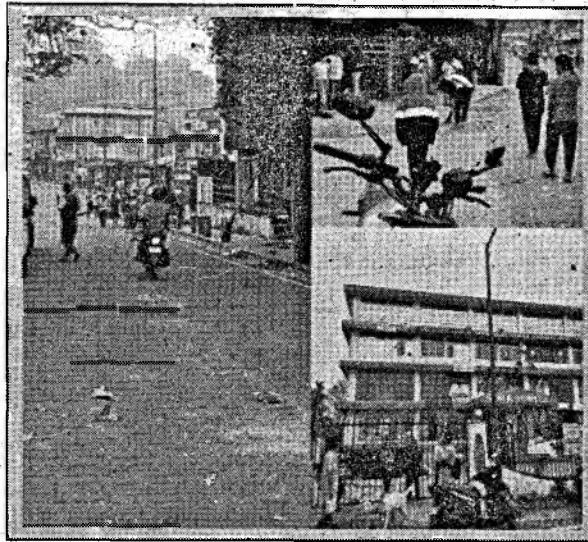
The roads won't widen themselves. The Hills are calling us. Can we hear?

Garo Hills in flames: Democracy and the fracture of trust

By Pynkmen Phankon

There are places where democracy is not merely a system of governance but a lived expression of identity, and for generations the hills of Garo Hills have been one such place. Here, community and culture have long existed in quiet alignment — festivals marked by drumbeats, traditions passed through memory, and political life woven gently into the rhythms of everyday existence. But when such a place begins to echo not with song but with unrest, the rupture feels deeper than politics. It feels personal.

In recent weeks, towns like Tura and Chibinang have witnessed a shift that is as unsettling as it is revealing.



What began as a dispute over eligibility rules in the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council elections has escalated into something far more volatile. A court decision altering the framework of participation was enough to ignite anxieties around identity and representation — anxieties that quickly spilled onto the streets. Protest gave way to confrontation. Confrontation gave way to violence.

And in that moment, the line between democratic dissent and disorder dissolved.

The consequences were immediate and stark. Lives were lost. Security forces

is already visible. Students find their futures delayed as examinations are postponed. Businesses close under the pressure of uncertainty. Families remain indoors, not by choice but by necessity. These are not abstract consequences. They are lived disruptions, reminders that political instability rarely remains confined to political spaces. It spills into homes, into routines, into the quiet expectations that define everyday life.

In moments like this, it is easy to assign blame — to decisions, to institutions, to individuals. But the deeper failure is often less visible. It is a failure of conversation. When concerns around

identity, representation, and fairness are not addressed early, they accumulate. And when they finally surface, they do so with force. Leadership, in such contexts, is not defined by the ability to respond after crisis, but by the willingness to listen before it.

Because democracy, at its core, depends not just on rules, but on trust. Without trust, procedure becomes hollow. Participation becomes reluctant. And governance begins to resemble management rather than representation. The events unfolding in the Garo Hills are not simply a breakdown of

"The ordinary rhythms of life—school schedules, market activity, daily movement—were interrupted not by natural calamity, but by fear. And fear, once it settles into a community, rarely confines itself to a single event. It lingers, reshaping behaviour, altering trust, and leaving behind questions that are far more difficult to answer than the crisis itself."

Letters to the Editor

A New World Order?

Editor,
This is a rejoinder to V.K. Lyngdoh's column, "War for petrodollar dominance" (ST, 13 March 2026). To view the current Middle East crisis as merely a regional skirmish between Islam and Zionism is sheer ignorance. People do not understand the depth and seriousness of the situation. Much of this is fuelled by fake news media apparatus that often functions as a propaganda machine, leaning into anti-Semitic rhetoric rather than addressing the cold, hard mechanics of power.

While popular belief suggests Israel steered U.S. policy, reports from The Washington Post and other outlets suggest a different catalyst. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman reportedly made multiple private calls to President Trump, pushing for decisive military action to "cut the head of the snake"—referring to the Iranian leadership—while publicly endorsing diplomacy. Trump, a man who lives for the "deal," seemingly struck one behind the curtain.

Behind this veil, the conflict is the latest chapter in the decades-long rivalry between the Sunni (Saudi Arabia) and Shia (Iran) factions for regional supremacy. While Iran has responded to U.S./Israel strikes by targeting Gulf energy infrastructure, the Gulf states have notably refused to retaliate, avoiding escalations. Why? Firstly, the Abraham Accords and subsequent promises made to the Trump administration bind them to a path of nominal peace in

the region. Secondly, they are acutely aware that Iran possesses the capability to inflict "collateral damage" that would ruin their economies. They are content to let "allies" U.S. and Israel do the "dirty job" for them.

I don't view the pressure on Iran as illegitimate. For a long time, Americans and Israel wanted to settle scores with their sworn enemy (Iran). The IRGC under Ayatollah Ali Khamenei is a radical regime and a primary global sponsor of terrorism, fuelled by diabolical ideologies that demand "Death to America" and the destruction of Israel. From domestic atrocities to the "October 7, 2026 massacre" carried out via proxies like Hamas, Hezbollah, and the Houthis, this regime has long invited such a reckoning.

Iran's fierce defence and strikes on U.S. military assets have derailed Trump's "regime change" dream. Besides a pro US government in Iran appears highly improbable. Iran has choked the Strait of Hormuz—a vital shipping route of global oil. President Trump may have made a fatal miscalculation by underestimating his foes. Given his volatile temperament and desire for quick win, we may see him seek an early exit, leaving Israel to clean up the strategic mess.

Fear grows that Middle East tensions signal WWII. A 'New World Order' may emerge out of this global chaos (before 2030). By targeting the soft belly of the world's economy, Iran could trigger the collapse of the dollar and a shift to Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) and a socialist-communist model. This aligns

with the World Economic Forum's "Great Reset"—the "you'll own nothing and be happy" agenda—replacing private property with state control and global elite governance.

Hence if global energy resources are burned out (due to fierce bombings), our very survival remains under constant threat. The world watches with bated breath: Will the Abraham Accords collapse, or can President Trump negotiate a truce? Only time will tell. Let's keep our fingers crossed.

Yours etc.,
A Laithphlang,
Via email

Mamata Banerjee's Tantrums

Editor,
The recent large-scale transfer of bureaucrats and police officers in West Bengal by the Election Commission of India (ECI), following the announcement of the Assembly election schedule, has predictably sparked a storm of protest from none other than the Chief Minister (CM) of the state. Her repeated outbursts against such routine measures raise troubling questions about the role of officials in the electoral process.

If the CM's political fortunes truly hinge on the presence of particular officers in key positions, then it casts a shadow on the fairness of past elections. Such a stance squarely suggests that administrative machinery was manipulated and utilized to tilt the scales in her party's favour. On the other hand, if her party is indeed popular with genuine mass support,

then the electorate will vote for them irrespective of who serves as Chief Secretary, District Magistrate or Director General of Police.

The Election EC's decision to reshuffle officials is aimed precisely at ensuring neutrality and restoring public confidence in the electoral process. Hopefully, this time the people of West Bengal will be able to freely determine who governs them without interference or manipulation by the bureaucracy or police, as has too often seemed the case in the past.

Yours etc.,
N.K. Kehar
Shillong-3

Bleak future for the youth

Editor,
These days, one question seems to be quietly troubling many of us. It comes up in newspapers, in homes, and even in casual conversations—will there be enough jobs for our children in the coming years?

Recent reports published around March 19–20, 2026, in India Today and other leading newspapers have drawn attention to a warning by Bill McDermott, CEO of ServiceNow—a company that develops software to help businesses organise and automate their daily operations. He cautioned that unemployment among college graduates could rise sharply—possibly reaching around 30% or even higher in the coming years—as Artificial Intelligence continues to take over many routine and entry-level tasks.

As someone who has spent most of his life in the

field of education, I cannot help but feel both concerned and reflective. For many years, we reassured our students with a simple belief—study sincerely, earn a degree, and a job will follow. Today, that assurance no longer feels as dependable as it once did.

I still remember many of my former students who were not extraordinary in studies but managed to find their footing through small beginnings. They learned on the job, gained confidence, and slowly built their lives. Now, those very starting points seem to be disappearing. Reports from platforms like TechRadar (March 2026) also suggest that many routine and entry-level tasks are increasingly being handled by AI systems.

The situation becomes even more serious when we think about small towns and ordinary families. In such homes, education is not just about learning—it is an investment of hope. Parents often make sacrifices quietly, believing that their children will one day stand on their own feet. If job opportunities become uncertain, the disappointment will not remain limited to one individual; it will be felt across the family.

At the same time, it would be unfair to blame technology alone. Progress has always brought change, and it cannot be stopped. The real concern is whether we are preparing our young people for this rapidly changing world. Unfortunately, there still seems to be a gap. Much of our education system continues to focus on memorising and passing examinations, while the outside world

is moving in a very different direction.

Perhaps the answer is not very complicated; but it does require seriousness. Students need to be exposed, from an early stage, to practical skills—basic understanding of technology, clear communication, problem-solving, and above all, the habit of learning continuously. Even small efforts in this direction can make a real difference.

There is also a clear need for stronger support from institutions and authorities. Skill development programmes, proper career guidance, and practical learning opportunities must reach not only big cities but also smaller towns, where awareness is still limited.

Above all, we should not overlook the qualities that make us human. Sincerity, adaptability, and the ability to work with others have always mattered, and will matter even more in the years ahead. Machines may perform tasks efficiently, but they cannot replace human understanding, responsibility, and judgement.

This is not a moment for panic, but it is certainly not a time to remain casual either. If we recognise the challenge early and respond with sincerity and practical steps, our young people will certainly find their place in this changing world. After all, where there is effort and guidance, there is always a way forward.

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*

opened fire. Curfews were imposed, internet services suspended, examinations postponed. The ordinary rhythms of life—school schedules, market activity, daily movement—were interrupted not by natural calamity, but by fear. And fear, once it settles into a community, rarely confines itself to a single event. It lingers, reshaping behaviour, altering trust, and leaving behind questions that are far more difficult to answer than the crisis itself.

At the heart of this unrest lies a deeper tension—one between identity and inclusion. For tribal communities, institutions like the autonomous district council are not merely administrative bodies; they are symbols of cultural preservation and political autonomy. When those symbols appear threatened, the response is rarely measured in legal terms alone. It is emotional, instinctive, and often immediate. Yet when that response escalates into violence, it risks undermining the very foundations it seeks to protect.

Democracy, by its nature, is not meant to be quiet. It is meant to accommodate disagreement, even discomfort. But it is also meant to contain that disagreement within the boundaries of dialogue. When those boundaries collapse, when protest turns into confrontation and enforcement turns into force, something more than order is lost. Trust begins to erode—trust between citizens and the state, between communities, and within the system itself.

The cost of that erosion

order; they are a signal that this trust is under strain.

Yet within this moment of fracture lies a possibility. The crisis exposes not only what has gone wrong, but what must be rebuilt. A democracy that balances identity with inclusion. A system that recognises the legitimacy of fear without allowing it to dictate action. A leadership that prioritises dialogue over declaration, empathy over expediency.

The hills have endured before. They will endure again. But endurance alone is not enough. What is required now is restoration—the careful rebuilding of trust, the reopening of conversation, the reaffirmation, that disagreement need not lead to division. Because the alternative is not merely instability. It is a gradual acceptance of it.

And that is a cost no society can afford.

The question, then, is no longer about the immediate crisis. It is about what follows. Whether the response will be limited to containment; or whether it will extend to reflection and reform. Whether the lessons of this moment will be absorbed, or quietly set aside.

Because in the end, the future of the Garo Hills will not be decided by a single election dispute or a single episode of unrest. It will be shaped by how the state, its leaders, and its people choose to respond to this rupture. And in that choice lies something larger than politics.

It lies in the preservation—or the loss—of trust itself.

"Nothing is more expensive than a missed opportunity."

— H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 222 SHILLONG, WEDNESDAY, MARCH 25, 2026

Worry over war

INDIA, as Prime Minister Narendra Modi has hinted, is on the verge of an emergency-like situation, requiring high alert and concerted action, as a consequence of the Iran-US-Israel war. The war nearing a month since it began on February 28 has seriously disrupted supply chains due principally to the curbs on movement of ships through the Strait of Hormuz. The blockade to the main trade route has seriously affected supply of petrol, diesel, LPG gas and fertilizers, as the PM has testified in his speech on Tuesday. It is generally understood that the impact of this war, which is unlikely to have an early end, will have a lasting adverse impact on the global economy; and India and China, with their large production lines, would be hard-hit. An increase in the prices of fertilizers is bound to hurt the agriculture sector, where small and medium level farmers are already struggling hard to recover their investments vis-à-vis crop-raising.

As is widely feared, and as the PM has made a special reference to, any tumult in the market is bound to be taken advantage of by the trading community especially in a nation like India where no rule is a guarantee against hoarding or black-marketing. While the PM has asked states to guard against such trends, the end result would be officials too would have a finger in the dirty pie. The people are the ultimate sufferers. The emerging situation is admittedly of high intensity as in the Covid-times, but this is also time to test the efficacy of governmental interventions. The safety of one-crore Indians living and working in the region is of immense concern, also as the aviation sector is hit and flights have largely been cancelled from and to the Middle-East and Gulf region. Thousands of people have died in the war, and more deaths are bound to take place. Nearly four lakh Indians have returned to their homes from the affected regions and their return is not easy in the immediate future. Indians working in the region are mainly helping the nation swell its foreign exchange reserves, which will now take a hit. It goes without saying that "saving them is our top priority", as the PM asserted, but meaningful diplomatic and other actions in this direction should follow.

On the economic front, especially with regard to energy security, the government says "we have strategic oil reserves of 53 lakh metric tonnes," which should suffice to tide over the present crisis for some more time. The big question is how long this military engagement would last. Iran, with its strong army and strong military muscle, is no easy prey to Donald Trump's ambitions. Iran has fire in its belly and would not accept defeat too soon, unlike in the case of Iraq in 2003, wherein Saddam Hussein's soldiers threw away their weapons and disappeared into thin air. Trump does not seem to have the courage to send his soldiers into Iran; and hence the hemming and hawing. He has hugely disrupted the global economy by his whimsical actions. In global diplomacy, the fact is India does not seem to count much.

Letters to the Editor

Census Operators: Why Use Teachers & Not Unemployed Youth?

Editor,
Census data is an integral and crucial factor towards understanding the needs and requirements of each and every household based on age, gender, income, race, etc. All government policies, programmes and processes are based on census data. This collected data is the foundational mother of all data. It is imperative that each and every household pro-actively and truthfully informs the census operators about their assets and liabilities so that future government policies and processes be delivered precisely and effectively. We must understand and educate ourselves and our neighbours that this data collection is not meant to infringe upon our privacy; rather it is meant to delve deeply into what we have and what we don't, to further empower us in the near future.

Let me cite a scenario - The head of a particular household responds to the census enumerator that he/she has a 3-room kutchra

house although in reality, he/she lives in a 2 rooms or less kutchra house. Perhaps the inaccurate response was to protect one's self-respect. Generally, there is nothing harmful with this over statement. But during a census data enumeration, this inaccurate response will ultimately lead this particular household to being deprived of receiving a PMAY(G) grant of Rs.1.3 lakhs, since PMAY(G) guidelines excludes households having 3 rooms or more from receiving the grant. This 2027 Census rule is no different.

On a sub context however, I would like to draw the attention of the government to, a particular aspect - who collects census-data? It is a known fact that the collection of data or enumeration as it is officially termed, has to be structured and meticulous and must include the best human resources to execute such a task. And that human resource is teachers. Most likely this group of educated human resource was the most viable option in the earlier days. Meanwhile, the teaching role is being substituted by the census enumeration role. Let's ask ourselves, if our children's future can be substituted or compromised in an age where the education sector is

For many residents of Meghalaya, lineage matters. When one meets another for the first time, one will eventually ask, "What is your (clan) title?" Often, one's title indexes an ethnic group and even suggests a migration history. In this sense, it is not simply a question of categorical belonging but also invokes the history and prosperity of the clan, which is, confusingly, often referred to as 'family.' Crucially, most people in Meghalaya carry their mother's clan title.

When I first set foot in Meghalaya, more specifically in the Jaintia Hills, I found myself confused about matrilineage. Coming from a patrilineal society, where women change their title to the husband's once married, it took me some time to understand how carefully the inheritance of the maternal title is protected, and how this protection shapes everyday life.

Yet matriliney, while widely associated with Meghalaya, remains only partially understood. The implied kinship structure alone—that a child inherits from the maternal line, thereby requiring a daughter for continuity—does not fully explain how lineage and clanship are deeply rooted in everyday living.

One time in Shangpung Pohshnong (the Niamtre quarter), I had a meeting about a planned seminar in the living room of my host family—the house that belongs to the mother. We were deciding on the location for the next meeting, and since my host father was part of this seminar discussion, I wrote the following—"Location: the residence of Ma Chibor." Seeing this, one of them said to me, laughing, "I think we need to change this phrasing. Otherwise, people would show up at his mother's house."

House, family and clan—in many intertwined ways, these revolve around matrilineage. Its significance comes to the fore in the everyday events unfold: marriage, childbirth and housewarming ceremony, to name a few. Take naming ceremonies, for example. In Shangpung Pohshnong, some days or weeks after childbirth, the newborn undergoes a series of rites, one of which is called 'Pyrtuid Boo' (child naming ceremony). The name of a child is not simply given but first proposed through several suggestions from the relevant clans. These suggested names will then undergo divine testing to determine whether they are acceptable. A simple process of naming a newborn within a family thus becomes an

struggling with foundational learning, high drop-out rates and a vast employability gap?

Currently there are about 22% literate unemployed youth. Can we not put a portion of these 22% literate unemployed youth to good use by training them to become census operators? Not only will these youth be benefiting financially, but this practice will have a positive collateral impact on society. This exercise may perhaps be reciprocated in future need-based government processes as well.

Yours etc.,
Roplang Kharmalki,
Shillong - 5

Concerts, Chaos or Calm?

Editor,
As Shillong steps into a growing concert economy, the conversation around audience etiquette inevitably leads to a more uncomfortable question, what does this reveal about our civic sense?

Concerts are, in many ways, a microcosm of society. The same habits that show up in daily life, disregard for public spaces, lack

important clan affair.

Events such as this occur almost every week across the village, and sometimes several take place simultaneously. One cannot attend them all. At other times, one becomes obliged to attend because of clan ties. In the case of a naming ceremony, on this celebratory occasion when the newborn symbolises clan prosperity, invited guests also embrace their relationship with the couple. Yet here too, the couple's lineage demands attention. Alongside the mother's—thus the child's—clan, the mother's father's clan, the husband's clan, the husband's father's clan, and so on, instantly become crucial participants in this ceremony.

To outsiders, the question of which clans must attend, and why, can appear as a complex social structure. Attendance itself is not a simple matter. Members of the required clan first gather at the natal house of the subject clan member and carry items such as rice, mustard oil, bananas, dry fish, ginger and rice beer from that house. The success of the naming ceremony therefore depends on other villagers knowing the couple's family tree and their matrilineage.

In my case, the mother's father belonged to my host father's clan, and he told me he was therefore expected to participate. On the morning of the naming ceremony, I followed him to the house from which the march to the house of the child's mother would begin. "How would they know not only the clan to which the mother's father belonged but also the location of his mother's house?" I wondered. This is the kind of knowledge that can only be acquired by living within the web of relationships that shape the village.

What confused me even more was that everyone at that house was introduced to me as my host father's 'siblings.' "But not from the same mother," he—a momentary pause later—added.

But at the same time, they do, in fact, share the same 'mother,' called 'Seinjait' (the original mother), who enabled the very beginning of the clan. Today, she, the originator who started their matrilineage, remains almost as though a goddess. Her presence is such that some clans in Shangpung maintain a dedicated altar, where they perform 'Kfia Seinjait' (sacrificial ritual for the originator). Yet she appears not only in this ritual. Each housewarming ceremony in

of accountability, and casual indifference to others, become amplified in crowded, high energy environments. Pushing through crowds, blocking views with phones, or leaving behind litter are not isolated actions, they are reflections of a deeper, everyday mindset. At times, a subtle distance toward visitors can quietly replace the warmth that places like Shillong are so beautifully known for. But this is also a moment to choose differently, to be remembered not for hesitation, but for openness. Unlike the often impersonal reputation associated with cities like Delhi, Shillong has the opportunity to define itself through kindness that is visible, consistent, and felt. A tourist who feels welcomed, helped when stranded, or simply treated with respect carries that story far beyond the hills. Word of mouth travels faster than any campaign, quietly shaping how the world sees a place. Thinking from a global perspective rather than a narrow one, every small act of civic sense becomes an investment not only in culture, but in the city's own growing economy.

Fortunately, it doesn't have to be like this everywhere. At the Hornbill Festival, the same energy exists,

By Anna Notsu

Between Origins and Futures: Matriliney among the Niamtre Pnar

Shangpung Pohshnong, for instance, requires the chanting of matrilineage from the seinjait down to the owner of the newly constructed house, tracing each and every mother as far back as people can remember. Again, lineage, family and house appear inseparably, embedding the significance of daughters.

"It is a kind of storytelling," a friend of mine in Jowai once said to me when I told him about my experience of a Niamtre housewarming ceremony in Shangpung. Through these rituals, matriliney is not only a given context but continually performed, as each generation retells the story of descent from the original mother, Seinjait. Every day, somewhere in the village, people give birth, pass away, name a newborn child, construct a house or perform sacrificial rituals for loved ones. Ordinary events such as these become extraordinary through the remembering of their own existence. In these spaces, where kinship extends beyond bloodline, time also becomes blurred as future prosperity, origin stories and current practices intertwine.

As I immerse myself in Shangpung Pohshnong, my relationship with certain people—and with them, their clans—has become central to my participation in events. Depending on the occasion I attend through, and sometimes 'as,' a member of my host mother's clan, almost like her daughter. At other times, I attend as an invited guest because of friendship, or as part of another clan. When people let me carry their wicker basket containing offering items from their clan house to the host's for a naming ceremony, they jokingly tell me, "From now, or at least today, you belong to our clan." One day I am a sister to the Ymbon clan, and the next day I might represent the Manar clan. In this way, my 'belonging' constantly shifts.

Perhaps because I am foreign to the village, yet participate in ways similar to villagers themselves—through their clan, family and personal relationships—I, too, have become part of these networks of relationships. And through such participation, the handover of ritual items from the attending clan to the host clan becomes more meaningful. "We don't just hand these items to them," my Shangpung companion once told me. In the context of a naming ceremony, this handover forms an essential moment

of the ritual, solidifying the connection between the host clan and its relative clan through whispered prayers from each side at a time. In this sense, the connection concerns not only immediate families but entire clans.

I used to think that matriliney itself gave shape to the Niamtre community. But it is in their practices that matriliney is embedded. The importance of matrilineage in Shangpung Pohshnong does not solely narrate descent or inheritance as a mere tradition; it demonstrates how people honour their relationships across the past, the present and the future.

In this sense, Niamtre storytelling does not only occur through spoken narratives but through repeated acts of participation. Each ritual and ceremony rehearses the same genealogical memory: who belongs to whom, which house one comes from and which mothers precede the present generation. It is at once individual and collective. What appears to be an ordinary gathering around food, offerings and prayer is also a moment when relationships are collectively cherished and remembered.

The past is recalled through origin stories, the present is enacted through the gathering of relatives and clans, and the future is anticipated in the child whose name is being tested or in the house that will shelter the next generation. Through these moments, matriliney is honoured through lived repetition.

Today, as calls for patrilineal inheritance gain attention across the hills, Niamtre storytelling continues to sustain matrilineage through everyday events. My point here is not to argue whether matriliney should or should not be protected in Meghalaya. Rather, I show how matriliney endures—perhaps even strengthens—through the everyday practices of the Niamtre Pnar. Moving back and forth between ancestral origins and future continuity through present relationships to one another, Niamtre communities in Shangpung Pohshnong continually reaffirm the value of and add value to matrilineage.

(The author is a PhD scholar from Leiden University, the Netherlands currently doing research in Jaintia Hills. Her PhD research is part of a five-year project, *Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas*, initiated by Leiden University and Ashoka University. Her research is funded by NWO and the Delta on the Move Foundation.)

but it's tempered by awareness and courtesy that makes the experience truly enjoyable. The crowds are just as vibrant, the music just as alive, yet people move with care, spaces are kept clean, and there is a shared understanding that the experience belongs to everyone, not just the individual. It is not enforced, it is practiced.

Somewhere along the way, we have perfected the art of blaming the government for everything, as if governance alone defines public life, forgetting that when one finger points outward, three quietly point back asking a far simpler question, how are we behaving when no one is watching? Civic sense is not about strict rules or constant supervision, it is about an internalised discipline. It shows up in how people behave when there are no immediate consequences, when accountability is not imposed but chosen.

The rise of larger events in Shillong brings with it an opportunity, but also a responsibility. Infrastructure can be built, stages can be set, but culture is shaped by people, for the people, and unfortunately, no ministry has announced a "Basic Concert Behaviour Yojana" yet. We are quick to blame the government for everything

from traffic to the weather, but somehow expect them to also manage our elbows in a crowd and magically teleport our trash into bins. One finger points at the system, three point back asking a far more uncomfortable question, are we here to enjoy the music, or audition for chaos?

The question is no longer whether Shillong is ready for bigger concerts, but whether its audience is ready to match the kind of civic sense that allows such experiences to truly thrive. Ultimately, a city's reputation is shaped by its people, not its government, and right now it is quietly defined by how we behave in public spaces. Chaos may feel thrilling, but it leaves a mark, and every careless moment at a concert, changes how visitors experience Shillong. The question now rests with the locals, how will Shillong be remembered, as a place that celebrates music and community, or as one where disorder overshadows the experience?

Your's etc,
Shivani Pde
Via email

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A Woman: Who Really Understands Her?

By Jenniefer Dkhar

Jawaharlal Nehru said: "You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of women."

There has been a change in the position and status of women for the better but there is still a lot that is left to be done. It will take a long time for women to be provided equality and equity in every sphere. Subordination of women be it at home, at the workplace or the political arena is a condition that must change.

Even today, women still perform a greater part of unpaid domestic work across the globe. Gender pay gap still exists in every economy and women remain vividly underrepresented in positions of political and economic power.

The relegation of women to the home was not based on the biological difference between men and women but an adherence to an actively constructed social arrangement that has been made strong through law, custom, religion, and economic dependency. In many cases even today, women are looked upon as beings subordinate to their husbands who are recognised as heads of their family.

At the domestic front, women are perceived as architects of the home. Home is a space where women do not merely live but a space that becomes their social world. The relegation of women to the home was not based on the biological difference between men and women but an adherence to an actively constructed social arrangement that has been made strong through law, custom, religion, and economic dependency. In many cases even today, women are looked upon as beings subordinate to their husbands who are recognised as heads of their family.

The public world of commerce, politics, and civic life is the domain of men, while the private world of home and family is the domain of women. It is encouraging that many women are carving spaces of their own but a great many of us are still never set free of gender roles and identities. Here, I'm reminded of Virginia Woolf's essay *Professions for Women* where she says that women have always been perceived as Angels in the House. "She was intensely sympathetic. She was utterly unselfish. She

a woman's worth.

With the passage of time, women have gained access to education, professions that were always the domain of the male gender are seeing women stand tall but women still retain their responsibility for unpaid and often unnoticed and unappreciated domestic chores of cooking, cleaning, childcare, elder care, emotional labour, and the vast invisible work of maintaining a household and a family.

A woman may be a working mother and is a contributor towards the economic fulfilment of the family but the responsibility of gratifying the needs of the family and the entire household still belongs to her. Regardless of their economic contribution,

women are still expected to perform the majority of domestic work. The planning, anticipating, remembering, organising remains almost entirely female. Though women have moved from subservience and confinement in the domestic sphere yet the unequal distribution of domestic chores and care remains a structural and an integral part of a woman's life and world.

It is noteworthy that access to education has been most transformative and we see women making significant advances in the judiciary, the military, the bureaucracy and other institutions of public authority. Yet, though women have moved from subservience and confinement in the domestic sphere, the unequal distribution of domestic chores and care remains a structural and an integral part of a woman's life and world.

On the job front, women are becoming active participants yet disparity still exists. In the political arena women are occupying positions of significant authority but they still remain under-represented. And in society the position of women is seeing forward transformation and change but that

It is noteworthy that access to education has been most transformative and we see women making significant advances in the judiciary, the military, the bureaucracy and other institutions of public authority. Yet, though women have moved from subservience and confinement in the domestic sphere, the unequal distribution of domestic chores and care remains a structural and an integral part of a woman's life and world.

excellence in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it—" Women have always been the nurturers and the caregivers in the house. Indeed, in almost every household, the woman is the one who sacrifices her needs, yearnings and desires for the sake of the other members in the family. It isn't that a woman, especially a mother, bears grudges, it is a simple question of why should it be so?

In the same essay, Virginia Woolf writes "in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to always sympathize with the minds and wishes of others." These lines are painfully true. What is disturbing is the way in which a woman is being perceived as a being who has no mind of her own. No matter how belittling it may sound it is not true. Rather, if truth be told a woman has as much strength, courage, wisdom and intelligence as her male counterpart. All that is required is for the world to see

transformation is still miniscule.

However, one would like to state that a woman fulfils great responsibility as the nurturer in her allows her to shape the moral and emotional foundation of the society. A mother's patience, a grandmother's stories, a sister's protection are not small gestures but powerful acts of giving that help shape future citizens, leaders, and thinkers. A child taught compassion grows into an adult who is empathetic towards others. A daughter raised with confidence carries that strength into her workplace and community.

Through the act of giving guidance and care, women gain the profound satisfaction of seeing their values reflected in the world around them. No matter what women will continue to hold an important place in the home, at work and in the society at large. Let me conclude with the words of Maya Angelou from her poem, *Still I Rise*:

You may shoot me with your words/You may cut me with your eyes/You may kill me with your hatefulness/But still, like air, I'll rise.

"Success is where preparation and opportunity meet."

— Bobby Unser

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.223 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2026

Power of Public Protests

DEMOCRACY withers if people don't take responsibility to demand their rights under the Constitution. While it is regrettable that two persons lost their lives in the violent protest against non-tribals contesting the District Council elections and also voting in such elections, in the Garo Hills. The fact that the amendment to the Assam and Meghalaya Autonomous Districts (Constitution of District Councils) Rules, 1951, has been successfully achieved by the Garo Hills District Council (GHDC) and ratified by Governor CH Vijayashankar shows that such amendments are possible and could have been undertaken decades earlier. Garo Hills, BJP leader and Members District Council, Bernard Marak has been leading this demand to keep non-tribals out of the Councils, essentially because they were created to govern the tribals and to conserve their customary practices and traditions but above all, their land holding rights and to be custodians of the natural resources. It is no secret that despite the Meghalaya Transfer of Land Regulation Act, 1972, land has changed hands even after the Act was enforced. Already, much of the prime land in Meghalaya, especially in Shillong city had passed into non-tribal hands while the state was part of Assam and before any Act was passed to restrict land purchase by non-tribals.

Land being a finite entity, once lost it cannot be retrieved. Land is linked to tribal identity. Yet it is ironic that there is landlessness among large sections of the tribes today. The question is what did the District Councils, created way back in 1951, done to secure the land rights of tribals. A reading of the amendments to the 6th Schedule in Meghalaya, made from time to time shows nothing of consequence was amended or enacted other than increasing the membership of the Council from 24 to 30, increasing salaries of members of the Executive Committee, the populist Khasi Lineage Act and the ADCs now empowered to issue building permissions, a power they don't strictly exercise since most buildings constructed in recent times are flouting the rules and are building right on rivers without leaving the mandatory 50 meters of the highwater mark of the waterbody as directed by the Meghalaya High Court in 2023. Herein lies the weakness of the District Councils which includes safeguarding the natural resources of the state.

Even with regards to mining and quarrying the District Councils have been found to be remiss. It's a go as you please policy as long as the hands of the Councillors are greased. And we are talking here of a Council that has all tribal Councillors — the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills District Councils. Now that the Garo Hills District Council will have only scheduled tribes as Councillors can it be expected that the interest of the Garo people and other minor tribes will be better served and that land and other finite resources will be better protected? An emotive issue such as the one granting the right to contest the ADC elections only to Schedule Tribes should not be allowed to drift. The people of Garo Hills must ensure that the natural resources of the region are not bartered away by elected MDCs surreptitiously which is what has been happening over the years. Business deals are struck with non-tribals, hence many own coal mines in the State, in the names of tribals of course. If the Councils cannot stop these benami transactions then they are as good as redundant.

The conflict between Iran and US, instigated by Israel, has by some sections been cast as a religious war. There have been reports that US military commanders have been invoking extremist Christian rhetoric about biblical "end times" to justify involvement in the Iran war to troops. They were told that "President Trump has been anointed by Jesus to light the signal fire in Iran to cause Armageddon and mark his return to Earth." Israel, of course believes that Jews are the chosen people of God and the land of Palestine along with parts of Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia was promised to them 3000 years ago. Iran on the other hand, is the stronghold of Shia Islam and whose leader, the now deceased Ali Hosseini Khamenei was the second most important Shia religious figure after Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani based in Najaf, Iraq. So, for some it is a fight between three major monotheist faiths, Islam, Christianity and Judaism. Ironically, all of these three religions are thought to have originated from Abraham, a mythical figure, who is considered to be the patriarch of all these religions. In fact, collectively these three religions are called as Abrahamic religions. What is however overlooked is that Iran or as it was known in the past, Persia, had a great influence in shaping their theology and mythology. To understand this story, one has to go back more than 2,000 years. In the eighth century BCE, the kingdom of Judah was captured by the Assyrian Empire, a fate it suffered again at the hands of the Babylonians during the sixth century BCE. On both of these occasions, many of the elite were forcibly removed from the kingdom and settled in Babylon (today's Iraq), which was a common strategy to curtail local uprising. Some returned home when the Achaemenid (an ancient Iranian empire) King Cyrus, conquered Babylon, and issued a decree stating that the Jews would be allowed to return to their homeland. Judah became a Persian province. The loss, exile, return and restoration that were associated with this tumultuous period triggered a flurry of literary activities that gave rise to the Hebrew Bible (known as the Old Tes-

tament) as it is found today.

In her award winning book 'God: An Anatomy' Francesca Stavrakopoulou, Professor of Hebrew Bible and Ancient Religion at the University of Exeter, has dealt extensively with ancient Judaism as reconstructed through Hebrew texts and archaeology. The book situates the origin of the religion within the larger religious landscape of southwest Asia and traces the beginning of its adoption of monotheism. It traces how Yahweh—originally a ferocious storm deity—evolved from one among many gods, along with a wife, to supplant El as the head of a local pantheon, and ultimately become the sole divine being in the universe. The latter process started with the return of Judah's exiles. While rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem, they also reconfigured the religion to adopt a more monotheistic character. There is even a silver coin minted during the fourth century BCE in Persian controlled Judah of a high god enthroned on a winged chariot, identified to be Yahweh. But Persia's influence on the Abrahamic religions goes beyond the fact that it allowed those exiled to return and compile the religious books that laid the foundation of Judaism, and later Christianity and Islam. Many ideas now regarded as core concepts of these religions have also been influenced by Persia's state religion, Zoroastrianism, world's oldest monotheistic faith.

The story of the Garden of Eden, from which Adam and Eve were banished (which was a reworking of an older myth of a king who could be expelled from the heavenly sphere if he displeased the gods) represents their departure from heaven for having committed sin. (The word 'paradise' is actually derived from an Old Persian word 'pairidaeza' which means "a (garden) surrounded by walls". The contact with Zoroastrianism also gave rise to the concept of hell and afterlife. Before this, ancient Jews believed that after death, both the righteous and the unrighteous would go to the underworld, called Sheol. This is not surprising, as many cultures around the world lack a concept of hell

as a place of punishment.

Indigenous Khasi faith does not have any reference to a place of punishment. Dujok and Norok, the words used for hell, are of non-Khasi origin, derived from Dojakh in Persian (Islamic) and Narak in Sanskrit (Hindu). The final destination of all the deceased is to have kwait in the house of God. It is only when the rituals are not conducted in the proper manner that the spirits of the deceased are forced to wander the earth aimlessly. In her 1969 PhD thesis 'The Origin and Early History of Khasi-Synteng People', Namita Catherine Shadap mentions a dark underworld, but it is inhabited by goblins and demons. In this, the Khasi are very similar to many indigenous groups around the world, for whom the final destination for all is the home of the ancestors rather than a flaming pit of damnation in which some are tortured for eternity. In fact, Jehovah's Witnesses, a Christian denomination, also do not believe in a hell of fiery torment, but rather in something similar to the original concept of the Hebrew Sheol.

In a culture where 'sin' is not a guiding principle, honour—moral consistency in remaining true to one's word—becomes central. In fact, spoken words have a great importance in Khasi cosmology, with the right utterances allowing humans to communicate with other non-human beings in the world. This is best illustrated by a version of the story of how the Pnars—a subgroup of the Khasis residing in the Jaintia Hills, excluding areas inhabited by the War and non-Khasi groups such as the Biate—overthrew the oppressive Syiem Malngiang of Hima Madur Maskut. This version is found in the 2015 PhD thesis 'Reconstructing the Early Jaintia State through Oral Traditions' by Betty Laloo.

A plan was devised among the Pnars to overthrow the oppressive Syiem, and assistance was sought from some of the Pnar servants in his household. They initially refused, stating that they were bound by the oath they had taken to serve him faithfully. In the end they agreed but not before accepting the

fact that God might punish them for breaking their oath but they were willing to bear the punishment. Transgressions are thus punished during the lifetime of the wrongdoers rather than after death, removing the need for a concept of hell in Khasi cosmology.

Another idea which is crucial to Abrahamic faiths is the idea of the Messiah. In Zoroastrianism, Saoshyans is the messiah who will come at the end of the world to destroy evil and resurrect the bodies of the dead. This concept entered ancient Judaism, with the Hebrew Bible referring to Cyrus as a messiah for his decree to rebuild the Jerusalem Temple. Christianity and Islam later adopted the idea; however, Jews do not regard Jesus as the messiah. In fact, orthodox Jews who are against the state of Israel argue that it is only the coming of the messiah which will undo the exile of the Jews and allow them to return. Some orthodox Jewish sects, therefore, do not recognize the state of Israel as it violates Jewish religious law. Similarly, other ideas like the fight between good and evil or light and darkness also has its origin in Zoroastrianism. The Magi, important figures associated with the birth of Jesus Christ, were originally terms used for Zoroastrian priests.

So, if one were to take away the idea of monotheism, heaven and hell, sin, fight between good and evil, and the messiah, the whole theology of the Abrahamic religions will look very different. Indeed history itself may have turned out very differently. Imagine, there is no Arab conquest of large parts of West Africa and North Africa, nor European colonization of many parts of the world or the displacement of indigenous Palestinians from their land. The world will never be perfect but it will not be the same as we see it today. Instead today we have a crisis which if not solved will affect not just mythical claims but the real world economy, in which all of us live irrespective of which religion one believes or does not believe. So, hopefully, this 'religious' conflict among siblings ends soon.

(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)

India's Traffic Chaos Meets Algorithms

By Shivani Pde

Beyond the political noise, the war, the everyday chaos, the rush & madness of human life, there is one thing that humbles everyone equally in India is Traffic. Whether it is a Minister or a clerk, movement comes to the same standstill at the same signal. Traffic does not differentiate, and neither does it negotiate. As Indians, we do not just navigate traffic, we anticipate it. We plan our mornings around it, schedule and reschedule meetings because of it, and often measure distance not in minutes but in delays. Here in Shillong, this reality feels even more real. When Blinkit arrived, many of us felt a quiet relief because it meant we did not have to step into the daily maze of traffic just to pick up something as simple as eggs from Laitumkhrah. And when that option disappeared, the weight of that routine returned just as quickly. For parents with school going children, the entire day is often built around traffic timing drop offs, pickups, delays, and the constant uncertainty in between.

In many ways, our lives do not just pass through traffic, they pause within it. At the same time, there is only so much human intervention can achieve. Traffic personnel stand for hours, navigating pressure, noise, and unpredictability, often without the tools to truly control it. They are expected to manage a system that exhausts even those moving through it. So, the question becomes unavoidable: why does this remain the elephant in the room, especially in a small city like Shillong where the scale is smaller and the opportunity to intervene is more immediate.

With the advancement of Artificial Intelligence, several cities across India have already begun applying AI driven systems to ease congestion and improve flow, and they are proving effective in many cities across India. However, realities on the ground cannot be ignored. Frequent power cuts present a genuine challenge, as AI driven traffic systems depend on continuous data flow and stable infrastructure. AI does not fatigue, but it does fail instantly without power, turning intelligent systems blind in moments where continuity matters most. Without addressing these foundational issues through reliable electricity and backup systems, even the most advanced technology risks falling short.

India's traffic has long been a symbol of controlled chaos, an unspoken negotiation between humans, machines, instinct, and impatience. But that chaos is slowly being rewritten. Not erased, not silenced but understood. And at the center of this shift is Artificial Intelligence.

Across the country, AI is beginning to transform traffic management from a reactive system into a predictive, almost intuitive network. The change is not theoretical anymore; it is already unfolding in pockets of India, quietly but significantly.

Take Bhubaneswar, for instance. Often cited as one of India's most advanced smart city models, it has implemented AI powered adaptive traffic signals at multiple junctions. These systems do not rely on fixed timers. Instead, they read traffic density in real time and adjust signal durations accordingly. The result is not just smoother movement but a measurable reduction in congestion and waiting time. More importantly, the system can prioritize emergency vehicles, creating instant green corridors when seconds matter most. In Nagpur, the focus has been on building an integrated ecosystem through the Intelligent Integrated Traffic Management System. By combining CCTV surveillance, sensors, and AI algorithms, the city is attempting to create a centralized command structure that monitors and responds to traffic conditions dynamically. While implementation challenges remain, the intent signals a clear direction that traffic is no longer just about roads but about data.

Meanwhile, Delhi is pushing boundaries in enforcement. The Dwarka Expressway hosts one of India's first AI powered traffic systems capable of detecting multiple types of violations in real time. From speeding to lane indiscipline, the system automates what was once entirely dependent on human monitoring. This marks a shift not just in efficiency, but accountability as well.

In a city like Varanasi, where narrow lanes and dense crowds complicate movement, AI is being used not just to manage vehicles but also pedestrian flow. By analyzing crowd patterns alongside traffic, the system attempts to balance mobility in one of India's most complex urban environments. It is a reminder that traffic in India is not just about cars it is about people, in all their unpredictability.

Beyond these examples, major metropolitans like Mumbai, Bengaluru, Chennai, and Hyderabad are all actively experimenting with AI driven solutions. These range from adaptive traffic signals and predictive congestion models to automated violation detection systems. While the scale and success of implementation vary, the trajectory is consistent towards smarter, data driven mobility.

Behind this transformation are a mix of private and institutional players. Companies like Soflabs Group and Futops Technologies are developing adaptive traffic control systems that integrate real time analytics with on ground infrastructure. Keltron has contributed to government-led initiatives, particularly in integrated traffic systems. Global players such as Johnson Controls are also entering the space, bringing international frameworks into Indian cities. Alongside them, government bodies like National Highways Authority of India are driving large scale deployment, especially on highways.

However, the narrative is far from seamless. Implementation gaps, infrastructure limitations, and coordination challenges continue to slow progress. Not every project scales successfully, and not every city is ready for full integration. The reality is that AI, no matter how advanced, cannot function in isolation. It depends heavily on the type of ecosystem it is placed within and thus will need adaptation to localised conditions to function effectively.

This transition towards data driven traffic management carries deeper implications in the long run. Reduced congestion means lower fuel consumption and fewer emissions. Faster response systems can save lives. Data driven planning can reshape urban design itself. Traffic management, once seen as a civic inconvenience, is emerging as a critical layer of urban intelligence.

For decades, Indian traffic has been governed by pure human instinct, eye contact at intersections, silent negotiations, and constant honking that can drive anyone insane, especially in metropolitans. Add to that a very confident "I will go first, you adjust" policy. It is a kind of organized disorder that somehow works, always balancing on the edge of a tipping point. Now AI enters with its data backed structure and probably stands very confused at a four-way junction. The real question is not whether one will replace the other, but how this beautifully chaotic human logic and this painfully disciplined machine logic will learn to survive each other.

Because in India, systems do not just function, they adapt to human behaviour, like a red light that technically means stop but in practice becomes slow down, assess, and then decide if you can still go. For the first time, technology is learning to do the same, like when Google Maps automatically suggests a faster alternate route the moment traffic starts building up ahead. There is hope in that shift, as AI quietly evolves in the background, although it is not a perfect system, but an artificially thinking one that is not bound by human exhaustion.

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya cricket needs more local talent development

Editor,
I write as a parent, and as someone who has watched Meghalaya cricket from a vantage point that neither the boardroom nor the press box quite captures. I appreciate Patrick Kurbah's article "Rock-Bottom: Meghalaya Cricket's Crisis and a Hope for Redemption" for what it was: an honest, data-driven engagement with a crisis that many have long felt but few have been willing to name in print. Here, I would rather speak to something more immediate, and more personal.

In the past years, my son has represented Meghalaya cricket. He put in scores. He delivered performances. And while I would believe such a player would be encouraged, he was dropped from the team on more than one occasion, without a word of explanation from anyone within the Meghalaya Cricket Association.

Now, I am aware that as a parent, I may be accused of bias and I accept that charge freely. No parent is entirely objective when it comes to their child. But that is not really the point.

The point is that no one from the Association was ever accessible, not to seek

clarification of the decision-making process, not even to ask what my son needed to work on, where he was falling short, what he could do to improve his chances. There was no coach's feedback. No selector's note. No pathway offered. Nothing.

In such a system, hard work goes unacknowledged. Merit goes unidentified. Players who put their discipline, their fitness, and their years on the line are left in the dark, not because the answers do not exist, but because no one considers it necessary to provide them the answers. This is not a minor administrative failing. It is a fundamental breach of the association's responsibility to the players it is supposed to serve. Cricket in this state will not improve until that changes.

The administrative overhaul that Kurbah spoke of is necessary. But it is not sufficient. What is equally needed is a thorough, unsparing examination of the daily cricketing operations at the MCA. The selection procedures, the criteria applied, the documentation reviewed, and the people making these decisions. These are not abstract concerns.

There is a question that has circulated quietly for too long and deserves to be asked openly: how is it that players who are not residents of this state—who were not born here, did not grow up here, did not study here—suddenly appear on the rolls with valid Voter IDs and Aadhaar cards, and

find themselves eligible to represent Meghalaya? And how is it that these players routinely find spots in squads, displacing local boys who had earlier earned their place through years of hard work and actual performance within the state's cricket ecosystem? These are serious questions. They touch on the integrity of the selection process. The current administration would do well to investigate this matter with the seriousness it deserves, and to be transparent about its findings.

States like Nagaland and Jammu & Kashmir offer a model worth studying. Both have made deliberate, sustained investment in identifying and developing homegrown talent and building pipelines, not just picking squads. The results speak for themselves.

Meghalaya has no shortage of talented young cricketers. What it has lacked is a system that finds them, nurtures them, and backs them consistently. Until that system exists, no amount of recruitment from outside, regardless of how eligibility is established, will produce results that last. And the statistics of recent seasons bear this out with a clarity that ought to be embarrassing.

The new administration has both an opportunity and a responsibility. I hope it uses both wisely to genuinely transform what comes next. The players of this state, and the parents who stand behind them, are watching and they deserve answers.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request
Via email

The Heritage of Health: Lessons from the Khasi Kitchen

Editor,
Food is an integral part of our lives, and generations have sustained themselves through it. So, without food, life simply ceases. The types of food we choose and our eating habits determine our well-being. A healthy and prosperous society, marked by good health and proper nutrition is a key to good health.

In today's world, we have abundant information teaching us about food's vital role in achieving a good quality life. Yet, despite this knowledge, many of us cling to poor food habits shaped by changing lifestyles and societal evolution. Our taste preferences have shifted towards intense flavours—excessive salt, sugar, and taste enhancers—rendering traditional foods bland by comparison.

The ever-expanding food industry influences these choices even more profoundly. The old saying "eat to live" has given way to "live to eat," encouraging gluttony, which is not a healthy practice at all.

In today's world, food has also transformed into an art

form, a commercial product, and fodder for social media influencers, where discussions on its link to health garner immense attention and sell effortlessly across communities.

In this reflection, however, I wish to highlight the role of food in the past and how our ancestors cultivated strong, healthy eating habits. In our Khasi society, these practices reveal the profound wisdom of our elders, a legacy we must cherish and preserve.

One striking example is "soh khleh" or fruit salad made from mustard leaves and a mixture of citrus fruits. The greens supply iron, and when you mix it with the vitamin C from the fruits, it helps absorb the iron more effectively—a principle fully supported by science.

Khasis do not keep dairy farms, and cattle are raised mainly for meat, so this has made me wonder about how our people get their required dose of calcium. When I looked long and hard at our food, I found that we have a traditional dish of dry fish cooked with colocasia leaves which provides calcium in abundance. We also get it from eating calcium-rich wild greens.

For urinary tract infections or kidney problems, elders advise drinking the water from the first rinse of rice. The layer just beneath the bran contains water-soluble vitamin B, highly beneficial for kidney health. To ease acidity or flatulence, they recommend stirring

fireplace ash into water and drinking it—or, if unavailable, burning a betel leaf to ash dip in into a glass of water and consuming it immediately. This alkaline solution neutralises acid with remarkable efficiency, showcasing foresight beyond modern remedies.

In the past, lunch came early in the morning to fuel the day's labours, a practice now rediscovered and rebranded as brunch. Dinner followed at 5 p.m., after which people visited neighbours or attended community gatherings before retiring, allowing a healthy gap of three to four hours before sleep. By contrast, today's late dinners, eaten after evening activities with little digestion time as the gap between dinner and sleep is very close. This ancestral rhythm mirrors the intermittent fasting praised today for its health benefits.

Our indigenous knowledge aligns seamlessly with scientific validation, a revelation that never ceases to inspire awe. What contemporary experts uncover as innovation, we recognise simply as the enduring wisdom of our forefathers—a profound heritage that calls us to honour and revive it for generations to come.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Barikor C Warjri,
Via email

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

"Be faithful to that which exists within yourself."

— Andre Gide

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No.224

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, MARCH 27, 2026

Trump's predicament

FOR now, the US attempt to browbeat Iran into submission has not produced the desired results. Iran is ably standing its ground despite major hits from the combined, lethal forces of the US and Israel, and is giving Uncle Sam and Tel Aviv some tense moments. President Donald Trump keeps blowing hot and cold, but seems to be in a mood for a pause. While White House threatens to "unleash hell" on Iran, Trump is proposing talks; and he appears to be more eager to end the military engagement as nearly a month has passed after the offensive began. What was thought to be a quick fix has turned out to be a long drawn war.

Trump aimed to dismantle the rule by the Revolutionary Guards and impose a puppet regime there. Obviously, Iran's oil wealth and the petro-dollar it commands was an attraction as in the case of Venezuela. With the war prolonging, Americans are becoming impatient, and so are the media there. Strangely, Iran is setting conditions for talks; and not Donald Trump. Reports are also that Israel is worried the US might opt for a ceasefire. The disquiet in the American camp is palpable, and so is its attempt to find a way out through talks rather than prolonging the war. Iran has its strong points. It has blocked the Strait of Hormuz, halting movement of ships through the principal global trade route. Global oil and LPG supplies are hugely hit though, by Thursday, Teheran has announced relaxations for five friendly nations, namely Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iraq. India heaves a sigh of relief and so too the other four nations. Ships linked to America and its allies can wait. Iran's strength is also its well-organised ground forces of the military. Hence, Trump is delaying action on the ground as things could go terribly wrong. Americans have superior firepower from the air, but the same cannot be said about its military's operational capability, be it in the Iranian soil or elsewhere. After a long war, Americans cut and ran from Vietnam. Vladimir Putin is facing a similar predicament in Ukraine, where he started a war four years ago. Once American soldiers step in, there would be casualties on both sides. If body bags reach back to America from Iran, the public mood would turn against Trump.

Admittedly, the Islamists or the Revolutionary Guards have played mayhem with the lives of people after the exit of the popular Shah of Iran from power. Iran's nuclear programmes are a matter of serious concern to the world. All the same, the crude manner in which the American President is going about challenging the territorial integrity of nations near and far cannot be the acceptable way forward. For power to perform in the right direction, checks and balances are important. The whimsical manner in which Trump began acting during his second term in office is unlikely to do any good to Americans. A level-headed governance is a better option than a head of state acting like a bull in a China shop.

Every once in a while one enters the portals of a University to witness young women scholars engage with the idea of matrilineality and its many layers; how it intersects with day to day lived experiences and how women here often hide the ugly scars they carry because society expects them to put their best foot forward when they are questioned as to what it is like to be a woman in a matrilineal society. I have long discarded the pretence of being privileged, simply because I come from this glorified society. Scholars from the West have come here to study us as specimens because they are so disillusioned with their brand of patriarchy that they want to portray us as an ideal society where women rule the roost.

Sorry, but nothing can be further from the truth. I chanced to walk into a closed door discussion between the students of Counselling Psychology, Martin Luther Christian University while they were deep in conversation with Prof Roy Moodley from the Department of Applied Psychology, University of Toronto, Canada. The students were all young women at the prime of their careers. There were drawings on the floor depicting what the students felt in every part of their bodies starting from the head which was shown as muddled – the stomach region where all the trauma of the day resides; the hands which were depicted as instruments of empowerment. I suppose because they could move to do something positive and the legs which were depicted as being chained. The drawings were put together not by those who felt the emotions but by other students who interpreted those emotions in art form. What a beautiful medley of reflection turned into thought interpreted in art. It takes a lot of deep diving to produce what I saw unfold as I stood there.

It takes intrinsic empathy for an artist to understand a counselling psychologist explaining how the emotions that play out in different parts of the human body and then, to articulate the bundles of emotions into an art form. In our time we could never imagine such an opportunity being given to us in the schools and colleges we

Oh To Be a Woman in a Matrilineal Society!

By Patricia Mukhim

passed out from. In fact, it would be true to say that we went through most of college, not understanding what we were taught – leave alone life skills. Its not as if in those years women and girls were not molested or raped. They were, but we were taught that silence was the best way to deal with such trauma.

These days young women have mustered courage to call out molesters and call them by their real name, "predators." There are Khasi families where the uncle had impregnated his own niece but society never considered the man an outcast. And as a society we are too busy putting up a show of respectability (donburom), that we have forgotten to teach our girls that they should not put up with sexual abuse of any kind beginning with those ugly bad touches when men would grope for a woman's breast in a crowded bus or even in a shared taxi. Many women feel outraged by such indecencies and sexual innuendos that they resort to silence instead of shouting and drawing the attention of others to that act. We women feel ashamed when it is the man who should be ashamed. But our upbringing has been so culturally tuned to put women always on the defensive that most of us have forgotten to speak up or are too scared to do so, especially if the man happens to be well placed and some sort of societal model in the day time and a predator in secret spaces.

Well, that age hopefully is now over because young women today don't hesitate to use social media to name and shame such predators. Good for them! I realise that we women need to be badass rather than being diffident, and reticent even when we are harmed. Our upbringing has left so much to be desired. Whether we look at how religion defines women's behaviours – the do's and don'ts prescribed and the social diktat governing women we have always been the recipients of, unsolicited advice; always told to behave in certain ways; to speak respectfully especially before men; in short to use tame language because to use any other language is to

be uncultured.

Khasis are so obsessed with "respectability" (the donburom cult), that we women can never be ourselves or express our deepest angst. Men can use cuss words with gay abandon but if a woman does it she would be called a 'khusbi' (person with loose morals). And talking about prostitutes (sex workers as they are called today), if there were no men to solicit their services they would not be in the business. It takes two to tango so all those men roaming around Police Bazar to shame sex workers (rot is the new name given to them) stop shaming these women. They are earning their livelihoods in a world where no one cares for them. Yes you men who try to shame these women, you can do so only if you can provide them a decent livelihood. Else you have no right to police the streets.

One topic that seems to bother many young Khasi women today is the burden of being the "Khatduh." One of the young scholars said that if you are the khatduh society has already brainwashed you into entering a role where you have to be responsible for your elder siblings, your parents and more. What's interesting is that the role of the Khatduh in Khasi society has been scripted such that she is the heiress of her parent's property – the ancestral home. This assumption is so cliched that it stinks. Not every 'Khatduh' comes from a moneyed family and not every Khasi family owns a home. There are thousands of families today that don't own any property and live in rented homes. What happens to the Khatduh in such a family where parents incur debts that they leave behind after their demise? Has anyone ever spoken about them? Do researchers within society and outside it ever delved into the economic condition of such 'Khatduhs'? Why do we stereotype all Khatduhs to be heiresses and hence attractive propositions? And do we leave the poor Khatduh with any choice? Parents want her to marry, reproduce and carry on the legacy. Young women are today finding the spine to resist early marriages and are living their lives by their own

rules. Good for them!

Matriliney is so glorified that people forget there are many single women parents out there whose lives are imperilled. In one of his write-ups, Nicholas Kristof quotes Daniel Patrick Moynihan who argued most presciently and powerfully that single parent households would make poverty more intractable. Moynihan says, "A community that allows large numbers of young men to grow up in broken families – never acquiring any stable relationship to male authority, never acquiring any set of rational expectations about the future – that community asks for and gets chaos." How very well spoken! A study by Sara McLanahan of Princeton and Christopher Jencks of Harvard shows that growing up with one biological parent reduces the chance that a child will graduate from high school by 40%. Do we have similar studies by any University here considering that single-parenthood is rampant? Sadly single-parenthood is taken as the norm and single mothers are expected to cope. But are they coping?

Unfortunately this society will discuss culture, tradition, religion and everything else under the Meghalaya sky except the real issues – single parenthood as the cause of poverty and landlessness among the Khasis. Is there any Government plan to acquire land and allot such land to the landless? Is the District Council, the custodian of all our land and resources thinking of such a scheme? When will they do it? It's now or never. The Khasi society is hurting but those in politics can't see the hurt and pain because they don't come from poverty and don't know what it is to walk a mile in a poor woman's torn slippers. And sometimes barefoot!

We have deceived ourselves with all the niceties of culture, buried our agonies in the dances and songs but the real Khasi society is not what is portrayed for the outside world. The poor have no right to cultural expressions because they cannot afford the finery. These are bitter truths that we need to deal with! Let's not pretend they don't impinge on our social character.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Old Men of India... There seems to be a sudden shortage of hobbies among the elderly gentlemen running the country. Having failed to handle inflation, infrastructure and international relations, they have now taken up a far more delicate responsibility. Managing youngsters.

Earlier, this noble activity was handled at home. A father would clear his throat, an uncle would raise an eyebrow, and a neighbour with nothing better to do would offer unsolicited wisdom from the balcony. It was all very informal and maybe mildly irritating.

Now, however, it has been elevated to national importance. The drawing room has become Parliament, and what was once a family discussion is now a matter of legislation. The youth of the country are no longer just children. They are a full-fledged project.

First came the protection of women. A noble idea on paper, inspiring in speeches, and very effective in WhatsApp forwards. But somewhere between the intention and the implementation, protection quietly changed its clothes and became restriction. If there are prowling Romeos outside, the obvious solution is not to strengthen Juliet's mind, but make laws against Romeos, or even cage Juliet indoors. It is neat, it is tidy, and it ensures that no one has to deal with the actual problem.

Soon, love itself began to look suspicious. It was no longer a spontaneous and inconvenient emotion. It became something that needed supervision, scrutiny, and preferably a government stamp.

Young people, it appears, were doing dangerous things. They were meeting, talking, choosing, and in extreme

must register. Register what exactly is not clear. Your affection, your compatibility, your morning moods, or your evening silences?

Perhaps a daily log will be required. Monday. Both parties smiled. Tuesday. Minor disagreement over tea versus coffee. Wednesday. Silence observed. Possibly reflective, possibly dangerous.

Meanwhile, the same wise men rulers are deeply invested in religion. They speak with great passion about one way of life, one set of beliefs, one cultural identity. It is delivered with such conviction that one almost forgets to look at how they themselves practise it.

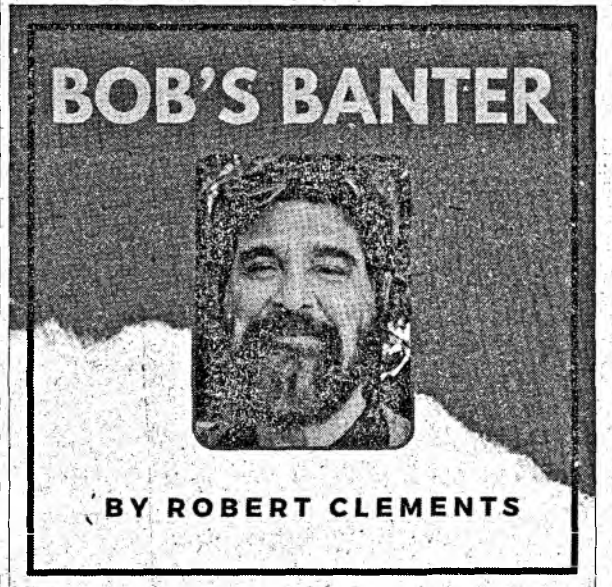
Because their practice, as it turns out, is far more flexible than preaching.

The youngsters watch all this quietly. They are not as loud as the speeches, nor as dramatic as the debates, but they are observant. They see the contradictions. They see the gap between words and actions. And then they do something that is far more worrying than protest. They lose interest in religion.

Because nothing confuses the youth more than being told what to believe by people who behave differently. Hypocrisy is not just unattractive. It is exhausting.

So instead of arguing, they withdraw. Instead of engaging, they switch off. Religion becomes noise, governance becomes theatre, and sincerity becomes a rare and endangered species.

Meanwhile, in Parliament, something rather interesting is happening. Young voices are rising. Articulate, confident, and inconvenient. Young women stand up and speak with clarity. Young leaders ask questions that do not come from prepared notes but from uncomfortable truths.



Letters to the Editor

Supreme Court's Decision on Conversion

Editor,

The Supreme Court of India has clarified that conversion to non-Indic religions leads to an immediate and complete loss of Scheduled Caste (SC) status. The judgment, while revisiting the Doctrine of Eclipse, also raises deeper questions about reservation, identity, and the limits of constitutional benefits.

In a judgment delivered on March 24, the Supreme Court of India upheld an earlier ruling of the Andhra Pradesh High Court, making it unequivocally clear that once a person converts to Christianity or any non-Indic religion and actively practices it, they cease to be a member of the Scheduled Caste community. The Court categorically held that no individual professing a religion other than Hindu, Sikh, or Buddhism can claim SC status, irrespective of their birth. Referring to the Constitution (Scheduled Castes) Order, 1950, the bench stressed that the restriction under Clause 3 is "absolute and admits no exception. 'Absolute bar': No benefits after conversion. The apex Court made one of its strongest observations in recent years on the issue:

This means that reservation benefits, legal protections under the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities)

Act, and other constitutional entitlements cannot be extended to individuals who have converted and are practicing another religion. "No statutory benefit, protection or reservation or entitlement under the Constitution or enactment of Parliament or state legislature can be claimed by or extended to any person who, by operation of clause 3, is not deemed to be a member of the Scheduled Caste. This bar is absolute and admits no exception. A person can't simultaneously profess and practice a religion other than the one specified in clause 3 and claim membership of the Scheduled caste," the Court held. The Court further clarified that a person cannot "simultaneously profess" a different religion and still claim SC identity, firmly rejecting the idea of dual eligibility. The ruling came in the context of a criminal case involving a man who had converted to Christianity and had been functioning as a pastor for over a decade.

He had filed a complaint under the SC/ST Act, alleging assault, caste abuse, and threats to life. Based on his complaint, charges were registered under multiple sections of the SC/ST t as well as the IPC. However, the accused challenged the case, arguing that the complainant, having converted to Christianity and actively practicing it, could not legally claim SC status or seek protection under the Atrocities Act.

The Andhra Pradesh High Court had earlier quashed the charges, observing that the caste system is alien to

Christianity, and therefore, the provisions of the SC/ST Act could not be invoked. The bench comprising Justice Prashant Kumar Mishra and Justice Manmohan examined the factual record in detail and upheld the High Court's reasoning.

The Court noted the following facts before delivering its verdict which are very important:

1. The individual had not reconverted to his original religion

2. He had been actively functioning as a Christian pastor for over 10 years

3. He regularly conducted Sunday prayers in the village

4. Even at the time of the alleged incident, he was engaged in religious activities as a pastor

The Court observed: "These concurrent facts leave no room for doubt that he continued to remain a Christian on the date of the occurrence."

This factual clarity became central to the Court's conclusion that SC status could not be claimed and caste certificate is not enough. Key arguments made by the complainant was that he still possessed a valid caste certificate identifying him as a member of the Madiga community.

But the Court firmly rejected this line of reasoning. It held that mere possession or non-cancellation of a caste certificate does not automatically entitle a person to SC benefits after conversion. The Court clarified that disputes regarding caste certificates must be

dealt with separately under relevant state laws, but such certificates cannot override constitutional provisions.

Doctrine of Eclipse: A limited window for reversion

Despite its strict stance, the Court's ruling still aligns with the legal principle of the Doctrine of Eclipse. Under this doctrine, caste identity does not disappear entirely upon conversion but goes into a temporary "eclipse." If a person genuinely reconverts to Hinduism, Sikhism, or Buddhism, the original caste status may be revived but only under strict conditions.

The Court reiterated the established three-pronged test:

1. Ancestral Proof: Clear evidence must show that the individual's family originally belonged to a recognised Scheduled Caste.

2. Genuine Reconversion: The return to the original religion must be sincere and not motivated by the desire to access reservation benefits.

3. Community Acceptance: The individual must be accepted back by their caste community. Without this, legal restoration is not possible.

The judgment sends a clear and firm message that reservation benefits cannot be used selectively or opportunistically. By emphasising the "absolute bar," the Court has attempted to close loopholes where individuals might seek to retain benefits after moving out of the social framework for which those benefits were designed. This

has reignited the larger debate around whether reservation policies should remain strictly tied to historical and religious contexts or evolve with changing social realities.

By emphasising the "absolute bar," the Court has attempted to close loopholes where individuals might seek to retain benefits after moving out of the social framework for which those benefits were designed.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

A Plea for Extreme Measures : Why Meghalaya is losing the war on Drugs

Editor,

I am writing to express my deep frustration with the deteriorating drug situation in our state. Recent reports suggest that nearly 10% of our population—roughly 3 lakh people—are now drug users. This is no longer just a "health issue"; it is a tipping point that threatens our very survival as a society.

The Anti-Narcotics Task Force (ANTF) and the Government have failed to curb the flow of hard drugs. While we see occasional seizures, the reality on the ground in places like Jowduh tells a different story. Jowduh has

become a haven for phone-snatchers and pickpockets. These are not just common thieves; they are addicts who steal to fund their next fix. If you walk through the market today, the sense of safety is gone.

It is time for the Government to stop focusing on "soft" targets. Ganja and alcohol are nothing compared to the heroin and meth destroying our youth. The Government must pivot all resources to hard drugs first.

Furthermore, the current laws are not enough. Dealers and users have no fear of the police because they know they can get bail or a light sentence. I believe the Government should consider a "shoot order" for those involved in this trade. Only the fear of death will scare the suppliers and the users enough to stop. If the state does not implement a zero-tolerance, high-stakes policy now, we will soon have a generation that is completely lost.

The time for awareness posters and seminars is over. We need comprehensive action that prioritizes the safety of our neighbourhoods and provides the resources necessary to dismantle these criminal networks.

Yours etc.,
Hilarious Umdor,
Shillong-8

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

cases, thinking. This clearly required intervention.

So now we have laws around interfaith relationships, where love comes with a background check. Boy meets girl is no longer enough. Boy meets girl, submits documents, attaches photographs, produces identity proof, and then waits patiently while someone somewhere decides whether his heart is in order.

Romance has entered the file system. One can almost visualise a government office dedicated to emotional regulation. A young couple stands nervously at the counter. "Sir, we like each other." "Very good. Kindly fill Form 17A for Emotional Intentions. Attach proof of mutual respect, two passport size photographs, and an affidavit stating that your affection has not been influenced by cinema, social media, or common sense."

"And what about disagreements, sir?" "Ah yes, please submit evidence of at least one argument and its peaceful resolution. We cannot approve relationships that have not faced adversity."

And naturally, there will be inspections. There is always an inspection in this country. A polite knock on the door. "We are here to verify your relationship. Please demonstrate mutual understanding." At this point, the young man looks at the young woman, the young woman looks at the inspector, and the inspector looks pleased that governance is finally reaching meaningful areas of life.

And just when you thought things could not get more organised, Gujarat has introduced a masterstroke. If you wish to live together, you must register. Register what exactly is not clear. Your affection, your compatibility, your morning moods, or your evening silences?

And suddenly, the seasoned veterans, with their fixed sneers and practised gestures, begin to shift slightly in their seats.

Because managing a country is one thing. Managing a generation that thinks is quite another. The old men may continue to regulate, supervise, and register the youth. They may create forms, offices, and committees dedicated to understanding something as simple and as complicated as love.

But there is one small problem they seem to have overlooked. Youngsters grow up. And when they do, they do not follow instructions printed in triplicate. They do not wait for approvals. They do not stand in queues to validate their feelings.

They lead. And when they lead, they remember. They remember who trusted them and who tried to manage them. They remember who guided them and who controlled them. They remember who lived with them and who only spoke. But one small warning, dear youngsters before I close: As you grow, think, and prepare to lead, remember to check one small detail. Whether your names are still on the voter list. Because with these old men and their remarkable ability to organise everything, even that might require your scrutiny. And imagine standing at yet another counter.

"Sir, I would like to vote." "Certainly. Kindly fill Form 27B for Democratic Intentions and attach proof that you still exist..."

(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)

"Procrastination is opportunity's assassin."

— Victor Kiam

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 225 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, MARCH 28, 2026

Of Constitutional Guarantees

THE Constitution of India allows Right to Freedom of Religion which means that adherents of any religion are free to practise and propagate their faiths. The main religions in India are Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism and Jainism. Every state also has its share of followers of the indigenous faith. These are people who have not converted to any of the above religions. To equate the indigenous faith with Hinduism is to mislead, since these faiths did not believe in idol worship or in gods and goddesses but in one creator – god. While Hinduism is the dominant religion, India has the third largest Muslim population. In a country with such diverse faiths, for one single religion to claim superiority over all others is inherently wrong and divisive. But this has been happening and it has led to religious rivalries and killings over faith and belief. When speaking about peace, people look to religious leaders to bring peace and understanding which can be achieved by a mutual respect for all faiths. But this is easier said than done.

Recently the leader of a pressure group while supporting the movement for disallowing non-tribals from contesting and voting for the Garo Hills Autonomous District Council election, at a public space, was heard saying, "We will not allow slogans of Allahu Akbar to be chanted in Meghalaya." Allahu Akbar is an Arabic phrase which means, "God is the greatest." In Meghalaya there is a sizable Muslim population and not all of them can be painted as illegal Bangladeshi immigrants, until proven so. It is but natural that someone got offended by the slogan and filed an FIR. Now the accused says he never raised any offensive slogan against any religion. The Christians use phrases like, "God is great," "To God Be the Glory" etc.. Hindus too have their own slogans. So why target only the Muslims as if all of them are Bangladeshis? Tomorrow if Christians are barred from praising their god would they sit silent?

These are dangerous fault lines. The sloganeering at Motphran which can be translated to populism might have won the pressure group leader many adherents as he prepares for the next election (he had lost the last election), but can the state allow such misdemeanours from any individual or group? Is this not a direct violation of the tenets of the Constitution? Also, are such slogans not provocative and could they not lead to unrest in the city of Shillong and spread across the state. In recent times religion has been used as a political weapon more overtly than in the past. Earlier there were whispering campaigns to vote for a co-religionist. Now after 2014, there is an open call by the BJP and its foot soldiers in the RSS to vote out anyone other than a Hindu because "India is under threat" (Bharat khatre mein hai). History is witness to the religious wars fought across the world between believers of the Abrahamic faiths. While those wars were fought on religious grounds the reasons included claim over land and resources and also of superiority and dominance. Does Meghalaya want to start a religious war by trivialising such sloganeering? Today it is no to "Allahu Akbar," tomorrow it could be no to "Jai Shri Ram" and then no to "Alleluia, God is Great All the Time." What next?

Vanishing Classrooms- In India Young Men Are Leaving Education

By Prof D Mukherjee

India is at a critical demographic juncture, with one of the world's youngest populations and the potential to benefit from a demographic dividend. However, this opportunity is threatened by a growing trend of young men aged 15-24 leaving education early to enter the labour force, often to support family income. Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey conducted by the National Statistical Office shows that financial constraints, family responsibilities, and weak links between education and employment are major reasons for early exit from education. Many young men who leave education enter informal sectors such as construction, agriculture, retail, and transport, where wages are low and job security is minimal. Over time, this leads to low productivity, low-income growth, and persistent economic inequality. Studies by the World Bank and the International Labour Organization warn that if young people enter the workforce without education and skills, the demographic dividend may turn into a demographic burden.

Compared to advanced economies such as Germany, Japan, and South Korea, India has weaker vocational training systems, lower secondary education completion rates, and limited apprenticeship opportunities. These countries successfully linked education with industry and ensured that students acquired skills before entering the labour market. India must therefore expand vocational education, apprenticeship programmes, student financial support, and industry-linked education systems. Retaining young people in education and skill development is essential for productivity, employment, and long-term economic growth. Without urgent policy intervention, India risks losing its demographic advantage and slowing its journey towards becoming a developed economy by 2047. India's most important source of labour market and employment statistics is the Periodic Labour Force Survey, introduced in 2017 to replace the earlier quinquennial employment surveys. The survey now provides annual and quarterly estimates on employment, unemployment, labour force participation, and the educational status of the population, making it a crucial tool for understanding India's workforce dynamics.

The survey follows a stratified multi-stage sampling method covering both rural and urban regions across all states and union territories. Villages are selected as primary sampling units in rural areas, while urban blocks are selected in towns and cities. Selected households are then surveyed to collect detailed information on employment, education, wages, migration, industry of work, and reasons for discontinuing education. The survey measures employment and education status using three approaches: Usual Status, Usual Principal and Subsidiary Status, and Current Weekly Status. These methods help determine whether young people are studying, working, combining both, or have permanently left education. Data from the survey is widely used by institutions such as NITI Aayog and the International Labour Organization to analyse youth employment and education trends in India.

The main objective of the Periodic Labour Force Survey is to provide reliable and timely data on labour force participation, employment, unemployment, wages, education levels, and labour market transitions in India. Beyond statis-

tical measurement, the survey is important for understanding how young people move from education into employment and whether they are entering the labour market too early without adequate skills. A key purpose of the survey is to measure indicators such as the Labour Force Participation Rate, Worker Population Ratio, and Unemployment Rate across different age groups, genders, and regions. It also examines 2 employment patterns across sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, construction, and services, and studies how education levels influence employment opportunities and wages. The survey also identifies reasons why young people leave education before completion, helping policymakers design scholarships, vocational education, apprenticeships, and employment policies. Research by the World Economic Forum and UNESCO shows that education and skills are essential for long-term economic development and workforce productivity.

The periodic agenda of the Periodic Labour Force Survey is to continuously monitor India's labour market, education participation, and employment trends so that government policies are based on current and reliable data. The survey is conducted annually for rural and urban areas and quarterly for urban employment indicators, helping policymakers track changes in employment and education over time. The survey monitors youth employment, school and college attendance, informal sector employment, wage levels, migration, family enterprise participation, vocational training, and dropout patterns. A major focus is the transition of youth aged 15-24 from education to employment. International comparisons by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development show that countries with higher secondary education completion rates generally have higher productivity and lower unemployment. The survey is also linked to national programmes like 'Skill India Mission, Make in India, and Digital India', making it an important strategic planning tool.

Recent labour and education studies point to a worrying trend in India: an increasing number of young men aged 15-24 are leaving education to support their families financially. Estimates from labour survey data suggest that the share of young men leaving education for economic reasons has risen from about 58% to nearly 72% in recent years. This change reflects not just a temporary issue but a deeper structural socio-economic problem linked to poverty, unstable incomes, and limited educational support. The trend is especially visible in rural areas, low-income households, and families dependent on informal sector employment where earnings are uncertain and young members are expected to start earning early. In many households, particularly in rural India, the eldest son is often expected to contribute to family income, even if it means discontinuing education. Studies by the World Bank show that children from poorer households are far more likely to drop out of school than those from wealthier families. Research by the International Labour Organization also indicates that most early school leavers enter informal jobs with low wages, little job security, and limited opportunities for skill development. As a result, leaving education early reduces lifetime earnings, limits

career mobility, and contributes to long-term economic inequality and lower national productivity.

The reasons why young men leave education between the ages of 15 and 24 are complex and linked to economic, social, educational, and labour market conditions. Data from the Periodic Labour Force Survey and research by Azim Premji University show that the most important factor is financial pressure and the need to support family income. Many families cannot afford the costs of secondary and higher education, including transport, books, digital devices, and accommodation. Even when tuition fees are low, indirect expenses remain high, especially for rural students. Another major reason is the growing perception that education does not guarantee employment. Many young people see educated graduates unemployed or working in low-paid jobs, which reduces the perceived value of education. Poor quality schooling, outdated curriculum, lack of vocational education, exam failure, migration for work, family business responsibilities, and the digital divide have also contributed to dropout rates. Many leave education due to uncertain economic returns rather than lack of interest in learning.

India's long-term vision of becoming a developed nation by 2047, often called Mission Viksit Bharat, depends largely on education, skills, productivity, and innovation. Institutions such as NITI Aayog and the World Bank stress that development is driven by strong human capital, not just economic growth. If young men continue leaving education early, India risks low productivity, high informal employment, weak manufacturing, and rising inequality. Countries like South Korea and China achieved growth through strong education and skill systems. Retaining youth in education is therefore a critical national economic priority.

Education may be compared to fuel in an engine: just as fuel powers movement, education drives productivity, innovation, and economic growth. Without education, an economy cannot function efficiently or compete globally. Research by the World Bank shows that each additional year of schooling can raise individual earnings by about 8-10 percent, while countries with higher secondary and technical education completion rates generally achieve higher productivity and income levels. Education also improves health, social mobility, entrepreneurship, and technological progress. Therefore, education should be treated as an investment in national development rather than mere expenditure. India must expand vocational education, scholarships, technical institutes, and industry-linked training so that education leads directly to employment and economic growth.

One of the most serious structural problems in India is the disconnect between education policy, employment policy, and socioeconomic conditions. Education policy often focuses on enrollment and infrastructure, while employment policy focuses on job creation, but the transition between education and employment remains weak. The education curriculum is often not aligned with industry requirements, vocational education is still underdeveloped compared to advanced countries, apprentice-

ship opportunities are limited, and labour-intensive manufacturing sectors have not grown fast enough to absorb the large number of young workers entering the labour market. Reports from the International Labour Organization and UNESCO emphasise that countries succeed economically when education policy, industrial policy, and labour policy are integrated. India's challenge is therefore not only education reform but education-employment integration reform.

A comparison between India and advanced economies such as Japan, South Korea, China, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, France, Canada, Switzerland, Sweden, Belgium, and Norway reveals major differences in education retention, vocational training, and the transition from school to employment. Countries such as Germany and Switzerland follow a dual education system that combines classroom learning with apprenticeships, allowing students to gain practical skills while studying. In Japan and South Korea, secondary education completion rates are very high and technical education is closely connected with industry employment. Scandinavian countries provide financial aid, career counselling, and vocational pathways so students rarely leave education due to economic reasons. In contrast, India still has lower secondary education completion rates and a large informal labour market that absorbs young workers without formal education or skills. This comparison shows that India must urgently strengthen secondary education retention, vocational training, apprenticeships, and industry-linked education through coordinated national policy action.

The increasing number of young men leaving education is not only a social concern but also a serious economic warning for India's future. If large numbers of youth enter the workforce without adequate education and skills, it may weaken the quality of the workforce and slow long-term economic growth. Therefore, policymakers need to treat this issue as a national priority requiring urgent and coordinated action. The government should provide financial assistance to students from low-income families so that poverty does not force them to leave education.

Conditional cash transfer schemes linked to completion of secondary education can help reduce dropout rates. Vocational education should be expanded at the secondary level so that students can acquire practical and employable skills even if they do not pursue higher academic education. The apprenticeship system must be strengthened to promote earn-while-learn opportunities, reducing the financial burden on families. Rural school and college infrastructure, along with digital education facilities, must also be improved to ensure access to education. Greater collaboration between industry and educational institutions is necessary so that education leads to employment opportunities. As India moves into an era of automation, artificial intelligence, and digital transformation, unskilled workers will be most vulnerable. Retaining youth in education and skill development is therefore essential for India's future growth.

(The author is Chief Education Officer & Principal Secretary-Office of the Chairman, the International Institute of Medical Science and Technology Council (IIMSTC), Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.)

Dissecting Dhurandhar: Facts, fiction and propaganda

By H. Srikanth

Aditya Dhar's movie sequel, *Dhurandhar 2*, has broken all previous box-office records and has amassed over Rs. 900 crores in the first six days of its release. It is estimated to cross Rs. 2000 crore collections, breaking the records of *Bahubali* and *Pushpa* series. The movie is appreciated for top-notch performances by the lead actors, adrenaline-fuelled storytelling, immersive cinematography, powerful dialogue, authentic-looking locales, and breath-taking background music. Apart from cinematic values, the movie is in the news also for the controversies that it has created. While many view the *Dhurandhar* duology as a graphical expression of what is happening in the country today, we also have critics who discard the movie as yet another propaganda movie meant to support the political regime in power. Apart from probing what is there in the movie, it is necessary to see how the public received it.

In the last two decades, Bollywood has produced quite a few spy-thrillers with Salman, Shah Rukh, or Hrithik Roshan as lead actors. Interestingly, despite strong anti-Pakistani sentiments in India, these Bollywood spy movies remained soft on Pakistan. Even while criticizing the 'rogue elements' in Pakistan's ISI and military, the spy movies tried to convey the idea that there are sane elements even in Pakistan who really aspire for peace and friendship with India. The protagonist in the movies, who is usually a RAW agent or an army officer, joins hands with sane elements within ISI to defeat the conspiracy hatched by villains in India and Pakistan.

The movie *Dhurandhar* refuses to toe the set moderate formula and taking a hyper-nationalist position, accusing Pakistan for sponsoring terrorism within India.

The instances of Pakistan-sponsored terrorist attacks on Indian soil have generated so much resentment against Pakistan and the terrorist groups within India. The parties and organizations supporting Hindutva ideology have cashed in on the anger and frustration among the majority community. Through the effective use of corporate media and social media, they have been able to propagate the idea that all terrorist activities are taking place in India because of the appeasement policies of the Congress and other opposition parties. They convinced their followers that the ideas of peace and harmony make little sense to Pakistan. It is only by hitting hard that India can teach a lesson to those sponsoring terrorism in India. Narendra Modi's 'Atmanirbhar Viksit Bharat' would take the bull by the horns and not compromise. This vision of new India found expression in the 2019 movie, *Uri-the Surgical Strike*, the first directorial venture of Aditya Dhar, where the protagonist declares: "Ye naha Hindustan hai... Yeh ghar mein ghosega bhi aur maarega bhee". (This is New India. It enters your house and also hits you hard). The *Dhurandhar* duology written, directed and produced by Aditya Dhar is also premised on the same idea.

Dhurandhar is the story of Jaskirat Singh Ranghi, who takes revenge against a local MLA and his family who killed his father and brutally gang raped his sister. The court is about to punish him for killing twelve male members, but before the court pronounces its verdict, he was rescued by Ajay Sanyal, Indian Intelligence Bureau Chief, who assures protection to his mother and sister, provided Jaskirat agreed to work as a spy. He trains and turns Jaskirat into a lethal weapon and sends him to Pakistan. Assuming a new identity as Hamza Ali Mazari, he penetrates the gang of Rehman Dakaik, a charismatic Baloch gangster. While working in the gang, he gets in touch with politicians, the ISI, and different ethnic militant groups. His proximity with them enables Hamza to get hold of information on the terrorist plans, which he keeps sharing with Ajay Sanyal.

This idea of sneaking into enemy gangs and working as agents of the state is nothing new. Way back in 1994, Govind Nihalani made the film *Droh Kaal*, wherein the government sends two police officers to infiltrate a Naxal group with the goal of eliminating it. In recent years, a couple of OTT platforms have also come out with originals where Indian spy agents are sent to Pakistan on a mission. What is novel in the movie *Dhurandhar* is the way the real-life events, places and personalities are used to create a make-believe world where the line between truth and fiction is obliterated. The audience get so involved that they believe all they see on the screen are true incidents.

Aditya Dhar's portrayal of gang war, politician-criminal-militant nexus, ethnic animosities, and power games that take place in Lyari, an urban locality in Karachi, looks very authentic. Some of the characters in the movie, such as Rehman Dakaik, Uzair Dakaik, SP Chaudhary Aslam, etc., are based on real-life Pakistani figures. Ajay Sanyal's character is inspired by Ajit Doval, India's National Security Advisor. Although the director plays a balancing act in the representation of different characters, his political bias becomes apparent in the sequel. The movie gives the impression that while the Indian spies are staking their lives in a foreign land and passing on key information about terrorist activities, our earlier political dispensation in India has failed to prevent terrorist activities. The movie alleges that the ISI funded the Congress party and civil society organizations to influence election outcomes in India.

Through Ajay Sanyal's character, the director conveys the message: "Hindustaniyonka sabse bada dushman Hindustan hi hai, Pakistan durre number pe aata hai" (The greatest enemy of India is Indians themselves; Pakistan comes next). Sanyal longs for a nationalist government which would effectively deal with terrorism. In the sequel, he portrays as if the much-awaited change has taken place in India with the election of Narendra Modi as the PM. There are indirect references in the movie showing how the arrival of 'Chaiwallah' has created problems for the criminal-militant nexus in Pakistan. The movie presents the demonization experiment as a masterstroke by Modi to prevent counterfeit currency from Pakistan entering India. Interestingly, the Government of India officially never invoked the fake currency problem to justify the much-maligned demonization experiment. Probably the leaders may do it now, as the people started believing this fictitious narrative.

Further, the movie gives the impression that all Pakistan-backed terrorist attacks have taken place during the Congress regime. It hides the fact that incidents such as the Kandahar hijack of IC 814 in 1999, the Parliament attack in 2001, the Pulwama attack in 2019 and the more recent Pahalgam attack in 2025 took place during the BJP regime. Further, some critics have pointed out that it was Indira Gandhi who established the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to counter Pakistan. Again, it was during the Congress regime (2004-14) in India that Rehman Dakaik, SP Choudhary Aslam, Arshad Pappu, Uzair Baloch, etc., were killed / arrested. In the story, even Hamza Ali and Jameel Jamali were sent as Indian agents during the Congress regime.

The director makes the audience believe that decisive action against Pak-sponsored terrorism started only after the 'Chaiwallah' took over power in India. No wonder Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Chief Minister of Assam, is confident that whoever watches the movie *Dhurandhar* would vote for BJP. But what those who justify the pro-BJP tilt in the movie are forgetting is that, defending *Dhurandhar* means admitting the Pakistani allegation that India is behind many of the killings, violence and ethno-national uprisings in Pakistan. Even ordinary Indians now find it difficult to believe Sarabjit Singh and Kulbushan Jadhav, who were arrested in Pakistan on charges of espionage and terrorism in Pakistan, are innocent. Post-*Dhurandhar*, India has now become what it never wanted to be, a carbon copy of Pakistan!

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Aditya Dhar's portrayal of gang war, politician-criminal-militant nexus, ethnic animosities, and power games that take place in Lyari, an urban locality in Karachi, looks very authentic. Some of the characters in the movie, such as Rehman Dakaik, Uzair Dakaik, SP Chaudhary Aslam, etc., are based on real-life Pakistani figures. Ajay Sanyal's character is inspired by Ajit Doval, India's National Security Advisor. Although the director plays a balancing act in the representation of different characters, his political bias becomes apparent in the sequel. The movie gives the impression that while the Indian spies are staking their lives in a foreign land and passing on key information about terrorist activities, our earlier political dispensation in India has failed to prevent terrorist activities. The movie alleges that the ISI funded the Congress party and civil society organizations to influence election outcomes in India.

Through Ajay Sanyal's character, the director conveys the message: "Hindustaniyonka sabse bada dushman Hindustan hi hai, Pakistan durre number pe aata hai" (The greatest enemy of India is Indians themselves; Pakistan comes next). Sanyal longs for a nationalist government which would effectively deal with terrorism. In the sequel, he portrays as if the much-awaited change has taken place in India with the election of Narendra Modi as the PM. There are indirect references in the movie showing how the arrival of 'Chaiwallah' has created problems for the criminal-militant nexus in Pakistan. The movie presents the demonization experiment as a masterstroke by Modi to prevent counterfeit currency from Pakistan entering India. Interestingly, the Government of India officially never invoked the fake currency problem to justify the much-maligned demonization experiment. Probably the leaders may do it now, as the people started believing this fictitious narrative.

Further, the movie gives the impression that all Pakistan-backed terrorist attacks have taken place during the Congress regime. It hides the fact that incidents such as the Kandahar hijack of IC 814 in 1999, the Parliament attack in 2001, the Pulwama attack in 2019 and the more recent Pahalgam attack in 2025 took place during the BJP regime. Further, some critics have pointed out that it was Indira Gandhi who established the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW) to counter Pakistan. Again, it was during the Congress regime (2004-14) in India that Rehman Dakaik, SP Choudhary Aslam, Arshad Pappu, Uzair Baloch, etc., were killed / arrested. In the story, even Hamza Ali and Jameel Jamali were sent as Indian agents during the Congress regime.

The director makes the audience believe that decisive action against Pak-sponsored terrorism started only after the 'Chaiwallah' took over power in India. No wonder Himanta Biswa Sarma, the Chief Minister of Assam, is confident that whoever watches the movie *Dhurandhar* would vote for BJP. But what those who justify the pro-BJP tilt in the movie are forgetting is that, defending *Dhurandhar* means admitting the Pakistani allegation that India is behind many of the killings, violence and ethno-national uprisings in Pakistan. Even ordinary Indians now find it difficult to believe Sarabjit Singh and Kulbushan Jadhav, who were arrested in Pakistan on charges of espionage and terrorism in Pakistan, are innocent. Post-*Dhurandhar*, India has now become what it never wanted to be, a carbon copy of Pakistan!

Letters to the Editor

Inequitable distribution of LPG in Jail Road

Editor,
I am writing to highlight the ongoing difficulties faced by residents of the Jail Road area in accessing LPG cylinders, which has become a matter of serious concern. On March 26, Sunny Gas Agency distributed gas cylinders by calling individual phone numbers, after a gap of more than two months. Such a long delay has already caused considerable hardship to households, forcing many families to struggle with basic cooking needs during this period.

What is even more troubling is the method of distribution adopted. Instead of ensuring doorstep delivery, residents were asked to come to the Jail Road point to collect their cylinders. As a result, elderly individuals, household members, and even school-going children were seen carrying or arranging porters to transport the cylinders. This not only creates inconvenience but also raises serious concerns regarding safety, dignity, and accessibility for the public.

As per LPG distribution norms and Indian Oil Corpora-

tion (IOC) policy, cylinders are meant to be delivered directly to consumers' homes. The current practice clearly violates these guidelines and places an unnecessary burden on residents.

It is therefore requested that the concerned authorities take immediate action to ensure strict implementation of IOC policies and restore proper doorstep delivery services. Timely and fair distribution must be ensured so that citizens are not subjected to such avoidable hardships in the future.

Yours etc.,
A Concerned Resident
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Need for Regular and Timely Garbage Collection in Umpling

Editor,
I write to draw attention to the persistent issue of irregular garbage collection in Umpling, which has been causing considerable inconvenience to residents.

I have recently moved to Shillong along with my young-

er siblings in pursuit of better educational opportunities, and we are currently residing in Umpling. As the eldest, I am responsible for managing the household while supporting my siblings, who are studying in Classes VII and VIII. With only the three of us, balancing academics and daily responsibilities is already quite demanding.

One of the most pressing challenges we face is the absence of a fixed schedule for garbage collection. Not only are the days uncertain, but the garbage truck also arrives at unpredictable hours—sometimes around 11:30 a.m., at other times as late as 1:00 p.m., or even later. This irregularity makes it extremely difficult for us to dispose of household waste, as I leave home by 8:30 a.m. and return only around 5:00 p.m. after my classes and tuitions.

The situation has become so dire that, on several occasions, I have had to carry garbage with me to college, which is both impractical and embarrassing.

Regrettably, this is not an isolated issue. Many residents of Umpling, particularly tenants and working individuals who remain away during the day, face similar difficulties

due to the lack of a predictable system for waste collection.

What is even more concerning is that this problem has persisted for a long time without any effective solution. In contrast, certain non-municipal areas have adopted more efficient arrangements through local dorbar shnong, ensuring early morning garbage collection that is far more convenient for residents.

A similar system in Umpling would be greatly beneficial.

Proper waste management is a fundamental civic necessity that directly impacts public health and quality of life. I therefore humbly request the concerned authorities to introduce a fixed schedule or adopt a more organised system, so that residents of Umpling may be spared this daily hardship, that they currently endure.

This letter is not intended to assign blame or to blame any authority, but to sincerely appeal for attention and remedial action. A simple and lasting solution—particularly early and predictable collection—would significantly improve the lives of many residents.

Yours etc.,
Resident of Umpling,
Name withheld on request
Shillong -6

Onus on US and Israel to end the war

Editor,

Apologies of the article "Iran-US War: A Clash of Faith and History" (ST March 26, 2026) by Bhogtoram Mawroh, while it made interesting reading, it is not appropriate "by some sections to cast this as a religious war." On February 28, 2026 the U.S. and Israeli forces launched nearly 900 strikes in 12 hours under Operation Epic Fury. However, Col Douglas Macgregor said that, "the U.S. started the war with 8000 missiles and the Iranians then retaliated with 45,000 missiles and there is no evidence that they are about to run out." The war was triggered by U.S.-Israeli pre-emptive strikes, not by a single Iranian offensive. While Iran's counterattacks escalated the conflict, the initial military action came from Washington and Tel Aviv. Accountability in war demands that they have to take responsibility to end it.

Historically, when powerful states initiate military action, international law and global opinion often argue that they bear a responsibility not only for the conduct of war but also for shaping its endgame.

Looking at the Iran-US-Israel conflict through that lens, the war began with the U.S. and Israeli strikes, which means they set the terms of escalation. International norms like those in the UN Charter emphasize that aggressors have obligations to seek peace, protect civilians and repair damage. Because the war disrupts oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz, the consequences ripple far beyond the region—fuel shortages, economic strain and political instability worldwide. Therefore, ending such a war typically requires the initiators to negotiate ceasefires, engage in diplomacy and accept compromises. Without their participation, peace efforts stall.

While Iran's counterattacks escalated the conflict, the onus to de-escalate and resolve lies heavily on those who launched the first strikes. That is why many analysts frame this as not just a military struggle but a test of whether initiators will accept responsibility for the humanitarian and geopolitical fallout.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh.
Via email

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

Celluloid: The story of the plastic that made Hollywood

History can sometimes take an unexpected turn. One of these curious, revolutionary twists came in the mid-19th century, when the tale of an unassuming everyday object – the billiard ball – ended in cinematic proportions.

Billiard balls were originally made of ivory, and the need to replace this scarce material led to the invention of a new, extraordinary material: celluloid. Considered the first semisynthetic plastic, this substance did more than just pave the way for future plastics – it was also vital in the earliest systems for capturing and projecting moving images.

Without it, cinema would not exist as we know it today.

From billiard halls to Hollywood

In the mid-19th century, the game of billiards was all the rage, and the industry surrounding it moved large sums of money. Michael Phelan was perhaps the most famous industrialist, and indeed player, of the game at this time.

The game's success meant large amounts of ivory were needed to manufacture the balls, to the point where, in 1867, The New York Times warned that demand for elephant tusks could put these animals at risk of extinction. In his search for an alternative material, Phelan offered an extraordinary prize: \$10,000 worth of gold to whoever could find a suitable substitute for ivory. This reward would be forever linked to the birth of both plastics and cinema.

The solution was found by inventor John Wesley Hyatt and his brother. It took the form of celluloid, a material obtained from cotton-derived cellulose and set with camphor. This material could be heated and repeatedly moulded, making it one of the earliest thermoplastics.

Hyatt's promotion of the material encapsulated the spirit of the age. One pamphlet declared: "As petroleum came to the relief of the whale, so has celluloid given the elephant, the tortoise, and the coral insect a respite in their native haunts; and it will no longer be necessary to ransack the earth in pursuit of substances which are constantly growing scarcer."

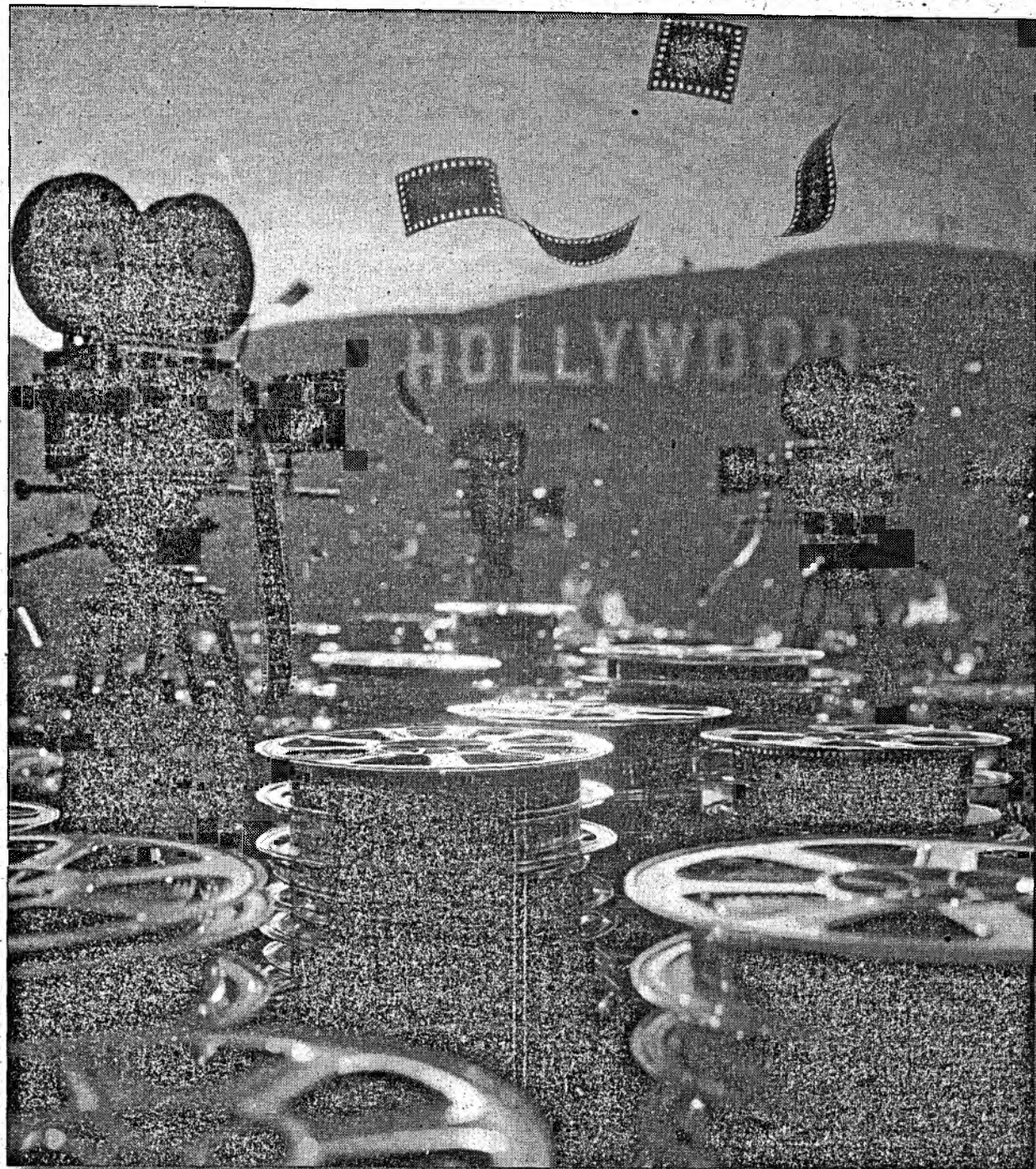
As the historian Jeffrey Meikle highlighted in his 1996 book *American Plastic*, by replacing scarce or costly materials, celluloid also played a major role in democratising a vast array of products for the rapidly expanding middle class.

Celluloid in the cinema

In the end, celluloid was only briefly used to make billiard balls. However, it did become synonymous with another world altogether: cinema.

In 1880 businessman George Eastman, who manufactured cameras, visited Hyatt with a clear proposal. He wanted to swap cumbersome photographic glass plates for a lighter material. Celluloid seemed ideal.

This new material allowed Eastman to put photographic emulsion onto long, flexible rolls, allowing multiple photos to be taken with the same compact



camera. The first Kodak camera was released in 1888. It popularised photography, and transformed the way people recorded their daily lives.

Just a few years later, thanks in large measure to the work of Hannibal Williston Goodwin, celluloid film opened the doors to the development of cinema.

In France, the Lumière brothers, sons of a re-

nowned Lyon photographer, were working with this flexible material. By the end of the 19th century, their family came to own one of the most important photography factories in Europe.

The Lumière brothers and the birth of cinema

Louis and Auguste Lumière went beyond the confines of still photography. Inspired by the technol-

ogy's advanced optical and mechanical capabilities, they developed the Cinématographe, a device that made ingenious use of perforated 35mm film. With a turn of a handle, it captured a quick succession of images that could then be projected onto a screen.

Each scene lasted only a few seconds, but it was enough to create the entirely new sensation of witnessing reality in movement. Cinema had begun.

The Lumière brothers' factory would go on to become the first ever cinematic studio. It was where they filmed *La sortie de l'usine Lumière*, which premiered on December 28, 1895, at the Salon Indien du Grand Café in Paris. The film only showed workers leaving the Lumière factory, but the mere fact of seeing moving pictures projected on a screen was a revelation for audiences at the time.

Celluloid was what made this technical marvel possible, and its name became synonymous with the film industry.

Within a few years, cinema had become widespread, and democratised access to spectacle and entertainment. On the screen, audiences could now laugh at Buster Keaton and, with the advent of cinema audio or "talkies" in the 1920s, hear voices like Al Jolson for the first time.

The dangers of early cinema

Despite its vital role in cinema's beginnings, celluloid also carried some major risks. Nitrocellulose film was extremely flammable, and would break down or catch fire at relatively low temperatures. It also released toxic gases over time.

The material's instability caused many fires in projection rooms and storage facilities, meaning large amounts of early cinema's heritage have been lost forever. Film historians estimate that less than half of the films recorded before 1950 – and a far smaller fraction of earlier silent films – have survived to the present day.

Some incidents were especially dramatic. During the 1897 Bazar de la Charité in Paris, a film projection ended in tragedy when nitrocellulose film caught fire. The event claimed more than 100 lives, and starkly highlighted the dangers of this new technology.

The film industry soon found a solution. In the early 20th century, Kodak developed an alternative material based on cellulose acetate, which was much safer than the nitrocellulose used up to this point. This change marked the beginning of the end for celluloid in cinema.

Despite its dangers, celluloid left an immense legacy. It made cinema possible, and also opened the door to a whole new family of materials – plastics – that would profoundly change modern society.

If a material could receive an honorary Oscar, it would undoubtedly be celluloid. Without it, cinema may never have become the great industry of ideas, dreams and stories that we know today. (*The Conversation*)

[By Jordi Diaz Marcos, Professor, Barcelona University]

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, MARCH 29, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Mars on your solar return chart, and it will give excellent results. You will have a lot of opportunities to earn money. The person whom you trust the most will be the one to betray you the most. Maintain a timetable for your activity. You will feel mental peace. Troubles that have been worrying you for some time will vanish. You will receive positive results. Your financial status will be better than before. In the matter of property division, it will be solved with the help of a third person. You will put your best effort into the achievement of your targets. You will hear pleasant news. It could be job promotion or a new business offer. You can fall in love with a person known to you leading to marriage.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a hectic week for you. You will be very busy with your work. You will also have to deal with sudden developments at your workplace. Your social life will also keep you engaged. You will be busy with meetings, discussions and parties. In the middle of the week, you will receive good news from somewhere. It will lift your mood. But you need to be careful in financial matters. Your expenses will rise. Your income will keep increasing. Your graph of popularity will creep upwards. This may make some people jealous of you. You will have an amazing time with your mate. He/she will keep you happy. You will also share good relations with your family members. By keeping an eye on your diet and regular exercise you will keep yourself fit and fit.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is time to take stock of the things that have been going on for a long time now. You need to do a major rethink on your way of doing things and expecting a lot from others. It will prove to be helpful for you in the long run. You will have mental peace and monetary gains. Some important decisions will be taken at your workplace. You will also make certain changes in your business. You will be sharing amazing bonding with your spouse/partner. You will also be embroiled in family matters. Time management is in your hands. You will meet some close friends or relatives who will be very happy to meet you. Business trips will prove to be beneficial. You will also develop new interests and will have desire to learn something new.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) These are days of fun, relaxation and lots of excitement building in your life. You will be spending lot of time with your family after a long time. You will plan to go on a picnic, retreat or long drive with family. You will also look at the priorities of your family members and discuss a few vital things with them. You will remain close to your mate. Your siblings will also support you. You will also remain on good terms with your peers and seniors. They will support you a lot. You will remain financially well off. Everyone will give you lot of respect. The time will be in your favor. You will also make efforts to recover money given as loans to someone. You will also meet an important personality in your field. You will have victory over your enemies, your health will remain perfect.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) Lot of good things will happen for you this week. You will have gains in work/business. You will also remain popular at your workplace. You will be having monetary gains. You will be busy doing good deeds. Your self-confidence will also be high. You will also make plans to buy a new house or vehicle. You will also purchase some new items for your house. You will also undertake major expansion of your business. You will remain close to your family members. Availability of things will bring happiness to your life and will help to make you feel secure. Your mate will remain a source of strength. You will spend most of your time on entertainment and fun activities. There will be situations of changes and transfer during this time.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) You will feel more energetic than usual. You will be cheerful and happy with your family members. There will be lot of love, warmth and respect in family relations. You will prepare for an auspicious function. The favorable placement of planets will bring lot of money to you. You will also get opportunities to rise in your job/work. You will also fall in love with an unknown person suddenly. You will maintain a timetable for your daily activities. You will feel mental peace. Troubles that you have been facing for some time will vanish. Despite efforts and opponents, they will not be successful. The time is fruitful for you. You will receive positive results.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Your personality will come up with everyone all of a sudden. People will be amazed at this sudden transformation. Your potential and capabilities will be highlighted in front of everyone. People will be completely impressed by your

skills. You will also make lot of friends. And get opportunities to rise in your work. Your financial position is good. You will also undertake major renovation in your home. You will be flush with funds. The feud will come to an end. Your brothers, sisters and family members will pour emotions of love for each other. You will meet old acquaintances, new friends and loved ones, and happiness will enter your life.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be kept busy with your work. You will get a chance with lot of like-minded people. You will associate people with similar thinking and ideology. You will be having heavy workload. Your bosses will be giving full support. You will also share perfect equations with your spouse. You will look after your elders well. And you will take interest in affairs of your family members. Students will study hard and will be getting good results. You will flaunt a more principled and diverse perspective. Some solutions to old problems will also come your way. You will get back your money that was given to someone. You will also make important and tough decisions in your work. Money will be spent on luxury and lavish lifestyle related works.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) It is a period of change. You will be taking even minor things in business and profession seriously. Business-related trips will keep you busy. Keep your eating habits and daily routine in an organized way or you else may suffer a bit. You will receive money from somewhere. You will also complete your tasks in a peaceful way. You will pick up an argument with someone senior at high position. You will purchase some new items for household needs. You will also give a final shape to the future projects seriously due to the financial condition being favorable for you. You will be full of enthusiasm. You will also receive pleasant news. Enemies will be active and powerful but won't be able to harm you.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) You will work hard at your job, but results will not be that satisfactory. Maybe you need to relax a bit and just take things easy. You will be having tensions about money and finance. And you will have to struggle a bit. But you will find a way out of things. Gradually you will make profit in your work. It is time to regain confidence of your seniors. You will exchange good vibes with your spouse. You will be diligent in order to achieve your targets. You will go on catching every opportunity from your financial point of view. People will be impressed by your intelligence. The time is favorable for you, and you will take full advantage of it. You will make every work possible due to your courage and determination.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The placements of planets indicate extravagance. But you need to remain careful and not go overboard. Your reputation will improve. You will be making sudden financial gains. Your expenses too will rise. You just need to keep things under control. You will think about a job change. It is expected that you will maintain pleasant relations with your bosses. Your earnings will be good. You can also be drawn to a person known to you, leading to warm and fulfilling relationships. You will solve family matters. You will also get relief from all the tensions you have been carrying for a while. You will receive the money that has been stuck somewhere.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) There will be sudden changes in your life. You can think of a job change. You will also get a marriage proposal all of a sudden. There will be spurt in expenditure on children-related activities. There will be some misunderstanding between husband and wife which will get resolved timely too. You will also receive the blessings of parents, elders, relatives and senior people. New acquaintances and contacts will be made. You will share good bonding with your spouse. You will develop contact with new people and improve your relations with old acquaintances. Government-related matters will be solved. You will feel new energy within you. You will make plans for bright future for your children.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is a wonderful week. You will get support from your better half. You will also get favorable marriage proposals. You will also be busy preparing for a festival or function. Your financial position is strong and stable. There will be success in many spheres – relationship, love and profession. You will feel a lot more energetic at this time. Your children will study hard and you will be proud of your children's activities. It is time for love and romance. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. You will also get extra income. You will get close to family members. And will remain devoted to your Guru. People will show faith in your abilities, and you will not be disappointed.

Dogs have been woven into human life for over 15,800 years: Study

Odin was a kelpie. Attentive and protective, with a happy smile and an endless hope for food, he succumbed to a terminal disease late last year. At his death, a deep sense of grief ripped through the household of one of us (Andrew): while Odin was not human, he was an irreplaceable member of the family.

Our new research, published in *Nature* this week, helps explain the unique and striking way dogs like Odin fit into the human world – whether reading our moods, following our movements or becoming part of the rhythm of everyday life.

Based on international collaborations lasting decades, the two new studies have unlocked previously unavailable information from the bones of dogs long dead. Yet these papers are not just about the dusty old bones found in our archaeological sites, or the cutting-edge science applied to them.

They shine light on a relationship that has been part of the human social world for at least 16,000 years.

The earliest known dog

Dogs are the earliest known animals to be both tamed and separated from their wild relatives over generations by humans. This process is known as domestication.

It has long been thought that dogs were domesticated from wolves, their closest relatives, during the last Ice Age. Solid evidence to test this has been hard to find in archaeological sites as dog bones are difficult to tell apart from those of wolves using their shape alone.

It has taken the successful extraction of ancient DNA (aDNA), a recently developed technique, to provide definitive identification of dogs, which differ genetically from wolves.

One of the new studies confirmed the earliest known dog is now from Pınarbaşı, a rockshelter site in Karaman, central Turkey. This dog lived around 15,800 years ago.

Excavated in 2004, the bones

could have been from either dog pups or wolf cubs. But aDNA analysis confirmed their identity as dogs 20 years later, following 10 years of analysis and comparison with other aDNA results.

The dog pups were buried carefully and treated in death similarly to the humans buried nearby. This continued a close relationship with people during life, as shown by chemical analyses suggesting the dogs and humans shared similar foods, including small fish from the local wetlands. Dogs were not



domesticated separately to those elsewhere, rejecting a long held hypothesis. Their difference to east Asian dogs is due to the spread into Europe with farmers 8,500 years ago from Turkey of dogs which had interbred with local wolves.

We know this because of the DNA of a dog from our site of Boncuklu, an 11,000-year-old village, near Konya in central Turkey. Our excavations showed that pups were buried in the graves of people directly related to those earlier communities at Pınarbaşı, located 30 kilometres to the southeast, though they lived a very different life in permanent houses supported by small-scale farming.

Genetically related farmers from this region spread into Europe around 8,500 years ago, with dogs also genetically related to those at Boncuklu at their heels. The incoming dogs interbred with those already in Europe, but didn't replace them entirely.

From the deep past to the present

Together, the studies show that dogs were already living alongside people across a surprisingly wide area from Anatolia to the far edge of western Europe in the last Ice Age, long before farming began, and that their history is older, more mobile and more entangled with human history than we once thought.

The detailed archaeological evidence from Boncuklu and Pınarbaşı show just how close dogs and humans had become and the larger scale analysis sees them repeatedly moving through human networks that crossed cultural boundaries.

We still do not know exactly where and when dog domestication began, and the patient research that will answer that question is already under way in excavations across the world.

But these two new studies make one thing very clear: by the end of the Ice Age, dogs were already deeply woven into human life and had become part of the community, forging deep bonds that continue to this day. (*The Conversation*)

**"Leadership cannot really be taught.
It can only be learned."**

—Harold S. Geneen

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 227 SHILLONG, MONDAY, MARCH 30, 2026

Gathering gloom

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has hinted of a gathering gloom on the global front in relation to the Iran-Israel-US war that has been raging for the past one month. In his monthly Mann Ki Baat address to the nation, the Prime Minister highlighted the fuel crisis that's gripping the world on account of disruption of the shipping route via the Strait of Hormuz. The scenario has already hurt life in India in multiple ways – and most prominently in relation to the commercial LPG supply and the aviation sector disruptions. Domestic gas distribution is bound to be affected sooner or later, as latest hints are that the war would go on for some more time. The US is now getting set for a ground-level engagement by reaching the initial contingent of over 3000 troops. It is likely that this is to exert additional pressure on Iran to be mindful of the warning ahead. It is also possible that more troops would reach there and take on the Iranian might. The Iranian army has not shown any signs of a demoralization and is perhaps fighting fit despite some casualties at the highest decision-making level. Teheran has warned the US that it should be prepared for taking back body bags by the thousands.

The scenario in India, vis-à-vis the war, is turning grim. Hotels and restaurants across India are facing the heat due to short-supply of commercial LPG cylinders. Many hotels have downed shutters, fully or in part. With the PM making a cautious declaration on the trouble ahead, chances are that the LPG and fuel scenarios could go out of control. If the fuel supply by bunks is affected, this would mean the road traffic would be majorly hit. Not just private transport but even public transport could grind to a halt. Indians largely use two-wheelers and cars for their daily commute for work and business. A paralysis of multiple sectors could be feared if the war lasts longer. The aviation sector is already facing the brunt of the war. International flights remain majorly disrupted and travel plans of hundreds of thousands of the jet-set have gone awry. A sense of uncertainty prevails in the aviation sector, which had only begun recovering from the Covid-19 crisis.

Another major front that requires urgent governmental attention is the likelihood of hoarding and black marketing. Traders by their very nature are bound to take advantage of any war-like situation. When the world has become one community in the glare of Globalization, a war a long distance away from us too could be raising the heat here. While both the central and state governments are seized of these matters, the scope for mischief cannot be discounted. Prices of several items have suddenly increased. Strong governmental intervention is the only way to limit the harm on consumers. It is also important that public transport services are maintained by ensuring adequate supply of fuel to them. Train services too must function in a normal manner, as a matter of first priority, unlike the grim scenario that had engulfed the country during the Covid-crisis.

The Angst of Autumn

By H.H. Mohrmen

Autumn is a beloved season of poets, yet what the poets and writers do not always tell us about this "season of mellow fruitfulness," as John Keats describes it, is that it is also a season of trepidation. If it is the harvest season for humans to fill their granaries, it is likewise the time when animals gather and build their stores before winter sets in. The ants are busy collecting food and carrying it into their colonies underground. The winged creatures take their last determined flights to gather nectar and provisions before the cold arrives. It is, in many ways, the last mile of the year, the final stretch before reaching the year's end. If autumn were to be compared to a human being, it would be like a woman in her bloom, a flower at the peak of its beauty just before it lets fall its petals to the ground.

Autumn, however, is also an important and demanding part of the year, in which both animals and humans are occupied with urgent chores. Like their human counterparts, insects are busy collecting food to sustain the colony throughout the cold and dry winter. It is the final leg of preparation before the coming of winter, and during this season we sometimes encounter conflicts between humans and animals. Beneath the soft golden light and the pleasant ambience of autumn lies an undercurrent of anxiety, for every living being senses that time is short and that preparation cannot be delayed.

In the early part of November 2025, there was a report that a woman from Myngkjoilum, a village near Umkhyrmi on the Assam-Meghalaya border, had allegedly died after being stung by bees. It is rare for someone to die from bee stings alone unless there is a severe allergic reaction. However, there are many stories of people dying from wasp attacks. In all likelihood, the woman may have been attacked by wasps, and certain species of wasps can indeed be deadly when provoked. The incident was a sobering reminder that autumn's beauty does not exclude danger.

Last year, I spent much of my time in the villages, which allowed me to do what I love most, which is to visit the forests and be in nature.

During one of my visits to a plantation site, after climbing a hill, I met EDS, who was doing his usual rounds, checking the trees and tending to them. Accompanying me was the village headman, WS. As we exchanged greetings, I noticed that EDS was carrying something unusual in his backpack. A few stalks of dried rice straw were protruding from the top. It puzzled me, for rice straw could be found everywhere at this time of year. It was autumn, and farmers had just completed the harvest in the many paddy fields around the Myngkjoilum river basin. So I asked him why he was carrying rice straw in his bag.

Before EDS could reply, the headman interrupted and recounted an unfortunate incident that had taken place only days earlier in the very area where we stood. Students and teachers from a local educational institution had set up camp on the banks of the Myngkjoilum River. It is a picture-perfect location for camping and picnicking. Some members of the group ventured from the campsite to trek into the nearby hills. Without warning, a swarm of angry wasps attacked them.

Fortunately, local villagers were nearby. They rushed to help and took the injured to an herbal medicine practitioner in the village, who carefully removed the stings and administered remedies to ease the pain. The situation could have been far worse. Though no lives were lost, the incident left a deep impression on the students' community.

There are many kinds of bees and wasps found in the Jaintia Hills. A few that I know by their local names are u Niang Li-oor, u Kyiein, and u Lwe, along with others whose names I hope friends from the hills will help identify. It is well known that not every wasp attack is deadly, even though wasps often attack in swarms. Yet there are stories of people losing their lives to certain species. Some types are especially dangerous, so relentless that even if one dives into water to escape, the swarm may hover above, circling until the person resurfaces for air, and then launch their attack. Whether these stories are ex-

aggerated or not, they reveal the fear and respect these insects command.

I believe, however, that no animal attacks without reason. Our elders have always taught us that if we encounter a snake or any wild creature, we must leave it in peace. The wise thing to do is to stop and whisper, "I do not wish to disturb you; you go your way, and I will go mine." In most cases, the creature will withdraw. Animals attack only when they feel threatened or when their space is invaded. Humans, too, are not different are they?

In the case of the recent wasp attack, farmers later discovered that the swarm had been disturbed, not by humans, but by an eagle. They saw the eagle striking the hive with its powerful wings before soaring upward to a height beyond the reach of the wasps' small wings. The eagle too was scavenging for food for its own survival and used the only trick its instinct could come up with, that is, to attack the hive and then fly high in the sky. The enraged swarm, like a black ball rolling in the sky, moved together in one direction and attacked the first living beings they encountered. It was a tragic chain of events, set in motion by the natural instincts of predator and prey.

We do not know which insect was responsible in such cases, for there are many varieties of winged creatures prevalent in the Jaintia Hills region. Farmers in the Sohm-ynting area shared with us several local names: u Lwe, u Tkaw, u Tkhi, u Kyiein, u Ngap Yong, Ngap Thohan, u Kyiein klong, u Nianglabatun, Niangloor soolei, and u Niangloor khian. Altogether, about ten types of wasps and bees are identified by local farmers, though only two varieties of bees are clearly distinguished. This indicates how rich and diverse our natural environment is. It would be interesting if young people who study zoology, and insects in particular, could document these species and provide their English and scientific names. Such work would preserve valuable indigenous knowledge.

Now, what does this have to do with the rice straw that EDS carried? According to

ancient wisdom, in the event of a wasp attack, one should quickly burn rice straw to produce smoke. It is believed that winged insects are sensitive to smoke, which disorients them and drives them away. Having heard of the recent incident, EDS prepared himself with the only safety measure he could conveniently carry and that is rice straw. It was not an act of fear, but of prudence.

Another incident occurred this autumn in a nearby village while our friend KL was harvesting rice. Suddenly, he felt a spray of liquid strike his eye, followed by sharp pain. He had been attacked by an insect locally called Nian-gryngkseit (Nezara viridula f. aurantiaca). Unlike bees and wasps, this insect does not attack in groups and is not known for flying in swarms. Instead, it defends itself by spraying a pungent liquid, which locals sometimes describe as "insect urine." KL immediately washed his face in a nearby stream, yet his eye swelled and he endured pain for about a week.

So what is it about autumn that stirs both wonder and a faint sense of unease? Perhaps autumn is not merely a season of beauty and ripeness, but also a reminder that change is inevitable. It reminds all living beings which include humans, birds, insects alike, that they must brace themselves for what lies ahead. The fields may be golden; the air may be gentle, the sun mellow, yet beneath the calm lies urgency.

Autumn stands at the threshold between abundance and scarcity. It offers harvest, yet whispers the arrival of cold dry winter. It adorns the hills with myriad colours, yet signals the shedding of leaves. It invites us to celebrate, yet urges us to prepare. In its warm and pleasant ambience there is beauty, but also concern about the uncertainty of the time to come.

Perhaps that is autumn's true nature: a season of transition, urging every creature to prepare, to endure, and to move steadily toward the long shadow of winter. In its soft golden light, we see both fullness and fragility. In its stillness, we sense movement. Autumn, in all its splendour, carries within it both gratitude and guardedness. And in that delicate balance between abundance and anxiety lies the true angst of autumn.

Who Gave You This Power? A Question of Political Culture

By Leander Lyngwa

A disturbing video circulated widely on social media last week: a driver being verbally abused, slapped, and threatened by a man who, through his language, demeanour, and threats, including references to a firearm, led many viewers to initially believe he was a police officer. The language was vulgar, the aggression unmistakable, and the imbalance of power deeply uncomfortable to watch. Public outrage was immediate, not only because of the violence, but because viewers believed the perpetrator to be a representative of the law.

It later emerged that the individual was not a police officer, but a civilian. Information circulating in the public domain has also pointed to his proximity to political circles, including familial links to a former member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC), who belongs to the National People's Party (NPP).

In many ways, these details do little to soften the core concern. If anything, they sharpen it. What the public reacted to was not merely the uniform, but the attitude. It was an unmistak-

increasingly appeared to be one of broad accommodation, absorbing politicians from across the spectrum and integrating them into its fold, often through the distribution of roles and positions within the party structure.

While this strategy may strengthen political stability and numerical dominance, it also raises concerns. When inclusion becomes expansive rather than selective, the boundaries that define a party's internal standards, its expectations of conduct, discipline, and public accountability, can begin to blur.

It is within this blurring that perception begins to shift. A party is not only defined by its leadership, but also by the individuals it accommodates and the behaviour it appears willing to tolerate. When figures known for abrasive conduct or strong-arm tendencies are seen operating within, or in close proximity to, the political establishment, their presence does not remain isolated. It becomes associated with the party itself.

Over time, such associations can reshape a party's public identity. For a party

"The appeal of such alternatives lies not merely in opposition, but in perception. Candidates associated with respectable professional backgrounds, public credibility, and relatively restrained public conduct have come to embody a contrasting political image, one that emphasises dignity over dominance."

able display of authority, entitlement, and presumed immunity.

This incident raises a deeper question: What makes an individual believe they can threaten, humiliate, and physically assault another person, seemingly unafraid of consequences? The answer may not lie in the individual alone, but in the broader political culture that shapes such behaviour.

Power and the Perception of Impunity

Across India, the criminalisation of politics and the normalization of strong-arm behaviour have become persistent concerns, cutting across party lines. Data from organisations such as the Association for Democratic Reforms (ADR) have consistently highlighted the presence of elected representatives with serious criminal allegations, raising uncomfortable questions about the standards of leadership within governance.

In public discourse, certain parties, particularly those with highly visible and assertive grassroots networks have increasingly come to be associated, fairly or unfairly, with a culture of aggressive political assertion.

When individuals with questionable reputations or overtly aggressive public personas find space and legitimacy within political ecosystems, it sends a signal, whether intentional or not, that power can shield behaviour. Over time, this blurs the line between authority and impunity, not just for those within the system, but also for those who orbit around it.

The NPP's Expansion and the Question of Standards

These national patterns find a quieter, but no less significant, reflection in Meghalaya's political landscape. Since 2018, the NPP has emerged as the state's dominant political force, consolidating its position further after returning to power in 2023. With dominance comes gravitational pull. Leaders from across the political spectrum have, over time, gravitated towards the ruling party, drawn by the promise of relevance, access, and influence.

The NPP's approach has

like the NPP, which in 2018 was widely perceived as a vehicle of change and a departure from entrenched political patterns, the risk lies in gradual transformation.

A Demand for Dignity in Politics

It is equally telling that there has been a visible appetite among sections of the electorate for alternatives that project a different kind of political culture. The previous parliamentary election outcome, which saw the Voice of the People Party (VPP) secure a decisive victory, reflected more than just electoral arithmetic. It pointed to a shift in what voters are beginning to value.

The appeal of such alternatives lies not merely in opposition, but in perception. Candidates associated with respectable professional backgrounds, public credibility, and relatively restrained public conduct have come to embody a contrasting political image, one that emphasises dignity over dominance. This is not simply the rise of a new party, but an indication that a section of the public is actively responding to how power is displayed, and choosing to reward those who appear to exercise it with restraint.

The viral video that sparked outrage may, in time, fade from public memory. But the questions it has raised should not. At its core, this was never just about one individual's conduct. It was about the confidence with which that conduct was displayed. A confidence that suggests not fear of consequence, but familiarity with power.

For a party like the NPP, which has successfully positioned itself as the central pillar of governance in Meghalaya, this presents both an opportunity and a warning. The opportunity lies in setting a higher standard by demonstrating that growth does not come at the expense of discipline, and that power is anchored in accountability. The warning is equally clear. Public perception is fragile, and once a party begins to be associated with arrogance or unchecked behaviour, that perception can be difficult to reverse, and even harder to outgrow.

Letters to the Editor

When Ego Takes the Wheel

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I would like to draw attention to a deeply disturbing incident of road rage that recently occurred in Shillong. A viral video circulating on social media shows a private vehicle driver assaulting a tourist taxi driver for allegedly not giving way during a traffic jam. What is even more alarming is that the aggressor reportedly claimed to be a well-connected and influential individual, and threatened to shoot the victim.

This incident is not just an isolated case of anger but reflects a growing culture of ego-driven behaviour on our roads. Many drivers today seem to view driving not as a shared responsibility but as a display of dominance and entitlement. The inability to exercise patience, especially in situations like traffic congestion, often leads to unnecessary conflicts and, in extreme cases, violence.

Such behaviour is particularly concerning when individuals misuse authority or falsely claim positions of power to intimidate others. If the claims made by the accused are true, it raises serious questions about accountability and abuse of power. If false, it is equally troubling as it shows how easily fear and authority can be manipulated.

Roads are public spaces that require mutual respect,

discipline, and understanding. No individual has the right to endanger or harm others over trivial matters like right of way. Strict action must be taken against such offenders to set a strong example and deter similar incidents in the future.

A thorough investigation into this matter, followed by appropriate legal action, is essential to ensure accountability. At the same time, greater awareness about responsible driving and the importance of emotional control behind the wheel remains crucial.

Yours etc
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah
Via email

Old wine in a new bottle!

Editor,

At the outset let me thank Svetlana Wankhar's letter to the Editor, entitled "Review of job Reservation Policy (ST March 21, '26) for a positive reaction to my letter 'Back to square one!'" (ST March 14, '26). The writer was on the spot to comment that my said letter was a veritable wake up call for the Hyniewtrep people in general and their unemployed army of employable youths churned out every year, in particular. The profile of the existing Reservation regimen has, in no uncertain terms become a deep-seated emotional issue and anxiety for the Khasi-Jaintia communities, specifically the unemployed youth. As per the government Notifica-

tion No. PER.222/71/138 dated January 12, 1972, the 40% earmarked for the Khasi-Jaintia tribes literally denotes that 20% apiece are shared between the latter vis-a-vis 40% for the Garos as a whole!

In fine, the inception of the Expert Committee in the wake of Ardent Basaiawmait's indefinite hunger strike has virtually ended in a damp squib for a large section of people. Incidentally, in the last session of the Meghalaya State Assembly, Adelbert Nongrum, who represents North Shillong constituency, couldn't have been more right when he befittingly commented that instituting a plethora of Committees is a strategic manoeuvre to befoul the gullible people but this articulation was countered vehemently by the Chief Minister and the Deputy Chief Minister P. Tynsong. Nonetheless, come what may, we can euphemistically conclude that the report of the Expert Committee on Reservation policy was nothing short of an 'old wine in a new bottle'!

Yours etc,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Persistent Power Cuts Leave Citizens Frustrated

Editor,

The rainy and windy season has come so it comes as no surprise that power transmissions will be affected. For

us, residing in the suburbs of Shillong, at Sharing Lum near Mawblei this seems to be a recurring problem. We have been without power on March 26 almost for the entire day, and on March 27 the power was out from morning and only came back after 5 p.m. When contacted the person at the complaints line also does not know why we're out of power.

When the narrative is on the capital becoming a Smart City and being the hub of international events even, prolonged power outages like this jars the picture. One wonders if we are ever going to reach a stage where power supply is fairly even, with only an occasional blip here and there. There are surely challenges which the weather and terrain play a big part, but the hope is that a way is found to deal with them so that the long suffering consumer is not made to endure prolonged delay in getting back the much needed power to his house or business.

Yours etc.,
R I Donn,
Shillong - 21.

From Religious Service to Politics

Editor,

The recent decision of a monk from Bharat Sevashram Sangha, Upal Maharaj, to step out of monastic life and enter electoral politics in West Bengal has sparked intense debate. In a state headed for the crucial assembly elections, his move is being interpreted by many

as a conscious choice to serve society through a different path—one that demands public accountability rather than spiritual seclusion. The Sangha, known for its strictly apolitical stance, has accepted his resignation and expelled him, maintaining its institutional discipline.

It is not surprising that comparisons are being drawn with figures like Yogi Adityanath, who transitioned from religious life to governance while retaining a strong societal connect. Upal Maharaj, too, is said to enjoy significant grassroots reach and influence—qualities that could translate into political capital.

This stands in stark contrast to a far more troubling episode involving another former monk of the same organization—Swami Damodaranda Maharaj of the Jail Road centre in Shillong. Expelled in 2018 over serious allegations of financial misconduct, his case remains a blot not just on individual conduct but on institutional accountability. Multiple FIRs were reportedly filed, alleging that he siphoned off donations—funds given in good faith by devotees for charitable purposes—and diverted them to family members.

What makes this episode particularly disturbing is not just the alleged money laundering, but the betrayal of trust it represents. Devotees who placed blind faith in a monk were instead manipulated and misled. It was not merely financial fraud; it

was a profound erosion of spiritual credibility. The matter, as understood, continues to languish with the CID in Meghalaya, with no visible closure, no accountability, and no justice delivered.

Equally disturbing are reports that the same individual is now associated with another organization in Madhya Pradesh, moving about freely and even visiting Shillong at will. The absence of legal consequence sends a dangerous message—that those who exploit faith can simply relocate and reinvent themselves without facing the full force of the law.

This is not to equate Upal Maharaj with Swami Damodaranda. There is, in fact, no comparison. One has chosen to step into the public eye, willingly subjecting himself to democratic scrutiny in pursuit of what he believes is a larger social good. The other stands accused of exploiting faith, misusing funds, and escaping accountability despite serious allegations.

What this juxtaposition reveals is a stark moral divide. Here is a monk who has renounced the comforts of ashram life to engage with society's challenges head-on, and there is another who reduced a sacred calling into a vehicle for personal gain.

Yours etc.
BC Paul
Shillong - 4

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“Crisis creates opportunity.”

— Bruce Rauner

The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVIII No. 228 SHILLONG, TUESDAY, MARCH 31, 2026

Meghalaya's Rivers: A Death Knell
THE Government of Meghalaya appears to be working only at the directive of the High Court or the National Green Tribunal (NGT) on the issue of rivers. Recently the Government reconstituted the River Rejuvenation Committee (RRC) ostensibly to prepare and execute an action plan for restoring identified polluted river stretches. The mandate of this Committee is to restore the rivers to a standard fit for humans to bathe in. Earlier in 2022 an expert committee was set up by the Government to prepare an action plan for the restoration of polluted water bodies in the state. The 10-member expert panel headed by the then Meghalaya Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (PCCF) was to submit the action plan to the government. Then too the Government had set up the water bodies Committee in compliance with a High Court order. This body was to advise the state government on measures for the restoration and protection of water bodies in the state using the latest technology and methods for cleaning and rejuvenating water bodies.

We are now in 2026 but not a single river has reached a point where it can be pronounced as being free from faecal matter, chemicals and other pollutants. The Umkhray River continues to remain not just muddy but a carrier of human and animal faecal matter and garbage. The Umshyripi is no different. The problem is that people appointed to such exalted bodies hardly see a river and much less dip their feet into it. Yet they make high sounding plans which will ultimately show the need for financial resources to tackle river pollution. But several years down the line the state of the rivers within Shillong city itself remains more polluted than they have ever been with people turning them into garbage dumps. What's worse is that all rules and laws pertaining to river conservation are never implemented. Houses are built right on the river and no authority has anything to say to such violators. Vehicles are regularly washed in the Umkhar and many other rivers with no one to stop them. Why make laws when institutions like the State Pollution Control Board don't have the teeth to implement those laws? The District Councils which are the prime stakeholders do not have the wherewithal to implement any law pertaining to river conservation. The only thing they are capable of doing is to get funds and construct some netting which is a one-time plan. They have no long-term river rejuvenation or conservation plan. The Dorbar Shnong who should be the eyes and ears of the Government in this important project also are left out of the grand scheme of things.

The recently constituted RRC will follow the exact terms of reference as its predecessor. The Committee is top heavy and loaded with officials but with no civil society activists or environmental NGOs included when they are the ones who have been fighting to conserve rivers and filing PILs in court. This officialdom is destined to fail as its predecessor has in the past. As of 2022 the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) had listed nearly 351 polluted river stretches of which 7 flow through Meghalaya. They include the Umkhray, Umshyripi, Kyruhu-khla, Nongbah, Umtrew, Lukha and Myntdu. The Lukha is a dead river with no solution having emanated on its rejuvenation. Will the NGT take sterner measures to ensure that the rivers of Meghalaya do not reach a point of no return?

From 'Right not to die' to 'Right to die with dignity'

By Saurav Goyal

As society evolves, individuals increasingly seek greater autonomy over their personal choices and life decisions. One important and sensitive question that emerges from this growing emphasis on individual freedom is whether a person in India has the right to die. Modern legal and ethical debates recognize that personal dignity and self-determination are central to human life. Under Article 21 of the Constitution of India, the right to life has been judicially interpreted to mean not merely animal existence but a life lived with dignity. This raises a profound constitutional question: if dignity is an essential component of life, should a person be compelled to continue living in circumstances where dignity is lost, such as in cases of extreme suffering or terminal illness? At the same time, the law historically treated an attempt to end one's life as a criminal offence under Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code. Consequently, a constitutional dilemma arose between the protection of human life by criminal law and the broader interpretation of dignity and personal liberty under Article 21, leading courts and scholars to debate the extent to which the right to life may also encompass the right to die with dignity.

The story so far

In State v. Sanjay Kumar Bhatia, 1985, The Delhi High Court strongly criticized the provision (Section 309, IPC) and observed that punishing a person who had already suffered mental distress and attempted suicide is both irrational and inhumane. The Court remarked that a person who tries to end his life is in need of care and compassion and treatment rather than punishment by the criminal justice system. It described Section 309 as harsh and anachronistic though it formally did not strike down it. The accused was acquitted.

Similarly, in Maruti Shripati Dubal v. State of Maharashtra, 1987, The Bombay High Court identified that right to life also includes right to termination of life and held that Section 309 IPC was unconstitutional. In Case, P. Rathinam v. UOI, 1994, The Supreme Court of India upheld the previous positions (of Delhi High Court and Bombay High Court) and considered that right to life is right to a dignified life and if dignity is affected then right to terminate the life is included under right to life. Section 309 is in conflict with Article 21 of the Constitution of India. It is like punishing him doubly. However, it maintained that Section 306 (abetment to suicide) IPC shall continue as an offence. It opined that euthanasia and abetment to suicide are different but in the absence of any law on the subject both to be considered as same.

The Constitution Bench (five

judges bench); in Gian kaur v. State of Punjab, 1996, reversed the previous decision of 1994 (P. Rathinam Case) and held that extinction of life cannot be included in protection of life. These are opposite things. Right to life is a natural right, suicide is an unnatural termination of life which may generate negative tendency in society. The Apex Court upheld the validity of Section 306 and Section 309 of the Indian Penal Code but distinguished euthanasia from suicide leaving room for the possibility of passive euthanasia. Also, the bench made the punishment under the Section 309 discretionary. This was the first time a punishment was made discretionary for the judges.

In a landmark judgment in Aruna Ramachandra Shanbaug rejected the request for active euthanasia but made an important legal development by allowing passive euthanasia in certain circumstances. The court held that withdrawal of life-sustaining treatment could be permitted in cases where a patient is in permanent vegetative state.

Provided strict safeguards are followed. The Court laid down a procedure that such decisions must be approved by the concerned High Court after medical examination by a panel of doctors. This judgment recognized that while the right to die is not a fundamental right, the right to die with dignity as part of a natural process of death can fall within the scope of Article 21 of the Constitution of India. This decision became a major step in the evolution of euthanasia in India. The court acknowledged the need for advance directives but did not provide specific guidelines for living wills.

Section 115 of the Mental Health Care, Act 2017 deals with the treatment of persons who attempt suicide. It is seen as an exception to Section 309 of IPC. It assumes a presumption that the person who attempts suicide is under severe stress unless proved otherwise. This provision does not decriminalize Section 309 but invokes a presumption, which is rebuttable. In case, if it is discovered that a person is under severe stress, it is the duty of the appropriate government to provide care, treatment and rehabilitation so that the person does not attempt it again. Hence operation of Section 309 of Indian Penal Code was significantly diluted by Section 115 of the Mental Health Care Act, 2017.

In 2018, in Common Cause (registered society) v. Union of India, The Supreme Court upheld the legality of passive euthanasia and by incorporating the recommendations of the Law Commission's 241st report (2012), laid down an elaborate

procedure for the execution and implementation of living wills in India. Living will is based on the best interest principle which is in consonance with one's right to life. One has a right not to suffer, if he is reduced to a level of vegetative state or terminally ill. Details guidelines were provided for the execution, revocation, and implementation of living wills, involving multiple authorities and medical boards.

In Common Cause v. Indian Society of Critical Care Medicine, 2023, the Supreme Court modified and simplified the procedure for passive euthanasia and living will laid down earlier in Common Cause v. Union of India (2018). Some changes made were- a living will no longer requires attention by a judicial magistrate; it can be attested by a notary or a gazetted officer. Earlier, living will was supposed to be kept in the custody of the district court concerned and in 2023 it was decided that the living will be a part of national digital health record which can be accessed by Indian hospitals. The 2018 judgment did not specify any outer limit on withdrawal of treatment but now the primary/secondary board has to decide within 48 hours on withdrawal of further treatment.

Recently, in Harish Rana v. Union of India and others, 2026, The Supreme Court held that where continuing treatment would merely prolong biological existence without any hope of recovery the life support can be withdrawn and directed that the process be carried out in a dignified manner. Also, the Court added that Clinically Assisted Nutrition and Hydration (CANH) is also a form of medical treatment and therefore it can be withdrawn in appropriate cases. It also urged the Union Government to enact a comprehensive law on end-of-life care. The court also acknowledged the general consensus that passive euthanasia is an obsolete and rather confusing term; it should be replaced by 'withdrawing or withholding of medical treatment'.

Euthanasia The word Euthanasia is derived from the Greek word "eu" and "thanatos" which means good death or may be described as mercy killing. The word was used by Francis Bacon in the 17th century to refer to an easy and painless death as it is the duty and responsibility of the physician to alleviate the physical suffering of the body of the patient.

Active and Passive Euthanasia

Active euthanasia is also known as "positive" or "aggressive" euthanasia. Passive euthanasia is also called "negative" or "non-aggressive" euthanasia.

Supreme Court Judge, Justice J.B Pardiwala in the recent case, held that the distinction between the active and passive euthanasia goes beyond the simplistic binary of 'act' or 'omission'. The true distinction lies not merely in the nature of the conduct but also in the source of the harm that leads to death. The judge characterized active euthanasia as causing death by introducing a new, external agency of harm, such as lethal injections, poisonous gases or shockwaves. In such cases, death is not the result of the patient's underlying illness, but of an intervention, that sets a new chain of events in motion. It is for this reason that active euthanasia is understood as an intervention that disrupts the natural path towards death. On the other hand, passive euthanasia should be understood as allowing death to occur. By withholding antibiotics or removing a patient from a life support system, the physician is not creating a new risk of death. Rather, the doctors are choosing to allow the underlying fatal condition to take its natural course by no longer continuing the medical interventions that were artificially prolonging life.

Living Will

A living will, also known as advance directive, is a legal document that allows individuals to express their wishes regarding end-of-life medical treatment. It provides instructions on whether to withhold or withdraw life sustaining measures in certain circumstances, such as terminal illness or a persistent vegetative state. By specifying their desires, individuals can avoid prolonged suffering and maintain dignity in the dying process.

Is passive euthanasia permitted even if the patient has not made a living will?

After the judgment in Common Cause v. Union of India by the Supreme Court of India, passive euthanasia is permitted even if the patient has not made a living will, including in cases where the person is in a permanent vegetative state. However, the decision cannot be solely taken by the family; it must follow safeguards laid down by the Court. What happens if a family refuses to follow the living will made by a person?

A living will represents the autonomous decision of the patient made while competent. It generally prevails because it reflects the individual's fundamental right over their body and medical treatment. The hospital medical boards examine the living will to verify its authenticity and applicability. If the directive is valid and the medical condition matches the situation mentioned in it, the withdrawal of treatment can proceed even if family members object.

(The writer is PhD Scholar, Faculty of law, University of Delhi)

On Preserving of U Tirot Sing's Memorial Monument

By A M Syiem and H. Syiemlieh

How did the Nongkhaw Syiemship come to celebrate the day of Tirot Sing's Syiem death anniversary every year on 29th March before they discovered the actual day of his death i.e. the 17th July 1835 every year, this could be due to the research conducted by writers from different subject fields who worked tirelessly, due to their love of the Khasi Hills. This has led us all to give our due respect and celebrate the life of the great Patriot on this date.

Ever since we achieved our Independence from British rule in 1947 the Government of India saw it fit to remember and honour Tirot Sing of Nongkhaw Syiemship, along with other freedom fighters like U Kiang Nangbah, of Jaintia Hills, and other national freedom fighters who also sacrificed their lives for the country and its beloved citizens.

Just going back to the past to enlighten the readers, the Memorial Tribute foundation stone in remembrance of the bravery of U Tirot Sing Syiem was laid down on the December 15, 1952, which was inaugurated by the then Governor of undivided Assam, Shri Jairamdas Doulatram in a field in Mairang town which is now called Madan Mot Tirot. Then On the March 29, 1953, the aforesaid governor of Assam also came to observe the auspicious day of celebration along with the presence of Chief of the Nongkhaw Syiemship at that period, Paem Kedro Manik Syiem who was from the house of Mawnai and Mawlong Syiem.

To supplement more on the beginning of this celebration of the death anniversary of U Tirot Sing Syiem, it was first initiated by the people of Mawnai village under Hima Nongkhaw, who were not yet converted to Christianity. Hence the celebration was accompanied by traditional dances. From this initiation onwards the people from other places within the Nongkhaw Syiemship would come together every year to pay respect to Tirot Sing Syiem on March 28 & 29.

Besides the traditional dances there was also a public procession parade on April 4, 1986 to commemorate the day on which Tirot Sing Syiem declared war against the British forces. This has been inscribed on the Memorial Tribute of U Tirot Sing Syiem at the mentioned site in Mairang town. This piece of land was bought by the Nongkhaw Syiemship not long ago where the Hima administrative office was built along with the Dorbar (council) house of the Hima Nongkhaw adjacent to the place where the monument stands. According to legends the wooden nails, the woods used for construction and the stone pillar called Maw Shankhrum (foundation pillar) belonging to the original house of U Tirot Sing Syiem were buried along under the foundation of the present Memorial Monument, wherefore people of his native kingdom would every year come to place flowers on his monument to this day as a symbolic tribute to his ultimate struggle and sacrifice. These materials were all brought from Nongkhaw village which was the traditional capital of Hima Nongkhaw, from its genesis lies, from the first native king who was consecrated with the religious ceremony of Tang Jai Syiem by the Five ruling Clan Lyngdoh at Mawthangsyar Village to U Shajer who was an exile from the royal family of Hima Sutnga in Jaintia Hills who ventured into this region with his sister Ka Shaphlong, where there was no ruling chief except the Lyngdohship and he became the First Chieftain of Hima Nongkhaw Syiemship and his Sister is the first Syiem-sad of Hima Nongkhaw. This was recorded by authors from the Ri Khasi and Jaintia Hills from their book that Shajer after being consecrated to hold power even fought a war against Don

Ahom to take possession of Borduar village in present day Assam and annexed it to Hima Nongkhaw. The question now is why in the past, the day of remembrance of his passing is held on March 29 every year? Maybe there is a misunderstanding because, on March 29, 1834, an agreement was made between U Riton Sing and Capt. Francis Jenkins, Agent Governor of the North-East Frontier, with Agent H. Inglis as a witness. The agreement between Tirot Sing and Mr. David Scott, Agent to the Governor General was renewed in the year 1826, when Tirot Sing was himself the king. After Tirot Sing was captured by the British government and was deported for imprisonment to Dhaka, on the March 29, it was misunderstood as the day of his death. These words were taken from "A Collection of Treaties, Engagements and Sanads Relating to India and Neighbouring Countries (Revised and Continued up to 1929) Vol. XII: Jammu & Kashmir, Sikkim; Assam and Burma. Compiled by C.U. Aitchison" Assam No. XXII 1834

(Translation of the Articles of an agreement furnished to the Governor-General's Agent, North-East Frontier, by Rujum Sing, Rajah, on his accession to the Raj of Nungklow, on the 29th March 1834) The Written Agreement of Rujum Sing (Riton Sing), Resident of Nongklow (Nongkhaw), executed to the following purport: the government has appointed me to the Raj of the Late Teerut Sing on 29th March 1834. Perhaps the title was misinterpreted during the translation process undertaken during the British administration.

On the 25th anniversary of the Khasi Cultural Society (KCS) that was held in Polo Ground, there was also the anniversary celebration of Syiem Tirot Sing ("150 year Death Anniversary of U Tirot Sing"), which was held on February 22, 1984. This strengthened the belief of many that this was the day to commemorate Tirot Sing's death anniversary not only in Mairang but all other districts of Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills: Government offices and educational institutions observe this day by declaring it a holiday as a mark of respect for the great patriot. The question is why is the day of remembrance not celebrated on the July 17, as his actual date of death (official date as recorded on the Memorial Monument in Mairang town since this was also confirmed by historians. Till this day, the Government of Meghalaya is still trying to collect and attain the official records related to the imprisonment of Tirot Sing from 1833 to 1835 in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

The people of Meghalaya in general, and the Khasis in particular, express their gratefulness to the Government of India for releasing the commemorative stamp of Tirot Sing Syiem in the year 1988. A request could also be made to the Government of Meghalaya through the Department of Arts and Culture and Meghalaya Heritage Authority, the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council along with the office of Syiem of Hima Nongkhaw, to maintain and preserve the Memorial Stone in Mairang town that was erected in 1952 as a historical heritage site inaugurated during the tenure of the Government of Undivided Assam. Besides the possibility of having a heritage memorial museum in Mairang town depicting the sequence of life events and struggle of U Tirot Sing Syiem.

The Memorial Stone is significant not only for the present generation but the future generations of the state and other historians and tourists from outside the state who are interested in knowing and documenting the heroic deeds of this beloved Native Warrior who sacrificed his life for the freedom of his people and one who stood against the colonial imperialism of the British.

Letters to the Editor

India Needs Energy Security

Editor,
Apropos of the news "Small eateries feel the heat of commercial LPG shortage." (ST March 30, 2026), the LPG crisis in India is directly linked to the ongoing war in West Asia, where U.S. and Israeli military actions against Iran have disrupted supply routes through the Strait of Hormuz. However, responsibility is shared: while the conflict triggered the disruption, India's heavy dependence on imports and lack of strategic LPG reserves have amplified the crisis.

The war involving the U.S., Israel, and Iran has effectively closed or restricted the Strait of Hormuz, a chokepoint through which 60-70% of India's LPG imports normally pass. India meets 85-90% of its LPG demand through imports, mostly from Gulf nations. This makes the country highly vulnerable to geopolitical shocks. India has only about 15 days of LPG storage capacity, compared to 65-72 days for crude oil. This lack of reserves leaves households exposed to sudden shortages.

Who bears responsibility? Israel and U.S. military escalation against Iran is the immediate cause of supply chain disruption. The closure of the Strait of Hormuz is a direct consequence of this conflict. By threatening or blocking tanker movement, Iran has leveraged its geographic control of Hormuz, worsening the crisis. Failing to build strategic LPG reserves,

over-reliance on Gulf imports and slow diversification means India is not just a victim but also structurally unprepared. Over 330 million households using LPG for cooking face shortages and price hikes. Queues for cylinders, rising costs, and reduced access to clean cooking fuel risks pushing poorer families back to biomass (wood, dung), which increases indoor air pollution and respiratory illnesses. This is also impacting the Indian economy where restaurants, tea estates, ceramics and MSMEs are shutting down or scaling back due to LPG shortages, echoing COVID-like disruptions. Externally the U.S. and Israel bear responsibility for initiating conflict, while Iran's retaliatory blockade worsens global supply chains. Internally India's lack of diversification and reserves magnifies the crisis. Unlike crude oil, LPG has no meaningful strategic buffer.

To conclude, the LPG crisis is not "beyond anyone's control." While Israel and the U.S. triggered the disruption, India's policy gaps in energy security have left households exposed. A long-term solution requires diversifying suppliers (Algeria, Australia, Canada, Norway), expanding storage, and transitioning to alternatives like piped natural gas and electric cooking.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

The End of Naxalism in India

Editor,
A combination of security

pressure and rehabilitation efforts has given a deadly blow to Naxalism, one of the country's longest-running insurgencies, with more than 10,000 Maoists laying down arms in the last decade and top leadership eliminated, officials said. The Union Home Ministry had set the deadline to eliminate Naxalism from the country as March 31.

In 2025, 2,300 Maoists laid down arms, and more than 630 cadres chose mainstream life over armed rebellion in the first three months of 2026, official data on surrenders from 2014 to early 2026 show. According to an official, the government has adopted a unified, multi-dimensional and decisive strategy against Naxalism.

An example is the road entrenchment in the "Red Corridor," an arc that once stretched from "Pashupati to Tirupati" across Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, Maharashtra, and parts of Andhra Pradesh, where contractors refused to work.

The Centre tasked the Border Roads Organisation with building roads in People's Liberation Guerrilla Army (PLGA) core areas, involving the construction of five key roads and six crucial bridges in these hotbeds of the insurgency. More than 15,000 kilometres of roads have been constructed in Communist Party of India (Maoist) affected areas, of which 12,250 kilometres have been completed in the last 10 years alone.

Fortified police stations increased from 66 in 2014 to 586 constructed in the last 10 years in areas where the insurgents, termed as "gravest internal security challenge." Addition-

ally, 361 new security camps have been established in the last 6 years, and 68 night-landing helipads have been built to strengthen operational reach. This has resulted in the number of police stations recording Naxal incidents dropping sharply from 330 across 76 districts in 2013 to merely 52 in 22 districts by June 2025.

The government's strategy of focusing on a combination of security pressure and rehabilitation efforts has chipped away at the movement's core, leaving it headless in Chhattisgarh, a first since it started.

In areas where governance was attenuated, and the Maoists cultivated both coercion and consent among marginalised communities, the fruits of government schemes started reaching the common people. Under the PM-Awas Yojana, the number of houses sanctioned jumped from 92,847 in March 2024 to 2,54,045 in October 2025. During the same period, Aadhar enrollment also rose from 23.50 lakh to 24.85 lakh, and 21.44 lakh Ayushman cards were issued compared to 19.77 lakh. The government has invested heavily in education and infrastructure, aiming to undercut the socio-economic roots of the insurgency.

Over 250 Eklavya schools have been sanctioned in the last 10 years, of which 179 are functional, along with 11 Central schools and 6 Navodaya schools. The central government also launched skill development initiatives in 48 Left-Wing Extremism (LWE)-affected districts by sanctioning as many Industrial Training Institutes (ITIs) at Rs 495 crore and approving 61

Skill Development Centres (SDCs).

Among these, 46 ITIs and 49 SDCs are already functional, providing vocational training and employment opportunities to local youth, while reducing Naxal recruitment and integrating remote communities into the mainstream economy, the officials said. Around 9,000 mobile towers have been installed, including 2,343 that are being upgraded to 4G, the LWE data from the government showed.

The rail connectivity from South Bastar to the central part of Chhattisgarh, a 95 km rail line, was developed between Dallirajhara and Raoghat.

A 140 km rail line will be developed between Raoghat and Jagdalpur, and a survey for a 180 km rail line from Dantewada (Chhattisgarh) to Munuguru (Telangana) has already been completed by the Railways Ministry, connecting the interior areas of Chhattisgarh to major Indian markets, officials said.

The downward trajectory of the guerrilla movement over the past decade tells a story of sustained political resolve, co-ordinated security operations, development outreach, and effective rehabilitation policies, resulting in a steady rise in the number of Maoist cadres surrendering and returning to the democratic mainstream, the officials said.

The crackdown on the funding of the Naxals gave a deadly blow to the movement, with the National Investigation Agency (NIA) seizing Rs 40 crore, state authorities seizing an additional Rs 40 crore, and the Enforcement Directorate attaching assets worth Rs 12 crore.

"Simultaneous action has inflicted severe moral and psychological damage on urban Naxals and tightened control over their information warfare networks," a government statement had said. The financial and logistical support from the Centre strengthened state capabilities through programmes like the Security Related Expenditure Scheme, which assists states in covering operational costs in LWE-affected districts, it said.

The most consequential factor in constraining the violent movement has been the recalibration of rehabilitation policy. The revised Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation Scheme provides financial aid, skill development training and housing support for former cadres.

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The revised Surrender-cum-Rehabilitation Scheme provides financial aid, skill development training and housing support for former cadres. It is a combined success story of all state governments.

Yours etc,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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