

*"A leader is one who knows the way,
goes the way, and shows the way."*

— John C. Maxwell

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2026: Hope Springs Eternal

PESSIMISM and gloom marred the last few days of the outgoing year 2025 with news of the death of Anjel Chakma an MBA student in Dehra Dun in what is purportedly a racist crime, committed by a group of hotheads. While the demand for justice in this case must not lag with time, civil society too has a major role to play in pushing the state and central government to deliver justice in this and other similar cases without being pushed to the wall. This is an important collective New Year resolution. New Year marks the beginning of a fresh chapter, symbolizing hope, renewal, and new opportunities. But beyond the celebrations citizens should stop to think why governments repeatedly falter and renege on their electoral promises. Shillong recently went without water for over a week because the Department whose sole responsibility is to supply water, did not have an emergency response system in place. Will this be put in place in the New Year or will the events of the last year pass without any lessons learnt?

The Meghalaya Government has made many tall claims about reaching out to the underserved with a range of welfare schemes. But these are not good enough. The Government needs to engage an independent agency to study the root causes of systemic poverty in the state. Much of this poverty is hidden and beyond the sight and attention of government departments entrusted to reach out to the last mile. This is Meghalaya's persistent problem — government has not reached the last person in the village. The central government has doled out freebies generously but whether these actually reach the targeted stakeholders (not beneficiaries) is questionable. Many of those who were given the PMAY scheme could not complete the construction of their homes because the amount is insufficient. The amount is based on calculations in the plains. In the hilly regions transportation cost of construction materials is much higher. Hence many such homes are left half done. The State Government could step in with an additional amount to help complete these homes.

The Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) is incomplete in several parts of Meghalaya. A timeline should be set for completion of this important project because water is life. The environment is crying out for survival even while the Forest and Environment Department chooses to look the other way if not actually colluding with those intent on denuding the state of its forest cover. Here of course the District Councils also stand guilty as hell since they are custodians of forests outside the reserved forests. One important New Year resolution for Meghalaya should be that the assembly should sit more often and citizens should set the agenda for their legislators. Assembly debates should be based on ground research and for this MLAs should set aside a portion of their MLA scheme to pay for such research and solid recommendations. The Assembly is not for nit-picking and spinning casual remarks into political fodder thereby leaving little or no room for meaningful discourse. Citizens should demand that politicians shun rhetoric and forgo outrageous allegations in today's clickbait-driven climate and focus instead on substantive issues. These New Year Resolutions from the MDA-2 Government, from citizens and legislators could hopefully help usher in better governance.

Meghalaya in 2025: Between Strain and Strength - Remembering a Year, Welcoming a New Beginning

By Jairaj Chhetry

There is a quiet saying often heard in the hills:

"Every year teaches its own lesson; wisdom lies in learning it."

For Meghalaya, 2025 was such a teacher — firm at times, uncomfortable at others, yet deeply meaningful. It was a year that revealed cracks without breaking spirit, exposed shortcomings without erasing hope, and reminded us that progress is rarely smooth, but must always be sincere.

Looking back, 2025 appears as a year lived on many fronts at once. Education reform moved alongside student anxiety. Cultural festivals bloomed even as drugs darkened young lives. Infrastructure expanded while nature pushed back. Governance remained stable, yet people quietly asked for deeper sensitivity. Through all this, Meghalaya stood — not untested, but unbroken.

Education: Honest Intent, Uneven Ground: Education remained at the centre of public conversation throughout the year, and it is only fair to begin with appreciation. The government showed intent and honesty — a structured academic calendar, emphasis on foundational literacy and numeracy under NEP 2020, expansion of colleges, upgrading of schools, and increased scholarships. Publicly acknowledging an "education crisis" itself required courage.

Yet wisdom reminds us: **"Good intention is the seed; care and patience make it a tree."**

Despite improved pass percentages, learning gaps remained wide. Many students moved ahead without mastering basics. Teachers were stretched thin, counsellors were scarce, and infrastructure often lagged behind ambition. Colleges opened faster than qualified faculty could be appointed. Degrees multiplied, but employment opportunities did not keep pace.

The shortcoming was not vision — but speed without enough support.

The road ahead is clear. Before expanding further, the system must consolidate. Existing schools and colleges must be strengthened. Teachers and counsellors must be appointed in adequate numbers. Courses must align with local employment opportunities so that education becomes a ladder to dignity rather than a collection of certificates.

A Garo saying captures this truth well: **"Skie ra-ani dongjaode, ja-man ka-ani dongja"** — knowledge is not only what is read, but what is understood and lived.

If this wisdom guides policy in 2026, education can recover its human face.

Drug Menace: Action Taken, Healing Still Incomplete: Perhaps the most painful chapter of 2025 was the deepening drug crisis. Here too, action did come — arrests increased, seizures rose, surveillance expanded, and rehabilitation finally entered policy discussions. Moving from denial to action deserves recognition.

But society soon realised a hard truth: law alone cannot heal what is also emotional and social.

Addiction reached disturbing levels, touching children barely in their teens. Convictions remained limited. Families stayed silent out of fear or shame. Mental health support was thin. Unemployment fed despair.

As wisdom says: "You cannot straighten a tree by pulling only its branches; you must nourish its roots."

The path forward must blend firm policing with compassion. Schools need counsellors, not only rules. Parents need awareness, not fear. Treatment must be stigma-free. Communities must watch over their own. Employment must restore dignity to young lives drifting toward hopelessness.

In Garo tradition, responsibility is shared: "Sakantona dakna ka songnok" — when one falls, the village must lift.

If government and society walk together, 2026 can still become a year of rescue rather than regret.

Governance: Stability with Scope for Sensitivity: Politically, 2025 was largely stable. Coalitions held. Outreach programmes expanded. Welfare messaging continued. Stability itself deserves appreciation, for it allows room to correct mistakes.

Yet stability must not slip into comfort.

Youth unemployment, pension delays, rural distress, and environmental accountability often moved slower than public patience. Governance sometimes appeared more administrative than empathetic. People did not ask for miracles — they asked to be heard.

The hopeful sign lay in growing dialogue. The road ahead is simple, though demanding: listen more, explain honestly, and act closer to the ground. Governance in 2026 must be measured not only by files cleared, but by trust rebuilt.

Society: Quiet Cracks, Shared Responsibility: Beneath headlines, social strain quietly grew. Loneliness deepened. Mental stress increased. Crime crept in. Elderly citizens lived unseen. Youth felt unheard. Drugs and crime fed each other in a dangerous cycle. Neither

government nor society can escape responsibility here.

Rebuilding community bonds must be central to 2026 — schools as caring spaces, neighbourhoods as support systems, and institutions that look beyond paperwork to people.

Nature and Borders: Lessons Written in Rain and Stone: Landslides, polluted rivers, and border tensions reminded Meghalaya in 2025 that nature does not negotiate — it responds. Court-monitored action against illegal mining showed willingness to correct course, though often after damage had occurred. The mistake lay in choosing short-term gain over long-term care. The way forward is balance — development that respects ecological limits, tourism that protects rivers and hills, and infrastructure that listens to geography rather than challenges it.

Economy and Infrastructure: Vision Visible, Reach Uneven: Roads expanded. Urban decongestion was planned. Economic hubs were envisioned. Cultural tourism flourished, creating livelihoods and pride. These efforts deserve appreciation.

Yet benefits did not reach all equally. Hill districts lagged. Skill gaps persisted. Many young people still searched for dignity in work.

Development in 2026 must touch hands, not just headlines.

Culture and Cinema: Meghalaya on National and Global Screens: If one chapter of 2025 deserves wholehearted praise, it is culture and creative expression.

Meghalaya's filmmakers carried hill stories far beyond the hills. Films rooted in Garo and Khasi life earned national and international recognition — not through noise, but through honesty.

Rimdogittanga, directed by Dominic Megam Sangma, won Best Garo Feature Film at the 71st National Film Awards, earning the Rajat Kamal. Internationally released as Rapture, it received multiple global accolades.

Ha Lyngkha Bneng, by Pradip Kurbah, and its international title 'The Elysian Field', won Best Film, Best Director, and the NETPAC Award at the Moscow International Film Festival.

These were not loud films — but truthful ones. And the world listened.

Cricket: Meghalaya Steps onto the National Stage:

Cricket in 2025 marked a quiet but important rise for Meghalaya. Players from Garo Hills, Shillong, and across the state earned national-level selection.

Selections to the North

East Zone and leadership roles in domestic cricket signalled growing confidence and capability. Women's cricket, too, made its presence felt at the zonal level. These were not overnight successes, but outcomes of persistence against limited resources.

Meghalaya cricket may still be growing — but it is no longer invisible.

Martial Arts: Strength from the Hills

Meghalaya's martial artists — particularly from Khasi and Garo Hills — won national medals and represented India in international tournaments across Asia and Europe. Training often happened with limited infrastructure but unlimited discipline.

Their journey reminded us that resilience often grows strongest in the hills.

2025 and the Threshold of 2026: Learning Before Moving Forward: As 2025 fades into memory, it leaves behind clear lessons:

- Reform needs roots
- Action must walk with compassion
- Growth must respect people and nature

The government showed intent. Society showed concern. Youth showed resilience. What is now required is coordination, patience, and humanity.

As wisdom reminds us: "A bend in the road is not the end of the road — unless you fail to turn."

Meghalaya stands at such a bend.

An Impressive Yet Quiet Hope for 2026: The arrival of 2026 does not demand grand promises. It demands steadier steps.

If education slows down to strengthen itself, if the drug crisis is met with empathy alongside enforcement, if governance listens more than it announces, if communities rediscover care, and if development learns to respect land and people alike — then progress will not need applause; it will earn trust.

2026 must become a year where healing begins, where confidence returns, and where direction becomes clearer.

As we step into the New Year 2026, let us carry learning instead of bitterness, responsibility instead of blame, and hope instead of fear.

May governance grow wiser and more humane.

May institutions grow stronger and more inclusive.

May youth be protected, guided, and heard.

May our hills remain peaceful, and our homes kinder.

May Meghalaya move forward together — slowly perhaps, but surely in the right direction.

"God Did Not Give David a Crown, He Gave Him Goliath"

By Roy Kupar Synrem

"When God wanted to make a King out of David, He did not give him a crown; He gave him Goliath." This truth speaks directly to the times we are living in. Before David was recognised, he was tested. Goliath was not sent to destroy David but to prepare him for something greater. Struggle comes before Leadership and success. As the youth of Meghalaya step into 2026, many are standing in valleys of their own — facing giants that feel overwhelming and unending. As we are about to enter the New Year, I want to speak to our youth of Meghalaya in general and the youth of U Hynniewtrep in particular that 'there is a

growth, lack of local platforms for sports, arts and entrepreneurship, and the disconnect between education and skills are real. But these challenges are also calling this generation to create, not just complain — to build start-ups rooted in local resources, revive indigenous sports and music, take pride in farming, craftsmanship and eco-tourism, and demand accountability while also offering solutions.

Too often, young people are told to wait — wait for jobs, wait for government schemes, wait for recognition. But David did not wait for permission to step into the valley. He stepped forward when others stepped

"For others, it is substance abuse and addiction, quietly draining families, villages and entire neighbourhoods. Many young people face the frustration of migration, forced to leave home in search of opportunities, while others remain behind feeling stuck and unheard. There is also the growing fear of cultural erosion, where language, tradition and indigenous values are slowly replaced by imitation and indifference."

light at the end of the tunnel' and that we should not give up on ourselves.

For some, the giant is unemployment. Despite years of education and degrees they do not translate into work. For others, it is substance abuse and addiction, quietly draining families, villages and entire neighbourhoods. Many young people face the frustration of migration, forced to leave home in search of opportunities, while others remain behind feeling stuck and unheard. There is also the growing fear of cultural erosion, where language, tradition and indigenous values are slowly replaced by imitation and indifference. These are not small battles. They are our present day Goliaths. Yet, it is important to remember that David was not chosen because he was strong; he became strong because he was chosen to fight. He did not wait for better weapons or perfect conditions. He used what he already had.

In the same way, the youth of Meghalaya must recognise the strength already in their hands. Our hills have taught us endurance. Our communities have taught us solidarity. Our traditions have taught us respect for land, elders and identity. These are not outdated values — they are assets in a world that is losing its moral compass. The challenges of limited

back. As 2026 begins, let this be the year when the youth of Meghalaya stop waiting for crowns. Crowns come later. What comes first is courage, discipline and responsibility. Facing corruption, addiction, hopelessness and identity loss will not be easy — but giants never fall easily.

If God has placed these challenges before the youth of Meghalaya, it is because within this generation lies leadership yet to be revealed. Giants do not stand before people meant to live ordinary lives. At times, as youth we may think that challenges in our lives appear too large, too entrenched, too powerful to defeat. It is easy to ask, "Why us?" But history — both biblical and real — teaches us something profound: those chosen to lead, to change, to build, are first chosen to struggle.

So let us face 2026 with confidence rooted in who we are — not copying others, not abandoning our identity, but strengthening it. Let us confront our Goliaths in classrooms, playgrounds, villages, markets and public life. Beyond this valley lies purpose, dignity and a future shaped by our own hands.

Remember: God did not give David a crown. He gave him a Goliath. The crown came later.

(The writer is an advocate & President, Hynniewtrep Youth Council).

Letters to the Editor

Unnao rape case breaks everyone's heart

Editor,
There are some stories that persistently haunt our minds, no matter how much time passes. The Unnao rape case is certainly one of them. Just picture this: a young girl from a small town in Unnao, who goes to a powerful politician, hoping he might help her find a job. She trusted the leader from her constituency — and who doesn't? The family believed the MLA would use his position, his influence, and his power for the righteous cause. But what followed was "un-righteous" — the nightmare. Former MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar raped the minor girl. This happened in 2017. It was alleged that he raped the girl multiple times, devastating not just her life but also her entire family's world.

Now pause and ask yourself. What kind of courage does it take for a minor girl to stand up against a man who had served as MLA for

four terms? Thank God, the family didn't give up. They kept fighting. They kept knocking on the doors of justice. But fighting powerful people in India is like wrestling with shadows. You never know where the next blow will come from! The victim's father was beaten, falsely accused, and thrown behind bars. There, he later died in judicial custody. Isn't it heart wrenching?

Another nightmare! A heavy truck, its number plate "deliberately blackened", smashed into the car carrying the survivor, her lawyer, and her two aunts. The victim's two aunts died. Coincidence? Hardly. When a truck rams into a car more than once, it doesn't look like fate. It is a well-conceived, murderous plot. The CBI also registered a case of criminal conspiracy and murder, linking this crash to attempts to silence witnesses in the rape case. Just imagine the ordeal endured by the victim and her relatives throughout.

Amidst the victim's family's security concerns, here's my honest question: were security guards ever deployed to protect them from the allegedly corrupt leader? No, not at all. The

court never ever thought along those lines.

Just think about it for a moment more pragmatically. This girl had already survived rape. And now she had to survive an attempt on her life. All this while mourning the aunts who died protecting her story and seeking justice.

Finally, after a long wait of two years, in 2019, a court convicted the MLA and sentenced him to life imprisonment. For once, it felt like the judicial system worked. The powerful man was behind bars.

But that relief was seemingly short-lived. Just a week ago, the Delhi High Court suspended his sentence and granted him bail. The news shook the heartbeat of the right-thinking population. How can people stomach the fact that a man convicted of raping a minor, and allegedly linked to a deadly crash involving the victim's family, is walking free? Is it not like watching the jail doors swing open for crime itself?

To everyone's relief, the high-pitched media coverage and consistent outcry from the masses finally pierced the ears of the apex court. The Supreme Court couldn't

help but quickly pronounce a stay on the High Court order on December 29.

Yes, the "fact" that the Delhi High Court granted bail to the alleged convict in this rape case, despite the deadly car crash meant to eliminate witnesses, as contested by the CBI, put the entire judiciary in question. It points to something gravely shady, a sign of deep-rooted corruption.

Hence, given the malice, considering brutal conspiracies, intimidation, and life threats, one can strongly believe that the aggrieved woman's battle isn't just hers anymore. It belongs to all of us who believe that justice shouldn't depend on how much power you have. It should depend on what's right and what's wrong, on what is moral and on what is immoral.

Thank God, the victim's case has now drawn the attention of a brave heart — Yogita Bhayana, a social activist determined to fight not only for this survivor but for every Nirbhaya, every Damini. Will we stand with her?

Yours etc.,
Salil Grewal,
Shillong

Linking CSR of Coke Oven Plants to Pollution Impact & Local Development Priorities

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of policymakers, industry leaders, and the general public to the urgent necessity of problem-linked Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in areas surrounding coke oven plants, with special reference to Meghalaya. The Government of Meghalaya needs to act now, particularly in districts where industrial activity has begun to exert visible pressure on fragile ecosystems and vulnerable communities.

Coke oven plants are indispensable to steel production and economic growth. However, they are also among the most pollution-intensive industrial units, emitting particulate matter, hazardous gases, and liquid

effluents that adversely affect air quality, water sources, soil fertility, and public health. In Meghalaya — an ecologically sensitive State with high rainfall, forest dependence, and community-based livelihoods — the consequences of such pollution are far more severe.

Districts such as Ri Bhoi District, East Jaintia Hills District, West Khasi Hills District, South West Khasi Hills District and others have witnessed increasing industrial and allied activities in close proximity to villages, agricultural land, and water sources. In these districts, rural and tribal communities are compelled to bear a disproportionate share of environmental and health risks, despite having limited institutional capacity to respond.

In this context, CSR must not remain a generic exercise confined to token donations or one-time activities. CSR expenditure should be directly linked to pollution, externalities arising from coke oven operations. Air pollution concerns must translate into CSR-supported community air-quality monitoring systems, green buffer zones, and respira-

tory health programmes. Water contamination and scarcity demand safe drinking water projects, rainwater harvesting structures, and restoration of local streams and springs that serve as lifelines for villages across these districts. Soil degradation and livelihood losses require targeted agricultural support, soil rejuvenation measures, and income-restoration initiatives for affected households.

Equally vital is the alignment of CSR initiatives with District and State development plans, and with Meghalaya's unique governance framework under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution. CSR projects must be planned in consultation with District Administrations, Autonomous District Councils, and traditional institutions such as Village Durbars, so that they complement public investment rather than duplicate it. Such convergence will enhance accountability, strengthen local ownership, and ensure long-term sustainability.

India's CSR framework under the Companies Act, 2013 mandates eligible companies to allocate a portion of their profits towards social

development. For industries operating coke oven plants in and around Meghalaya, this obligation must be enforced in the spirit of the polluter pays principle, where responsibility is proportionate to environmental impact and ecological sensitivity.

The onus now lies squarely on the Government and regulatory authorities to ensure strict monitoring, district-wise CSR convergence, and time-bound action — especially in Ri Bhoi, East Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills, and South West Khasi Hills districts. Responsible industrial growth is possible only when economic progress advances hand in hand with environmental protection and social justice. Delay today will only deepen ecological damage and social justice. Delay today will only deepen ecological damage and social distress tomorrow.

Yours etc.,
Forwardman Nongrem,
South West Khasi Hills

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"In life, all good things come hard, but wisdom is the hardest to come by."

— Lucille Ball

The Shillong Times

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Dawn of new hope

AS the nation stepped confidently into a New Year, the mood was palpably upbeat, reflected in the celebrations across mega cities that rang in the New Year at midnight with illuminations, firecrackers and an eruption of youthful joy and merriment. They rang out the old, creating the space for a dawn of new hope. Sounds of high-pitched music hung about in the air. India looks forward to better times in a world that has reinvented itself from the worries of a pandemic that killed over seven million people.

The confidence of the nation was punctuated by a statement from Prime Minister Narendra Modi that India has edged past Japan to become the fourth largest economy. His assertion was also that India would soon become the third largest by bypassing Germany, an economic giant for decades. India's biggest strength arises less from its leadership and more from its teeming population of 1.4 billion, whose collective energy is working wonders. The economic liberalization of the Rao-Singh era in the early 1990s was a turning point. Growth gained new dynamics. Its benefits are there for all to see, but its effects fail to percolate down to the ordinary masses. Salaries/wages, for instance, are not seeing any substantial rise. Greed manifested in the loot of the exchequer by politicians and the unbridled bureaucracy, coupled with acts of exploitation by vested interests, makes the common man's life miserable. Restructuring of the systems, as was done in the economic sphere, is an urgent requirement. This requires both wisdom and courage on the part of those who govern the nation. A steady income, big or small, keeps family hearths burning. In a nation where agriculture still remains the main source of income for families, this is easier said than done. Reforms attempted in this sector by the Modi government failed to take off due to pressure from the wealthy segments of the farming community. Judicial and bureaucratic reforms are not attempted at all, due to lack of courage on the part of government and sway of vested interests. The clogging of the justice dispensation system with a backlog of over five crore cases, a delay in delivery of justice and legal fights lasting decades, as in India, are manifestations of weak governance. Building highways through the length and breadth of the nation by itself means little, set against the drag in solving larger issues of the nation.

As one more year passed by, we have miles to go before we pause to rest. The strengths of the systems are eroding. Systems are being sabotaged from within by the crooked, semi-literate political class. To reinvent them, reforms spanning all sectors are the way forward. Very little is being attempted at, other than in the pushes like GST, the unification of the nation's market taxation mechanism. A change in nomenclature is hardly a reform, as in the shift from Planning Commission to Niti Aayog, or from IPC to Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita or the unsung national education policy. All these failed to capture the fancy of the nation; meaning they were half-baked.

Letters to the Editor

The Systematic Dismantling of Regional Radio Identity

Editor,

Despite recent celebrations regarding the restoration of certain services, a persistent crisis is plaguing our public broadcaster. While 2025 has been a year of partial relief with the restoration of FM stations like Akashvani FM Jangphri (Shillong), FM Rainbow Kannada Kaamanabillu (Bengaluru), Ananthapuri FM (Thiruvananthapuram), FM Rainbow Kolkata, FM Rainbow Panaji, FM Sangai (Imphal) and FM Ujjayanta (Agartala), we must not let this overshadow the systematic erosion of regional broadcasting that began over a decade ago.

The revival is welcome, but the wounds inflicted by the policy decisions of 2014, 2019, and 2023 remain deep and unhealed. The decline began in 2014 with the shutdown of Yavavani, a platform that nurtured youth talent, followed by a gradual decay of regional shortwave transmitters. However, the most devastating blow came

in 2019 with the "rationalisation" orders. In one fell swoop, we saw the shutdown of The North Eastern Service (NES) of Akashvani on shortwave radio, the closure of the National Channel, and the shuttering of Regional Academies of Broadcasting and Multimedia (RABMs) in five cities, including here in Shillong. It has been six years since the NES shortwave transmitter fell silent. The towers, as of May 2023, stand as silent sentinels, prone to weather and rust, while the station continues to broadcast on FM with a 100W transmitter, which cannot reach the entire Northeast India.

It is deeply frustrating to observe that while External Services shortwave transmitters were spared and upgraded, domestic regional transmitters were left to rot. This disparity suggests that the broadcaster cares more about its image abroad than serving its own citizens in remote areas. The Northeast Indian region is a terrain where FM coverage is often patchy and shortwave was the only reliable connector. Akashvani Kurseong faced a similar fate with their shortwave transmitter but an upgrade was planned—to install a new 50kW shortwave

Meghalaya and the BJP: Beyond Coalition Politics, Toward a Strategic Alternative

By Divesh Ranjan

As 2025 draws to a close, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) remains the principal governing force in India, either independently or as part of coalitions in over twenty States and Union Territories. In the Northeast, the party has consolidated its presence by leading governments in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, and Tripura, while sharing power with regional allies in Meghalaya, Nagaland, and Sikkim. Mizoram remains the only Northeastern state outside the BJP's political orbit, while Manipur continues under President's Rule following prolonged unrest.

Against this broader national backdrop, Meghalaya occupies a uniquely sensitive and strategic position. Though part of the ruling coalition, the BJP continues to be perceived as a secondary player—present in government, yet peripheral in political influence. This contradiction presents both a challenge and a significant opportunity.

Why Meghalaya Matters
Meghalaya's relevance extends well beyond electoral arithmetic. The state shares a porous 442-kilometre international border with Bangladesh, making it critical from the standpoint of internal security and border infrastructure. Conventionally, border states have benefited from alignment with the party in power at the Centre, particularly in areas requiring close institutional coordination.

Socially and politically, Meghalaya presents a distinct test case. With over three-fourths of its population following Christianity, the state challenges the BJP to evolve from being perceived as ideology-driven to demonstrating inclusive, plural governance. Success here would not merely be a state-level breakthrough; it would offer a template for engagement with Christian-majority regions across the Northeast and beyond.

A Political Vacuum and a Floating Electorate

For decades, Meghalaya's politics were anchored by the Indian National Congress. Its steady organisational decline has created a vacuum that regional parties have attempted to fill. While these formations have captured voter discontent, many lack institutional depth, governance experience, and long-term cohesion. The recent rise of new political platforms reflects dissatisfaction rather than ideological consolidation.

An estimated 20 percent of Meghalaya's electorate remains politically fluid and open to alternatives that promise stability, development, and credible leadership. Unlike deeply polarised

states, Meghalaya's tradition of collective consciousness allows such shifts to occur more organically. This space remains underutilised by national parties.

The BJP's Present Reality
The BJP's presence in Meghalaya is limited but instructive. The party's two senior legislators, A.L. Hek and Sanbor Shullai, have won multiple terms from urban Shillong constituencies, demonstrating that strong local leadership can overcome broader perception barriers. However, this success also exposes a structural weak-

ness: the party's reliance on individual leaders rather than a robust grassroots organisation. Electoral data reinforces this concern. The BJP's vote share has hovered around 9–10 percent for over a decade, declining marginally from 9.7 percent in 2018 to approximately 9.3 percent in 2023. Despite sustained resource deployment and

failure of proactive engagement by the party's state leadership. The prolonged crisis in Manipur has further complicated perceptions, raising broader concerns about conflict management and governance responsiveness in the region.

A Moment of Strategic Opportunity

Recent political churn in Meghalaya suggests voter

"Socially and politically, Meghalaya presents a distinct test case. With over three-fourths of its population following Christianity, the state challenges the BJP to evolve from being perceived as ideology-driven to demonstrating inclusive, plural governance. Success here would not merely be a state-level breakthrough; it would offer a template for engagement with Christian-majority regions across the Northeast and beyond."

restlessness rather than rejection. Simultaneously, shifting regional alignments, particularly the National People's Party's evolving stance within the North-East Democratic Alliance, have altered coalition equations. These developments create space for the BJP to rethink its role, moving beyond coalition dependence toward building an independent

coalition participation, the party has failed to meaningfully expand its electoral footprint. Missed opportunities, including the inability to adequately support potential mass leaders, point to strategic and organisational shortcomings at the state level.

The Trust Deficit and the 'Image Trap'

The BJP continues to face a trust deficit among large

"The party's two senior legislators, A.L. Hek and Sanbor Shullai, have won multiple terms from urban Shillong constituencies, demonstrating that strong local leadership can overcome broader perception barriers. However, this success also exposes a structural weakness: the party's reliance on individual leaders rather than a robust grassroots organisation. Electoral data reinforces this concern. The BJP's vote share has hovered around 9–10 percent for over a decade, declining marginally from 9.7 percent in 2018 to approximately 9.3 percent in 2023."

errors happen. We frequently experience "no transmission" or dead air because the transmitters are not switched on or off correctly due to fatigue. Biology dictates that humans need 7 to 9 hours of sleep, a fact the policymakers in New Delhi seem to have forgotten. Expecting staff to function without adequate rest is not just poor management, it is sadistic. It creates a scenario where we lose local programming to a relay that often fails to transmit anyway. The dilution of content extends beyond technicalities. The removal of secular, inclusive programmes like Sehar Gahi (which covers religious content like The Quran and The Gita segments) in 2019 and the rebranding of "All India Radio" to "Akashvani" in 2023 signal a move toward homogenisation that disrespects the diverse cultural fabric of India.

If Prasar Bharati is serious about its mandate, it must do more than just restore FM channels. Firstly, it must Revive The North Eastern Service on Shortwave by upgrading the infrastructure to a 50kW analogue transmitter with DRM simulcasting to ensure high-quality, long-distance coverage. Secondly,

stop the FM Gold Relay on FM Jangphri but if a relay is necessary, it must be FM Rainbow Delhi, or better yet, allow the station to close down at its original time to allow staff to rest.

Lastly, respect the identity of regional stations because the distinct signature tunes and local flavour are not inefficiencies to be "rationalised" but heritage to be protected. The restoration of FM Jangphri and others in 2025 was a victory for listeners, but if the programming is foreign to the region and the transmission relies on exhausted engineers, it is a hollow victory. This current state leaves no room for interpretation other than a blatant and shameless subjugation of regional identity.

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh
Lawai,
Via email

Need for a dedicated State University for Teacher's Education

To achieve the vision of Viksit Bharat @2047, I urge the Education Ministry to consider establishing a dedicated university for Teacher Education in Meghalaya. This would secure our students' future and contribute to the state's educational development.

Yours etc.,
Krishnendu Deb,
Via email

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Editor,
I take this opportunity

From coal to clean

How sustainable energy can power growth & cut carbon in developing nations

Ali Usman Muhammad

Every morning in India, the rising sun illuminates millions of solar panels quietly converting light into power. Across villages and cities, a silent energy transformation is underway. Developing nations are increasingly turning to sustainable energy not only to combat climate change but also to unlock economic opportunity, as renewable sources reshape how countries grow and function.

For decades, economic growth in developing countries has come at a heavy environmental cost. Rapid industrialization and urbanization have driven rising energy demand, largely met through coal and oil, among the most carbon-intensive fuels. India reflects this dilemma clearly. It is the world's third-largest carbon dioxide emitter, responsible for roughly 7 percent of global emissions, yet millions of citizens still lack reliable electricity. This coexistence of high emissions and energy poverty shows why the energy transition is not a luxury but a necessity. Sustainable energy offers a path to expand access without worsening the climate crisis, bringing science, innovation, and development together.

India's energy challenge is one of scale and urgency. As one of the fastest growing economies in the world, the country must meet the rapidly rising electricity demand of its economy driven by population growth, urban expansion, and industrial development. Historically, coal has formed the backbone of India's power sector, supplying affordable power but at great environmental and public health costs, which include severe air pollution in major cities and persistent respiratory disease for its urban population. At the same time, many rural and peri urban communities continue to experience unreliable or insufficient electricity supply. Balancing economic growth, energy security, and environmental sustainability has therefore become one of India's defining policy challenges.

Solar energy has emerged as a practical and scalable response to India's energy challenge. With abundant sunlight, the country has used solar power to diversify its energy mix and reduce reliance on fossil fuels. Over the past decade, India's solar capacity has grown more than forty times, from around 3 gigawatts in 2014 to nearly 130 gigawatts by 2025, placing it among the world's largest solar markets. Large-scale solar parks, rooftop installations, and decentralised mini-grids have expanded electricity access, especially in remote regions where grid extension is difficult and costly. Initiatives such as the National Solar Mission have accelerated this shift, making solar energy a central pillar of India's energy strategy.

India's progress in solar energy extends beyond just domestic deployment. In 2015, India co-founded the International Solar Alliance (ISA) with France, positioning itself as a global leader in advancing solar energy for climate vulnerable regions. Headquartered in Gurugram, the ISA now brings together more than 125 member countries, most of them from the Global South. Its goals are ambitious: mobilising up to one trillion US dollars in solar investment by 2030, supporting the installation of 1,000 gigawatts of solar capacity, and expanding clean energy access to one billion people worldwide.

Through policy guidance, technical assistance, and capacity building programmes, the ISA enables developing nations to overcome financing and technological barriers, allowing them to improve from fossil fuel dependent economy development pathways. The science behind renewable energy is simple yet powerful. Solar panels, much like leaves, convert sunlight directly into electricity through the photovoltaic effect, producing power without combustion, smoke, or greenhouse gas emissions. Wind turbines generate electricity by harnessing moving air, while hydropower uses flowing water to spin turbines. Unlike coal-fired plants, which release large amounts of carbon dioxide and cause severe pollution, renewable sources emit little to none during electricity generation. Even when life-cycle emissions are considered, solar and wind remain far cleaner than fossil fuels. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, electricity from solar and wind produces less than 5 percent of the carbon emissions per kilowatt-hour compared to coal-based power. In 2023 alone, renewable energy prevented

an estimated 2.5 billion tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions globally.

For developing nations, the benefits of renewable energy extend well beyond emission reduction. Clean energy technologies bring electricity to rural and underserved communities where traditional grid expansion is costly or impractical. In India, decentralised solar systems and mini-grids now power schools, healthcare centres, and small businesses, while training programmes are equipping rural women with green skills and livelihood opportunities. Clean energy also helps address India's severe air pollution crisis, which causes over 1.6 million premature deaths each year and heavy economic losses. Reducing reliance on coal therefore delivers immediate public health benefits alongside long-term climate mitigation.

The clean energy transition also delivers strong economic benefits. Unlike fossil fuel power plants, which require limited labour once operational, renewable energy systems create jobs across design, manufacturing, installation, and maintenance. Globally, the sector employs over 13 million people, with Asia leading job growth. In India, solar and wind industries have already generated hundreds of thousands of green jobs across technical, managerial, and entrepreneurial roles. Expanding domestic manufacturing of solar panels and batteries can further boost local industries, reduce import dependence, and strengthen the economy. In rural areas, access to clean power supports irrigation, cold storage, and mechanised farming, improving productivity and farmer income.

Despite its promise, the transition to renewable energy faces challenges, including high upfront costs, limited financing, weak grid infrastructure, and the intermittent nature of solar and wind power. However, rapid technological advances are easing these constraints. Battery storage costs have fallen by nearly 90 percent over the past decade, while improvements in smart grids, hybrid systems, and emerging technologies such as green hydrogen are strengthening grid stability and reliability. With supportive policies and sustained investment, these barriers are becoming increasingly manageable.

India's experience offers valuable lessons for other developing nations. By aligning long term policy vision with falling technology costs, private sector participation, and international cooperation through platforms like the International Solar Alliance, India has demonstrated that rapid clean energy expansion is achievable even in resource constrained settings. More importantly, its transition shows that climate action and economic development do not have to be competing goals. Instead, clean energy can serve as a powerful driver of inclusive growth, energy security, and social progress. Countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America facing similar challenges can adapt India's approach to their own local contexts.

Ultimately, the shift to sustainable energy is about more than reducing carbon emissions. It represents a pathway toward healthier populations, resilient economies, and equitable development. Every solar panel installed and every wind turbine constructed contributes to cleaner air, stronger communities, and a more sustainable future. For developing nations, the evidence is clear: investing in clean energy supports affordable electricity, decent work, and climate action simultaneously.

The world now stands at an energy crossroads. Continuing dependence on fossil fuels risks locking in polluted skies, widening energy inequalities gaps, and accelerating climate change impact. Embracing sustainable energy, on the other hand, offers a cleaner and fairer alternative, one in which scientific progress fuels human progress. For countries like India, the energy transition is not just an environmental essential but an economic opportunity. By choosing clean energy today, developing nations can power growth while protecting both people and the planet.

The sun shines equally on all nations. The challenge, and the opportunity, is ensuring that its power does too.

(The writer is First Year B.Tech Student at Plaksha University, Mohali)

Inside scoop: The 2,500-year history of ice-cream

We all scream for ice-cream, especially as temperatures soar in the summer season. Ancient civilisations had the same desire for a cold, sweet treat to cope with heat waves. There are plenty of contenders claiming credit for the first frozen desserts, from Italy and France in the 17th century to China in the first century. But before you can make ice-cream, you need a reliable source of ice. The technology to make and store ice was originally developed in Persia (modern-day Iran) in 550 BCE.

Ancient ice makers

These ancient Persians built large stone beehive shaped structures called yakhchal ("ice pit"). They were constructed in the desert, with deep, insulated subterranean storage, making it possible to store ice all year.

High domes pulled hot air up and out, and wind catchers funnelled cooler air into the base. The yakhchal was not just an ancient ice house, it was also an ice maker.

Canals filled shallow ponds, shaded from the sun, with fresh water during the winter. Overnight temperatures dropped, and in the dry desert air the water would cool through evaporation.

Some yakhchals have survived centuries of desert erosion, and are found across Iran in areas where it is cold enough to produce ice in the winter, or close to mountains where ice could be harvested.

A study of one 400-year-old yakhchal, still standing in Meybod, estimated its annual production at 50 cubic metres - about 3 million ice cubes.

Early frozen desserts

Stored ice was used to make frozen desserts such as fruit sorbets, sharbats, and faloudeh (frozen rosewater and vermicelli noodles) sweetened with honey syrup.

After the Arab conquest of Persia circa 650 CE, the Persian method for ice production and storage spread across the Middle East.

The new technology was used to freeze milk and sugar mixed with safflower flour (powdered orchid root) and mastic (dried sap from an evergreen bush) to make stretchy forms of ice-cream in Syria, like booz and bastani, in Persia.

A frozen dessert, sushan, (literally "crispy mountain") was also developed in China in this period, during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). Goat's milk curd was melted, strained and poured into metal moulds shaped like mountains to create the dessert.

The final texture was described by poet Wang Lingran as being somewhere between a liquid and a solid, melting in his mouth.



Discovering the science of freezing

Freezing techniques changed when a popular book on "natural magic" - meaning everything from natural science to astrology and alchemy - was first published by Giambattista della Porta

in Naples in 1558.

Magia Naturalis included instructions on how saltpetre (potassium nitrate) could be added to ice to rapidly chill wine for summer feasts: cast snow into a wooden vessel, and strew into it Salt-peter, powdered, or the cleansing of Salt-peter, called

vulgarly Salazzo. Turn the Vial in the snow, and it will congeal by degrees.

This method meant it was much easier to freeze liquids, because potassium nitrate dissolved in water draws heat out of the surrounding environment.

Experiments in the 17th century revealed a similar reaction occurs with mixture of ordinary salt, water and ice. Smaller quantities of stored ice could now be used to freeze and chill mixtures to create frozen desserts on demand.

This technology was combined with supplies of cheaper sugar sourced from European plantations in the Caribbean. Sugar is an important element of frozen desserts because it keeps mixtures from freezing into impenetrable ice blocks.

France v Italy in the claim for first ice-cream. Two claims for the "first" ice-cream recipes emerge at almost the same time in France and Italy in the 1690s.

Earlier attempts produced granular, slushy confections. Recipes that produced frozen results we would recognise today as ice-cream were introduced by men who managed households for noble patrons.

Alberto Latini, working for Cardinal Barberini (nephew of Pope Urban VIII), had access to expensive and novel ingredients, like chocolate and tomatoes. His recipe for a new "milk sorbet" aligned with the cutting edge cooking methods in the 1694 edition of his book, Lo Scälco alla Moderna (The Modern Steward).

This recipe used milk, sugar, water and candied fruits, and is considered a precursor to Italian gelato.

The other contender for first ice-cream is Nicolas Audiger, who had worked for Jean-Baptiste Colbert, chief minister to Louis XIV, who helped prepare feasts at Versailles.

He published a handbook on running noble households, La maison réglée, in 1692 with numerous recipes for fruit sorbets, and one for ice-cream sweetened with sugar and flavoured with orange blossom water.

While both claims have merit, Audiger's recipe included detailed descriptions of the techniques for stirring and scraping to ensuring a better texture and even distribution of sugar throughout the mixture. He wrote his volume after spending 18 months in Italy, so he probably learned Italian techniques and refined them, leading to the creamy delights we now enjoy.

The ice-cream paradox?

In the northeastern United States, the original Ben and Jerry's ice-cream factory in Vermont used to run a promotion where prices changed as the weather got colder. As temperatures dropped below freezing, ice-cream cones got cheaper. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambhani

Sunday, JANUARY 4, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon conjunct Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give fantastic results. It will turn out to be an amazing year. You will appear far more assured and wiser. You will enjoy your work. The projects that you have been thinking of getting completed would see the light of the day. You would be man with the midas touch. You will be able to win a big order for your concern. Your name and fame will spread far and wide. People will start taking notice of you. And you will be able to convince them too. You would be invited to social gatherings and new contacts would be developed. You will have numerous business opportunities too. A female person might prove lucky for you and may be a source of comfort. Your brothers/sisters would support you and will be a source of inspiration. Financial position would be good.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) There will be improvement in your financial condition. And your business will improve. You will also undertake business-related trips and get a chance to meet lot of new people. You will be happy and at ease. Your carefree attitude will win you new admirers. Jupiter orbit in your horoscope will keep your health in the best condition. The doors of fate are open for you, and you will rise in your field of work. The time is good; take advantage of it. Though you will be kept occupied by different matters, you will adopt a helpful attitude in your office and with your friends. It is right time to show your talents. You will also settle disputes and problems peacefully.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is going to be a very favorable week for financial and love matters. You will be in best position to take advantage of a very favorable period. You will do the best of work now. And get the desired success. You will also take tours due to your job/business purpose. You will also enjoy perfect understanding and bonding with your mate. He/she will be a source of inspiration and will keep on guiding you. You could also get involved in a new romantic relationship. 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 recollect some good memories. Students will perform well in exams/interviews.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) Your influence and prestige will grow. You will also recollect some good memories. Your prestige in society will increase. And your deeds will bring lot of name and fame. You will have kindness and pity for the sick and needy. It is a very good time for financial gains. Some new guests will arrive at your home and will keep you busy. Students will work hard and get desired results. You need to introspect and analyze yourself. It is time to become a bit vocal and express your feelings. You need to bring about a change in your communication and behavior. It will help you in meeting challenges of life well. Your friends and family members will keep supporting you.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a favorable week. Your physical health is going to be very good. You will make good gains in your business. Your progress in job/work is going to be praiseworthy. There are going to be no major financial worries. You will try and keep your family away from all problems. You will also get blessings of your elders. Changes in plans will be helpful. You will be on the lookout for various alternatives in career. Keep away from interfering in other people's affairs. You will also buy new gifts for your dear ones. You will also attend a family function. There is possibility of work related to land, building etc. being completed.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your well-executed plans will bring in lot of money. You will have sudden gains. Your efforts will also bear fruit. You will meet people with the same thinking. You will also pay attention to sports and entertainment. You will work hard and make progress in business/job. You will also enhance your knowledge. Some happy moments will come in your life. You will be able to take everybody with you. Housewives and working women will pay attention to their families. You will top in some interview. There will be some enthusiastic activity in family life. You will be full of vigour and energy. Pending matters will gather momentum. Relations with siblings will be perfect. Your opponents will try to dominate but not get success.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) Things are looking up again for you this week. A dispute that has been going on for long will get resolved with the help of a third person. It will bring you lot of relief. Possibility of some journey with your family is there.

You will be appreciated for your contribution to your society and workplace. Your opponents will be active but will not be able to face you. You will also fulfill your family responsibility well. The time is in your favor. You will be able to make a separate identity for yourself on the basis of your talents. Officials will be influential by your style of working. It is an ideal time to realize your dreams. There will be improvement in the health of elderly. You will be successful in a competitive exam.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will have a desire to excel in your work/job. You will be successful in your efforts. You will also be able to make new contacts which will prove very profitable for you. A chance meeting with an influential person will open the doors of destiny for you. You will also plan a major expansion of your business. You will get success in matters related to heart. Your dreams will come true. The help of successful persons will prove beneficial in difficult situations. You will be able to pay attention to your career along with having a good time. Your behavior towards others will be friendly. You will receive good news from somewhere.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The beginning of the week will start with money inflow. Your financial position will get better. You will also establish a good working relationship with your bosses. Your investments will fetch you good gains. Couples will have cordial relations. You will be able to establish yourself in office with your hard work and dedication. Initially you will have to make a lot of sacrifices in your career. There will be struggles too but later you will get success. Everyone will take advice from you. You will also have a feeling of dedication. Your spouse will have good bonding with you. You will never let your objectives go out of sight. You will face opposing things with confidence. You will be absorbed in yourself and be able to establish coordination amongst things.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) It is a wonderful week. Your relations with closed ones will improve. You will also enjoy good food in a restaurant. You will also purchase a new property. It is time to leave some of your old ideas and bring new energy and thinking into your personality. Legal matters will be resolved with the mediation of someone. The middle of the week will be peaceful. Some new thoughts may come to you. You will also complete your work with sincerity. The atmosphere at home will be happy. Students will get admission in institutes/courses of their own choice. You will do meditation and religious work. You will make a business trip that will be very satisfying.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) An exciting week is in store for you ahead. Due to influence of Mars on your Zodiac, you will show a lot of zeal and zest in your work. Through hard work and grit, you will get what you had desired for. You will get great speed or response in your work. At this time someone else may try to take credit for your work but you will not allow it to happen. Emotionally you will be strong. Hurdles will get removed and you will get success in studies. Dedication and commitment towards your goals will take you far. Keep control over your rising expenses. You will also get success in welfare/charitable works.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) This week is a success granting week. You will make a very good start and keep getting success. Your efforts will be praiseworthy. This will make you feel delighted. Your work planning will take you towards success. The time will fetch you great rewards. There will be an increase in your work potential. All the problems in your profession will be sorted out. Business will prosper and flourish. You will spend it on renovation of house. Meeting with an important personality will be rewarding for you. You will finish work related to higher education and research and children related work. You will get good rewards for your efforts.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is an extraordinary week for you. All your planned work will be completed. You will also make good profits in business. Government related work will get done. You could also get a promotion in your job. But you will be getting the opportunities to rise. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. Those who are single will get good marriage proposals. You will also meet a top personality. It will open the doors of progress for you. You will be lost in your world and thinking. But this is an ideal time to make the perfect move. We must grab the opportunity when it matters most. Your children will make you feel happy with their performance.

Braces: Why our ancestors didn't need straight teeth

Ancient Egyptians and Etruscans pioneered orthodontics, using delicate gold wires and catgut to straighten teeth. It's a tale that has appeared in dentistry textbooks for decades, portraying our ancestors as surprisingly modern in their pursuit of the perfect smile. But when archaeologists and dental historians finally scrutinized the evidence, they discovered that most of it is myth.

Take the El-Quatta dental bridge from Egypt, dating to around 2500BC. The gold wire found with ancient remains wasn't doing what we thought at all. Rather than pulling teeth into alignment, these wires were stabilising loose teeth or holding replacement ones in place. In other words, they were functioning as prostheses, not braces.

The gold bands discovered in Etruscan tombs tell a similar story. They were probably dental splints designed to support teeth loosened by gum disease or injury, not devices for moving teeth into new positions.

There are some rather compelling practical reasons why these ancient devices couldn't have worked as braces anyway. Tests on Etruscan appliances revealed the gold used was 97 per cent pure, and pure gold is remarkably soft.

It bends and stretches easily without breaking, which makes it useless for orthodontics. Braces work by applying continuous pressure over long periods, requiring metal that's strong and springy. Pure gold simply can't manage that.

Try to tighten it enough to straighten a tooth and it will deform or snap.

Then there's the curious matter of who was wearing these gold bands. Many were found with the skeletons of women, suggesting they might have been status symbols or decorative jewellery rather than medical devices. Tellingly, none were discovered in the mouths of children or teenagers - exactly where you'd expect to find them if they were genuine orthodontic appliances.

But perhaps the most fascinating revelation is this: ancient people didn't have the same dental problems we face today.

Malocclusion - the crowding and misalignment of teeth that's so common now - was extremely rare in the past. Studies of Stone Age skulls show almost no crowding. The difference is down to diet.

Our ancestors ate tough, fibrous foods that required serious chewing. All that jaw work developed strong, large jaws perfectly capable of accommodating all their teeth.

Modern diets, by contrast, are soft and processed, giving our jaws little exercise. The result? Our jaws are often smaller than those of our ancestors, while our teeth remain the same size, leading to the crowding we see today.

Since crooked teeth were virtually non-existent in antiquity, there was hardly any reason to develop methods for straightening them.

That said, ancient people did occasionally attempt simple interventions for dental irregularities. The Romans provide one of the earliest reliable references to actual orthodontic treatment.

Aulus Cornelius Celsus, a Roman medical writer in the first century AD, noted that if a child's tooth came in crooked, they should gently push it into place with a finger every day until it shifted to the correct position. Although basic, this method is built on the same principle we use today - gentle, continuous pressure can move a tooth.

After the Roman era, little progress occurred for centuries. By the 18th century, however, interest in straightening teeth had revived, albeit through some rather agonising methods.

Those without access to modern dental tools resorted to wooden "swelling wedges" to create space between overcrowded teeth. A small wedge of wood was inserted between teeth. As saliva was absorbed, the wood expanded, forcing the teeth apart. Crude and excruciating, perhaps, but it represented a step towards under-

standing that teeth could be repositioned through pressure.

Scientific orthodontics

Real scientific orthodontics began with French dentist Pierre Fauchard's work in 1728. Often called the father of modern dentistry, Fauchard published a landmark two-volume book, The Surgeon Dentist, containing the first detailed description of treating malocclusions.

He developed the "bandeau" - a curved metal strip wrapped around teeth to widen the dental arch. This was the first tool specifically designed to move teeth using controlled force.

Fauchard also described using threads to support teeth after repositioning. His work marked the crucial shift from ancient myths and painful experiments to a scientific approach that eventually led to modern braces and clear aligners.

With advances in dentistry during the 19th and 20th centuries, orthodontics became a specialist field. Metal brackets, archwires, elastics and eventually stainless steel made treatment more predictable.

Later innovations - ceramic brackets, lingual braces and clear aligners - made the process more discreet. Today, orthodontics employs digital scans, computer models, and 3D printing for remarkably precise treatment planning.

The image of ancient people sporting gold and catgut braces is certainly appealing and dramatic, but it doesn't match the evidence.

Ancient civilisations were aware of dental problems and occasionally attempted simple solutions. Yet they had neither the necessity nor the technology to move teeth as we do now.

The real story of orthodontics doesn't begin in the ancient world but with the scientific breakthroughs of the 18th century and beyond - a history that's fascinating enough without the myths. (The Conversation)

Ancient African bedrock reveals violent beginnings of life on our blue planet

You have probably seen the images of the surface of Mars, beamed back by NASA's rovers.

What if there were a time machine capable of roaming Earth during its remote geological past, perhaps even going right back to its beginnings, beaming back pictures of similar quality?

This is not science fiction. In remote corners of the world, geologists have found tiny relics of Earth's very ancient surface.

I have been part of this scientific endeavour, looking at the treasure trove of information in the bedrock of the Makhonjwa Mountains in South Africa and the adjacent small kingdom of Eswatini.

These rocks reach back more than three quarters of the way through our planet's long history of nearly 4.6 billion years.

In my new book, *The Oldest Rocks on Earth*, I describe the graphic images "beamed back" by this geological time machine.

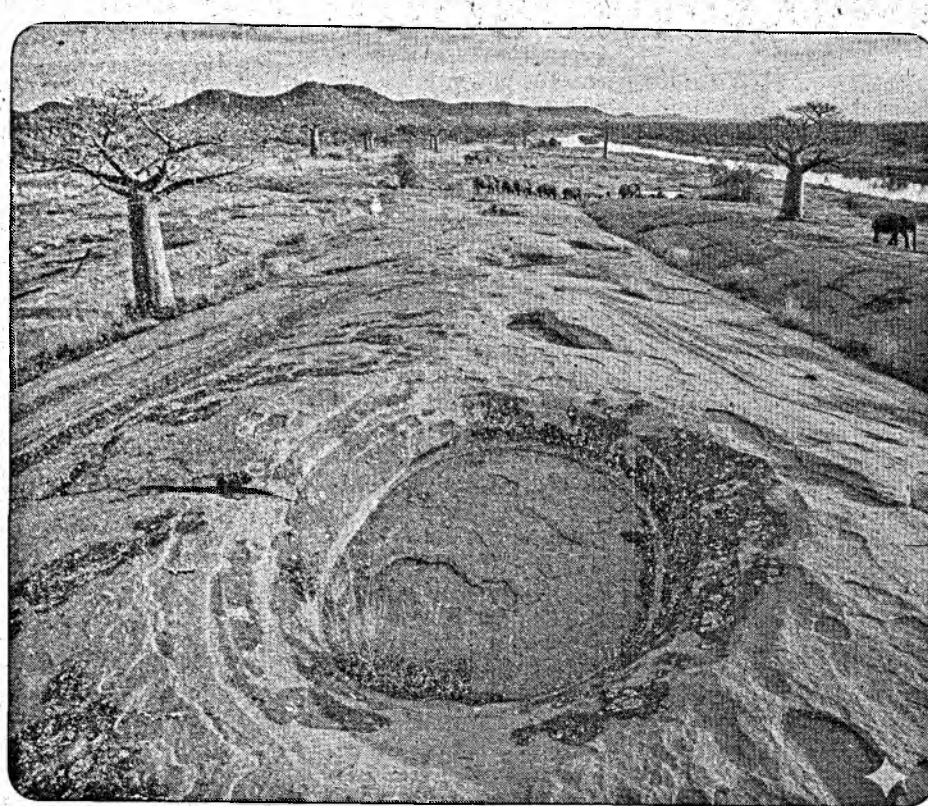
World of oceans

The ancient rocks reveal a world with extensive oceans and intense volcanic activity on the sea floor.

Deep beneath the crust, Earth was much hotter than today, giving rise to an unusual white-hot magma, rich in elements from its interior.

Huge volumes of superheated water continually gushed out of underwater cracks, building up chimneys of valuable metals. And life was thriving around these undersea vents.

Volcanic islands rose up from the ocean depths. These were dangerous places. Pools of hot bubbling mud dotted



AI generated photo

their shores, and clouds of volcanic ash periodically exploded from volcanic craters.

Life was already there, forming microbial mats in the sheltered nearshore waters.

Periodically, large earthquakes violently shook the bedrock, triggering submarine avalanches that cascaded down into the deep ocean, creating vast jumbles of rock on the sea floor.

Giant asteroid impacts disturbed this world, but crucially, did not extinguish it.

Deep-seated forces were pushing up new land, creating the early continents.

Ocean waves moved back and forth on sandy beaches along coastlines with bays, lagoons, inlets and estuaries, with tides similar to those today.

During floods, large riv-

ers brought muddy water from the continental interior. Farther in the distance, their headwaters drained a mountainous terrain, often enveloped in thick cloud.

It was a blue planet because, like today, the oceans scattered light in the blue part of the colour spectrum.

But the atmosphere contained a lethal cocktail of gases, including high concentrations of methane and carbon dioxide.

These greenhouse gases kept the surface at the right temperature for liquid water, at a time when astrophysicists calculate the Sun was much weaker. But there was no oxygen.

The earliest life forms were anaerobic microbes, although brightly coloured - pink or purple have been proposed.

Oceania today

Oceania, in the southwestern Pacific, may illustrate best what this early world was like.

Here, the ocean is peppered with volcanic islands and small continents, rocked by great earthquakes where tectonic plates rub against each other.

There are even clues to how life began

The 2022 eruption of the Hunga volcano, near Tonga, created a mushroom cloud of ash that burst out of the ocean and reached up into space with an estimated energy of a 60-megaton atomic bomb.

It generated more than 200,000 lightning strikes and left behind a deep underwater crater filled with a chemical soup derived from numerous underwater hot vents.

Experiments show that

lightning strikes can trigger the synthesis of basic organic molecules needed by living organisms.

Millions of Hunga-like eruptions on early Earth would have created myriad opportunities to kick start the chemistry of life in underwater volcanic craters - life was born out of extreme geological violence.

Staying blue

Going back in time beyond the Makhonjwa Mountains, we still find evidence for oceans, life and, I argue, plate tectonics. Earth became blue within the first tenth of its history.

Mars and Venus may have started this way, too

But our planet uniquely lies in the so-called Goldilocks Zone, receiving just the right amount of solar energy to avoid becoming a boiling Venusian hell or freezing Martian world.

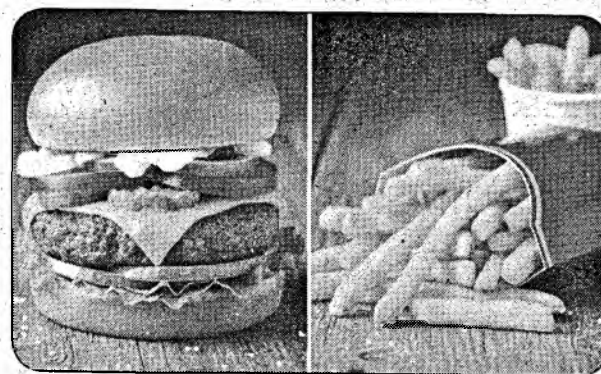
It is also big enough to have a magnetic field and pull of gravity sufficient to retain its atmosphere.

And right at the start, a dramatic collision with a Mars-sized asteroid spalled off our Moon, stabilising Earth's spin axis so that day and night were less extreme.

Finally, the biochemistry of living organisms may have played a key role in keeping Earth this way by helping the bedrock absorb greenhouse gases in the face of a steadily warming Sun.

We must not be the first to let Earth lose its distinctive life-giving blue, a colour so wonderfully referred to in the Siswati language of Eswatini as *luhlata lwesibhakabhaka*, literally "green like the sky". (The Conversation)

Can regular intake of fast foods lead to illnesses & death?



AI generated photo

Regular eating of fast foods, ranging from deep-fried snacks served as street food to quick-service restaurant chains, can cause serious damage to health, which can, in the long run, lead to several diseases, including cancer and cardiovascular conditions, contributing to death, said experts here on Saturday.

The doctors said this as social media was recently flooded with viral posts claiming that an 11th-grade student from Amroha district in Uttar Pradesh, admitted at the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi in December, died due to excessive consumption of junk food.

While the girl's family asserted that she was suffering from an intestinal infection that ultimately led to her death, media reports revealed that the girl was facing multiple health issues, including severe typhoid and complaints of tuberculosis.

Doctors at the AIIMS declared that her death resulted from cardiac arrest.

"While habitual excessive consumption leads to obesity, fatty liver, hypertension, and hyperlipidemia, it is definitely not a cause for perforation of the intestine," Dr. Rajeev Jayadevan, Ex-President of IMA Cochin and Convener of the Research Cell, Kerala,

told IANS.

"In a young Indian adult, in the absence of trauma, the main causes of intestinal perforation are duodenal ulcer, typhoid, tuberculosis, or severe appendicitis. The two main causes of ulcers of the stomach and duodenum are *Helicobacter pylori* infection and excessive intake of painkillers," he added.

Eating fast food is known to increase weight gain, cause inadequate nutritional intake, digestive issues, energy crashes, and mood swings.

These can contribute to obesity, diabetes and hypertension, and poor mental health, and more - all of which can lead to mortality in the long term. Studies have shown that fast food consumption is associated with "all-cause mortality," meaning a higher overall risk of dying early.

Unhealthy diets, including fast food, contribute to approximately 1.1 crore deaths worldwide annually. "Regular eating of fast food can silently damage the heart, liver, and blood vessels."

It leads to obesity, high sugar and high BP, increasing the risk of heart attack, stroke and sudden death - even in young people who appear otherwise healthy," Prof. Dr. Naresh Bansal, Dept of Gastro, at a leading Delhi-based hospital, said. (IANS)

Study warns of global threat of brain-eating amoebae in water

The free-living amoebae, also known as brain-eating amoebae, are becoming a growing global public health threat, warned a new study.

Climate change, ageing water infrastructure, and gaps in monitoring and detection are making the dangerous group of pathogens lurk freely in water and the environment, warned the team of environmental and public health scientists, in the article published in the journal *Biocontaminant*.

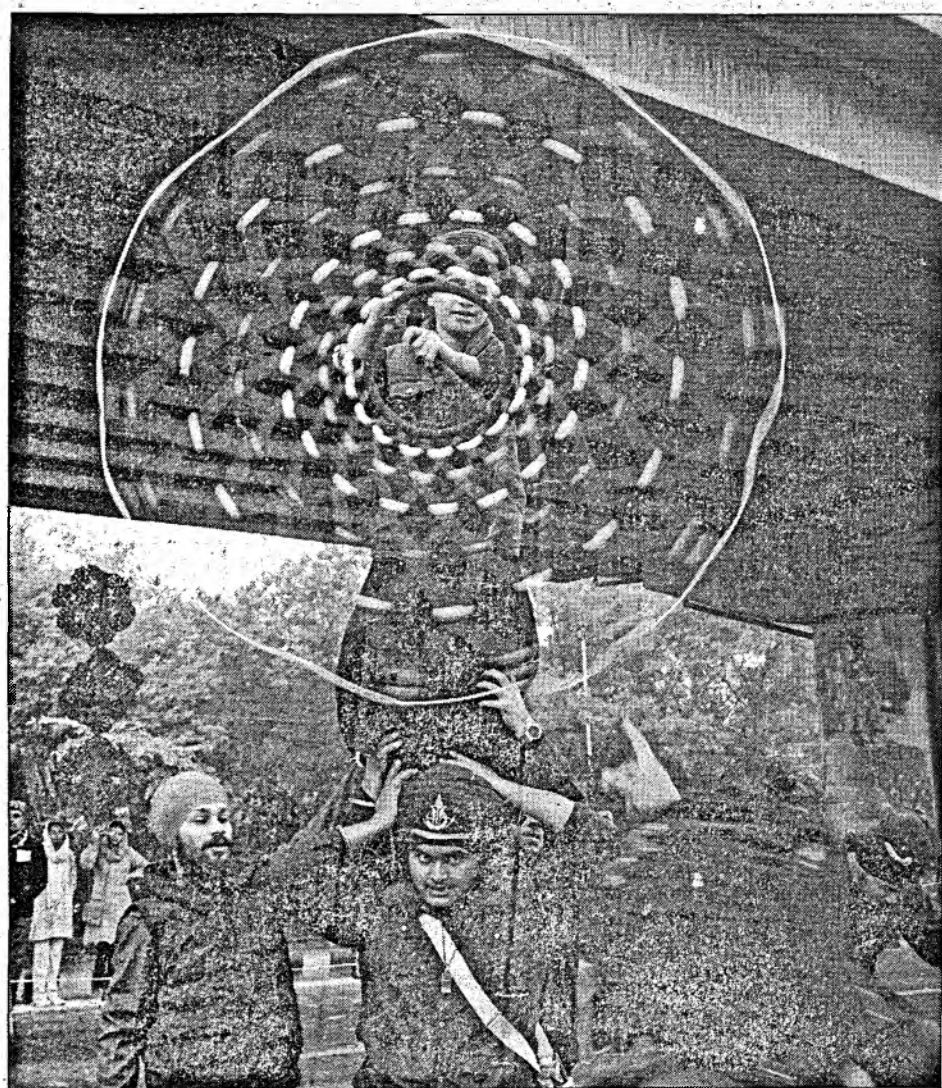
"What makes these organisms particularly dangerous is their ability to survive conditions that kill many other microbes," said corresponding author Longfei Shu of Sun Yat sen University, China.

"They can tolerate high temperatures, strong disinfectants like chlorine, and even live inside water distribution systems that people assume are safe," Shu added.

Amoebae are single-celled organisms commonly found in soil and water. While most are harmless, some species can cause devastating infections. Among the most notorious is *Naegleria fowleri*, often referred to as the brain-eating amoeba, which can trigger a rare but almost always fatal brain infection after contaminated water enters the nose during activities such as swimming. *Naegleria fowleri* has also contributed to several deaths in Kerala in the recent years.

The authors also emphasised that amoebae act as hidden carriers for other harmful microbes. By sheltering bacteria and viruses inside their cells, amoebae can protect these pathogens from disinfection and help them persist and spread in drinking water systems.

This so-called Trojan horse effect may also contribute to the spread of antibiotic resistance. (IANS)



Members of the Sikh community perform 'Gatka', the community's traditional martial arts, during a religious procession celebrating the birth anniversary of tenth Sikh Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, in Jammu on Saturday. (PTI)

Woman delivers baby girl on moving train

FARIDABAD, Jan 3: A woman was forced to give birth to a girl on a moving train near Old Faridabad railway station on Saturday after she went into premature labour, officials said.

The train was stopped at Faridabad Old Railway Station and the mother and the newborn were rushed to a hospital. Authorities said both of them are "completely safe".

The delivery was carried out with the help of other women present in the train. The woman was returning from Katra, Jammu with her husband for the delivery which was

due next month, police said.

"A woman delivered a baby on the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Katra-Jabalpur Express going from Jammu and Kashmir to Madhya Pradesh. At present, both the mother and the newborn are completely safe," said DSP Rajesh Chechi.

With the help of women police personnel of Railway Protection Force (RPF), Government Railway Police (GRP), they were taken to BK Hospital in Faridabad by ambulance. Police said the woman and the child are both safe. (PTI)

Mawlai Games and Literary...

(Contd from P-3) urged against stigma, while also highlighting the national toll-free helpline 1097 for confidential information and counselling.

The Mawlai Games and Literary Fest 2026 will continue over the coming days with sporting events, literary programmes and community activities.

14 Naxalites killed in C'garh encounters

SUKMA/BIJAPUR, Jan 3: In the first Naxalite encounter of 2026, at least 14 Maoists, including wanted ultras Vetti Mangdu and Madvi Hunga, were killed in separate encounters in Chhattisgarh's Sukma and Bijapur districts in the Bastar region on Saturday, officials said.

While 12 Naxalites, including Mangdu and Madkam, and five women, were neutralised by the security forces during an exchange of fire in Sukma, the bodies of two Maoist cadres were found in the forests of Gaganpalli village in Basaguda, Bijapur.

State Police unit, District Reserve Guard (DRG) had launched the anti-naxal operations based on inputs about the presence of Maoist cadres; a senior police official said.

Hailing the security personnel, Chief Minister

Vishnu Deo Sai said that due to the precise strategy, sustained pressure, and strong ground presence of the security forces, the Maoist network has been rapidly weakening.

The operation in the southern region of Sukma was launched on Friday night by the DRG. An exchange of fire broke out around 8 am in the forest of the Kistaram area, said Sukma Superintendent of Police Kiran Chavan.

"The bodies of 12 cadres, including five women, and automatic weapons were recovered from the encounter site," he said.

Two among them were identified as Vetti Mangdu, incharge of the Korta area committee of Maoists, and Madvi Hitesh alias Hunga, the secretary of the same formation, Chavan said, adding that the identity of the remaining cadres is yet to be

ascertained.

A cache of weapons, including AK-47, INSAS, and self-loading rifles, has been recovered from the encounter site.

Mangdu and Hunga were involved in several Maoist incidents, including an IED blast in Korta area in June last year in which then Additional Superintendent of Police (Korta) Akash Rao Girepunje was killed, Chavan said.

Girepunje was killed, and two other police officers were injured on June 9 when an IED planted by Naxalites exploded at a stone quarry near Dondra village.

During a separate operation in Bijapur, a gunfight broke out in a forest in the southern region of the district around 5 am, another official said, adding that the bodies of two Naxalites were recovered. Their identity is

yet to be established.

CM Sai, meanwhile, stated that trust, development, and security are new directions for Bastar, where peace, not violence, has now become the only option.

Decisive success has been achieved in the anti-Naxal operations conducted by security forces in Bijapur and Sukma districts, in which 14 Maoists were neutralised, he stated.

Bastar is now moving forward with new opportunities for development, investment, education, health, and employment. This transformation is the result of the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leadership of Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the indomitable courage and commitment of the security forces, a sensitive rehabilitation policy, and the unwavering trust of the people of the region,

he said.

He hailed the bravery of the security forces and congratulated all the personnel involved in the operation.

Those who are still choosing the path of violence should surrender, join the mainstream, avail themselves of the benefits of the government's rehabilitation policy, and live a life of dignity, Sai said, appealing to Naxalites to surrender.

Otherwise, the state government and security forces are fully capable and committed to fulfilling their responsibilities in accordance with the law and the Constitution, he added.

In 2025, a total of 285 Naxalites were gunned down in separate encounters with security forces in Chhattisgarh.

The Centre has set a deadline of March 31, 2026, for eradicating Left-Wing Extremism. (PTI)

NCC plans to train 1L cadets as 1st responders for disasters, raise 10,000 'cyber warriors'

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The National Cadet Corps (NCC) has planned to train one lakh cadets as first responders in the wake of natural disasters, and raise a group of 'cyber warriors' who can contribute to bolstering India's digital defence mechanism, a top official said on Saturday.

These will be integrated with the national database, Director General, NCC, Lt Gen Virendra Vats said during a press conference on the NCC's Republic Day Camp 2026 that began on December 30 at the Cariappa Parade Ground at Delhi Cantonment.

He announced that for the "first time, parade and contingent commanders of the NCC will march carrying a sword during the 2026 Republic Day Parade, "at par"

with the members of military contingents.

The officer also said the NCC has started work on raising four to five hubs across the country where select cadets can be trained on drone and counter-drone aspects.

A total of 2,406 NCC cadets, including 898 girls, from across the country are participating in the annual camp this year. More than 200 cadets from over 20 friendly foreign countries, including Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Bangladesh, Nepal and Malaysia, are also taking part.

The month-long camp features several inter-directorate competitions and events like the best cadet competition, small arms firing, marching contingent during the Republic Day

Parade at Kartavya Path, and flag area designing.

This year, 127 cadets from Jammu and Kashmir, and Ladakh Union territories, and 131 cadets from the Northeastern region are participating, officials said.

Lt Gen Vats, in response to a query, said the NCC plans to increase its strength from 17 lakh to 20 lakh in a phased manner, and "we plan to achieve it by 2028".

Girls cadets form 40 per cent of the total current strength, he added.

He also made a Power-Point presentation on the occasion outlining various future plans of the NCC.

In coordination with the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA), the NCC has planned to train as many as one lakh cadets

as "first responders" in the wake of any natural disaster, he said.

These cadets will be known as Yuva Apda Mitras, and they will be trained and linked with the national database, so that the services can be used by the nation in case of need in future, Lt Gen Vats said.

Furthermore, work is also in progress under a plan to raise 10,000 cadets as 'cyber warriors', "who can stand as a wall of digital defence, as today, the cyber domain is getting weaponised," he told reporters.

They will be integrated with the national database, too, the NCC DG added.

"The idea is to raise cadets who are disciplined, have leadership qualities and possess a spirit of adventure," he said. (PTI)

Cong to launch 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram' on January 10

NEW DELHI, Jan 3: The Congress on Saturday announced a nationwide 'MGNREGA Bachao Sangram' from January 10 to February 25 to demand the withdrawal of the VB G-RAM-G Act, and restoration of MGNREGA as a rights-based law, the right to work, and the authority of panchayats.

Addressing a joint press conference, Congress general secretaries K C Venugopal and Jairam Ramesh said through the new VBGRAM G Act, the Centre has ensured complete centralisation as "employment will no longer be a right under the new Act", which will be challenged in court.

On whether the states ruled by the INDIA bloc constituents would not implement the new Act or oppose it, Venugopal said the Congress would hold consultations. (PTI)

"Technology, like art, is a soaring exercise of the human imagination."
—Daniel Bell

The Shillong Times

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Aggressor again

AN "aggressor" tag is not new to the United States of America. That the US acts, de facto, as the global police, targeting those that are on its wrong side, has been well-documented. Adding to this, President Donald Trump got away with the worst provocation in geopolitical engagements on Saturday. The elected head of Venezuela, left-wing leader Nicolas Maduro, was dragged out of his bedroom along with his wife and then blindfolded and handcuffed in a US Naval ship before he was flown to New York by the elite Delta Forces of the American military. This was followed by Trump's declaration that the US would now run Venezuela. The stated charge is that the leftwing Venezuelan government was facilitating drug trafficking to the US. Notably, the US bombings on boats "carrying" drugs to the US shores had killed over 115 persons; and a US court has indicted Maduro on drug trafficking charges.

That the Venezuelan opposition, backed by the US, had accused Maduro of rigging in the parliamentary polls there also formed the backdrop for the present US offensive. Yet, the real reason for the present provocation appears to be Uncle Sam's greed to grab Venezuela's oil wealth — the world's largest, forming some 18 per cent of the total; and of which the country could tap only one per cent due to infrastructural inadequacies. Trump has stated as much and claims the US would now address this problem. It, however, matters little that Venezuela's traditional ally Russia has condemned Trump's action. Obviously, the US president chose a time when Vladimir Putin is seriously handicapped, caught as he is in a never-ending military conflict with tiny Ukraine. There's little that Russia can do now to protect Venezuela's territorial integrity. Nor can the United Nations step in or act effectively to help Maduro. The UN is proving to be increasingly ineffective in checking usurpations and recurrence of wars; and it's more ineffective when it comes to disciplining the US. Worse, Trump is a hard nut to crack. The US had gone hammer and tongs against Iraq and its long-serving leader Saddam Hussein at the start of this century, and unseated and liquidated him. Americans invaded Afghanistan after the World Tower bombing. Yet, in both countries, they eventually left governance in the hands of natives and quit for good.

What would happen now in Venezuela is worth a watch. Trump got back to power a year ago with an aggressive mindset. He had the gumption to call the Canadian prime minister "governor" Trudeau — the obvious hint being that he considered Canada a US province. The abrasive act of aggression on Venezuela takes global diplomacy to a new (pitiable) normal — a scenario of might is right. Norms of territorial integrity have been thrown to the winds. However, for a nation like India or China, the saving grace is their population bulge. No one can take them for granted. Yet, the Trump effect on India was there for all to see — in the abrupt end to India's Operation Sindoor, without it obviously achieving any end.

Thansa - the Proposal

By Prof Mahmood Alam

in the history of a Diaspora — marked by constant internal migration between hills, plains, valleys, and towns, and by inflows from outside the region, has reduced identity politics to a blunt binary now: indigenous old settlers (Assamese and the tribes) versus non-indigenous new settlers (Bangladeshis and Biharis).

Unlike alliances and coalitions in Assam, One Northeast explicitly disavows stewardship by national parties. It seeks not partnership but autonomy; not accommodation but negotiation from a position of collec-

achieved three critical objectives: it legitimized ethnic difference, decentralized governance, and redirected identity-based mobilizations into constitutional channels. However, it also entrenched autonomy as the primary mode of political expression, making regional consolidation structurally difficult.

The advocates of the present unity movement call for solidarity amongst all — the hills, the plains and the valleys. In this sense, One Northeast is less a rupture than a reprise — a second attempt to do what history made difficult the first time

"The political leaders from Meghalaya, Tripura, Assam, Manipur, Nagaland, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh, Sikkim — and voices linked to Darjeeling — stood together, and announced a bold proposition: the resurrection of thansa — unity. It is a call to transcend fragmentation without denying diversity. The leaders announced the formation of a nine-member committee, tasked with drafting the proposed party constitution. Weeks later, a rally in Agartala signaled the political project's outreach beyond the elites into the civil society."

tive strength. What ONE proposes is not another alliance but a full merger — a political unification with one flag, one constitution, one logo, and one philosophical compass. The idea is to fuse state-bound parties, pressure groups, and tribal fronts into a single negotiating force capable of exerting sustained pressure on New Delhi.

Every political idea and moment has a prehistory. The contemporaneous political and civil call for unity carries historical resonance. India in the northeast has never followed a uniform trajectory of development. Instead, it evolved through intersecting academic, constitutional, political, and economic interventions. Its progress has been uneven, shaped as much by history and geography as by governance.

Independent India's response to this inherited complexity was neither assimilationist nor isolationist, but constitutional. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, shaped by the Bordoloi Sub-Committee, institutionalized the autonomous district and regional councils as instruments of self-governance for tribal populations.

This framework sought to reconcile democratic integration with protection of land, language, culture, and identity. For political decision-makers, the Sixth Schedule

around. What distinguishes the present call for Thansa from earlier movements is its scale and ambition.

For the first time, the unity being imagined is not sectional but comprehensive — encompassing plains tribes, hill tribes, valley communities, and other indigenous populations across state boundaries. The proposal seeks unity at three levels simultaneously: among political leaders, in negotiations with the Centre, and in the aspirations of ordinary people.

The novelty of present endeavors lies not in its diagnosis but in its prescription. The clarion call of One Northeast insists that diversity need not condemn the region to permanent disunity, and that fragmented voices, when braided together, may yet speak with moral and political force.

It seeks oneness at three levels: the political oneness — ending rivalries among regional leaders through an outright merger of parties, the strategic oneness — negotiating with the Centre as a unified bloc to secure land, resource, and cultural protections, and the aspirational oneness — forging a shared future for the masses across linguistic, religious, and cultural divides without reliance on national parties.

In political economy terms, the project imagines

a single regional vanguard — something long desired but historically unattainable. For the first time, plains, hills, and valley tribes are being asked to see themselves as stakeholders in a common destiny rather than competitors for limited safeguards. Moreover, they are appealed to find the commonness rather than differences. It is an audacious recalibration of identity politics.

This is no small undertaking. India in the northeast is a mosaic of languages, religions, and historical experiences. To suggest that these can be harmonized under a single political platform does invite a sort of skepticism. Skeptics may dismiss the present civil and political movement for fraternity as romantic or utopian. Supporters may however counter that ambition is not a flaw but a necessity in a region shaped by peripheral neglect. Yet the advocates of One Northeast argue that beneath these differences lies a shared condition: a sense of being peripheral to national priorities, of being seen but not heard, counted but not consulted.

History offers ample cautionary tales of regional unity foundering on local rivalries. Yet to do so would be to underestimate the depth of regional discontent and the maturity of its political articulation. This movement emerges not from youthful idealism but from accumulated disappointment — from accords partially implemented, promises selectively honoured, and protections unevenly enforced.

In that sense, One Northeast is not merely a political project. It is an attempt to heal historical wounds, to stitch together a fractured region, and to finally complete an unfinished chapter in the democratic journey of integration of India in the northeast — the solidarity amongst tribes.

The insistence on adherence to constitutional guarantees, including the Eighth Schedule's recognition of linguistic diversity, signals that this is not a rebellion against the Indian state but a demand for its fuller realization. The movement insists on strict adherence to constitutional guarantees, including the protection of indigenous languages under the Eighth Schedule, and envisions contesting elections across all eight northeastern states — without alliances with national parties.

The movement seeks not separation but recalibration — a renegotiation of the terms of belonging. Whether this experiment matures into a durable political force remains to be seen. But as a narrative, it taps into a century-old yearning — for dignity, security, and voice of the periphery.

Bangladesh unrest - India's security and foreign policy dilemma

By R C Sharma

Bangladesh is on edge, gripped by state and fundamentalist sponsored unrest since the dethroning of Sheikh Hasina and insurrection of the interim administration of Muhammad Yunus. The current unrest in Bangladesh is laced with a heavy cocktail of anti-Indianism. This situation was avoidable, had India been correct in its foreign policy assessment of simmering discontent against Sheikh Hasina and not lent legitimacy to the 2018 and 2024 elections, which were termed not free and fair by US state department and other international observers.

Sheikh Hasina's democratic aberrations in the 2024 elections followed by the mass students' protests to force her to resign, were overlooked by India's foreign policy establishment. Mass protests forced Hasina to heed the Army's nudge to resign as a bargain for safe passage into India. India placed all its eggs in one basket, ignoring other political stakeholders and leaving limited space for engagement with future establishment, since a future political establishment in power is likely to be beset with anti-Indianism as the current trends indicate.

Had India nudged Sheikh Hasina to take all stakeholders into confidence for conduct of free and fair elections, she could have avoided the diplomatic and security dilemma Bangladesh faces today, wherein a peaceful and reliable eastern neighbour has turned rogue and disruptive affecting safety of minorities which is a highly emotive issue, also affecting external and internal security. It was this tunnel vision which has led to the current Indian isolation in Bangladesh and anti-minority rhetoric.

There are three main stakeholders in the current political landscape in Bangladesh, likely to pull the strings of power that India needs to harness. They are the Bangladesh Nationalist Party led by Acting chairman Tarique Rahman, National Citizens Party (NCP), and Pro-Pakistan jamaat-e-Islami (JeM). India needs to engage with all of them in the interest of peace and stability in the region. This engagement is a must to address civil unrest, security of minorities, infiltration, militancy, radicalization and illegal migration into the North East and stability of the Siliguri corridor. India needs to realize that the North East is separated from India by Bangladesh except for the very narrow Siliguri corridor. A stable, peaceful and developing Bangladesh is a win-win situation for India to access land trade and transit facilities providing supply stability to the North East. Imminent need for India is to engage with all political stakeholders and not repeat the mistake of storing all eggs in one basket and face unresolvable diplomatic and security dilemmas.

What are India's diplomatic and security dilemmas that it needs to address to improve relations with Bangladesh. The first is to address the aggressive narrative for handing over Sheikh Hasina to Bangladesh for facing trial. It is being used as a tool to stoke anti-India and anti-minority feelings. These are geo-political disruptions to fuel instability in the North East with new found ally Pakistan's ISI. India needs to wait and watch for a new government to take over the reins of power to address these issues since their unresolvable status affects India's clout as a regional player; affects border security and makes it difficult to counter extremist narratives.

India needs to address the Bangladesh dilemma at two levels of diplomacy and security: Diplomacy must involve aggressive engagement with Bangladesh and security must address porosity; deployment and operational handling of the Indo-Bangladesh border. Border security must address vulnerabilities of Indo-Ban-

gladesh border involving large temporarily manned riverine stretches, unfenced feasible and infeasible gaps, population ahead of fence which makes Indo-Bangladesh border one of the most hostile and difficult borders being managed through tactically unviable non-lethal strategy. Security also must have plans to address Pakistan and Chinese attempts to raise Bangladesh as a third front in case of conventional conflict which may involve preparing the Border Security Force to handle the Bangladesh front in case of such a conflict.

The interim administration has improved relations with Pakistan. Military cooperation, ISI footprints, relaxation in visa requirements for Pakistani citizens and resumption of flights has threatened India's security and strategic depth in South Asia and the Bay of Bengal with Bangladesh shifting towards the China-Pakistan axis.

India's security and foreign policy establishment needs to appreciate that India must engage in aggressive diplomacy to address Bangladesh concerns and assure it of consistent and unhindered political and economic support for peace, stability and development. This way it will be able to arrest Bangladesh's tilt towards Pakistan and China. As a confidence building measure it should restore trans-shipment services to Bangladesh for its export products via India.

Tarique Rahman, seen as the future Prime Minister immediately on return from exile while addressing people said that Bangladesh belongs to people of all faiths including Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists and Christians. This sentiment must be exploited by India for stability in relations with Bangladesh and strengthening border security. India needs to realize that security stakes for India in the region all along Indo-Bangladesh, Indo-Nepal, Indo-Bhutan and Indo-China border are very high with the Siliguri corridor locked within this quadrilateral which is the only land link between the mainland with the eight states. This vulnerability is further compounded with Chinese logistic and infrastructural presence in Bangladesh and its rebuilding of Lalmonirhat airbase in North Bangladesh close to the Siliguri corridor. Group of two as President Trump described USA and China along with common partner Pakistan is trying to dominate Bangladesh to reduce Indian dominance in the region and may be using the current unrest to create an anti-India narrative which India needs to be careful of. It must not rush into hurried security misstep which further isolates Bangladesh into Pakistan and Chinese lap.

India must appreciate that a stable and peaceful Bangladesh is a must for peace, prosperity and stability in India's North East. It not only provides the cushion and protection to India's North East but also its role as a player in the development of the North East becomes primary through land trade facilities with Bangladesh. It also becomes a facilitator in India's Act East Policy.

India must be careful and cautious in dealing with Bangladesh as a stable Bangladesh brings prosperity to India while a hostile Bangladesh becomes a launch pad to create another wave of unrest in the North East and to become a facilitator in the big game of power play to diminish and dilute Indian dominance in the region as the main player. Caution and patience must be the mantra for Indian diplomacy and security establishment without lowering guard on the security front.

(The writer is Commandant (Retd), Border Security Force)

Letters to the Editor

Beyond the Inner Line : Safeguarding indigenous futures in Meghalaya

Editor, Meghalaya, known for its pristine beauty and distinct tribal culture is also, a state grappling with deep-seated anxieties over its demographic future and the economic well-being of its indigenous communities. A persistent and growing demand across civil society and political spectrum is for the implementation of the Inner Line Permit (ILP). This demand is not merely a political slogan, but a reflection of fears that "outsiders" are encroaching upon limited job opportunities, leaving local tribals with few options beyond casual labour.

The ILP is a colonial-era travel document that regulates the entry of Indian citizens into protected states (currently Arunachal

Pradesh, Nagaland, Mizoram and Manipur). Its original purpose was colonial exclusion, but post-independence, it was re-purposed to protect the unique cultural identities and land rights of indigenous populations.

Meghalaya, once the administrative hub of the undivided Assam, remains the only major tribal-majority state in the region without the ILP.

While the Meghalaya Residents' Safety and Security Act of 2016 mandates registration for long-term visitors, pressure groups argue it lacks the regulatory power of a full ILP system.

The central argument for the ILP often ties directly to employment. Proponents argue that without a regulated influx of non-tribal workers from neighbouring states leads to intense competition for jobs, particularly in the private sector and in informal (misteri jobs). The narrative is that outsiders are often preferred, leaving qualified

local youth marginalized. Despite Meghalaya's job reservation policy that reserves 80% of state government posts for tribals, the concerns persist in the private sphere and entry-level positions where enforcement of such preferences is difficult. Groups like HITO and others point to a scenario where local concerns about economic disenfranchisement are real and immediate, thereby demanding a stronger protective legal framework.

Critics caution that the ILP could stifle tourism, a key economic driver for Meghalaya, and deter essential investment and skilled labour. However, the current government is actively exploring ways to incorporate "ILP-style safeguards" within the new central immigration and Foreigners Act 2025, a move they claim would be more effective in regulating entry and tackling illegal immigration from across the international border with Bangladesh.

The path forward for Meghalaya requires a careful

balance. Whether through a full ILP or an alternative, robust mechanism, the solution must address the legitimate anxieties of the indigenous people while ensuring that the state remains a welcoming and economically viable part of the Indian Union. The call from the ground is clear: protect identity and ensure local livelihoods before all else.

Yours etc.,
H.Umdor,
Shillong-8

Meaningful Development

Editor, Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw your kind attention to the callousness across our state (and also to the numerous such incidents including even killing of individuals in the past which has slowed down development. As a result Meghalaya is reeling under a serious crisis and this can be attributed primarily to the personalized politics and poor educational infrastruc-

ture. In today's life everyone is talking about development and they relate this to construction of roads, multi-storied buildings, shopping malls etc., whereas meaningful development is through educational enlightenment which in turn will promote individual freedom, empowerment and yield important developmental benefits.

Unfortunately, many of us, although we have undertaken the responsibility, have deviated from the supposed primary objective of ensuring quality education, affordability, free and fair education system and many more constructive approaches towards nation building. Education is integral to the growth and development of the human mind and also for expressive development. It will also be worth mentioning that even after 53 years of statehood Meghalaya does not have proper infrastructure to cater to the needs of educational institutions. It is also a fact that the Central Government has a vision to setup new educational institutions for Meghalaya and perhaps

many more in other fields but due to lack of initiatives these are yet to materialize.

Even hydro-electric projects have stagnated though our state is blessed with abundant power potential. Vision of a developed state will be a realised only when social illness is corrected and the present younger generation is empowered to do that through suitable social reforms for which they need to be good human beings first and this is possible only through appropriate education. Therefore, I sincerely appeal to those in government and those in charge of education to kindly resurrect the objectives and struggle for the welfare of students because today's students are the architects of tomorrow.

Long live Meghalaya!

Yours etc,
Krishnendu Deb,
Via email

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

"Learning never exhausts the mind."

— Leonardo da Vinci

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Security, acquisitions

AMIDST the worsening security scenario in the geopolitical region, India has embarked on a major tranche of defence procurements — worth nearly \$9 billion (Rs 790 billion). The deal cleared by the defence acquisition council chaired by defence minister Rajnath Singh in December 2025 involves purchase of missiles, rockets, radar systems, drones and support platforms, all of which are expected to strengthen the nation's defence capabilities across the three major spectrums — the Army, Navy and Air Force. India is facing growing threats to its integrity from multiple sources in the region, most notably from China, Pakistan and now even Bangladesh, not to speak of the terrorist outfits based out of Pakistan. China keeps giving pinpricks to India through its machinations along the northern border regions, as was evident in the Galwan Valley offensive and the confrontation that India had to have with the PLA in the eastern sector, very close to the sensitive Chicken's Neck region, vis-à-vis the Doklam stand-off. Simultaneously, China is allying with Pakistan in troubling India through several bilateral engagements between Beijing and Islamabad/Rawalpindi. To which is added a new security threat to India in the form of linkages between Bangladesh's interim government and Pakistani players, not excluding the ISI and Islamist forces. India now faces serious security threats from three sides — west, north and east. A lethal security linkage between the Pakistani and Bangladeshi militaries too cannot be ruled out.

India is being mindful of the increasing frenzy of the anti-India forces in the subcontinent and beyond. But it has not attempted to excessively hike its defence spend as the nation accords first priority to economic growth and welfare programmes that target the poor multitudes. Yet, India's defence budget is seeing a steady rise — the allocations growing from Rs 2.53 lakh crore in 2013-14 fiscal to Rs 6.81 lakh crore in 2025-26. Notably, emphasis is being given under the Modi dispensation for indigenization of defence production and procurements, with involvement of the native industrial giants. Development of indigenous platforms, new-age technologies, and defence corridors has been attempted at. The Make-In-India initiative has been having a major thrust on the defence sector. Indigenous defence manufacturing has seen a significant push with the country recording the highest ever defence production of Rs 1.27 lakh crore in 2023-24 — a rise of 174 per cent compared to Rs 46,429 crore in 2015. Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in the defence sector has been liberalized in 2020 to attract more external funds. Its response, however, has been limited.

The setting up of two dedicated defence industrial corridors, in Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu, has also helped in promoting the goal of this indigenization. It is common knowledge that defence procurements worth billions from external sources, mainly from the West, had in the past involved huge corruption through the commission raj. The Bofors deal was one example. Such commissions might still exist in hidden forms. Yet, when it comes to advanced technology, indigenization is not the answer; acquisitions in bulk from foreign sources would have to continue.

Development for whom? The unasked questions behind the Umiam deal

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

Look... I need to be honest here. When I first heard about the Taj coming to Umiam Lake, part of me felt proud. You know that feeling? When your state—your home—gets recognized by a big brand. When the Chief Minister stands there, hands over 66 acres, and everyone's talking about Rs 330 crores and "luxury tourism" and "putting Meghalaya on the map," it seems to make sense.

But then I started thinking. Really thinking. And the more I thought about it, the more questions came up. Questions that keep me awake at night. Questions that I think every citizen of Meghalaya deserves answers to.

Here's what bothers me most: Why does a government need to hand over public land—land that already has a functioning resort—to a private corporation?

I mean, let's pause here for a second. The Orchid Lake Resort exists. It's operational. It brings tourists. It employs people. People who've worked there for years—some for over a decade—cleaning rooms, cooking meals, maintaining boats, welcoming visitors to our beautiful state. So why couldn't the government invest that Rs 330 crore into upgrading what we already have? Why couldn't the Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation (MTDC)—which is supposed to be our tourism corporation—develop a five-star property itself?

Socrates used to walk around Athens asking uncomfortable questions. So here's my uncomfortable question: Is this deal about development... or is it about giving up?

Dr BR Ambedkar spent his life fighting for the rights of the marginalized. He understood something fundamental: when the state abdicates its responsibilities, it's always the most vulnerable who suffer first.

Right now, there are workers at Orchid Lake Resort—contractual workers—who've been told their jobs are ending. Not because they did anything wrong. Not because they're incompetent. But because their workplace is being demolished to make way for the Taj.

These aren't just statistics. These are real people. Fathers and mothers; people paying school fees. People with elderly parents. People who wake up every morning and do honest work.

And here's the thing that really gets me... nobody con-

sulted them. Nobody asked the union representing these workers: "Hey, how do we make this transition fair?" Nobody convened a meeting. Nobody even sent a formal notice.

Plato wrote about the ideal state—the Republic—where philosopher-kings would govern with wisdom and justice. But you know what the foundation of that ideal was? Dialogue. Consultation. The idea that good governance requires listening to all voices; not just the powerful ones.

Where's the dialogue here? Let me walk you through something that's been nagging at me.

The government says this project will "generate employment." Fine! But employment when? The construction will take three to five years. During those years, the existing workers are... what? Just supposed to survive on air?

And after construction? Sure, the Taj will hire people. But here's what they're not telling you: luxury hotels like Taj have standards. They'll bring in trained managers from other properties. They'll hire people with hospitality degrees from fancy colleges. They might—might—just hire some local workers for entry-level positions.

But the experienced staff who know Umiam, who know the local culture, who've been serving tourists for years? They're being shown the door.

Now compare that to what could have been: If MTDC had developed this property itself, those existing workers would have kept their jobs. They could have been trained to meet five-star standards. The profits would flow back to the state government—to us, the people—instead of to IHCL shareholders.

So again: Why privatize? Aristotle talked about the polis—the city-state—and how its purpose isn't just wealth creation, but human flourishing. The good life. He'd ask: Does this deal serve the flourishing of Meghalaya's people... or just the flourishing of private capital?

Here's another thing that troubles me deeply.

Back in November 2024, the MTDC workers' union submitted a detailed complaint to the then-Tourism Minister, Paul Lyngdoh. They documented serious issues like workers being paid below minimum wage. No overtime compensation. People hired as cleaners were

being asked to do managerial work without extra pay. There is no ESI or health scheme benefits, no provident fund. Above all there was violation of "equal pay for equal work."

You know what response they got? Nothing. Silence. Complete silence.

And now, instead of addressing these grievances, the government's solution is to... hand everything over to Taj and terminate these workers? That's not governance. That's abandonment.

Gandhi once said, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members." What does it say about us when we celebrate a luxury resort deal while ignoring the pleas of workers who built and maintained our existing tourism infrastructure?

I'm not against development. I'm not against the Taj. I'm not even necessarily against private investment in tourism. But I am against making decisions that affect thousands of lives without transparency, without consultation, without even considering alternatives.

So here are the questions I believe every MLA, every minister, every official involved in this deal needs to answer publicly:

Firstly, Why couldn't MTDC develop this property itself? We have the land. We have the staff. With Rs 330 crore of government investment, we could have built a world-class resort and kept the profits in Meghalaya.

Secondly, What happens to the existing workers? Where's the rehabilitation plan? Why wasn't the workers' union consulted? Why haven't previous grievances been addressed?

Thirdly, What are the terms of this deal? How long is IHCL getting the land for? What's the revenue-sharing arrangement? What guarantees exist for local employment? Why isn't the full agreement public?

Fourthly, Who benefits? I mean, really benefits. Not in press releases about "job creation" or "tourism boost." I mean: who gets richer from this deal, and who bears the cost?

Fifthly, Why the rush? The land was handed over in December 2025. Workers are on the verge of being terminated. But the resort won't be ready for three to five years. Why couldn't we take time to do this properly, with proper consultation and planning?

Legal theorist Ronald Dworkin talked about "rights as trumps"—the idea that individual rights shouldn't be sacrificed for collective goals, no matter how worthy those goals seem. The workers at Orchid Lake Resort have rights. Constitutional rights under Articles 14, 19, and 21. Legal rights under the Industrial Disputes Act. Human rights to dignity and livelihood. Those rights shouldn't be "trumped" by tourism development goals—no matter how shiny the Taj logo looks in government press releases.

Justice here would look like: (a) Immediate consultation with the workers' union (b) A transparent rehabilitation plan with guaranteed re-employment or fair compensation (c) Public disclosure of the full IHCL agreement (d) Resolution of the wage grievances raised in November 2024 (e) A commitment that local workers get priority hiring in the new resort.

Is that too much to ask?

You know what scares me most about this whole situation? It's not just about one resort or one set of workers. It's the precedent. If the government can hand over public assets to private corporations without consultation, without transparency, without protecting existing workers... what's next? More hotels? Water resources? Forests? Land?

And each time, we'll be told the same story: "Development. Progress. Economic growth. Global standards." But development for whom? Progress toward what? Growth that benefits... who, exactly?

Socrates was eventually sentenced to death for asking too many uncomfortable questions. But before he died, he said something that still echoes across centuries: "The unexamined life is not worth living." I would add: The unexamined policy is not worth implementing.

We deserve answers. The workers deserve justice. And Meghalaya deserves a development model that doesn't sacrifice its people on the altar of private profit.

So I'm asking—we should all be asking: Why, Government of Meghalaya? Why this way? Why now? And why without us?

Because last time I checked, democracy means government of the people, by the people, and for the people.

Not government of the people, by the corporations, for the profit margins.

Think about it.
(The writer is a practising Advocate)

U.S. Invasion of Venezuela may set the process of Trump's downturn in November Mid Term

Massive protests in America and division among republicans may impact Trump's plans

By Nitya Chakraborty

The invasion of Venezuela by the United States on the early hours of January 3 along with the kidnapping of President Nicholas Maduro and his wife marks a new phase in Donald Trump's foreign policy which has been termed by The Guardian columnist as "naked imperialism". The announcement by Trump that the U.S. would now oversee the administration of the Latin American nation and take care of its oil installations reveal candidly how the business and imperial interests merged in the U.S. President's implementation of Donroe doctrine, an updated version of the earlier Monroe Doctrine.

But the latest reports from both the U.S. and Caracas are not indicating that Trump is having a smooth sailing in his operations. The vice President under President Maduro Delcy Rodriguez who is now interim President, is under siege by the US. Initially, she came out with a strong statement declaring Maduro as her President, but the latest on Monday was that she issued an appeal to the US seeking collaboration on the basis of an agenda within the framework of international law. She however still stuck to the sovereignty of Venezuela against US invasion. Now coming days will show whether Rodriguez will succumb to the U.S. pressure or she will stick to her independent position.

Apart from this, the US expected chaos and uprising by the anti-Maduro supporters in Caracas after the invasion, but that has not taken place. Even the army and other defence forces have been supporting the government as of now. The Venezuelans are shocked but they are not welcoming the American invasion. Another aspect is that the opposition leader Machado who got the Nobel Peace prize last year is not being backed by Trump in the new situation since the President started disliking her after she was given the Noble Prize depriving him. Trump is looking for someone from Maduro government as a replacement, but so far, he has found none.

In the last three days since the invasion, the US cities including New York and Washington are witnessing huge protests against America's military intervention in Venezuela in the manner another President George Bush intervened in Iraq in the early part of this century on the basis of fake allegations against the then President of Iraq. The same scenario has been repeated in the beginning of 2026 by Trump who only last month announced the new US national security strategy giving powers to the American agencies to work for regime change in the Latin American nations.

The United Nations Security Council is meeting on January 5. The meeting may not produce any result as the US will use its veto power to oppose any resolution condemning its invasion. But at least the other nations including France and Britain will be expressing their worries and anxiety at the dangerous direction of the unilateralism of Trump. The EU nations cannot strongly oppose the US action but they are extremely worried as in Europe Trump may target Greenland for acquisition. Already Trump aides have announced that Denmark has no right to retain Greenland which belongs to the US. Denmark Prime Minister has come out strongly against this move of Trump aides. Denmark is a member of the EU but any occupation of Greenland will be a slap in the face of the European Union proving to the world that the EU nations are a bunch of toothless

powers with no capacity to confront their big brother.

In New York, the most important development is strong protest by the new socialist Mayor Zohran Mamdani who called Trump and told him this was an act of war. The New York police administration is under Mamdani. President Maduro will be put to trial in a New York court and big demonstrations by the opposition parties and peace groups are expected in New York during the trial. It will be of political interest how Mamdani tackles the situation when his friends of the anti-war movement take to the streets in New York during trial.

For Latin America, the Venezuela invasion by US has polarized the region. In 2025, there was a right wing swing in Latin America during elections. All the countries with right wing governments are happy at the invasion. These countries include Argentina, Ecuador, Bolivia and even the President elect of Chile who is a trump acolyte. Brazil, Mexico, Nicaragua along with a few other small nations have still left wing regimes. They are under tremendous pressure. They are talking of having a joint front to deal with the new situation. The Left president of Colombia Gustavo Petro condemned the invasion but Trump hit back at him saying Colombia is ruled by a sick man and he is producing and selling cocaine. He will not last long. He even threatened to attack Colombia. So he is acting like a Rambo as far as Latin America is concerned.

If Trump fails in his objective of capturing Venezuela and takeover of its oil industry, that will be a major setback for him in his political career in 2026. In 2025, he was dominating global politics in his own manner. Trump was everywhere. But from the beginning of 2026, this action on Venezuela may not achieve the desired results. If the confrontation prolongs, it will have an impact on Trump's MAGA base whose programme is that the US should not be involved in any war. So far the US has not sent land troops. The Venezuela operation has been done with air force strength. Many Republican Congressmen are bitter that Trump did not seek any approval from the Congress. The top leaders of GoP were not even apprised.

As far as Democrats are concerned, the entire Democratic Party is now united in opposing Trump on this action. The Democratic Socialists led by Bernie Sanders, Mamdani, Pramila Jaipal, Saikat Chakraborty, are in the campaign to expose Trump. There has been massive response to their call in the last three days. Already in the recent by elections, Democrats have fared well at the cost of sitting Republicans. The Democrats have now got momentum. They will continue it till November 2026 midterm. If the Democrats succeed and get majority in both the Congress and Senate, that will be a big boost for them for the 2028 Presidential elections.

The midterm results will not have any impact on the Trump Presidency. He will remain till his term expires in 2028, but it will have adverse effects on his standing as a leader and acceptability. That might restrain Trump to some extent. At the other end, Trump, knowing that this is his last term, might use the next two years after midterm to act more unilaterally without caring for any international norm. That will be a more dangerous period for geopolitics at the global level. The next few months will show how the situation develops in Latin America. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Pulling down a hijab cannot go unpunished

Editor,
On December 18, hardly two weeks ago, Nitish Kumar, the sitting Chief Minister of Bihar pulled down the Hijab of a Muslim doctor. Kumar was distributing appointment letters to newly appointed AYUSH (alternative medicine) doctors, and while handing the appointment letter to a female Muslim doctor, Kumar insisted that she remove her veil (Hijab), to which she resisted, following which, he himself tugged at her Hijab.

Nitish Kumar's act is punishable under numerous sections of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita (BNS). For example, section 74, which makes the use of force to outrage the modesty of a woman, a punishable offence. The minimum punishment under this section is imprisonment for one year, which may extend to five years. Kumar could also be charged under section 76 of the BNS, which places a minimum 3 years (and a maximum 7 year) punishment on the use of force to disrobe a woman. In addition to misconduct with a woman, Kumar can also be charged under section 299 of the BNS which criminalises any act which outrages the religious feelings of any class of citizens in India.

News reports indicate that complaints have been filed and First Information Reports have been lodged across different states in

India by different political parties. The question is: what is the fate of such complaints/FIRs? This question echoes even louder given the inaction of the Bihar police. All the three offences mentioned above are cognizable, and non-bailable offences. This means the Police enjoy complete autonomy to arrest the accused without a warrant from a court. Inaction of the Bihar Police in spite of such wide powers is appalling. The Zero-FIRs that have been registered in other states are sooner or later to be transferred to Bihar, for investigation, where, given Bihar's own police's reluctance to lodge an FIR, the independence of the investigation is questionable.

Article 361 of the Constitution places a prohibition on initiation of criminal proceedings against the President of India, and the Governor of any State. Pertinently, this protection does not extend to the Chief Minister. Additionally, section 8(3) of the Representation of People's Act, 1951 says, any representative convicted of an offence and sentenced to two years or more of imprisonment shall be disqualified from contesting/holding such seat from the date of the sentencing till six years after the completion of his sentence. Thus, if convicted and sentenced the convicted and sentenced, Nitish Kumar, could be disqualified from being a Member of Legislative Assembly, and thus would automatically lose his seat as Chief Minister.

Lastly, this is not the first time that Kumar has made

news for improper conduct. In 2023, he made headlines when he made crude remarks on the relation between female literacy and sexual intercourse, which are not worthy of repetition here. When a sitting Chief Minister commits such an act, its repercussions are often more severe than that which meets the eye. It signals an ethos of impunity to all those who see it, and normalises such conduct. Ordinarily such conduct would not pass without punishment, however, when committed by a distinguished citizen, senior in both age, and political experience, and dealt with dismissively it becomes a dangerous trend for people watching such obnoxious behaviour.

Yours etc.,
Vedant Chaudhury,
Via email

Save Wah Myntdu - No Idol Immersion Please!

Editor,
With profound respect for both ecological justice and cultural integrity, concerned citizens of the Jaintia Hills appeal for urgent administrative intervention to ban the immersion of Puja idols in the river Wah Myntdu.

Wah Myntdu is not merely a river. It is the beating heart of our land - a lifeline that nourishes paddy fields, replenishes drinking water sources, and sustains fragile ecosystems across West Jaintia Hills. For generations, it

has flowed as a symbol of purity, resilience, and life itself.

Yet today, this sacred river faces a growing threat. Despite community-led efforts such as the petition filed by Pynkhoid Wah Myntdu before the National Green Tribunal (NGT), idol immersions continue unchecked. These acts introduce toxic heavy metals like lead, mercury, cadmium, chromium, and synthetic dyes into the water. While visible debris may be cleared post-immersion, these chemical pollutants remain dissolved, poisoning aquatic life and seeping into soil and crops irrigated by the river.

Let us be clear. Wah Myntdu is not Wah Umkrah. One still runs clean, vital, and revered. The other, regrettably, has become an overburdened urban drain. We must not allow our pride to become another casualty of neglect.

As per the Revised CPCB Guidelines (May 12, 2020) and Section 15 of the Environment (Protection) Act, 1986, immersion in natural water bodies is prohibited unless strict environmental safeguards are followed. The law mandates the use of designated artificial tanks to prevent irreversible damage to rivers like ours.

We therefore urge the District Administration to immediately ban all forms of idol immersion in Wah Myntdu, direct Puja Committees to construct or utilise designated artificial immersion ponds under the supervision of the Pollution Control Board, and ensure strict

enforcement of NGT and CPCB guidelines through regular monitoring and accountability to safeguard the river's ecological and cultural integrity.

This is not a challenge to faith, but a call for responsible reverence: a balance between tradition and sustainability that our ancestors understood deeply. Our culture teaches us to honour nature as divine. Let our actions reflect that truth.

The media, administration, and public must act now before the damage becomes irreversible. To protect Wah Myntdu is to protect the very soul of the Jaintia people.

Yours etc.,
Mantre Hame Dkhar,
Via email

Awareness about Leptospirosis can save lives

Editor,
The news item, published on January 5, in The Shillong Times, reporting the detection of Leptospirosis in Meghalaya for the first time, calls for timely awareness and early diagnosis. The report, also carried in the Indian Journal of Medical Research, deserves serious attention from both the authorities and the general public.

For many years, Meghalaya was considered a low-risk state for this disease. Because of this belief, cases of fever may not always have been examined with due care. As stated Lep-

tospirosis often begins like a common fever, but delayed diagnosis can lead to severe and even life-threatening complications. The fact that young and working people were affected, and that some required intensive care, is deeply concerning.

There is an urgent need for simple and clear public awareness. People should be informed about basic do's and don'ts—such as avoiding stagnant water during the rainy season, wearing footwear while working outdoors, keeping surroundings clean, and seeking medical help early when fever is accompanied by body pain, vomiting, or yellowing of the eyes.

It is equally important to strengthen early diagnostic facilities within Meghalaya. At present, the absence of local confirmatory testing leads to delays. This is unfortunate, as Leptospirosis is easily treatable if detected early. Better diagnostic facilities will help doctors act in time and prevent avoidable suffering.

I am confident that this report will lead to greater awareness, better diagnostic facilities, and a more alert public health response in our state. Timely action today can prevent a silent health risk from turning into a larger public problem tomorrow.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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"Age is an issue of mind over matter.
If you don't mind, it doesn't matter."

— Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Surreptitious Mining & Land Grabbing
ALL talks of scientific mining are a huge cover-up for the illegal coal mining that continues to happen across Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. There is a strong mafia controlling this trade and obviously they have the Government eating out of their hands for everyone from police officials to state government functionaries continue to deny that this happens. The recent deaths of two individuals — mine workers due to an alleged blast is surprisingly being denied by the police. If that is the case what was the cause for the burn injuries suffered by the two deceased persons? Can the police not visit the site of the blast to ascertain what the cause of the blast was. Dynamite is an explosive largely used to blast stubborn rocks for quarrying and mining. Accidents can and do happen when the dynamite explodes without being detonated, due to a bump, shock or heat.

This is a fit case for an independent enquiry. After all, two lives were lost even if those who died were poor labourers. Human life must be given due respect. Unfortunately, labourers continue to die inside the mines even today without anyone knowing it except their family members. The bodies of the dead persons are quietly whisked away to their place of residence outside Meghalaya without any noise. Police claim no knowledge of such deaths since they act only when someone files an FIR stating that a family member has died in unnatural circumstances or is missing. Many families are too poor to follow this due process.

The reality in Meghalaya today is that policing is slack and made to be slack because coal mining involves powerful people some of whom are part of the government. If the government of the day is as concerned as the NGT is about the impact of acid mine drainage that is killing all rivers around the mining areas and beyond it could have conducted a thorough investigation to put a stop to this venality. This is where the Opposition party/parties come in. They have full right to conduct their own enquiry into these illegal transactions and demand that scientific mining be carried out. But the Opposition has been lax on this front and on other environmental issues that afflict the state. No Opposition leader has lent support to river cleaning and reclaiming. Trees are being felled mercilessly but the District Councils are silent witnesses. And now the VPP leader speaks of Article 371 of the Constitution to be applied to Meghalaya. If the ADCs cannot even assert their rightful custodianship over forests outside of the 4 percent State Reserved Forests, then how do they expect to make Article 371 work? Is the VPP actually stating that the Sixth Schedule is a dead instrument simply because its MDCs don't know the powers provided under the Schedule? In fact, now that the State of Meghalaya is headed purely by tribal legislators the Sixth Schedule is outdated. Bringing in Article 371 will make no difference. Look at the scale of corruption in Nagaland and the elite capture of land there. A similar avarice for land has engulfed the tribal elite here. Instead of clamouring about protecting land from being usurped by non-tribals the focus should now be on passing a Land Ceiling Act pronto before landlessness grips the indigenous tribals.

Letters to the Editor

Meghalaya's PHCs and CHCs - An Unsung Public Health Strength

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw attention to an often-overlooked strength of Meghalaya's healthcare system, the consistently strong performance of our government-run Primary Health Centres (PHCs) and Community Health Centres (CHCs).

Across many parts of India, public primary healthcare facilities continue to struggle with inadequate services, poor maintenance, and declining public trust. In contrast, Meghalaya's PHCs and CHCs function as dependable first points of care, even in geographically challenging and remote areas. Outreach services, regular village health and nutrition days, and mobile medical units have ensured that healthcare reaches communities that would otherwise remain underserved.

One of the most noticeable and commendable aspects of these facilities is their cleanliness and maintenance. Many PHCs and CHCs in the state are well-kept, hygienic, and orderly, an achievement that significantly enhances patient

confidence and safety. Clean labour rooms, outpatient areas, and immunisation spaces reflect a system that values dignity and quality of care, often surpassing conditions seen in public health facilities elsewhere in the country.

The dedication of healthcare personnel also deserves recognition. Doctors, nurses, ANMs, ASHAs, and other frontline workers routinely go beyond their formal responsibilities to ensure continuity of care, particularly in maternal and child health services, immunisation, tuberculosis control, and non-communicable disease screening. Despite resource constraints, services remain functional and responsive.

Equally important is the strong community trust in government health institutions. Unlike in many states where public facilities are bypassed in favour of private providers, PHCs and CHCs in Meghalaya continue to serve as the backbone of healthcare delivery. This trust is built through culturally sensitive care, communication in local languages, and sustained engagement with communities.

While challenges remain, especially in specialist availability and advanced diagnostics it is vital to acknowledge what is working well. Meghalaya's experience demonstrates that effective, clean, and people-centred public healthcare is achievable through good governance, decentralised

planning, and a committed workforce.

Recognising and strengthening these successes will not only benefit the state but also offer valuable lessons for public health systems across the country.

Yours etc.,
Adriall Mary Lyngdoh
Via email

Meghalaya is failing its youth in ways the developed world abandoned decades ago

Editor,

Let us stop pretending that Meghalaya's failure in sports and youth development is abstract, accidental, or unavoidable. It is departmental, identifiable, and sustained. More importantly, it is outdated. What Meghalaya continues to neglect is something the developed world resolved decades ago: that sports policy is not entertainment policy, but education, health, and social policy combined.

In developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Australia etc., sports is governed through binding national and sub-national policies. These policies fix responsibility, ring-fence funding, integrate sports into school curricula, mandate community playgrounds, and link public

health and youth welfare directly to structured physical activity. As a result, sports infrastructure does not depend on political moods, and youth development does not collapse between elections.

Meghalaya, by contrast, continues without a binding State Sports Policy, allowing responsibility to dissolve across departments while youth pay the price.

The Department of Sports & Youth Affairs has presided over unfinished stadiums, abandoned playgrounds, unused budget allocations, and the absence of any structured grassroots athlete pathway. In developed systems, such failures would trigger audits, resignations, or legislative scrutiny. In Meghalaya, they are normalised because no policy exists to impose consequences. Athletes are forced to crowd-fund survival while the department claims intent without delivery.

The Department of Education continues to treat sports as dispensable. In countries like the UK and Germany, physical education is compulsory, professionally staffed, and assessed, because it is understood that discipline, resilience, and mental health are inseparable from learning. In Meghalaya's government schools, trained Physical Education teachers are missing, playgrounds are unsafe or absent, and sports periods are sacrificed without consequence. This is not modern governance; it is educational regression.

The Department of Social Welfare confronts youth drug

addiction largely through awareness programmes, ignoring what developed countries treat as settled policy: sustained sports engagement as a primary tool of prevention, rehabilitation, and social reintegration. Australia and several European states embed sports within youth justice, mental health, and rehabilitation frameworks. Meghalaya leaves this potential untapped, not due to ignorance, but due to the absence of inter-departmental coordination enforced by policy.

The Department of Industries and Commerce, along with regulatory authorities, has allowed coke oven plants, cement factories, and other pollution-intensive industries to operate without structured obligation to contribute to sports development in affected communities. In developed economies, industrial social responsibility is geographically targeted and tightly regulated. In Meghalaya, CSR is allowed to drift elsewhere because the State refuses to anchor it within a State Sports Policy. Communities that bear the environmental and social costs of industrialisation receive no compensatory investment in youth development. This is not corporate generosity failing—it is regulation failing.

The constitutional implications are unambiguous. The Supreme Court of India has consistently held that the right to life under Article 21 includes dignity, health, and holistic development, and that education under

the two special provisions is sufficient to protect the local indigenous community. But if they are violated, notwithstanding the special provisions, they will be dealt with according to the overarching constitutional provisions. Those who say otherwise are lying.

One complaint about the Sixth Schedule is Section 12A, which states that in instances of a clash between legislation made by the ADC and the State Legislature, the latter will prevail. This gives primacy to laws made by the state legislature, compromising the autonomy of the ADCs. Those making this argument forget that we are no longer living under Assam but in our own state, where an overwhelming majority of the legislators belong to the indigenous communities. I don't recall any legislation that has been passed by the ADCs to protect the local indigenous community that has been in conflict with laws made by the State Government, controlled by the indigenous communities, thus weakening the provisions meant for protecting them. If there are any, I would very much like to learn about such legislation, and I am sure the public will also like to learn about them to understand how the Sixth Schedule has failed to protect the indigenous communities.

The move of the KIHADC to break away from tradition was done with the intention of establishing a client-patron relationship within Hima Sohra. It also sent a signal to the other Himas to fall in line lest they should also be made an example of on the pretext of reform in governance. There is also the shadow of the demand for Article 371, citing the inability of the Sixth Schedule to protect the interests of the indigenous communities. Ironically, those demanding extra protection are the ones who have just violated traditional norms which are supposed to become more secure under Article 371.

The year 2026 is, therefore, going to be a year full of the same drama over rhetoric and continuation of the same client-patron model of governance. I guess things will never change in Meghalaya. (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)

Article 21A includes conditions necessary for physical growth and safety. Developed countries operationalise these principles through enforceable policy. Meghalaya merely acknowledges them in speeches. This is no longer a failure of coordination. It is a failure of will.

Meghalaya does not need another announcement, festival, or symbolic gesture. It needs what developed societies already understand as non-negotiable: a binding State Sports Policy that assigns responsibility to departments, fixes timelines, enforces accountability, integrates sports into education and welfare, and compels industrial contribution in regions from which industries profit.

Until such a policy exists, departments will continue to deflect blame, industries will continue to free-ride, and youth will continue to lose futures—not because Meghalaya lacks talent, but because it refuses to govern like a modern State.

This is no longer about vision. It is about accountability. Either the Government of Meghalaya legislates, enforces, and owns a State Sports Policy now—or it must accept responsibility for remaining behind a world that moved on long ago.

Yours etc.,
Forwardman Nongrem,
South West Khasi Hills

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

Clean Politics or Old Games?

KHADC and the Politics of Tradition

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

There's never a dull moment with politics in Meghalaya. The year ended with the highly irregular move of the KHADC appointing Mynjurlang Majaw, a Myntri, as the acting Syiem of Hima Sohra instead of a Marremdor Syiem, as mandated by customary norms. This raises an important question: is the KHADC meant to protect Khasi traditional institutions and norms, or can it distort and twist norms to suit those in power at the moment? Is this not a hollowing out of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule, which gave autonomy to indigenous communities in the North East to protect their land, customs, and culture? Even the British, who considered the Khasi to be savages and kept them away from their places of residence (European Ward), decided to allow them to govern themselves and, to a great extent, maintained a policy of non-interference, giving rise to the arrangement now enshrined in the Constitution as the Sixth Schedule. So, why is it that the KHADC has decided to violate the norms and weaken the constitutional protection provided to the Khasi?

There are some who have argued that the move has been forced due to issues related to corruption within the Hima Sohra, and therefore a diversion from norms has occurred. Does this mean that Marremdor Syiem is involved in illegal activities? And if so, why have charges not been filed against him so that legal proceedings can be initiated against him? Among the many virtues on the basis of which a Syiem is elected, unblemished moral character is one of them. So, if this is true, this means that Marremdor can no longer qualify to be a Syiem and a new heir has to be elected. There are provisions to ensure that an heir of dubious character does not occupy the chieftainship. Clear instructions are available on how a new heir is to be chosen, and failing any eligible male, a woman can be appointed as Syiem. So, why are customary norms being violated?

As of now, there have been no legal proceedings against Marremdor Syiem, which suggests that the move of disregarding tradition has nothing to do with corruption by the heir-apparent. It is simply to do with power

and how it is to be exercised. By ignoring tradition, a message is being sent to the other Himas that if they do not want a similar violation of their rights, they must fall in line with what the KHADC wants. I expect that this year we will be seeing similar pressures being applied on the other Himas on the pretext of reforming governance. The appointment of Mynjurlang Majaw, a Myntri thought to be close to the VPP, which is now controlling the KHADC, is the strengthening of the client-patron relationship, where if one is close to those in power, they will be rewarded with important positions. This is similar to how politics has been practiced in the state.

Once they win an election, politicians will make sure that their supporters are able to monopolize schemes and other development initiatives, which include awarding of contracts as well. A few years ago, one of my friends working in the state government tried to distribute the schemes and benefits to those who had been ignored for a long time. These were the ones who did not support the politician. He was promptly transferred in order to protect the client-patron relationship that was essential for the local politician. Then, as elections come close, a lot of money will be spent on the non-core voters to persuade them to cast their ballot for the candidate. On most occasions, this proves to be the winning formula. So, it does appear that a client-patron relationship is being created at Hima Sohra, sending a signal to Myntris of other Himas who might also be interested in the same kind of relationship as well. So, in the end, all the talk of clean politics was just a ruse in order to recreate the same model as practiced by the other political parties.

In fact, if one were to look back at some of the issues that were raised last year, the focus on rhetoric was clearly apparent. Connected to the weakening of the traditional institutions and the Sixth Schedule was the demand for Article 371 for Meghalaya, especially 371A as is applicable to Nagaland. According to it, no Act of Parliament

in respect of—(i) religious or social practices of the Nagas, (ii) Naga customary law and procedure, (iii) administration of civil and criminal justice involving decisions according to Naga customary law, (iv) ownership and transfer of land and its resources—shall apply to the State of Nagaland unless the Legislative Assembly of Nagaland by a resolution so decides. So, the argument for Article 371 is for protecting local customs, traditions, land, and its resources from outside interference. However, is that not already the case with the Sixth Schedule as well?

Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) like the KHADC have been given the power to make laws on social customs and land, with the Sixth Schedule clearly stating that non-indigenous communities cannot own land in territories within their jurisdiction. The Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971 provides another layer of protection. Land alienation is happening in Meghalaya, but it is driven by elites belonging to the indigenous community and not by outsiders. Local communities have been exploiting resources like timber, coal, and limestone for a very long time. There is an argument made that these activities will be protected from outside interference if the state is brought under Article 371. This is not correct.

When the 1996 timber ban was imposed by the Supreme Court, even Nagaland had to comply with it. Complaints against rat-hole mining operations in Meghalaya were brought before the Supreme Court because the effluent from the mines was making the Kopili acidic, destroying paddy fields, prompting the Dimas Students' Union to take up the issue. Special provisions like Article 371 and the Sixth Schedule are part of the constitutional framework, and they cannot interfere with the basic structure of the Constitution. As long as the issues of governance, i.e., customary norms or management of natural resources, do not violate constitutional norms (right to life, livelihood, freedom from discrimination based on religion, race, caste, sex, place of birth, etc.), either of

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Youngsters, Don't Be Globally Backward..!

There is a strange irony playing out in full public view, that while the sons and daughters of our political leaders board flights to London, Boston, Singapore, Sydney and Toronto, to study, the message delivered to the average Indian youngster standing in crowded classrooms back home is very different. You do not need English, they say. You do not need to look beyond our borders. Everything outside is colonial poison. Everything foreign is a threat.

And then comes the most intoxicating line of all. You are already the greatest.

That, dear young India, is the most dangerous lie ever sold to a generation.

Progress has never come from shutting windows and drawing curtains. No civilization has ever advanced by congratulating itself endlessly. Growth has always come from learning, questioning, comparing, absorbing and improving. Cultures that believed they had already arrived stopped evolving, and those that stopped evolving were soon overtaken by those still hungry to learn.

English is not a betrayal of culture. It is a bridge. A

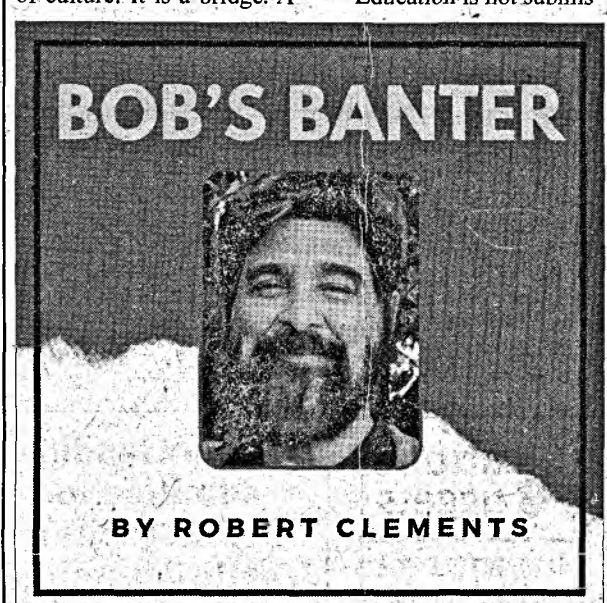
guage. That is the dignity of education. It does not erase your identity. It allows you to represent it with grace and credibility.

Parents, this is where your responsibility becomes critical. Do not mistake loud nationalism for leadership. Do not confuse cultural pride with intellectual stagnation. Teaching your child English does not make them less Indian. Teaching them to engage with the world does not uproot them from their soil. It strengthens their roots by giving them perspective.

Being proud of one's heritage does not require blindness. Loving your country does not mean refusing to learn from others. Our ancestors were great because they were seekers.

When you are told you do not need to better yourself, pause and ask who benefits from that advice. When you are told English is unnecessary, notice whose sons and daughters speak it fluently behind closed doors. When you are told the world has nothing to teach you, observe defence ministers, finance ministers and countless leaders quietly sending their children into that very world.

Education is not submis-



bridge to science, medicine, technology, aviation, diplomacy and global dialogue. It is the working language of innovation and international cooperation. Refusing to cross that bridge does not make you patriotic. It makes you isolated. It leaves you waving flags on one side of the river while the world builds cities, systems and futures on the other.

The world does not pause for slogans. It does not reward sentiment. It rewards skill. It rewards clarity of thought. It rewards those who can communicate effectively, negotiate intelligently and innovate responsibly across borders.

While you are urged to take pride only in ancient glory, the children of those delivering these speeches are quietly acquiring global degrees, global exposure and global confidence.

This is not accidental. Ignorance is loudly celebrated for a reason. An informed child asks inconvenient questions. An educated youth demands evidence. A globally exposed citizen does not swallow myths easily. Superstition thrives best where curiosity is discouraged. Myths flourish where learning is mocked. Obedience is easiest where ambition has been deliberately clipped.

A thinking population is uncomfortable for those who survive on emotional manipulation. A questioning generation is dangerous to those who rule by slogans rather than substance. It is far easier to govern applause than intellect.

Let me share something personal. Yesterday, at a function here in Chicago, I was invited to speak. I spoke, simply and honestly, as I always do. Afterward, several Americans gathered around me and said they were amazed at my command over their language. They assumed, quite naturally, that I must have studied abroad. When I told them I had never studied outside India, there was genuine surprise. And in that moment, I felt something deeper than personal satisfaction. I felt proud to be an ambassador for India; my country.

Not because I rejected the world, but because I could engage with it confidently. That is the power of lan-

guage. Exposure is not betrayal. They are your birthright. No ideology has the right to shrink your future in the name of pride. No leader has the authority to tell you that curiosity is disloyalty.

Learn languages. Travel if you can, physically or through books. Read widely, especially voices that challenge your assumptions. Question respectfully but firmly. Measure extravagant claims against verifiable facts. Look at outcomes, not speeches. Look at data, not drama.

Do not let anyone convince you that mediocrity is virtue and ignorance is authenticity. Do not be flattered into complacency.

The world will not judge you by how loudly you chant slogans. It will judge you by your competence, your ethics, your ideas and your ability to work with others across cultures and continents. Employers will not ask how proud you felt. They will ask what you know. Nations will not negotiate based on nostalgia. They will negotiate based on capability.

If you are, trained only to clap while others learn, you will wake up one day applauding from the back row of history. You will watch others build, decide and lead, while you are told to feel proud of victories you did not participate in.

Choose learning over noise. Choose curiosity over comfort. Choose truth over flattery. The future is arriving whether you are ready or not. And it will arrive speaking many languages, asking difficult questions and rewarding those who prepared.

Otherwise, dear youngsters, you may wake up one morning to a world that feels unfair, only to realize that you were deliberately kept unprepared for it. The future will arrive speaking a language you were told you never needed to learn.

And by then, the applause will be hollow, the pride will be borrowed, and the opportunity will have quietly passed...

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

“Never let success go to your head,
never let failure get to your heart.”
— Beyonce

The Shillong Times

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Diplomacy, Venezuela

THE cautious response from governments across continents to the provocative actions of the Trump Administration in Venezuela is a sign of the times. The global order has been hugely shaken by the abrasive US offensive against a weak nation in its neighbourhood. Yet, there's no one around to stand up against the aggressor; and not many to condemn the action even for the sake of a condemnation. The United Nations went as far as expressing its deep concern over the US action and stated that it, “undermined the core principle of international law” but it stopped short of condemning the outrageous offensive. The UN stands divided on the issue, but its Human Rights wing has stated in a firm voice that, “Accountability for human rights abuses cannot be achieved by unilateral military intervention that violates international law.” Yet, the world body stopped short of a condemnation. So too with India, which also is cautious in its response, perhaps for fear that a stronger response could antagonise the Trump administration. An emboldened Trump keeps holding out threats of annexation against more of his neighbours; and has set his eyes on Greenland as well.

The global scenario is back to square one. There's none to stand up against the bullying of Uncle Sam. Russia is a pale shadow of its USSR days. Vladimir Putin added to its loss of esteem by an aggression against Ukraine and is bleeding himself. China, not in a position to ever take on the US militarily is restrained in its responses. The Non-Alignment Movement, a powerful entity during the Cold War period, and India a leading partner, is an old story. In this backdrop, no one understands the present possibilities for usurpation better than Trump himself. The UN is increasingly proving its irrelevance. It is turning into a white elephant, its functionaries drawing huge salaries and perks, and not being able to effectively mediate in global disputes, and more so in disputes involving the US. The result is a sense of uncertainty, especially with the existence of smaller nations. A new normal has been introduced through abrasive actions, be it Russia or the US. The definition of territorial integrity is getting increasingly blurred.

Leadership is also about a vision for the future. Great empires were built by courageous men who waged wars and annihilated humans by their thousands, but such rulers changed the course of history. Eventually, their wrongs were forgotten and their victories glorified on the pages of history. That's hailed as statecraft. India maintained a high global standing during the Nehru era when it refused to ally with rival global powers. But it's well-known that the NAM had a soft corner towards the USSR and raised its voice against the US' imperialist designs. Today, global diplomacy by New Delhi is led by a ‘hug and hands-shake’ culture. Perhaps India built confidence in ‘aggressor’ Trump but not resisting his mediation in the Operation Sindoor — an involvement that he kept citing as a new feather on his cap. If anyone thought this would qualify him for a Nobel Peace Prize, what happened in Venezuela now should occasion a rethinking.

Letters to the Editor

UN hamstrung by its very structure

Editor,

The editorial “Aggressor again” (ST January 5, 2026) made interesting reading. Over and above what the editorial states, oil is a major factor in U.S.-Venezuela tensions, but it is not the only one. While Venezuela's vast reserves make it strategically important, US actions also reflect broader goals such as regime change, geopolitical rivalry, and energy security. Venezuela holds about 303 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, more than any other country. Controlling or influencing Venezuelan oil flows could reduce US dependence on Middle Eastern energy. For decades, Venezuela's oil wealth has defined its relationship with the US—sometimes cooperative, often conflictual.

Other drivers of aggression are US sanctions and pressure aimed to weaken Nicolás Maduro's government, which Washington views as authoritarian. Venezuela's alliances with Russia,

China, and Iran complicate US influence in the region. After years of sanctions failing to topple Maduro, Washington has explored harsher measures like maritime chokeholds. Officially, US policy frames its actions as promoting democracy and human rights, though critics argue this masks economic interests. Oil greed plays a role, but US aggression toward Venezuela is also about power, influence, and regime change. Oil is the leverage point, but the bigger picture involves geopolitics and control over strategic resources.

The UN is proving ineffective against US aggression in Venezuela because its structure limits enforcement power: the Security Council is dominated by veto-holding states (including the US), and while UN experts and the Secretary-General can condemn actions, they cannot compel compliance or impose binding measures without Council consensus. The structural limitation of the UN is that the US is a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Any resolution condemning or sanctioning US actions can

be blocked by its veto. Effective UN action requires agreement among major powers, which is rare when one of them is directly involved. The UN can issue statements, condemnations, and recommendations, but it lacks independent military or coercive capacity.

The UN declared the US maritime blockade illegal under international law, calling it “armed aggression” and a violation of the UN Charter. Secretary-General António Guterres expressed being “deeply alarmed” at US military operations, including the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, warning it sets a “dangerous precedent” while the role of the General Assembly is that it can debate and pass resolutions which are non-binding and often symbolic. The UN effectiveness is limited because the US has global influence, military reach, and economic leverage, making enforcement against it politically and practically difficult. Some states quietly support US actions or avoid confrontation, thereby weakening collective resistance. Repeated inability to restrain powerful

states erodes trust in the UN's capacity to uphold international law. Though the UN is not silent, it has condemned US aggression in Venezuela—but its institutional design prevents it from enforcing accountability against powerful member states. This exposes the tension between international law and realpolitik: the UN can articulate norms, but cannot override the geopolitical dominance of its most influential members.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Donald Trump, architect of war, not peace

Editor,

The recent military aggression by the United States against Venezuela is uncalled for. It has set a dangerous precedent. The US used narcoterrorism and governance disputes as a pretext. Its brutal strikes with over 150 aircraft and the capture of Venezuela's leader and his wife have exposed something rotten. Yes, this

The Man Who Chased His Dreams: A Voice That Learned to Listen to the Game

By Jairaj Chhetry

Cricket is not sustained by runs alone. It lives in pauses, in silences heavier than applause, in the long walk back to the mark, and in the breath a crowd holds before the ball leaves the bowler's hand. It survives on rhythm, anticipation, and memory. And sometimes, it endures because someone gives those fleeting moments a voice—steady, thoughtful, and faithful to the spirit of the game.

From the sun-scorched local grounds of Tura to the heightened theatre of state-level finals, Sushanta Biswas, one of Tura's most recognisable cricketing voices, has been there for more than twenty-five years, his commentary has not merely followed the game; it has accompanied it—patiently, attentively—turning action into narrative and competition into shared experience. His voice has grown familiar to players and spectators alike, not because it seeks attention, but because it respects the moment.

This is not a story of overnight success. It is a journey shaped by time, trust, and an enduring love for cricket—one that unfolded quietly, without haste, yet with unwavering purpose.

Where It All Began: There was no grand plan behind the beginning. During his college days, at a local Day-and-Night Tennis Ball Cricket Tournament organised by the then MDC Billykid Sangma, Sushanta Biswas was given a simple responsibility—announcing scores. It was an unassuming role, far removed from the glamour often associated with commentary. Yet, within that modest duty lay the first hint of a larger calling. What stood out was not loudness, but clarity; not flourish, but composure. His announcements carried a natural rhythm, a sense of timing that drew attention without demanding it. Spectators listened. Players noticed. Encouragement came quietly but consistently, expressed through nods, smiles, and the subtle expectation that his voice would soon do more than announce numbers. Before long, the score announcer was invited to take on full commentary—within the same tournament, among the same people, on the same ground. It was an organic progression, born not of ambition, but of trust.

Cricket, however, had entered his life long before the microphone did. His love for the game began in childhood. His father, a skilled football player, believed sport was not merely recreation, but discipline—of the body, the mind, and the spirit. Growing up in such an atmosphere, passion came naturally. Sushanta played cricket till college and followed the game with keen curiosity, collecting information, keeping records, and studying performances. He came to commentary not as a performer, but as a student of the game—one who believed understanding must precede expression.

Learning the Language of the Mic: The early years absorbed. Each match added a layer of understanding. Slowly, confidence replaced hesitation, and preparation became instinct.

District Cricket: The True Classroom: District cricket became his real training ground. Regular commentary for tournaments organised by the Tura District Cricket Association shaped his professional values. At this level, cricket is earnest and uncompromising. Players, compete with pride, spectators watch with emotion, and every word spoken into the microphone carries weight. Here, Sushanta Biswas learned responsibility. Commentary was not about clever lines or dramatic exaggeration, but about fairness—motivating players, acknowledging effort, praising good cricket, and remaining neutral at all times. In district matches, one is often commenting for neighbours, relatives, and familiar faces. Neutrality, therefore, is not just professional—it is moral.

Among many moments of appreciation, two remain unforgettable. One came when Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, approached him and said simply, “Aap bahut achha bolte ho.” The words were brief, but their impact enduring. Another came during a prize distribution ceremony

when Meghalaya Cricket Association Secretary Gideon Kharkongor publicly expressed hope that he would one day commentate in IPL matches. Such moments did not inflate ambition; they strengthened belief and renewed commitment.

Stepping onto the State Stage: In 2022, a significant milestone arrived. Sushanta Biswas received his first opportunity to commentate at the state level during the Under-19 Boys' final between Shillong Cricket Association and East Garo Hills. The difference was immediate. The cricket was sharper, the pace quicker, and the margins finer. The atmosphere was heavy with ambition. These were players chasing futures beyond the boundary rope. The commentary, too, had to rise to the occasion—measured,



informed, and precise. The response from players, officials, and fellow commentators was encouraging. Many advised him to seek wider exposure and think beyond familiar grounds. It was recognition earned through consistency rather than spectacle, through trust built match after match.

A Voice the Crowd Remembers: With time, names fade, but voices endure. Many spectators recognise him simply as “the commentator.” Some players, with affectionate humour, refer to him as “Local Harsha Bhogle.” He accepts such comparisons with humility, aware that affection—not acclaim—gives them meaning.

Beyond cricket, his comfort with the microphone has taken him to cultural and musical stages as an anchor. Yet the cricket ground remains his natural home—the place where his voice finds its truest purpose. Despite more than twenty-five years in commentary, he has received no official awards. For him, the applause from the stands and the trust of listeners across the Garo Hills are honours enough. Appreciation, he believes, is not a resting place—it is a reminder to remain sincere and evolving.

Moments That Stay: Some moments refuse to fade. One such memory is

a breathtaking Tennis Ball cricket innings by former Ranji player Kilco Marak—fearless stroke-play, towering sixes, and effortless timing that electrified the crowd. The commentary flowed naturally because the cricket demanded it.

There were moments of loss too. Sharing the commentary box with the late. Kalyan Sharma, known for his Hindi anchoring, had been reassuring. After his passing, Sushanta was compelled to take on Hindi commentary more fully. What began as necessity gradually became strength, and today he moves with ease between Hindi and English.

There are lighter memories as well. On one occasion, a police officer, impressed by his fluent Hindi, insisted that Sushanta must be from Delhi or Uttar Pradesh. When told he was born and raised in Tura, the officer refused to believe it, saying his Hindi was “too pure.” It took explanation—and shared laughter—to settle the matter.

Language, Balance, and Belief: Comfortable in both Hindi and English, he believes Hindi carries immediacy and warmth, echoing the golden era of All India Radio commentary. Language, however, is only a medium. Integrity is the message. Personal preferences may exist, but neutrality remains sacred. A commentator must never play for one side—only for the game.

Beyond the Boundary: Sushanta Biswas sees district and state-level commentary as still evolving, full of promise if nurtured well. With increasing demand for local-language broadcasts, the space is open for new voices. His advice to young aspirants is simple: love the game, respect the microphone, and bring honesty to your words. Learn before you speak. Listen before you judge.

When asked how he wishes his journey to be remembered, his answer is quiet and resolute:

“I learned from radio and television, shaped my own path, and stayed true to the game. Remember me as the man who chased his dreams.”

A Journey That Travels Beyond Home: Sushanta Biswas, a distinguished and much-admired local cricket commentator from Tura, has been invited to lend his voice to the prestigious Pepsi Cup cricket tournament, scheduled for January 2026 at Siliguri. The tournament is expected to showcase high-intensity limited-overs contests featuring leading club and regional teams from North Bengal and neighbouring regions. His inclusion is more than a personal milestone; it stands as a quiet yet powerful acknowledgment of the calibre of cricketing voices emerging from the Garo Hills—voices shaped by grassroots cricket, earned credibility, and an unwavering respect for the game—now finding resonance far beyond the boundaries of Meghalaya.

Words as social mirrors

By Chiranjib Haldar

The year gone by was a year of climate quandaries and content fatigue. Sociologists warn that whenever there is content abundance, the icing gets slushier with the cake tasting mushy. If we notice the trending words picked up by Oxford University Press and the dictionary troika of Cambridge-Collins-Merriam Webster; rage bait, slop, parasocial, vibecoding, a thought process fawns. The words unveil societal consciousness and cultural shifts that encapsulate our angst and values. Besides

like or an emoji. There is an entire virtual world waiting to engulf you, intoxicate and finally make you oblivious of life's other necessities. Mindless scrolling through reels on Facebook or Meta is like an opiate, it numbs the senses more than excites. And in a world in which we carefully craft digital selves, it's increasingly difficult to distinguish personality from persona. A figment of distorted perceptions is actually endorsing a worrying trend.

Hence, lexicons anointing

“If random ‘likes’ often compulsive for acquaintances have trivialised genuine appreciation, popularity is now a misnomer for the number of clicks as inducement. Maybe it's time to put the genuine meaning of authenticity in the back-burner. Let us all accept that our social media reels are not our own selves but carefully curated extensions of our persona, like little aspirational objects. Our ideal delusional self is an important part of our imagined identity.”

the pervasive influence of artificial intelligence, these word picks of 2025 offer a revealing snapshot of our obsessions and fears. Collaborations, strategic tagging and influencers have their roles and thus what is trending may be far from reality. Commonality clearly shows how technology is converting our psyche and objectives. So words of the year are also curated mandates for modern marketers.

Algorithms are hunting down our preferences at every level and making us passive. Let us assume, you are not a stock market trader or punter or even an investor. Maybe you have made occasional forays to invest in the bourses. A casual search or two about a company's share

specific words and stressing their current contexts is more of a reflection of society from desktop warriors to mobile touchscreen beacons. Endless scrolls are an invention of today's ethos. Attention deficit syndrome seems to have gripped all of us. Dealing with the relentless flow of the digital world has some unwarranted consequences. Social media algorithms churn out mind-boggling sets. The being and nothingness of time is best experienced in scrolling through options, reels and stories though there may not be any underlying need for these. If this is merely the beginning of the AI revolution, one shudders to think what lies ahead. Mental escape valves may well govern our choices in future.

“Endless scrolls are an invention of today's ethos. Attention deficit syndrome seems to have gripped all of us. Dealing with the relentless flow of the digital world has some unwarranted consequences. Social media algorithms churn out mind-boggling sets. The being and nothingness of time is best experienced in scrolling through options, reels and stories though there may not be any underlying need for these. If this is merely the beginning of the AI revolution, one shudders to think what lies ahead. Mental escape valves may well govern our choices in future.”

price or future prospects reveals a dozen articles from fund houses, brokerages and financial institutions. Countless options spew out with alarming alacrity to entice us into doing something we have not tried. Though an enormous convenience, it comes at a price. For many, it may be a mode of release but for many an induced activity.

If random ‘likes’ often compulsive for acquaintances have trivialised genuine appreciation, popularity is now a misnomer for the number of clicks as inducement. Maybe it's time to put the genuine meaning of authenticity in the back-burner. Let us all accept that our social media reels are not our own selves but carefully curated extensions of our persona, like little aspirational objects. Our ideal delusional self is an important part of our imagined identity. There are manifold social media options and the choices are deliberate and compulsive. These social media outlets are like a slew of sleep panaceas sometimes addictive. After all, sleep and mental rest are now increasingly coveted aspirations for individuals.

In other words, we are improving at pretending to be real. Snacking, chilling or watching some cringe content on over-the-top (OTT) platforms entices us into passivity. Responding to friends passively on social media is a way of validating their stance, be it with a

The power of a hashtag is remarkable and language may be evolving according to digital nuances. Oxford University Press' word rage bait has also entered political discourse, with outrage used to boost politicians' profiles and provoke a chain of reactions and counter reactions.

One of the most searched terms or the words looked up umpteen times on websites vie for being nominated as words of the year. The mass distribution of almost everything has its repercussions on society. Indian Khadi is often a ‘humble’ fabric but designers who exhibit in up-scale galleries and lounges have ‘arrived’. Webster's word of the year slop has gained such traction that it is not merely a word. The flood of slop in 2025 include absurd videos, fake advertising images, cheesy propaganda and junk AI-written books. It may have become our ideological default setting, an objective arbiter of meaning for the electorate.

Two decades back ‘Carbon footprint’ was selected as the word of 2004, during a time of rising environmental cognizance while ‘climate emergency’ in 2019 reflected an exigent call to tackle climate change. In tandem, ‘post-truth’ (2016) defined a world where emotions and opinions eclipsed facts. The words of the year showcase how language captures and influences our socio-political milieu.

(The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

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

"If my mind can conceive it, if my heart can believe it, then I can achieve it."

— Muhammad Ali

The Shillong Times

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Build-up for polls

YEAR 2026 would shape the future course of major political establishments through assembly polls in Assam, West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry. The Election Commission is likely to announce the schedule soon for the polls that are expected in April. Political establishments have begun the spadework for the campaigns, with the Congress party naming its observers for the poll-bound states. Notably, other than for Assam, these states are generally out of the BJP's sphere of influence while it shares power with a dominant regional party in the Union Territory. West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala are ruled by regional entities -- the Trinamool Congress, DMK, and the Communists respectively. Assam is run by the BJP with an influential chief minister for the past five years. The Congress has hopes of returning to power in Kerala in the coming polls, and the party is also bound to put up a strong fight in Assam, while it is hopelessly placed in TN, Bengal and Puducherry.

Another electoral fight is unfolding in Mumbai, Maharashtra, where the BJP and the three Shiv Sena groups are strong. The polls to the Brihanmumbai Municipal Corporation on January 15 are keenly watched as the BJP and its allies are aiming to take direct control of the civic body that these parties are running by proxy through an administrator appointed by the BJP-led state government. A resurgence of the Congress in the western metropolis is unlikely while the reunion between two Thackeray brothers for the electoral fight poses a significant challenge to the BJP. The results of the polls in the nation's wealthiest civic body will be out on January 16. The campaign scene is already vitiated with chief minister Devendra Fadnavis "reserving" the Mayor post for a Marathi Hindu, after a section within the local BJP sought the post for a "Hindi-speaking" member.

In West Bengal, the BJP that failed to seize power from the TMC in the last assembly polls despite a huge hype has begun adopting questionable strategies to neutralize the influence of chief minister Mamata Banerjee on the electoral landscape. The raid on the premises of the I-PAC election consultancy firm engaged by TMC and the seizure of confidential documents of the state's ruling party by the Enforcement Directorate have raised a row on Thursday. Banerjee alleges that her party's poll strategy documents were targeted by the central sleuths in the name of a raid in relation to a coal scam case. Prima facie, the West Bengal chief minister is safely positioned in the state's political landscape. So too with Tamil Nadu, where MK Stalin might reassert his party's dominance, as the opposition AIADMK is yet to demonstrate a matching might. In Kerala, where the CPI-M led Left Democratic Front held power for the past 10 years through two terms, an anti-incumbency mood is evident. The eruption of several scandals like temple gold thefts and other acts of corruption has sullied the LDF's image. The Congress-led United Democratic Front is aiming to grab power in the state. The BJP is on the sidelines in Kerala and Tamil Nadu.

Is Khasi Culture & Tradition Alien to Conservation

By Patricia Mukhim

Meghalaya has been in the news across the country and the globe as well. For what? For a video showing a young lady -- a white-skinned foreigner dancing away to the music at Police Bazar while being guarded by guys who not only enjoyed the dance exhibition but also did their dancing bit while maintaining the circle around the young lady. Good advertisement for Meghalaya and perhaps tourists will feel safer to venture even into the distant hills and mountains to explore Meghalaya without any fear. But there is a lingering question in my mind. What if the young lady dancing was a Khasi in exactly the same dress worn by the foreigner? After all, clothes are now global style statements! Would there be as much tolerance by those same men around the circle? One doesn't know but one can guess that the levels of tolerance have double standards -- one set for foreigners (white-skinned ones); another set for people from the rest of India and the third one for locals. So, let's not make a big deal out of that viral video.

This article is not about New Year's eve dances. The first was just to call out the double standards of morality practised by our patriarchs young and old. This article is about the diminishing ecological balance in Meghalaya. There are people in this state, particularly in Shillong city who go gaga over tradition and culture. But their idea of tradition is limited to songs and dances and how these are exhibited outside Meghalaya and outside the country. We try and sell to the world the boring notion that we still uphold the Khasi culture and tradition built around the community spirit which involved sharing of resources at a time when people grew food to survive, not to sell and make money out of farm products. At such a time there was a community sowing season and also a weeding season followed by harvesting. This culture is now alien to us. Everything we grow today is a commodity to make money from. This is fine; after all we have to evolve and we now live in a dog eat dog economic system that is cruel and rewards selfishness. It's each to his own and the survival of the fittest. The fittest here meaning the affluent who have ensured that they convert every piece of opportunity to hard currency.

One wonders why Meghalaya has a Water Resources Department and a minister to preside over it plus an entire contingent of staff looking busy as ever. What is the outcome of this Department with 33 engineers beginning with the Chief Engineer, fol-

lowed by Additional Chief Engineers, Superintending Engineers, Executive Engineers and SDOs plus the clerical baggage?

I looked up the purpose and mission of this Department and saw the following:

The Water Resources Department shall have the following functions namely:-

- All activities relating to survey and investigation, planning, construction, establishment, implementation, management and monitoring of Minor and Medium irrigation projects and schemes.
- Technical guidance and advisory services to Departments and agencies of the Government of Meghalaya in respect of provision of minor and field level irrigation services including lift and flow irrigation as well as drip irrigation.
- Command Area Development and support to land based Departments of the Government of Meghalaya for production and cultivation planning and implementation activities in command areas developed by the Department of Water Resources.
- Development and promotion of participatory Irrigation Management and support to the activities of Water User Associations in the rural sector.
- Capacity building of Engineering, technical and professional staff and personnel of the Water Resources Department and the Department of Agriculture and related agencies in the areas of water conservation management and utilization for agriculture.
- Coordination of hydrological and ground water resources assessments for the state of Meghalaya.
- Evolution of medium and short term perspective on water conservation, management and utilization for the state of Meghalaya.
- Assessment of ground and surface water potential for irrigation and other uses.

The charter further says that the development of irrigation in the state has been slack and till date only about 25% of the identified irrigation potential of the state has been covered under the various schemes undertaken by the Department. Hence the Department is prioritising the expansion of area under irrigation by initiating a number of Minor and Medium irrigation projects, both under the state and central sector schemes.

What's interesting are the claims of the Water Resources Department. It says, "Some of the new initiatives which the department has taken up are water harvesting structures, protection and rejuvenation of springs, rooftop rain water harvesting, multipurpose reservoirs and the repair-renovation-restoration of water bodies."

Then the charter says, "The Department is also in the process of putting in place a system for the collection, management and analysis of data for the development of water resources throughout the state under the national Hydrology Project."

My question to this huge entourage of workforce in the Water Resources Department is (a) Have they seen the condition of Umsawli in the New Shillong Township which used to be bristling with riverine life and a popular fishing ground for villagers living around the area. Just near the bridge spanning the Umsawli River there used to be a sort of water pumping station that apparently supplied power to places in Ri Bhoi. Will the engineers in the Department tasked with looking after water resources in the Greater Shillong area which includes the New Shillong Township, explain to us why the pumping station is now abandoned and under lock and key and why several trees are being cut along the banks of the river while all the branches are also thrown into the Umsawli river? The other question is -- Who owns the land adjacent to the river and why is sand being dumped in the river? Are there no rules or regulations where builders are told not to discard sand, stones and other debris into the river? If the rules are there why are they not implemented and why do people get away with breaking the rules in this state?

Umsawli is just one river. The Mawpat forests are reservoirs that feed the entire Shillong city. Several trees have been brought down to make way for a road as if the builders could not find a better alignment without destroying the forests. And in all of this, one finds that the Syiem of Mylliem, the Rangbah Shnong of Mawpat and the areas around it, the District Council and the Department of Environment and Forests are in collusion. They must be held accountable. It would appear that the only route left for concerned citizens is the legal one. The High Court of Meghalaya is already burdened by several environment related cases and has been giving strict rulings and environmental guidelines but who really bothers about these court rulings? They are violated with impunity because there is no punishment for violating the rules and laws.

Hectares of prime land is now owned by a certain individual in the present government and his family members. This also tells us that there is a huge elite capture of land and it is not clear how such large parcels of land are being sold out by clans and individuals without a thought for the future. There is no clarity as to what is forest land because other than reserved forests everything belongs to the so-called community. Words like 'community,' 'people' etc are hollow words. They are idioms that mean nothing and allow vested interests to get away with crime in the name of such idiomatic phrases.

The question then is -- have the Khasis abandoned their tradition of conserving water sources and forests? Or did they not have any idea at all about environmental conservation practices? Are the glorious epithets like "Ka Ri" which immediately sends some groups into romantic soires and others to take up arms to defend it, not include the rivers and forests? Why then don't we have a single pressure group that normally makes loud noises on sundry non-issues, speaking up for our rivers and forests that are being destroyed by humans every single day? Is it because doing so is not lucrative?

The hypocrisy in this society is jarring. We have the Khasi National Dorbar Hall which was created to debate on issues that affect the society. Why are these issues which the Khasis are fond of regurgitating about such as, "Ka lap Ka Im Jong Ka Jaibynriew," (relating to the survival of the people), not discussed in the sanctum sanctorum of Khasi political consciousness? The idiosyncrasies of society need to be fleshed out and addressed rather than swept under the carpet simply because we have to keep up the façade of "donburum," (morally correct). If the river is life, then the slow death of rivers is also the death of a people. As the wise native Americans say, "One day we will have the money but not the water."

Sadly, not a single school, college or university has deigned to adopt a single river to ensure it is clean and that its source is not depleted of the trees that help to recharge ground water, stabilize the soil while their canopies intercept the rain and release that water slowly. It's a whole process that the young need to learn and be sensitised to. But since much of the learning is classroom based, the young hardly connect to real life situations.

Will the Water Resources Minister please respond to the above queries?

clearly reflecting aspiration rather than rejection. The continued emphasis on vernacular languages at the elementary level, particularly in government-run and aided schools, also needs to be viewed in the right perspective. This approach is pedagogically sound and culturally necessary. Early education in the mother tongue strengthens comprehension, confidence, and emotional development, while also preserving indigenous languages, culture, and traditions. Far from opposing English, this foundation often enables children to acquire additional language skills more effectively at later stages.

India's global presence itself challenges the idea of large-scale rejection of English. The growing number of Indians in top leadership positions worldwide highlights long-standing engagement with the language. Leaders such as Sundar Pichai at Google, Satya Nadella at Microsoft, Indra Nooyi at PepsiCo, and Shantanu Narayana at Adobe are not isolated success stories. They are products of an education system and social environment that have, for decades, recognised the value of English while remaining rooted in cultural identity.

The real concern, there-

fore, lies not in any ideological rejection of English, but in unequal access to quality education. Shortage of trained teachers, infrastructural gaps, and regional disparities continue to limit effective language learning for many students. Addressing these systemic issues would be far more constructive than framing the situation as cultural resistance or misplaced nationalism.

Bob Banter's warning against intellectual isolation is valid and important. However, a nuanced understanding is equally essential. India does not need to choose between roots and wings. Vernacular languages give children identity, values, and belonging; English gives them reach, confidence, and opportunity. Together, they help create citizens who are grounded at home and capable in the wider world.

A balanced, inclusive, and well-supported education approach -- rather than a polarised narrative -- will best serve the future of our children and the nation.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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The Downgrade of India's NHRC A Reflection on Persistent Human Rights Challenges in Northeast India & the Tragic Case of Angel Chakma

By Neha Desai

In a significant blow to India's standing on the global human rights stage, the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions (GANHRI) has recommended downgrading the accreditation status of the National Human Rights Commission of India (NHRCI) from "A" to "B."

This recommendation, issued by GANHRI's Subcommittee on Accreditation (SCA) in April 2025, follows repeated deferrals in 2023 and 2024, citing concerns over political interference, lack of diversity in appointments, reliance on police-led investigations, and failures to adequately address issues like torture and restrictions on civic space.

Although the downgrade is deferred until March 2026 to allow for reforms, it underscores a broader erosion of institutional independence and effectiveness in safeguarding human rights within the country.

This development is particularly alarming when viewed against the backdrop of ongoing human rights violations in Northeast India, a region plagued by ethnic conflicts, security force excesses, and systemic discrimination -- issues exemplified by the recent tragic murder of Angel Chakma.

Human Rights in Northeast India:

AFSPA, which grants security forces broad powers including immunity from prosecution, remains in effect in several northeastern states, enabling extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions. In 2025, reports highlighted persistent abuses, with police and security forces implicated in rape, deaths in custody, and excessive force.

A Region in Turmoil
Northeast India, comprising eight states including Assam, Manipur, and Tripura, has long been a hotspot for human rights concerns, rooted in ethnic tensions, insurgency, and the heavy-handed application of laws like the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA).

AFSPA, which grants security forces broad powers including immunity from prosecution, remains in effect in several northeastern states, enabling extrajudicial killings, torture, and arbitrary detentions. In 2025, reports highlighted persistent abuses, with police and security forces implicated in rape, deaths in custody, and excessive force.

The situation in Manipur exemplifies the crisis, where ethnic violence between the Meitei and Kuki communities has raged since 2023, resulting in hundreds of deaths, widespread displacement, and destruction of property. This conflict has drawn international attention as a "silent crisis," with allegations of state complicity and failure to protect minorities.

Indigenous communities in the region, such as those in the "tribal belt," continue to face violations amid Naxalite-affected areas and aggressive mining expansions, which threaten land rights and environmental security.

The Indian government's efforts, including peace accords touted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have been praised in some quarters for addressing historical grievances, but critics argue they fall short in curbing ongoing atrocities.

Moreover, discrimination against people from the Northeast extends beyond the region, manifesting as racial bias in mainland India. Individuals from these states often face slurs, harassment, and violence due to their distinct ethnic features and cultural differences, highlighting a national issue of prejudice that undermines India's constitutional commitment to equality.

The NHRC has attempted interventions, such as hearing 56 cases of violations in the Northeast during a

camp sitting in Guwahati, but its capacity is increasingly questioned amid the accreditation downgrade.

The Angel Chakma Case:
A Stark Example of Systemic Failures

The murder of 24-year-old Angel Chakma, a student from Tripura, in Dehradun in December 2025, brings these issues into sharp focus. Chakma, belonging to the Chakma indigenous community, was allegedly attacked after protesting a racial slur directed at him and his brother. The assault, carried out by a group including Avinash Negi and Suraj Khawas, led to severe injuries from which he succumbed days later.

While police have arrested three suspects and described the incident as arising from "remarks in jest" rather than racial animus, activists and civil society groups have condemned it as a hate crime, pointing to the normalization of racism against North-easterners. The case has sparked widespread outrage, with the Youth's Forum for Protection of Human Rights issuing strong condemnations and a Public Interest Litigation (PIL) filed in the Supreme Court seeking guidelines on hate crimes.

The NHRC has taken cognizance, demanding a report on the killing, but this

response is seen by many as inadequate in the face of systemic bias. Chakma's death not only underscores the vulnerability of North-eastern minorities outside their home region but also exposes selective outrage in India, where violence against certain groups garners less national attention.

Linking the Dots: NHRC's Downgrade and Its Implications for Northeast India
The proposed downgrade of the NHRCI is not an isolated event but a symptom of deeper institutional weaknesses that directly impact regions like the Northeast.

Critics argue that the commission's reliance on police for investigations -- often the perpetrators in cases involving security forces under AFSPA -- compromises its impartiality.

In the context of Manipur's ethnic strife or the racial violence faced by individuals like Angel Chakma, a weakened NHRC struggles to enforce accountability, allowing impunity to persist.

The downgrade could further diminish India's international credibility, limiting the NHRC's participation in global forums and access to funding, at a time when human rights defenders in the Northeast face weaponization of investigative agencies.

As of early 2026, with the deferral period nearing its end, the Indian government has an opportunity to implement reforms, such as ensuring transparent appointments and diversifying the commission's composition.

However, without urgent action, cases like Angel Chakma's will continue to highlight the gap between India's human rights rhetoric and reality, particularly in marginalized regions like the Northeast.

To conclude, the NHRCI's accreditation crisis serves as a wake-up call, urging a recommitment to protecting the rights of all citizens, including those in India's peripheries. Only through strengthened institutions can tragedies like the loss of Angel Chakma be prevented, and the cycle of violence in the Northeast broken.

Letters to the Editor

The Forgotten Martyr of Jaintia

Editor,
U Kiang Nangbah was executed by the British on December 30, 1862, yet the Jaintias persisted in their struggle even after his death. A meeting was held at Nongphyllut, where U Mynlon, the former Dalloi of Mynso, declared his determination to carry on the fight till the end. The patriots took a solemn oath to continue their resistance, symbolically described as Hadooh Khatar Snem Luti, which translates to "till the end of a twelve-year journey" or, metaphorically, "till the bitterest end." Leadership was assumed by U Mynlon, Dalloi of Mynso, and Mon Lato, who valiantly continued the resistance until their last breath.

In January 1863, a renewed revolt emerged, with the populace constructing stockades and retreating into the dense forests to launch fresh assaults on British forces, resulting in significant casualties for the latter. Resistance was notably active in regions such as Rymbai, Padu, Nanggingi, Nongbareh, Umkiang, Jowai, Mynsoh, Nartiang, Lamin, Mukhla, and Nangbah. There were also reports of an encounter

between "the Cossaya police" under Captain Worsley and the Jaintias numbering around 3,000, including women and children who had fortified themselves in a cave.

However, by February 1863, the resistance was quelled, as many leaders were killed in confrontations with British troops, while others surrendered and were taken captive. Notably, Oossa Marateang of Rymbai (as recorded in the Bengal Judicial Proceedings No. 214 on March 4, 1863) was tried by Capt. B.W.D. Morton and executed on January 16, 1863.

As we commemorate the profound sacrifices made by Oossa Marateang for the freedom of our nation, we must also honour the memory of those leaders who laid down their lives in service to the motherland. Among these distinguished figures are U Mynlon Mynso, U Mon Lato, U Kiri Dalloi of Changpung, U Swar Suta, U Long Padu, U Mon Rymbai, U Bang Raliang, U Bukhiar Pator of Raliang, U Woh Riang, U Kiang Sule, U Kat Changpung and U Chey Rangbah -- the most trusted lieutenant of U Kiang Nangbah.

We pay tribute to the courageous patriots of Jaintia Hills, U Kiang Nangbah and

Oossa Marateang, who were executed by British authorities. Despite their deaths at the hands of the British Raj, their ideals, patriotic sentiments, and sacrifices remain indelible in our collective memory.

As we honour these individuals whose endeavours to liberate us from colonial rule culminated in their ultimate sacrifice it is perplexing that the Jaintia Resistance movement is often overlooked in the historical narratives of India's freedom struggle. More than seventy years after independence, the contributions of countless martyrs and freedom fighters from the northeastern region, who shed their blood and offered their lives for the nation, deserve rightful recognition in the annals of India's history.

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

Both English and the Vernacular Languages are Equally Important

Editor,
This refers to the recent article by Bob Banter ex-

pressing concern over the alleged denial or rejection of English in India and its implications for the younger generation.

At the outset, the author deserves appreciation for drawing attention to the undeniable importance of English as a gateway to global knowledge, scientific research, higher education, technology, and international engagement. His concern that intellectual isolation and inward-looking attitudes can limit a generation's future is both relevant and timely, and it certainly calls for serious reflection.

That said, the suggestion that English is being widely denied or consciously rejected by parents and the masses in India does not fully align with present realities. While it may be true that English is neglected by some sections -- often due to socio-economic constraints, regional limitations, or lack of access -- this cannot be seen as a general or deliberate national mindset. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that parents across social and economic backgrounds place great importance on English education. Many families make extraordinary sacrifices to enrol their children in English-medium schools or arrange additional language support,

"Liberty means responsibility. That is why most people dread it."
— George Bernard Shaw

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HNLC Threats & Government Response
THE Voice of Peoples' Party (VPP) has rightly questioned the silence of the MDA Government on the recent threat to their President Ardent Basaiawmoit on the imbroglia arising out of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council's appointment of a myntri of the Hima Sohra, Mynjurlang-Majaw as the Acting Syiem following the demise of Late Freeman Syiem. This appointment violates tradition as no one outside of the Syiem clan can hold the post of the Syiem (chieftain, not king). Normally the Syiem is appointed after an electoral body comprising adult male members from select clans elect the next Syiem who usually is from a certain natal clan (kpoh) and Marremdor Syiem was also Deputy Syiem and accepted as such by the people of Sohra. It is therefore not understood as to why the KHADC decided to violate this provision. Since every Hima is founded by a 'Kur' (clan) there is also a lack of uniformity on who is entitled to become the Syiem of a Hima. Also there have been a lot of contestations in such appointments in the past and also the propensity of the KHADC to disenfranchise some Syiems and to appoint the people of their choice.

The KHADC should have just followed the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen) Act 1959 to avoid unnecessary conflict. No explanation has also been given by the Council as to why it decided to veer away from tradition, which perhaps might be an internal problem related to toll collections since Hima Sohra oversees several land customs stations around the Shella-Bholaganj area that trade in limestone, boulders and sand by the thousands of trucks on a daily basis. Earlier, coal too passed through this area. It can be gauged therefore that the revenue collection both formal and informal must be a lucrative one for the Hima. It is also not ruled out that there are many informal actors who levy their own kind of taxes (extortion) of which perhaps the Hynniewtre National Liberation Council (HNLC) is one. Apart from claiming to abide by tradition insofar as the appointment of a new syiem is concerned, the HNLC perhaps has other interests, known only to those involved in the limestone trade, in particular. But the HNLC threatening Ardent Basaiawmoit the individual, also the VPP President and an elected member of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly warranted a public condemnation of the threat and an assurance of safety for Basaiawmoit.

In a state where law and order prevails, any threat, veiled or open against any citizen cannot be allowed. The HNLC is an outlawed militant outfit, currently in talks with the Government. How is it that the outfit is repeatedly violating the terms of the talks and issuing death-threats apart from causing IED blasts wherever they choose to. Some of their cadres have been arrested in Jaintia Hills for causing the IED blast at a workstation of a construction company. Clearly the MDA Government seems to be handling the HNLC with kid gloves for reasons best known to it. It is similarly handling other pressure groups too with the same tentativeness. But this is not new to Meghalaya. All governments have been hamstrung by pressure groups and militant outfits and succumbed to populism. This has to end.

Letters to the Editor

Questioning the Secular Credentials of the Meghalaya Government

Editor,
I write this letter not to offend anyone but to express my deep outrage at the duplicity of the Government of Meghalaya in its selective use of public funds for religious celebrations. As a devout Christian I should be happy at it, but as a responsible citizen who believes in the spirit of secularism I ought to express my views for readers here to introspect. Every year, the state spends lavishly on Christmas lightings and decorations, projecting it as a matter of pride and tourism. Yet, when it comes to festivals of other faiths—particularly Seng Kut Snem and Shad Suk Mynsiem, which are central to the indigenous identity of our people—such recognition and support are conspicuously absent.

It is undeniable that the majority of citizens in Meghalaya are Christians. However, as a secular government, it is duty-bound to respect and uphold the traditions of all communities equally. The double

standards are glaring during pujas when the district administration imposes strict rules on pandals and immersion ceremonies, citing law and order or environmental concerns. But during Christmas and New Year celebrations, no such restrictions are enforced, and instead, public money is freely spent.

The government may justify its expenditure on Christmas lighting as a tourism initiative. Yet, Seng Kut Snem and Shad Suk Mynsiem are equally vibrant cultural festivals that attract visitors and showcase the unique heritage of Meghalaya. Why then are they not accorded the same importance? Can public money legitimately be used to promote one religious festival while ignoring others?

This selective patronage undermines the very spirit of secularism enshrined in our Constitution. If the government of Meghalaya truly claims to be secular, it must extend equal respect and support to all faiths and traditions, not just the majority religion. Anything less is discriminatory and erodes the trust of citizens in the fairness of governance and instead of lavish spending for decorations govt should utilise the amount to help the poor and needy during Christmas.

Honouring and Renewing: New Beginnings among the Biates of Meghalaya

By Anna Notsu

January arrived. The world still carried the lingering weight of December festivities, along with unfinished tasks and duties from the year before. Yet the feeling of a new beginning, though somewhat slowly, nudges all of us to look ahead, to consider how our future might unfold.

In Meghalaya, January is also a high season for wedding ceremonies. Couples begin their new, wedded lives together, and not only two families but two clans become connected through the marital bond between two individuals. Within this sense of 'newness', a deep familiarity—whether called tradition, custom or otherwise—continues to structure the future of Meghalaya.

At the same time, within this seemingly cyclical calendar marked by public holidays, familiar ceremonies and anticipated climatic patterns, Meghalaya's diversity becomes visible in the varied ways people welcome their new beginnings.

In East Jaintia Hills, after the eventful month of December, Biata people once again prepared themselves for another celebration that takes place annually on the 11th of January (the 12th this year)—Nul-Ding Kut. It is a Biata cultural festival signifying the renewal of life. In earlier times, people used to organise it according to the 'feel' of the new year rather than by the calendar as they do now. In response to a growing sentiment of disconnect from their great past, the Biata community recently decided to revive Nul-Ding Kut as a way of honouring how they have come to be.

From programme organisation to stage setup, everything is done by the hands of the community. When I arrived in Saipung village a couple of days ago, already close to eight in the evening, we drove past the headman and several other men returning together in a car. They had just come back from this year's festival site.

Especially since the launch of the first-ever Biata picture book was planned as part of the festival programme, expectations for grandeur were running high. As the days counted down to the festival, the host village, Saipung, seemed to have long forgotten the slow pace usually associated with the new year. Day and night, people worked tirelessly to complete the venue on time.

This year, however, this hectic pace coincided with my Biata sister's housewarming ceremony. Despite the widespread matrilineal practices of Meghalaya, the

Biata community upholds its own post-marriage practice of moving into the husband's place after spending some years at the wife's. This move is called Moitui in Biata, meaning "taking away the bride." My Biata sister was about to move out of her natal home to join her husband's.

She had once told me, when we attended the Moitui ceremony of our neighbour last year, that she felt lucky because she found her husband in the same village. Indeed, our neighbour's Moitui required hours of travel, as her husband lived a full day's car journey away. I joined their Moitui on a pick-up truck from Saipung to an

a stranger to her family. Living together under one roof allows both sides to get to know each other, deepening family ties. In fact, the wife, though long married, formally takes her husband's title on the day of Moitui. As my Biata brother put it, "It is like a second marriage."

The week leading up to the day of Moitui is restless for both families. One side prepares for the departure ceremony, the other for the welcome. As the couple packs their belongings and receives gifts from their family, friends and neighbours, a steady stream of visitors arrives to greet them. The gentle clinking of teaspoons stirring sweet tea and last-

"Our faces were covered with thin scarves and our eyes shielded by sunglasses. Snack wrappers and plastic bottles flew through the air as our bodies bounced with the uneven road."

other Biata village in Assam, through gusts of dusty wind constantly blowing against our faces.

Nine of us squeezed ourselves into the bare truck bed, barely seated. Our faces were covered with thin scarves and our eyes shielded by sunglasses. Snack wrappers and plastic bottles flew through the air as our bodies bounced with the uneven road. The vehicles carrying us and the couple's belongings crossed the Kupli River and paused by the riverside, almost like a resting herd of animals.

By dusk, this comical scene and the long hours of discomfort eventually brought us to the husband's home in Mualdam, far from the wife's village. While joy filled those who eagerly awaited their arrival, a great wave of emotion overwhelmed the couple who had built their wedded life with her family, and those who experienced it together in Saipung. From that day onwards, they would build their lives among new neighbours and friends.

Traditionally, once married, the husband is expected to spend seven years at the wife's home. Over time, this norm has been adjusted. Some couples take only a few years, while others stay with the wife's family for over a decade. By living with the wife's family, the husband proves his dedication to her through labour. As my Biata brother explained, "He can prove himself to the in-laws."

From another perspective, this arrangement ensures that the husband does not remain

ing conversations filling the house leave just enough space for schoolchildren to stomp and run through. To call this time "busy" would be an understatement.

The chance to witness my Biata sister's Moitui evoked a strange sense of beginning anew. The space where I usually dried my clothes was now covered in tarpaulin and decorated with a dark blue velvet drape. Its concrete floor lay beneath a red carpet as the couple's room grew emptier each day.

Three months ago, when I last stayed in Saipung, the extended family had been my steady home. While I was away, one family had already moved into a newly built house. And now, my Biata sister, her husband and their nine-month-old son are about to settle into their permanent home. The passing of time revealed itself through these shifts, through the quiet re-making of everyday life. Others in Saipung may simply take this as the way things are.

As I sat with a subtle sense of melancholia, I remembered there was another ceremony taking place the same day. Though I could not attend, the church held a service to pray for a bountiful harvest and prosperity in this new year. Across the village, many others were making their new beginnings in their own ways.

Perhaps because of my closeness to my Biata sister and her husband, with whom I, too, shared a life under the same roof, or perhaps because of the timing, this Moitui seemed to amplify the

festival's theme—renewal of life.

When I first heard of Nul-Ding Kut, I wondered why it took place on the 11th of January. Was it not too late for a New Year festival? But now, observing new-beginnings take shape in people's lives, I understand the answer lies in what my Biata brother's called "the feel."

In this cycle of life, tradition is not sustained through the simple repetition of the past, or by rigid adherence to a calendar. It lives instead through attentiveness to people, relationships, timing and change. Here, renewal is not about restoring something frozen in time, but about allowing practices to move, adapt and remain meaningful within the current lives people are actually living.

Seen this way, I could no longer see Nul-Ding Kut and Moitui as separate events. They are connected ways of care and belonging. They remind us that futures are not completely abstract ideas, but are made in the everyday—through labour offered to loved ones, through reconfigurations of kinship and through rooms slowly emptied and homes slowly built. These moments hold together memory and anticipation, anchoring people as they step into uncertainty without severing ties to where they come from.

At a time when smaller communities are often spoken about only in terms of loss—of language, land or tradition—the revival of Nul-Ding Kut suggests something far more powerful than stories of neglect. It is not nostalgia. It shows the Biata community deciding what is worth carrying forward, and how. Within this careful negotiation between honouring elders, responding to present realities and imagining futures that remain meaningful for younger generations, they find the ground for a new beginning.

This year, on January 12, we will honour, in collective commotion, what has allowed us to be who we are, and we will renew it by strengthening the relationships we value—within families, across villages and with the land that continues to sustain us. Some may call this rethinking heritage. To me, it is future-making. A future that does not rush ahead, but listens closely to the feel of life as it unfolds, and moves forward with love and care.

(The author is Lecturer, Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology | Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, Leiden University, The Netherlands)

of regional autonomy. Prasar Bharati must stop treating its high-power transmitters as mere repeaters. Whether it is Rameshwaram or Shillong, these stations must be empowered to be local voices, not just long-distance echoes of Chennai or Delhi. If we do not speak up now, the "restorations" of 2025 will be nothing more than a temporary pause in a permanent plan to silence the unique sounds of our regions.

Yours etc.,
Hameenabha Lyngdoh
Lawai,
Via email

Four to Five Thousand Pages & 200 Kgs of Paper Weight!

Editor,
Certainly, the government requires more time to carefully examine the report of the expert committee on Meghalaya's Reservation Policy, but there is no harm in making it public for all to read; it is only a recommendation. After six months, when Ardent Miller Basaiawmoit raised the issue, Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma, replied by pointing

out that the report runs into nearly 4,000 to 5,000 pages and weighs close to 200 Kgs. From the number of pages, it is understood that the committee has done a good job, to ease the process for the government in drafting the policy. However, suddenly I realised that we must go back to school and learn a few basic arithmetic, geometry, and formulae, to find out the number of sheets from the total weight.

Usually, A4 (80 grams per square meter with an area of 0.0625 square meter) is the most frequently used copier/printer paper in offices. When $(80 \times 0.0625) = 5$ grams which is the weight of a sheet. Therefore, to find out the number of sheets from a given weight, $(200\text{kg} \times 1000\text{grams divided by } 5\text{grams}) = 40000$. So, in 200Kgs the number sheets are 40,000 (approx.)

I express my good wishes to the Government of Meghalaya and all officers involved in drafting the Reservation Policy that will shape the bright (socio-economic) future of the State.

Yours etc.,
D. Pakyntein,
Via email

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Gearing up for GHADC 2026: A Look at the Garo Hills Chessboard

By Divesh Ranjan

The Garo Hills Autonomous District Council (GHADC) election is likely to be scheduled in April-May 2026. The upcoming GHADC contest is shaping up as a largely triangular fight between the NPP, INC, and TMC, with the BJP, VPP, and UDP also emerging as significant players. The council comprises 29 elected members and one nominated member. Following the 2021 polls, the NPP formed the Executive Committee with 11 MDCs, supported by two BJP members, one GNC member, and three Independents, bringing its strength to 17, while the Congress secured 12 seats. Under Dr Mukul Sangma, all Congress MDCs defected to the TMC, which later witnessed further shifts to the NPP and the INC, reshaping the political balance ahead of a high-stakes contest.

NPP: Implementation Advantage Amid Anti-Incumbency
While rivals are still strategising, the NPP remains in execution mode and is the most active on the ground. Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma's outreach, direct engagement, leadership performance reviews, and the CM Connect initiative give the party a clear operational edge. Effective implementation of CM Connect is critical to bridging the trust deficit and consolidating its foothold. However, challenges persist. Defeats in both Tura and Shillong in the last MP elections point to declining popularity and entrenched anti-incumbency since the Assembly polls, which ruling parties often underestimate due to biased internal assessments. A united opposition further complicates the political landscape.

Lessons from the KHADC elections, where the NPP was reduced to around 14 per cent of the seats, highlight the cost of fragmented contests despite MDA ties. Pre-poll alliances and selective accommodation of BJP candidates are essential in a crowded field. Delays in clearing GHADC salary arrears damaged the party's credibility. Going forward, the NPP needs neutral assessments, timely elections, alliance discipline, and a development-focused agenda for sustained success.

INC: Opportunity Hinges on Leadership Unity
The Congress's decisive victory in the Tura MP seat demonstrates that its symbol remains the strongest "anti-NPP" brand in the Garo Hills. However, the party must not assume that Lok Sabha success will automatically translate into MDC victories, as District Council elections are intensely micro-local and personality-driven. The return of senior leaders such as Sadhia Rani M. Sangma and Winnerson D. Sangma has already weakened the TMC's organisational base, shifting influence back to the Congress.

Most significantly, Zenith Sangma's return marks a potential turning point. A proven grassroots organiser and former right-hand man of Dr Mukul Sangma, Zenith has the capacity to dismantle the remaining TMC structure and restore public trust, provided he is given autonomy, resources, and real authority. This opportunity, however, hinges on internal discipline. Any factional friction, particularly between Zenith Sangma and Saleng Sangma, could derail momentum. The party must move beyond a "wait and watch" approach, project Zenith as the field general with Saleng's support, and pursue an INC-TMC alliance. Aligning with the VPP risks consolidating Garo votes in favour of the NPP.

TMC: The Mukul Sangma Factor and a Test of Central Commitment
Dr Mukul Sangma remains TMC's most significant asset in Meghalaya, backed by loyal and experienced supporters. Following the 2023 Assembly elections, a lack of visible momentum exposes limited central engagement, underlining its strongest leadership. For the TMC to revive and counter the perception that its Meghalaya entry was only part of a "Congress-mukt Bharat" strategy, the 2026 GHADC election must serve as a decisive credibility test, requiring real organisational investment and protection of loyal leaders facing defection rumours. Without such backing, internal dissent is inevitable.

Electoral, TMC may secure 3-5 seats, potentially 5-7 with a focused strategy. A calibrated INC alliance offers the best outcome. Recent Enforcement Directorate action in connection with money laundering allegations against the Indian PAC, which handles crucial data for TMC, may strain resources further, making independent contests under Mukul Sangma's guidance a pragmatic option for MDCs.

BJP: Limited Expansion, Strategic Dependence on Alliances

Led by Bernard N. Marak (Tura MDC), the BJP has been the most vocal critic of the NPP-led Executive Committee, highlighting fund mismanagement and salary arrears. While aiming to grow beyond two seats, solo contests are unlikely to succeed. Pre-poll alliances are crucial. Having supported NPP in the last MP elections by not fielding a candidate, the BJP can seek reciprocal accommodation, aiming for 2-5 seats via micro-level strategies. The party must also introspect on the exit of leaders like Himalaya Shangliang and Williamson D. Sangma, highlighting weak retention mechanisms. The absence of a charismatic state-level leader and limited visibility of governance achievements despite ministerial presence remain key challenges, requiring urgent and sustained attention from the central leadership.

VPP: Disruptive Rhetoric, Limited Ground Presence

The Voice of the People Party (VPP) lacks a historical base in the Garo Hills and does not have a robust booth-level organisation across its remote villages. Widely perceived as Khasi-centric, the party's emphasis on pro-Khasi narratives and reservation demands has led many Garo voters and sections of Khasi youth to view it as politically divisive rather than inclusive. This perception significantly limits the VPP's acceptance in the Garo Hills.

The party also faces challenges arising from a lack of experienced and cohesive leadership. Under Ardent Basaiawmoit, the KHADC administration has struggled to inspire confidence among MDCs, with gaps in administrative handling becoming increasingly visible. The exclusive focus on "fresh faces," while sidelining experience, has resulted in policy inconsistency and limited governance outcomes, raising questions about the party's readiness for larger political responsibility.

UDP: Marginal Presence, Strategic Possibility

The United Democratic Party (UDP) holds a challenging but strategic position in the GHADC. While strong in the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, it has historically struggled in the Garo Hills, winning none of the seats contested in 2021. Seen as Khasi-centric, its biggest hurdle is perception. Observers suggest the UDP could target 1-3 seats, ideally through an internal alliance with the NPP, fielding credible local Garo candidates instead of leadership imposed from Shillong.

Conclusion: Development and Livelihood Over Division

In essence, the GHADC elections are the "semi-finals" of Meghalaya politics, setting the stage for 2028. Voters increasingly reject divisive "Garo vs. Khasi" narratives. For the ruling NPP, credibility hinges on a demonstrable track record of development in infrastructure, governance, and social schemes. Opposition parties must focus on everyday issues such as salaries, utilities, education, health-care, roads, and livelihoods. Ultimately, the party that prioritises tangible benefits over identity politics, backed by smart pre-poll alliances, is best positioned to win the mandate of today's modern Garo Hills voter.

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Does running affect bodies of professionals and amateurs alike?

Running counts among today's most popular sports. Sometimes the race is on even before the competition itself has started, as tickets for events sell out within hours. In France, this has got people talking about a "race for the runner's bib".

So, while running enjoys the reputation of a wholesome sport, the reality is that some of us feel stress at the simple prospect of donning a bib, while even a greater number of us face exhaustion upon completing a race such as a marathon or trail. So, what exactly is the toll of the sport on our bodies, and does our status as an amateur or a pro make a difference?

Working it out like a pro

It'd be easy to place professional and amateur runners in two separate boxes. Indeed, pros train hard-up to three times a day ahead of certain races. Life at those times is austere, punctuated by meals, runs and sleep, leaving little room for improvisation. And while you might think that the countless events around the world might dilute some of the demand for them, competition in such a universal sport is in fact fierce and professional runners need to push their bodies to the limit to get better at it.

High-level careers are often brief, lasting five or six years. Stories such as that of Eliud Kipchoge, the first man to run a marathon in under two hours (under non-certifiable conditions), sixteen years after becoming world champion in the 5,000 metres on the track, remain exceptions.

The significant mechanical stress inherent in the sport weighs on the muscles, tendons and skeleton. There are times when rest periods are short and it's increasingly common to see athletes injuring themselves during competitions on live television, a surefire sign of physical and mental exhaustion. Some might consider these factors to be fairly typical; after all, these are top-level athletes.

Similarities between professionals and amateurs

But are world champs, next-door champs and ordinary runners really that different? Considering the tip of the iceberg of this question, the answer seems obvious: they don't run at the same speed and therefore don't spend the same time exerting themselves. But what about the submerged part: the pre-race prep, training, the individuals' investment and self-sacrifice? When you want to break a record—your own record—don't you give 100% of yourself, both physically and mentally?

Let's consider the figures for the Paris Marathon in 2025: 56,950 registered for the race, 55,499 fin-

ishers. The mass event spells the same challenge for all: 42,195 km (around 26 mi) for the fifty or so athletes who might be considered elite and all the others who have to juggle it with their professional and family lives.



In truth, regardless of your level or speed, there are many similarities in how you prepare for a marathon, with identical training loads. Marathon training typically lasts ten to twelve weeks and includes essential elements such as "long runs", a training session of around thirty kilometres recom-

mended once a week.

No one escapes it. And there's a whole range of science-based books on running, designed to guide the general public.

However, as training takes its toll on both body and morale, the risk of injury rises.

Trail or marathon prepping: increased risk of injury for amateurs

In fact, we most often see stress-related injuries among amateurs.

A high-level athlete doesn't need to see a sports doctor. Why is that? Because they have built their careers over many years and have specific genetic characteristics that allow them to take on heavy training loads. They follow a specific programme that includes dietary measures, recovery phases and processes.

Professional athletes benefit from much better general and medical support than novice or amateur runners who, whether for individual or collective challenges, embark on projects such as marathons or trail running. This is how a runner like Christelle Daunay, after fifteen years of practice and modest beginnings at the national level, patiently built herself up to win the European Marathon Championships in Zurich in 2014.

When physical stress takes its toll on professionals

The issue of physical stress has been raised for a long time. In the 1990s, it was already reported that simply running for 45 minutes rather than 30 minutes a day could double the frequency of injuries. Going from three to five weekly sessions had similar effects.

Christelle Daunay was no exception. She suffered a stress-related fracture in 2018, which prevented her from defending her title as European marathon champion in 2014. It should be noted that a "stress fracture" is a bone injury, similar to a crack, which can be caused by running long distances.

When ultra-trail puts body and mind to the test

The recent development of trail running (i.e.

running in the great outdoors) only reinforces these concerns, with not just the wilderness but "ultra" aspect appealing to many.

The extreme sport has its own particularities. Due to the irregular terrain, its practice requires different joint and muscle movements and therefore greater concentration than road running. Add to that the effort's duration, ranging from a few hours to a full day or more, the issues of nutrition, effort management, and muscle damage that sets in over time, and it's easy to understand why these events lead to mental and physical fatigue, not only during the event itself, but also in the long term.

The conditions of running-related physical wear depend on many factors and vary from person to person. For example, on whether you jog to fit a speed or mileage goal.

Whatever the focus, people often engage in specific training programmes, with physical and physiological progress relying on the human body's remarkable adaptive capacity.

Note the paradox here: one of the principles of training is to stimulate the body, to "wear it out" at a given moment in time in order to trigger the physiological processes that will lead to improved capabilities, the fight against fatigue... and, ultimately, increased resistance to physical stress.

This fundamental process is the basis of physical rehabilitation/recovery programmes, which are increasingly used in physiopathological contexts, for example to treat peripheral artery disease or obesity.

However, at its most intense, training can require mental commitment, resistance to weariness, and a strong will to continue the effort over time despite fatigue.

Stress can therefore also be mental. This is perhaps the major difference between amateurs and professionals, who have no choice but to put their bodies under severe strain in order to progress in the high-level hierarchy.

Pros or amateurs, the importance of good coaching

Seeking to push their physical and mental limits can lead any runner to feel "worn out". All these factors highlight the importance of being well supervised and advised (by coaches, in clubs, etc.) in order to train with a certain progression, both in terms of quantity and intensity, and to adapt one's lifestyle.

No technical equipment is needed to run – an advantage which allows you to ideally experience your own body, provided you're aware of races' risks and limitations. And rest assured, if you still don't enjoy this sport, there are plenty of other options available so you can find something that suits you and enjoy the health benefits of physical activity. What's important is to keep moving. (*The Conversation*)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 11, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn on your solar return chart, and it will give favourable results. All your tasks will be completed. You will rise in your work. You will also meet influential people and manage to get your work done. You will also make plans to buy a new house/property. You will also have strong relations with your mate and family members. They will help you a lot. There are strong chances of getting a reward from long-term plans. You will also get involved in romantic times with a person known to you. New job/business offers will keep coming. You will also hear good news about relatives. Marriage of a family member might get fixed. Your senior officers will appreciate your work which will increase your self-confidence. You will be busy with your household activities. The atmosphere at workplace will be favourable.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) This week you will be successful in adverse circumstances. You will have problems but solutions too. Your enemies may try to engage you, but you will remain unaffected. You will also be able to establish your dominance over others. Your financial condition will be strong. You will also spend quality time with your family. And you will enjoy life to the fullest. You will also improve your lifestyle and buy something new. You could spend money on jewelry, household and clothes. You will be enjoying this whole process. The latter part of the week will be particularly fruitful days. You will be determined to achieve your plans. And this is the right time for earning money, having unexpected gains and getting money from somewhere.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) The whole week will yield positive results. Your troubles will be over. You will have control over the situation. You will finally breathe a sigh of relief as your problems get resolved. Talking with your partner will give you a lot of energy. It is time to perfect your bond with closed ones. Just the right time for relaxation, fun, leisure and entertainment. Your work will start getting completed. You will be full of self-confidence and courage. Your bosses will support you. A new hope will flow. Your financial condition is wonderful. You will feel fit and will be in high spirits. It is time to go closer to nature. You will get the love of your dear ones. Business journey will be successful.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) A dispute with a closed one may seem to run out of control. You may have some work pressure too. Things may start looking tough, but you will manage the situation well. You will hold one-to-one talks with people involved and with your gift be able to resolve your differences. Your domestic and professional responsibilities will increase but not affect you. Things will get better with time. You will feel very secure in your job. Your self-confidence will also increase. You will impress one and all with your work and behavior. You will learn the skill to keep everyone happy. Your investments will yield good results. Lovebirds will have a wonderful time. You will learn something new.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) The entire week is splendid. These are days of victory. You will do your work in style and finish it on time too. Your bosses will encourage you and you will get full support from your colleagues. You will complete your financial matters at this time and get desired results too. You will be in spotlight and enjoy all the attention that you get. You will be surrounded by your well-wishers. People will be attracted towards you because of your strong personality and behavior. You will make progress in business and work. Your prestige will get enhanced. Love birds will have wonderful time. You will have happy time with family and friends. Your siblings will support you fully.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your efforts will be bringing in lots of money. New business orders will be profitable. You will also get a salary hike. Those looking for new jobs for a long time will finally get one. At the domestic level, you will receive love from close ones. Your partner/spouse will continue to inspire you. A change of plan according to the time will be good. The placement of planets is beneficial for you. You will feel peaceful and relaxed. Students will get results from their efforts. Some auspicious functions may take place at your home. Your boss will be happy and will also promote you. Keep your important documents carefully. You will need them at some stage. You will remain involved in useful activities.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is time to take stock of your needs. You need to balance things quickly. Your tough professional life may be making it difficult for you, but you cannot escape them. You will have to take the responsibility and prove your worth and capabilities. You will make your plans, understand the situation and

fulfill them. You will also have great time with your family members. A new addition to the family will bring joy. Those appearing for some exams will be successful. The impossible will be made possible. Your success will astound your family members. Your image will be positive. You will have confidence in your abilities. Your entire focus will be on proving your worth.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) This week you will be full of enthusiasm. You will be working hard and fulfilling your targets. Your communication skills will be second to none. You will be able to get your work done. Your desire to meet new people will also be strong. You will also be able to organize your house and office work efficiently. You will be able to fulfill all your responsibilities and bring your family together. The company of your partner/spouse will make you feel happy. You will also have no major financial worries. You will also not force your views on others. You will also understand the feelings of others and the difficulties that they are undergoing. It will make you a better person.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The whole week is going to be wonderful. You will be having happy moments. You will be finishing your work on time and spending quality time with your loved ones. You will never be sort of company and not feel lonely. A lot will be achieved through your hard work. You will also have success in court-related matters. Some financial deals will also be negotiated successfully. Your partner will remain a pillar of strength for you. You will value relations and relatives will also respect you. Works that had been envisioned will be completed. You will be able to adjust yourself in different situations. Family bond will strengthen. There will be marriage, engagement and other functions and you will enjoy yourself fully.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) The whole week is an indicator of victory for you. You will remain dynamic in your approach and complete your task in style. You will get success in whatever you do. You will also meet new personalities from different fields. You will be socially very active and earn good money. Philanthropic activities may attract you. You will also get interested in matters related to self-realization. You will also do your work very sincerely. You will also remain alert during this period. Your natural leadership qualities will make you very positive in your actions. You will also enjoy more authority at this time than before. Love-birds will have a wonderful time. You will also not let your ego interfere in your professional and personal decisions.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will be busy with your work. And you will feel happy in the company of your friends. You will complete your task with ease. Money will flow in. You will take full advantage of your contacts and work to the best of your abilities. There will be radiance in your work, family matters and personal matters. You will also expand the scope of your work. Your relations with family members will also get better. Love birds will make plans to get married with family support. Business trips will be tiresome but fruitful. You will make maximum use of your knowledge and intelligence. There will be rest, peace and stability in your personal life. You will also support your friends in need.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is a fantastic week. These are the days to do hard work and get the results. You will be happy to complete the work and feel happy to get the desired results. You will also establish good working relationships with influential people. Some guests will arrive suddenly and keep you busy. You will also be able to do some important works you will not let your mind wander in the wrong direction and talk peacefully. You will have a few obstacles in government work. Your children will also listen to your views. Your health will remain perfect. You will face all your difficulties with determination and not get discouraged by difficult situations.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) There will be an increase in your dignity, name and prestige this week. All your work will be completed according to your wishes. Students will maintain their good record and their performance is going to be excellent. Youth will also be inspired to do their work. You will also acquire some new assets/jewelry. However, spiritual thoughts will come to your mind. There will be an increase in your self-respect. You will also get success in matters of love and finance. You will also win over your enemies. Your better financial position will help you to fulfill your dreams. With this success you will be encouraged to renovate, beautify and decorate your house.

Find how to set work goals that stick in the new year

Every January, offices quietly reset. New planners appear on desks. Fresh notebooks open in meetings. To-do lists look neater, ambitions clearer. There is a shared sense that this year, things will be different.

And yet, by February, many of those planners sit half-used. The motivation that felt so real just weeks earlier fades. This pattern is often blamed on a lack of discipline or willpower. But psychology tells a more generous and useful story.

Fresh starts can help us begin, but they often don't help us persist. Here's why – and what research can tell us about setting work goals that actually stick.

The start of a new year acts as what psychologists call a "temporal landmark" – a moment that separates our "old" selves from the people we hope to become.

Behavioural science research has found landmarks such as New Year's Day create a "fresh start effect": people feel more motivated to pursue aspirational goals simply because a new chapter seems to be opening.

Researchers propose the appeal lies not in the new diary or planner itself, but in what it symbolises – a clean slate, untangled from last year's unfinished tasks and perceived failures. A blank page makes it easier to believe progress will be smoother this time.

After the social, cognitive and emotional overload of December – crowded calendars, constant decisions, accumulated fatigue – that promise of a blank page can be deeply comforting.

Writing goals into a new notebook can offer a brief sense that life can be reordered, intentions clarified and control gently restored.

The problem is not that fresh starts don't work. It's that we often mistake the emotional lift of beginning something new for motivation that will last. Self-determination theory, an

established theory in motivation research, proposes an explanation for why enthusiasm drains quickly.

It suggests motivation is sustained when goals support three psychological needs: autonomy (feeling the goal is genuinely ours), competence (feeling capable of progress) and relatedness (feeling supported).

January goals often fail this test. They are often shaped by social pressure ("I should be more productive"), vague aspiration ("be better at work"), or unrealistic scope ("I'll overhaul everything at once"). When early effort doesn't translate into visible progress, competence falters and motivation follows.

This helps explain why hesitation creeps in after the first blank page is filled, ambitious planning cycles stall, and abandoned gym memberships mirror workplace initiatives. It isn't poor character; it's that enthusiasm was doing too much of the work.

As motivational researcher Richard Koestner has argued, goals pursued because we feel we ought to rarely sustain effort. Goals that feel self-endorsed and meaningful are more likely to endure once the initial excitement fades.

How to set goals that stick

Sustained follow-through depends on planning for the moment when motivation dips. At work, this means designing goals for psychological endurance, not peak January energy.

Ask not what success looks like when motivation is high, but what progress looks like in a busy, distracted week. Three shifts can help:

Plan for the dip

Assume motivation will fade and decide in advance what "continuing" looks like.

For example, instead of committing to a full project overhaul, identify the smallest mean-

ingful step that still counts as progress. That could be a quick review, a strategic conversation or noting priorities for the week. Designing for low-energy moments ensures momentum survives early-year dips.

Anchor goals in autonomy

Goals aligned with personal values, rather than just external pressure, are often far more resilient – even when they're part of performance reviews or team expectations. Motivation is stronger when you can find your own reason to care.

Ask yourself: how does this goal connect to my growth, sense of purpose or how I want to show up at work? 3. Lower the effort required to persist. It helps to break intentions into small, concrete, repeatable actions so progress doesn't depend on high motivation alone. Instead of aiming to "be more organised", commit to reviewing your planner for ten minutes every Friday or noting one unfinished task before leaving.

Breaking goals into small "when...then" steps, also known as implementation intentions, makes follow-through easier.

Research shows these concrete cues can reduce the need for in-the-moment motivation, a principle author James Clear popularised in the book *Atomic Habits* as building systems that work even on low-energy days.

A more realistic approach

The urge to start fresh each January isn't naïve. It reflects a deeply human need for renewal, coherence and hope. Blank pages matter – just not because they magically change behaviour.

Fresh starts can open the door to change. But lasting momentum depends on what we build after the novelty wears off. The real skill isn't setting goals when motivation is high. It's designing goals that survive the weeks when it isn't. (*The Conversation*)

Your dog's dinner can be worse for the planet than your own

Cutting down the amount of meat we eat helps reduce greenhouse gas emissions associated with agriculture. But what about the meat that our pet dogs eat?

Our new study shows that feeding dogs can have a larger negative effect on the environment than the food their owners eat.

For a collie or English springer spaniel-sized dog (weighing 20kg), 40 per cent of tested dog foods have a higher climate impact than a human vegan diet, and 10 per cent exceed emissions from a high-meat human diet.

Dog food comprises a significant part of the global food system. We have calculated that producing ingredients for dog food contributes around 0.9-1.3 per cent of the UK's total greenhouse gas emissions.

Globally, producing enough food for all dogs could create emissions equivalent to 59-99 per cent of those from burning jet fuel in commercial aviation.

The type of animal product used to produce pet food really matters. The environmental footprint of dog food differs for prime cuts and offal or trimmings.

Cuts like chicken breast or beef mince are used in some dog foods but are also commonly eaten by people. Selling these "prime cuts" provides around 93-98 per cent of the money from selling an animal carcass.

By-products like offal and trimmings - which are less sought after for human consumption, much cheaper, but highly nutritious - are widely used in pet food. We assign more of an animal's environmental footprint to high-value cuts and less to these by-products.



Some previous studies have given by-products the same environmental impact by weight as the highest value cuts, directly using figures calculated for human food. This "double counts" livestock impacts and substantially overestimates the footprint of pet food.

A practical problem for pet owners and researchers like us is that it's difficult to find out which parts of the carcass are in a product.

Our study used mathematical models to estimate the composition based on the ingredients list and nutritional composition of each food.

Labelling guidelines allow broad terms such as "meat and animal derivatives". These give manufacturers flexibility to change recipes but make it hard to distinguish between foods mainly based on low-value cuts and those rich in prime meat.

Ingredients listed as chicken may be fresh, dehydrated (made from low value offcuts) or a mixture, and recipes are commercially sensitive.

For this reason, we adjusted our assumptions about nutrient content, environmental consequences of

specific ingredients and the comparative values of meat products when estimating feed compositions.

After repeating this process 1,000 times, one pattern was consistent: higher shares of prime meat drove up negative environmental effects.

Improved labelling - for example, indicating the proportion of prime meat v by-products - would enable owners to make informed choices and allow better scrutiny of "sustainable" claims.

The format of pet food also matters. Some owners see raw and grain-free diets as more natural, although for many dogs these diets may offer no benefits and could introduce health risks, including nutritional imbalances and bacterial risks for dogs and their owners.

Studies show that carefully formulated plant-based diets can meet dogs' nutritional needs with similar health outcomes to meat containing diets, and there is increasing acceptance of this feeding approach from veterinary professionals.

On average, wet foods (for example, tinned or those packed in foil trays) and raw foods had more of a negative environmental effect than dry

kibble. Grain-free options also have a greater environmental footprint than foods not marketed in this way.

While the few plant-based diets we studied tend to be slightly less environmentally damaging than average meat-based ones, particularly among wet foods, this advantage is small compared to the difference between wet or raw and dry foods.

There are exceptions. For example, the lowest impact wet foods we studied had lower emissions than the typical dry food. And, the foods with the absolute lowest negative environmental consequences we tested included meat by-products.

There are other protein sources being marketed as sustainable alternatives to feed dogs, the most widely marketed example being insects. We haven't studied these in detail yet, but plan to in the future, while taking into account ongoing scientific debate about how large the real-world environmental benefits of insect production are.

Wet foods - and probably raw foods requiring refrigeration or freezing - tend to have greater greenhouse gas emissions from packag-

ing and transportation. This further increases the chance that choosing these food types is less environmentally friendly.

Vegan v wolf diets

Pet food choices can provoke strong emotions. One of us (John Harvey), a veterinary surgeon working on environmental sustainability, regularly sees owners torn between ideals of dogs as meat eating "wolves" and their wish to reduce environmental harm.

Our study shows that it's not simply a matter of choosing between vegan diets and raw meat. Simple rules like "dry always has a lower environmental footprint than wet" do not hold for every product. The ingredient mix within each product is key.

So, for owners looking to reduce the environmental footprint of their pet food, it's important to know that choosing grain-free, wet or raw foods can result in higher negative environmental effects compared to standard dry kibble foods.

Regardless of food type chosen, selecting foods that use genuine animal by-products or plant proteins rather than competing directly with meat humans typically eat is also preferable.

Dog foods showed over 65 times more variation in the effect they have on the planet, compared to a 2.5-fold difference between vegan and high-meat human diets.

The potential to reduce - or increase - environmental damage by changing dog diets is enormous. By choosing meat products wisely for pet food and making labelling clearer, we can cut this hidden part of our food footprint and have healthy, well-fed dogs. (*The Conversation*)

Geologist explains why Greenland is rich in natural resources

Greenland, the largest island on Earth, possesses some of the richest stores of natural resources anywhere in the world.

These include critical raw materials, - resources such as lithium and rare earth elements (REEs) that are essential for green technologies, but whose production and sustainability are highly sensitive - plus other valuable minerals and metals, and a huge volume of hydrocarbons, including oil and gas.

Three of Greenland's REE-bearing deposits, deep under the ice, may be among the world's largest by volume, holding great potential for the manufacture of batteries and electrical components essential to the global energy transition.

The scale of Greenland's hydrocarbon potential and mineral wealth has stimulated extensive research by Denmark and the US into the commercial and environmental viability of new activities like mining.

The US Geological Survey estimates that onshore northeast Greenland (including ice-covered areas) contains around 31 billion barrels of oil-equivalent in hydrocarbons - similar to the US's entire volume of proven crude oil reserves.

But Greenland's ice-free area, which is nearly double the size of the UK, forms less than a fifth of the island's total surface area - raising the possibility that huge stores of unexplored natural resources are present beneath the ice.

Greenland's concentration of natural resource wealth is tied to its hugely varied geological history over the past 4 billion years.

Some of the oldest rocks on Earth can be found here, as well as truck-sized lumps of native (not meteorite-derived) iron.

Diamond-bearing kimberlite "pipes" were discovered

in the 1970s but have yet to be exploited, largely due to the logistical challenges of mining them.

Geologically speaking, it is highly unusual (and exciting for geologists like me) for one area to have experienced all three key ways that natural resources - from oil and gas to REEs and gems - are generated. These processes relate to episodes of mountain building, rifting (crustal relaxation and extension), and volcanic activity.

Greenland was shaped by many prolonged periods of mountain building. These compressive forces broke up its crust, allowing gold, gems such as rubies, and graphite to be deposited in the faults and fractures.

Graphite is crucial for the production of lithium batteries but remains "underexplored, according to the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, relative to major producers such as China and South Korea.

But the greatest proportion of Greenland's natural resources originates from its periods of rifting - including, most recently, the formation of the Atlantic Ocean from the beginning of the Jurassic Period just over 200 million years ago.

Greenland's onshore sedimentary basins, such as the Jameson Land Basin, appear to hold the greatest potential of oil and gas reserves, analogous to Norway's hydrocarbon-rich continental shelf. However, prohibitively high costs have limited commercial exploration.

There is also a growing body of research suggesting potentially extensive petroleum systems ringing the entirety of offshore Greenland.

Metals such as lead, copper, iron and zinc are also present in the onshore (mostly ice-free) sedimentary basins, and have been worked locally, on a small scale, since 1780.

Difficult-to-source rare earth elements

While not as intimately related to volcanic activity as nearby Iceland, many of Greenland's critical raw materials owe their existence to its volcanic history.

REEs such as niobium, tantalum and ytterbium have been discovered in igneous rock layers - similar to the discovery (and subsequent mining) of silver and zinc reserves in south-west England, which were deposited by warm hydrothermal waters circulating at the tip of large volcanic intrusions.

Critically, among REEs, Greenland is also predicted to hold sufficient sub-ice reserves of dysprosium and neodymium to satisfy more than a quarter of predicted future global demand - a combined total of nearly 40 million tonnes.

These elements are increasingly seen as the most economically important yet difficult to source REEs because of their indispensable role in wind power, electric motors for clean road transport, and magnets in high-temperature settings like nuclear reactors.

The development of known deposits such as Kvanefeld in southern Greenland - not to mention those not yet discovered in the island's central rocky core - could easily affect the global REE market, owing to their relative global scarcity.

An unfortunate dilemma

The global energy transition came about due to increasing public recognition of the manifold threats of burning fossil fuels. But climate change has major implications for the availability of many of Greenland's natural resources that are currently blanketed by kilometres of ice - and which are a key part of that energy transition. (*The Conversation*)

CM, LoP, MLAs appeal for peace...

(Contd from P-1) efforts are being made to maintain law and order and communal harmony.

As part of peace-building efforts, MLA Kazi announced that a peace committee meeting has been scheduled for 3 pm on Wednesday at Rajabala. The meeting will be attended by the Deputy Commissioner, Superintendent of Police, and representatives from various communities and non-governmental organisations.

He further informed that, as a mark of respect and solidarity with the victim's family, shops remained closed from 12:30 pm onwards between Hallidayganj and Gomaijhora.

The Rajabala MLA stated that the overall situation in the district was peaceful at present and appealed to all sections of society to remain calm, refrain from spreading rumours, and maintain unity and brotherhood during this sensitive time.

Both legislators reiterated their strong call for peace in West Garo Hills and assured the public that those involved in the attack would be dealt with strictly in accordance with the law.

Civil society groups condemn...

(Contd from P-1) The statement concluded with a call on the government to uphold the rule of law, stating that there could be no middle path between lawful governance and administrative convenience.

The Northeast Indigenous People's Association also condemned the act of violence that resulted in Dilseng's death.

"This tragic incident has resulted in loss of life and injuries to many. We urge the authorities to take swift and decisive action against those responsible for this atrocity. The senseless violence has disrupted the law and order situation in the region, and we demand that the authorities ensure the safety and security of all citizens. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families of the victim and those affected by this mindless violence", the organisation said in a statement.

MDA has malafide intent...

(Contd from P-1) habitations under the MRSSA in order to ensure safety and security of the residents of the state.

"If CCTV cameras were installed along the national highways, state highways and habitations, they could have easily checked illegal coal mining and transportation," Sangma said.

He added that the government would not have been able to allow illegal coal mining activities had the MRSSA, 2016 been implemented. "They wanted to allow illegal coal mining and transportation, and hence, they are not allowing this Act to be implemented," he alleged.

Accusing Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tyngsong of lying to the public, Sangma said he (Tyngsong) himself was the co-author of the Act. He dared the Deputy CM to make the rules for the Act.

He also challenged the government to enact a new law if it has trust deficit in the MRSSA, 2016. He alleged that the MDA government had started discussions on bringing amendments in 2018 without even implementing the MRSSA, 2016.

Byrnihat becomes India's most polluted...

(Contd from P-1) quality requires concrete, science-based interventions. He stressed the need to focus more on PM2.5 and associated gases such as sulphur dioxide and nitrogen dioxide, rather than PM10 alone.

Kumar also called for updating the list of non-attainment cities under NCAP, enforcing stricter emission norms for industries and power plants, allocating funds based on pollution sources, and adopting an airshed-based approach at the regional level. Under NCAP and the 15th Finance Commission, Rs 13,415 crore has been released so far, of which 74 per cent (Rs 9,929 crore) has already been spent.

Man held on charge of raping...

(Contd from P-1) allegedly repeatedly committed forcible sexual intercourse on the minor girl.

On January 1, the minor returned to her home after being dropped off by the accused's wife. Upon reaching home, she narrated the entire incident to her mother, following which the matter was brought to the notice of the police.

A case has been registered at Mawlai PS under various sections of the POCSO Act and further inquiry is in progress.

MDA strangling ADCs...

(Contd from P-3) While December 20 and 21 were holidays, the government went to the extent of declaring December 22 and 23 as holidays as well.

"They did not have the money, and hence they closed the offices so early," Sangma said, while questioning who had given the government the authority to declare December 22 and 23 as holidays.

He said he had checked the state government's bank accounts across all banks, adding that the move also deprived people of their wages.

State shines at SKOCH awards...

(Contd from P-3) Another Silver Award went to the Directorate of Tourism's Nongwar Tourism Project for advancing sustainable, community-based tourism while preserving local culture and natural heritage.

The Chief Minister congratulated all departments, officials and community stakeholders involved, stating that the awards reflect Meghalaya's focus on inclusive growth models that combine livelihood generation, environmental sustainability and cultural preservation.

CM attends pre-budget meet...

(Contd from P-3) This session follows 10 rounds of sectoral consultations held previously by the Finance Minister, involving experts from agriculture, MSMEs, capital markets, manufacturing, and technology. The Union Budget for 2026-27 is expected to be presented in Parliament on February 1.

Tribal Cultural Centre comes up...

(Contd from P-3) Construction and implementation of the project were carried out exclusively by the Dorbar Shnong Qualapatty.

Acknowledging the support of the state government, the Dorbar Shnong stated that the project fulfilled a long-standing aspiration of the local community.

The inaugural programme began with a welcome address by Rangbah Shnong DM Thangkhiw followed by a prayer led by Rev Dr AC Moore. General secretary of the Dorbar Shnong, JR Warji, presented the background and evolution of the project, while Project Manager of the Building Sub-Committee, Damon M Lyndem, detailed the execution and completion process.

The ceremony also featured a special performance by members of the Shillong Chamber Choir, who presented their rendition of "To God Be The Glory."

Addressing the gathering, MP Kharlukhi acknowledged the coordinated efforts of the Dorbar Shnong, noting that effective teamwork played a decisive role in the timely completion of the project.

In his address, Paul Lyngdoh commended the planning and quality of execution of the infrastructure and recalled the historical importance of Qualapatty, referring to its association with late JJM Nichols Roy, founder of the Sixth Schedule, and the locality's role during the period when India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited the area.

Over 1,500 family members...

(Contd from P-3) reflecting a shift towards skill-based capabilities rather than rank-based hierarchies. He described MILVEST as a national asset in supporting dignified career transitions for the military community.

The Management Essentials 2025 course comprised a 100-hour online certificate programme delivered through 67 sessions by IIM faculty. Certification required a minimum of 70 per cent attendance, completion of weekly assignments and participation in bi-monthly online vivas. The curriculum also included modules on facility management, digital designing, LinkedIn optimisation and resume building.

Data shared at the event showed that between 2024 and 2025, over 2,000 armed forces family members enrolled in the programme, with more than 1,500 successfully certified. The certified cohort includes approximately 800 officers, 600 personnel from other ranks, 500 military spouses and over 100 wards of defence personnel.

The convocation also highlighted Project Deepak, a joint initiative of MILVEST and Sambhav-Kadam Foundation, aimed at delivering structured, future-ready professional skills to armed forces families with limited access to formal career-transition platforms.

Captain Vinay Singh said the initiative remained a charitable, purpose-driven effort, supported by the Indian Army's 101 Area Headquarters and IIM Shillong, to enable sustainable post-service career pathways for the military community.

Self-reliance in defence key to strategic autonomy, says Defence Secretary

NEW DELHI, Jan 10: India is at a "decisive moment" in its defence and industrial journey, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said on Saturday, describing self-reliance in the production of various military hardware as a "national imperative".

Speaking at a defence conclave in Chandigarh, Singh said indigenous platforms such as Tejas combat jets, Astra beyond-visual-range missiles, Dhanush artillery guns and aircraft carrier INS Vikrant are shining examples of the growing synergy among industry, defence research and skilled manpower.

Singh reiterated that self-reliance in defence is not merely an economic objective but a necessity aimed at achieving long-term strategic autonomy. The evolving global supply chains and rapidly advancing technologies present both challenges and unprecedented opportunities for India's defence sector, the defence secretary said.

Guided by the vision of Aatmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India), the defence sector has moved from import dependence to a vibrant ecosystem comprising defence public sector undertakings (DPSUs), private industry, MSMEs and startups, he said.

The defence secretary stressed that concerted efforts towards ease of doing business and continued policy reforms have catalysed an indigenous manufacturing surge, encouraging domestic design and production of various platforms and weapon systems.

He noted that more than 788 industrial licences have been issued to 462 companies, significantly boosting private sector participation.

Singh, however, did not specifically mention the time period during which the industrial licences were issued. He also pointed out that defence exports crossed Rs 23,162 crore in 2025, reflecting a nearly 35-fold increase since 2014.

Emphasising the importance of human capital, the defence secretary said true strategic autonomy requires not only indigenisation of hardware but also sovereignty over skills, technology and intellectual capital. He highlighted the government's efforts under the Skill India Mission, with agencies such as the National Skill Development Corporation and the Directorate General of Training mapping existing capabilities and future skill requirements for the defence and aerospace sectors. (PTI)

Ad hoc panel to promote...

(Contd from P-3) Aristonson Thabah as vice president and Arnold M Lanong as general secretary. Other office-bearers include Vego Ja Nongpluh as joint secretary, Chandra S Gautam as organising secretary, Zachariah T Lanong as publicity secretary and Krishna Muskara as treasurer. Ten executive members will be notified separately.

The committee has been mandated to promote and popularise Sepak Takraw across the state, organise coaching camps and tournaments, liaise with national and international bodies, prepare athletes for state and national competitions, and initiate the process for the formation and election of a regular body as per prescribed rules.

The resolution was passed with the consensus of all members present and will remain in force until a duly elected body assumes charge.

"The man who interprets Nature is always held in great honor."

—Zora Neale Hurston

The Shillong Times

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Iran in turmoil

IRAN, caught in a huge economic crisis, is on the boil with street protests erupting over the worsening economic conditions. Hundreds have been killed in firing by security forces though the actual numbers are under wraps due to suspension of internet and other communication facilities across Iran. The protest started by harried shopkeepers and spread to middle and lower income localities has gripped all 31 provinces, threatening a fundamentalist rule by clerics that started 45 years ago. The Ayatollah Khamenei-led regime is tottering and its threat of severe reprisals has only helped aggravate the law and order situation. Notably, a promise of help from US President Donald Trump has added to the moral strength of the anti-government protesters.

The Western sanctions against Iran's nuclear programme were the main reason why oil-rich Iran's economy suffered a hit in recent years. The 12-day war with Israel in which the US too got involved, added to the nation's economic downturn. The resultant inflation, aided also by large-scale corruption in the governance system, made life unbearable to the common man. The Iranian currency is collapsing due to the sanctions, and governmental services have been seriously hit as well. Iranians are battling frequent power outages and shortages in tapped water supply across towns. Shop shelves are turning empty. The situation is tailor-made for anarchy from which the clerics may not have an easy escape. Iran, a nation of 91 million and formerly known as Persia, has been facing internal odds for quite some time. Women came out into the streets boldly in 2022, under the banner of 'Women, Life, Freedom' movement, seeking more freedom in a land where, during the rule of the Shah, they had a happy-go-lucky life. That life ended by around 1980 when the clerics ousted him and grabbed power. The epochal holding of a set of Americans as hostages by the Ayatollah-led fanatics then could end only after the electoral victory of tough-talking Ronald Reagan in the United States. The Ayatollahs carried their rule forward for many years, introducing Islamic fundamental streaks into the Shia-dominated nation's governance and sharply cutting down the people's freedom. An era of Shah's close association with the US and his western styles in administration had ended abruptly. Here now is time for a rethinking in Iran. With Donald Trump acting hard in Venezuela, the threats he now held out to the clerics in Iran assume more seriousness.

Inspiration comes to the protesters also from Reza Pahlavi, exiled son of Shah, from his base in the US. His announcement that the protesters would target and seize the city centres across Iran sounds ominous. Notably, when the US under George Bush junior initiated a pro-democracy offensive in the Middle East spanning part of Asia as well since 2004, a while after the Al Qaeda bombings in the US, Iran remained unaffected. Iraq had fallen, followed by regime changes in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Yemen around 2011-12. Pro-democracy movements sprang up in several other nations in the region, and in Afghanistan, but their tempo could not be sustained. The US itself failed to keep up the momentum.

Governor of Meghalaya's Comfortable Silence While Lok Bhavan Forgets Its People

By Napoleon S Mawphniang

We've walked past it countless times, haven't we? That imposing structure—The Lok Bhavan, they call it. The House of the People. A beautiful name... almost poetic in its democratic promise. But here's the thing about beautiful names—they can mask ugly truths. Like calling a prison a "correctional facility" or describing our endless waiting as "patience." George Orwell understood this linguistic sleight of hand better than most. He'd have had a field day with "Lok Bhavan."

Because let's be honest with each other. When was the last time any of us—ordinary citizens, without political connections or influential surnames—actually walked through those gates? When did that "House of the People" truly belong to the people?

The Governor's Theatre of Governance:

Governor CH Vijayashankar declared in August 2025 that "Raj Bhavan belongs to the people of Meghalaya and its doors are open for citizens with valid concerns". A magnanimous statement. Almost moving. Except... except it rings hollow when you're standing outside those very gates, watching the security guards size you up, calculating your worth by your clothes, your vehicle, your connections.

The Governor says "forget the protocol". But protocols, we've learned, aren't easily forgotten when they serve as convenient barriers. They're like Kafka's doorkeeper in "Before the Law"—always there, always preventing entry, always suggesting that perhaps today isn't the right day, perhaps your concern isn't quite "valid" enough.

In January 2026, we watched the Governor meet with 25 selected youth for the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue. A nice photo opportunity. He spoke about leadership being "rooted in character, quality and service to society". Beautiful words. We need to ask though—where is this service when it comes to the issues that actually haunt our sleep? Where is this leadership on the Inner Line Permit? On the 8th Schedule recognition for our Khasi language?

The Silence on What Actually Matters:

Here's what keeps us up at night: The ILP demand has been languishing since 2019. The Meghalaya Assembly passed a resolution. Our Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has met with Union Home Minister Amit Shah multiple times—in Septem-

ber 2025, July 2025, and before. MP Ricky AJ Syngkon has pleaded with the Centre. The matter remains "pending with the Union Home Ministry".

And the Khasi language? The Khasi Authors' Society has been fighting for over four decades—since 1979, to be precise. Four decades of memorandums, seminars, delegations. Four decades of watching other languages get added to the 8th Schedule while ours waits in bureaucratic purgatory. As KAS president DRL Nongliat noted, the demand "remains pending with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs".

But where is the Governor in all this?

You see, here's what most people don't know—and what the comfortable silence from Lok Bhavan hopes we'll never discover. Under the Constitution of India, the Governor of a state with significant tribal populations wields extraordinary powers. Through PESA (Panchayat Extension to Scheduled Areas Act) and provisions under the Fifth Schedule, a Governor can "allow or disallow any law or development programme in tribal areas to protect self governance and development needs". They can make regulations, annul laws, even override state regulations—all to protect tribal interests.

The National Commission for Scheduled Tribes has actually indicted Governors for "not performing their special administrative roles" in tribal areas. These aren't ceremonial powers. These are teeth. Real constitutional teeth that could bite on our behalf.

The Dostoevskian Absurdity of It All:

There's something almost Dostoevskian about this entire arrangement, isn't there? We maintain this elaborate apparatus—the Governor, the Raj Bhavan, the staff, the security, the convoys, the ceremonies. We pour public money into it (while our state budget shows we're 75% dependent on central funds and 39% of our revenue receipts go to committed expenditure on salaries and pensions).

We genuflect before the position. We call it the "House of the People." And then... then the Governor hosts orientation programs for national youth festivals while our most fundamental demands—ILP to protect our land from demographic invasion, 8th Schedule status to preserve our mother

tongue—gather dust in Delhi's corridors.

It's like the Grand Inquisitor's reproach to Christ in The Brothers Karamazov—we've built magnificent structures and elaborate rituals, but somewhere along the way, we forgot what they were actually for.

The Mathematics of Neglect:

Let's talk numbers. Not because numbers tell the whole truth but because they reveal patterns—

Umberto Eco taught us to be suspicious of anyone who claims complete truth. Meghalaya's total estimated expenditure for 2025-26 is ₹30,003 crore. Revenue expenditure is ₹20,556 crore. A three-fold increase over eight years! Impressive growth. Yet ILP? Still pending. 8th Schedule? Still pending. The Governor's special constitutional powers to push these demands? Still dormant.

The Khasi Authors' Society president said it plainly: "We have not received any information on when the Eighth Schedule will be amended". After forty years. After countless resolutions. After the state government granted "associate official language status" to Khasi in 2005—a half-measure that satisfied no one.

The Political Economy of Indifference:

We need to examine something uncomfortable here. The Governor's position costs us money—how much exactly, the budget documents don't specify in convenient line items, but Raj Bhavan doesn't run on good wishes. Staff salaries, maintenance, security, vehicles, official functions... it all adds up. And what's our return on investment? Youth orientation programs? Ceremonial meetings with carefully selected delegates? Statements about how "leadership is not about power, but about empowerment"?

Meanwhile, as MP Syngkon pointed out in December 2025, these issues require "political unity" and sustained pressure on the Centre. The Chief Minister engages. The MPs engage. Civil society organizations like the Hynniewtrep Youth Council, Jaintia National Council, and Confederation of Ri Bhoi People keep submitting memoranda but the one constitutional office specifically empowered to be our tribal advocate—our Governor, who could invoke special provisions, who could

submit detailed reports to the President, who could make regulations under the Fifth Schedule? That office remains... comfortable. Silent. Ceremonial.

What "Lok" and What "Bhavan"?

So we return to the name. Lok Bhavan. The People's House. Orwell wrote in "Politics and the English Language" that political language "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." Harsh words. But are they wrong here? When a "People's House" is practically inaccessible to people without political connections... when a position meant to protect tribal interests presides over their neglect... when "doors are open" but the doorkeeper remains vigilant... what do we actually have?

We have a palace. We have pageantry. We have photo opportunities and inspirational quotes. What we don't have is advocacy where it matters most. We don't have someone using their constitutional authority to push the Centre on ILP. We don't have someone making regulations to protect our demographic character. We don't have someone filing those detailed reports to the President that could actually move the needle.

The Question We Must Ask:

As concerned citizens of Meghalaya, we're left with a simple, brutal question: What exactly is the Governor doing for us? Not for selected youth contingents. Not for carefully curated orientation programs. But for us! For the ILP that would protect our land. For the 8th Schedule recognition that would preserve our language. For the major issues—the ones that will determine whether our children and grandchildren inherit a Meghalaya that still belongs to its indigenous people or one where we've been rendered strangers in our own home.

The Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulations of 1873 protects four northeastern states through ILP. Meghalaya wants in. The 8th Schedule of the Constitution recognizes 22 languages. Khasi, spoken by lakhs, waits outside. These aren't radical demands. These are survival imperatives.

And our Governor? Our constitutional guardian remains ensconced in Lok Bhavan, that beautiful misnomer on the hill, while the actual "lok"—the people—wonder if we'll ever reclaim what was always supposed to be ours.

(The writer is an Advocate, Trade Unionist & Ethicist)

Exasperating Quietude of the Khasi Inheritance of Property Committee

By Melarbor L Thabab

The Khasi Inheritance of Property Committee was formed by the KHADC on March 28, 2025. As the name suggests, the recommendations made by this committee will be extremely important in the matter of inheritance in Khasi families particularly in all 5 districts of the Khasi hills. This committee comprises of 4 members namely the Chief Executive Member, 2 Executive Members with Law backgrounds and one opposition MDC. These 4 MDCs were tasked to make a recommendation on regulating the rights of the parents or either surviving parent's decision to decide on who or whom will inherit the procured property or properties of the parent or parents or ancestral property handed over

their personal space is not infringed, interfered and superseded upon by any law or bill which is unbalanced and leans towards one sex be it females or males and that the right of the family in taking such a decisive mode of action in writing be it deed or will is respected thereby falling in consonance with aforementioned fundamental rights of the nation including the fundamental right to equality under law so as to ensure equitable distribution of ancestral property as per the wishes of the parent(s) and not determined by any constitutional body. The constitutional body may however, make it equitable via its recommendation, bill and subsequent law, leaving the final right in decision making to the parent(s)

"In the Khasi community there were many instances where the right of the sole male offspring or males only offsprings in which their rightful property which they were supposed to inherit as per the parents will or deed was usurped by related family members having female offspring(s) or the sister siblings upon the death of the parents or more specifically the mother in the case of the Khasis."

to the parent through generations to their offspring(s). It will be 10 months on January 28, 2026 since this committee was tasked with this job without any tentative deadline; I might add, for submission of its report.

In the Khasi community there were many instances where the right of the sole male offspring or males only offsprings in which their rightful property which they were supposed to inherit as per the parents will or deed was usurped by related family members having female offspring(s) or the sister siblings upon the death of the parents or more specifically the mother in the case of the

which adheres and is in sync with the fundamental ethos of our constitution.

Time has come that the disadvantages that a Khasi male has, to endure in this world in almost every facet of his life be mitigated to a great extent with the recommendation and subsequent passage of such a bill into a law which grants those fundamental rights to the family namely the parent(s) and leave it upon their wisdom. The recommendations made by this Committee will reverberate on each and every Khasi household in the Khasi hills. This bill when passed into a law, may also serve as a precedence for

"Time has come that the disadvantages that a Khasi male has to endure in this world in almost every facet of his life be mitigated to a great extent with the recommendation and subsequent passage of such a bill into a law which grants those fundamental rights to the family namely the parent(s) and leave it upon their wisdom. The recommendations made by this Committee will reverberate on each and every Khasi household in the Khasi hills."

Khasis. Many a times such cases go unheard and unreported in which the rightful male heir(s) have to keep quiet and swallow the hard pill in losing their ancestral or parents' property whom the parent(s) had granted to them in writing since the right to inherit property lies with the daughter(s) or sisters or those relatives having the daughter(s) especially the youngest daughter in reference to Khasi families. Most of the times, Khasi males do not challenge this in the KHADC court or lack the finance to challenge such cases in the court since such cases are lengthy and time consuming or even when they challenge, chances are, that they may lose the case since the inheritance of property in Khasi society is tilted towards females.

The time has come for reform in the Khasi society in that the parent(s) who have only one male offspring or many male offsprings only or offsprings having both male and females in this era; that their fundamental right to privacy, decision, thought, belief and action in

the JHADC or may be even the GHADC to adopt the same. It is hoped that this Committee will empathise with the plight and yet, deservingly rights of the Khasi males whom these MDCs themselves or the 4 members of this Committee may have male offsprings, to actually take a hard look at their own male offsprings to realize the hardships that they will face in their adult life as Khasi men within the Khasi community before submitting their recommendations or later in the passage of this bill. It is urged that this committee submit its long-awaited report before the start of the February 2026 budget session so that the recommendations and latter bill can be debated and passed by the Council to be eventually pushed through the government to make it into a law. There has been a lot of anticipation for change. We hope that the EC will walk the talk by taking this matter with the seriousness that it deserves and that the aggravation of the parents will be over sooner than later on this extremely important and pertinent issue.

Letters to the Editor

Mamata Banerjee defies constitutional provisions

Editor,
The drama unfolding during the Enforcement Directorate's (ED) search at the I-PAC office in Kolkata represents a troubling low point in the erosion of federal cooperation and the rule of law in our country. It is profoundly disturbing that a sitting Chief Minister would physically intervene in a lawful search operation conducted by a central investigative agency. The video evidence and the open admission by Mamata Banerjee that she forcibly took possession of key evidence including digital devices and documents under the protection of the highest echelons of state police reflect a blatant disregard for judicial procedures and constitutional norms.

When state machinery is unleashed to obstruct federal investigations, it sets a dangerous precedent that strikes at the very foundation of India's administrative and constitutional framework. The conduct, functioning, and repeated actions of the TMC government in West Bengal over the years increasingly give the impression of a parallel regime which acknowledges neither constitutional discipline nor federal authority. It appears that Mamata Banerjee is actually running a "separate country" with only armed forces and currency beyond her control.

If such defiance is allowed to go unchecked, as has been hitherto done, it is not inconceivable that future actions

may include denying entry to constitutional authorities like the Prime Minister or the Union Home Minister or even issuing arrest warrant against them if they visit West Bengal. Equally concerning is the continued silence of the Central Government, which has repeatedly appeared as a passive spectator to the systematic obstruction of its agencies and the breakdown of constitutional governance in West Bengal. It is baffling that instead of asserting its constitutional authority, the Central Government has consistently chosen to kow-tow before a rogue and defiant state administration.

Yours etc.,
D. Bhattacharjee
Shillong-1

Why this violation of the Constitution?

Editor,
The forcible entry into the premises of I-PAC and taking possession of documents & electronic devices by Ms Mamata Banerjee, Chief Minister of West Bengal at a time when a duly empowered Central Government agency was lawfully conducting a search raises issues of the gravest concern. Such direct interference with an ongoing legal operation strikes at the very foundation of the rule of law. Under the provisions of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023, these actions fall within the ambit of several criminal offences, including:

Section 147 (House-trespass): Punishable with imprisonment up to two years, or fine, or both.

Section 148 (House-trespass after preparation for hurt, assault or wrongful restraint): Punishable with imprisonment up to seven years.

Section 303 (Theft of property, including electronic devices and documents): Punishable with imprisonment and fine.

Section 317 (Obstruction of a public servant in the discharge of official duty): Punishable with imprisonment up to two years, or fine, or both.

Had these acts been committed by any ordinary citizen, immediate arrest and prosecution under the aforesaid provisions would have followed. Article 14 of the Constitution of India guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws, leaving no room for privilege based on position or power. However, conspicuous absence of any legal action against Ms Banerjee, despite the prima facie commission of cognizable offences, reinforces the troubling perception that the law is applied rigorously to ordinary citizens while politicians enjoy de facto immunity in our country.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar,
Shillong-3

Advantages of the Sohra-Mawsynram tourism circuit

Editor,
The news "Call to build direct road link between Mawsynram, Sohra" (ST January 9th 2026) was interest-

ing and important. A common tourist circuit for Sohra and Mawsynram can be achieved primarily by building direct road connectivity between the two towns, integrating their attractions into a single itinerary, and developing joint infrastructure projects such as visitor centers, eco-tourism hubs, and thematic experiences (rainfall, caves, waterfalls). This would allow tourists to explore both destinations seamlessly without detouring back through Shillong. The MLA of Mawsynram Ollan Sing Suin rightly pointed out that the biggest hurdle is the lack of a direct road between Sohra and Mawsynram and currently, tourists must return via Upper Shillong, which discourages circuit travel. A proposed new road link would cut travel time and make a combined circuit practical.

Integrating Sohra, famous for its living root bridges, Nohkalikai Falls, Mawmai Cave, Nohsngthiang Falls and Thangkharang Park with Mawsynram the wettest place on earth, with caves, waterfalls and the proposed Rain Museum as a thematic anchor are good tourism selling points. By combining the two, tourists can experience caves, waterfalls, root bridges, and rainfall heritage in one circuit. Thematic development could be "Rainfall Tourism" as both Sohra and Mawsynram share extreme rainfall records. A joint "Rainfall Experience Circuit" could include museums, observation points and monsoon festivals and eco Tourism by promoting sustainable trekking routes, homestays and community led experiences across Khasi

villages. Adventure Tourism like zip-lining, caving and waterfall treks can be marketed as a combined adventure package. However, there are risks and trade-offs like environmental fragility as both regions are ecologically sensitive; mass tourism could damage caves, root bridges and forests. As such strict eco-tourism guidelines are essential.

There is a need for community involvement as without local participation, tourism may lead to cultural erosion. Involving Khasi communities in homestays, guiding and cultural showcases ensure inclusivity. As for funding and coordination it will require joint planning between Meghalaya Tourism, local MLAs of Mawsynram and Sohra by exploring funding under central schemes like PM-DevINE and name it as "PM-DevINE Sohra-Mawsynram Circuit". Such a circuit is achievable if direct road connectivity is prioritized, attractions are packaged together under themes of rainfall, caves, and waterfalls, and eco-tourism. This would transform the two rainiest places on earth into a single world-class destination.

Further the Mawsynram Fossil Park offers a unique hike through ravines filled with ancient marine fossils, orchids, and marble deposits, while the Mawlyngbna Split Rock is a dramatic natural formation created by the 1897 Assam earthquake, where a massive rock cracked open into a walkable passage. Both sites add adventure and geological depth to a Sohra-Mawsynram tourist circuit where ancient marine fossils

are embedded in ravines and caves. Vertical drop canyons formed by tectonic shifts, seasonal orchids and marble deposits along the trail add their own glamour. Natural pools for swimming, plus views of Weikynmei waterfall are an added attraction. A moderate 1 day-hike (1,400-1,600 m elevation) that blends geology, biodiversity, and scenic landscapes from January-June for clearer trails and vibrant flora can be added to the itinerary. Mawlyngbna Split Rock is believed to have split during the 1897 Assam earthquake, leaving a vertical crack in a giant rock. Visitors can walk through the narrow passage, making it a popular trek and photo spot. Often combined with river canyoning treks and jungle trails they offer immersive adventure tourism. Sohra-Mawsynram Circuit adds the geological depth as Fossil Park highlights Meghalaya's ancient marine past, while Split Rock showcases seismic history. Both sites attract trekkers, geologists, and eco-tourists, complementing waterfalls and caves. By adding these sites, the Sohra-Mawsynram loop evolves into: "Rainfall, Roots & Rocks Circuit"—combining rainfall heritage, living root bridges, caves, fossils, and seismic landmarks.

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

"If I could not do great things, I can do small things in a great way."

— Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Meghalaya's Illegal Regime

THE incident in Garo Hills that claimed the life of a person belonging to an NGO which has been protesting against illegal stone and sand quarrying in the plain belts of West Garo Hills does not portend well for the state. It shows that all these illegalities are operating with the explicit knowledge of the government. While there is an established government elected by the people, several illegal set-ups continue to operate or are allowed to operate under the watch of the government. In such situations the police are told to look the other way. In any case it is not the brief of the police to deal with illegal quarrying. The Garo Hills District Council and the State Forest Department must be in the know about all this but they have allowed the crime to continue. The question that repeatedly arises is why lawlessness is allowed to prevail and how the rule of law can be so outrightly undermined. Where is the safety of the few environment protection groups that call out against the devastation caused by rampant quarrying/mining?

Also what is the brief of the top heavy State Forest Department other than giving permission to cut trees right left and centre or to turn a blind eye when vicious groups decide to operate quarries and mines without even seeking permission? These include illegally operated coal mines which have defied the NGT ban on coal mining since 2014. East Jaintia Hills is another example of how the NGT ban is violated with impunity. Coal is mined as it used to be in the past. Trucks carry this coal to its destination and all that the police do along the way is to let these trucks pass when money changes hands. It's as if there is no government presence in these coal belts and a 'go as you please' policy persists. Those who operate the coal mines are what are termed as the "high level" people with political clout. So how can they be arrested?

In a belated reaction the Forest Department has come down on the illegal quarry operators but that has come a little too late. It took a person's life for the Forest Department to wake up from its "induced" slumber. This is a fit case to be dealt with by the CBI so that the persons behind the crime are not just arrested but their handlers brought to book and be dealt with the severest of punishments. In such cases, civil society has to rise to the occasion and not let the matter die down after a few arrests. It is common to hear that the arrested are out on bail sooner than later. And if the Forest Department and the Police have come down heavily on illegally operated coal mines and quarries in West Garo Hills why is the same vigilance not exercised in East Jaintia Hills where freshly mined coal is visible in and around the Sutnga area. Sadly while ACHIK – the NGO is bringing these illegalities to the fore in Garo Hills there is not a single NGO or pressure group to blow the whistle on illegal coal mining in Jaintia Hills whereas they take up other needless issues. Will the State Forest Department now turn its attention towards East Jaintia Hills too? Or will it wait for something drastic to happen before taking action?

Why the Thangsko Blast Should Trigger Federal Intervention

By Nicholas Jason Ingrai

effective enforcement.

This failure is especially stark given the specificity of the Commission's prior recommendations. The report called for the systematic closure of over 22,000 abandoned coal mines in East Jaintia Hills alone, the integration of drone surveillance with dedicated police units, the installation of smart check gates at key transport bottlenecks, and the rollout of alternative livelihood schemes to address the economic compulsions sustaining illegal mining. These measures were neither vague nor aspirational; they were operationally actionable.

Yet these recommendations remained unimplemented. The High Court observed that there was "no quantitative improvement" on the ground, with surveillance mechanisms remaining ineffective, enforcement infrastructure stagnating, alternative employment schemes showing no movement, and mine closure efforts stalled. More tellingly, the reported disappearance of nearly 4,000 tonnes of coal in July 2025, as stated by a former minister, offers concrete evidence of continued regulatory failure.

This is not a problem of resources or technical capacity, as evidenced by comparative experience elsewhere. In Rajasthan, facing similar challenges in regulating mining operations, enforcement agencies carried out 552 enforcement actions in a single week in January 2026, registered 76 FIRs, and recovered Rs 2.88 crore in penalties. The contrast is instructive. Meghalaya's continued paralysis reflects not feasibility constraints but distorted structures shaped by entrenched political and economic interests.

The Economics of Corruption and the Human Cost

Illegal coal mining in Meghalaya has evolved into a sophisticated criminal syndicate sustained by deep state linkages. An Enforcement Directorate investigation in April 2025 uncovered organised syndicates coordinating miners, transporters, intermediaries, and public officials to move illegally extracted coal across state borders. Documentation is systematically falsified at each stage to manufacture the appearance of legality. At the extraction end, managers and sardars (informal labour contractors) oversee mining under hazardous and inhuman conditions, while a parallel economy of bribes lubricates the supply chain from pithead to market.

For workers, the economic incentives are powerful but lethal. Legal employment in Meghalaya remains scarce, irregular, and poorly paid, particularly for low-skilled labour. Illegal mining offers substantially higher daily cash wages, drawing trafficked workers from Nepal and Bangladesh as well as migrants from India's poorest regions. These workers remain entirely outside formal labour protections. They are unregistered, uninsured, and lack formal employer accountability. When accidents occur, deaths frequently go unrecorded. The 2018 Ksan mining disaster that killed 15 miners and the 2021

Sorkari crane collapse that claimed six lives exemplify this pattern, with more recent deaths at Thangsko reinforcing its persistence.

The Katakey Commission as Institutional Theater

The appointment of Justice B.P. Katakey in 2021–2022 was projected as evidence of the state's seriousness on enforcement. More than a decade after the NGT's 2014 ban, a retired judge was tasked with auditing compliance and recommending corrective action. In practice, however, the Commission illustrates how judicial oversight risks becoming institutional theater when detached from political will and enforcement capacity.

The Katakey Commission has been thorough in its investigations and precise in its recommendations. Justice Katakey has repeatedly documented continuing illegal mining, missing coal stocks, and sustained government inaction. Interim reports have called for aerial surveillance, dedicated police teams, mine closures, and stricter monitoring mechanisms. Yet enforcement has remained weak, and illegal mining has continued unabated. This persistence is not an indictment of the Commission's diligence but of the system within which it operates.

The core failure lies not in the absence of information or solutions but in the lack of political will to act on them. Although the High Court has consistently endorsed the Commission's findings, the absence of effective enforcement has reduced these reports to records of non-compliance rather than instruments of correction. That illegal coal mining continues despite repeated judicial scrutiny, seizures, and arrests indicates that those who benefit from the illicit economy wield greater influence than those tasked with dismantling it.

Why Enforcement Collapsed: The Structural Problem

The core failure is neither legal nor technical but structural. Over time, coal mining in Meghalaya has become embedded within political and administrative power structures, making effective regulation incompatible with political survival at the state level.

Three factors explain why twelve years of NGT prohibitions, Supreme Court interventions, financial penalties, and judicial oversight have failed to halt illegal mining.

First, political patronage is deeply entrenched. Elected representatives and government officials are widely reported to have direct or indirect interests in mining operations. When enforcement threatens these interests, state action is redirected toward symbolic compliance rather than substantive enforcement. The state BJP's January 2026 statement that "repeated denials followed by eventual admissions raise profound questions about the government's credibility" reflects this pattern. Initial denial preserves plausible deniability, while delayed acknowledgment allows limited action aimed

at containing public fallout rather than dismantling illegal networks.

Second, enforcement requires confronting organised syndicates with extensive reach. Coal networks operate across district and state borders, maintain transport and storage chains, and interface with multiple regulatory agencies. State police forces lack both the capacity and institutional backing to dismantle these structures independently. When the Meghalaya High Court observed in February 2023 that the deployment of Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) was necessary to stop illegal mining, it implicitly acknowledged the limits of state-level enforcement.

Third, the economics of illegal mining consistently outpace legal alternatives. In the absence of stable and adequately remunerated employment, workers rationally choose illegal mining despite its risks. Without credible livelihood pathways such as vocational training, cooperative mining models, agricultural support, or small enterprise development, enforcement alone cannot succeed. The Commission's repeated emphasis on alternative livelihoods is therefore not supplementary but central to any sustainable strategy against illegal mining.

Federal Intervention as Necessity

The Thangsko incident, viewed alongside dozens of similar incidents over the past decade, warrants federal intervention in a context where state-level enforcement has demonstrably failed. The Supreme Court's past practice of directing central agencies in cases of persistent regulatory breakdown, including the Odisha iron ore and Goa mining cases, provides clear precedent for such intervention.

Such intervention would be extraordinary but not unprecedented. Its necessity also reflects a deeper failure to recognise indigenous land relations and customary governance systems that have historically regulated resource use in Meghalaya. Illegal mining does not merely violate statutory law; it erodes community authority over land held in trust across generations. As extraction expands through coercion and opacity, both migrant workers and regional communities are rendered vulnerable.

Voices like that of the late Kong Spelity, a prominent anti-uranium activist from Domiasiat, remind us that resistance to extractivism in Meghalaya has never been anti-development. It has been a defence of land, water, and life against a political economy that treats territory as expendable and communities as collateral. Kong Spelity stood for a principle increasingly pushed aside—that land is not merely a commodity to be sold, but a living inheritance tied to dignity, memory, and survival. Making people aware of the realities of rat-hole mining, alongside sustained efforts at mine closure, land reclamation, and ecological restoration, is not an alternative to accountability but its necessary continuation. No measure of development or progress is meaningful if it comes at the cost of human lives and the land that sustains them.

Zohran Mamdani and the idea of India

By Malay Mishra

Zohran Mamdani took the oath of office as the mayor of New York, the largest and most important city of USA, at a decommissioned subway of Manhattan to symbolise his affinity with the city's workers and marginalised people whose cause he said he would serve, thus wearing the badge of a democratic socialist on his sleeve. He was administered the oath by the Democratic senator Bernie Sanders, a monumental figure in American politics and a torchbearer of democratic socialism, with Congresswoman Alexandria Cortez by his side.

There was hardly any coverage in the Indian media of his historic oath-taking, and the seminal impact Mamdani's election would have on American politics. The 34-year-old politician broke several taboos in taking charge of the Big Apple, right in the heart of the elite, fat-cats and billionaires, the bastion of American Jewry.

Mamdani, however, remains a taboo in India. The government through its media handlers had made it a point to invisibilise Mamdani despite his stupendous victory by ousting the two-time Democrat governor Andrew Cuomo, his nearest rival, by polling more than 50% of the vote. Over one million New Yorkers, cutting across race, religion, ethnicity and economic background and largely carrying the immigrant tag, had voted for him in a ground-breaking election creating waves across the world. It is only his home country India that did not salute its 34-year-old son on his unprecedented victory, rising from an Assemblyman to head USA's richest city.

Mamdani has several firsts: the first American of Asian descent and African origin, the first Muslim and the youngest Mayor of New York. Scion of the celebrated power couple Mira Nair, the globally acclaimed filmmaker with films like 'Salaam Bombay!', 'Monsoon Wedding' and 'Namesake' to her credit, and Mahmood Mamdani, Professor Emeritus at Columbia University and post-colonial theorist (his celebrated oeuvre, 'Good Muslim Bad Muslim' published soon after 9/11 remained a New York Times bestseller for weeks), Zohran has never idolised being born into an elite legacy. On the contrary, he has taken up the cause of the immigrants given that New York hosts more than 150 nationalities on its soil. Secular and liberal in orientation, he has shown himself caring for the plight of every New Yorker. Outspoken about Netanyahu's role in the genocidal killings of Palestinians, he has distanced himself quickly from allegations of antisemitism, given that the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), America's largest pro-Israel lobbying group, and the New York Jewish Foundation had played an active role in canvassing support for Cuomo. However, the results saw an even split of the Jewish vote, the younger generation rooting for Mamdani while the older, Hasidic and wealthy Jews, voting en masse for Cuomo.

President Trump's fulminations and public denunciations of Mamdani, threatening to cut off federal funds and openly supporting his Democrat rival Cuomo, hardly made any dent in Mamdani's surging popularity. Calling Mamdani a Marxist and anti-national, Trump sought to nix Mamdani's political career even before it had started. However, the NYC Mayor turned the tables on Trump by appearing at the White House for a courtesy meeting, stressing his primary objective of securing affordability for all New Yorkers while providing free transport, and childcare, affordable housing and government-run grocery stores as he had promised in his election campaign. Surprisingly, and perhaps gauging the public mood, Trump turned turtle and assured Mamdani of all support. The incident showed the contrarian portraits of

both ideologically divided politicians of the right and left. One, mean-minded, vindictive, unpredictable, and the other, defiant, committed and fearless.

In the current turmoil in South America, with Trump defying all international norms and "capturing" the elected President and the first lady of Venezuela, a sovereign country, the American system literally collapsed with the media largely and perniciously silent, and with the Congress and the Supreme Court voiceless against this flagrant abuse of power. Mamdani stood up to condemn the brazen act of aggression as a "declaration of war".

Known for his outspoken views (including outspoken views against Narendra Modi, who he has called a fascist), Mamdani has positioned himself securely on the side of a pro-people ideology. Treating Netanyahu with the same disdain, he cautioned the Israeli PM not to ever land in New York as he would have him arrested for committing "crimes against humanity" for massacring thousands of helpless Palestinian women, children, old and sick while calling for the Palestinians' right to a peaceful homeland on their own soil. Mamdani's father is a Kutchi Gujarati while his mother is a Hindu Punjabi. Zohran, who is married to a Syrian Muslim, radiates the kind of cosmopolitanism which resonates in his unequivocal liberal views, notwithstanding his taking the oath by placing his hand on a historic old Quran to reaffirm his Muslim ancestry (he had met sizeable Muslims in all five boroughs of New York and secured their near unanimous vote).

In his ideological pronouncements, Mamdani veers closely towards a liberal socialist front, a much-needed panacea against the slide towards an autocratic majoritarian State which democratic India has morphed into over the last decade or so. With its secular and democratic credentials founded on the majesty of a nonviolent freedom struggle, India needs a Mamdani at its hour of reckoning in a world tossed between powerful and opposing ideological blocs. It is no wonder that Mamdani chose to quote from Nehru's iconic "Trust with destiny" speech when he vanquished all his opponents singlehandedly to emerge as the youngest leader of a new generation of Americans, without relying on any corporate or political backing but on sheer people's support.

In his seminal work 'The Idea of India', eminent political scientist Sunil Khilnani writes: "Modern Indian politics continues to plunder the nationalist pantheon for its iconography while, at the same time, in its practical struggles, it moves further and further away from the nationalist world and its distinctive temperament. The old arguments and battles are replayed today with the current generation's new meanings and desires: Ambedkar is once again ranged against Gandhi, Patel is brought into battle against Nehru. Even as they divide, these struggles themselves testify to the presence of a common history, a shared Indian past... These struggles constitute the identity of India's history since 1947. And, in its ability constantly to encompass diverse ideas of what India is, this history is itself expressive of the Indian idea".

India's strength lies in its civilizational diversity, its age-old tradition of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (where the world is seen as one family) and no attempts to paint with a monochromatic brush can bring the real Indian canvas to life. Zohran Mamdani's ideas – plural, liberal and invaluable – resonate with the core of a new India, and make him stand out as a leader worth cherishing.

(Dr. Malay Mishra is a retired diplomat and policy analyst. Views are personal.) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@the-billionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Burnout in Nursing: Why It Matters

Editor,
In my earlier letter, I wrote about the visible burdens carried by nurses in Garo Hills, the long working hours, staff shortages, and emotional exhaustion that are part of their daily lives. Beneath these visible challenges lies a quieter and deeper issue, one that many nurses themselves struggle to name – burnout.

Burnout is not just about feeling tired or overworked. It develops gradually when stress at the workplace continues without relief. Over time, it drains emotional energy, dulls motivation, and creates a growing sense of distance from one's work. In professions, centred on caring for others, this gradual erosion affects not only personal well-being but also professional effectiveness.

Nurses experiencing burnout often feel exhausted even before their shift begins. Tasks that once gave meaning and purpose start to feel overwhelming. Empathy, the very heart of nursing, becomes harder to sustain, not because nurses care less, but because they have been giving too

much for too long without adequate support.

In regions like Garo Hills, burnout often develops silently. Nurses work in understaffed wards, manage heavy patient loads, and shoulder responsibilities far beyond what one person can reasonably handle. Many work far from their families, with limited access to rest, recovery, or professional support. Over time, this constant pressure takes a toll not just on the body, but also on the mind and spirit.

Why does this matter? Because a burnt-out nurse is not a failed nurse, it is a sign of a failed system. Burnout affects concentration, decision-making, and emotional availability, all of which are essential for safe and compassionate patient care. When nurses struggle, patients inevitably feel the consequences.

Understanding burnout is the first step toward addressing it. If we continue to see it as a personal weakness rather than a workplace issue, we risk losing dedicated professionals and further weakening an already fragile healthcare system. Recognizing burnout is not about sympathy alone, but about strengthening healthcare for everyone."

Yours etc.,
Khusi A. Sangma,
Via email

A needless debate

Editor,

With regards to the ongoing deliberations between the opinions expressed by Asaduddin Owaisi and Himanta Biswa Sarma regarding the possibility of a non-Hindu person becoming the Prime Minister of India, as widely reported in the Press, it is pertinent to remember Rishi Sunak, erstwhile Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. He has always been a devoted, practising Hindu but was chosen to be the Prime Minister of a predominantly Christian dominated country, which job he could carry out quite successfully. That was possible because the United Kingdom is essentially a modern democratic nation.

Therefore, one may safely conclude that India also being a modern democratic nation, there should be no harm, rather every likelihood, of a non-Hindu becoming the Prime Minister of India some day.

Yours etc.,
Subhasis Chakrawarty,
Via email

At the 'Dukan Ja bad Sha'

Editor,

For me, a Dukan ja bad sha has never been a destination. It has always been a pause, a place to sit down, eat quickly and then return to the rhythm of the day. Like many people in Meghalaya, I grew up seeing these small eateries everywhere, in market areas, near offices and colleges, by busy streets and highways. They are so familiar that we rarely stop to think about what makes them special.

The first thing that always strikes me is what is missing, a menu. There are usually no board on the wall, no printed list, no prices displayed. Instead, the woman running the shop simply tells you what is available. She repeats the same list again and again, to every customer who asks. Over time, the words feel almost scripted, like a daily ritual. Regular customers often don't even need to ask.

Once the food arrives, it arrives fast. Faster than fast food. There is no waiting, no token, no number. The food is already there, warm, filling and familiar. You eat without thinking too much about time, even though everything about the place is designed

to save it.

Seating is usually on long benches and personal space is a luxury you don't expect. More often than not, I find myself eating beside a stranger. Sometimes we exchange a few words, sometimes we eat in silence. Either way, there is something quietly comforting about sharing a bench and a meal with someone you may never see again.

Payment comes only after the meal. And this is where the Dukan ja bad sha reveals its most remarkable quality, trust. Many times, the shopkeeper asks, "What did you eat?" And based on your answer, she tells you how much to pay. There is no checking, no questioning. Just belief.

But during my conversations with some of these women, I was told something that stayed with me. They said there are customers who eat and then simply disappear without paying. It does not happen every day, but it happens often enough to hurt. What makes it sad is not just the loss of money, but the breaking of trust. These eateries survive on thin margins and most are run by women supporting families. When someone walks away without paying, it is not just a meal taken, it is dignity ignored.

Most Dukan ja bad sha are run by women who begin their day early and end it late. Many have little formal education, but they manage accounts in their heads, remember regular customers and keep the food consistent. Their small earnings go towards household expenses, school fees and survival. Yet their labour often goes unnoticed.

Each shop has its own speciality and reputation. There are no signboards announcing this. People just know. Word travels quietly. In a time when shiny cafés and foreign cuisines dominate attention, the Dukan ja bad sha continues to exist without demanding to be seen.

Next time we sit on one of those benches and eat, we can remember that this simple act works because of trust, a trust so visible and essential that it quietly holds the whole place together, and what feels ordinary to us can feel remarkable to anyone seeing and experiencing it for the first time.

Yours etc.,
Zaman E. Tongper,
Via email

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"The best way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing."
— Walt Disney

The Shillong Times

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Young India, old leaders

NATIONAL attention was hardly riveted to an event in the national capital on Monday, when Prime Minister Narendra Modi addressed the nation's youth as part of the Viksit Bharat Young Leaders Dialogue. This was a rare occasion in tradition-bound India where the focus shifted albeit briefly to youth, whose energy is the principal factor that drives nations to progress. But, the disconnect between the PM and the large, elite audience comprising mostly youths, was all too spectacular. The prime minister explained how he created better conditions for the nation's youth and cited "how difficult" it was for them 10 years ago to get jobs or start an enterprise. Claims apart, in an event like this, leaders should rather speak in the idiom of the new generation and give them hope.

In a hip and happening world, refreshing new ideas matter; the old order must change and the old faces too. Narendra Modi, in his third successive term as prime minister, represents a retired generation. The world keeps changing with the times. Change in India, however, is slow and not giving much hope to the new generation. This is evident also in the fact that nearly seven lakh people, mostly youths, emigrate from India each year – a doubling of the number in 15 years. India records the largest outflow of skilled and educated youths in search of jobs and opportunities in foreign soil. For a developed nation, which India is not, it should be the other way round. As per reports a while ago, more of the educated Indians go to Bangladesh for jobs, than youths from there coming to India for such jobs. The salaries there are higher. Over 1.8 million Indian students are flying out to take their degrees in a year, while the inflow of students from abroad to India is still rare. Modi claimed at the event that larger numbers of start-ups were coming up here in recent years; and that drones were now being used for spraying pesticides in the agricultural fields. These are natural progressions over time. The 'Make In India' slogan has not helped create too many jobs; FDI flows have not gone up in recent times. More investments mean more jobs. Addressing these issues is of paramount importance. The restrained response to the prime minister's speech at the event is also proof of the disenchantment among the new generation about the decadent systems letting them down in every sphere of life.

Serious issues are at stake. The ageing profile of politics and leadership in this country is itself a dampener. Leaders carry on and on through successive terms, keeping the young generation of leaders in the queue. Unless a space turns vacant at the apex, those below the ladder cannot climb up and take responsibilities. Modi, who introduced an age-75 bar on politicians holding public offices, has himself defied the rule when he crossed the line. Politics across the board is infested by ageing politicians who refuse to move aside. The longer they are in politics, the more they vitiate the system. The youth of India are no longer impressed looking as they do at a gloomy future.

Letters to the Editor

Fines must combine with strict enforcement of traffic laws

Editor,
The news "Police crackdown on traffic discipline in East Khasi Hills" (ST January 13, 2026) is newsworthy. Fines can be an effective deterrent for traffic violations because they impose a clear, immediate financial cost on offenders, making risky behaviour less attractive. However, fines alone are not always sufficient; their effectiveness increases when combined with consistent enforcement, penalty points, and public awareness campaigns. Why do fines work as a deterrent? Unlike warnings, fines create tangible penalties that drivers feel right away. It is an economic disincentive and people generally avoid behaviours that could lead to financial loss.

Fines can be adjusted depending on the severity of the violation (e.g., speeding vs. drunk driving). Public knowledge of stricter fines often discourages violations, as drivers perceive high risk. There are limitations of fines and research shows fines alone have low elasticity which means drivers don't

always change behaviour just because fines increase. If drivers aren't caught, fines lose deterrent power. There is also a socio-economic bias as wealthier drivers may not feel the sting of fines, while poorer drivers may be disproportionately burdened.

The best practices for using fines are to combine with the points system by linking fines to license suspension and increasing deterrence. Automated enforcement such as cameras and smart systems ensures consistent application of fines. Higher fines can be reserved for repeat offenders or dangerous violations like drunk driving. Announcing stricter fines raises awareness and compliance. Fines are a strong deterrent because they impose immediate financial consequences, but they work best when paired with consistent enforcement, license penalties and awareness campaigns. Alone, they risk being ignored or unevenly felt across society.

The East Khasi Hills police department has rightly declared a zero-tolerance policy for illegal parking and lane driving which is sane and prohibits unsafe overtaking and reckless driving. The East Khasi Hills SP has rightly requested the public to cooperate for safety and smooth movement of vehicles. It is important to note that fines are designed

Nul-Ding Kût and the Living History of the Biате

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A few days ago, I was invited to take part in the Nul-Ding Kût Festival, organised by the Biате Cultural Organisation of Meghalaya in Saipung. Nul-Ding Kût, or the 'Festival of Renewal of Life', is celebrated by the Biате—an indigenous community residing in the East Jaintia Hills District—to express gratitude for nature's abundance and a successful harvest. This year's celebration was much grander, with invited guests such as Santa Mary Shylla, the sitting MLA of the Smta-Saipung constituency, and Patricia Mukhim, editor of The Shillong Times. The event also served as a platform to launch the first-ever Biате picture book, *Is She Wise*, by Anna Notsu, a PhD scholar from Leiden University, Netherlands.

This was my first time travelling to Saipung, and I had heard that the road from Smta to Saipung was in very poor condition. Indeed, that turned out to be true. After five hours of gruelling travel over dusty roads, Patricia Mukhim and I finally reached the venue where Nul-Ding Kût was being celebrated. This was an important event for the Biате community, and the field was almost full, with people clad in their best attire. One programme that particularly caught my attention was the fashion show, which attempted to showcase the history of the community through changes in clothing styles. The earliest Biате were portrayed as wearing garments made of leaves and other natural materials, while later representations showed a modern look—pants and suits for men, and a fusion of traditional and modern designs for women. I am not entirely convinced about the accuracy of these depictions, as they seem to reflect a stereotypical portrayal of indigenous communities that has long dominated mainstream narratives.

The Biате are part of the larger Sino-Tibetan language family, which originated in northern China along the banks of the Yellow River. The Khasi, on the other hand, belong to the Austro-asiatic language family, whose homeland was located in southern China, through which the Yangtze River flowed. Both groups were among the earliest farmers in the world and possessed knowledge of pottery, evidence of which has been found at Lum Sohpetbneng. There was a suggestion that the Biате were originally hunter-gatherers, which also appears to be inaccurate. Like

many indigenous communities throughout East, South and Southeast Asia, the Biате depended significantly on wild meat and plants; however, as part of the Sino-Tibetan group, they were also among the earliest farmers who domesticated foxtail millet, the second most widely grown millet species in Asia. In fact, northern China, particularly the Yellow River region where the Sino-Tibetan languages originated, was one of the world's centres of agricultural origin. The Biате, like the Khasi, were always farmers.

Another important discovery from Lum Sohpetbneng was charred seeds of various plants, including wild rice, sobriew, soy myleng, sobriew, and cotton. The last item is particularly significant, as it suggests that the Khasis were already weaving their own clothes when they settled around Lum Sohpetbneng. This skill must have come from China, where the history of weaving dates back more than 5,000 years, with silk weaving beginning around 3500 BCE. The Biате, who also originated in the same region, would have known the art of weaving—possibly even silk weaving—when they began migrating to South Asia. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that they wore garments made of leaves; instead, they most probably wore clothing made from cotton or other fibres.

Thus, the fashion show presented during the festival appears to reflect a mainstream stereotype of indigenous communities as backward and wholly dependent on nature. This portrayal is inaccurate. Indigenous communities such as the Khasi and the Biате were highly advanced farmers who domesticated rice and millet—two of Asia's most important staple crops. They also possessed knowledge of pottery and weaving, both of which require a high degree of technical skill and specialised knowledge. These innovations laid the foundations of urban cultures in East, Southeast, and South Asia—the very epitome of what is often termed "civilisation." Hopefully, future narrations of Biате history will replace stereotypes with authentic cultural depictions.

The Khasis were the first to arrive in what is now Northeast India and Meghalaya, an event believed to have occurred around 5,000 years ago. The Biате, on the

other hand, according to B. Pakem, former Vice-Chancellor of NEHU and former Education Minister, entered the Jaintia Hills around the 13th century, more than 800 years ago. This was nearly 300 years before the founding of Hima Jaintiapur, which emerged when Hima Sutnga captured Jaintiapur. Based on Fabian Lyngdoh's 2024 article "Solving Tribal Boundary Issues: The Ancestors' Way", the Biате are also known as Hadem. Pnar folklore speaks of a Hadem warrior named U Khongweng Myllep, who once terrorised the people of Raliang. Even the warriors of Jaintiapur could not defeat him until he voluntarily retreated to his own realm across the Kupli River. Even today, Biате communities live in the North Cachar Hills, on the other side of the Kupli. This confirms that the Biате were present during the period of Hima Jaintiapur, and those living on this side of the Kupli—particularly in Saipung—must have lived under the suzerainty of the Khasi Syiem.

The alternate name of the Biате—Hadem—also sheds further light on their historical presence. According to Bhoi and Pnar traditions, there was once a Syiem Hadem (Hadem chief), and even today a village in Ri Bhoi is called Kor Hadem, meaning the resting place of the Hadem. This suggests that the Biате were once far more widespread, extending as far as Ri Bhoi, before gradually becoming confined to Saipung. Interestingly, the Khasi word for maize is (B)riew-Hadem, meaning "the people of Hadem." The Khasi-Pnar term for maize appears to have originally referred to Job's tears (sobriew). Since maize was domesticated in southwest Mexico around 9,000–10,000 years ago and introduced to Southeast Asia by European traders in the 15th century, the Biате—or Hadem—may have been the community that introduced maize to the Khasi, who traditionally did not cultivate it. This historical exchange seems to have been memorialised through the naming of the crop.

Based on folklore, archaeology, and historical records, the Biате likely arrived at their present location between 600 and 800 years ago. It is certain that they were present at least 500 years ago, when Hima Jaintiapur emerged from Hima Sutnga. This makes the Biате one of the oldest indigenous communities in the state.

It is therefore fitting that, as one of the oldest indigenous communities here, the Biате are represented in the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC), where a constituency has been reserved for them. Their situation is thus better than that of many other minor groups in the state, such as the Karbi, Tiwa, Hajong, and Rabha, who have no seats reserved for them in the KHADC, JHADC or GHADC. While there have been instances of representation—for example, E. Teron, a Karbi MDC from the Nongjri constituency—in the current term, no community other than the Khasi and one Biате representative has representation in the KHADC and JHADC. In fact, the state government, along with the KHADC, JHADC, and GHADC, opposed the inclusion of "unrepresented tribes"—namely the Bodo-Kachari, Hajong, Koch, Mann, and Rabha—in the proposed amendment to the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

I believe that minor communities should have representation in the ADCs, just as I would like the Khasi to have political representation in the Karbi Anglong Autonomous Council (KAAC) in Assam and in other states where they reside, such as Manipur, Tripura, and Mizoram. The Biате have also been demanding a Regional Council within the JHADC to safeguard their rights, culture, and interests—a legitimate demand, given that the community lags behind the Khasi and Garo in several socio-economic indicators.

We must take care of our own minorities if we wish to demand that others protect our people who are minorities in their lands. Only then can we foster peace among indigenous groups and protect ourselves from greater threats, such as legislation like the CAA and the unchecked entry of corporate capital into our territories. Those who promote these agendas must prefer us to fight among ourselves so that they can take everything from us. Helping the Biате preserve their cultural heritage and advance in education and socio-economic development can therefore be an important step towards securing our collective future. Let us hope that happens 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)

opened already.

While we ask for upgrades to a new 50kW shortwave and DRM transmitter, the administration is busy calculating the scrap value of copper and iron. If 50 kW and 100 kW transmitters in a metro city like Mumbai are deemed "obsolete" and sold on an "As is where is" basis, what hope is given to the regional transmitters in the Northeast? These documents prove that the 2014-2019 shutdown of regional shortwave radio was not a pause for maintenance, but a preamble to permanent destruction. We must demand transparency. Are the NES shortwave towers in Shillong still standing tall, or have they too been marked for "cutting from the bottom?" We refuse to let our regional identity be sold off as scrap.

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh
Lawai,
Via email

On Road Safety

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw attention to the pressing issue of road safety, which is intricately linked to the physical and psychological fitness of drivers. The alarming rise in road accidents necessitates urgent measures to ensure

that drivers of commercial buses and passenger-carrier vehicles are fit to operate these vehicles safely.

I humbly urge the authorities to consider introducing mandatory fitness camps for drivers in our state. These camps, organized by District Transport Offices, should assess drivers' alertness, reflexes, vision, hearing, stress levels, and mental readiness at regular intervals.

The absence of such assessments puts passengers and other road users at risk. It is equally crucial to educate drivers about safe driving practices, professionalism, and public safety. Regular awareness sessions on traffic rules, stress management, and substance abuse prevention can significantly mitigate road accidents.

Furthermore, providing guidance on financial planning and welfare schemes can enhance drivers' overall well-being and work efficiency.

The implementation of these measures can substantially enhance road safety, reduce accidents, and save precious lives.

Yours etc.,
Krishnendu Deb,
Shillong-4

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

The Outsider: Dangerous, Foreign, and Essential

By Ellerine Diengdoh

Disclaimer: I can confirm that absolutely no trains were involved in the transport of these sentences. I was petrified that if I put these words on a train, they would arrive too quickly and much too cheaply, bringing with them a terrifying 'Influx' of low-quality, migrant adjectives that might dilute the cultural purity of the paragraph. Instead, to ensure maximum inefficiency, this article was delivered exclusively by truck. As a result, this article cost 2000 rupees per paragraph. It is the most expensive opinion you will read today.

Since the dawn of time, humans have always been terrified of "The Outsider". In the olden days, the outsider was usually a sabretoothed tiger or a man from the next cave who had a slightly better rock. Today, in the dust-covered hills of Shillong, we have evolved. We no longer fear the tiger. We fear the fella who cooks curry differently from our mum. Science informs us that this terror is encoded in our DNA, and our DNA for those who don't know, is a sort of microscopic spiral staircase in our blood that screams "Stranger, Danger!"

"This is a terrifying thought. It is so terrifying that we have decided to wear our traditional costumes as a shield. But the Dhara, the very fabric of our identity, woven with pride and history, is also woven by a couple of blokes in Assam. We are literally fighting a culture war while wearing the enemy's merchandise, like a vegan protesting a slaughterhouse while wearing a coat made of sausages."

whenever we encounter an "Outsider." We are told over and over that the "Outsider" is coming to take over our land, our jobs and to dilute our culture. This is a terrifying thought. It is so terrifying that we have decided to wear our traditional costumes as a shield. But the Dhara, the very fabric of our identity, woven with pride and history, is also woven by a couple of blokes in Assam. We are literally fighting a culture war while wearing the enemy's merchandise, like a vegan protesting a slaughterhouse while wearing a coat made of sausages. So, we strut around in our indigenous pride, ignoring the "Made In" label and pray that our hypocrisy doesn't shrink in the wash.

Let us first examine the prickly issue called "employment." Now, if you want a wall built, or a pipe fixed, or a hole dug, or carpentry work done in these hills you have two choices: do it yourself, or hire the Outsider. You simply cannot ask 'one of your own'. We are told the 'good ones' exist (like fully-functional government schools), but no one has actually seen them. They have all been 'taken', presumably hoarded by the super-rich in underground bunkers where things actually get fixed.

This leaves you with the terrible ones. If you hire them, you realise that their family tree isn't a tree, it is a dense, tangled fungal growth that spans the entire globe. They have more relations than the population of China, who wait until you need a shelf put up, or a floor laid, and then they drop dead out of spite! Statistically, a local worker has more dead relatives than there were casualties in World War One.

If nobody has died, their other excuses would be 'tired', or it is raining, or, crucially, it is not raining, but the clouds look a bit moody and they seriously don't want to risk it. So, we are forced to hire the Outsider. Our entire construction industry is built on the backs of people who are theoretically supposed to be chasing out of town with pitchforks, which is awkward, because if we did chase them out, who would build the shed to store the

pitchforks in? We will now look at the domestic front. The domestic ecosystem in Shillong is brutal. Finding "help" that genuinely wants to "work" is harder than finding an honest politician. If you find one, be warned: you are not an employer; you are a sponsor. You are sponsoring their transition into adulthood. Firstly, you feed them until you are destitute. Next, they wear your wardrobe to take selfies, posing in your designer sweatpants like they own the place, which, given how much better they look in them, they basically do. After which comes the monthly review, where they demand a raise for the gruelling task of 'existing in your house'. As soon as you comply, they exchange their dumb phones for a smart one. The Smartphone is the Holy Grail. Once acquired, they access the internet, which is basically a catalogue of potential husbands. They swipe right, they match, and vanish into the mist to start the cycle all over again.

But this misery is nothing however, compared to the amount we are paying for essential commodities. Everyone complains, no one does a thing. Everything in Shillong

costs a fortune. Buying a kg of onions requires a mortgage. If we had a train, a large metal snake that carries things cheaply, prices would go down. But we are scared of the train. We think the train will bring "Influx". So we decide instead to bring goods by trucks. This allows us to support our thriving local industry: The Check Gate. So the truck pays the bribe, the truck driver pays the bribe, the truck owner pays the bribe, the onion however doesn't care who pays...it just decides to cost a hundred rupees.

The irony is that the influx happens anyway, largely because people have legs, and cars exist. And when they get here, they meet the gatekeepers. The gatekeepers don't stop them. That would be rude. Instead, they charge them. It is a perfect system: we get to keep our racial purity theoretical, inside our heads, while the gatekeepers keep the cash actual, inside their pockets.

Through all this, we maintain a dignified silence. We are terrified of the truth, so we attend church religiously. We believe that if we sing hymns loudly enough on Sunday, God won't notice that we are being held hostage by our own hypocrisy on Monday. We pay our dues to the church and our bribes to the gatekeepers, a double taxation to keep our souls clean and our vegetables expensive. In the end, we have preserved our DNA. We are pure. Purely terrified, purely paranoid, purely delusional, purely fake, purely contradictory, and purely fleeced by our own. But at least we aren't 'Them'. Even though 'Them' is currently the only reason 'Us' has a roof to sleep under....

P.S.
But on a completely unrelated note, I have an emergency. I need to rehomed 4 sets of my mother's kittens and I am pretty desperate at this point. They are small, furry and unlike our workforce, they actually move around quite a bit. They are available immediately, absolutely free, no toll gate fees apply. You can mail me at ellerined@gmail.com. I am dead serious about this! Please take a cat. Or four.

When Illegality Mars Governance

THE death of ACHIK member Dilseng M Sangma should not be forgotten too quickly because it raises many troubling points that need to be publicly debated not just in the Garo Hills but in the state capital of Shillong as well. It is rather unfortunate that none of the pressure groups from the Khasi-Jaintia Hills have condemned this attack on another pressure group member who was calling out the illegal stone quarrying in Rajabala area. Now, Congress leader Deborah Marak wants a thorough investigation into the case. Marak is also keen to know who gave permission to the people who are operating the quarry. Was it the Garo Hills District Council or the State Forest Department? These issues cannot be left unresolved. Those who are following up this case in Garo Hills need to get to the root of the matter and do a series of RTIs if need be. Too often the hue and cry over fatal attacks die down quietly before justice is served.

In a state where the economy has relied heavily on natural resources such as coal, limestone, boulders, charcoal, timber etc., and where their extraction is not guided by any environmental norms there are two types of forces that emerge. One group believes that since they have relied on coal mining for their livelihoods for generations no one, not even the law can stop them from carrying on with their trade. Another believes in conservation. The former see the forces that plead for the environment as their enemies. Those legislators representing constituencies from East Jaintia Hills, West Khasi Hills and Garo Hills where coal continues to be extracted cannot take a stand against illegality since those involved in mining activities are their voters. That being the case, the administration which includes the Police also gets their cues from the MLAs/ministers and have learnt to ignore the repeated violations of the NGT order banning rat hole mining of coal. Since coal mining continues, its transportation to different parts of the country via Assam and also to different cement plants in Jaintia Hills, also happens on a daily basis. Large sized trucks by the dozens that are overloaded with coal, ply freely without license plates and anyone pointing to this serious violation of Transport rules are threatened and intimidated. The crime rate in East Jaintia Hills is spiralling. The Police is created to prevent crime, not to facilitate it. So why are the Traffic Police manning the Jaintia Hills roads turning a blind eye to this blatant violation of the law?

Then there are coke units that continue to function again despite the NGT ban. Why are these lawless acts not taken up in the State Assembly? Dr Mukul Sangma (TMC) has just begun to question these illegalities after Dilseng Sangma's death. The only Opposition today in the Meghalaya Assembly are the Trinamool Congress and the Voice of People Party (VPP). Of the two the VPP seems to be in line with the idea of continued rat hole coal mining despite the NGT ban. In the last MP election the VPP scored very high in Jaintia Hills possibly because of its stance on coal mining. Not a word is heard from VPP President Ardent Basaiawmoit on this illegality. The question demands and answer. A political party that preaches ethics in politics cannot be supporting a lawless regime!

Why Drag Cricket into Ugly Politics

By Rajdeep Sardesai

your surname is Khan you remain a soft target for the Hindutva hotheads.

In normal times, a rational, level-headed government would have ignored the rants of the 'fringe' but in 'new' India, the Hindutva fringe is now 'mainstream' and a government that is fuelled by toxic religious politics cannot ignore the social media army that propels it forward. When this social media outrage begins

Asia Cup or now ostracising a Bangladesh player, Indian cricket calls the shots. That 'superpower' status is now being used, rather misused, to play big bully on behalf of the government. Indeed, the decision to remove Mustafizur wasn't even taken after consulting the IPL Governing Council but instead seen as an urgent firman from the political leadership.

Which brings one back to

"Dr S Jaishankar as external affairs minister has been the highly visible public face of the Modi government, a peripatetic and seasoned diplomat who has often made headlines for his sharp and pointed soundbites. And yet, there have been enough moments when even the media-savvy minister must wonder just who is calling the shots in South Block. The latest instance of diplomatic confusion is exemplified by the handling of relations with Bangladesh."

to influence sensitive foreign policy choices, then it enters a very dangerous terrain. It is almost as if the foreign minister's reach out to Dhaka doesn't really matter; what matters is the raw emotions of a domestic political constituency that treats every Bangladeshi as 'anti-national', including a cricketer who has little to do with coarsened politics.

This isn't about making

the original question: who is deciding Indian foreign policy? India's practised diplomatic corps or the home minister and the BJP's sangh parivar brotherhood in saffron? The former have to often walk a delicate tightrope, patiently balancing national interests within a larger framework of achieving credible strategic goals in the neighbourhood. By contrast, the netas

"The BCCI exercises hegemonic dominance over the cricket world with home minister Amit Shah's son, Jay Shah the president of the International Cricket Council and easily the most powerful man in the sport. Then be it refusing to shake hands with the Pakistani players at the Asia Cup or now ostracising a Bangladesh player, Indian cricket calls the shots. That 'superpower' status is now being used, rather misused, to play big bully on behalf of the government."

the usual trite argument about the need to separate sports and politics. Such distinctions are impossible to make at a time when sports, especially cricket in the sub-continent context, is a graphic demonstration of Indian 'soft power' to the wider world. The BCCI exercises hegemonic dominance over the cricket world with home minister Amit Shah's son, Jay Shah the president of the International Cricket Council and easily the most powerful man in the sport. Then be it refusing to shake hands with the Pakistani players at the

and their supporters have no such constraints. There is an election in Assam and West Bengal just months away and ratcheting up anti-Bangladesh sentiment is seen as a useful weapon to win votes. Where a nuanced diplomatic policy would strongly protest the attacks on Bangladeshi Hindus without making it a prime time spectacle, the political leadership and their cheerleaders prefer riding a wave of emotion that they hope will grab headlines and earn them electoral dividend. Consequentially, rather than building bridges with

Dhaka, we have only created a wall of mistrust and anger that could only exacerbate an already fraught situation, further emboldening the Islamic fanatics in that country. Imagine the embarrassment now if Bangladesh doesn't come to play in India or prefers neighbouring Sri Lanka as a 'safer' country.

Nor is Bangladesh an isolated example of ad-hoc foreign policy choices being driven by sentiment rather than common sense. In 2024, there was an entirely avoidable spat with tiny Maldives sparked off by incendiary tweets on both sides. It eventually required diplomatic finesse to slowly paper over the cracks. Last year, in the immediate aftermath of Op Sindoor, the Modi government revoked the security clearances for Turkish airport ground handling firm, Celebi, citing national security concerns. It was again a sudden decision taken against the backdrop of Turkey being accused of siding with Islamabad in the war against India. Here again, a more refined foreign policy would have avoided an instant confrontation with Ankara but the impatient social media warriors have no time for any complex, well-considered messaging.

Perhaps the most obvious example of just how an inconsistent foreign policy matrix is influenced by rabble-rousers is provided by New Delhi's initial response to Beijing in the aftermath of the Galwan clashes in 2020. From banning Tik-Tok to calls for boycotting Chinese goods, the right wing internet's perpetually angry brigade determinedly sought to escalate the conflict by taking measures that were frankly no deterrent to an expansionist regime. Five years later, the BJP-RSS leadership is hosting a visiting Chinese Communist Party delegation, treating the engagement as routine politics. When the Congress engaged with Beijing's political class, their leadership was accused of betraying national interests. Now, it's business as usual. The hypocrisy is staggering.

Post-script: At the mall a few days ago, I saw a group of young men lining up to buy sweaters at highly discounted prices. As they furiously shopped, I noticed that the sweaters carried a 'Made in Bangladesh' tag. So much easier to target a cricketer than a textile manufacturer.

(The writer is senior journalist and author. His latest book is 2024: The Election That Surprised India. Mail: rajdeepsardesai52@gmail.com)

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Sleepless World Leaders..!

World leaders, ladies and gentlemen, have officially stopped sleeping.

Not because of climate change, inflation, unemployment, or even social media trolls. No. Sleep itself has become geo-politically unsafe. Ever since one Latin American leader was escorted from his bed to New York faster than a room service order, bedrooms across the world have been reclassified as high risk zones. The humble pillow is now viewed with suspicion. Mattresses are no longer places of rest but potential launchpads for international embarrassment.

Sleep, therefore, has been postponed until further notice.

In many capitals, emergency protocols have been quietly updated. Bedrooms are no longer sanctuaries. They are liabilities. Curtains are drawn not for privacy but for plausible deniability. Lights are left on not to chase away darkness but to avoid helicopters mistaking the roof for a tennis court.

Some leaders, adopting a practical and forward-looking approach, have moved their sleeping arrangements to the roof. Why complicate matters, they reason, by making soldiers march through corridors and staircases when a rope can be lowered and

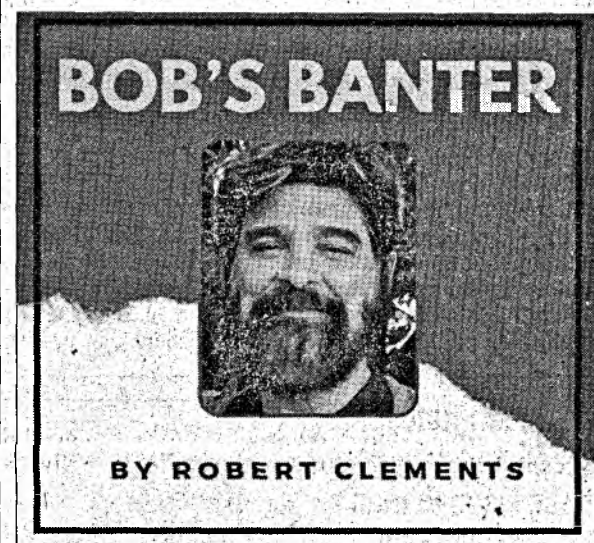
In North Korea and Iran, signs have been pasted on doors saying we actually do not have the bomb. The font is large. The tone is earnest. In some cases, the signs are laminated. Just in case sincerity needs waterproofing.

In India, the signage is more philosophical. A board outside one prominent residence reads there is nothing of value here. It was all fake news. Another simply says please remove shoes before entering. Civilisation must not collapse entirely.

Europe is pretending to be calm. It is not. Every helicopter sound triggers emergency meetings. Leaders sleep lightly, like anxious cats, alert to every noise. Even ambulances now cause diplomatic panic. In some countries, noise cancelling windows have been installed, not to block sound but to block imagination.

Africa, meanwhile, has responded with strategic wisdom born of long experience. Many leaders have stopped sleeping with one wife in one place. Bedrooms rotate. Houses rotate. Sometimes even countries rotate. You cannot be lifted from bed if nobody knows which wife's bed you are in. It is not chaos. It is decentralisation.

India, as always, brings innovation to the table. One opposition leader keeps a



the leader can be airlifted directly. Efficiency is, after all, the hallmark of good governance.

On several terraces, helpful arrows have been painted pointing towards the ideal lifting spot. A few leaders have thoughtfully marked an X, just like in the movies. Others leave the terrace lights on all night so helicopters do not overshoot. Cooperation, after all, is the cornerstone of diplomacy.

Those who continue to sleep indoors do so fully dressed. Suits. Ties. Shoes. Some even wear their ceremonial jackets to bed. It is not vanity. It is preparedness. One never knows when history will demand a photograph at an ungloved hour. Nobody wants to be remembered as the leader who faced the world in striped pyjamas.

Married leaders have issued firm instructions at home. No casual nightwear. Wives must sleep as though attending an official function. Silk gowns are acceptable. Nightgowns with cartoon characters are not. Intimacy and romance have been postponed in the interest of national security. Love may be eternal, but extradition moves faster.

Interestingly, many wives have embraced the situation with remarkable foresight. Shopping lists have already been slipped into their husbands' pockets. Just in case. In case you land in New York, please pick these up from the local Salvation Army or Goodwill store. Winter jackets. Discount shoes. A blender. American chocolates for the grandchildren. Crisis management, after all, begins at home.

Outside bedroom doors and rooftop staircases, polite notices have appeared. Welcome soldiers. Tea or coffee before departure. One particularly thoughtful leader has added biscuits to the menu. Another has included a small note apologising for any inconvenience caused. Manners, even under arrest, must be maintained.

copy of the Constitution permanently in his pocket. If our leader is taken, I might as well be sworn in immediately, he reasons. Efficiency again. Why waste a perfectly good crisis.

Another leader practices his oath of office in front of the mirror every night, just in case. A third has already written his first speech. It begins with dear fellow citizens, I did not expect this responsibility so suddenly.

The irony of it all is delicious. For decades, citizens lost sleep worrying about their leaders. About their decisions, their speeches, their egos, their silence. Now leaders are losing sleep worrying about a knock on the door, or worse, a rope descending silently from the sky.

Power, it seems, has finally discovered insomnia.

The world order, once so confident, now drinks chamomile tea. International summits discuss wellness before warfare. Leaders exchange tips on sleep apps and white noise machines. One even suggested group meditation. It was vetoed.

So if you see a world leader with dark circles under the eyes, or one who seems to have forgotten how to hug, do not ask if they are tired. Ask whether they slept on the roof. Ask whether the sign outside their bedroom was written in correct English. Ask whether their shopping list survived the night.

And above all, ask whether they are pronouncing Donald correctly.

Because in this brave new world, leadership is no longer about vision. It is about staying awake long enough to see where the rope is coming from.

Sleep well, if you can. The leaders certainly cannot...!

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

Letters to the Editor

When development turns ugly and destroys Shillong's heritage

Editor,

It is quite a feeling of joy and excitement of every Shillongite that the first phase of the much-awaited Shillong - Tamabil road is perhaps just a few months away before we can finally use it. Driving from third mile up to Banuif is breathtakingly beautiful; with wider open road unobstructed by any huge structure; flanked by endless beautiful trees and houses which dot some of the sides of the road, rendering a feeling of pure joy and satisfaction at having seen development that simultaneously accentuates or enhances the natural beauty of our beloved hill station. But no sooner had one savoured this beauty when suddenly there appeared a blot on the landscape, an eyesore, at once claustrophobic, tasteless and a complete monstrosity! A Flyover! Whose lower walls supporting the road rises up to the size of

a three storied building- the style usually adopted by highways in Meghalaya. I'm afraid this is the same architectural style about to be adopted for the flyover running from Rilbong to Barik point!

Shillong's grandeur and heritage pride is in the heart of the city; in its rolling hills, beautiful pine trees and colonial structures, offering not only a pleasant spectacle for visitors but adding real and exotic value to the place for the locals as well as a the stakeholders outside our state who genuinely praise and cherish it. The latter however, over the past few years have mourned and are surprised at our society's reckless modernist attitude overlooking the very thing that we should be proud of. Some of those who share a piece of their heritage in Shillong are culturally more attuned and once even protested hopelessly against one of its heritage building's destructions only to receive no support from any locals. In fact, some local netizens mocked at them for mourning over the destruction of an old fashioned structure,

not knowing that we are the ones that should be mocked at for our ignorance and lack of heritage awareness. Our society overlooks the value that this town is known for which makes us at once not pro-development advocates but reckless modernists.

Mega constructions like a flyover in the heart of the city, should be avoided if it is just a showpiece of development to feed the pride of the authorities in power and the ego of the stakeholders. This may ruin the exotic grandeur of Shillong. Instead, leaving the road to a wide spaced open four lane stretch is more practical, in order not to make the flyover an eyesore but to make the project that enhances, maintains and reclaims the glory and grandeur of the city. If at all the structure is necessary, it should be done keeping in mind that the structure should not be another blot in the landscape. It should not be erratically done but should be planned in order to enhance, reclaim and maintain the beauty that the place is known for. One suggestion is to perhaps use supporting pillars for the

flyover just like in any other city of the country and the world instead of the high-rise walls to avoid ruining the city making the place look tasteless, claustrophobic and bleak.

Yours etc.,
Bethania Sohtun,
Shillong 14

Nurses suffer burn-out and untimely payment of salaries

Editor,

The letter to the Editor: "Burnout in Nursing: Why it Matters" by Khushi A. Sangma (ST Jan 13, 2026) while spelling out the emotional exhaustion that nurses are going through in their daily lives, the writer not only speaks for the nurses in Garo Hills but also about similar stress that nurses in the state are going through. One would like to add that contractual nurses at the Civil Hospital, Shillong are also going through not only emotional and mental stress but a lot of financial stress as well as they do not get their salaries on a regular

basis. Imagine not being paid for months after fulfilling one's duty. Without a regular income they struggle to meet the basic needs of food, rent, electricity bills, medical expenses, school and college fees of children, transport, etc. With prices of essential commodities ever increasing, how can they meet their monthly expenditure when even those who receive their salary on time face the pinch? How can they run their homes? Isn't it a grave struggle for them? Prolonged non-payment of salary will definitely lead to anxiety, depression, frustration and helplessness. Having studied so hard and after working hard yet not getting a salary after every month leaves any sane person with a feeling of uncertainty about their survival and the future.

An assured income at the end of every month allows individuals to budget their expenditure without worry and anxiety. Timely payment helps allocate funds for savings, insurance and emergencies while also bringing about stability to the management of the house,

encouraging long-term planning for children's education, health and security in the future. Most importantly, an assured salary at the end of every month provides psychological reassurance. Knowing that one's efforts and fulfillment of duties and responsibilities will be duly recognised and compensated brings peace of mind and reduces stress, thereby enhancing productivity at work.

Strengthening the healthcare system means strengthening infrastructure and facilities as well as strengthening the morale and spirit of the caregivers. Sangma has correctly pointed out that nurses are individuals that cater to the care and safety of their patients. Why should they be denied timely income that belongs to them? Give them their salary regularly for they deserve it.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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“Meaning is about making a difference, not having an audience.”

— Adam Grant

The Shillong Times

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US as global bully

GLOBAL order is in for a major disruption with US President Donald Trump beginning to act in a hyper-active mode, virtually disrupting governance in leftist Venezuela, staking his claim for Greenland and now threatening military action in Iran to unseat the Ayatollah Khamenei-led clerics from their long-held power there. Clearly, Trump is acting as a global bully and usurper, with his guiding principle being “might is right.” The United Nations, formed after the Second World War to arbitrate disputes between nations and avoid wars in future, is often caught napping in situations of war in recent times. The US being its main fund-provider, the global body is often a passive spectator to aggressive postures from the US. While Democrats are more friendly to the outside world, Republican rule more often than not creates situations of confrontations and war. Donald Trump being from the Republican stock, his first term as president was relatively cool compared to his present term, which started a year ago.

The US is often labelled as a global bully due to its strong and aggressive stands vis-à-vis the issues of the outside world. However, with the Soviet Union disintegrating and Russia under Vladimir Putin not keen to adopt an anti-US posture, a scenario has emerged wherein the US actions have gone unchallenged. American offensives in Afghanistan, or Iraq later, were understandable, if not justified, as these happened in the aftermath of the Al Qaeda bombing on Twin Towers and elsewhere. Americans’ tough action in the name of the global fight against terror won wide support, even from some of the Islamic nations, not excluding Saudi Arabia. Yet, the selective amnesia of Americans is evident when it comes to handling Pakistan, currently seen as the epicentre of global terror. The sanctuary offered by the Pakistani military to Al Qaeda leader Bin Laden, close to the military headquarters of Rawalpindi, too did not ruffle US feathers against the Islamic nation. In Pakistan’s anti-India stands, support often came from the US at the diplomatic level as also in the supply of sophisticated military armaments. While the US’s financial and military support to Pakistan was explained as help for the latter in fighting terrorism, these were used by the Pakistan military to target India.

It would now appear that the US president is keen on subverting the global order altogether and establishing American authority over nations near and far. Venezuela could be the starting point. No nation is safe from the American greed for capture of others’ wealth, be it oil or other precious natural resources, as in the case of Venezuela and Greenland. Trump’s call to Denmark to simply hand over Greenland, or America would take it by force, shows the President’s excessive greed. He has begun addressing himself as the President of Venezuela. Trump tasted success in global aggressiveness first by his self-appointed mediation to halt Operation Sindoor, and announcing the ceasefire to the world before the Indian or Pakistani governments could do it. This is still an unexplained enigma as far as Indians are concerned.

Letters to the Editor

Progress and Development at the Cost of Our Roots

Editor,
I write to you today to express my views not merely as a concerned citizen, but as a witness to a quiet, suffocating tragedy. We often speak of the Shillong-Tamabil road in the sterile language of “connectivity” and “bilateral trade,” but on the slopes opposite to the villages of Darrang, Shnongpdeng and Amkoi, the reality is much darker. It is the story of an ancestral legacy being buried alive under the very earth that once gave it life.

For generations, these hillsides have been a vibrant sea of green—the towering betel nut trees and lush vines are the lifeblood of our people. To a farmer in this region, a betel nut grove is not just “agriculture.” It is a living bank account; it is a fund for a daughter’s wedding, the hope for a son’s higher edu-

cation and the security for an elderly parent’s medical care and so on. These trees are raised with the patience of decades, treated and cared for like family members rather than crops.

Today, that green is being choked out by a relentless, suffocating brown. As heavy machinery carves through our mountains for the NH-40 expansion, the “progress” we see is a man-made avalanche. Instead of responsible waste management, massive amounts of construction debris are being pushed off the cliffs, cascading down onto the private lands below.

I recently spoke with a local elder who watched, his eyes welling with silent tears, as thirty years of his life’s work disappeared in a single afternoon under several feet of rock and excavated soil lie the trees he planted as a young man. He didn’t just lose his income; he lost his history. These are not “unoccupied slopes” as the blueprints might suggest; they are the sacred, ancestral gardens of a community

When One Individual Makes a Mockery of the Rule of Law

By Patricia Mukhim

The MDA-2 Government is led by a bright young politician with degrees in Finance from foreign universities but is assisted by a bunch of other ministers whose only credential is that they have learnt how to buck the system to keep winning elections. Some ministers have protected dishonest and corrupt officers as long as they serve their personal needs. And the intelligent Chief Minister looks on!

Today this article will focus on how the Government of Meghalaya has literally allowed a 1993 batch Indian Forest Service Officer - MBK Reddy to remain untouched despite the many occasions when he has broken the law and has a string of cases against him. Reddy belongs to the Assam-Meghalaya cadre and has served in Meghalaya for the longest time. In 2011, he was convicted by the CBI Court, Indore and the punishment was rigorous imprisonment for 2 years plus fine for indulging in corrupt practices in the Civil Services Examination 1996. Imagine a guy who gets into the Indian Forest Service through cheating, thereby breaching the integrity of a prestigious Examination. Reddy had managed to get a copy of the question paper in advance and taken pre-written answer sheets to the examination hall, where he was caught red handed by the invigilator. He confessed to his crime. During the course of investigation, CBI arrested Reddy and he spent 15 days in prison as an under-trial prisoner in 1997 before he was released on bail.

Reddy filed an appeal against the conviction order which was rejected by the Sessions Court, Indore in 2013. Reddy was sent to the jail to undergo his prison term after spending 16 days in the Indore Central Jail as a convict. Reddy got out on bail granted by the Madhya Pradesh High Court. Hence his sentence is merely suspended pending the hearing and disposal of the Review Petition filed by him. But his conviction still stands. And he is still serving his sentence.

In 2017 the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), Government of India instituted Disciplinary Proceedings (DP) against Reddy to dismiss him from service on account of his conviction on criminal charges. Incidentally the same was set aside by the Guwahati Bench of the Central Administrative Tribunal (CAT) on grounds that the Government of Meghalaya is the competent authority to institute Disciplinary Proceedings. An appeal against the CAT ruling filed by the MoEFCC in the matter was disposed of by the Meghalaya High Court vide Judgment dated July 5, 2022 with a direction to the Government of Meghalaya to institute proceedings against Reddy within a month.

Meanwhile aggrieved by the Meghalaya High Court decision, MoEFCC filed a

Special Leave Petition (Civil) No. 19363 of 2023 before the Supreme Court. The main contention of the case is that the Union of India is the competent authority to institute Disciplinary Proceedings as the offence for which Reddy has been convicted was committed by him while he was undergoing probationary training at the Indira Gandhi National Forest Academy (IGNFA), Dehra Dun. All respondents in the matter have already filed their replies before the Supreme Court. The SLP was last listed for hearing on April 02, 2025.

In compliance with the directions of the Meghalaya High Court vide Judgment dated July 5, 2022 the Meghalaya Government instituted disciplinary proceedings against Reddy with a penalty of reduction by one stage in the existing grade and withholding of increments for three years without cumulative effect. On receipt of the case records, the UPSC has advised that defects in the disciplinary proceedings instituted against Reddy in compliance with the Judgment of the Meghalaya High Court should be removed by issuing a fresh office memorandum to propose a penalty of dismissal from service, as is applicable in cases involving conviction of a government servant on criminal charges. The advice of the UPSC is binding on the State Government but in case the State Government does not agree with advice of the UPSC, the same needs to be communicated to the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest & Climate Change (MoEFCC) - the Cadre Controlling Authority for the Indian Forest Service. The decision of the Government of India on the matter will be final. In case the Government of India also disagrees with the advice of the UPSC, the same along with the reasons thereof needs to be provided to the UPSC for incorporation in its Annual Report to be presented to the President of India for placing the same before both Houses of Parliament. Strangely the Government of Meghalaya has sat on this file since it received the advice from the UPSC on May 1, 2025. The timelines stipulated by the Government of India to complete the disciplinary proceedings against Reddy have expired long ago.

The question here is What vested interest does Meghalaya Government have in protecting MBK Reddy and why? Meanwhile, in compliance of a recommendation of the Estimate Committee of the Lok Sabha, the MoEFCC, GoI, Cadre Controlling Authority for the Indian Forest Service, is repeatedly insisting that all the 4 promotions given to Reddy during pendency of criminal charges against him and 2 promotions obtained by Reddy after his conviction by the CBI court should be withdrawn by holding

ing a review Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) and he should be brought back to the position of Assistant Conservator of Forests which he would have held but for these erroneous promotions. The last communication was made on July 28, 2025.

Now Reddy has demonstrated strange behaviour while undergoing probationary training for the Indian Forest Service at the IGNFA, Dehradun. He absconded from the training. On account of his long unauthorised absence, Reddy was found unfit and discharged from the service in 1996. However in 1999 Reddy was reinstated into the service with all consequential benefits by the Andhra Pradesh High Court vide a brief order, without going into the merits of his discharge. The Central Government too reinstated him into the service without contesting the said order which did not go into the merits of his discharge from service.

Hence Reddy is the only officer in the country who not only continues in service but has also obtained regular promotions and annual increments without completing the mandatory probationary training and without passing the mandatory departmental examination so far.

Prior to absconding from the Probationary Training at the IGNFA, the anti-dowry cell of the Andhra Pradesh Police from Hyderabad arrested him in a dowry harassment case filed by his then wife. Then too, Reddy spent several days in police custody and judicial custody as an under-trial prisoner. Reddy was acquitted from the charges in the dowry harassment case on the basis of a certificate from a medical practitioner declaring him as impotent. With that certificate Reddy proved that his estranged wife delivered a baby out of the wedlock and hence is a woman of loose character. Strangely, Reddy, despite being certified impotent by a medical practitioner, was recently blessed with a daughter from his current wife, who he married a few years ago.

In another startling development the period spent by Reddy in the Indore Jail as a convict has been regularised as ‘leave’ by the Government of Meghalaya and he has drawn leave salary for the said period spent by him in the Indore Central Jail. Similarly, Reddy has also drawn salary for the period spent in the jail as an under-trial prisoner in both the UPSC cheating as well as dowry harassment cases on the basis of the order of the Andhra Pradesh High Court which reinstated him with all consequential benefits.

As per guidelines issued by the Government of India, a convicted officer like Reddy cannot hold any sensitive post especially those dealing with public funds, settlement of tenders and exercise of discretionary powers.

transparent compensation mechanism for the farmers whose livelihoods now lie buried under the rubble of “development.”

True progress and development should uplift our community up and not bury them beneath the rubble of a road that treats their home like a wasteland.

Yours etc
Chanmiki Lamin
Via email

Digital Arrest and the Rising Menace of Cyber Fraud

Editor,
I wish to draw the attention of readers to a disturbing report published recently in the paper Aaj Tak regarding a case of so-called digital arrest in Delhi, in which an NRI doctor couple was cheated of nearly Rs 15 crore. The woman was kept under intense psychological pressure for several days by cyber criminals posing

as police and investigating officials. I believe this news is extremely important, as it creates awareness and helps citizens protect themselves from the growing threat of digital fraud.

This incident clearly shows that cyber crime today is not merely a technical issue but a psychological one. The fraudsters succeed not because people are careless, but because fear, authority, and urgency are carefully manufactured. Fake legal documents, threats of arrest, and warnings about family safety leave victims with little time or mental space to think rationally.

What is especially worrying is that such crimes continue despite repeated advisories from the government, banks, and telecom companies. This suggests that public awareness needs to move beyond routine warnings and focus more on helping people recognise the common patterns of such frauds—unexpected calls, demands for secrecy, pressure for immediate action, and requests for money or

Instead of complying with the directions of the Government of India to withdraw all the six promotions by holding the review DPC and to remove defects in disciplinary proceedings instituted against him by proposing imposition of a penalty of dismissal from service and referring the matter to the Government of India for making the order to dismiss him from service to render him ineligible for any future engagement under the Government and also to avail pension and gratuity, on receipt of advice from the UPSC as to the nature of penalty to be imposed on Reddy, the Meghalaya Government has done the opposite. It has placed almost the entire natural wealth of the State under the control of Reddy by appointing him to the posts of Principal Secretary, Mining and Geology Department (August 8, 2025) and Forest and Environment Department (November 17, 2025), in flagrant violation of the guidelines prohibiting convicted officers from holding sensitive posts.

As a Principal Secretary to the Forest and Environment Department, Reddy is expected to comply with the directions of the MoEFCC to hold a review Departmental Promotion Committee (DPC) to withdraw all the 6 promotions obtained by him so far in violation of the DPC guidelines. He is also responsible for complying with the advice of the UPSC to rectify shortcomings in the disciplinary proceedings instituted against him in compliance with directions issued by the Meghalaya High Court vide judgment dated July 06, 2022 by issuing a revised Office Memorandum to propose the penalty of his dismissal from service.

Instead MBK Reddy is placed in a position where he will misuse the powers and authority vested on him in the post of Principal Secretary to the Forest and Environment Department, not just to delay and derail all actions against him, but also to weaken the case against him. He is now in a position to destroy all documentary evidence against himself and that cannot be ruled out.

By taking advantage of pendency of proceedings before the Indore Bench of the Madhya Pradesh High Court in the Criminal Revision Petition (CRR) No. 966/2013, and also before the Supreme Court in SLP (C) No. 19363/2023, MBK Reddy with the connivance and support of his backers, both within and outside the Government of Meghalaya has not only successfully played with the prestige and respect for Constitutional, Judicial, Parliamentary and Administrative authorities but has also made a mockery of the rule of law, at a great cost to the public probity and State exchequer.

So who in the Government of Meghalaya today is benefiting from all this chicanery? Or should we call it skulduggery?

OTPs.

It must be clearly understood that no police officer, court, or government agency arrests anyone over phone or video calls, nor do they seek financial transactions for verification. This simple fact, if widely internalised, can prevent immense financial and emotional loss.

I urge the authorities to strengthen people-centric awareness programmes, particularly for senior citizens and NRIs, while ensuring swift and decisive action against cyber fraud networks. I also appeal to readers to pause, consult family members, and verify facts before responding to any alarming calls.

In the digital age, awareness is not optional—it is essential for our safety.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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Beyond particles: How string theory may rewrite the universe

By Kavya Aggarwal

If the universe was a soundtrack, we have been humming it our whole life. Every atom in our body, every star in the sky, every beam of light is part of a piece of music that never stops playing. String theory asks us to imagine that beneath everything we see and touch there are unimaginably small strings, each one vibrating with its own rhythm. These strings are so tiny that if an atom were stretched to the size of the solar system, a single string would still be smaller than a tree.

String theory proposes that the building blocks of nature are not zero dimensional particles but one dimensional strings whose vibrations generate all known particles and forces. These strings can be closed loops or open segments, and they sweep out thin, sheet-like surfaces as they move through space and time. Those surfaces record how a string evolves. In this framework, a particle is not a separate object but a particular way a string can vibrate. Different frequencies and patterns of vibration correspond to different masses, charges, and spins.

To make this work mathematically, string theory introduces something that sounds like science fiction: extra spatial dimensions beyond the three we move through every day. The equations that describe vibrating strings are only consistent if space has more directions than length, breadth, and height. These additional dimensions are imagined to be tightly curled up on scales far smaller than an atom. Their shapes are highly intricate, more like twisted, many holed surfaces than simple lines or circles. The geometry of these hidden dimensions acts like the design of a musical instrument, setting the allowed vibrational modes. By changing the shape of the extra dimensional space, you can change which notes the strings can play and therefore which types of particles and forces exist. In this way, the deepest features of our universe may be encoded in the “architecture” of invisible dimensions.

String theory is needed because modern physics is built on two very successful, but very different theories. First being quantum mechanics which describes the behaviour of particles at the tiniest scales, where uncertainty and probability dominate and the second being general relativity which describes the smooth bending of spacetime under the influence of mass and energy, giving us gravity and the large scale structure of the universe. Each theory is exceptionally accurate in its own domain, but when both are needed at once the mathematics fail.

String theory tries to mend this by changing the basic assumptions about matter and interaction. When physicists attempt to merge quantum mechanics and gravity using points like particles, calculations near very high energies tend to diverge, producing infinite answers that do not correspond to anything real.

A string, by contrast, spreads its influence over a minuscule length. Collisions between strings involve extended regions rather than single mathematical points. This removes many of the infinities. Additionally, one of the natural vibrational patterns of a closed string behaves exactly like a quantum carrier of gravity. That is the key reason string theory is considered a candidate for unifying quantum mechanics and general relativity within a single, consistent framework.

Strings can be open, with two distinct ends, or closed, forming loops. Open strings can represent matter particles, while closed strings typically model the gravitational sector. As a string evolves, it traces a two dimensional world-sheet through spacetime. The equations that govern this worldsheet closely resemble the equations that describe waves on a vibrating membrane. Quantizing these waves produces a tower of possible excitations, each one corresponding to a different particle state with a specific mass and spin. Some versions of the theory also include supersymmetry, a proposed symmetry that pairs each known particle with a heavier partner differing mainly in its intrinsic

spin. Supersymmetry helps the theory remain mathematically well behaved at very high energies.

Another distinctive feature of string theory is the network of relationships, or dualities, connecting what might at first appear to be different theories. There are several named versions, such as Type I, Type IIA, Type IIB, heterotic, and an eleven dimensional extension called M theory. Dualities show that these are not really separate universes of ideas but alternative descriptions of the same underlying physics. They are like different notations for the same tune: one written for piano, one for violin, one for full orchestra. Depending on how strongly strings interact, it can be easier to use one description or another, but they all point back to a single deeper composition. This network of dualities has unexpectedly linked string theory to advanced branches of pure mathematics, leading to proofs and conjectures about geometric spaces that mathematicians had struggled with independently.

To appreciate why this search matters, imagine trying to understand a symphony while only ever hearing a single instrument at a time. Quantum field theory and general relativity each let us listen to one section of nature’s orchestra. String theory aspires to provide the full score. A genuine theory of everything, if it can be developed and tested, would not just satisfy intellectual curiosity. It would reveal how spacetime itself might emerge from more primitive ingredients, clarify whether our universe is unique or one of many possible “arrangements,” and explain extreme environments where current theories fail. Questions about the information stored in black holes, or about the earliest quantum ripples that grew into galaxies, might finally receive coherent answers once the full structure of the theory is known.

Before string theory, progress depended on quantum field theories and the Standard Model of particle physics, backed by increasingly powerful accelerators and detectors, as well as on precise astronomical observations testing general relativity. Those tools remain essential, but they reach natural limits. Pushing energies high enough to probe distances where strings would be visible is far beyond existing technology. As a result, much of string theory’s development has been theoretical, guided by mathematical consistency and by indirect hints. For example, work on string inspired models has led to better understanding of black hole thermodynamics and of the strange fluids that appear in condensed matter systems. Unexpectedly, the same equations used to describe strings in a curved spacetime can also model strongly interacting quantum systems in the laboratory, through what is known as holographic duality.

For everyday life, the benefits of string theory are mostly indirect. However, history shows that deep theoretical advances often lead to new technologies in surprising ways. The mathematics of quantum mechanics eventually produced semiconductors, lasers, etc. Techniques developed in string theory are already influencing fields such as quantum information, high energy phenomenology, and pure mathematics. Insights into the structure of spacetime could one day feed into ultra precise navigation, new forms of encryption, or materials designed with unprecedented control over their quantum properties.

Beyond the laboratory, string theory offers something harder to quantify but just as valuable: a new way to think about existence. It suggests that the reality you experience is the emergent result of patterns far below direct perception. It changes how we tell stories about the cosmos, how we teach science, and how we imagine the future. It blurs the boundary between disciplines, inviting ideas from music, geometry, computation, and philosophy into a shared conversation about what the universe really is.

(The writer is a First year Student, Plaksha University)

"Never allow a person to tell you no who doesn't have the power to say yes."

— Eleanor Roosevelt

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Whither collective responsibility

THE MDA Government appears to be a one-man army with Chief Minister Conrad Sangma answering questions on every issue under the Meghalaya sky. Normally the cabinet which comprises 12 ministers, the Chief Minister included should appear to be a collective body where any minister should be able to answer questions upfront to the media. But the task of handling the media has been left to Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma. When Paul Lyngdoh was in the cabinet he answered questions and even appeared to be the unofficial spokesperson of the Government. Paul Lyngdoh is replaced by someone who is not just inarticulate but mumbles his way through a press conference or when questioned by media persons. Article 164(2) of the Indian Constitution establishes the principle of collective responsibility within the state government. This means that all ministers agree to every decision taken. Whether those decisions have actually been arrived at according to the principle of consultation, discussion and exchange of ideas is unclear. When the Chief Minister is way ahead of his cabinet colleagues in terms of understanding the larger implications of most issues, also because he is the one representing Meghalaya in Delhi where he has to negotiate with different ministries, it is obvious that he has to take the final call on every matter that affects the state. We hardly see any other minister negotiating with different ministries of the central government.

Looking at the vast array of departments that the Chief Minister handles which include Cabinet Affairs, Elections, Finance, Forests & Environment, Home (Political), Information Technology and Communication, Mining & Geology, Personnel & A.R., Planning, Investment Promotion & Sustainable Development, Programme Implementation & Evaluation and any portfolio not allotted to any other Minister. This means the Chief Minister looks after at least 12 departments. Is it possible for one person to manage so many departments and to do justice to each one of them? True the Chief Minister is assisted by able bureaucrats but the final call on any issue lies on him. Since the Chief Minister is another human, subject to fatigue and overwork it is possible that he might take decisions on crucial issues without being adequately briefed by the bureaucracy because there's not enough time and the matter demand quick decision-making. What happens if such decisions turn out to be against the interests of the state?

All other ministers have four departments under them and some just three. Obviously they would have more time trying to understand the demands of each department and the series of actions that need to be taken. But even here it is the Chief Minister who has to take a final call. It is the Chief Minister who is now answering queries related to NEHU when this should have been the brief of the Education Minister. The Chief Minister is in charge of Home (Political) Department while Home (Police) is with Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong, yet when it comes to answering queries related to the HNLC threat to VPP chief, Ardent Basaiawmoit, it is the yet again the Chief Minister who is held answerable. What does this say about the capability, confidence and grasp of issues of the other ministers? Not much to write home about. Incompetence is the hallmark of the majority of Meghalaya's cabinet members. Hence the Chief Minister remains the sole arbiter for the State and people.

Growing up, in an educated mixed marriage, I was exposed to ideas, values, concepts that many even now would believe to be too perfect for today's world. I remember the times when my Nana would bring me onto his lap and tell me the stories of fighters and soldiers and the kings of old. How Alexander conquered the world, how great of a king Akbar was, poems of Sarojini Naidu. My mum would tell me about the invasion in Afghanistan and how she would sit by the radio day after day waiting for an update. I watched movies and heard stories of people, regular people who rose to fight for what was right to fight for our country.

I was 10 when I heard about the legend of Spartacus, 14 the first time I ever watched Rang De Basanti, the first time I saw and heard the word Azadi, 16 when I first watched an interview of Arundhati Roy, where she spoke of the India she was fighting for. My childhood, my whole life, every story, every movie and moral has pushed me to want and yearn for Azadi, for freedom. It has been driven into my bones, to want freedom.

So when people ask "tum kya chahte hai?" (What do you want) My only answer is freedom, 'Azadi'.

During an MLA meeting in Karnataka, while the assembly was discussing the chaos of the state a law maker said, "There is a saying that when rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it". Has all the fighting and suffering of our people before us come to this? Has all the blood-shed for equal rights come to this? To allow such comments to pass, for someone who is in charge of the laws that restrict us, that allow us our freedoms and rights? What rights could come in place if such crimes are dealt with and seen as common gossip and laughing matters by the same people who are elected into power regardless of the parties they represent.

When a woman walks down the streets, regardless of whether she wears a skirt, jeans, a kurti, school uniform, work attire or a burqa, should it give a man the right to take advantage of her simply because she is a woman? Simply because he can? Simply because of these same comments made in houses, in shops, on the streets, behind the shadows or in broad daylight and now even during MLA Meetings.

Where is the Azadi, the freedom, the independence we so proudly speak of when a woman cannot walk the streets without clutching her keys, her eyes averting any gaze, her ears perked up for any sounds just to get home safely? Why is it that even in school uniform, we still receive stares and advances

media platforms' further worsens the situation:

I strongly urge the concerned government departments, cybercrime authorities, and social media companies to take immediate action. This includes investigating the App, restricting its circulation, and ensuring that content violating cultural, ethical, and legal standards is removed. Awareness campaigns on responsible digital behaviour should also be initiated, particularly in indigenous and rural areas.

Our indigenous communities deserve protection, respect, and a safe digital environment. Development and technology should empower our people, not exploit or degrade them. Silence on this matter will only allow further harm. It is time for collective responsibility to safeguard our culture and future generations from such digital threats. Mawlai is not cheap, Shillong is not cheap and most importantly our Meghalaya is not cheap.

Yours etc,
Augusten Blah,
Shillong - 2

Losing our Freedom in New India

By Lillian Anjum Smale

from men? Where is this freedom when our right to clothing is being questioned instead of the rates of pollu-

this so openly, completely disregarding women and pushing us back by years in 1 sentence. Many may

"There is a saying that when rape is inevitable, lie down and enjoy it". Has all the fighting and suffering of our people before us come to this? To allow such comments to pass, for someone who is in charge of the laws that restrict us, that allow us our freedoms and rights? What rights could come in place if such crimes are dealt with and seen as common gossip and laughing matters by the same people who are elected into power regardless of the parties they represent.

tion or literacy or discrimination?

Why is the price of living rising everyday? Why is there such high illiteracy or poverty? Why are there children begging on the streets or working in small dukans

wonder, why so much anger over a single sentence that he has already apologized for? Simply, because it is not just a sentence. It is a comment which stems from years of systematic disregard towards women, years of listening to



and dhabas? Why are basic menstruation facilities and products unavailable or unaffordable for so many little girls? Why are we turning a blind eye to so many of the problems that are vital to the development of our

what the chachas and mamas say, years of men and systems pushing women down again and again and again, of taking away our rights our freedom are dignity, years of saying "what was she wearing? Why was she out so late

They fought for dignity, for safety, for equality, for the right to exist without fear. And yet here we stand, watching law makers debate women's bodies instead of hunger, poverty, education, violence, or justice. The past does not sit silently behind us. It screams. It echoes with longing and shrills with sorrow at what this country has allowed itself to become. Every freedom movement, every slogan, every martyr's cry rises to ask us: Was this the future you promised us?

country? How can we be the fourth largest economy in the world, battling at an international level yet our own people are starving to death? And our law makers and representatives are discussing "ripped jeans"?

In the words of George Orwell "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others"

That's true, because some men can make comments like

at night?" And it's not just men, but also women who too have been desensitized by such a society that they too blame the women. A desensitisation so great that when Men come out about their own abuse and traumatic experiences they are mocked? Why is it that when a boy is sexually harassed or assaulted the only words of "comfort" are "You must've enjoyed it". Why must one be

expected to have enjoyed unconsensual sexual interaction simply because they have the organs too? Why is rape and sexual assault treated so lightly? Why is society always making excuses "don't ruin his life, he has a bright future ahead", "it'll bring shame on your family if you file a case?"

What Azadi is this? What freedom is this, where the blood of our ancestors has dried into dust beneath our feet, forgotten by those who sit in power? The women and men who fought, who starved, who bled and died for this land did not imagine a future where their sacrifices would be mocked in legislative halls. They did not fight so that the very people entrusted with protecting our rights would reduce women to bodies and jokes.

Our ancestors would be turning in their graves, not in quiet disappointment but in rage; rage that the freedom they carved out with their lives has been warped into a hollow slogan. They fought for dignity, for safety, for equality, for the right to exist without fear. And yet here we stand, watching law makers debate women's bodies instead of hunger, poverty, education, violence, or justice. The past does not sit silently behind us. It screams. It echoes with longing and shrills with sorrow at what this country has allowed itself to become. Every freedom movement, every slogan, every martyr's cry rises to ask us: Was this the future you promised us?

This is not about one comment, one case, not one man, not one moment of "poor judgment." It is a nation that has learned to flinch and then look away. A country desensitized to the pain of its own people, trained to excuse violence, to laugh at cruelty, to normalize humiliation. It is a system that teaches men entitlement and teaches women endurance. A society that demands silence from survivors and sympathy for perpetrators. One that asks women to adjust, to cover up, to stay home, to stay quiet while asking nothing of those who violate them. One that protects "reputations" more fiercely than human lives.

This is the Azadi where outrage lasts a news cycle and apologies erase accountability. Where women's anger is labelled hysteria and their fear dismissed as exaggeration. Where justice is negotiable, dignity conditional, and freedom reserved for the privileged few.

How long can a nation survive when it grows numb to its own moral collapse? How much blood was spilled for a freedom that now exists only for some?

Because this is not freedom, this is betrayal and history is watching.

already been the third week since this uprising and the barbaric killings began. To understand the roots of this uprising, one must look back into history.

Another million-dollar question is --- if the main leaders, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Masoud Pezeshkian, claim to be religious men, why do they order such a brutal crackdown on their own people? Do true God-fearing individuals not believe in forgiveness, peace, compassion, and the values of humanity? One wonders why the more religious are most intolerant and uncompassionate. Can anyone sincerely provide a logical answer? Now we, nay, this civilisation, need an answer that resonates with humanity and that resonates with the God above in heaven.

Yours etc,
Salil Gwahl,
Shillong

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Ha ka Ktien ka Thylliej: The Sacred Power of Words in Khasi Culture

By Dapbianglin Sohkhlet

Among the indigenous Khasi community, words have never been understood as a mere form of communication. Ka ktien ka thylliej, words are believed to carry power, power that heals and power that harms, power that blesses and power that curses. This belief, preserved across generations, lies at the very heart of Khasi identity and moral life.

Our ancestors consistently reminded us, "Ban kren da thev bad ym kren lamler ioh poi sha ka sang ka ma." Speak with care and do not speak falsely, lest words lead to ruin and destruction. These words were not uttered casually. They were warnings shaped by experience, by observation, and by a deep understanding of how speech shapes reality. In Khasi belief, words are never neutral. Once spoken, they act.

What is unique about this belief system is the recognition that not everyone equally holds the power of words. The skill of the tongue, known as "ka sap

affects the body, the family, and the community as a whole. Among the Khasi people, truth is not only ethical, it is curative.

Most of the modern era dismisses such beliefs as superstition. Yet Khasi beliefs remain so deeply rooted and consistently practised that even science cannot fully explain their effects. This is not because Khasi belief rejects science, but because it recognises that science does not account for every dimension of human experience. Healing is not always biological alone; it is moral, emotional, spiritual, and communal.

Another powerful example of ka ktien ka thylliej lies in the belief that words are meant to be spoken not only to humans, but to all living and breathing beings created by God. Animals, plants, forests, rivers, and nature as a whole are believed to respond to words. Elders speak of people who could calm a hissing snake and swarming bees, through speech alone, not by force, but by respect-

"The belief was never about controlling nature, but about restoring harmony. Likewise, words were believed to carry the power to curse those who harmed nature without cause. Forests were not entered carelessly. Trees were not cut without purpose. To destroy nature irresponsibly invites moral consequence, enforced not by written law, but by spoken condemnation. Words thus functioned as ethical boundaries."

ka ktien," is understood as a sacred gift carried through generations. It is not just any kind of person who holds this power. Only some are believed to be specially blessed by God himself. These individuals, often elders, healers, or spiritually entrusted members of the community, are respected not because they speak often, but because their words carry weight. Their blessings are believed to bring well-being and prosperity; their curses are feared because words, once spoken by such tongues, are believed to take effect.

Among the Khasi people, words that cure a person can also be words that curse a person. The same tongue that offers healing can inflict harm if misused. This is why restraint, truthfulness, and moral discipline are inseparable from speech. Words are understood as both medicine and sword.

What stuns me the most is a story I once heard from an elder, a story that continues to challenge how we understand belief, healing, and the limits of explanation. There was a woman who had been in labour pain for nearly forty-eight hours. She suffered continuously, exhausted and struggling, yet unable to deliver her child. Despite all efforts, nothing changed. An elderly woman then intervened, someone recognised for her wisdom and spiritual insight. She did not suggest any physical remedy. Instead, she asked that the woman's husband be called. He was asked a single question: whether he had committed any act of infidelity, sexual or emotional, during his wife's pregnancy. When the husband confessed to the wrongdoing he had committed, something extraordinary occurred. Almost immediately, the woman delivered her child successfully. The baby was born healthy and unharmed.

How can such a belief hold so much power? How can words be so powerful that even scientific knowledge struggles to explain them?

Within Khasi belief, this is not viewed as a coincidence. It is understood through "ka ktien ka thylliej". Silence, especially when it conceals wrongdoing, is believed to bind life. Truth, once spoken aloud, releases it. Moral imbalance is not merely personal; it

ful and composed words. The belief was never about controlling nature, but about restoring harmony. Likewise, words were believed to carry the power to curse those who harmed nature without cause. Forests were not entered carelessly. Trees were not cut without purpose. To destroy nature irresponsibly invites moral consequence, enforced not by written law, but by spoken condemnation. Words thus functioned as ethical boundaries.

Before cultivation or harvesting, Khasi families traditionally sought blessings from God through spoken words. Through speech, they acknowledged what was to be done and what was not to be done. They named their intentions aloud, placing themselves under responsibility and restraint. Words governed action before action occurred.

In this way, "ka ktien ka thylliej" shaped Khasi society itself. Words preserved balance between humans and nature, regulated behaviour, and sustained communal harmony. Speech was not reactive; it was preparatory. To speak was to commit.

In today's world, where words are spoken instantly and carelessly, this worldview appears increasingly rare. Yet its endurance suggests profound wisdom. What modern society dismisses as superstition may, in fact, be a deeper understanding of consequence, accountability, and interconnectedness.

The Khasi belief in words does not contradict reason; it expands it. It reminds us that language does not merely describe the world, it participates in it. Words shape lives, societies, and destinies.

This is the enduring truth of ka ktien ka thylliej: words are not only spoken. They carry responsibility. They bind and release. And at times, they give life.

In essence, Khasi oral beliefs are deeply intertwined with morality, ecology, spirituality, and social governance. Words are both a tool and a force: they shape reality, regulate behaviour, and connect humans with the spiritual and natural world. Oral knowledge is preserved not in writing, but in ritual, storytelling, song, and careful instruction by elders, making it both living and adaptable across generations.

Letters to the Editor

Inappropriate App Poses a Threat to Our Indigenous Community

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed newspaper, I wish to draw the attention of the authorities, civil society, and the general public to a deeply concerning issue affecting our indigenous people. An inappropriate mobile application (NOLO) is currently being circulated widely through social media platforms, and its impact on our community—especially the younger generation—is alarming.

This App promotes content that is culturally insensitive, morally degrading, and completely at odds with the values, traditions, and identity of our indigenous society. What is more disturbing is the ease with which it is being accessed and shared through video

on Whatsapp, advertisement on Facebook, availability in Playstore often without any form of age restriction or content warning. Such unchecked exposure threatens to erode our cultural fabric and normalise behaviour that disrespects our customs and social harmony.

Our Khasi, Pnar communities have long struggled to preserve our language, values, and way of life in the face of rapid modernisation. The spread of such digital content adds a new and dangerous challenge. Young people, who are still forming their identity, are particularly vulnerable to being influenced by harmful narratives that ridicule or undermine indigenous dignity and self-respect.

There are also serious concerns regarding privacy and exploitation. Many users download these Apps without understanding the potential risks to personal data, leaving them exposed to misuse, manipulation, or psychological harm. The lack of accountability from app developers and social

media platforms' further worsens the situation:

I strongly urge the concerned government departments, cybercrime authorities, and social media companies to take immediate action. This includes investigating the App, restricting its circulation, and ensuring that content violating cultural, ethical, and legal standards is removed. Awareness campaigns on responsible digital behaviour should also be initiated, particularly in indigenous and rural areas.

Our indigenous communities deserve protection, respect, and a safe digital environment. Development and technology should empower our people, not exploit or degrade them. Silence on this matter will only allow further harm. It is time for collective responsibility to safeguard our culture and future generations from such digital threats. Mawlai is not cheap, Shillong is not cheap and most importantly our Meghalaya is not cheap.

Yours etc,
Augusten Blah,
Shillong - 2

Iran weeps amid flames and mass killings

Editor,

Iran is in flames. Iran is mourning! The cruelty of its leaders knows no bounds. It's like they're waging war against their own citizens. To carry out their brutality, they have shut out the eyes of the press. So the mass shootings can be carried out in the dark. In just a span of a few days, it's been estimated that over twelve thousand people have been killed. Some claim that the death toll from the massacre could be well above twenty thousand. What lies ahead for the hapless citizens remains completely uncertain. Those most targeted are women's groups who believe in freedom of expression and stand against heartless oppression. Worse still, countless journalists have been killed, many threatened with death or subjected to horrific torture. Many artists, athletes,

and other public figures have also been arrested or endured cruel torture at the hands of the armed forces.

I was deeply shaken when I came across a social media post about a woman breaking down in tears, recounting how noted footballer Mojtaba Tarshiz and his wife were reportedly shot dead by security forces. Just imagine the heartbreaking situation of their two young daughters left behind. A brave doctor, Aida Rostami, who risked her life treating the wounded, was reportedly tortured and killed in an unimaginably cruel way just a few days ago.

Yes, countless clips are now circulating on social media. They also expose a glaring double standard. The world roared in outrage over the Palestinians and Hamas, and rightly so. Yet when it comes to the unprecedented massacre in Iran, the voices fade to a whisper! And here's a serious concern -- why has the UN remained so passive? Why has it failed to take decisive action against Iran or stop the mass executions immediately? It has

A NEW COURSE FOR OCEAN DIPLOMACY

Oceans shape everyday life in powerful ways. They cover 70 per cent of the planet, carry 90 per cent of global trade, and support millions of jobs and the diets of billions of people. As global competition intensifies and climate change accelerates, the world's oceans are also becoming the front line of 21st-century geopolitics.

How policymakers handle these challenges will affect food supplies, the price of goods and national security.

Right now, international cooperation is under strain, but there are many ways to help keep the peace. The tools of diplomacy range from formal international agreements, like the High Seas Treaty for protecting marine life, which goes into effect on Jan. 17, 2026, to deals between countries, to efforts led by companies, scientists and issue-focused organizations.

Examples of each can be found in how the world is dealing with rising tensions over Arctic shipping, seafloor mining and overfishing. As researchers in international trade and diplomacy at Arizona State University in the Thunderbird School of Global Management's Ocean Diplomacy Lab, we work with groups affected by ocean pressures like these to identify diplomatic tools - both inside and outside government - that can help avoid conflict.

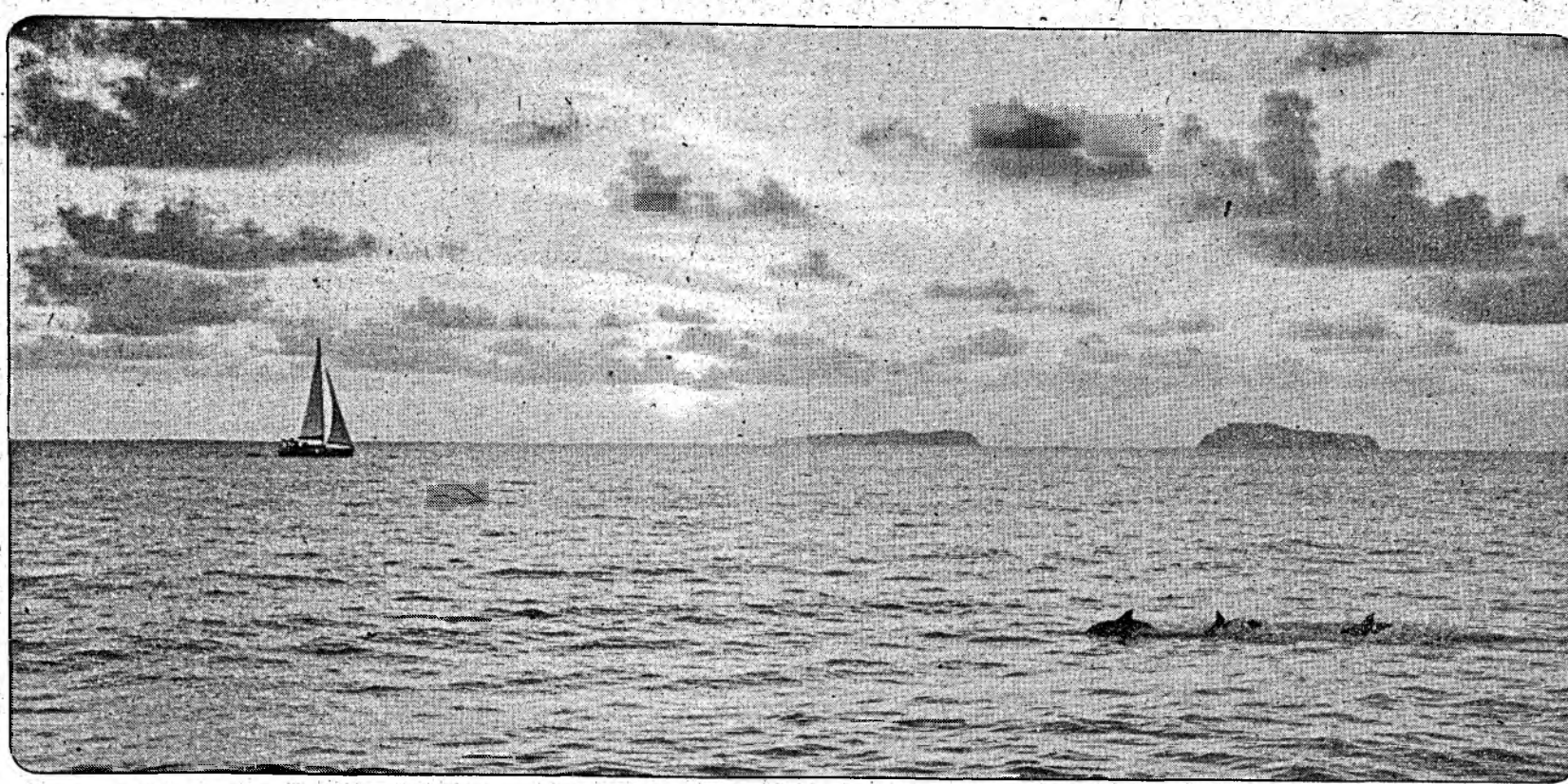
Arctic shipping: New sea lanes, new risks

As the Arctic Ocean's sea ice cover diminishes, shipping routes that were once impassable most of the year are opening up.

For companies, these routes - such as the Northern Sea Route along Russia's coast and the Northwest Passage through Canada's Arctic Archipelago - promise shorter transit times, lower fuel costs and fewer choke points than traditional passages.

However, Arctic shipping also raises complex challenges.

The U.S., Russia, China and several European countries have each taken steps to establish an economic and military presence in the Arctic Ocean, often with overlapping claims and competing strategic aims. For example, Russia closed off access to much of the Barents Sea while it conducted missile tests near Norway in



2025. NATO has also been patrolling the same sea.

Geopolitical tensions compound the practical dangers in Arctic waters that are poorly charted, where emergency response capacity is limited and where extreme weather is common.

As more commercial vessels move through these waters, a serious incident - whether triggered by a political confrontation or weather - could be difficult to contain and costly for marine ecosystems and global supply chains.

The Arctic Council is the region's primary official forum for the Arctic countries to work together, but it is explicitly barred from addressing military and security issues - the very pressures now reshaping Arctic shipping.

The council went dormant for over a year starting in 2022 after Russia, then the Arctic Council president, invaded Ukraine. While meetings and projects involving the remaining countries have since resumed, the council's influence has been undercut

by unilateral moves by the Trump administration and Russia, and bilateral arrangements between countries, including Russia and China, often involving access to oil, gas and critical mineral deposits.

In this context, Arctic countries can strengthen cooperation through other channels. An important one is science.

For decades, scientists from the U.S., Europe, Russia and other countries collaborated on research related to public safety and the environment, but Russia's invasion of Ukraine disrupted those research networks.

Going forward, countries could share more data on ice thaw, extreme weather and emergency response to help prevent accidents in a rapidly opening shipping corridor.

Critical minerals: Control over the seabed

The global transition to clean energy is driving demand for critical minerals, such as nickel, cobalt, manganese and rare earth elements,

that are essential for everything from smartphones and batteries to fighter jets. Some of the world's largest untapped deposits lie deep below the ocean's surface, in places like the Clarion-Clipperton Zone near Hawaii in the Pacific. This has sparked interest from governments and corporations in sea floor mining.

Harvesting critical minerals from the seabed could help meet demand at a time when China controls much of the global critical mineral supply. But deep-sea ecosystems are poorly understood, and disruptions from mining would have unknown consequences for ocean health. Forty countries now support either a ban or a pause on deep sea mining until the risks are better understood.

These concerns sit alongside geopolitical tensions. Most deep-sea minerals lie in international waters, where competition over access and profits could become another front in global rivalry.

The International Seabed Authority was created under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea to manage seabed resources, but its efforts to establish binding mining

rules have stalled. The U.S. never ratified the convention, and the Trump administration is now trying to fast-track its own permits to circumvent the international process and accelerate deep-sea mining in areas that are outside national jurisdictions.

Against this backdrop, a loose coalition of issue-focused groups and companies have joined national governments in calling for a pause on deep-sea mining. At the same time, some insurers have declined to insure deep-sea mining projects.

Pressure from outside groups will not eliminate competition over seabed resources, but it can shape behaviour by raising the costs of moving too quickly without carefully evaluating the risks. For example, Norway recently paused deep-sea mining licenses until 2029, while BMW, Volvo and Google have pledged not to purchase metals produced from deep-sea mines until environmental risks are better understood.

Overfishing: When competition outruns cooperation

Fishing fleets have been ranging farther and fishing longer in recent de-

cadec, leading to overfishing in many areas. For coastal communities, the result can crash fish stocks, threatening jobs in fishing and processing and degrading marine ecosystems, which makes coastal areas less attractive for tourism and recreation. When stocks decline, seafood prices also rise.

Unlike deep-sea mining or Arctic shipping, overfishing is prompting cooperation on many levels.

In 2025, a critical mass of countries ratified the High Seas Treaty, which sets out a legal framework for creating marine protected areas in international waters that could give species a chance to recover. Meanwhile, several countries have arrangements with their neighbors to manage fishing together.

For example, the European Union and UK are finalising an agreement to set quotas for fleets operating in waters where fish stocks are shared. Likewise, Norway and Russia have established annual quotas for the Barents Sea to try to limit overfishing. These government-led efforts are reinforced by other forms of diplomacy that operate outside government.

Market-based initiatives like the Marine Stewardship Council certification set common sustainability standards for fishing companies to meet. Many major retailers look for that certification when making purchases. Websites like Global Fishing Watch monitor fishing activity in near real time, giving governments and advocacy groups data for action.

Collectively, these efforts make it harder for illegal fishing to hide. How well countries are able to work together to update quotas, share data and enforce rules as warming oceans shift where fish stocks are found and demand continues to grow will determine whether overfishing can be stopped.

Looking ahead

At a time when international cooperation is under strain, agreements between countries and pressure from companies, insurers and issue-focused groups are essential for ensuring a healthy ocean for the future. *(The Conversation)*

(By Jonas Gamso and Hossain Ahmed Taufiq, Arizona State University)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 18, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon opposite Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give excellent results. You will appear noble and sober. And your conduct will be gentle. You will impress your peers and superiors, and they will help you a lot. Your behaviour will win you a lot of friends and admirers. You will also get a chance to meet lot of influential persons who will help you immensely in times to come. You will also have interactions with learned persons. Those appearing for exams or interviews too would be successful. You could also get involved with a person at your workplace. He/she will be a person of redefined taste and very gentle. Marriage ties can be possible. You will get consent of your family elders.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It is going to be a special week for you. You will do something new at your workplace and get lot of name and fame. Your whole personality will undergo a sea change. And you will impress one and all with your attitude and behavior. Your attitude towards life will be positive and you will accept new challenges. You can also fall in love with a person who will come into your life suddenly. You will get new opportunities in your profession / business. And you will easily complete your work. You will also have auspicious and money giving days. You will be artistic and imaginative. Your prestige will also increase. You will also be traditional and fulfill your dreams.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) There will be lot of offer for you this week. Your financial position is going to be good. You will receive some good payments and will also sign new contracts in your business. Those who are unemployed will get good job opportunities. There will be improvements in your business too. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will do every work carefully, with a lot of deliberation and on advice of your seniors. You will also spend quality time with your family. Your love life is going to be great, and you will have amazing bonding with your partner. Newlyweds will also be able to understand each other properly and take care of each other. You may become impatient in some situations.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) It is going to be a wonderful week for you. You will be very confident and positive. Works done by you will be fully successful. You will maintain your dominance at your workplace because of your liberal and flexible attitude. Your enemies will also get defeated. There will be meetings, trips and contracts with regard to your work which will keep you occupied. You will be getting excellent results. You will also listen to problems of others and try to solve them. You will be having little problems on the monetary front. Put a hold to your unimportant work, otherwise problems might increase. Listen to what your partner and well-wishers are telling. They are your lifeline in these testing times.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will have a lot of problems but solutions too. There are chances of getting lot of money. Do not interfere in other people's affairs; otherwise you might have to feel embarrassed. You need to use your money at the right place. Your friends and relatives will help you a lot. Your enemies and opponents will try to put a hurdle on your path, but you will be little affected by it. Pay attention to your work. You will get good results. Some dispute and misunderstandings between husband and wife may take place. But it will be resolved amicably. You will share amazing bonding with your mate. Atmosphere at home will be peaceful. The placement of planets is indicating a period of good progress in times to come.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Things are looking up again for you this week. You will also get involved in the affairs of your children and might go to his/her school/institute to get information about them. You will be very satisfied seeing their work and performance. You will also start getting good job offers. Now is the right time to fix long term goals. You will have to work hard to get happiness and good results. Halted works will gather momentum. You will feel physically active and relaxed. The time is full of fun and frolic. You will do each work very carefully. These are good days. You will spend time with your parents and wife. Keep away from controversies. You will get good news from somewhere and take an important decision regarding your career and business.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is going to be a very busy week for you. You will remain involved in your work and will have deadlines to finish. You will do the right thing and achieve your objectives. You will interact a lot with your bosses and subordinates.

You will remain concerned about everyone. There will be lot of peace at home. You might visit a beautiful and solitary place. You will also have new tenants or will think about buying a new house. Proposals will come for unmarried people and they will be favorable. You will feel that there is something new in life. You will be successful in acquiring knowledge. Your thoughts will be beneficial for the members of your family.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) There are chances of your work getting done. So, make best use of these opportunities. There will be various activities in different directions. You will also get united with your dear ones. You will come closer to your life partner. You will be getting lot of money and fame and will be bestowed with good health. You will also achieve the heights of success. You will get to meet new people. You will remember the time you spent in the happy company of your family. You will be guest somewhere and derive pleasure. This is the right time to get results from your hard work. Marriage talks may be finalized. Brother and sister will assist and cooperate with each other. Spend only that much as you have in pocket.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) What an amazing week this is going to be for you. You will get unexpected success in your professional deals. New job / business offers will come to you. Your prestige and respect at job too will rise. Your monetary position is also going to be great. Money and wealth will keep coming. You will fare very well in interviews or tests you may appear at this juncture. You will also get pleasant news. Health is going to improve gradually. You will become very emotional and will miss someone close. You will get the blessings of your senior family members to have your morale boosted. Some long-lasting worries will also vanish. Property dispute will also be resolved by some family members' mediation.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) Financially you will feel very relieved. Your problems will ease and new sources of income will be tapped. You will also resolve old differences and disputes with mutual understandings. You will also develop contacts with new people. It will prove to be beneficial for you. As it is, you may find financial crunch gradually getting eliminated. In your profession you may have to be very careful and act with much prudence. You will have good equations with your bosses. You will achieve your desired results and feel happiness and peace in your work field. You will enjoy good understanding with your life partner. Things will be on the normal track. Property disputes will get resolved.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Your tasks will start getting finished this week. You will work very hard and will multiply your sources of income. You will also get some lucrative opportunities in business as well. At times it looks too that things are tough and not going in our favor. Maybe it is needed to bring out best in us. It is high time to start a new venture. Your projects will be completed. You need to remain careful of some people. Be wary of the fights and confrontation or altercation stay away from them. You will receive blessings from your elders. With your prudence and wisdom, you may make some good decisions. Fortune favors the brave. Your colleagues and friends will be cooperative.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will get pleasant news about your relatives. You will get emotionally involved with a person known to you. It will lift your spirits. Government related matters will get done. Your family members will stand shoulder to shoulder with you in all situations. You will get gains from everywhere. Your financial position is going to be good. You will face life's problems fearlessly and impartially. You should not trust anyone in financial matters. Some people may criticize you, but you need not pay any attention to them and keep control over your speech and anger. There will be an improvement in your relations with people whom you interact with. You will be busy with daily work.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will be required to show lot of guts to stay in the competition. You will in fact take some serious decisions which will have a powerful impact upon your competitors. Even they will praise your efforts. Financial position is going to be strong and stable. You will use your talent and abilities to the hilt. Your hopes and expectations may be squarely met. The differences with your partner will get resolved. You will be butt of some scathing criticism. Your government related work will also gather momentum. Your colleagues and friends will be quite cooperative. You will introduce a new system in your work pattern.

Aus needs canine brain bank to reduce risk of dog attacks

Dog attacks are on the rise in Australia. The most recent data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show dog-related hospital admissions more than doubled in the eight years to 2021.

Over 2021-22 in Australia, there were more than 9,500 cases of attacks where a person was bitten or struck by a dog.

In response, some governments are introducing tougher penalties for dog attacks. In November 2025, for example, the South Australian government introduced fines of up to A\$25,000 for people whose pet attacks and seriously injures or kills a person or animal.

But reactive enforcement like this can't prevent tragedies. Something that might be able to help is an Australian canine brain bank. This would be a key step in developing genetic tests that could identify high-risk animals before they ever bite.

Breeds are complex

In March 2020, 90-year-old Ada Holland was killed by three unregistered dogs on Collingwood Beach in Vincentia, New South Wales. Her death prompted a coronial inquiry which heard that just a week before the fatal attack, the same dogs had attacked another person. However, inadequate council procedures failed to prevent the subsequent tragedy.

During the inquest, one of us (Paul) provided expert evidence. Asked to identify the breed of dogs involved in the attack, he could only conclude they appeared to be a mixture of multiple dog breeds which included Staffordshire bull terrier; the specific breed composition could not be determined.

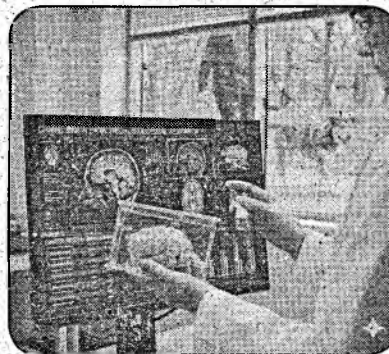
Deputy State Coroner Carmel Forbes acknowledged breed-related issues remain "complex".

This uncertainty is a fundamental limitation of our current approach when it comes to identifying aggression in dogs, which relies on appearance, not neurobiology.

The genetics of dog behaviour

In the past few decades scientists have made slow but steady progress in understanding the genetics of dog behaviour.

A 2016 study found genetic variants linked to behaviours such as stranger-orientated and dog-orientated fear and aggression.



Another study three years later identified genomic regions associated with aggression and fear across more than 100 breeds.

Most significantly, a 2022 study demonstrated that breed alone explains less than 10 per cent of behavioural variation.

Our team's pilot work has also shown increased serotonin 1A receptors in dogs euthanised for aggression. Genetic studies have linked serotonin and dopamine-related genes with canine aggression.

These represent genuine advances in understanding aggression in dogs. A canine brain bank would go even further.

What is a canine brain bank?

Our research team first proposed establishing an Australian canine brain bank to understand the biological basis of impulsive aggression in 2013. But more than a decade later, it still doesn't exist.

The concept involves systematically collecting brain tissue from the thousands of dogs euthanised for aggression in Australia each year alongside normal controls and identifying receptor densities that characterise high-risk dogs.

These patterns will then be linked to genetic markers predicting which dogs pose the highest risk - before they ever bite.

Unlike probing a living dog's brain, testing for the genetic markers predictive of impulsive aggression may eventually require only a simple blood sample.

The brain bank essentially provides the key to translate neurobiological risk into testable genetic markers for living dogs.

Building better science

Shelters already use behavioural assessments to evaluate how dogs

respond to handling, food, and unfamiliar people.

These assessments are useful, but they have limitations. For example, dogs can lead "double lives" - loyal in familiar contexts, capable of sudden aggression when circumstances change. A dog may pass shelter assessments, yet later respond dangerously to triggers not encountered during evaluation. A shelter could combine observed behaviour with genetic risk assessment. A dog showing good temperament but carrying high-risk genetic markers might need extra socialisation or placement only with experienced handlers.

Conversely, a dog breed perceived to be dangerous but with low genetic risk markers might be safely rehomed. This combined approach could target resources where most needed. It could also help breeders select away from high-risk traits and give shelter staff objective assessment tools.

But it's important to say that genetic markers should only inform management strategies, such as placement with experienced handlers or enhanced training, and not mandate euthanasia decisions.

Nature versus nurture

Of course, genetics and behavioural assessment don't tell the whole story.

Each dog's learning history and gene expression - including their socialisation experiences, training methods, living conditions and how the owner handles the dog - profoundly shape behavioural outcomes.

Even dogs with genetic predispositions toward impulsivity may never display dangerous aggression if properly managed, while dogs with low genetic risk can become dangerous through neglect or deliberate conditioning.

This doesn't diminish the value of genetic markers but underscores why we need multiple layers of assessment. Genetic information would help identify which dogs need particularly careful environmental management and which owners need additional support to provide it.

No single approach will prevent all attacks. But better science - including the establishment of a canine brain bank - gives us much better odds. *(The Conversation)*

(By Paul McGreevy and Rimini Quinn, University of Sydney)

Coal mining legacy of 200-yr-old...

(Contd from P-1) The chief minister said that while the background and social realities needed to be understood, it remained the government's duty to implement the law. He noted that enforcement, however, came with practical challenges, including limited manpower and the fact that such activities were spread across different corners of the state.

Emphasising that the government was taking firm action, Sangma said more than a thousand cases had been registered against those involved in illegal mining, thousands of people had been arrested and chargesheeted, several mines had been closed, and many offenders had been sent to jail. He added that despite sustained enforcement, it was unrealistic to expect illegal activities to stop overnight simply because of court orders, given the economic desperation of those involved.

Sangma clarified that he was not justifying or promoting illegal mining, but explaining the reality that people who had depended on coal for decades were willing to risk arrest or danger to feed their families. He said this made the situation extremely challenging and required a balanced approach rather than simplistic expectations.

The chief minister said the government had continuously acted by arresting offenders, closing mines, and filing cases whenever illegal activity was detected, while acknowledging that such actions often led to the problem resurfacing in other locations. He stressed that despite these difficulties, the government remained firm and would continue to act wherever violations were found.

Looking ahead, an optimistic Conrad said he believed the worst phase might be behind the state.

He pointed out that scientific mining had now been introduced, coal blocks were being officially allotted by the government, and the Supreme Court had lifted the ban, creating a legal framework for regulated mining. He said the state was currently in a transition phase and expressed hope that, over time, illegal activities would gradually decline and be replaced by a scientific and lawful mining system.

Describing the situation as a process that required time, Sangma said challenges would persist during the transition, but maintained that the state was moving steadily in the right direction.

Ponzi scheme case: ED files...

(Contd from P-1) According to the investigation, Pearlvine International collected a minimum of Rs 2,250 as membership fees and ran a pyramid-based scheme in India between 2018 and March 2023. During this period, numerous seminars were organised across the country to solicit members and popularise the scheme.

At its peak in 2022, Pearlvine International claimed to have around 80 lakh members in India and abroad. The ED's probe revealed that proceeds of crime, amounting to approximately Rs 1,575 crore, were collected, of which at least Rs 395.35 crore was allegedly siphoned off, defrauding investors.

So far, the ED has attached assets worth Rs 54.98 crore. The attached properties include 13 immovable assets and seven movable assets, including luxury vehicles which were allegedly acquired using the proceeds of crime.

The ED had stated that the key accused, including mastermind Neeraj Kumar Gupta and his associates, are based in Delhi.

Officials said the exact number of people duped is yet to be ascertained due to the absence of proper and verifiable records maintained by the firm.

"Pearlvine International was an unrecognised entity that falsely claimed to be US-based and operated in India between 2018 and March 2023," an ED official had stated, adding that the scheme functioned on a classic pyramid structure, requiring participants to recruit new members, leading to exponential growth of investors. Further investigation into the case is on.

Curtain falls on Cabinet Retreat...

(Contd from P-1) On the first day, the focus was on social commitments alongside economic progress, including housing for all, electrification, and strengthening education and healthcare. Investments in schools and health infrastructure were highlighted as critical for both growth and fulfilling the government's pledge to ensure quality education, joyful learning, and accessible healthcare for all citizens.

Sangma said the retreat had helped align the thought processes of ministers and officials, creating a shared understanding of priorities and a collective approach to advancing the state's development agenda.

Discussions also highlighted the Sports Action Plan 2025 and 303 projects worth over Rs 2,000 crore to host the 2027 National Games, aimed at creating a youth-focused sports economy. Under PRIME Meghalaya, more than 500 entrepreneurs have been incubated with a 25% revenue increase post-incubation, while the CM-ELEVATE program targets over 3,800 beneficiaries with an outlay of ₹130 crore. Plans include finalising the Startup Policy and launching a PRIME Venture Capital Fund to support high-growth enterprises.

The Tourism, Arts, and Culture department outlined strategies to generate 1.25 lakh jobs by 2028, including the CM Meghalaya Homestay Mission 2025, which aims to develop 3,000 units with a 70% financial subsidy. Sangma stressed profiling tourists, noting that younger visitors increasingly seek curated and unique experiences, making homestays a major growth opportunity for the state.

Urban transformation strategies were also presented, focusing on decongesting Shillong through traffic restructuring and organised relocation of hawkers, with similar models planned for Tura and Jowai. Innovative grassroots initiatives were highlighted, such as the transformation of Anganwadi Centres in East Garo Hills into holistic health and early learning hubs, and community-driven digital libraries in South Garo Hills' Purakhasia Block to combat low literacy rates.

State targets universal internet access...

(Contd from P-1) Funded by both central and state resources, the project aims to achieve full saturation within the next two years.

The Chief Minister noted that reliable digital infrastructure is essential for improving public services, particularly in healthcare and education. He cited telemedicine and digital learning as key sectors that will benefit from the rollout.

Sangma added that specific targets have been set for all relevant departments to ensure the coordinated implementation of these connectivity plans across the state.

Key 6th Schedule reform Bill among...

(Contd from P-1) However, the Bill has also been a subject of debate and concern within the state. Civil society groups, political parties and traditional institutions in Meghalaya have repeatedly flagged fears that certain provisions could dilute customary laws, weaken the authority of traditional bodies like the dorbar shnong, or open the door to increased state control over autonomous institutions. These concerns have contributed to calls for wider consultations before the Bill is taken up again in Parliament.

The Rajya Sabha, being a permanent House that is never dissolved, allows Bills to remain pending indefinitely unless withdrawn or passed. According to the latest Upper House bulletin, 19 Bills are currently pending, the oldest dating back to 1992. While some of these, such as the Delhi Rent (Amendment) Bill, 1997 or the Seeds Bill, 2004, relate to sectoral reforms, the 125th Constitutional Amendment stands out for its regional significance to the tribal-dominated Northeast.

Other pending NDA-era legislation includes the Registration of Marriage of Non-Resident Indian Bill, 2019, while the most recent among the stalled Bills is the Pesticide Management Bill, 2020.

For Meghalaya and its neighbouring hill states, the continued delay of the 125th Amendment Bill keeps unresolved a critical question: how Sixth Schedule governance will evolve to meet contemporary administrative and developmental challenges without compromising tribal identity and autonomy. Until Parliament revisits the Bill, that uncertainty remains firmly in place. (With PTI inputs)

Reports on PA Sangma Stadium safety...

(Contd from P-1) He said around Rs 45 crore had been sanctioned for the project, the tendering process had been completed, work had been allotted, and construction would begin soon.

On the issue of land requirement, Sangma said a portion of land currently occupied by the BSF was needed to extend the West Stand and also to construct a road that would provide access to several localities located below the stadium. He noted that hundreds of houses were situated in these areas and that safety considerations made the additional space necessary.

From this specific structural and safety point of view, he said the West End area required immediate construction. Sangma added that a letter had therefore been addressed to Coal India Limited, explaining the seriousness of the requirement and seeking the necessary land to carry out the construction.

The chief minister emphasised that the communication to Coal India Limited did not indicate that the entire stadium was unsafe, but was limited to a particular section to facilitate the West Stand project. He said the issue had been completely misinterpreted and added that the Sports Department would also issue a clarification.

Sangma urged the press fraternity to conduct proper research before publishing such reports, stating that inaccurate and hurried reporting could create unnecessary doubt and undermine the credibility of media organisations themselves.

In a first, Bengal Fox...

(Contd from P-3) monitoring is essential to determine the population status and long-term survival of the Bengal Fox in Meghalaya as the species can be vulnerable to habitat loss and interactions with free-ranging dogs.

Why do some people get 'hangry' more quickly than others?

Come on, little fella we should get going now." But my son was not listening.

The sand in the playground was just right, so he kept digging with his new toy excavator.

As I drifted back to my list of to-dos, however, the laughter was suddenly replaced by sobs.

My son was not hurt, just very upset. When I looked at my phone, I saw it was well past his regular mealtime and he was feeling very hungry.

However old we are, we all have a tendency to grow irritated if our body lacks enough fuel. But while humans have experienced this for as long as we have been on the planet, a specific word to describe the phenomenon only entered the Oxford English dictionary in 2018.

"Hangry: to be bad-tempered or irritable as a result of hunger."

Perhaps more surprising is the scarcity of research into how hunger affects people's everyday moods.

Most studies on food and mood have focused on patients with metabolic or eating disorders perhaps because many psychologists have traditionally understood hunger to be such a basic physiological process.

So, with colleagues from the fields of psychology and mental health, I decided to investigate how different people respond to feeling hungry.

We wanted to see if (and why) some people are better at reacting calmly when hunger strikes.

Perhaps there would be some lessons for those of us with young children, too.

Surprising results

In the animal world, hunger is frequently studied for its role as a key motivator. Hungry rodents, for example, will vigorously press a lever or climb over large walls to get to food rewards.

In the wild, hungry animals often roam further to explore their environment, seeming restless as they seek to overcome the threat of low or no energy.

To investigate the relationship between energy levels, hunger and mood in people, we equipped 90 healthy adults with a continuous glucose monitor for a month.

Glucose is the primary source of energy for the body and brain, and these monitors used in clinical practice to help patients with diabetes regulate their blood sugar levels report values every few minutes. (Participants could actively check their glucose levels using the sensor app, and we could see when they accessed them.)

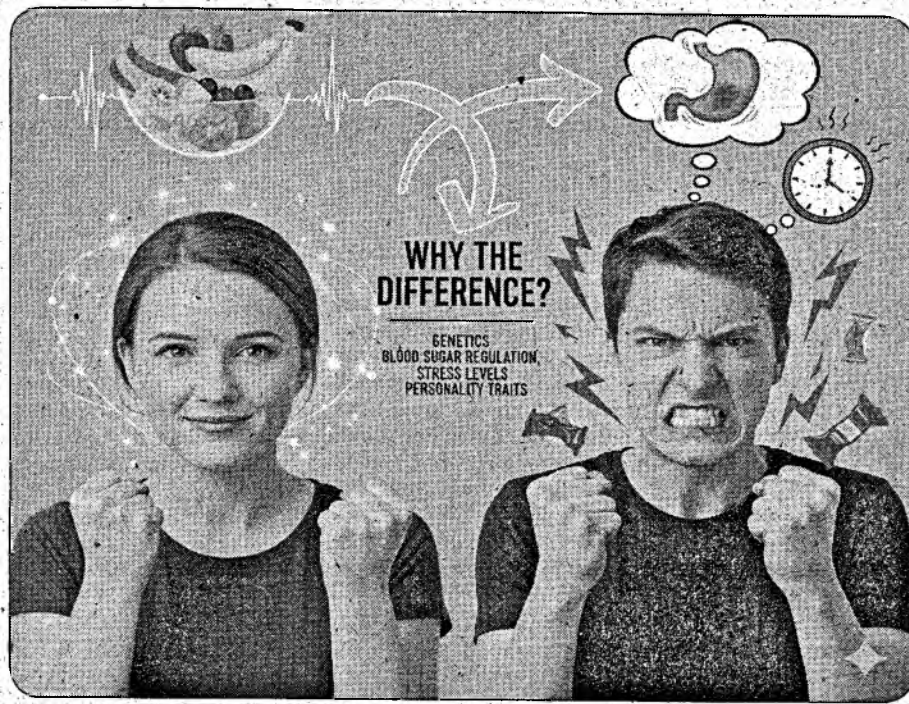
We also asked our participants to complete mood check-ins on their smartphones up to twice a day.

These included questions about how hungry or sated they felt on a scale from 0 to 100, as well as a rating of their current mood.

The results surprised us. First, people were only in a worse mood when they acknowledged feeling hungry not simply when they had lower blood sugar levels.

And second, people who more accurately detected their energy levels in general were less prone to negative mood swings.

This suggests there is a



key psychological middle step between a person's energy and mood levels, which scientists call interoception.

In the brain, hunger is signalled by neurons in the hypothalamus that detect a prolonged energy deficit.

Conscious feelings of hunger are then linked to the insula, a part of the cerebral cortex that is folded deep within the brain, and which also processes taste and plays a role in feeling emotions.

In our recent study, people with high interoceptive accuracy experienced fewer mood swings. This does not mean they never felt hungry they just seemed better at keeping their mood levels stable.

This is important, because a sudden change in mood can have knock-on effects on relationships with family, friends and colleagues.

It can lead to bad decision-making and more impulsive behaviour including buying

fast-energy food that can be less good for you.

More generally, paying close attention to our bodies' needs helps keep our minds at ease too, avoiding unnecessary wear and tear on both.

Deviating too much from the body's ideal state can pose a long-term risk to our health, mental as well as physical.

Caught off-guard

Young children find it hard to interpret all the signals from their rapidly developing body.

They are also easily distracted by what is happening around them, and often fail to attend to their hunger or thirst without prompting leading to a sudden meltdown like my son had in the playground.

Likewise for many adults in today's fast-paced world full of digital distractions, it can be easy to be caught off-guard by dipping energy

levels.

One simple life hack is to keep a regular meal schedule, because hunger often kicks in when we skip a meal.

Everyone's energy levels ebb and flow, of course. But it is possible to improve your interoceptive accuracy by allowing your inner systems to pay closer attention to your energy levels.

In addition, exercise and physical activity can sharpen your hunger sensing and improve energy metabolism. Most of the time, of course, our moods are only modestly affected by hunger, among the many other factors that can come into play.

But one of the lessons of my time at the playground has been to take care of my son's food needs long before they become obvious.

Perhaps we all need to be more aware of the risk of getting hangry. (The Conversation)

Physical activity in adolescence may ward off breast cancer risk

Adolescent girls who actively partake in recreational physical activity can have significant protection against risks of breast cancer, according to a study.

Researchers from the Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health in the US showed that recreational physical activity may be associated with breast tissue composition and biomarkers of

stress in adolescent girls.

In the study, girls who reported engaging in at least two hours of recreational physical activity in the prior week, compared with none, had lower percent water content in breast tissue- an indicator of lower breast density and lower concentrations of urinary biomarkers linked to stress.

The findings shed new light on how physical activity

during adolescence- a critical period of breast development may influence biological pathways related to future breast cancer risk. "Our findings suggest that recreational physical activity is associated with breast tissue composition and stress biomarker changes in adolescent girls, independent of body fat, which could have important implications for breast cancer risk," Kehm, Assistant

Professor of Epidemiology at Columbia Mailman School of Public Health added. During adolescence, participants self-reported past-week engagement in recreational physical activity, including both organised and unorganised activities, and completed clinic visits that included blood and urine collection as well as breast tissue assessments.

The average age of girls in the study was 16 years.

More than half (51%) reported no recreational physical activity in the past week. 73% reported no participation in organised activities, and 66% reported no participation in unorganised activities.

The team noted that additional longitudinal studies are needed to determine how these adolescent biomarkers may translate into breast cancer risk later in life. (LANS)

Shullai inspects Rs 11 cr devp works...

(Contd from P-3) nearly Rs 4 crore has been allocated to the PWD for widening the road from the gate of Raid Laban College up to Pom Muid.

The MLA also expressed gratitude to the Raid Laban shnong and Raid Laban College for voluntarily providing land for the road-widening project.

He further inspected the existing football ground as well as the ground where work is under way to lay artificial turf. He stated that an amount of about Rs 6 crore has been sanctioned for the football ground.

In addition, Shullai said that the Water Resources department has prepared a Detailed Project Report (DPR) and cost estimates for the construction of a check dam at an estimated cost of around Rs 2 crore.

He said the proposed check dam will help conserve water for use at the football ground and, at the same time, will serve as an additional source of water supply for the entire Laban area.

Tympang club marks...

(Contd from P-3) exclaimed "Too Tympang" on first seeing the place, a phrase that endured as the name of both the locality and the club.

The inaugural function was also addressed by Thombor Chiwat, Chief Executive Member of the JHADC, along with Edelweiss Dkhar, Chairman of the Club, Ajoy Lywait, and Rev. GS Shullai, who offered the opening prayer.

Earlier in the day, a special meeting was held at the club hall to honour former leaders of Tympang Club who have passed away.

Posthumous awards were presented to their families in recognition of their service, during a session chaired by R. Lamarr, vice chairman of the Club.

Noted evangelist passes...

(Contd from P-3) The Hynhiewtrep Youths' Council (HYC) also expressed deep sorrow over his passing, describing Rev. Dr. Cunville as a revered spiritual leader, teacher and servant of God whose life was dedicated to faith, compassion and service to humanity.

"Dr. Cunville's contribution to the spiritual and social fabric of our society will be remembered with great respect. His words of wisdom, humility and commitment to Christian values touched countless lives and continue to inspire generations," the organisation said, while extending heartfelt condolences to the bereaved family, the Church and all those mourning the loss.

Shillong Med College hosts workshop...

(Contd from P-3) Sampath Kumar, Dr. Karthik Adapa, Regional Adviser, WHO-SEARO, set the context for the consultation, followed by a keynote address by Sunil Kumar Barnwal, Chief Executive Officer of the NHA.

An overview of the National AI Strategy for Healthcare was presented by NHA Director, Vikram Pagaria.

Participants representing the central and state governments, academia, healthcare institutions, industry and development partners took part in structured discussions, offering inputs on implementation priorities, resource needs and institutional responsibilities under the strategy.

Bindas Syiem alleges...

(Contd from P-3) off by hand, raising serious questions about the quality of materials used and the manner in which the work was executed.

Visibly distressed by what she witnessed, Syiem said the condition of the road was deeply disheartening, especially given the struggle she had undertaken to ensure that the project was sanctioned and implemented.

She further maintained that such poor workmanship would not bring any real relief to residents of the area, who have long suffered due to the dilapidated condition of the road.

Speaking to the media persons, Syiem recalled that she had endured a hunger strike at the Additional Secretariat purely in the public interest, seeking a durable and properly constructed blacktopped road.

She said it was therefore painful to see the work allegedly being carried out in a careless and substandard manner.

She urged the concerned contractor to act responsibly, redo the damaged portions and ensure that the road is rebuilt properly in accordance with required standards.

The Nongpoh-Umden-Sunapur road had remained in the news after Syiem staged her hunger strike agitation at the Additional Secretariat to press for urgent repairs.

While the subsequent sanctioning of the road work was welcomed by the public, Syiem said the present state of construction has left her saddened and disappointed, undermining the very purpose of her protest.

She nevertheless expressed gratitude to the state government and Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong for responding to her demand and facilitating the execution of the project.

However, she stressed that it was distressing to witness alleged irregularities after the work had finally begun, and appealed for strict monitoring to ensure accountability and quality in public infrastructure projects.

Prog raises legal awareness...

(Contd from P-3) He encouraged the community to promote education and skill development, noting that basic literacy is essential to access various training and livelihood opportunities available today.

He further cautioned against the misuse of protective laws, stating that false accusations are also punishable under the law.

“Be hopeful. Be optimistic. Never lose that sense of hope.”

—John Lewis

The Shillong Times

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Wooing in Bengal

THE scene for a major confrontation is opening up in West Bengal, with assembly election approaching in another three months, and the Trinamool Congress led by chief minister Mamata Banerjee attempting to defend its long-held fortress. The BJP, which tasted defeat repeatedly in the assembly polls as also parliamentary elections in the state is keen on making another try – through a voter list revision as is done in other states too, and extending olive branches to the electorate through the launch of a new set of developmental projects at the hands of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday.

The electorate in Bengal has proven repeatedly that they stood by Banerjee despite the high electoral hype the BJP created in the last two assembly polls there. The Congress and the Left are mostly down and out there, while the BJP at one time showed signs of significant growth. Due to a variety of factors, Banerjee managed to hold the ground – not the least among these being her direct, personal approach with the ordinary masses in the state. Obviously, the Muslims, who felt they got a raw deal from the three decades of Left rule, also solidly backed Banerjee, their new-found saviour. Nothing yet goes to show this large segment of the population turned against her – their alternative being the Congress and the Left, both being in a lost situation. The BJP’s Hindutva slogan does not jell with the generally progressive mindset of the Bengalis, though a section of them have in recent times edged closer to the saffron cause due mainly to the fact that the BJP runs the central government. With the Leftist governments failing to extract the state’s due share from the Congress governments at the Centre in the past, and later the TMC from the BJP government too, Bengal’s infrastructural progress suffered. Kolkata as the western metropolis, which once acted as the central business and commercial hub for the entire north-east, has also failed to build fresh muscles. The Left rule had seen several industries migrating to neighbouring states due to the trade union militancy on the part of the CPIM.

Prime Minister Modi launching projects like new railway lines for Bengal, as he did on Sunday, is appreciable. But, if projects are launched during the run-up to elections, chances are also that these would not progress in the event the vote goes against the party that runs the central government. Such lures had been held out for Bengal during the Congress terms at the Centre too, but the state lost heavily due to its regional-centric politics. Modi’s own promise to the people, state after state, is to elect BJP to power to ensure the functioning of a “double-engine” sircar; but this does not rhyme with the grand federalism concepts the framers of the Constitution introduced. States must get their due share from the Centre, irrespective of who rules them. Yet, the BJP’s plea seems to have worked in its favour in the Mumbai civic polls, as also the previous Maharashtra assembly elections. Bengal might or might not think anew.

Letters to the Editor

30 Pieces of Silver: Still Going Strong it Seems

Editor,

I wish to begin with a disclaimer. My disclaimer is that what I am going to write about is based, as at present, on rumour, hearsay and sheer gossip which, incidentally, I wish and pray continue to remain so. It would be most disappointing and disheartening if such rumors turn out to be true. However if the hearsay were to prove to be factual and accurate, I want this communication of mine to serve as a red flag of danger to all concerned stakeholders (all those who wish to preserve the natural splendor of Shillong; all devotees of Shillong’s beauty and heritage; those of us who mourn the rapid disappearance of once beautiful tree lined urban boulevards now sadly replaced with ugly concrete monstrosities and especially to all well meaning, devoted and dedicated members of the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Church) because this is an alarm call to the possible/probable and plausible destruction and dismantling of one of Shillong’s iconic heritage structures - the English Service Church building located at Police Bazar.

Again I reemphasize that this call is based purely on unverified suspicion, yet past endeavors by parties with vested interests to carry out nefarious designs on this antiquated and lovely icon of Presbyterian worship at PB, simply enforces the need to sound the bugle of alarm. To-

day there is a rumor spreading very fast, especially among concerned members of the KJP community, that there are yet again preparations afoot, to demolish the English Service Church building at Police Bazar and erect in its stead, a shopping complex. The Church Building in question might be small, archaic and in constant need of maintenance, but do people realize the impact it has had on generations of Church goers who had attended its services down the ages? The peace of mind it had bestowed on young, troubled and disturbed souls? The lives it has helped change for the better? Faith issues aside the building also stands out as one of the three Heritage Christian structures in the city and to quote the poet Keats it is “a thing of beauty, a joy forever”. In short both from a faith perspective as well as from the aesthetic point of view the Presbyterian English Church building at Police Bazar is Priceless! Well the only known selling price for a priceless antiquity is the proverbial “30 pieces of Silver”! So are we seeing Biblical Betrayal and Sellout History being replayed here in Shillong? I sincerely hope not.

In the end, whatever be the reason that drives you for the continued existence of the heritage English Service Church at PB, the writer’s request is for you to come forth and take a stand on the issue. The need of the hour is for people, meaning you, to express as best you can through rejoinders; through groups you belong to; through the individual church you are affiliated with or through Social Media as to what

your views are on the fate of the English Service Church at Police Bazar. Should it remain as it is or should it be dismantled. Let that be the subject of your efforts. All of us are stakeholders in preserving and maintaining heritage structures that contribute to the beauty of this city we all love. Those in power be it within the Church or in the Government need to hear and heed the voice of the citizens. Give a call for the English Service Church building at Police Bazar to be included in the Heritage structures of the city. It must not be destroyed. The voice of the people must prevail. So let that powerful voice be heard.

Yours etc.,
Toki-Blah,
Via email

Biani Momin’s venture into cinema

Editor

After reading the interview in the Sunday edition of The Shillong Times, I felt a deep sense of pride and quiet admiration while reflecting on the inspiring cinematic journey of Biana W. Momin.

A very popular English professor and a dedicated, sincere educator, she spent her life shaping young minds with quiet commitment and integrity. Her transition from the world of classrooms to the world of cinema is not merely a personal achievement; it is a moment of collective pride for our region. It beautifully shows how learning, discipline, and life experience can find meaningful expression

even in entirely new fields.

Her entry into the South Indian cine world stands out for its dignity and authenticity. In an industry often dominated by glamour and youth, her presence brings depth and realism. Particularly striking is her performance as a silent character—where emotions are conveyed not through words, but through expressions and inner strength. Such roles demand maturity and emotional control, qualities clearly refined through her long and sincere career as an educator.

As a newcomer in cinema, she displayed humility, openness to learning, and respect for the craft. Her journey also reflects the inclusive spirit of South Indian cinema, which recognises talent beyond age, language, or background. At the same time, her performance quietly suggests that the doors of Bollywood, too, could open for artists who bring honesty and substance to the screen.

Her story is a powerful reminder that reinvention has no age limit and that genuine talent, when combined with sincerity, will always find recognition. This is not just her success—it is a proud entry of our talent into the wider Indian cine world.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Via email

Collective responsibility versus ministers’ competence

Editor,

The editorial “Whither

collective responsibility” (ST January 17, 2026) made interesting. In a parliamentary democracy like Meghalaya’s, the cabinet is supposed to function collectively, with ministers sharing responsibility. If most members are perceived as incompetent, the balance naturally tilts toward the Chief Minister, who becomes the de-facto decision-maker. In a small state like Meghalaya, co-

State	Cabinet strength	CM dominance	Implications
Meghalaya	Often fragmented due to coalition politics and regional party alignment.	High-CM acts as arbiter when ministers lack initiative.	Risk of cabinet becoming a symbolic governance depends heavily on the CM’s competence.
Uttar Pradesh	Large, socially diverse cabinet with strong representation.	Moderate - CM Yogi Adityanath has strong personal authority but relies on the cabinet for caste/community balance.	The Cabinet provides legitimacy, but the CM dominates policy direction.
West Bengal	The Cabinet is relatively weak, with most decisions routed through CM Mamata Banerjee.	Very high - CM is the central figure.	Streamlined decision-making but risks over-centralization.
Tamil Nadu	Cabinet moderately strong. With ministers managing portfolios.	Moderate - CM Stalin leads but delegates.	More balanced governance; institutional resilience stronger.
Nagaland & Mizoram	Cabinets often fragmented due to coalition and ethnic representation.	High - CM dominance common.	Cabinets act more as representative bodies than decision-making engines.
Andhra Pradesh	Cabinet portfolios distributed strategically.	Moderate - CM Nara Chandrababu Naidu dominates but uses cabinet for political balance.	Cabinet provides legitimacy but limited autonomy.

alition governments often produce cabinets filled with compromise candidates rather than strong policy leaders. This weakens collective governance. Strong Chief Ministers can push reforms quickly, but this creates a bottleneck where governance depends on one person’s vision and stamina. However, at the moment I do not see

prime-time news, the ISL matches receive little to no attention. The Indian women’s national football team’s recent historic qualification for the AFC Women’s Asian Cup, a step closer to the FIFA World Cup, was barely mentioned on television while cricket achievements are rarely overlooked.

This pattern is evident even in the case of Olympic medalists, who receive brief media attention during the competition before cricket once again reclaims the spotlight. Likewise, athletes from other sports often remain under-recognised, limiting their access to sponsorships, institutional support and public appreciation. While media outlets naturally respond to commercial incentives, thoughtful government support may help ensure that other sports and their athletes receive sustained visibility for encouragement.

This skewed media coverage has created a negative feedback loop in which millions of young Indians see cricket as the only path to recognition, financial security, and social mobility which is a misleading belief given the sport’s narrow professional pyramid. Football, by contrast, offers wider opportunities through its vast, global ecosystem of clubs and competitions. With its large youth population, India should be contributing to football’s global rise rather than remaining on the sidelines, as success in the sport would also elevate the country’s standing in the global sporting arena.

True sporting greatness requires an ecosystem that nurtures talent across disciplines throughout the year. Infrastructure and policy matter, but visibility matters just as much. Athletes outside cricket also deserve their stories to be told, their struggles acknowledged, and the assurance of national support in both victory and defeat.

Let cricket flourish; its achievements merit recognition. But let other sports breathe, grow, and claim their rightful place in the national imagination. Only when India’s gaze widens beyond the boundary rope will the country emerge as a land of multiple sporting glories. For that, awakening to occur, Indian media, especially television, must act not as a cheerleader for one sport, but as a storyteller for all.

any Minister capable of doing things the way the Chief Minister does. When Paul Lyngdoh was in the cabinet it was different and the CM was confident of him as he would speak and make decisions which are appropriate. Meghalaya’s cabinet dynamics mirror a wider Indian pattern. The dashboard on cabinet strength vs CM dominance and its implications in Indian states is given below:

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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

Beyond Cricket: India’s Sporting Ambitions Need a Wider Lens

By K L Tariang

and of global dignity.

India, by contrast, remains largely confined to cricket’s comfort zone, with little visible urgency to compete seriously beyond it. This stands in sharp contrast to countries such as England, Australia, South Africa and New Zealand. Like India, these are formidable cricketing nations, yet they have cultivated diverse sporting ecosystems and consistently produced ample medalists across disciplines at international events. They also compete at football’s highest level, the FIFA World Cup finals, an arena where India remains, for now, a distant aspirant.

As India considers a bid for the 2036 Games, the true test lies not in ambition but in resolve: the commitment to build a balanced and competitive sporting ecosystem across disciplines, beginning now. This is alongside sustained investment in modern infrastructure, particularly in sports where India has genuine potential, world-class coaching, strong grassroots programmes, and regular international exposure in globally competitive disciplines.

Equally, consistent visibility of athletes in both team and individual sports, backed by institutional support, is crucial to build public interest, attract sponsorship, and foster national confidence long before the global spotlight arrives. Currently, cricket dominates India’s sporting landscape, while other sports struggle for recognition.

While there are varied factors that led to cricket dominance in India, Indian mainstream media, particularly television, has played a decisive role in this. The process began in 1983, when India’s Cricket World Cup victory coincided with television’s rapid spread in Indian homes. The triumph was repeatedly shown by the national broadcaster transforming it into a lasting spectacle to make cricket a powerful symbol of national pride and identity.

Perceptive of this emotional surge, broadcasters quickly monetised cricket, transforming it into a commercially driven entertainment industry. The rise of satellite television and digital streaming further expanded

its reach. Advertisements featuring cricket proliferated, brands adopted the sport as their marketing vehicle and broadcasters struck gold. Today, cricket dominates prime-time bulletins, while newspapers and digital platforms remain saturated with its coverage. This constant focus has amplified cricket’s visibility at the expense of other sports, creating a pronounced imbalance in public awareness and interest.

The cycle soon became self-perpetuating. The more cricket is broadcast, the more it is consumed and the more coverage it receives. By flooding audiences with cricket-centric content, the media effectively determined which sports matter and which do not. An India-Pakistan cricket match, magnified by relentless coverage, grips the nation, while an equally intense hockey encounter between the same rivals barely registers, subdued by media indifference.

Cricket loyalists claim that cricket deserves disproportionate attention because India excels at it. The claim is weak. India’s performance across cricket formats has been uneven. Moreover, the sport has a limited global footprint, with few nations seriously playing it. Therefore, success within such a narrow competitive field is hardly remarkable for a country of over 1.4 billion people.

Meanwhile, hockey, once India’s Olympic pride and a team sport in which the country still competes credibly, has been systematically pushed to the margins. The Asia Cup in hockey, where India regularly faces strong Asian sporting nations such as Japan, South Korea, and China, struggles to secure even basic prime-time coverage. In stark contrast, the Asia Cup in cricket, where these nations do not participate and where India’s dominance is predictable, often dominates television schedules.

Millions of Indians follow domestic and international football. The Indian Super League (ISL) of football regularly fills stadiums, reflecting a strong domestic fan base. Yet, while the Indian Premier League (IPL) of cricket matches often gets reporting coverage even in

Red Shirts, Burning Hearts: The Jaintia Football Club Legacy”

By Dr Omarlin Kyndiah

The origins of football in Shillong date back to the early 20th century, during the British colonial era when the city served as the administrative headquarters of Assam Province. Between 1920 and 1940, the sport took firm roots in the hills of Meghalaya, fuelled by British officers and local enthusiasm alike. It was during this vibrant period that some of Shillong’s earliest and most talked about football institutions emerged: Jaintia Football Club (JFC), the Gorkha Rifles, Gorkha Regiment, Hill United Sports Club, Laban Sports Club, Mawlai Sports Club, St. Edmund’s College and School, Survey of India, Government High School, St. Anthony’s School, Town Club, and Malki Sports Club. These clubs and institutions not only nurtured a deep love for the game but also laid the foundation for a football culture that would define the identity of the region for generations.

During those formative years, however, the standard of play was comparatively poor by today’s measures. Matches were often marked more by raw passion than technical finesse, and emotions ran so high that physical altercations between players and even among spectators were not uncommon. The Jaintia Football Club, despite boasting a number of gifted individuals, struggled to achieve consistent success due to a lack of proper organisation, coaching, and systematic training. The team largely relied on individual brilliance rather than cohesive strategy. Among its standout players were Albin Pariat, the celebrated “Jaintia National Poet” alongside Sahon Lanong, Kison Shylla, Loken Shylla, Homiwell Laloo, Karling Shullai, Long Shullai, Long Nikhla, Joniwell Laloo, Erik Pariat, Derick Pariat, Tunnel Pariat, J.C. Khonglah, and Norin Lamare. The club’s survival and spirit were sustained by the dedication of its chief patrons and financiers: Haring Pakyntein, Harrison Kyndiah, Albin Pariat, and Sahon Lanong. These men believed in the unifying power of football long before it became a professional pursuit.

The advent of World War II in 1940 phenomenally altered the football landscape in Shillong. With the city designated as a Retreat Centre for the British Army, Shillong suddenly found itself hosting a wave of military personnel including several renowned international footballers who participated in local tournaments organised by the Shillong Sports Association. Their presence raised the competitive bar, introduced new tactical ideas, and ignited greater public interest in the sport. At this critical juncture, the Jaintia elders recognised the urgent need to transform the Jaintia Football Club from a loosely knit group of talented individuals into a professionally run institution. There was a growing realisation that the club’s reputation often associated with on-field brilliance but also infamous for frequent fights both on and off the field had to evolve beyond just a “brand name.” What was needed was discipline, structure, and strategic leadership.

Answering this call, a group of prominent community leaders stepped forward to reorganise the JFC with a professional ethos. Key figures included Harrison Kyndiah, Welson Kyndiah, A. Alley, Hari Blah, Nowa Rymbai, Albin Pariat, Sahon Lanong, Haring Pakyntein, Kison Lamare, Lakhon Shullai, Fre Shylla, and several other dedicated elders. Through their collective vision, investment, and relentless effort, they instilled discipline, recruited better coaching support, and fostered team cohesion. Their reforms bore fruit spectacularly: in 1945, JFC ‘A’ and JFC ‘B’ teams lifted both the First Division and Second Division trophies in tournaments organised by the Shillong Sports Association—a historic double that stunned the local football fraternity. The momentum continued through 1946 and into 1947, as the club dominated league competitions and consistently maintained a streak of championship win, cementing its status as Shillong’s premier football force.

The team spirit of the JFC during this golden era burned like wildfire, uncontrollable and fiercely proud. And the Jaintia supporters? Their passion defied description. Crowds swelled at Polo Grounds chanting in unison, their voices echoing through the Khasi Hills like war cries of old. Men, women, and children alike followed every match with religious fervour; victories were celebrated with feasts and folk songs, defeats mourned like

personal losses. This emotional bond between club and community became the heartbeat of Jaintia identity—an unwavering belief that when JFC played, the entire Jaintia nation played with them. The squad that powered this dominance was a constellation of talent. Among the most outstanding were S. Keston Shullai, whose leadership and vision later earned him the captaincy of the Assam State Football Team in 1952; Milton Shylla, Khroo Shullai, Konjo Rymbai, E.P. Prince Stone Laloo, Edwel Roy Majaw, Nolini Das, Jokendro Lanong, Justly Tariang, Bensil Pyrbot, S. Senapaty, Mr. Jennings, and Mr. Oflin (both British nationals), Dong Shynret, and N.D. Pradhan. Remarkably, the JFC was a highly cosmopolitan club, reflecting Shillong’s multicultural fabric. Its ranks included British nationals, Assamese, Bengalis, Nepalese, and of course, indigenous Khasi and Jaintia players united not by ethnicity, but by a shared love for the beautiful game and the pride of representing Jaintia.

Adding to the club’s distinctive identity was its iconic uniform: wine-red jerseys paired with crisp white shorts: a symbol of pride instantly recognisable across Shillong’s football circles. These kits were generously gifted from time to time by Sundur Shullai, whose quiet yet steadfast support became part of JFC folklore. Even more remarkably, the club once owned a truck, which was used for commercial purposes. The revenue generated from this enterprise was channelled directly into sustaining the club’s operations from player allowances to travel expenses demonstrating an early model of financial self-reliance rare for community sports teams of that era.

However, the club’s storied journey was not without setbacks. In August 1961, following an unfortunate incident reportedly involving crowd violence and on-field aggression, Jaintia Football Club was handed a ban by the Shillong Sports Association. The episode reflected a darker side of the intense local rivalries and the deep-seated emotional investment in the sport. The Jaintia community, known for its passionate and at times, volatile was often described as exhibiting “hooliganism,” a term used then (and now) to characterise the rowdy, emotionally charged behaviour of certain fan groups. While such fervour stemmed from genuine love for the club, it occasionally crossed lines of sportsmanship, leading to disciplinary actions that temporarily dimmed JFC’s bright flame.

Yet, even in adversity, the spirit of JFC endured. The ban, though painful, became a moment of reflection for the community. It underscored the need to balance passion with discipline, a lesson that would echo through future generations of players and supporters alike. Today, over a century later, Shillong is rapidly transforming into a major football hub for India. Spearheading this evolution is the construction of the massive, FIFA-compliant Mawkhanu Football Stadium—a state-of-the-art facility poised to host national and international tournaments. Backed by significant government investment and strategic partnerships with football federations and private stakeholders, Shillong is positioning itself as India’s “Football Capital.” The vision goes beyond infrastructure: it aims to harness the Northeast’s profound passion for the sport to nurture grassroots talent, create professional pathways, and elevate the region onto the global football stage.

With a legacy rooted in colonial-era camaraderie and a future shaped by modern ambition, Shillong stands at a pivotal moment in its sporting journey. The city’s historic clubs continue to thrive alongside emerging academies, and government support while youth tournaments draw scouts from across the country. As the Mawkhanu Stadium nears completion and more national-level events find a home in the State, Shillong’s dream of becoming the heart of Indian football is no longer just aspirational. It is becoming reality. And at the soul of this dream lies the indomitable spirit first kindled by pioneers like the Jaintia Football Club—a flame that continues to burn bright in the hearts of every football-loving son and daughter of the Northeast.

Another Mining Tragedy; So What

THE editorials here have harped on the illegalities that are allowed to carry on with impunity insofar as coal mining is concerned. Chief Minister Conrad Sangma has taken the view that a traditional livelihood activity dating back to 200 years cannot be done away with by a sleight of hand of the National Green Tribunal (NGT). The Government has also maintained that mining happens in distant places and the police lack the wherewithal to reach those areas. It is in this context that the Supreme Court had ordered for posting central police forces in those areas. Surprisingly the Union Home Ministry which should have responded positively to that order has instead shot it down. Is this not a signal from the Home Ministry that the illegality should continue perhaps after consulting the State Government? Central forces without a vested interest would have gone hammer and tongs at the illegal mining and the mine owners and perhaps brought a halt to such criminality. It is a known fact that those with political clout are either coal mine owners or their family members are in the business. It would not be wrong to assume that much of the political funding for elections also come from the coal mining profits.

The NGT first came down heavily on coal mining based on a petition filed by the Dima Hasao Students' Union on the plea that the rivers flowing from East Jaintia Hills towards Dima Hasao district in Assam are laden with acid mine drainage and hence toxic and no longer potable. Later the NGT also took note of the deaths in different coal mines across the state that went unreported. The death of at least 15 persons in the coal mine at Ksan, East Jaintia Hills in December 2018 after the mine flooded, had sounded alarm bells across the country. Despite the Indian Navy and Air Force trying to render assistance to retrieve the bodies from the mines, they failed. Naturally those who die inside the mines are poor labourers from Nepal, Bangladesh and now quite a good number from Assam. That fact alone renders them vulnerable since mine owners could not care less about mine safety measures and they don't follow the Mines and Mineral Development & Regulation (MMDR) Act.

In the latest reported case too, the labourer who died is from Hojai, Assam and hence there is no hue and cry. If the victim were to have been a local person perhaps the reaction of the people too would have been different. So, whose livelihoods are being served since the locals don't enter the mines any longer as they fear for their lives and the mine owners are not all locals for only the wealthy can engage in the coal business. It follows therefore that there is a vested interest in the continued support for coal mining because it serves a political purpose — it funds elections. The argument that coal is a livelihood for the locals is therefore flawed and not based on any data to establish the realities of the coal mining business today in Meghalaya. The fact that there is not a single voice of protest against what is a criminal activity suggests that all are paid to remain silent. That's the pattern of governance in Meghalaya today.

Trump's Betrayal of MAGA, Modi & takeover of nations

By Melarbor L Thabab

MAGA stands for Make America Great Again through policies that will benefit “America First” and its people from the perceived erstwhile non-beneficial policies. During Trump's first term, there was great fanfare because here comes a man who was not directly connected nor intrinsic to the Washington DC elites. He was an outsider who funded his own campaign making him not beholden to the donors. In his first term, he did exactly what he said he would during his campaign — that is to impose tariffs on China, to build the border wall with Mexico, to ban the citizens of certain Muslim countries whom he thinks are dangerous, to not make America involved in foreign wars, to renegotiate NAFTA, to make NATO countries pay their fair share, to deport illegal immigrants, to extricate America from the Iranian nuclear agreement, to pass America's mega infrastructure budget, to increase military spending and to recognize Jerusalem as Israel's capital. It is rare and worth appreciating that a politician kept his word. He improved America's standing in the world, had a good economy with the lowest black unemployment ever. He had a few failures too like ending all donors cum special interest lobbying groups, removing global banking control, ending free trade, not banning Chinese students and skilled immigrants.

His second term campaign was diluted and funded by various donors including Jewish lobby groups. He kept his election promise of imposing tax on all countries who had raised their tariffs to America's detriment. He initially imposed high tariffs on China but reverted quickly to minor tariffs since China weaponised their control of the world's rare earth elements. He allowed an estimated 600,000 Chinese students to study in America by stating that American educational institutions might go bankrupt without them. He promised to end the Russia — Ukraine war and the Gaza War but failed.

Israel Policy: He diluted MAGA for MIGA (Made Israeli Great Again) by placing “Israel First” instead of America. He recognized the Golan Heights as Israel's territory, bombed Iran on behalf of Israel, asked for pardon for the Israeli Prime Minister who was charged with bribery and fraud. He provided American weapons and praised Israel's use of those weapons to carpet bomb Gaza. He was forced to release the files of the Jewish American Billionaire Jeffrey Epstein who had negotiated on behalf of the Israeli government with other countries. Trump provided America's money to fund the Gaza

genocide, the bombings of 16 churches, educational institutions, hospitals, mosques, use of chemical weapons, carpet bombings of entire communities, ghastly sniper killings of infants — children thereby allowing Israel to conduct the most barbaric slaughter and famine on innocent Gazans. He talks about transferring the Gazans to foreign nations, building casinos, resorts and setting up military bases in Gaza. Rich Zionist Jewish Americans have formed an oligarchy and used this concentrated power to full effect on this American President to make Israel first. Trump fails to realize that Zionist Americans are “Israel First and allows AIPAC and Israel to drag America to its wars. He has become the most pro-Israeli American president in history.

He improved America's standing in the world, had a good economy with the lowest black unemployment ever. He had a few failures too like ending all donors cum special interest lobbying groups, removing global banking control, ending free trade, not banning Chinese students and skilled immigrants.

Trump's policy on Americans: While Trump is busy with his external activities, the American people are suffering from high inflation like housing, rent, food and essential items. Donald Trump's tariffs have led to inflation in prices of essential commodities and the money earned from tariffs has not been used to shield the American consumer by keeping prices down nor to better American lives. He is giving billions of American dollars to the Israel and Ukraine wars as opposed to investing on the American people and creating jobs for them. He increased the H1B visa amount thereby allowing around 170,000 thousand migrants to come and work in big tech American companies instead of employing many unemployed Americans. He belittles American techies by saying that they are not as talented as the immigrants all because tech companies have funded him. America's national debt has increased to 38 trillion dollars during his first term and second terms. Dismantling of USAID and wasteful spending identified and stopped by Elon Musk's Department Of Government Efficiency (DOGE) has not resulted in using the saved money to repay the national debt and ease the American consumer but instead contributed to a rise in military spending from 700 billion to 1 trillion dollars. He grants tax cuts to big corporates but did not slash taxes for the American

people coupled with jobs and investments. Wages are not rising to commensurate with inflation. He campaigned to end America's endless war yet he is on the verge of war with Iran and other nations which if it happens, vast sums of American money and lives will be lost. He tried to repeal the Affordable Care Act called Obama care which will affect millions of sick Americans out of spite for Obama whilst managing to round up 300 million for the White House Ball Room and 40 billion dollars for Argentina. Life and health insurance coverage have become more expensive under him.

Mass deportation of illegal immigrants is being carried at a snail's pace with some skilled illegal immigrants being kept back

for cheap labour to benefit the corporates thus doing a policy reversal. Wall street, corporates, Silicon Valley and other lobbying groups are working for their respective benefits and have succeeded in diluting Trump's agenda at the cost of the American people. The US-Mexico border is closed after more than 10 million illegal aliens have been allowed to enter. Crime rate in America is high. Trump espouses to Make America Great Again but he is distracted with frivolous issues instead of working in the interest of Americans who helped him win the presidential election. He became a businessman again enriching himself and his family from bitcoin and other businesses. MAGA is now the biggest scam. Upon noticing that his favourability rating is dipping fast, he tries to pander to the Americans by ranting at the Ethiopian immigrants to rally his base but Americans see through this façade. The American people will have their say in the 2026 mid-term elections which will indirectly be a referendum on his presidency.

Trump and Modi: When the BJP took over in 1998, it improved relations with the USA culminating with the arrival of Bill Clinton in 2000 marking a thawing of relations between America and India. The Congress government which came thereafter and later Modi's BJP followed the inroads made by their predecessors which achieved diplomatic

success. Since Bill Clinton, every American President had visited India at least once. The good relations with the USA secured India, a non-NPT signatory nation in receiving nuclear technology from America, membership to the Missile Technology Control Regime, a strategic partner, 2+2 dialogue, quicker delivery of military technology, more visas for Indians, CATSA exemption for India, QUAD member, trade surplus and UNSC membership support. PM Modi had invested a lot of political capital to make this relationship work at a personal level with Trump. His investment succeeded during Trump's first term but did not on his second term, with Trump imposing 50% tariffs on trade for buying Russian oil. This is the highest tariff imposed along with Brazil. Not even communist nations received these high tariffs which as per IMF, had hindered India's growth and its exports immeasurably. Modi feels betrayed and is looking to BRICS and other nations to buffer the impact of these tariffs. This massive diplomatic failure is the culmination of Modi's failure to realize that India is a dispensable partner because India's economy is not intertwined with the America's economy as China is and that India has no oil nor precious minerals to offer as China and Russia have. In essence, India has always been a very soft target. Modi is now calibrating his next move in the remaining three years of Trump's presidency.

Takeover of nations: Donald Trump's mindset is now on a takeover spree of certain nations which have minerals resources and for their strategic location. He had taken control of Venezuela's oil, a nation which had the world's largest proven oil reserves besides other minerals thus reinstating the Monroe doctrine which called for America's domination of Latin America. He is threatening to take over Greenland and make it part of America because of Greenland's strategic location and possession of rare earth elements. He has shown some interest on Cuba because of its location. However, the situation is very tough with Iran, a nation rich in oil and gas reserves compared with the other nations since the repressive regime governing Iran has the capability of striking back at American interests. Under him, American hegemony is back, starting with a bill to impose 500% tariffs on nations buying Russian oil and imposing 10% tariffs on European allies for their support on the freewill of the people of Greenland and Denmark to decide on their future. The world is waiting with bated breath what the fickle minded American President will do in the remaining three years of his presidency.

Biochar for Greener Meghalaya Strengthening Organic Farming, Climate Resilience, and Rural Livelihoods

By Dr Subhash Ashutosh

Meghalaya stands at a crucial juncture where the pursuit of organic agriculture, climate resilience, and sustainable rural livelihoods can be meaningfully aligned. Biochar—a carbon-rich material produced through the pyrolysis of biomass in a low-oxygen environment—offers a powerful and locally relevant solution to achieve these interconnected goals. With abundant biomass resources and a strong policy push towards organic and green development, biochar has the potential to become a cornerstone of Meghalaya's sustainable development pathway.

Biochar production and use are particularly well suited to Meghalaya's ecological and socio-economic context. The state possesses ample biomass in the form of bamboo, forest plantations, horticultural residues, and agricultural waste. Converting this biomass into biochar and its application in the agriculture fields creates multiple benefits: it improves soil quality and agricultural productivity, strengthens ecosystem resilience, generates income and employment opportunities for rural communities, and provides an environmentally sound option for waste management.

One of the most significant advantages of biochar lies in its application as a soil amendment. Biochar naturally enhances soil structure by creating porous spaces that support the growth of beneficial microorganisms such as mycorrhiza and bacteria. This increased microbial activity improves nutrient cycling, raises soil organic carbon levels, and reduces soil acidity. Given that Meghalaya's soils are largely acidic, biochar can play a critical role in restoring soil health and improving crop productivity. In erosion-prone areas, where high rainfall and runoff have depleted soil nutrients, biochar offers a long-term and cost-effective solution for soil restoration. Its benefits persist over many years, making it an attractive input for sustainable agriculture.

Bamboo-based biochar production presents a unique opportunity for Meghalaya. The state is rich in bamboo resources, yet much of this potential remains underutilized due to limited industrial demand and alternative uses. Promoting biochar production from bamboo can help build a sustainable bamboo economy, creating new value chains and livelihood opportunities. Community-based enterprises centered on bamboo biochar can transform an underused resource into a valuable product while encouraging sustainable management of bamboo forests and plantations.

Beyond agriculture, biochar has growing demand across several industrial sectors. It is widely used in air and water purification and finds applications in cosmetics, pharmaceuticals, metallurgy, and construction industries. Industrial-grade biochar, produced through specialized pyrolysis reactors, also has a growing export market. Meghalaya's diverse biomass base positions it well to tap into this demand. The state's new industrial policy can play a catalytic role by offering targeted incentives to promote biochar-based industries, thereby strengthening the green industrial ecosystem.

Biochar is also closely aligned with Meghalaya's Organic Mission, which aims to promote certified organic and natural farming while improving farmer livelihoods. The mission targets the conversion of 100,000 hectares of agricultural land to organic farming by 2028. Biochar is expected to be a key input in this transition. Even with a conservative application rate of two tons per hectare, the potential demand for biochar could reach around 200,000 tons over the next three years. This translates into an estimated market value of nearly Rs 400 crore, representing a substantial economic opportunity for the state. Alongside direct economic benefits, biochar use would lead to improved soil quality, higher agricultural productivity, and

enhanced resilience of farming systems. Over time, this green economy model can be extended to additional agricultural areas across Meghalaya.

Another compelling dimension of biochar is its role in carbon dioxide removal (CDR). Biomass absorbs carbon dioxide from the atmosphere during its growth. When this biomass is converted into biochar through pyrolysis, the captured carbon is stabilized. Once applied to soil, this carbon can remain sequestered for hundreds of years. Owing to this durable carbon storage, biochar has gained global recognition as an effective CDR solution. Biochar-based carbon credits are in high demand and command premium prices—currently ranging from 150 to 200 US dollars per credit—significantly higher than many forestry or agricultural credits. This creates an additional revenue stream for rural communities, making biochar an attractive option for building a sustainable green economy.

Meghalaya's bamboo resources further strengthen this opportunity. While bamboo is commonly used for household needs, handicrafts, and limited industrial supply, these uses represent only a fraction of its sustainable availability. Community feedback suggests that a significant amount of bamboo remains unused and eventually decays in forests. Utilizing even a portion of this unused bamboo for biochar production through community-based enterprise models could generate supplementary income while promoting sustainable bamboo management.

Biochar also offers a practical and forward-looking solution for managing agricultural and horticultural waste. Rural areas of Meghalaya generate substantial quantities of biomass residues, which are often burned as a disposal method. Such practices release stored carbon back into the atmosphere and represent a loss of valuable resources. Although stubble burning is not currently a major concern in Meghalaya, proactive adoption of biochar can help avoid future environmental challenges. Converting agricultural waste into biochar not only prevents emissions but also transforms waste into a valuable agricultural input.

For biochar to realize its full potential, a strong and sustained demand must be created, particularly through its widespread use as a soil amendment. In the initial stages, government-supported incentive programs will be essential to make biochar affordable for farmers and encourage adoption. With a well-designed policy framework and institutional support, the biochar sector in Meghalaya has significant potential for growth.

In this direction, an important step has already been taken. With the support of the Meghalaya State Bamboo Mission and MEGNOLIA (a society under the Government of Meghalaya's Agriculture Department), the Centre of Excellence for NRM & Sustainable Livelihoods under MBDA is implementing a pilot project focused on producing biochar from bamboo. The project brings together two cooperative groups of farmers, bamboo growers, and a technical partner, with carbon credit benefits expected to be shared among all contributors. This pilot initiative aims to demonstrate the economic, environmental, and social benefits of biochar and to lay the foundation for scaling up across the state.

Biochar thus represents far more than a single technological intervention. It is a unifying solution that links organic farming, climate action, waste management, and rural livelihoods. With continued policy support, community participation, and institutional collaboration, biochar can help pave the way for a climate-resilient, inclusive, and green economy in Meghalaya.

(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

Between a Mall and a Church: How Different Are They?

Editor,
I am writing in response to Mr. Toki Blah's impassioned letter regarding the rumoured dismantling of the English Service Church at Police Bazar. While Mr. Blah begins with a disclaimer that his fears are based on hearsay, history in Shillong has taught us that rumours of demolition are often just the prelude to the arrival of bulldozers.

But frankly, I wonder what all the fuss is about. If recent magical disappearing acts with funds in our local religious circles are anything to go by, the line between a “House of Prayer” and a “Den of Thieves” has been blurry for a while now.

I find myself asking, is there really a difference between a church and a mall? I mean conceptually, a church and a mall are both

franchises in the business of selling hope to people who feel empty. You go to one to buy insurance for the afterlife, and the other to buy distractions for this life. The only real difference is that in a mall, when you pay for something, you actually get to take it home in a bag.

So, if they do knock down the old building to put up a concrete monstrosity, we shouldn't view it as a betrayal. We have worshipped the Almighty Rupee for so long in Shillong, it is only polite to finally build it a proper temple.....

Yours etc.,
Ellerine Diengdoh,
Via email

Overcharging at MUDA Complex Public Parking Lot

Editor,
I wish to draw the attention of readers and the concerned authorities to an incident of arbitrary overcharging at the MUDA Complex parking lot in Shillong.

which raises serious concerns about transparency and accountability in public parking management.

Recently, I parked my two-wheeler at the said parking facility for approximately thirty minutes. As per the rate clearly mentioned on the parking slip, the charge for a two-wheeler is Rs 10 per hour. However, I was charged Rs 20. When I pointed out the discrepancy and referred to the printed rate on the slip, the counter staff dismissed the written rate, stating that it was “just Rs 10 more.” Following this, the counter staff angrily remarked “I will increase the fee to Rs 30 in the coming days.”

What is particularly troubling is that on an earlier occasion, despite parking the vehicle for nearly fifty-five minutes, charges for more than one hour were applied, thereby suggesting manipulation of parking time to suit arbitrary charges. Such practices indicate that the issue is not an isolated error but a pattern of discretionary and non-transparent fee collection.

Public parking facilities

are meant to function on clearly defined and prominently displayed rates. When written rates are ignored and charges are altered verbally, it undermines public trust and places citizens in an uncomfortable position of having to argue over small amounts, which many may choose to avoid.

It is therefore hoped that the concerned authorities will take note of this matter, ensure strict enforcement of the approved parking rates, and put in place effective monitoring mechanisms at public parking facilities so that citizens are not subjected to arbitrary charges.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Four Lanes & Flyovers an Immediate Need

Editor,
I recently came across news that the new bridge at Umiam will soon be made functional for buses and

other heavy vehicles. This is a welcome development, especially considering that the approval and construction process moved at a commendable pace.

However, this announcement also raises serious concerns regarding the present condition of the road from the Umiam bridge to Shillong. The stretch is in a pathetic state, marked by numerous bumps and uneven surfaces, making travel extremely uncomfortable. At a time when our state is frequently hosting national and international artists and dignitaries, one wonders whether the administration wants such renowned visitors to experience these road conditions.

Another important issue is traffic management. Is there any concrete protocol or plan in place to regulate or ease traffic once heavy vehicles and buses start plying from Umiam towards ISBT and beyond? Without proper planning, this could further worsen the already existing congestion.

It is also surprising that no serious steps have been

taken to construct a flyover at the ISBT junction. The location is ideal and favourable for such an intervention. Daily traffic snarls and repeated congestion at this junction clearly indicate the urgent need for long-term infrastructure solutions.

Furthermore, I believe, the general public, strongly request that a four-lane road be developed, wherever feasible, from the Umroi junction below the flyover up to Mawlai at the earliest. This would significantly ease traffic congestion and ensure smoother movement of vehicles.

I sincerely request the concerned authorities not to turn a blind eye to these pressing issues. Time waits for none, and we all aspire for smooth, safe, and traffic-free roads wherever possible.

Yours etc.,
B. Laitphlang,
Via email

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*"A great person attracts great people
and knows how to hold them together."*

— Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe

The Shillong Times

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BJP's young face

THE election of a 45-year-old 'youth' as president of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, the nation's strongest political entity running governments in 19 states, sends out the right signals to a spectrum dominated by ageing men. This, in a nation where some 65 per cent of the people are below the age of 35, and the average age of an Indian is 29 years. Old leaders hang on to positions in their parties and government, rejecting a chance for reinvention and rejuvenation.

The BJP, despite its questionable ideological orientations and resort to religion as a campaign plank, has its softer sides. Unlike the Congress, it has a broader leadership base cutting across regions and communities, though the minorities and Dalits are fewer in this lineup. Dynasty spirit is mostly not evident in this party and its principal leaders are drawn from diverse regions. The Congress party has, in recent times, installed a senior leader from the South as its president, a post normally reserved for the Nehru-Gandhi family. Yet, palpably, the family calls all the shots. A better sense of democracy is evident in the BJP even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi holds an overarching influence over the organisation, which is balanced by the RSS influence from outside. Five-time legislator from Bihar, Nitin Nabin, who was installed in the post in the national capital on Tuesday, is not a known face to most people. He's the youngest president for the party, the 12th in a row, and obviously has patronage from both the PM and home minister Amit Shah. The RSS' nod was a prerequisite. Outgoing president, JP Nadda, who also holds the health and fertilizers portfolios in the Modi ministry, had completed the two terms spanning six years. Nadda jelled well with both Shah, the previous president, and Modi. He however lacked the clout of Amit Shah in the party chief's role. Perceptions were that Shah and Modi remote controlled him in the presidential chair. Be that as it may, the BJP kept winning most elections during his term. A dampener was the 2024 parliament polls, where the BJP and its allies failed to muster a majority in the Lok Sabha. Modi could form and run the government only with backing from the JDU of Bihar and TDP of Andhra Pradesh. Fact is, the BJP does not have much of an organisational heft across states; a weakness that was so far made up by the mass support Prime Minister Narendra Modi enjoyed at a personal level. When Modi's stock started falling, this affected the BJP's electoral prospects in 2024. The BJP managed to retain power as there was no strong anti-incumbency mood.

Obviously, the BJP is targeting the young generation for its future sustenance and growth. On the other side of the political spectrum, Rahul Gandhi at age 55 is young as well. So is Priyanka Gandhi. Among the other senior politicians, many are in the 70s or 60s and some in the 80s, like Kharge. Nitin Nabin is thus the odd leader out. Yet, he's not so young to capture the fancy of the youth.

Letters to the Editor

Don't the poor enjoy the right to life?

Editor,
I wish to express my concern and appreciation at the same time for your recent editorial on illegal coal mining in Meghalaya, published on January 20, 2026. Though painful to read, the editorial was timely and necessary, as it brought attention to an issue that, sadly, continues to trouble the state even as of now.

As your editorial, along with earlier reports published from time to time in The Shillong Times, coverage in other newspapers, and observations of the National Green Tribunal, have repeatedly shown, deaths in illegal coal mines are neither new nor unforeseen. Yet, despite these warnings and directions, workers continue to lose their lives in unsafe conditions, while rivers and land suffer lasting damage. With due humility, one cannot help but feel that this ongoing situation reflects a serious gap between awareness and effective action.

The concern shown in the editorial for poor and voiceless labourers, many of whom are migrants, is particularly touching. These individuals enter hazardous mines not by choice but out of necessity, and their deaths often do not receive the attention they deserve. The frequent justification of coal mining as a livelihood appears increasingly difficult to accept when, as things stand now, ordinary workers continue to bear the risks involved.

Equally distressing is the environmental harm that has

gradually become accepted as routine — polluted rivers, damaged land, and potential threats to future generations. When such consequences persist despite court orders and scientific findings, it raises concerns that go beyond administration and touch upon our shared moral responsibility.

Your editorial reflects sincere concern for human dignity, environmental protection, and the rule of law. I humbly hope that those responsible for decision-making will take note of the issues raised and respond with the seriousness they deserve, so that further loss of life and damage may be prevented.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

How Dare They Trade a Church for a Mall?

Editor,
This is in response to the article titled "Between Church and Mall" published in your esteemed newspaper on January 20, 2026. While the author is entitled to her personal opinions, I feel compelled—on behalf of countless believers and citizens of Shillong—to express deep anguish and strong disagreement with the casual acceptance of dismantling a heritage church for commercial development.

For many of us, this church is not merely a structure of stone and timber. It is our heart and soul. It is the sacred space where we first learned to pray as

toddlers, where generations found solace, hope, moral grounding, and communion with our Lord and Saviour. It shaped our lives, our values, and our identity. To reduce such a place of worship to a negotiable asset between "church and mall" is profoundly disturbing.

The very idea of dismantling a church that has stood for nearly a century—one that holds immense spiritual and heritage value—to make way for a commercial complex reeks of unbelievable greed. Who conceived such a proposal? Whose interests are being served? Is this not an attempt to grab public land and erase the very fabric of Shillong under the guise of development?

Are we witnessing a government that is increasingly anti-people and insensitive to Christian faith and heritage? Is this the real intention of those in power under the NDA—development at the cost of conscience, faith, and history? Turning Shillong into a concrete jungle by sacrificing heritage structures, and not sparing even places of worship, is a betrayal of the city's soul.

To even contemplate selling or dismantling a church evokes the biblical image of betrayal for thirty silver coins. Such an act would amount to the ultimate betrayal of Christians and their sacred space. Over our dead bodies should such a thing be allowed to happen.

This proposal must be unequivocally condemned. Shillong must not be handed over to a nexus of greedy businessmen and complicit politicians. Development cannot, and must not, come at the cost of faith, heritage,

the context in which this once great Hima was born. Since we were only passing through, I could not observe much of the area, especially as we had to roll up our windows to prevent dust from entering the vehicle. Although Sutnga is officially recorded as a village, it more closely resembles a small town, with well-built houses reflecting the prosperity of its residents. According to the 2011 Census, the village has a total population of 550 households. While it is unclear whether all households benefited equally from the coal trade, it appears that a significant number of people did gain from it.

A similar observation can be made when passing through Ladrymbai, one of only two towns in East Jaintia Hills. All kinds of shops can be found in the market, which appeared livelier than other towns of similar size in Meghalaya. Most of the shops were run by the non-indigenous community, undoubtedly generating substantial rental income for local land owners. It is evident that the market has flourished because of coal mining. When the mines are eventually exhausted, the market will eventually shrink and may even disappear. At present, the footfall in the market is quite heavy, which is evident from the shops being lavishly stocked with goods. Consequently, traffic congestion is a major issue. Therefore, we decided not to pass through the town and instead took a detour from Mookhep, turning left onto an alternate road. After a few minutes of driving along this route, we stopped at an open space to have breakfast prepared by Kong Patricia.

After breakfast, I went into the bushes to relieve myself. One of the camera crew members accompanying H. Hamkein Mohmen, a well-known social and environmental activist, in the other vehicle came with me. We noticed a hole overgrown with vegetation. Curious about its depth, I approached it, but the cameraman cautioned me against going any closer. It was one of the pits dug for coal mining, and the entire area is riddled with such underground tunnels. Given Meghalaya's heavy rainfall, it is only a matter of time before the percolation of rain water weakens the soil

and the collective spiritual life of its people.

God forbid that this church ever be reduced to a commercial transaction. The people of Shillong are watching, praying, and will not remain silent.

Yours etc.,
EK Chamall,
Via email

Between church and mall – an absurd comparison

Editor,
Ellerine Diengdoh in the third paragraph of her letter to the editor under the heading "Between a Mall and a Church: How different are they?" (ST January 20, 2026) is sharp, and provocative and it captures a truth about how both institutions operate as ritual theatres of hope. Unpacking the two in a dashboard below:

	Church as "Hope Franchise"	Mall as "Hope Franchise"
Product	Salvation, meaning, moral guidance, and assurance of continuity beyond death.	Goods, experiences and distractions that promise happiness, status or relief from boredom.
Currency	Faith, devotion, ritual participation, financial offerings	Money, time, attention.
Delivery	Intangible – you don't walk away with a physical object, but with a promise, a narrative and sense of belonging.	Tangible – you literally carry hope home in a bag, though its effect often fades quickly.
Psychological Function	Addresses existential emptiness, fear of mortality and the need for transcendence.	Addresses social emptiness, desire for novelty, and the need for identity through consumption.

A comparative insight – both spaces ritualize emptiness into hope: one through transcendence, the other through consumption. Both rely on

enough to cause collapses. Very soon, the entire area will be littered with sinkholes. Effluent from these abandoned mines also poses a serious contamination risk to local water bodies. In fact, one of the streams we crossed had a bluish tinge—a tell-tale sign of pollution caused by mining. The spot where we had breakfast had once been used as a coal depot. There was none there that day, which led me to assume that coal mining had ceased, especially since the Thangsko incident was less than a month old. I was badly mistaken.

As soon as we entered Sookilo village, signs of coal mining were everywhere. Huge piles of coal lay on both sides of the road. Overloaded trucks covered with tarpaulin became a common sight. Many of these trucks had their registration numbers removed, making identification impossible. It has been over ten years since the Supreme Court imposed a ban on coal mining, yet coal continues to be transported under the pretext that it is old stock being disposed of. The coal heaps lining the road did not look ten years old. That mining is continuing unabated was further evident from the ladders hanging from the sides of many trucks—ladders used in rat-hole mining, a practice explicitly banned by the Supreme Court.

One of the most visible impacts of ongoing coal mining was the pathetic condition of the roads. The constant movement of overloaded trucks had resulted in the roads becoming riddled with potholes. As mentioned earlier, dust was everywhere, forcing us to keep our windows shut to avoid suffocation. The biggest casualty of this deplorable state of the roads was Moolamyllyang. Since 2019, the village has been known for its Christmas Festival of Lights, which has attracted tourists from across the region. This year, however, the festival had to be cancelled due to poor road conditions that made travel unsafe—a fact I can personally attest to after passing through the area.

The condition of the road in Sutnga is no better. Santa Mary Shylla, the MLA of the Sutnga-Saipung constituency, has announced that Rs 260 crore has been

sanctioned for road improvement, with work scheduled to commence by March this year. The funding is being provided by the World Bank, making it yet another externally aided project—one that some argue is increasing the state's indebtedness to external agencies. Even if roads are repaired or newly constructed, how long they will last if overloaded trucks carrying illegally mined coal continue to ply on them remains to be seen. As we left the valley and climbed the green-clad hills of Tong-seng Nongkhlich, we gained a bird's-eye view of the devastation caused by coal mining.

Supporters of coal mining often argue that disrupting it would ruin the local economy and adversely affect people's livelihoods. This argument assumes that the benefits of mining have been shared—equitably, among the local population. A cursory glance at Sutnga might suggest that this is true. However, when the socio-economic indicators of East Jaintia Hills district are examined, the picture that emerges is of deep deprivation. According to NITI Aayog's India: National Multidimensional Poverty Index – A Progress Review 2023, East Jaintia Hills has the third-highest proportion of people suffering from multidimensional poverty in the state, at 43.79 percent. Similarly, NITI Aayog's North Eastern Region District SDG Index: Report and Dashboard 2021–22 ranks the district third from the bottom among all districts across the 15 Sustainable Development Goals.

These findings suggest that the claim that coal mining is essential to the local economy and provides valuable livelihoods applies to only a small section of the population. While it may have made a few individuals extremely wealthy, the cost borne by the majority has been extremely disastrous. Indeed, what is happening in East Jaintia Hills is a tragedy for a people who once built one of the most powerful Khasi Hima—one whose influence was felt far and wide. Will that golden age ever return? Not while illegality continues to reign.

(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)

pay the fine immediately or be taken to court. To avoid unnecessary harassment, delay, and legal complications, many people choose to pay on the spot. Unfortunately, in most such cases, no challan receipt is issued, making it evident that the money goes directly into the pockets of these officials.

This raises a serious question: is the responsible administration unaware of this malpractice, or is it happening with the knowledge or involvement of higher authorities? Such actions severely undermine public trust and tarnish the image of law enforcement.

I strongly appeal to the concerned authorities to review CCTV footage at traffic checkpoints and take strict action, including suspension, against officials found indulging in corrupt practices. The ground reality is deeply disappointing and demands immediate intervention.

Yours etc.,
B. Laithphang,
Via email

Then he banged his gavel. "Case dismissed." The lawyers froze. "Dismissed?" they cried. "On what grounds?" The judge sighed, a long sigh that travelled across continents. "On the grounds that this case is based entirely on fiction."

"Fiction?" said the first lawyer indignantly. "These are national achievements." The judge shook his head. "No. These are short stories. Imaginative writing. In fact, I keep reading excerpts from this fictitious book in your newspapers every day."

The courtroom chuckled. Even a few seasoned diplomats smiled, grateful for comic relief.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Why Only Greenland? The courtroom of the International Court of Justice was unusually quiet that morning. Even the translators, who normally whispered into their microphones with the enthusiasm of gossip, had paused. The judge adjusted his glasses, looked down at the thick file before him, then looked up at the two Indian lawyers standing confidently in crisp black coats.

"You have filed a case of discrimination against the United States," he said slowly, as if reading a line he never expected to read in his judicial career.

"Yes, My Lord," said the first lawyer, clearing his throat with patriotic firmness. "We feel deeply offended."

"Offended?" asked the judge, raising an eyebrow that had seen wars, sanctions, coups and several dozen international embarrassments.

"Very much so," said the second lawyer. "Why is the United States interested only in Greenland, Canada and Venezuela? Why not India?"

A murmur ran through the courtroom. Pens paused mid-sentence. A journalist dropped his croissant. A diplomat from a small island nation stopped pretending to understand international law and leaned forward.

The judge leaned back. "And why, may I ask, should the United States want India?"

The first lawyer smiled. This was his moment. He

"You cannot," the judge continued, "build a legal case on novels and works of fiction. Courts deal in facts. Not slogans. Not speeches. Not election posters."

"But My Lord," pleaded the second lawyer, "our leaders say this every day."

"Exactly," said the judge. "That is why I recognised it immediately as fiction."

He leaned back in his chair. "It is time you realised that what sells at home may not sell outside."

Laughter broke out. Even the stenographer smiled, though she quickly returned to typing in case the smile was recorded as contempt of court.

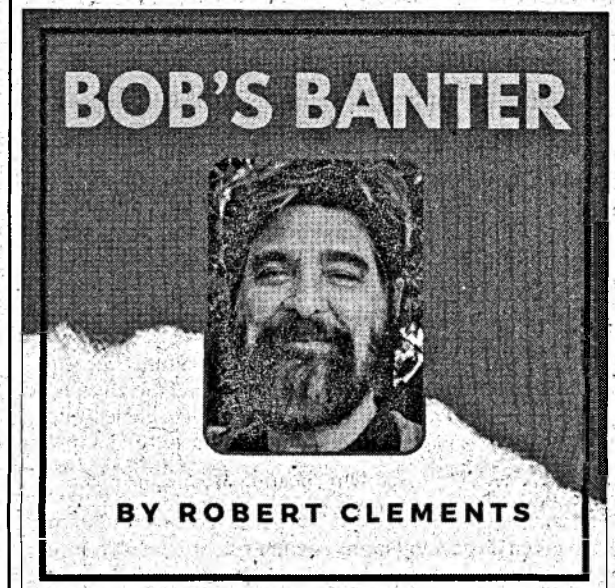
The judge tapped the file. "Let me explain this slowly. When journalists are questioned for asking questions, freedom of speech develops a nervous stutter. When poverty is hidden behind statistics, it does not disappear. It simply changes addresses. When minorities need protection from the law instead of protection by the law, religious freedom becomes conditional."

The lawyers shifted uneasily.

"And when you announce these things loudly enough," the judge continued, "you begin to believe them. That is the true power of fiction."

A reporter raised his hand, forgetting he was not in school.

The judge ignored him. "This court cannot proceed until poverty disappears, free



had rehearsed this answer in front of the mirror that morning. "Because we are the fourth largest economy in the world."

The judge nodded politely.

"Because we have religious freedom," added the second lawyer, with a confident nod to the gallery.

"Because we have absolute freedom of speech," continued the first, warming up nicely now.

"And because," the second lawyer said proudly, chest expanding, "we have no poverty at all."

There was silence. The kind of silence that usually appears just before someone realises they have said something unforgettable. Somewhere, a ceiling fan hummed awkwardly. The judge blinked once. Then twice. He flipped through the case papers again, as if hoping the words might rearrange themselves into something more legally acceptable. "You are saying," he asked carefully, "that all of this is true?" "Absolutely," said both lawyers together, in the tone usually reserved for schoolboys denying responsibility for a broken window.

The judge removed his glasses and placed them on the desk. He looked tired now. Not physically tired, but morally exhausted. The kind of tiredness that comes when reality has been bent, stretched, polished and finally presented as a press release.

Then he banged his gavel. "Case dismissed."

The lawyers froze. "Dismissed?" they cried. "On what grounds?"

The judge sighed, a long sigh that travelled across continents. "On the grounds that this case is based entirely on fiction."

"Fiction?" said the first lawyer indignantly. "These are national achievements."

The judge shook his head. "No. These are short stories. Imaginative writing. In fact, I keep reading excerpts from this fictitious book in your newspapers every day."

The courtroom chuckled. Even a few seasoned diplomats smiled, grateful for comic relief.

speech stops trembling, poverty is genuinely eradicated and unfair laws against minorities are scrapped. Until then, this case remains firmly in the fiction section."

He picked up his gavel again. "Court adjourned."

As the lawyers packed their bags, one turned to the other and whispered, "At least we tried."

"Yes," the other replied. "But next time, let us bring facts. Or at least a better novelist."

Outside the courtroom, reporters rushed forward. Microphones were shoved into faces. Headlines were already forming.

India Loses Case at World Court

Judge Calls Claims 'Creative Writing'

Back home, the evening news presented the story differently. The case, viewers were told, had been dismissed due to "international bias." Panels nodded. Anchors shouted gravely. Graphics flashed.

The same novelist smiled. He knew it didn't matter. His stories were not meant for courts. They were meant for living rooms. For television studios. For WhatsApp forwards. For people who preferred comforting fiction to uncomfortable truth.

In the end, Greenland remained just Greenland. Canada stayed where it was. Venezuela continued being Venezuela. And India remains a nation where fiction sells far better than facts. That the world can tell us to stop believing what we are fed but like cinema goers at a theatre we close our eyes and tell ourselves to believe everything that is fed to us.

The only difference is that as we continue believing in the fiction that is being spoon-fed to us, we will walk out of the theatre or bookshop or library one day, and realise that what my fictitious judge at the international court said was not fiction but the truth.

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 bobshanter@gmail.com

Conservation versus Commerce

WHEN the British chose Shillong as their headquarters they had a reason. The undulating hills, the greenery around and the salubrious climate must have tempted them to decide on this city as their headquarters after shifting from rainy Cherapunjee (Sohra). Whatever may have been their fault and failings the British built institutions that have lasted and which were appropriate for a state that was earthquake prone. The earthquake of June 12, 1897 must have also been a warning to them that buildings should as much as possible use wood for floorboards and the sand and lime mixture for the walls while the roofs were of corrugated galvanized iron sheets. Many of these structures stand testimony to the architectural skill of the British. One of those structures is the Presbyterian Church at Police Bazar which was built in 1876 but was destroyed by the 1897 earthquake. It was rebuilt in 1902.

This church has a statue of Rev Thomas Jones, a Welsh missionary who gave the Khasis their script in 1841, following which they could write their own folk tales and historical narratives which earlier were part of oral narratives. But this Presbyterian Church is not the only heritage building. The Raj Bhavan, now known as the Lok Bhavan to give it a people-centric nomenclature too is a legacy of the British. It was originally built for the Deputy Commissioner and later became the Chief Commissioner's residence in 1874. Like the Church it also was destroyed in the 1897 earthquake, and then rebuilt with an earthquake-resistant timber design and was completed in October 1903. After independence, in 1951 the building was named Raj Bhavan and has served as a historical seat for Meghalaya's governors. There are heritage structures such as the Tara Ghar which have now been brought down to make way for some other structures.

There have been concerns expressed in this daily about an alleged proposal to dismantle the old Church at Police Bazar which would be replaced by a commercial structure. If indeed there is such a proposal, it will inevitably be pushed back by those who continue to worship in that church and for whom it has been a place of great solace apart from the fact that it also is a constant reminder of Thomas Jones that great missionary who took great trouble to understand the Khasi language and give the Khasis their script. True, a statue of Thomas Jones is also set up at Nongsawlia in Sohra but what has been put up with much thought cannot be undone so abruptly. The MDA Government ought to reconsider any such decision that can have far-reaching consequences. There are many other spaces that can be utilised to set up what the Government considers to be crucial infrastructure that is not necessarily a commercial one. In a city that is growing exponentially there is bound to be a growing demand for space to accommodate different stakeholders such as hawkers etc., some of whom are now located inside the MUDA Parking lot and another lot in the old PWD set-up at Barik. However, some spaces are sacred and the Government should recognise that. If private parties are involved in this attempt to convert a church into a commercial space then those owing their allegiance to that church ought to gear themselves up and fight the good fight.

Remembering A Man of True Faith

By Meyu Changkiri

The sanctuary of Laitumkhrah Presbyterian Church was filled with quiet emotion as the funeral service of Rev Dr Robert R. Cunville drew to a close. In that sacred moment, Rev. Terrence Wanshong rose to sing Dr Cunville's favourite hymn, "Leave It There."

As the familiar words were sung, grief and gratitude seemed to meet. It was more than a song - it was a final sermon, a confession of trust, and a gentle invitation to place every burden into the hands of God. In that moment of shared sorrow and faith, the life of Rev Dr Cunville was remembered not merely through spoken tributes, but through worship.

Listening to that hymn, I recalled the first time I heard his name, long before I ever imagined that our paths would cross so closely, or that I would one day stand among those remembering his life with such personal gratitude.

Rev Dr Cunville came from the Khasi tribe and was nurtured within the Presbyterian tradition, particularly the Khasi-Jaintia Presbyterian Church. He was deeply rooted in his own people, church, and theological heritage. Yet the beauty of his life lay in the way he never allowed those roots to become boundaries. His faith reached outward - with humility, grace, and deep respect - embracing believers across denominations, tribes, and regions. It was this spirit that endeared him deeply to the Naga people and to the wider Christian fellowship of Northeast India.

A Name First Heard Through Song and Friendship

My first awareness of Dr Cunville dates back to 1998, when I joined Eastern Theological College in Jorhat, Assam, as a student. During those formative years, I came into close contact with Rev. Terrence Wanshong, who was then pursuing his Master's in Theology.

Our friendship grew naturally through music and ministry. Rev. Wanshong often invited me - and a few other friends - to join him in singing at various college and church programmes. Those moments of shared worship were simple, unplanned, and deeply formative. Through song, prayer, and fellowship, a deep bond was formed - one that quietly shaped my understanding of ministry as something relational rather than performative.

Only later did I learn that Rev Wanshong was a close associate of Dr. Cunville. In that quiet and unassuming way, Dr Cunville's name entered my life - not through prominence or publicity, but

through friendship, song, and shared service. Looking back now, it feels deeply fitting that my earliest connection to him came through worship and relationships, reflecting the very spirit with which he himself lived and served.

God's Quiet Leading to Shillong

I never imagined that my journey would bring me to Shillong, nor that I would come to know Dr Cunville so personally. What began as a distant name gradually became a relationship shaped by conversation, prayer, and a shared concern for the Church.

"That morning, I had the privilege of a long and meaningful conversation with Dr Cunville. We spoke about ministry, about Nagaland, and about the Church. His words were measured and thoughtful, marked by deep concern, affection, and prayerful hope for the people and the land. Even in conversation, he carried the posture of a shepherd."

On hindsight, it is clear that this unfolding was not of my own planning, but of God's gracious leading - especially within the wider ecumenical fellowship of Northeast India. Dr Cunville was deeply committed to the unity and witness of the Church in this region, serving faithfully through his close involvement with the North East India Christian Council and the United Bible Societies. His concern was never institutional for its own sake, but pastoral - rooted in a longing to see the Church stand together in faith, integrity, and humility.

A Suit Worn in Faith

Before the Kohima Crusade organised by the Kohima Baptist Pastors' Fellowship on November 30, 2025, Dr Cunville made a simple and thoughtful request. He asked if the pastors would gift him a suit to wear while preaching at the Crusade.

He was careful to explain that this request did not arise from need, nor from an inability to provide for himself. Rather, he shared that he wished to wear the same suit at his own funeral as well.

In that quiet request was revealed a soul at peace - one who understood that the Gospel proclaimed in life is the same hope that carries a servant home. What he wore to stand before God's people, he wished also to wear as a final testimony of faith before God Himself. It was

a profoundly simple expression of readiness, humility, and trust.

Gifts That Carried Honour and Belonging

At the Kohima Crusade held at Indira Gandhi Stadium, Dr Cunville was also presented with traditional Naga symbols - a Naga headgear and a ceremonial spear. In Naga culture, such gifts are not mere tokens; they signify honour, trust, and belonging.

Unable to carry these items on his return flight to Shillong, Dr Cunville accepted the pastors' promise that they would bring the gifts to him later. None of

them knew that this promise would be fulfilled not to him personally, but to his bereaved family.

When the pastors later arrived with those gifts, the moment was deeply moving - a promise kept, love honoured, and unity affirmed even beyond death. In that act, cultural respect and Christian fellowship came together in quiet harmony.

Fellowship That Transcends Boundaries

Representing the Kohima Baptist Pastors' Fellowship, Rev Dr Ruokuoville Sachü, Dr S. N. Among Jamir, Rev Dr Benry Lotha, Rev Vezopa Rakho, and Rev Irengte visited Dr Cunville's family to present the gifts and to pay their last respects.

A Baptist pastors' fellowship visiting a Presbyterian family. Naga leaders honouring a Khasi Christian elder. Churches crossing denominational and tribal lines - not for formality, but for love. In a time when divisions often dominate Christian discourse, the life of Dr Cunville bore witness to a quieter, deeper unity - one lived rather than declared.

He did not try to erase differences. He honoured people within them. He did not seek prominence. He sought faithfulness. He did not demand unity. He embodied it.

A Personal Conversation Remembered

On May 25, 2025, church

leaders gathered at Eldorado Guest House for breakfast and prayer - a time set apart for reflection, fellowship, and discerning a shared vision for the renewal of Shillong.

That morning, I had the privilege of a long and meaningful conversation with Dr Cunville. We spoke about ministry, about Nagaland, and about the Church. His words were measured and thoughtful, marked by deep concern, affection, and prayerful hope for the people and the land. Even in conversation, he carried the posture of a shepherd.

A Sacred Final Visit

After returning from Kohima, I later learned that Dr Cunville had travelled to the Garo Hills and had shared the Word of God at Nongkrem Presbyterian Church on Christmas Day, December 25, 2025. The following day, he was hospitalised.

On January 2, 2026, Pastor Vikethozo informed me that Dr Cunville had been admitted to Bethany Hospital, Shillong and conveyed the request from the Kohima Baptist Pastors' Fellowship that we visit him on their behalf.

Though physically weakened, Dr Cunville was visibly pleased to see us. We spoke gently about family, Kohima, and ministry, and before leaving, I offered a word of prayer, entrusting him once more into the gracious care of God.

The following week, after returning from a family gathering and my native church's Quasiquintennial celebration at Nagaland, I received the news of his passing. The suddenness was deeply sobering. Yet, in retrospect, that hospital visit now feels like a sacred gift - a final moment of fellowship, prayer, and shared hope.

A Life Left in God's Hands

At his funeral, tributes spoke of a faithful servant, a global evangelist, and a man known well by God. Yet what remains most deeply is the quiet way he lived his faith - with humility, courage, and trust.

As Rev. Terrence Wanshong's voice carried the words of "Leave It There" through the church that day, it felt as though Dr Cunville was offering one final witness. A witness that faith does not cling, but surrenders. That unity is not demanded, but embodied.

May we honour his memory not only with words, but by living with the same trust, humility, and love. And may the Church, across denominations and communities, learn again to leave our burdens there - at the feet of Christ.

The Captain and the Crowd Can India afford to be regulated by popularity alone?

By Julius Karki Thapa

Standing in line under the hot Indian sun to vote is often called a festival of democracy. We proudly show our inked fingers on social media, representing our participation in the world's largest collective choice. However, as we leave the polling booth, a troubling question stays with us: Does the person I just voted for really know how to run a country?

This fear is not new. Twenty-four centuries ago, Plato sat in Athens and witnessed a populist trial that led to the execution of his teacher, Socrates. In his book, *The Republic*, he created a disturbing analogy that feels shockingly relevant today. He imagined a ship where the passengers, eager for power but unskilled in navigation, choose a captain based on storytelling or generous drink offerings, not on skill with the stars or the wind. The outcome, Plato warned, is inevitable: the ship eventually crashed.

In India in 2026, we are that ship. The storm we face is shaped by the chaotic noise of AI-driven deepfakes, complicated economic changes, and a climate crisis indifferent to campaign slogans that are becoming too dangerous to sail through based on popularity alone.

We often blame unaware or illiterate voters for our government's failures. But this critique lacks depth. In an age of information overload, even the most educated citizen can be unaware. When a grandmother in a rural village sees a deepfake video on WhatsApp, or a tech worker in Bengaluru is caught in an algorithmic echo chamber, the outcome is the same: they vote based on a curated illusion instead of the reality of policies.

The issue isn't a lack of intelligence; it's a lack of expertise. We live in a society where we wouldn't allow a popular person to perform heart surgery, nor would we let a charismatic individual pilot a commercial jet. We expect qualifications, tests, and years of proven experience for nearly every job that involves human lives. Yet, for the highest office in the nation, the one that influences the lives of 1.4 billion people, all that's needed is a winning smile and a skilled campaign manager.

India exists within a strange contradiction. We have one of the most rigorous meritocratic systems globally: the Civil Services. We put our bureaucrats through the UPSC exam which is an ordeal so tough it filters for

the best analytical minds. We rely on these "merit-holders" to manage our districts and create our laws.

Yet, we place these experts under leaders who often have never managed a budget or read a policy paper. It's like building a high-end Ferrari engine and then letting a child drive it because they won a playground popularity contest. This Competence Chasm is where our national progress frequently falters.

To suggest taking away the vote from the "unaware" is a dangerous, elitist path that India's history rightfully rejects. Voting is the only tool of dignity that the marginalized possess. However, claiming democracy should remain stagnant is equally risky.

What if we required a Meritocratic Anchor for our democracy?

Imagine a system where a candidate for the Ministry of Finance must have training in economics, or a Health Minister must have run a healthcare system. Just imagine Citizens' Assemblies which are small, randomly selected groups of ordinary Indians who spend three months with experts learning about the details of a bill. They could then provide a Fact-Check Score to the public before an election. This doesn't take away passengers' right to choose their destination; it ensures that whoever is steering knows how to sail.

Critics may argue that merit can often disguise privilege. They raise valid concerns. In a country where access to quality education is still a luxury, a pure meritocracy could easily become a new kind of aristocracy. We cannot let "smart" become a synonym for rich.

However, we must also recognize that our current version of pure democracy is failing the very people it claims to protect. When a government wins by promising short-term benefits that ruin the future for the next generation, that's not empowerment, it's deceit.

Plato's ship didn't sink because the passengers were bad people; it sank because they were misled by those who valued power over skill. If India aims to be a true global leader, we must stop viewing our government as a reality TV show and start seeing it as the complex, life-saving entity it is. It's time to bridge the gap between the "will of the people" and the "wisdom of the expert."

Our survival depends on it.

Letters to the Editor

A Bleak Future for Human Empathy and Morality

Editor,

It is with deep concern that I write about the moral decline I see in today's society, both locally and globally. Change may be part of life's journey, but what troubles me most is the growing lack of empathy and the confusion about what is right and wrong. I am not a psychologist nor a moral teacher, yet as a theologically trained person I can clearly sense that many of us are becoming less patient, less compassionate, and less connected to one another.

For generations, families and communities were built on love, care, and a strong sense of belonging. People stood by each other because they knew that unity meant safety and meaning. These values shaped our behaviour: good character was respected, while harmful actions were discouraged. This moral foundation helped societies survive and grow for centuries. But today,

those values seem to be fading. The modern world we live in often rewards image over character, wealth over meaning, and so on. In fact, we appear more divided than being united. And on the personal level, we have created more enemies rather than forming more allies. Speaking of this, I am reminded of a scene from the famed *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. When the wizard Gandalf reasons with his fellow-wizard Saruman, who attempts to use dark power to gain control. Gandalf asks, "Since when did Saruman the Wise abandon reason for madness?" That movie moment for me was not ordinary, but rather it speaks volume to our thoughts and against our perpetual actions every day.

What is more concerning is how easily our society now shrugs at things that once disturbed our peace. We take dishonesty as cleverness, selfishness as self-care, and cruelty as personal redemption. Most of us no longer ask whether something is truly right or wrong, but only whether it is convenient or popular. Gradually, this careless attitude pollutes our moral sense and leaves us

spiritually confused, drifting without any clear direction for goodness. We are slowly becoming a generation of people who do less, feel less, and care less for others.

These problems are clearly visible at the family level. A friend of mine who is a police officer often shares cases they have taken almost every day - cases that arise from petty issues between husbands and wives. This shows how love, patience, and respect within the home are weakening. Besides that, relationships, dating, and marriage are becoming harder as ego, social media, materialism, and unrealistic expectations distort our very understanding of love and affection. And with that, Jesus' End times prophecy in the gospel of Matthew 24 says, "Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold." What we can grasp from the prophecy here is it feels painfully real day by day, as it is not a silly joke made up by somebody.

Finally, despite of all these, I believe hope will, and still remains as one of our nearest ally. But much depends on our willingness to nurture it too! If we

care enough, we can protect our humanity by choosing kindness, by sticking to strong and meaningful values, by listening more than we speak, and by valuing a person over status. If we can return to these simple yet powerful principles, we may be able to preserve empathy, morality, and love during these difficult times - without compromising our conscience and moral integrity.

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

Delay in implementing JJM Scheme

Editor,

I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities of the prolonged delay in the implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) in Mawiong. I have been residing in Mawiong for many years with the hope that the administration would eventually address the basic needs of the people living here. Unfortunately, till date, there is no clarity or commu-

nication regarding the roll-out of the JJM scheme in our locality. While the scheme has successfully covered many rural areas across the state, it is disappointing that Mawiong - which can now be considered a semi-urban area - has been left out.

It is all the more concerning, as access to clean and safe-drinking water is a basic right of every citizen. I understand that certain issues, including pending dues from earlier phases, may have contributed to the delay. However, these administrative challenges should not result in the continued deprivation of the residents of Mawiong.

I sincerely request the Public Health Engineering (PHE) Department and the concerned authorities to look into this matter at the earliest and clearly communicate the reasons for the delay, along with a concrete timeline for the implementation of the JJM scheme in our area.

I hope this letter will prompt the authorities to take necessary and timely action in the interest of public welfare.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Church Cannot Be Weighed with Silver or Gold

Editor,

I deeply appreciate Toki Blah's timely letter, "30 Pieces of Silver, Still Going Strong It Seems". As a regular worshipper at the English Service Church I was unhappy, discomfited, dismayed and felt a sense of betrayal, at this bit of discouraging news. But I am at the same time comforted by a knowledge that the members of the Presbyterian Church in the State and indeed various sections of the Shillong citizenry will surely come together to protect this special place.

This church building has been standing for over a hundred years. It is one of the structures which stands witness to the heritage of the city of Shillong. With the huge growth of tourism, this small church has been an attraction to many visitors from different parts of the country, who are drawn by the quaint and appealing ar-

chitecture. Many, however, simply respectfully walk in for a time of quiet prayer or meditation. For Shillong citizens it has served as a welcoming and homely church where all are warmly received, a place where they find solace, or answers to many questions of life, or meaning to experiences they encounter.

The plans to modernise the city had raised apprehensions among many worshippers about a year and a half back. The Chief Minister had however moved swiftly to assure believers, that the government has not made any decision to relocate any place of worship.

There is a need to modernise but to do so while preserving the history and culture of the city. Our children need places which they can identify with and be proud of. There is the example of the arch bridges which were on our roads. Yesterday I was dismayed to see the last arch bridge in Mylliem dismantled. Such bridges are examples to simple yet sturdy construction; structures which are pleasant to the eye and need no maintenance for ages.

The one at Mawsmai spanning a beautiful clear stream was knocked down several years ago by over-eager constructors who did not value its aesthetics, or the physics lessons such constructions hold for school children.

While the English Service, property is owned by the Khasi Jaintia Presbyterian Assembly the church has been adopted by many as their own local church. In order to take care of this century-old wooden structure members of the congregation have been sharing the burden for its maintenance with an attachment and devotion reflecting their commitment to this church and their trust in God.

Their trust and commitment have proven to be successful as worshippers strive, in the spirit and of Jesus Christ, to have this church serve all who enter its gates.

Yours etc.,
Barkos Warji,
Via email

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Politics, religion

RELIGION and politics make a lethal mix. The scenario is progressively worsening in India. Church played an indirect role in politics and statecraft in Europe and across the West, while religion is central to politics and governance in the Islamic world. India and several Asian nations did not have a direct connect between politics and religion for a long time. Jawaharlal Nehru as the first prime minister and the framers of the Indian Constitution conceived India as a secular nation, while Pakistan was born simultaneously as an Islamic nation. In recent decades, when the pro-Hindu sentiments grew – undercutting the secular credentials of the nation – this saw the rise of the BJP and the progressive weakening of the secular Congress party. Nehru had motivated the people by launching an era of dams and steel factories, which helped build the economic might of the nation. He called dams the "temples" of modern India. India still remains a secular nation, but the role of religion is increasingly strengthening in national politics. The frenzy with which those in authority launched the Ram Temple in Ayodhya two years ago signalled a drive in the reverse direction. The well-marked difference between religion and politics – and by extension statecraft – blurred.

The inauguration of the Ram Temple with fanfare and rituals in Ayodhya marked a high point with direct involvement and patronage of the prime minister himself. Now, a frenzy is building up in West Bengal for the erection of a Rs 100-crore Ram Temple in Kolkata – significantly, after the foundation was laid for a Babri Mosque in Murshidabad. The Hindutva forces are also bent on furthering the religious wedge between Hindus and Muslims by staking claims for more places of Islamic worship in the country to build Hindu temples. They do so by raising the bogey of the past "desecrations" by Muslim invaders. The unholy link between religion and politics undercuts the spirit of nationalism, especially in a democracy like India where people of different races, religions, castes and languages co-exist as a mosaic.

In fact, the BJP is not the only political establishment that seeks to mix religion with governance, systems. Governments in several states are going out of their way to fund and promote spirituality by patronizing religious events. Karl Marx called religion the detestable opium of the masses. Curiously, the Marxist government in Kerala recently organised a global congregation of Ayyappa devotees with liberal funding and other support from state-run entities. The leftists ended up with egg on their face, as a subsequent expose of massive loot of the temple's gold and other valuables led to the jailing of some senior party functionaries, among others. Several state governments, run by the BJP and regionalists, are liberally granting funds from the exchequer for shrines and their festivals. Substantial parts of such allotments are siphoned away by vested interests in the name of religion and spirituality. India has travelled a long distance away from Nehru, who was secular, agnostic, a humanist and one who promoted a scientific temper. Politicians out to pocket the votes of the poor today encourage spirituality to win or retain power.

Beware of the "Goldilocks" Mirage

By Ajit Ranade

The second issue is of farm wages. Food deflation lowers the CPI, but it can also compress incomes for farmers. Low food inflation can therefore coexist with rural distress because food producers do not benefit as much.

This becomes relevant for the Budget because the credibility of high growth depends on demand being broad-based. If rural incomes and wages stagnate, consumption remains fragile. If consumption is fragile, private investment has less reason to accelerate. The current moment, therefore, should be read not simply as "macro stability achieved", but as a possible signal that the growth process is uneven

labour-intensive. Output rise was due to vigorous growth in capital spending, mostly by the public sector. Output can rise without proportionate increases in employment and wage bargaining power. The Budget must treat rural earnings as a core macro variable.

A third concern is external: the rupee's relative weakness and the latent risk of imported inflation. The rupee has depreciated even as CPI inflation remains near zero. The immediate question is why the pass-through has been muted.

Part of the answer is that food deflation – a domestic phenomenon – has dominated the CPI story, and crude oil prices have been

the fiscal deficit arithmetic becomes harder. And if deficits widen unexpectedly, they can become inflationary and currency-negative, reinforcing the very risks policy-makers hoped to avoid.

The Budget should hence be pragmatic and resilience building.

First, construct macro assumptions that anticipate normalisation. It is safer to assume inflation returns towards the 4% with upside risk. Second, treat rural earnings and employment-rich growth as central objectives. The Budget should emphasise interventions that raise earning capacity – rural infrastructure, irrigation and storage, value-chain development, rural non-farm clusters, and MSME credit ecosystems – rather than treating rural stress as a welfare-only issue. Third, public capex is still needed, but it should tilt toward job creation, for instance focusing on housing, logistics, urban public services, and decentralised energy. Fourth, recognise that currency stability is partly a fiscal credibility function. Fifth, be precise in public communication. Low inflation is not the same as low cost of living – a point often missed in political debates. If citizens feel their cost of living remain high and wages remain weak, they will distrust macro narratives, however technically correct the indices may be.

India's current combination of strong real growth and very low measured inflation is unusual – and in parts, welcome. But it rests heavily on food price dynamics and favourable base effects, while the labour market – especially rural wages – continues to show strain. The rupee and commodity prices add external uncertainty. And low nominal GDP growth can complicate fiscal arithmetic.

The Finance Minister's challenge, therefore, is not to celebrate or to fear the moment, but to interpret it correctly. It is an opportunity to strengthen the conditions that make growth inclusive and durable – rising wages, broad-based consumption, steady investment, and credible fiscal assumptions, before the inflation cycle turns again.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist). (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

"A significant part of this disinflation is explained by food prices, which have moved from double-digit inflation in October 2024 to outright deflation a year later, turning negative 5 percent. Food has high weight in the CPI basket and that's why the latter is low. This consumption reality still dominates food inflation. The "core" inflation outside of food and fuel has been stubbornly higher, close to 4 percent. This low CPI inflation tells us more about agricultural price cycles, supply conditions and weak underlying demand."

— strong in some segments, weak in others.

An important warning sign, and perhaps the most consequential concern is the persistence of weak rural wage growth. Analyses of rural wage trends show that over multiple years, nominal rural wages have grown modestly, but real wages have been flat to negative for long stretches. When food prices were rising sharply as in 2023-24, they were eating up the modest growth in nominal wages, causing real wages to remain stagnant. The stagnation of real rural wages is over several years from before the covid period.

This could be due to two factors. First, labour supply has expanded – including rising female labour force participation. This is as much due to rural distress, and the need to augment household income. It is worth noting that 57 percent of employment created under NREGA was taken up by women. Second, India's growth in recent years has been less

relatively steady. But muted pass-through today does not guarantee muted pass-through tomorrow. Farm prices can turn quickly, and price pressures in metals and precious metals can seep into costs and inflation expectations. When food inflation drops from a high positive number to a negative one, next year's comparisons become more likely to show a rebound, which is a base effect. In addition, the CPI basket is scheduled for revision. The Budget's macro assumptions should not be built around the expectation that 0-2% inflation is a "new normal".

Finally, there is nominal GDP growth. When inflation is exceptionally low, the gap between real and nominal GDP narrows sharply. This has immediate fiscal implications because tax collections track nominal, not real, aggregates. If nominal growth underperforms, revenue buoyancy disappoints, and expenditure pressures remain. In an environment of heightened welfare expecta-

Dream Engineering

By Kabir Rajale

What if the most powerful tool for healing trauma, optimising creativity, and solving problems was something you have already been doing for a third of your life?

For centuries, artists and scientists alike have suspected that what happens in our minds during sleep affects emotion, learning, and creativity. Naturally, humans explored, and experimented with sleep and dreams. These endeavours into the human mind have led to the making of the field of "Dream engineering". It's a recent but rapidly growing field that can influence dream content using technology. We can therefore influence dreams positively and with thought chains. This offers us a medium to optimise creativity, cognitive function, and deal with mental health issues.

The field focuses on modulating and shaping dreams, not controlling them. This is done with the use of technology, specifically in the form of sensory stimuli (inputs like gentle sound, light, temperature, or vibration that the sleeping brain incorporates into dream imagery). EEG (electroencephalogram) feedback and targeted cueing, a method of tracking brain electrical activity to determine when the sleeper enters certain stages of sleep during which these stimuli are provided for a significant effect. Research says that many parameters of dreams like dream recall, emotion, and imagery are closely correlated to alpha and theta waves; these waves are slow, rhythmic electrical patterns the brain produces during relaxed wakefulness and light sleep. Research also shows that certain parts of our brain control dream emotions, while other parts control perceived movement in dreams. Dream engineering is an attempt to use these insights to influence dream content for mental health, creativity, and cognitive enhancement.

But why is it important to even talk about this? Because all facets of our functioning are affected. Therefore for individuals who face trauma or frequent nightmares, dream modulation can be a safe medium to positively shape dream content. Studies have used sensory stimulation to influence dream features like movement, suggesting that emotional features could also be influenced. Dream recall and emotional tone directly affect our emotional life, and creativity can be boosted in certain states of sleep and dreams.

Even though dreams have been a part of the human experience since the very beginning for our species, they are uncontrolled. Victims of nightmares, trauma, anxiety attacks, or disturbed sleep are unable to do anything to affect their dream content. Although dreams naturally help in emotional regulation and memory consolidation, we do not have control over what emotions and memories to reinforce for therapeutic or healing purposes.

Furthermore, creativity and problem solving often occur spontaneously or in abstract forms in dreams, but they remain uncontrolled and underutilized. With the right tools to affect dream content, the cognitive and creative potential of dreams can be used. Scientifically, the difficulty in manipulating dreams has also made it challenging to study their mechanisms and functions in controlled settings.

Hence, the major problem here is the lack of a precise and scientifically grounded methodology of influencing dream experiences to support mental health, creativity, and personal well-being.

In dreams, the mind enters a state of associative thinking, linking ideas, memories, and perceptions in unexpected ways. Dreams communicate through metaphors and symbolic situations that reflect our inner psyche, making them a powerful space for creativity and problem-solving. Influencing this process can help form new concepts and insights, while also allowing researchers to better understand how sensory inputs and brain states shape dream experiences. Salvador Dalí famously used this state to generate ideas by falling asleep with a key in his hand, waking the moment it dropped so he could capture the images forming in his mind. This

simple experiment reveals the creative potential hidden in the border between sleep and wakefulness.

Earlier attempts to influence dream content failed due to unreliable methods. Lucid dreaming required extensive practice and offered little control, while basic sensory cues like light or sound often woke participants instead of shaping dreams, as there was no accurate way to track sleep stages or time the stimuli effectively. Another approach was to use pharmacological methods, such as drugs that increase REM (Random Eye Movement). The effects of these drugs were unpredictable and they also produced side effects. These older methods did not track brain waves and other data that related to dream recall and emotional tone, resulting in them being ineffective. Research shows that dream recall, emotional tone, and dream structure rely on the timing of alpha, theta, and REM-related rhythms.

Modern dream engineering uses a closed loop system that tracks the brain's state in real time and gives precisely timed stimuli. These systems improve upon the limitations of the earlier methods by matching the stimuli to the brain's natural patterns during various stages of sleep.

Recent studies introduced portable dry-EEG (Electroencephalogram) headsets capable of tracking sleep stages at home. These devices detect oscillatory patterns of the brain and in response trigger auditory cues at the most receptive phase of the brain. These audio cues are usually softer tones that are integrated into the dream content and affect tone. This prevents disruptive stimuli from waking us up, supports deeper sleep, softer cues reduce the effect of nightmares or stressful imagery. This results in an overall boost for dream and sleep quality.

Perhaps the most influential device in the field is the Dormio, which uses a Targeted Dream Incubation (TDI) during hypnagogia, a state between sleep and wakefulness where most dream activity occurs. It monitors physiological markers like muscle tone and heart rate when the user starts to enter the hypnagogic state. In this state a verbal cue is played, this cue helps shape our dreams. The hypnagogic state is the most flexible sleep state and extremely active when it comes to dreaming, positive words heard during this state results in positive and calming imagery. It can also be used to guide thoughts to boost creativity.

Non-invasive brain stimulation is a set of techniques involving magnetic fields and electric currents to influence brain activity. This technique can be used to gently stimulate the sensorimotor complex, this can alter dream movement sensations to calmer and subtle movements, by reducing distressing movements like falling, fast movements, paralysis. This helps calm nightmares involving motion and allows to tone down overwhelming dream scenarios.

Now we have seen the potential benefits of Dream engineering. We can direct dreams to have safer environments reducing nightmares/traumatic imagery. Since dreams affect our waking life, emotion regulation in dreams leads to a better mood. Dream cueing can even reinforce therapeutic practices and sessions into the subject. Tools like Dormio allow us to seed creative prompts allowing for increased creativity and idea generation. Further, idea guidance in dreams with the help of a set prompts can lead to better problem solving and reinforce learning. This also increases memory consolidation.

We can take this a step further with wearable EEG headsets that have a linked system with your smartphone allowing for monitoring sleep activity and making this technology more accessible to the masses.

Dream engineering invites us to rethink sleep not as downtime, but as a hidden workspace of the mind. By learning to work with our dreams, we may discover that some of our greatest breakthroughs happen while we are asleep.

(The writer is First Year B.Tech Student, Plaksha University).

Letters to the Editor

Relocation of hawkers

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

Why I Should Pick the Next Set of Awardees

Editor,

I nearly choked on my morning tea when I saw Professor Kynpham Sing Nongkynrih's name on the Meghalaya Day Awards list. That the man deserves it is indisputable. It was the sheer, physiological shock that the Powers That Be actually noticed him. I was his PhD student back in the Paleolithic era, a time I spent perfecting the "Thoughtful Nod" while he said profound things that sailed majestically over my head.

Honestly, the man is a menace to forestry. He churns out literature with such an alarming rate that one must assume he has a personal vendetta against the trees. He is currently studied in colleges and universities across India, which is frankly suspicious. In academia, you usually need to have been decomposing for at least a century before a Board of Studies considers you "canonical". Being a living text is terribly inconvenient...it deprives scholars of the joy of making up wild theories about what you "really meant" without you annoyingly correcting them

on Instagram or Twitter.

But the timing, don't you find it comical? Giving him this award now is like congratulating the Beatles on their "promising new sound" in 2026. It feels like the bureaucracy woke up from a thirty-year nap, wiped the drool off its chin, and said, "Hey, this Kynpham chap might be onto something".

I am 99% certain this was a computer glitch. Someone in the department must have leaned on a keyboard, accidentally highlighted a deserving name in the database and hit print before they could swap it out for a politician's nephew. Other states gave him awards, while our government was likely still forming a sub-committee to define the word "literature".

Don't get me started on the others! Look at Professor Esther Syiem, another gem we ignored until a neighbouring state honoured her. It is embarrassing, really. We are sitting on a goldmine of intellect, yet we wait for our neighbours to point out the nuggets.

So, here is my proposal to the state: Hire a consultant. That's the Shillong way, isn't it? Pay someone an obscene amount of public money to do a Google search for "Who has done commendable work?" Or, you could hire me. I'm expensive, I'm cynical, I have internet access, and I actually read the books. That makes me overqualified for the job, but I'm willing to lower

my standards for the right price.....

Yours etc.,
Ellerine Diengdoh,
Via email

When interviews are framed to defame

Editor,

I write this letter to place on record an important truth that is often missing from public discussion about the much-trodden television interview of boxing legend Mary Kom. Today, people remember only what she said. Very few remember what she was asked—or the context in which she was made to answer.

The episode occurred during a televised interview conducted by senior journalist Rajat Sharma. Until that point, the conversation had followed a normal course, touching upon Mary Kom's life and achievements. Then, quite suddenly, the focus shifted away from sport.

Mary Kom was asked a direct and deeply personal question about her husband's career—what he did, and whether his professional life had suffered because of her success in boxing. In effect, she was asked to publicly explain her husband's earnings and professional standing. This context is crucial.

Caught unprepared by such a question, Mary Kom

responded honestly and without calculation. She spoke about the period when her husband chose to support her career, take care of their children, and manage household responsibilities. While doing so, she said that during that phase he did not earn money. Her intention was clearly to acknowledge sacrifice and support, not to demean or ridicule her husband.

However, what followed is what we see today. Her reply was clipped into a short video, stripped of the question that led to it, and circulated widely on social media. The context disappeared. What remained was a single line, repeatedly replayed and mocked. Mary Kom began to be troled—not for dishonesty or arrogance, but for answering a question she did not choose to face. This is where the injustice lies.

People laugh at the answer without asking why such an answer was required at all: They forget that no male athlete is ever asked whether his wife's career suffered because of his success. No man is expected to explain his spouse's income on national television. Mary Kom was placed in that position because she is a woman—and because the question itself carried a gendered assumption.

A senior journalist understands the power of framing. He also understands how a single sentence can be clipped, shared, and misused

in today's media environment. A question of this nature was bound to produce, exactly the kind of reaction that followed. The trolling was not accidental; it was foreseeable.

Mary Kom trusted the interviewer and answered in good faith. She did not insult her husband. She did not boast about her success. She merely responded to what she was asked. To hold her responsible for the cruelty that followed is to punish honesty and reward poor judgement.

Mary Kom's life story is one of courage, discipline, and extraordinary achievement against social and economic odds. It deserves to be remembered for medals, not mockery; for resilience, not ridicule.

If we are to be fair, we must remember the episode in full—the question, the context, and then the answer. Remembering only the reply while forgetting the provocation is not justice; it is convenience.

I hope this letter helps readers see the episode in its entirety and reminds us that responsibility in journalism begins not with the answer, but with the question.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Via email

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"A good decision is based on knowledge and not on numbers."

— Plato

The Shillong Times

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Davos: More Politics than Economics

LARGE sections of the media would have us believe that Davos is the place to strike billion dollar deals and because they are flown there, they have to report about those deals. But whether the deals fructify is another matter. This time, however, Davos was more about politics than business. At what is supposed to be a pow-wow on world economics, Trump's politics trumped. The US President even mocked the Europeans in his speech. Christine Lagarde, a prominent French lawyer and politician who has held some of the most influential positions in global finance, most notably as the first female President of the European Central Bank (ECB) and the first female Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and continues to serve as the President of the ECB, a role she assumed on November 1, 2019, walked out of a private dinner hosted by the US Commerce Secretary. French President Emmanuel Macron cracked sarcastic jokes about living in a "predictable" time even while Canadian President, Mark Carney urged countries to stand up to bullies and received a standing ovation for that.

For the US President Trump to tell the gathering at Davos that if not for the United States all Europe would have been speaking German was the worst kind of mockery expected in a setting meant to discuss global economics. Trump speaks from a position of ignorance about world history, experts say. German happens to be the most widely spoken of the four official languages in Switzerland. Attendees at Davos and also those following the extravaganza from Brussels to Berlin to Paris found Trump's speech insulting, overbearing and inaccurate. Trump would have the world believe that Europe is moving down the wrong trajectory but to say that in Europe while addressing people of different political ideologies is not just insulting but politically incorrect. The idea of Davos is to find common grounds for economic collaboration; not for the US to impose its views on the entire world.

It is in this context that Davos too requires a serious critique. Started in 1971 when the dollar fell the US imposed tariffs on European imports. And the Europeans were totally blindsided. It was then that the German economist, Klaus Schwab, convened this gathering of politicians, academics and business people in Davos. Now it has grown into a giant business conference with the motto, "Committed to improving the state of the world." Now the talk is only about big business even as Davos is populated by giant tech companies, consultancies and crypto companies. There is no space in Davos to speak about issues afflicting planet earth such as global climate change and environmental sustainability. It's as if commerce alone would drive human existence. Since Davos is a venue of the who's who in a world that's rapidly moving towards crass commerce the invitees from India feel they have scored several brownie points to boast about to their electorate, more so those states that are headed for the polls. That deals which could have been struck in India without much fanfare are being discussed in Davos and that public money is expended for the jamboree is in itself an issue that merits discussion at home. The question at the end of the Davos escapade is - Will life be better for the ordinary Indian back home?

Disconnecting dots of NPP: Why governance success is not translating into public trust?

By Divesh Ranjan

relying on the bureaucracy to implement schemes. While this has reduced claims of favoritism, it has made governance seem distant. Elected representatives should act as a bridge between the state and the people. When ministers and MLAs are not visibly involved in delivering or explaining policies, citizens

and shared responsibility. Political history shows that parties built around a single dominant figure tend to become fragile over time. Lasting leadership is not about centralizing power but about allowing others to grow. In Meghalaya's politically shifting environment, where defections are com-

to an end.

Speculation about another Rajya Sabha nomination from the Garo Hills has further strengthened this narrative. Even if such a decision seems politically convenient, it could prove strategically harmful. At a time when the Voice of the People Party has successfully promoted strong Khasi leadership at the national level through its Lok Sabha representation, the lack of a similar counter-voice from within the NPP could reinforce perceptions of imbalance. The party urgently needs a credible, articulate, and vocal Khasi leader at the national level to address political attacks and reassure voters. Leadership decisions should reflect political realities and public perception, not just internal comfort.

A moment for introspection: Conrad K Sangma has undoubtedly played a central role in the NPP's political growth. He is regarded as one of the more insightful and politically adaptable leaders in Meghalaya. His ability to keep the party united, adjust to changing situations, and focus on issues that resonate with everyday citizens has been crucial to the party's success.

Yet success often brings the risk of complacency. As power concentrates, leadership becomes surrounded by affirming voices, limiting direct engagement with grassroots realities. This gap allows opposition forces to channel public dissatisfaction more effectively.

The anti-incumbency facing the NPP today is not superficial. It is emotional, layered, and deeply rooted in perception. The 2028 Assembly election will not be won through cosmetic changes or empty promises. Addressing the current mood requires genuine introspection, decentralization of leadership, regional balance, and renewed public engagement. If the NPP aims to maintain power in Meghalaya and expand meaningfully across the Northeast, it must consciously address these disconnected dots. Inclusive leadership, balanced representation, empowered public representatives, and stronger emotional connections with citizens are no longer optional. They are political necessities.

(The author is Political Researcher and Columnist at The Shillong Times diveshranjanitg@gmail.com)

The party could not retain the Shillong and Tura seats and saw its vote share drop to nearly 24.5 percent. This downward trend continued in the Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council elections, where the party's results fell below expectations. These repeated electoral losses show a clear and growing anti-incumbency sentiment that the party can no longer overlook.

often feel disconnected, and party workers feel overlooked. Effective governance needs balance. Bureaucracy and political leadership must work together.

The risk of becoming a one-man party: Another aspect shaping public perception is the concentration of leadership. Conrad Sangma is the most visible face of the party, dominating public communication

mon, reluctance to showcase second-line leaders is understandable. Yet insecurity cannot replace strategy. Political experiences elsewhere show that empowering leaders, even during tough times, can strengthen the organization. The NPP would benefit from learning from such examples.

Growing perception of regional imbalance: Another challenge facing the

Elected representatives should act as a bridge between the state and the people. When ministers and MLAs are not visibly involved in delivering or explaining policies, citizens often feel disconnected, and party workers feel overlooked. Effective governance needs balance. Bureaucracy and political leadership must work together.

and outreach. Besides him and the two Deputy Chief Ministers, few leaders enjoy consistent visibility. Even flagship initiatives like CM Connect highlight this issue. While the Chief Minister is consistently present, other ministers and most MLAs remain largely absent in the public eye, often limited to ceremonial attendance at events. Media platforms tend to focus heavily on the Chief Minister's image and messaging.

Strong leadership is essential, but sustainable politics needs a broader leadership ecosystem. When other ministers and legislators are mostly out of view, questions arise about internal balance

NPP is its increasing image as a Garo Hills-centric party. Although the party rejects this label, the concentration of significant positions has created visibility issues, particularly outside the Garo Hills. Currently, most major political and constitutional posts are held by leaders from the Garo Hills. Key positions, including the Chief Minister, Assembly Speaker, Deputy Speaker, Leader of the Opposition, and a Member of Parliament, are all occupied by leaders from this single region. Representation from the Khasi and Jaintia Hills at the national level is limited, especially with Dr. Wanweiry Kharlukhi's Rajya Sabha term coming

How humans have created their version of God

By VK Lyngdoh

This is in response to the editorial "Politics, religion" that appeared in this paper on January 23, 2026. No contemporary Indian politician has matched Jawaharlal Nehru's iconic vision of calling dams and factories the "modern temples of India." Today's leaders emphasize infrastructure, digital technology, and welfare schemes, but none frame them with the same civilizational symbolism Nehru used to define post-independence nation-building.

Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-1964) saw large dams, steel plants, and factories as sym-

political legitimacy is tied to religious majorities. Instead of fostering solidarity across linguistic, caste, and regional divides, religion-based politics risks deepening polarization. The broader implication is that communal tensions rise when political actors exploit religious differences, undermining trust between communities. The use of religion in politics can weaken democratic norms by prioritizing identity over policy. India's reputation as a pluralistic democracy is challenged when nationalism is equated with one religious identity. Nationalism

Karl Marx famously described religion as "the opium of the people," meaning it provides comfort in times of suffering but also dulls awareness of exploitation and prevents revolutionary change. He saw religion as both a protest against harsh conditions and a tool that sustains oppressive systems. Marx called religion, "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions."

bols of modern India's progress. His famous phrase, "temples of modern India," linked industrial infrastructure to spiritual and cultural renewal. He believed these projects embodied national unity, self-reliance and modernization, much like temples embodied spiritual life. Why is there no equivalent today? Nehru's era equated industrialization with modernity. Today digital transformation, services and private enterprise dominate. Large dams and factories are now criticised for displacement and ecological damage, making Nehru's metaphor less resonant. Political rhetoric today is "Make in India," "Digital India," rather than a philosophical metaphor.

Nehru's framing was civilizational and symbolic, tying India's industrial projects to India's destiny. Modern leaders emphasize efficiency, competitiveness and global positioning but lack the poetic national building language Nehru employed. In short, India has leaders who push infrastructure and modernization but none who elevate them to the level of spiritual-national symbols. Nehru's metaphor of dams and factories as "temples" remains unmatched. Today's leaders pursue modernisation through digital and infrastructural projects, but their rhetoric is managerial, not visionary.

The editorial is correct in pointing out that when religion and politics intertwine too tightly, it risks fragmenting the idea of nationalism in India. Instead of uniting citizens under a shared civic identity, it can deepen divisions along religious and caste lines, weakening the inclusive spirit that nationalism ideally represents.

Since 2014, the BJP-led government has emphasized Hindu identity as central to Indian politics. This has created a majoritarian narrative that sidelines minority communities and reshapes nationalism into a religiously inflected project. Religious symbols, rituals, and institutions are often used during elections to rally support. This blurs the line between faith-based identity and political citizenship, making nationalism less about shared civic values and more about religious belonging. The fusion of religion and politics isn't new. Hindu nationalism as a political language dates back to colonial times, when religious identity was mobilized against both colonial rule and rival communities.

Why does this undercut nationalism? True nationalism should unite diverse groups under one civic identity. When religion dominates politics, minorities may feel alienated or treated as outsiders. India's constitutional commitment to secularism is weakened when

in India thrives when it is inclusive, civic, and pluralistic—rooted in shared values like democracy, freedom, and equality. The "unholy link" between religion and politics risks turning nationalism into majoritarianism, which is nationalism in name but sectarian in practice. To preserve the spirit of nationalism, India must reaffirm secular principles and ensure that political identity is not reduced to religious belonging.

Karl Marx famously described religion as "the opium of the people," meaning it provides comfort in times of suffering but also dulls awareness of exploitation and prevents revolutionary change. He saw religion as both a protest against harsh conditions and a tool that sustains oppressive systems. Marx called religion, "the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless conditions." It gives meaning and solace to people living under exploitation. He argued that religion offers illusory happiness by promising rewards in the afterlife, distracting people from fighting for justice in the present.

Marx acknowledged that religion can express genuine protest against suffering and alienation, but he believed it ultimately reinforces the status quo. In Marx's materialist framework, religion is part of the superstructure—an ideology shaped by economic and social conditions. It helps maintain class hierarchies by legitimizing inequality. Why did he call it "Opium"? In 19th-century Europe, opium was used medically to relieve pain but also caused dependency. Marx used this metaphor to show that religion soothes suffering but also creates dependency, preventing people from confronting the root causes of their misery—capitalist exploitation.

What are the implications of Marx's views? Marx believed that once oppressive economic systems were dismantled, religion would no longer be necessary. His analysis highlights how ruling classes can use religion to justify inequality and discourage rebellion. Later Marxists (like Lenin) extended this critique, advocating secularism and viewing religion as a barrier to socialist consciousness. Marx didn't dismiss religion as meaningless; he saw it as a symptom of suffering. But he argued that true liberation requires addressing the material conditions that make religion necessary in the first place.

However, the most dangerous truth today is not the one that denies God. It is the one that shows how men created Gods in their own image.

Letters to the Editor

"Don't dress sexily, Or I will assault you"

Editor,

I recently came across a video released on January 11, 2026 by the channel Madiang Entertainment titled, "Wat Riam Sexy Ioh Nga Thombor," which translates to "Don't dress sexily or I will assault you." The title itself is deeply disturbing, and at the time of writing, the video has garnered over half a million views. It immediately suggests justification of sexual assault based on how a woman dresses, a narrative that has long been used to excuse male violence and shift blame onto victims.

This way of thinking is not new. Across the country, in countless rape cases, perpetrators or their defenders often claim that men, "cannot control their desires," and that women somehow "invite" assault based on their clothing or behaviour. Such statements reveal far more about the character and moral failure of the perpetrators than about the victims they attempt to blame. Sexual assault, no matter in what way you put it, is a conscious act of violence.

When I first saw the video, I genuinely wondered whether it was intended as satire or a critique of such thinking. However, the comment section makes it clear that many viewers believe the video to deliver a "lesson" to women, urging them to dress modestly so as to not "attract" men who allegedly lack self-control and act on

impulse; even if that means destroying the life of another. The fact that this message is being praised as "necessary" by members of our society is deeply disturbing to me.

The storyline follows two men who see a woman wearing knee-high boots and a short skirt. They begin cat-calling and following her, clearly making her uncomfortable. When she tries to avoid them, they later discuss her in sexual and dehumanising terms, implying that seeing such women causes their "brains not to function," while continuing to physically and verbally harass her. Eventually, the men are chased away by an older male figure who is positioned as the woman's "protector." However, instead of condemning the men's action, he immediately criticises the woman's clothing. He blames her for attracting such attention, ignoring the men's attempt to harass and assault her. He alleges that the men followed her because they desire her thighs ("ki ibang ia ka lbong phui") and admits that even he, a married man, feels attracted to her; though he claims restraint only because he has a wife at home.

Young men, he says, "cannot control themselves." The video goes on to contrast this woman with another who is dressed modestly in a jainkyrshah. The same men express disinterest in her, implying that modestly dressed women are unworthy of attention, in a condescending manner. In this way, women are demeaned on both sides: those who dress "immodestly" are portrayed

as temptations responsible for provoking male desire, while those who dress modestly are rendered invisible and undesirable.

Perhaps the most disturbing metaphor used is that of a wrapped versus unwrapped candy. The wrapped candy attracts ants when placed in the ground; the unwrapped one does not. The woman is compared to the unwrapped candy, described as "lyngkhuid" (naked). This analogy strips women of their dignity, objectifies them, and most of all, reduces men to animals who have no control over their instincts. Are men really incapable of rational thought, moral judgment, or self-control?

The hypocrisy of the video becomes even clearer when the same older man later begins harassing the woman himself, touching her and chasing her, stating that he is no longer attracted to his wife at home because she is "old" after giving birth to their children. The woman, hence, is forced to flee repeatedly: from young men and then from the older one.

This reflects a broader pattern in our society, where women are routinely blamed when violence is committed against them. A woman's choice of fashion shouldn't be taken as "consent." Men, I believe, can understand boundaries; they can see when attention is unwanted. They understand language, gestures, resistance, even fear (right?). When a woman says no, asks to be left alone, pulls away, or fights back, the message cannot be mistaken as "consent." Yet, videos like

this push the idea that predatory behaviour is natural and uncontrollable, shifting responsibility away from those who commit harm and instead, placing it on the victims who suffer it.

I strongly believe in our society's values, ethics and principles; modesty being one of them. However, modesty must apply equally to all genders, both men and women. Violence, coercion, harassment and assault are definitely not modest. They are moral failures and criminal acts.

Yours etc.,
Ibalrishisha Syiem,
Via email

A New Kind of Fear

Editor,
On reading the letter, "Irregularities in our Neighbouring State" written by 'B. Laitphlang' (ST January 21, 2026), I was deeply touched and encouraged to rewrite on the same matter.

A similar incident occurred with me and my family, when we were on our first outing to Guwahati. My family included my parents and my little sister. Suddenly two traffic police showed up and they were the people I was expecting to be the ones keeping the law and assisting the citizens. Instead they suddenly asked us to pull over to the side of the road and demanded money right there on the spot without giving any reason.

I was hurt and sad when I saw my parents; the two strongest people I knew,

having to swallow their pride and stay silent. There was a heavy, suffocating unfairness in the way we had to pretend. We knew the officer was lying; he knew that we knew. That silent agreement to just, 'pay and move on' felt like a betrayal of everything they had taught me about honesty.

My parents taught me integrity and honesty but at that moment none of these two virtues were visible. The officer's act was inhumane and overcome by greed amounting to cruelty. In the end, I realise that my voice matters. Even though I am only 12 years old now, I knew then that it was wrong as I do now. But I promise to always stand up against any unlawful activity and to voice the truth, as I grow older.

Yours etc.,
Johan Kharsyiemong,
Via email

Benami Deals & Limits of ILP

Editor,
Meghalaya's silent takeover refers to ongoing concerns among indigenous communities that without the Inner Line Permit (ILP) and the use of benami (proxy) land and shop deals by non-tribals threatens their land rights, economic opportunities and cultural identity. The shadow economy in Shillong, driven by unlicensed and undocumented business, undermines legitimate local enterprises by creating unfair competition, eroding

consumer confidence and causing significant revenue loss to the Government. This informal sector operates outside the regulatory framework and poses major challenges to the region's economic development.

The Government loses significant tax revenue (e.g. Professional tax in Meghalaya) and other contributions, which limit funding for public goods infrastructure and services. The question of whether the (ILP) is a sufficient safeguard for local interests in parts of Meghalaya is a subject of intense debate with many local communities feeling it is an insufficient shield against the demographic and economic pressures. The perception that non-local "outsiders" are flourishing while the indigenous population struggles is a primary driver behind calls for stricter enforcement and expanded regulations.

Despite the ILP's intended purpose of protecting indigenous culture, land rights and employment opportunities several factors limit its efficacy. The ILP system can act as a barrier to private investment and tourism, potentially hindering the overall economic development of the region. This lack of local opportunities can drive educated local youth to seek work elsewhere.

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

How to get managers to say yes to flexible work arrangements

In the modern workplace, flexible arrangements can be as important as salary for some. For many employees, flexibility is no longer a nice-to-have luxury. It has become a fundamental requirement for staying in the workforce, especially after COVID.

Reports - from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, professional services firm Aon and UNSW - indicate while a substantial number of workers prioritise flexibility, many of their requests are still being declined.

This leaves many employees with a stark choice: either conform to standard, rigid office hours or look for better conditions elsewhere.

The stakes of these negotiations are remarkably high. For the employee, a successful deal can mean the difference between professional growth and total burnout. For the employer, it is a major lever for retaining top talent.

Yet, many employees approach these conversations as simple "asks", unaware that the success of their requests often hinge on invisible factors that have little to do with their actual job performance.

In our new research, published in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, we wanted to provide an evidence base for how to negotiate for flexible work, so both employers and employees can benefit.

Request for approval

To understand why some flexible work requests are approved and others are rejected, we ran two studies with more than 300 participants.

Instead of asking people what they think influences flexible work approvals, we asked them to make real decisions on a series of requests presented to them. To strengthen our findings, all participants had management experience.

In both studies, participants read short requests from hypothetical employees asking to work flexibly.

Each request was designed to look realistic, but was given a focus on one of four different things: caring responsibilities; improved productivity; and greater wellbeing via work-life integration task completion instead of hours worked. In the second study, we varied both the gender of the requester

and how much flexibility they asked for: either two or four days working from home.

What we found

Across both studies, a clear pattern emerged. Requests related to caring responsibilities and improved productivity had the greatest success. Requests which focused on improved personal wellbeing or greater autonomy over their time were less successful. However, contrary to what we expected, we found men and women were equally likely to be approved for flexible work.

This suggests that, at least at the approval stage, "gendered flexibility stigma", or bias against workers (usually women) who access flexible work arrangements, may be less pronounced than earlier research has suggested.

Overall, we found managers have a clear preference for fewer days of flexible working. Requests for two days of flexible work were much more likely to be approved than requests for four days.

Some good news for parents

Remote work, normalised in the pandemic, allowed fathers to become

more engaged in caring.

Our results indicate fathers won't be penalised for asking for flexible work to provide care to their children. However, there's an important caveat. While their requests were just as likely as women's to be approved, our research cannot speak to the impact on men's (or any workers') careers after they take up flexible work.

The stigma against those who cannot be seen in the office or workplace - a perceived lack of commitment, judgements about decreased productivity, reduced likelihood of getting promoted - may still be present.

Other ways to make a strong case

Flexible work debates often focus on and even favour parents. That can leave non-parents with fewer options. Our research provides good news for those without caring responsibilities who still want to embrace the benefits of flexible work.

We found the business case was equally as effective as the child-care argument. Non-carers should strongly consider the mutual benefits to their employers and to themselves and be sure to make a strong case for how the

company will reap the rewards.

For example, workers could highlight the possibility for increased productivity or fewer sick days.

Resources and tools are available to help employees construct their business cases, such as the Workplace Gender Equality Agency's page on legal requirements in Australia and evidence for a business case.

What the law says

Anyone can ask for flexible working arrangements; your boss might say no, but it's worth a shot. At a national level, in Australia where this study was conducted, employers cannot unreasonably refuse flexible working arrangements for people in certain circumstances, including those who have worked for the same employer for more than 12 months and who are: pregnant; a person with disability; have various caring responsibilities; 55 or older; and experiencing family and domestic violence providing care for someone who is experiencing family and domestic violence.

Employers are legally required to respond to such flexible work requests

in writing within 21 days, and make their approval decisions based on "reasonable business grounds".

Room to make things fairer

Together, our findings show that flexible work is still not doled out fairly. Because these negotiations often occur on a one-on-one basis, they are highly susceptible to individual bias, favouritism, and assumptions about who deserves to work flexibly.

One factor outside an employee's control is their manager's attitude. Our research found managers who held positive views about flexible work were more likely to approve requests of any kind. Those with negative attitudes were more likely to say no, regardless of how the request was framed.

Ultimately, success depends on how the request is framed, how much flexibility is asked for, and who is making the decision. (The Conversation)

(By Melissa A. Wheeler, Asanka Gunasekara, RMIT University, Lindsay Arthur, The University of Melbourne)

Splinters are everyday injuries commonly involving a small shard of wood, glass, metal, plastic or a thorn that becomes embedded in the skin and the soft tissue underneath.

The outer skin layer, known as the epidermis, has a high level of pain receptors. The layer just underneath, called the dermis, has even more of them, potentially making such injuries very painful.

Knowing how to remove a splinter may not be a matter of life and death. However, good technique can relieve someone from ongoing pain or subsequent complications.

Little in the medical literature

Despite pain relief being an important topic in health care, splinters have drawn little academic interest.

In 2004, a team of clinicians wrote that "no controlled studies have been done comparing different techniques, leaving physicians to rely on anecdotal experiences". A 2025 search of the medical literature on splinters only reveals a long stream of case studies and anecdotal evidence.

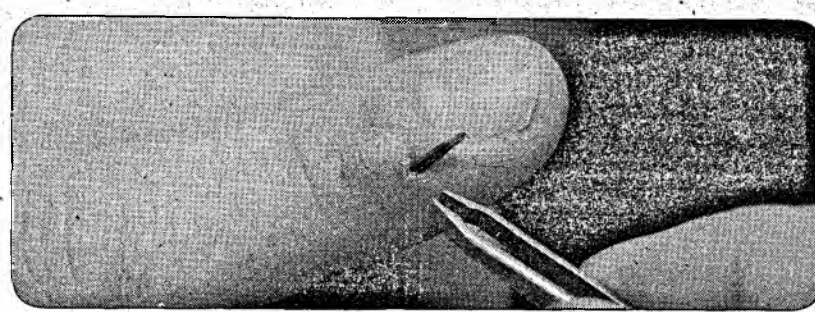
What's the best way to remove a splinter?

Online sites and TikTok videos are awash with "hacks" and tips that suggest using vinegar, duct tape, glue, onion slices and banana peels among other methods. There's limited evidence to support or refute such practices, but some of them may cause irritation of the skin, or even allergic reactions. Ultimately, you don't need any hacks to remove splinters. Here's how to do this correctly and safely and when to seek medical advice.

First, where is the splinter?

The location of the splinter is the first triage point. If an eye or eyelid splinter is suspected, you should seek urgent medical care through a general practice, urgent care clinic or emergency department. Do not attempt to flush or irrigate your eye; this needs to be done by a health practitioner with sterile saline in a controlled environment.

Splinters stuck under a fingernail or toenail, known as subungual splinters,



also often require surgical removal.

Second, what is splinter made of?

The type of splinter can also determine if you need help from a medical professional.

Care needs to be taken with glass splinters as they can break off or shatter, leaving fragments that can be difficult to remove and may cause ongoing pain, inflammation or infection.

Outdoor splinters from wood, thorns or rusty metal can also be a source of tetanus and a tetanus vaccine

booster may be required. People who are immunosuppressed or who have had lymph gland surgery should seek a medical appointment, as they may need antibiotics.

What you will need to remove the splinter

If none of the above apply and you can clearly see the splinter, the best way to approach removing it is with tweezers. If the end of the splinter is near the surface, consider using a bevelled needle (available from chem-

ists) to gently lift the top layer of skin to expose the splinter. Be careful not to enter deeper layers of skin as this will be painful.

Before attempting removal, if the splinter isn't from wood, soaking the impacted area in warm water may help to soften the skin. Epsom salts, baking soda or hydrogen peroxide are sometimes recommended, but there's no scientific evidence to support their use. Don't soak wood splinters, as this may cause the wood to swell and make it harder to pull out.

Steps for pulling out a splinter

Wash your hands with soap and water or use a hand sanitiser gel.

Sterilise the tweezers (and needle, if using) by rubbing or dipping the tips in the same sanitiser gel. Allow the tweezers to dry and do not place them back down before use.

If needed, use reading glasses to magnify the splinter. This will avoid bumping the splinter (further pain)

and facilitate a good grip with the tweezers. For metal splinters only, consider using nail clippers to pinch the splinter for better grip.

Remove the splinter following the path of entry and gently pull it back from the direction it went in.

Once the splinter is removed, wash the area with soap and water or an antiseptic solution. Cleaning with alcohol-based hand gel may cause stinging.

If the wound is bleeding, cover with a plaster or small dressing.

For splinters close to the surface, you'll likely be able to see if the whole splinter was removed. For splinters that penetrate at a steeper angle, it may be difficult to know if you got it all out. Deep splinters may even require medical diagnostic imaging to locate them.

After removing the splinter, monitor over the next few days for ongoing pain and signs of infection, such as redness, swelling, pain or discharge. Wound infections that are left untreated can lead to sepsis, a potentially life-threatening medical condition. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, JANUARY 25, 2026

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Jupiter on your solar return chart and it will give favourable results. You will have gains in business. Money and wealth will keep coming. There will be serious discussion with your bosses about increasing your wages. You will have monetary gains in business. Your seniors will be happy with your performance at work. You will also get drawn to a person known to you, leading to a warm and fulfilling relationship. You will also plan to get married. You will also have good bonding with your family members. Your brothers will give you full respect. There will be peace and happiness in family relationships. You can participate in recreational activities. You will also get drawn to an unwanted controversy. There are chances of some matter being revealed that you wanted to keep a secret. However, misunderstandings with family members will gradually get removed.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) This week the road to success will be bright. You will gain in your business. New financial gains are indicated. You will also make new investments which will prove to be beneficial. Your work will also be completed. Your work will keep you so busy that you will not get time even for yourself. People will acknowledge your intelligence. Your bosses will appreciate your work. Those who are jealous of you will be envious of your popularity. Your family life will be good. There will be joy and cheer in family relations. You will also plan to go out with your family. Achievements will bring peace and happiness into your life, and you will feel secure and content.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) It is going to be a wonderful week for you. Your dreams will get fulfilled and you will achieve everything. Your hard work, dedication and sincerity will pay off, and you could be promoted in your job. Your peers and bosses will support you. Your path will become easier with the help of an influential person. But do not trust others in financial matters. You may get cheated. You need to be aware of the enemies and foes. You will have good bonding with your mate/spouse. Guests will arrive and you will be busy welcoming them. You will also get the blessings of your elders. The understanding between husband and wife will be very good. Financial condition will be stable and strong.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) It is a favorable week for you. The situation at workplace will be in your favor. You will give a glimpse of your talent through your hard work and dedication. Your bosses will discuss and implement your ideas. You will also receive an important message for some person. Students will be successful in exams/interviews. It is a very important time for young people. Those in job could be promoted or given additional responsibility. Your colleagues will be good to you and will be happy with your good work. You will also give full time to your family. You will also have wonderful bonding and understanding with your partner. It is time for spiritual and religious gains.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is going to be a testing week for you. Your bosses will be on your side, and you will complete your pending work with alacrity. You will also have new ideas. Some people may try to corner you, but you will have the situation under control. You will be busy in the office as well as at home. Your family members will keep supporting you. Your hard work and efforts will prove fruitful. You will complete your work with dedication. Your financial position will also keep getting better. Those who are single will get marriage proposals. You will have good understanding with your brothers. You will also receive pleasant news from somewhere. You will get back struck up money.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Your efforts will be rewarded. Conditions at workplace will be in your favor. Beware of being cheated in financial matters. Don't trust other persons easily. In the dispute between brothers, conditions will be in your favor. Your capabilities will also be revealed to people. You will be busy with daily activities. You will have pressure to complete your pending work but will be able to do so. You will meet an influential person and get immediate benefits. You will also give entire time to your family. Your time will be spent in joy and laughter. You need to take control over unnecessary expenses. Students will get good results in exams/interviews. You will use your knowledge discretion and will increase your profits in business.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) There will be favorable events taking place for you this week. Money will come in from somewhere. You will have happiness and joy in family relations. You will get good results in your business. You will also fulfill the demands of your family members. You will complete your work

with dedication and full honesty. You will increase your profits in business. You will also receive valuable gifts from relatives. You will also bring some changes to the personnel and at your workplace. Your misunderstanding with brothers will get resolved. You will have high self-confidence and your responsibilities at the workplace will increase. Success will be at your feet. Your health will remain perfect.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be absorbed in your work. And you will be getting better opportunities in your job/business. There will be positive changes in your behavior and habits. You will discuss matters of great importance with your bosses. You will also get a work order from abroad. You will also adopt a positive attitude towards people. In business you will be enthusiastic because of rising profits. You will enjoy the best of health. Your bonds will be strengthened between brothers and other relatives. You will be hopeful of one person, but your expectation will be hampered. You will also establish relationships with influential people. Travelling will help you in obtaining money. Money will keep coming.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) Things are looking bright this week. The range of contacts will be quite big and widespread. You will move forward with focus on your objective. The time is favorable for students. The results of competitive/departamental exams will come in your favor. Your financial condition will get stronger. The work you have thought about will be completed. You will be busy with some functions. You will be busy with family and will receive some good news from relatives. Seeing your progress, people will be jealous of you. You will possess a rich personality and will meet a close friend. There will be improvements in your health. You will adopt a liberal attitude in your home and business.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) Your monetary gains will increase, and your confidence will also rise. Your property disputes will get resolved. You will also have happy moments with your partner. Your colleagues will help you a lot. You will also get appreciation for your efforts. The people around you will be fascinated with your personality and work. It will open the doors of progress for you. There can be a promotion or increase in salary. You will get something new for the house. The passage of time is smooth. You need to be patient and balance currently. Your friendship with the officials will come in your rescue. You will be able to accomplish the most difficult tasks very easily. Business prospects in the future are bright.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) You will have some tensions due to love affairs. It is time to take stock of the situation and take an appropriate decision. You might be handed additional responsibility at the workplace. You will get victory in financial matters. You will have some differences of opinion with your bosses, but matter will get resolved quickly. You will have good time with your family members. Your partner will continue to support you. The money that was struck for a long time will be yours with little effort. You will get success in job/business. An unexpected meeting with an influential person will open the doors of progress for you.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will spend a lot of time with your family. Your financial position will be stable, and you will adopt a positive approach towards life. You will be full of enthusiasm and will make maximum use of your contacts. Conversation and contacts will be of importance to you. This will help in completing your tasks. A new person will come into your life suddenly. Relationships, people and places will also hold an important place in your life. Your routine life will be regular and balanced. Your health is going to be wonderful. You will look at life with a totally different perspective.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) The beginning of the week is going to be good. You will have monetary gains. And will also get a chance to rise in your business. Matters connected to the government will be resolved. The work related to bankers will be done well on time. You will get loan for a project of yours. You will have good working relations with your colleagues. You will make your house a heaven. Qualities of being the best father/mother are in you. You will get the results of your work. You will make all efforts to make money. People will praise you. You will take pleasure in things. Your bosses will be happy with you and praise your work. A balanced attitude will bring success.

ChatGPT will have ads; this opens new door for dangerous influence

OpenAI has announced plans to introduce advertising in ChatGPT in the United States. Ads will appear on the free version and the low-cost Go tier, but not for Pro, Business, or Enterprise subscribers.

The company says ads will be clearly separated from chatbot responses and will not influence outputs. It has also pledged not to sell user conversations, to let users turn off personalised ads, and to avoid ads for users under 18 or around sensitive topics such as health and politics.

Still, the move has raised concerns among some users. The key question is whether OpenAI's voluntary safeguards will hold once advertising becomes central to its business.

Why ads in AI were always likely

We've seen this before. Fifteen years ago, social media platforms struggled to turn vast audiences into profit.

The breakthrough came with targeted advertising: tailoring ads to what users search for, click on, and pay attention to. This model became the dominant revenue source for Google and Facebook, reshaping their services so they maximised user engagement.

Large-scale artificial intelligence (AI) is extremely expensive. Training and running advanced models requires vast data centres, specialised chips, and constant engineering. Despite rapid user growth, many AI firms still operate at a loss. OpenAI alone expects to burn USD 115 billion over the next five years.

Only a few companies can absorb these costs. For most AI providers, a scalable revenue model is urgent and targeted advertising is the obvious answer. It remains the most reliable way to profit from large audiences.

What history teaches us about OpenAI's promises

OpenAI says it will keep ads separate from answers and protect user privacy. These assurances may sound comforting, but, for now, they rest on vague and easily reinterpreted commitments.

The company proposes not to show ads "near sensitive or regulated topics like health, mental health or politics", yet offers little clarity about what counts as "sensitive," how broadly "health" will be defined, or who decides where the boundaries lie.

Most real-world conversations



with AI will sit outside these narrow categories. So far OpenAI has not provided any details on which advertising categories will be included or excluded. However, if no restrictions were placed on the content of the ads, it's easy to picture that a user asking "how to wind down after a stressful day" might be shown alcohol delivery ads. A query about "fun weekend ideas" could surface gambling promotions.

These products are linked to recognised health and social harms. Placed beside personalised guidance at the moment of decision-making, such ads can steer behaviour in subtle but powerful ways, even when no explicit health issue is discussed.

Similar promises about guardrails marked the early years of social media. History shows how self-regulation weakens under commercial pressure, ultimately benefiting companies while leaving users exposed to harm.

Advertising incentives have a long record of undermining the public interest. The Cambridge Analytica scandal exposed how personal data collected for ads could be repurposed for political influence. The "Facebook files" revealed that Meta knew its platforms were causing serious harms, including to teenage mental health, but resisted changes that threatened advertising revenue.

More recent investigations show Meta continues to generate revenue from scam and fraudulent ads even after being warned about their harms.

Why chatbots raise the stakes

Chatbots are not merely another social media feed. People use them in intimate, personal ways for advice, emotional support and private reflection. These interactions feel discreet and non-judgmental, and often prompt disclosures people would not make publicly.

That trust amplifies persuasion in ways social media does not. People seek help and make decisions when they consult chatbots. Even with formal separation from responses, ads appear

in a private, conversational setting rather than a public feed.

Messages placed beside personalised guidance - about products, lifestyle choices, finances or politics - are likely to be more influential than the same ads seen while browsing.

As OpenAI positions ChatGPT as a "super assistant" for everything from finances to health, the line between advice and persuasion blurs.

For scammers and autocrats, the appeal of a more powerful propaganda tool is clear. For AI providers, the financial incentives to accommodate them will be hard to resist.

The root problem is a structural conflict of interest. Advertising models reward platforms for maximising engagement, yet the content that best sustains attention is often misleading, emotionally charged or harmful to health.

This is why voluntary restraint by online platforms has repeatedly failed.

Is there a better way forward?

One option is to treat AI as digital public infrastructure: these are essential systems designed to serve the public rather than maximise advertising revenue.

This need not exclude private firms. It requires at least one high-quality public option, democratically overseen - akin to public broadcasters alongside commercial media.

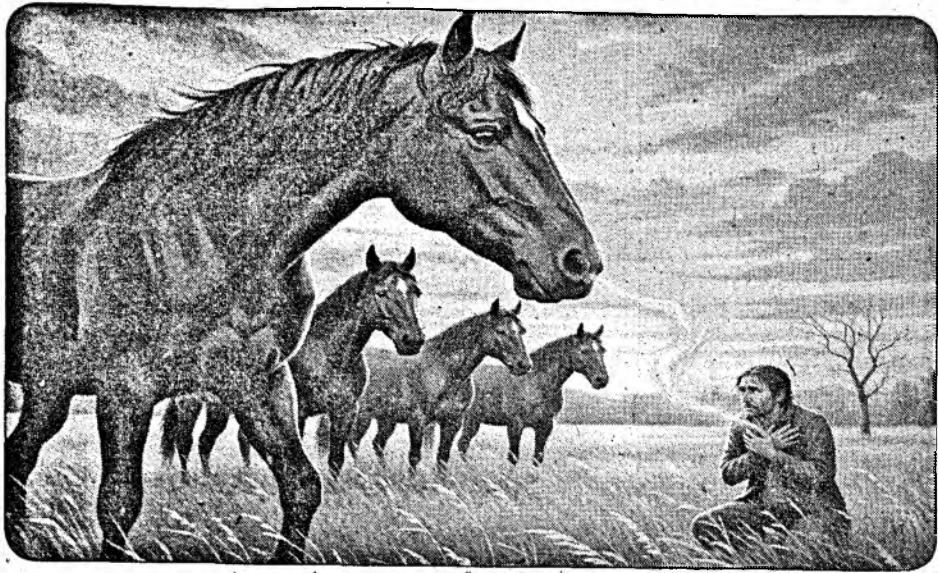
Elements of this model already exist. Switzerland developed the publicly funded AI system Apertus through its universities and national supercomputing centre. It is open source, compliant with European AI law, and free from advertising.

Australia could go further. Alongside building our own AI tools, regulators could impose clear rules on commercial providers: mandating transparency, banning health-harming or political advertising, and enforcing penalties - including shutdowns - for serious breaches.

Advertising did not corrupt social media overnight. It slowly changed incentives until public harm became the collateral damage of private profit. Bringing it into conversational AI risks repeating the mistake, this time in systems people trust far more deeply.

The key question is not technical but political: should AI serve the public, or advertisers and investors? (The Conversation)

Horses can smell fear & it changes their behaviour, claims study



Humans have long believed horses can "smell fear". Nervous riders are often told to "relax, or the horse will feel it".

Until recently, though, there was little scientific evidence to show whether this was anything more than folklore.

A new study has found that this belief is no myth. Its results show that horses can detect chemical signals linked to human emotions, and that these signals can influence their behaviour and physiology.

Previous research has pointed to a form of emotional contagion between humans and horses. This is a phenomenon in which the emotional state of one person or animal influences the emotional state of another.

But this is the first study to find evidence horses can detect human fear using their sense of smell.

Horses rely heavily on their sense of smell to understand the world around them. Their olfactory system is far more sensitive than ours, allowing them to detect subtle chemical differences in the

environment.

There is scientific evidence that horses can select the most nutritious food by smelling it.

A 2016 found that horses select foods based on nutrient content (such as protein), not just flavour, and that the way their body responds after eating influences future choices they make about food.

So how can horses smell our fear?

Well, human emotions come with physiological changes. When people experience fear or stress, their body, face and voice changes.

Their body also releases hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol, heart rate increases, and their sweat composition changes. These changes alter the chemical profile of a person's body odour, which can carry information about their emotional state.

The scent of fear

The new study found evidence horses not only detect but also respond to human emotional odours.

Horses in the study were exposed to human body odours collected via cotton pads wiped under the armpits of people.

These research participants watched either an excerpt from the 2012 horror movie *Sinister* (to induce fear) or clips, like the Singing in the Rain's dance scene (to induce joy). The researchers also collected control odours with no emotional association.

The horses showed distinct behavioural and physiological changes when exposed to fear-related odours through the cotton pads, which were secured by a nylon mask on the horses' noses.

They were more alert, more reactive to sudden events and less inclined to approach humans.

And they showed increases in maximum heart rate, which indicates stress, during the exposure to the fear smell from sweat.

Crucially, these responses happened without any visual or vocal cues from humans displaying fear. This finding shows that smell alone can influence a horse's emotional

state. Horses were not reacting to tense body language, facial expressions or nervous movements they were responding to chemical signals carried in human scent.

Previous research has shown horses seem to be sensitive to humans' emotional states.

In a May 2025 study, horses were shown videos of humans expressing fear, joy or neutral emotions in their facial expressions and voice.

Researchers measured the horses' heart rate, behaviour and facial expressions while they watched the videos.

The horses showed increased heart rates when exposed to fearful or joyful human expressions compared with neutral ones, which indicates heightened emotional arousal.

Fearful expressions depicted in the videos were associated with alert postures in the horses, like holding their head high and pointing their ears back and stress-related facial movements, like wide eyes.

Joyful expressions depicted in the videos were linked to patterns associated with positive emotional states, like relaxed nostrils and ears.

Together, these findings are consistent with emotional contagion. Emotional contagion has been documented between humans and dogs, for instance, and these results suggest horses may also be affected by human emotions.

What this does and doesn't mean

These studies do not suggest that horses understand fear in the same way humans do, or that they know why a person is afraid.

Instead, the evidence shows horses are highly sen-

sitive to the chemical, visual and vocal cues associated with emotional states.

Smell is probably just one part of a broader physiological system.

Horses are adept at reading human posture, muscle tension, breathing patterns, heart rate and movement—all of which change when a person is anxious. These cues shape how a horse perceives and responds to a human.

Understanding how horses perceive human emotions has important implications for welfare, training and safety. Riders, handlers and therapists working with horses may unintentionally influence an animal's emotional state through their own stress or calmness.

More broadly, the research challenges outdated assumptions about animal perception.

Horses are not passive responders to human commands, as equine professionals and researchers thought until recently. They are sensitive social partners, finely tuned to the emotional signals we give off.

Horses evolved as social prey animals living in large herds on open grasslands, where survival depended on detecting danger quickly.

Although humans began domesticating horses around 5,500 years ago, this is evolutionarily recent, meaning modern horses still retain highly sensitive sensory systems adapted for vigilance and social awareness.

So, when people say horses can smell fear, science now suggests they may be closer to the truth than we originally thought.

And next time you are close to a horse, try to relax, and make the interaction more enjoyable for both of you. (*The Conversation*)

Childhood vaccines does not raise risk of epilepsy

Routine childhood vaccinations are not associated with an increased risk of epilepsy in young children, according to a new study led by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The study, showed that the aluminum used as vaccine adjuvants also does not increase the risk of the neurological condition.

"Incident epilepsy was not associated with up-to-date vaccination status or cumulative vaccine aluminum exposure among children less than 4 years of age," said the team, including those from the Marshfield Clinic Research Institute in Marshfield, US.

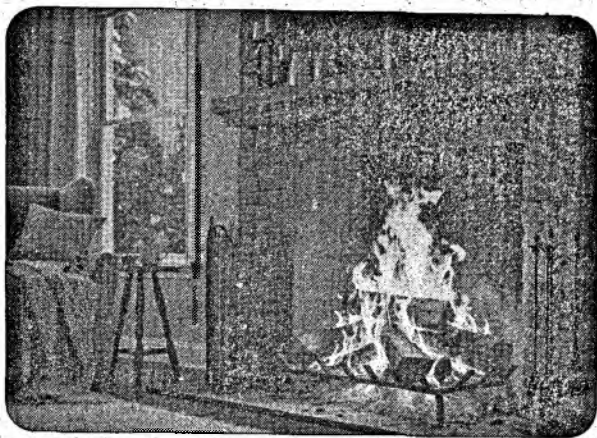
The study included 2,089 children diagnosed as having epilepsy from age 1 year to less than 4 years. These were compared with 20,139 children without epilepsy based on age, sex, and health care site.

The majority of the kids were boys (54 per cent) and between the ages of 1 year and 23 months (69 per cent). No higher risk following the childhood vaccine schedule was observed, stated the researchers. To assess vaccine exposure, the team examined the schedule for routine childhood vaccines and their cumulative aluminum exposure from vaccine adjuvants, measured in milligrams.

Aluminum salts—including formulations of aluminum hydroxide (AH), amorphous aluminum hydroxyphosphate sulfate, aluminum phosphate (AP), combined AH and AP (AH/AP), and aluminum potassium sulfate—are commonly used as adjuvants in vaccines. While this helps to enhance immune response, it has been a focus of safety concerns.

However, the team found that neither measure was associated with a higher risk of epilepsy. (*IANS*)

Burning firewood at home in winters raises air pollution, premature deaths



Burning firewood at home can be a major contributor to air pollution and premature deaths in winters, according to a study.

The study, published in the journal *Science Advances*, showed that residential wood burning comprises about 22 per cent of PM2.5 pollution in winter, making it one of the single largest sources of fine particle pollution during the coldest months.

The modelling study led by researchers from Northwestern University found that pollution from residential wood burning is associated with about 8,600 premature deaths per year in the US.

They suggested using alternative appliances to heat homes instead of burning wood, which can have a big impact on fine particulate matter in the air - and increase the risk of cardiovascular diseases.

"We frequently hear about the negative health impacts of wildfire smoke, but do not often consider the consequences of burning wood for heat in our homes," said Daniel Horton, Associate Professor of Earth at the varsity.

"Since only a small number of homes rely on wood burning for heat, facilitating a home-heating appliance transition to cleaner-burning or non-burning heat sources

could lead to outsized improvements in air quality," he added.

The study focussed on wood burning in homes, including emissions from wood-burning furnaces, boilers, fireplaces, and stoves. Using a high-resolution atmospheric model, they simulated how pollution moves through the air.

The model accounted for weather, wind, temperature, terrain, and atmospheric chemistry to estimate air quality over time. "Wood burning emissions enter the atmosphere, where they are affected by meteorology," Horton said.

"Some emissions are considered primary pollutants, such as black carbon, and some interact with the atmosphere and other constituents, and can form additional, secondary species of particulate matter pollution."

The team found that particulate matter from wood burning is particularly problematic in cities and suburban communities due to the combined effects of population density, emissions density, and atmospheric transport.

Even cities not typically associated with wood burning, such as those in warmer climates, can experience impacts from wood burning during cold snaps, recreational burning, and atmospheric transport. (*IANS*)

KSU demands fresh resolution...

(Contd from P-1) vice president Biangbor Paliar, assistant general secretary Sonstar Nongkhaw, along with a few other senior leaders, have expressed their intention not to contest another term.

Emotional scenes were witnessed at the conclusion of the meeting, as several women members of the KSU were seen in tears, embracing Marmgar and Thabab, reflecting the strong bond between the leadership and the cadre.

Responding to media queries on whether a final decision had been taken, Marmgar said it was normal for leaders to step aside at the end of a term while others continue. He clarified that a formal decision would be taken only after the CEC meets to deliberate specifically on the election process.

"It would not be proper to divulge anything at this moment. Let the CEC first meet to discuss the election," Marmgar said.

On whether the organisation has capable leaders to replace the present office bearers, he asserted that the KSU has no shortage of leadership. He noted that as the KSU approaches its 50th year, it has a well-established system to groom future leaders.

"We have always had a mechanism to prepare leaders who can shoulder responsibility and serve the interests of the indigenous community," he said.

Marmgar added that the question of the continuation of the current leadership would be considered at the appropriate time.

Marmgar, Thabab, Paliar, and Nongkhaw were first elected during the KSU's 13th general election in February 2017 for the 2017-2020 term. They have since served three consecutive terms, leading the organisation through several major movements.

While speculation had suggested the leadership might continue for another term, recent developments point towards a change at the helm, with new faces likely to guide the organisation in the coming years.

The present leadership had taken over from former KSU president Daniel Khyriem and then general secretary Augester Jyrwa, marking a significant phase in the organisation's history that now appears to be nearing its close.

KSU looks to restore transparency in MPSC, DSC recruitment

The (KSU said it will take all possible steps to restore credibility and transparency in the recruitment processes of Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) and District Selection Committees (DSCs).

A resolution towards this end was taken during the union's General Executive Council meeting. Leaders from various KSU units voiced concern over "persistent" lack of transparency in recruitment, both at MPSC and DSC levels.

The issue, the student's body said, has caused frustration among jobseekers in the state. KSU president Lambokstarwell Marmgar told media persons that the organisation has witnessed the problem firsthand and has, from time to time, made efforts to push for reforms, aimed at ensuring fairness in the recruitment system.

"In the coming days, the Central Executive Committee will sit together to carefully examine and compile the suggestions put forward by members from various units. We will deliberate thoroughly and work towards ensuring that the aspirations of job-seeking youths—particularly their demand for fairness and transparency—are addressed," Marmgar said.

He added that concerns raised by district-level leaders indicated that the issue is not confined to the MPSC alone but is equally prevalent in recruitments conducted by the DSCs.

According to the KSU, the situation has led to widespread uncertainty, dissatisfaction, and grievances among aspirants. The organisation said it will seriously consider all possible options and steps required to bring back transparency and public confidence in the recruitment processes.

On January 19, the KSU had issued a seven-day ultimatum to the MPSC, demanding an end to the delay in implementing reforms. The student body had alleged that the recruitment system was being deliberately manipulated to favour well-connected candidates over deserving applicants.

Following a meeting with MPSC Chairman D Langstang, KSU Employment and Monitoring Cell Chairman Reuben Najiar stated that although a committee report recommending reforms was submitted to the Commission five months ago, no concrete action was taken. The committee was headed by Principal Secretary F.R. Kharkongor.

Najiar had expressed disappointment over the "unjustified delay" in implementing the committee's recommendations.

"When we questioned the chairman, we were told that the Commission is still studying the report. There is nothing left to study—the committee has already done its work. What is required now is implementation," he had stated.

The KSU also submitted a written reminder to the MPSC, demanding that all key recommendations, including the disclosure of marks and other transparency measures, be implemented within one week.

GH groups seek Rs 1 cr ex gratia...

(Contd from P-1) The District Magistrate issued the order under Section 163 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS) on Friday evening. The directive prohibits unauthorized assemblies of five or more people and the carrying of weapons—including sticks, rods, and stones—between 6 PM and 6 AM.

These restrictions apply to villages falling under the jurisdiction of the Hallidayganj, Rajabala, Phulbari, and Tura Police Stations.

According to police reports, recent violence in the plain belt has led to apprehension and distrust among different community groups. Authorities noted that incidents in mixed-population areas, often fueled by miscommunication, necessitated these precautionary measures to ensure public safety.

The order has come into immediate effect in villages including Hallidayganj, Kasharipara, Charkasripara, Lalmati, Konarchar, Sobribari, Kharigaon, Panbari, Tetultulia, Borjhora, Jewali, Bollongre, Jeldupara, Boldamgre, Guaragre, Nawalgre, Gansenggre, Masangpani, Gudibala (Kamtil), Gomaijhora, Dendema, Belbari, Babilgre, Songjalgre, Shyamdin, Chibang, Kokaimari, Batabari, Mengkakgre, Chandigre, Rongkon, Takimagre, Old Bhaitbari, Rajpur, Babulgre, Bamundanga, and Chokchokia.

Youths to trek Tura-Shillong...

(Contd from P-1) Speaking for the group, Shadap stated that the walk is a conscious stand against drug abuse and aimlessness.

"This walk is our response to the challenges facing today's youth. Instead of surrendering to drugs or despair, we want to show that transformation is possible through discipline and focus," Shadap said. He added that the initiative is a call for young people to choose "direction over distraction."

The organisers noted that while previous walks were individual efforts, this year's event has evolved into a collective movement representing different regions of the state. The group aims to make positive lifestyle choices the standard for the youth of Meghalaya rather than the exception.

Shadap expressed gratitude to government departments, educational institutions, and local businesses for their support of the initiative, which he described as a march toward a healthier society and a more focused future.

Meghalaya launches monthly...

(Contd from P-3) A key attraction of the market was a live kitchen operated by members of a Van Dhan Vikas Kendra (VDVK), who were trained at the Institute of Hotel Management, Shillong. The live kitchen showcased a range of value-added dishes prepared from oranges and pumpkins, offering visitors a unique farm-to-plate experience using locally sourced ingredients.

Farmers participating in the market expressed satisfaction over the strong response from buyers.

A woman farmer from the Pynursla block said the market witnessed a large turnout of consumers and provided direct access to organic produce. She added that such initiatives would greatly benefit farmers by giving them better opportunities to sell their produce without intermediaries.

Programme Manager of 1917 iTEAMS, Gavin C. Shullai, said the Chairman of the Farmers' Commission had suggested utilising government parking areas, which usually remain vacant, as market spaces.

He noted that such an arrangement benefits both farmers and consumers by creating accessible, well-located markets in urban areas.

SOMOI, a homegrown quick-commerce app based in Shillong, has partnered with the Farmers' Market initiative to procure produce directly from farmers, thereby strengthening local supply chains and supporting farm-based livelihoods.

Aligned with the vision of Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma to make agriculture a sustainable and dignified livelihood for every farmer in Meghalaya, the Monthly Farmers' Market is envisaged as a strategic initiative to empower farmers, promote entrepreneurship and strengthen sustainable local economic development.

Each edition of the market will feature two to three seasonal crops aligned with local harvest cycles. In addition to fresh produce, the platform will support local entrepreneurs engaged in agri-based, value-added and artisanal products. The initiative also promotes the consumption of fresh, local and healthy food while strengthening urban-rural market linkages across Meghalaya.

In the long term, the state government aims to integrate the Monthly Farmers' Market into the Meghalaya State Tourism Calendar, positioning Shillong as a regular farm-to-table destination and an emerging agri-tourism hub.

Mawsynram MLAs oppose handover of power distribution to SAI Computer Ltd

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Jan 24: The MLAs of Mawsynram and Ranikor, Ollan Sing Suin and Pius Marwein, on Saturday held a meeting with local NGOs and opposed the handover of electricity distribution services to SAI Computer Limited.

Earlier, Kynhun Sengbhalang of Mawsynram raised serious concerns over power distribution in Mawsynram following the transition from FEDCO to SAI Computer Limited.

The organisation stated that households are facing severe hardships due to high electricity bills, with economically weaker families and women-headed households being the most affected.

MBoSE constitutes...

(Contd from P-3) colleges, teacher education institutions and higher secondary schools located in Tura, Shillong, Jowai, Dalu and Nongpoh.

The Controller of Examinations, MBOSE Tura, is among the members, while the Chief Academic Officer of MBoSE has been appointed as the Member Secretary. As per the notification, all nominated members will hold office for a period of three years from the date of issuance.

The Board has also delegated specific academic powers and functions to the committee under Section 23(2)(XII) of the MBOSE Act, 1973, thereby strengthening its role in shaping academic policy, curriculum development, academic reforms, and examination-related matters under the MBOSE framework across the state.

AICC appoints ten...

(Contd from P-3) president Mallikarjun Kharge appointed several hundred AICC observers to oversee the selection of new District Congress Committee (DCC) presidents across multiple states, including Meghalaya.

The committee comprises Bharat Singh Solanki, who concurrently serves as the AICC in-charge for Jammu and Kashmir, Ashok Tanwar, a senior Congress leader and former Member of Parliament, and eight other observers.

From Meghalaya, Szariya Laitphlang has been appointed as one of the observers for Uttar Pradesh under the campaign. Hailing from the hill state, she is currently serving as a secretary of the AICC and as general secretary of the Chhattisgarh unit of the Indian National Congress.

The other observers are Subhashini Yadav, Nadeem Javed, Sachin Naik, Biswaranjan Mohanty, Belliah Naik, Manish Yadav, Tilotama Loitongbam and Amir Hussain Khutheibam.

According to party sources, the team of observers will expedite the appointment of new DCC presidents to ensure transparency and inclusivity, work in direct coordination with Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) observers, address local grievances and foster unity as part of a broader strategy to rebuild the party's organisational strength in the region.

The observers have been tasked with a "bottom-up" selection process to ensure neutral and hardworking leadership. Their roles include camping in assigned districts—often for up to three months—to assess organisational strength.

They will also engage with block-level office-bearers and local stakeholders to identify potential leaders and submit comprehensive reports to the AICC General Secretary (Organisation), followed by one-on-one discussions to finalise appointments.

"You get respect when you give respect. That's how you get respect."
—Michael Nutter

The Shillong Times

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State of the nation

A proud India celebrates its 77th Republic Day with pomp, colour and a symbolic yet impressive display of its military prowess, in the national capital today. The long period – over three quarters of a century – under Self Rule after the British exit from this landmass in 1947 – was certainly one of progress on many fronts. India hopes to be the third largest global economy in a few years – reaching a shade closer to both the United States and China. With a GDP of four-trillion plus, India surpassed Japan to become the fourth and aims to outwit Germany in around four years. The gloom of the Socialist era is a thing of the past. The post-liberalization era saw the emergence of a large middle class forming, some 30 per cent of the population by now. They drive the economy forward. It must also be stressed that the collective energy of our 1.4 billion population is what makes India's growth epoch-making. Being the world's largest population by now, India also boasts of having the largest share of young people – some 65 per cent of the total. India, in a sense unstoppable because of them.

While also granting the successive governments their share of credit for this progress, what must be stressed is that India could have worked wonders with this large mass of productive energy, had the youths been endowed with the skills and resources to drive this growth in super-speed. Large numbers of educated youths are idling away their time, more so in the rural areas, where there hardly are opportunities for employment. Making them start their own units is difficult due to their lack of financial resources and the freewheeling corruption and red tape in the bureaucracy. The result is inertia. Foreign firms are largely unwilling to step in here due to the massive corruption in the system. FDI is not coming in, in an expected way, and the manufacturing sector is failing to gain strength even as India now has the lowest wages. Wages in China are better. Yet, multinational companies from there are reluctant to transplant their units to India because of the loose systems, bureaucratic controls and political corruption here. When Liberalization dawned on us in the 1990s, the promise was that red tape and the licence raj would be eliminated. Today, under Modi, there are more controls through a surfeit of new rules and regulations – which are only helping the corrupt to take bribes for every signature appended.

When we celebrate 77 years of our Republic and the launch of the Constitution, it is worth taking a close look as to how the citizens are benefited by the laws and principles that guide the nation. Several crores of cases are pending in courts and their number is progressively increasing. Cases go on and on for decades, discouraging ordinary people from approaching the courts to seek justice. Justice delayed is justice denied. The footloose 'desi' rule has resulted into poor governance, lacking accountability in almost all several spheres of the public delivery system. India's democracy is increasingly turning into an oligarchy. The poor remain where they were while the handful of rich control the country's wealth. The Constitution is applied now in the breach. Hence the celebration of Republic Day remains performative only.

Kamai ia Ka Hok: The Struggle for Transparency, Accountability & Justice Continues

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

offences are committed by political leaders, senior civil servants, business persons and community leaders, involving "large, international bribes and 'hidden' overseas bank accounts."

Normalization of Corruption and Violence:

The two things which have become normal across India today are corruption and violence. Transparency and accountability which are essential for governance have taken a back seat and disappeared in the wilderness. According to the corruption perception index, corruption is a normal phenomenon all over the world. In Meghalaya as well it is generally perceived that no work gets done in any Government establishments without a "bai sha" or "monetary gift." In other words, a private citizen will need to monetarily buy favour from the government authority or officials or Minister (s) to get a government contract or benefits from any governmental schemes or projects.

Jon S.T. Quah in his paper, *The Normalization of Corruption* (2015), has quoted United Nations' definition of corruption as "the misuse of public power, office or authority for private benefit – through bribery, extortion, influence peddling, nepotism, fraud, speed money or embezzlement. He also noted that due to the increasing importance of private sector... the definition of corruption must also include the misuse of public or private power, office or authority for private benefit. Further, in analysing the normalisation of corruption, it is important to distinguish between corruption as a fact of life or a way of life. This distinction was introduced in 1981 by the eminent scholar, Gerald Caiden, who describes corruption as a way of life in a country when it is rampant, systemic, and is the norm rather than the exception. However, corruption is a fact of life in a country when corruption offences are the exception rather than the rule, and are examples of individual rather than systemic corruption. When corruption is normalised in a country/state, it is optimal for individuals to be corrupt and corrupt behaviour becomes the equilibrium behaviour or the social norm. It is necessary to distinguish between petty corruption and grand corruption.

Minorities in India, especially Christians and Muslims have become the daily targets of the Hindu fundamentalist groups and whose acts of violence and atrocities received the patronage of several political leaders of the current regime. Last Christmas was the season of fear for Christians in Delhi, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Assam as Hindu right activists violently disrupted prayer meetings, Christmas carol services and celebrations. Besides, repeated incidents of violence against nuns, pastors or preachers who are being stripped of their self respect and dignity in public view. Some of them were even forced to eat cow dung and chant "jai shri ram" in Odisha. Similarly, it has now become a crime for Muslims to pray after 12 Muslims men were arrested recently in Uttar Pradesh's Bareilly District for offering namaz in their private home.

Moreover, to be a Muslim in India today is to endure suspicion and oppression. Rasheed Ahmed wrote that, "Muslims' political claims in India today are no longer considered as legitimate. They (Muslims) are being framed as demographic or ideological problem. Indian Muslim are expected to be compliant, even as they are denied of the ordinary exercise of rights enjoyed by other citizens. However it is totally unjust and unconstitutional to treat fellow citizens, whose religion and ethnic identities are different from the Hindu majority, as second class. On the other hand, for decades Muslims have met suspicion with disciplined silence and exclusion with endurance, not because they lacked pride but they believed in promise of the Republic. The Republic may be misinterpreting endurance as acceptance and patience as consent."

"Kamai ia Ka Hok": Khasi Ancient Reflexive Whispers.

The entire system is corrupt and rotten, and the common people are bewildered by the greed and the manipulation of those who run the State. As against this gloom the age old reflexive whispers of "Kamai ia Ka Hok" should be rediscovered and reinterpreted to become a powerful tool in our struggle

for a transparent, accountable and just society.

"Kamai ia ka Hok", is an indigenous Khasi concept. Literally, "Kamai" means to earn, where as "Hok" stands for truth. Truth is universal and is indeed a powerful weapon to confront any form of injustices prevalent in the society. Every saint or sage from Lord Buddha to Jesus Christ to Prophet Muhammad to Mahatma Gandhi to Martin Luther King Junior, have used it during their struggles for emancipation. Jesus once said, "the truth shall set you free", and it is this freedom that all of us long for. Throughout the ages the Khasis have always believed in "Truth". Truth dwells in each person, as there is a purpose to be born into this world, to fulfil obligations, duties and responsibilities, of what is dispensed and gifted.

"Kamai ia ka Hok" has no English equivalent, but to put it in simple words it means earning through fair and just means. In theological/ religious terms, some scholars have termed it as earning righteousness by keeping one's conscience upright and being truthful in life. However, "Kamai ia ka Hok" also encompasses Justice, Freedom, Rights and Equality, and since time immemorial we have applied it in our politics and economics. It is the guiding principle in human-relationships, business transactions and day-to-day affairs. Its implication is both transcendent and imminent.

Transparency and Accountability in Religious and Faith-based Institutions:

Meghalaya is replete with religious and faith groups. Around 11.50% are Hindus, the adherents of Indigenous faiths account for 8.7% and followers of Islam constitute a meagre 4%. However the State is dominated by a Christian majority which accounts for 75% of the population. All these religious/faith groups are working towards uplifting both the spiritual and physical needs of people of the State. In the process of serving public interests they collect funds from their faithful and general public alike, to be used for common good. In response to their noble deeds, believers and others as well make good contributions to fill the religious coffers. There are Church organizations whose bank accounts amount to crores of rupees and the same crores have been alleged to have been

stolen or swindled with no proper accounting. The matter at hand is the strange case of embezzlement of ₹ 4.5 crores of Mawkhair Presbyterian Church's fund which led to the arrest of the chowkidar in 2019. It is reported that the chowkidar had confessed to having taken ₹ 3.26 crore. However, the amount missing from the accounts of the Church is ₹ 4.5 crore. The question is who took the remaining amount? Who will provide the answer?

Moreover, the Church Committee had also constituted the special audit team to look into the accounts for the period from January 2012 to July 2019. The audit team had already submitted the Special Audit Report in 2024 and the same has been released and shared with the general members. In fact, the findings are staggering and bewildering. The members are yet to come to terms with the magnitude of irregularities and discrepancies. In the light of the above missing crores and the audit findings, are the members of the Mawkhair Presbyterian Church, Shillong, willing to let the missing crores and Special Audit Report find closure or die down without justice? No way should the members of the Mawkhair Presbyterian Church allow the cover up.

More than a decade ago, the issue of transparency and accountability of religious or faith based institutions were at the centre of deliberations of the Right to Information movement. During the National Convention held in Shillong in 2011, it was declared that all religious and faith-based institutions should be transparent and accountable regarding the use of public money, which includes tithes and offerings, for private purposes.

Enough of Violence: Caldwell Manners strongly called for an end to violence in these words, "The violence we witnessed across the country and the globe over these past few years are not isolated events that happened "spontaneously" like the government would like us to believe. These are events orchestrated by a cultural shift toward a politics of hate.

Enough of hate. Enough of racism. Enough of religious bigotry. And enough of the exclusion of our neighbours. Everyone has the right to be safe. If you are a Niam Tre/ Niam Tyrai, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Sikh, Jain, atheist or agnostic, you have the right to be safe.

A balanced approach – based on legality, equal opportunity, and economic cooperation – is the need of the hour. Any policy that conflicts with constitutional guarantees must be reviewed in the larger interest of justice and national integrity.

Yours etc.,
Homnath Gautam
Shillong-2

Why the correct spelling of La-Chaumiére is important

Editor,
Apropos of the news "Dorbar clears air on official spelling of Lachaumiére" (ST 24, January 2026), the Dorbar Shnong has taken a correct decision on the inaccuracies of the spelling of the locality that dilutes the historical and cultural significance of the locality. "La Chaumiére" is a French word that literally means "the thatched cottage" or "the rustic hut." La → "The" (definite article in French). Chaumiére → A small rural house, traditionally with a thatched roof. It evokes simplicity, coziness, and countryside charm. In French culture, chaumiére symbolizes pastoral beauty, rustic simplicity, and homely warmth. When used as a

name like (La Chaumiére House in Shillong), it suggests a heritage property with quaint, old-world charm, designed to feel welcoming and serene—like a cottage retreat and by extension, it conveys a sense of rustic elegance and peaceful living.

Why was a French name like La-Chaumiére chosen for a property in Shillong? The word evokes rustic simplicity and pastoral beauty. For a hill station like Shillong, surrounded by pine forests and rolling hills, the name fits perfectly suggesting a peaceful retreat in nature. La Chaumiére House – the "rustic hut" was once the Nawab of Dacca's estate (East Bengal) built in the 1880s and later a British hotel known as Holders Hotel in the days of the Raj. Post-Independence (1950s) the house was acquired by Shiva Prasad Sharma and Anjali Devi Sharma, an Assamese couple from Guwahati. They refurbished the property while retaining its heritage charm. The house continues to operate as a heritage guesthouse, blending colonial architecture with Assamese-style annexes. It remains in the family's care, preserving its legacy as one of Shillong's oldest heritage homes.

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

Reflections on the Freedoms Guaranteed in the Indian Constitution

By Aristotle Lyngdoh

The divide and rule policy that the British employed had a long and lasting impact on Indian society even today. Consequently, we who are born after colonial imperialism had ended, had to bear the brunt of this divisive tactic. The gap between Hindus and Muslims has not subsided even after eight decades of achieving independence. Of late, this divisive campaign has shifted its focus to the Christian community. In many parts of the country hooliganism against the Christian communities and churches is becoming more pervasive and inhuman. The disgraceful act against a Christian pastor in Odisha where he was forced to eat cow dung is unacceptable in any civilized society. Such shameless acts should not have happened in this nation unless there are forces behind who try to impose their ideologies and philosophy on others. In another incident, bigotry has claimed the life of an innocent student from Tripura.

Those who committed these atrocities consider themselves as heroes but in fact exhibit the state and mentality of foolishness. The breach against personal liberty is at large. Who will be the next victim is unpredictable, so where is the constitutional hope of fraternity among Indians if these atrocities still prevail. In the strictest sense, do we still need to educate people about the privileges guaranteed in the Constitution such as liberty of faith and expression in addition to equality of status and opportunity. And this has been clearly mentioned in the preamble of the Constitution too. So why does this fundamental goal of the Constitution remain a challenging task for minority groups is something we should ponder.

The spirit of colonialism and imperialism

Following the partition in 1947, Pakistan continued to rule and dominate Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) for almost 24 years which ultimately led to its liberation in 1971. The recent crisis in Bangladesh is no doubt an attempt to ignite the religious sentiments and rejuvenate the spirit of religious imperialism on a larger scale. Within India for instance, the creation of the state of Meghalaya in 1972 was a result of linguistic imperialism by the then Assam government. At the global level big nations are flexing their muscles on their neighbors to exert power and command more influence. This shows how desperate the imperialist spirit is and how it is trying to influence and motivate those who managed to obtain power even if they believe in democracy. We cannot also forget how the Covid-19 pandemic has made every administration in the world to experience and taste the joy of acquiring absolute control and these are not encouraging events.

The colonial mindset of education

Education is a catalyst that changes the mindset of a person. During the colonial era education was primarily an effort to teach Indian people the English language in order to raise administrative clerks to serve and assist the colonial officials. It is purely for administrative requirements and people too are content because their employment is assured. People left agriculture and other traditional occupations to enrol in the colonial service because of better incentives. Gradually, the system produced dependents and an elite class who were Indian by blood but English in taste, style and mentality. These people were the luckiest and thought of themselves as having a better status compared to those who served under other local regimes. In this way the colonial rulers could exercise full control and authority over the majority of Indians through the Indian people.

This same mentality is also common today, particularly in states like ours where industrial growth is relatively low and dependency of employment is only on government establishments and projects. This is so because over the years the education

system has been structured in such a way that learners are fit for institutional occupation only. If one looks at the statistics available in the website of MBOSE, in 2023 the number of students who cleared the 10th exam (SSLC) number only 26,629. These same candidates appeared for the 12th exam (HSSLC) in 2025 and those who passed out are 18,736 in the Arts Stream, 32,53 in Science Stream, 2033 in Commerce Stream and the rest in vocational streams. The trend is almost the same every year unless there is a paradigm shift. These data reflect what type and nature of occupation these youngsters will seek to make ends meet. Those who can afford will pursue higher studies but finally end up in clerical and teaching jobs. What is more concerning is the fate of those from the rural areas whose parents perhaps are farmers or vegetable growers. What will be the fate of our local food industry and security if the upcoming generation do not actively engage and explore the scope in agriculture and allied activities?

In fact, we should learn a great lesson from other communities such as the Gujaratis who prefer entrepreneurship over salaried jobs. For them 'naukri' or service is not an ideal status, such mindsets has revolutionised and created a high rate of business ownership by local people of the community and employed people from other states too. Here it seems that the concept of critical learning has not effectively addressed the community needs for robust economic development. Education system on the other hand is to create a shift from dependency to self-reliant individuals equipped for any challenges and problems.

Governance through the East India Company

The East India Company was set up by the Royal Charter in 1600 to do business in India to enrich the British shareholders. Eventually it became the machine that heavily exploited the wealth and resources in their colonies and controlled the colonial government extensively. The nexus between the two cannot be separated, and this is true for every country on the planet today. Politicians and businessmen are the two sides of the same coin and most of the politicians are also privileged shareholders of major business houses. In this way influential business houses dominate every business in the nation and not only that, they will influence the economic and fiscal policy of the state and nation. Gone are the days where the economists played a prominent role in shaping the policy of the state. Today, industrialists and tycoons decide what the economic reforms should be. The first-generation leaders of both post-independence and post-hill state movements were purely nationalists and development-oriented personalities, unlike their successors who are more guided by their personal benefits.

This year, the nation will commemorate the 77th year of adoption of the Indian Constitution. Preparation is in full swing to showcase military achievements and strengths. However, on the other side, racism and religious intolerance still pose a serious threat and concern, therefore, we cannot overlook this susceptibility. Even though Independence Day and Republic Day are monotonous events, yet they serve as reminders for every generation about the cause and purpose that our late leaders and founders have fought for and re-deemed on our behalf. And the idea of self-determination and self-governance was the ultimate goal of their struggle to liberate the people from the colonial mindset of dominance and suppression. Because of this, we are extremely grateful to our founding fathers who had envisioned such a pluralistic and people-centric Constitution.

Letters to the Editor

A Casualty of Political Power Play

Editor,
The sorry state of affairs of the approximately 10-kilometre road connecting Takhnang village to Thadialong-Samatan in West Jaintia Hills District stands today as a glaring example of how development can become the first casualty of political apathy and rivalry. This neglected stretch, falling under the Laskein Development Block, lies precisely between two adjacent constituencies—Nartiang Constituency represented by none other than Mr. Sniawbhalang Dhar and Mowkaiaw Constituency represented by Nujorki Sungoh.

Ironically, this geographical "in-between" status appears to have condemned the road to decades of official neglect. For years, this vital link has been left at the mercy of nature. What should have been a lifeline for poor farmers and daily commuters has instead turned into an obstacle course. During medical emergencies, the situation becomes downright inhuman—patients and pregnant women are forced to endure dangerous and delayed journeys, often at great personal risk, simply because the road is not motorable. More importantly, this road serves as one of the main lifelines for the people of Elaka Shiliangmyntang and Mukroh, particularly during times when emergency boundary disputes arise, making its condition not just

a developmental concern but a serious matter of public safety and security.

What baffles travellers, particularly those journeying from Shillong towards Barato-Mukroh, is the stark contrast in infrastructure quality. The black-topped roads from Nartiang to Takhnang village on one end and from Shiliangmyntang village to Mukroh on the other are maintained in near-perfect condition. Why, then, has this crucial middle stretch been conveniently abandoned? The question lingers, unanswered and uncomfortable. Among local residents, a widely held belief persists: that this road has become a victim of political one-upmanship, a silent battleground where ego and influence matter more than public welfare. Reliable sources indicate that this very stretch was mentioned in the 2023–24 Budget Speech in the August House, with assurances from Prestone Tyngsong, the Minister in Charge, PWD (Roads), that the road would be metalled and blacktopped. Yet, for reasons best known to the authorities, those assurances remain trapped on paper.

With the forthcoming Budget Session now just one month away, this is an opportune and crucial moment for the government to re-include this long-neglected road and accord it the highest priority for sanction and execution. The people of this region can ill afford another budgetary cycle of promises without delivery. Meanwhile, due to deplorable condition of this road, people continue to

pay a heavy price. Vehicles frequently break down, transport costs rise, and livelihoods suffer—all because a sanctioned promise has not translated into action. We urge Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma to immediately intervene on this issue. With the next General Election round the corner, we urge our political leaders to bury the hatchet, rise above constituency boundaries, and finally sanction and complete this long overdue road. If ignored any longer, this stretch will not just remain a road in ruins—it will become one of the hottest electoral issues in the region.

Yours etc.,
HT Wells (A Concerned Citizen)
Shillong

Trade Licences by Exclusion are Unconstitutional: KHADC'S Policy Defies Law, Logic, & Lived Reality

Editor,
This refers to the news report titled "New trade licences only in areas without Khasi residents: KHADC." The statement attributed to the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC) raises serious constitutional, legal, and practical concerns that deserve public scrutiny. India's Constitution guarantees every citizen the right to livelihood and occupation under Article 19(1)(g), of the Constitution of India. It guarantees every citizen the fundamental right to practise

any profession or to carry on any occupation, trade or business subject to reasonable restrictions imposed by law, not by administrative discretion or ethnic classification. No Autonomous District Council, constituted under the Sixth Schedule, has the authority to override, dilute, or selectively suspend fundamental rights.

It is important to underline that Autonomous District Councils function within the framework of the Constitution, not above it. Protection of indigenous interests cannot come at the cost of denying fundamental rights to other law-abiding citizens who have lived, worked, and contributed to the local economy for decades.

The claim that a trading licence can be cancelled merely because a local person later wishes to undertake the same business is also misleading and legally incorrect. Once a trade licence is validly issued after due verification, it cannot be revoked unless the trader violates the law, licence conditions, or engages in illegal activities. Any other interpretation would amount to administrative excess and uncertainty, discouraging lawful enterprise.

Ironically, such restrictive policies may encourage benami businesses, where licences are taken in tribal names but operated by another, defeating transparency, regulation, and revenue collection. This neither protects local interests nor strengthens governance—it only pushes economic activity into grey areas.

Non-tribal citizens are

"Prove yourself to yourself, not others"

— Steven Pressfield

The Shillong Times

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Purge in China

THE Chinese are apparently in a state of silent shock. News emerging from the red nation is of yet another season of purge. Zhang Youxia, the second-in-command in China's military structure, next only to President Xi Jinping in the Central Military Commission, is "missing" from public life since November last. The defence establishment says he's under "investigation for serious violations of discipline and law." He has been accused of leaking crucial defence secrets about China's nuclear programme to the United States. In this backdrop, Xi's present round of purge is targeting senior military personnel involved in corruption. Corrective steps are underway through removal of scores of top defence personnel from their positions. He's also aggressively attempting to modernize the military to make it "world-class" by next year – when the People's Liberation Army reaches its centenary year.

What happens in China bears crucial lessons for India. Xi's hard-edged anti-corruption drive saw the ouster of several ministers and generals in the last two years. Cleaning the system has been a matter of first priority for Xi ever since he took charge of the nation in 2012. The recent years saw China scaling new heights in military prowess and economic power. Yet, the accusations now that his second-in-command "leaked" vital nuclear secrets to the US explains the extent to which the rot has set in there. What happens in India is not always known in the public sphere despite the media freedom here. Corrupt officials generally get away with their act. Those at the helm are not serious about curbing corruption. Central agencies like CBI and ED have majorly lost their reputation due to corruption and political interference in their functioning. Not even 10 per cent of the cases these agencies investigate reach a successful conclusion. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, despite his 2014 promise to check corruption, vacillated through his three terms. While Modi is not seen to be personally corrupt, he's infamously presiding over a corrupt system. He obviously lacks the energy, skills and courage to clean up the Augean stables.

China's party-led dictatorship has its good sides and bad patches. Xi claims he would make the Chinese society a strong, democratic, civilized and modern entity in another 20 years. Fact is that the fruits of China's development have reached all, cutting across communities and regions. This is unlike India, where growth is region-specific, its benefits being reaped by select segments of the people, leaving the large army of the poor in a state of disadvantage and despair. The life of the tribals, for instance, has improved only marginally in a span of 80 years. Nepotism in governmental and bureaucratic functioning is at its height. The mass discontentment is increasingly pronounced even as a deceptive calm exists. Politicians are no longer a respectable lot. This is an invitation to trouble for the future. A JP-movement unseated the all-powerful Indira Gandhi's government in the mid-1970s. Today, a spark can ignite a fire. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh proved how fragile the governments in Asian democracies are. Even China with all its controls can erupt. Global order itself can change.

Letters to the Editor

The excruciating cost of freedom

Editor,
Apropos to the article titled 'When Freedom Meant Flight: A Grandmother's Story from 1947' authored by Nadeen Pakyntein on the occasion of Republic Day, I wish to express my sincere appreciation for this, deeply touching and memorable piece of writing.

We celebrate Republic Day every year with pride, speeches, and flags, but very rarely do we pause to reflect on what freedom actually meant for ordinary people in 1947. This article does exactly that. By narrating the life of a nine-year-old girl who was forced to flee her home during Partition, the author reminds us that Independence was not a joyful moment for everyone.

The article stays with the reader because of its simple, honest narration. A child returning from school, a mother sending her to buy curd, and suddenly the streets filling with slogans of violence — these small details bring history alive in a way no textbook ever can. The moment when the father learns that Lahore has gone to Pakistan and rushes home, even cutting his hair to save his life, is painful to read and impossible to forget.

The family leaving behind their home, land, animals, neighbours, and memories overnight shows the cruelty and suddenness of Partition. Running through narrow lanes amid gunshots, hiding through the night, and then escaping with the help of a Muslim neighbour reminds

us that fear and humanity existed side by side during those dark days.

The journey towards Amritsar, the threat of being stopped, the fear of imprisonment, and the eventual rescue by Indian soldiers reflect the terror faced by thousands of refugee families. The description of sitting outside the Golden Temple, homeless, surviving on charity, suffering from illness and humiliation, is heartbreaking. It forces us to acknowledge a truth we often avoid — that freedom came at an unbearable personal cost.

What makes the article even more meaningful is how it shows life slowly rebuilding. From Patti to Jalandhar, and eventually to Shillong, the story becomes one of quiet courage, resilience, and dignity. The little girl growing into a woman, starting a new life, and today sharing her memories with her grandchildren is a reminder of the strength carried by an entire generation.

There is no anger or bitterness in the article, only remembrance. That is its greatest strength. It gently reminds us that while the Constitution gave us rights and freedoms, many families paid for it with loss, displacement, and lifelong trauma.

I thank the author for preserving such a personal and important story, and the newspaper for publishing it. Articles like this deserve to be cherished, especially by younger generations who must know that freedom was not free.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Via email

Jaintia and the British Connection

By H H Mohrmen

The term Jaintia has always been abhorred by certain sections of the population who also blame the British for creating that name. Those who know very little about the history of the land detest the use of the term and even call it a non-local name, therefore not indigenous. Scholars who study the subject are ridiculed and questioned if they are not ashamed to be called Jaintia, which is obviously considered a non-tribal name. But the blame goes to those who detest the notion, for their lack of knowledge of the history of the place.

It is true that the name of the hills district, Jaintia, has its origin in the ancient kingdom in the plains called Jayantia, with its capital at Jayantiapur (Jayantia buranjil), but it was the latter part of the history of the kingdom which is related to the highlanders.

The origin and the rise of the Sutnga kingdom

Sutnga was the kingdom of a small tribal chieftain who was able to consolidate his power and become the ruler of a powerful kingdom, not only in the hills but one whose dominion extended to the plains as well. Folk narratives have it that the Sutnga dynasty originated from a nymph who became the progenitor of the clan. History records that Prabhata Rai (not his real name, but a name given to him by the people he conquered), which means the Lord of the Hills, was the king who defeated the Jayantia kingdom and annexed it to his own kingdom (Jayantia Buranjil / Gait, E. A., p. 253, 255).

After he had extended the kingdom's dominion to the plains, he was attracted by the cultural advancement and development of the new kingdom and perhaps for this reason he decided to move his capital to Jayantiapur in the plains. The shifting of the capital to the plains also helped him gain access to the larger and wider world. This, in a nutshell, was how a small hill kingdom later became very powerful and entered into encounters and marriage alliances with other dominant kingdoms of the time.

The rise of the Jayantia kingdom

The Jayantia kingdom flourished between 1500 and the early part of the

1800s, and during the reigns of different kings they were able to issue coins, a very important achievement of the kingdom. The Jaintia kings were first mentioned in the annals of the Koch kingdom when Nar Narayan, the Koch king, defeated the Jaintia in the early part of the sixteenth century. Apart from the Koch, the kingdom had numerous encounters with other neighbouring kingdoms.

The Jayantia kingdom had at least three encounters with the British. The first was as early as 1774, when the British, under the leadership of Major Hennicker, led an expedition against the Jayantia (Gait, p. 260). The second uprising was in the 1850s and the early 1860s, when the British levied income tax on the hill people, and the last rebellion was the 1862-63 uprising led by U Kiang Nangbah (Giri, H., p. 82).

Jayantia Connection with the British Raj

Jaintia, or what was formerly ka Hima ki Syiem Sutnga, was a flourishing country until the British annexed it on March 15, 1835 (Gait, E. A., 1906, p. 302). When the kingdom was annexed, it comprised the Jayantia parganas in the Sylhet district and the hills up to Goba, which is in Nowgong (Gait, E. A., 302).

After the annexation, the king was left with only the hills portion of the kingdom, which provided him with very little or no revenue at all. U Ram Singh, the king of the Jaintia kingdom, had no interest in continuing to rule the hills section of the kingdom once he lost the Jayantia parganas, which constituted the plains part of the country. The hills portion did not provide him with the kind of revenue he had earlier collected from the plains. The king therefore opted to receive a pension of Rs. 500 rather than continue to rule the hills.

Two Political Entities under the British Government

The salubrious climate of the region was what led the British to set their eyes on the hills; they were in need of a sanatorium for the convalescence of British officers. Helen Giri, in her book, mentioned that David Scott was the first officer to

suggest the setting up of a "convalescent station" in the hills, particularly in Sohra or Cherrapunjee (Giri, Helen, The Khasi under British Rule, 1824-1947, 1998).

Post-1835, the area we now know as the Khasi and Jaintia Hills was recognised as two political entities by the British government: the Khasi-Jaintia region and the Khasi States (Bodhi, S. R., 2020). The Khasi states were independent whereas the Khasi-Jaintia regions were those under the direct control of the British government. These were either kingdoms defeated and annexed to the British Empire, as in the case of the Jaintia Hills, or areas acquired through various agreements and treaties, as in the case of Cherrapunjee.

There were three agreements between Dewan Sing Rajah of Sohra and the British government, represented by David Scott, in the year 1829: Treaties No. LXXVI, No. LXXVII, and another relating to the ceding of land for the setting up of a haat near Panduah and Company-Gunge near Sylhet (Bodhi, S. R., 2020). These areas were included in the Khasi-Jaintia region of the British government. Later, the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were made one of the districts of the Assam Division, and a notification to this effect was issued in the year 1858 (Bodhi, S. R., 2020).

Initially, the British set up a base at Nongkhlaw, which was later shifted to Sohra (Cherrapunjee) (Bodhi, S. R., 2020). It was from Cherrapunjee that the British administered the Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the area under direct British control which also included the territory that was part of the erstwhile Jaintia kingdom.

The British, having direct control over the Khasi and Jaintia Hills region, for reasons best known to the government, decided to establish a thanah at Jowai in 1855 (Giri, Helen, 1998). The thanah was evidently the first government institution set up in the hills portion of the Jaintia Hills. The establishment of the thanah was one of the main causes of the rebellion under the leadership of U Kiang Nangbah.

Bodhi also mentioned that the Khasi and Jaintia Hills District included only the

British areas that fell within the jurisdiction of the Jowai Subdivision. A notification to this effect was issued on 6 November 1869 and published in the Calcutta Gazette, 24 November 1869, p. 2067 (Bodhi, S. R., 2020). Perhaps the Jowai Subdivision, which was stationed at Jowai, was established by the British government in the year 1869. By then, there were two government institutions in Jowai: the thanah, established in 1855, and the Jowai Subdivision, established in 1869. Both these institutions were set up in the lawmusing area.

Jowai's Connection with Shillong

One of the factors that led to the Jaintia rebellion was the distance of Sohra from Jowai and the numerous problems that people from the area had to encounter when seeking redress for their grievances (Giri, H., p. 83). To address this problem, when the rebellion finally ended in the latter part of 1863, the government decided to station an English officer with full powers at Jowai (Giri, H., p. 95). The order stated: "... a European officer as Sub-Assistant Commissioner to be stationed in the Jynteh Hills, who should exercise, in subordination to the Principal Assistant Commissioner at Cherrapunjee, the same judicial, fiscal, and general powers as are given to detached Sub-Assistant Commissioners in Assam." (Giri, H., p. 127).

When the station was shifted from Sohra to Shillong or Jowai, the government felt the pressing requirements of public service and thus sanctioned two experimental offices, one at Yeodeo (Shillong) and the other at Jowai (Giri, H., p. 146). The transfer of British administrative headquarters from Cherrapunjee to Shillong occurred around 1864. The Jaintia Hills had been part of an independent kingdom and later part of the British Empire since 1823.

Jaintia is therefore not the creation of the British; it is part of the history of the hill people of the region, which later became one of the most powerful kingdoms in the area. Jaintia is also the country that U Kiang Nangbah had in mind when he rebelled against the British, and it was the freedom of this country that he fought for.

Take politics out of cricket

Editor,
Strained Indo-Bangladesh relations have severely affected cricket ties between the two countries ahead of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2026. The Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) refused to send its team to India for the tournament citing security concerns. The trigger for this crisis in world cricket was the BCCI's decision to drop Bangladesh pacer Mustafizur Rahman for next month's IPL. Following the violence against Hindu minority community in Bangladesh, things went berserk and anti-India radical forces in Bangladesh intensified their agitation against India. The BCCI's decision to drop the Bangladesh player added fuel to fire and helped the radical elements to gain an advantage. The BCB's claim that their team faces security risk for their matches in India and their demand that the ICC shift them to Sri Lanka hold no water. In fact, there is no such security threat to Bangladesh players. The Pakistan cricket authorities took advantage of the situation by supporting Bangladesh. Scotland has replaced Bangladesh in the tournament. Given that the Indian team's tour in September is likely to be cancelled, the BCB faces a huge financial loss. By refusing to play in India, Bangladesh has scored a self-goal.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

This appeal is not about choosing between human welfare and animal welfare. It is about justice, balance, and conscience. Meghalaya, and our nation, can only progress when we protect our people, secure our borders, uphold the dignity of women, respect faith and diversity, and treat animals humanely.

I place this concern with sincere respect, trusting that our compassionate governance and decisive action can restore public faith and social harmony.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Amanda A. Pakyntein,
Via email

Seed ball propagation technology in livestock

By Serene Roy Lakuna & Sulila S. Anar

Seed-ball technology is a cost-effective and environmentally-sustainable way of pasture development. Seed Balls support natural farming by minimizing soil disturbance, reducing the need for irrigation, and protecting seeds from predation and harsh environmental conditions. Seed Balls provide quality fodder all year round, increasing livestock nutrition, thereby leading to increased milk and meat production. Seed Balls are labour saving and are best to cover a large area in short time period. Originally popularized by Masanobu Fukuoka, a Japanese Natural Farming Pioneer in the 1970's especially after the publication of his famous book 'The One-Straw Revolution' (1975). Later adopted in Africa, India and the US for large scale regeneration.

Seed Ball technology is an innovative, low input and environmentally sustainable way to promote pasture development and for regenerating fodder resources. Seed-balls are small balls made of seeds of pasture grasses, legumes, or fod-

der trees along with soil or clay (to protect seeds) and compost or manure (as a nutrient source). This coating shields seeds from birds, rodents, and insects, prevents dehydration, provides initial nutrients and enables seed to germinate only when conditions are favourable, typically after sufficient rainfall (these balls are air-dried and dispersed directly onto the soil surface without tillage).

The different types of Seed Balls are Clay Seed-balls, Charcoal dust seed balls (for moisture retention), Bokashi Seed balls (Which is of fermented nutrient), Aerial seedballs with lightweight binders and coated seed pellets for commercial agriculture.

Selection of Seeds
● Seeds of native species from same climatic conditions are selected for making seed balls. This improves the chances of germination.

● In annual grass or legume species, seed should not be older than one year.

Preparation of Seed Balls
● Collect well drained native soil and sieve it to get clay particles.

● Mix clay, organic fertilizer of your choice and vermiculite in the ratio of 3:2:1.

● Add culture of beneficial microorganisms viz. N fixers, P solubilizers and mobilizers for improving the germination of seeds and growth of seedling even in adverse conditions.

● Add water in the seed ball substrate to prepare dough. If dough is very sticky, co-opeat may be mixed.

● Air dry seed balls for 24-48 hours in a shade before sowing or storing.

Propagation of Seed Balls
● Seed ball propagation must be started during pre-monsoon rainfall or from October-December in winter planting areas.

● The number of seed balls required for propagation depends on the site conditions, size of seed balls and objective of plantation.

Broadcasting/Aerial Throwing
● Aerial throwing of balls is recommended on hillocks or harsh habitats that are inaccessible or fragmented to develop maximum green cover.

● Broadcasting of seed balls can be done by throwing with hands or dropping from

helicopter or drones.

● The ploughing or pit digging is not required.

● It covers large area in least time.

Application of Seed Ball in Livestock Farming
1. Seed balls for fodder development in degraded grazing lands- seed balls helps in restoring overgrazed pastures. It reintroduces native fodder grasses. It also improves long term forage availability. (FAO Grassland Index 2019)

2. Fodder seed balls tailored for livestock nutrition- Seed Balls can be customized for different livestock nutrition goals.

3. Silvopasture Development- Silvopasture combines trees, grasses and livestock. The benefit is trees provide shades reducing heat stress in cattle. Availability of fodders even in dry season. This system is particularly useful in hot humid areas where heat stress reduces productivity. (FAO Grassland Index 2020)

4. Erosion control in Livestock Farms- Livestock movement often creates bare patches that lead to soil erosion, water logging and

increased incidence of hoof diseases. Seed Balls can quickly re-establish vegetation that stabilizes soil, improves drainage and creates safer walking surfaces for animals. (FAO Grassland Index 2019)

5. Fodder production for zero grazing and stall feeding units- Small holder dairy farmers need consistent fodder for stall-fed cattle. Seed Balls can be used to establish micro pastures around shades, develop mini fodder plots that require low maintenance and grow perennial fodder species with minimal labour. This reduces recurrent feed cost and ensures fresh forage availability.

Advantages of Seed-ball Preparation for Pasture Development
● Cost-effective and labor-saving: Requires minimal inputs and can be easily prepared and applied by farmers or community groups.

● Enhanced soil health: Adds organic matter and beneficial microbes, improving soil fertility.

● Adaptability to challenging conditions: Ideal for dry lands, hilly terrains, and degraded ecosystems.

● Eco-friendly and sustainable: Reduces dependence on heavy machinery and chemical inputs.

● Facilitates large-scale restoration: Easy to broadcast over large or remote areas, even using drones.

● Improved livestock productivity: Ensures year-round fodder availability, supporting animal health and yields.

Impact on Livestock Sector
Seed-ball based pasture development leads to:
a) Improved livestock nutrition.
b) Sustainable fodder resource round the year.
c) Increased milk and meat production.

Conclusion
Seed ball propagation is low-cost method for greening of fragmented and degraded sites. Seed balls are best to cover large area in short time period.

The main purpose of these Seed Balls is to provide quality fodder to the Dairy Cattle as well as to protect the environment.

(The authors are Internee Students (Final Year) B.V.Sc & A.H. College of Veterinary Sciences & Animal Husbandry, Jalukie, Peren, Nagaland)

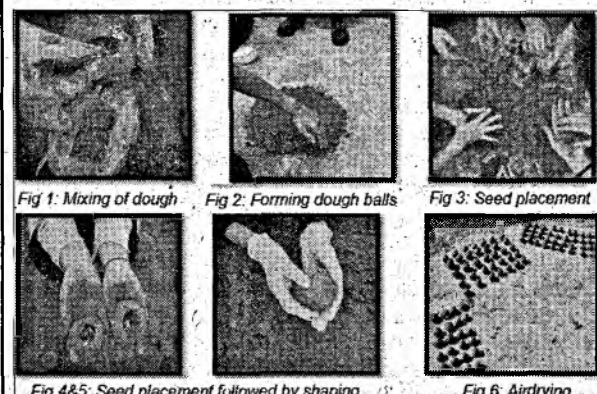


Fig 1: Mixing of dough Fig 2: Forming dough balls Fig 3: Seed placement Fig 4&5: Seed placement followed by shaping Fig 6: Airdrying

"The quality of a leader is reflected in the standards they set for themselves."

—Ray Kroc

The Shillong Times

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Going beyond the GSDP Hype

GOVERNOR CH Vijayashankar announced on Republic Day that Meghalaya's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) recorded a real growth of 9.66% in the financial year 2025 making it the second fastest growing state and scoring nearly double the national average. With this growth trajectory it would appear that Meghalaya's economy is growing exponentially. But is that the case and does this GSDP translate into real growth for Meghalaya's citizens? At the outset let's understand what GSDP is. Common citizens too should know how the GSDP is affecting them. The GSDP is the total monetary value of all final goods and services produced within the geographical boundaries of a state in a given period, usually a year, accounted without duplication. It is arrived at by aggregating the Gross Value Added (GVA) of all economic activities within the state, often referred to as the "production approach" or "value-added method." Undoubtedly some sectors in the state have managed to do well particularly the horticulture sector. Meghalaya's oranges and turmeric have become well known outside the state and abroad too. Add to that Meghalaya's organic honey or that is what producers claim but without any organic certification.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma correctly places much stress on technology and says the youth of Meghalaya must be future ready and get into the technology bandwagon. But the irony is that Meghalaya is also a data-scarce state. Any claims made without evidence becomes a mere assumption and makes policy intervention difficult. There is no specific data on the number of school and college drop-outs in 2023-24, 2024-25. There is also no data on the number of citizens here who live below the poverty line (BPL). Has poverty come down or have the numbers of the poor gone up? There is no latest data so how is the Government making interventions where it needs to?

Data is crucial for governments to enhance decision-making, improve service delivery, and increase operational efficiency. Since the CM is tech savvy he would know how important it is for officers in the last mile—the Blocks to get real time insights through Data analytics. This in turn helps to make policies that impact on the ground because they are formulated on the real needs of people thereby making service delivery more personalised. The role of Government is primarily to allocate resources based on needs, not on assumptions. The real need in Meghalaya's rural outback are roads, rural livelihoods, education and healthcare. Unless these are in place, urban migration will grow and urban centres face pressure to provide the basic amenities. The exponential growth in the number of hawkers in Shillong city, with many coming from the outskirts, is a clear indication of the lack of opportunities in rural areas. Meghalaya needs to buck up on data generation in key areas. One question that stares the state in the face is whether the Anganwadi centres are even working. Most of them are in a dilapidated condition and look as if they are rarely open. Yet these are centres that are supposed to address malnutrition, under-nutrition, stunting of children which the National Family Health Survey (NFHS) has consistently pointed out to. The Government should not shy away from getting accurate data for that alone would enable it to address the real problems of Meghalaya's citizens.

From Darjeeling to Shillong: Who Decides the Fate of Heritage?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

"Tea is us. Tea is not ours". This is the name of a film made by Ugyal Tshering Lama Yolmo, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication at SRM University Sikkim, which encapsulates succinctly the trap in which the people of Darjeeling find themselves in relation to an important part of their heritage: tea. He shared this during a group activity with participants (including myself) at the academic workshop "Temporalities of Futuring: Heritage, Custom and Tradition in the Himalayas," which was followed by a two-day fieldwork-based ethnographic workshop titled "Sensing Darjeeling: Experiential Ethnographies across Time" in Darjeeling. These workshops were part of the annual program jointly organized by Leiden University (the Netherlands), Ashoka University (Haryana), and RV University (Bangalore) under the project "Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas". As part of the workshop, we visited the Phoboshering tea gardens, established around 1856, to understand how the community residing in this estate perceives tea cultivation—an activity that has become synonymous with the region and its people.

Considering the high value of tea from the region, I was greatly surprised by the poor condition of the roads leading to the tea estates. Except for a few short stretches near the army encampments, the road was narrow and full of potholes, made even more risky by sharp switchbacks with no railings along the edge. This neglect was symptomatic of the longstanding apathy suffered by that most crucial to this highly lucrative industry: the tea garden workers. Eventually, we reached the house of our local interlocutor, who took us to meet a few women workers pruning the tea plants.

The workers belonged to the Nepali-speaking community and were descendants of migrants who arrived in the region as part of the labor force for the tea estates in the 1860s. Despite having lived in the region for more than 150 years, they do not possess land rights. Their fortunes are tied to the tea estates and the companies

that lease the land from the Government of West Bengal for a period of 99 years. If a tea estate changes ownership from one company to another, the workers are transferred along with the tea gardens to the new owners. They are, therefore, treated as commodities to be traded, with little or no ability to resist this process.

The plight of the tea garden workers is therefore similar to that of landless people. They possess no assets other than the wages they earn, which amount to a paltry 6,000 rupees per month—well below the minimum wage prescribed in West Bengal. Low wages and the lack of land rights are persistent complaints of the workers and has remained a source of constant tension. However, conversations with the workers and the interlocutor revealed the existence of an informal land tenure system that allows workers to hold certain assets, which they can dispose of for cash if required.

An important asset the workers have is the forest surrounding the settlement, which appeared to be mostly natural but, as we were told, some parts of it were planted by the workers for extracting fuelwood, fodder, water, and some amount of wild food. Workers could even harvest timber from these forests to build their houses. With wages being very low, this helps offset some of the costs that would have been incurred if the items were bought from the market. What was surprising was that, although the land on which the forest stood belonged to the tea estate, the parts of the forest planted by the workers became their private property, which they could use as they saw fit. This informal form of ownership was also seen in the case of the land on which the workers had built their houses.

A few of the workers' houses clearly showed signs of the substantial investment made in improving the dwelling. Some had multiple stories and wore a freshly painted look, with vehicles parked in front of the house. They did not look like the houses of workers who earned only 6,000 rupees per month. We were told

that these houses belonged to families who had family members working outside the tea estate in different jobs, which included the Indian Army. So, the houses were built using remittances. The houses and the land on which they are built are the private property of the family, which can even sell it to others. However, since the sale is restricted only to people from the surrounding region, the prices received are very low. Vacant lots near the house can be used to build a new house for extended family members if needed. So, while formally the tea workers have no legal land rights, there exists an informal land tenure system where they enjoy private property rights. But since it is informal, it is also highly precarious.

The ownership of the house and the land depends on the whims of the estate managers. Well paid and living in a bungalow provided by the company, they could restrict any new building or ask existing ones to be dismantled, with the workers being helpless to comply with the order. If the family no longer has any member working for the tea estate, they would lose the right to reside within it. So, despite the high investment and effort made in improving the land, they would have to leave the estate, making them homeless. The family of one of the participants and a member of my group faced such a dilemma. Her father had got a government job. However, he was told that if he joined it, he would have to leave the estate. Worried that the family would be rendered homeless, he declined the job and remained with the tea estate. The risk is more acute for families who may not have any member working outside the tea estate and for whom the paltry wage is the only source of income. This highlights the highly precarious condition in which many tea workers find themselves, where they have no choice but to allow themselves to be exploited by the tea estate.

According to Ugyal, people from outside Darjeeling derive a false sense of romanticism about the region and its people from popular-Hindi songs like

"Mere Sapno Ki Rani Kab Aayegi Tu" from the 1969 film Aradhana. The tea estates became an object of heritage imposed upon the region and the community. But, in reality, the train in the song is a symbol of the extraction of the resources and wealth of the region—the revenue from tea—while leaving the local community impoverished and trapped by that romanticism. The tea estates do not allow them to escape the precarious situation in which they find themselves, i.e., lack of land rights and low wages. But without the tea estates, they would be thrust into a more precarious situation, i.e., homelessness with no income. In recent years, the government has embraced the romanticized narrative of tea being a heritage symbol and has begun supporting tourism in the tea estates. Gardens are being uprooted for constructing resorts, with no transparency and no guarantee that the existing workers will be absorbed and provided with decent wages. Heritage has therefore become a trap from which the people cannot escape, at least not without hurting themselves in the process.

Whether to preserve heritage or dismantle it to create something new and, maybe, better is a question that is being asked in Meghalaya as well. Recently, there have been rumours circulating that the iconic Presbyterian Church at Police Bazar, which was built in 1876 and rebuilt in 1902, is slated for destruction to make way for a mall. Unlike the tea gardens in Darjeeling, the loss of the church will be keenly felt by many, and not just Christians (I have enjoyed sitting on its lawn). Here, the question raised is different: is conservation more important than commerce, particularly when the heritage in question is still providing a very important service? In Darjeeling, the tea workers are trapped by their circumstances and, in a way, are helpless to change their situation. What about the worshippers in Shillong? Are they also helpless? I am guessing we will find out in the future.

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

The Silent Piano...

At home my piano is a silent one. It stands there in the sitting room, polished, upright, respectable. Visitors notice it immediately. They nod approvingly and say things like old world charm, classic taste, elegance. Some even run their fingers lightly along its glossy surface, as though touching history itself. The piano accepts the compliments quietly, knowing full well that admiration without use is a rather hollow affair.

With my daughters gone and my wife busy with life's many urgencies, the piano waits. It lends character to the room the way antiques do, by simply existing. It gives the space a certain dignity, as though the room itself has read good books and listens to classical music in the evenings. It has become part of the furniture, part of the scenery, part of the background of my life.

And yet its keys remain untouched. White and black in perfect order. Lined up like obedient soldiers who have never been asked to march. Silent. Patient.

There is something unsettling about unused potential. It makes no noise. It causes no trouble. It simply sits there, quietly accusing.

As I stood looking at it today, the piano spoke. Not

cordial but distant. But even untrained fingers can coax beauty out of a well made instrument.

The notes filled the room, hesitant at first, then a little more confident, like a voice that realises it is finally being heard.

The sound surprised me. It was warm. It was generous. It was forgiving.

The piano did not judge my lack of skill. It did not sigh or roll its imaginary eyes. It simply offered what it had been created to give. Music.

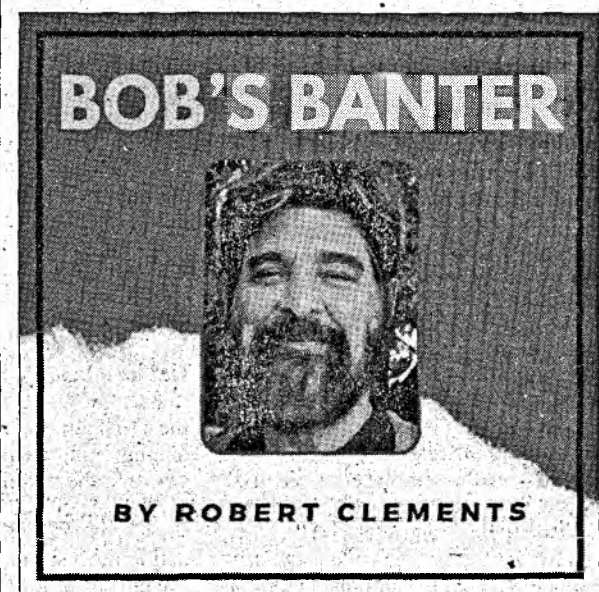
And in that moment, I realised how many women around us are just like that piano. Waiting. Capable. Rich with tone and depth. All they need is an invitation to play.

Not permission. Not charity.

Not special favours. Just an honest invitation. Tell us what you think. Show us what you know. Let us hear your voice.

Instead, we often hand them dusters and beauty creams, while quietly reserving microphones, boardrooms and decision making tables for ourselves.

We still marvel when a woman drives well, as though steering requires ovaries. We still express



aloud, of course. Pianos are far too dignified for that. But its message was clear.

Aren't I like so many beautiful women, it seemed to say. Displayed proudly. Shown off to visitors. Admired for appearance. But rarely listened to. Rarely asked to speak. Rarely allowed to reveal what lies beneath the polished surface.

I felt suitably chastened. The piano was right. We live in a world where beauty is applauded loudly while ability is acknowledged softly, if at all. Where women are praised for how they look before they are respected for how they think. Where brains are an afterthought, a footnote, something to be discovered only if one accidentally stumbles upon it.

From childhood onwards, the conditioning begins. Pretty girl. Cute girl. Lovely smile. Nice hair. Beautiful eyes. Somewhere, buried under these well meaning compliments, intelligence waits quietly for its turn. If it ever comes. I have often wondered what would happen if, for a single day, the world reversed its priorities. If little girls were first told, You are sharp. You are curious. You are capable. You can solve problems. You can build things. You can change things. And only later, almost as an afterthought, You also happen to be beautiful.

What a dangerous world that would become. Dangerous to outdated mindsets. Dangerous to fragile male egos. Dangerous to systems that thrive on keeping half the population ornamental. So we settle instead for pianos in living rooms. Gleaming. Impressive. Silent. I opened the piano. The lid rose like an eyelid finally waking from sleep. There was a faint creak, the kind old furniture makes when it stretches after a long rest. I placed my fingers on the keys and played a few notes.

I am no pianist. Let us establish that firmly. My relationship with music is

pleasant shock when a woman understands finance, as though numbers are genetically allergic to femininity. We still say things like, She is intelligent, for a woman. Imagine telling a man, He is brave, for a man.

The piano notes lingered in the air long after I stopped playing. They hovered like shy guests unsure whether they were welcome to stay.

Somewhere across the country, more than seven hundred million women smiled as those imaginary notes travelled through the air. Not because a piano was being played, but because a small acknowledgement had been made.

That beauty without voice is incomplete. That admiration without respect is shallow. That decoration is not destiny.

I imagined pianos all over India suddenly being opened.

In drawing rooms. In classrooms. In laboratories. In police stations. In courtrooms. In corporate offices.

In kitchens where brilliance has been quietly simmering for generations. Imagine the symphony. It would not be perfect. It would not be neat. It would not always be polite.

But it would be real. The piano in my sitting room seemed pleased. Not smug. Not triumphant. Just quietly satisfied.

For the first time in a long while, it was no longer just a showpiece.

And neither, I hope, will the women around us remain showpieces for much longer. Now if you will excuse me, I have an important appointment.

With my piano.

And with a world that desperately needs to start listening...

(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

Where are the Career Counsellors?

Editor, The recent CBSE circular dated January 19, 2026, mandating the appointment of career counsellors in every one of its schools, addresses an urgent and pressing need. It presents the career counselling fraternity with an opportunity of unprecedented proportions. At the same time, it presents the heads of CBSE schools with a challenge! There are about 30,000 CBSE schools in the country. But do we have that many trained career counsellors in the country? Where a career counsellor is not available, the notification provides for the appointment of teachers who must acquire the competencies of career counselling.

A 50-hour training must be completed within a period of 2 years. Focus is brought to bear therefore on the urgent need for capacity building. It is essential that these counsellor training courses are theoretically sound, evidence-based and focused on the skills of career counselling. Above all, they must be culturally grounded and sensitive to our unequal socio-economic realities. Further, if career guidance is to be effectively delivered, the school must, performance make provisions in the timetable for at least 20 to 25 periods over the year dedicated exclusively to career guidance. In short, the next steps to optimize this welcome mandate are to create a qualified workforce and also make time-tabling

commitments for the implementation of career guidance in the classroom. It is when these provisions are made that this critical policy will find its manifestation in the lives of children.

Yours etc.,
Gideon Arulmani PhD.,
(Clinical and Career Psychologist & Director, The Promise Foundation)
Via email

Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) Losing Trust of Aspirants

Editor, The credibility of any public service commission rests on transparency, fairness, and adherence to established norms. Unfortunately, recent developments surrounding recruitment processes conducted by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) raise serious concerns about whether these principles are still being upheld.

In recent times, aspirants have witnessed several anomalies in examinations conducted by the Commission. While multiple recruitment processes have attracted criticism, the issue that warrants urgent attention today is the conduct of the SDO/AE recruitment for PHE-PWD. Several articles and representations have already highlighted irregularities in this examination process. However, no meaningful corrective action appears to have been taken so far.

To begin with, the written

examination was preponed by almost a month, and candidates were informed at very short notice. Such abrupt rescheduling not only disrupts preparation but also disadvantages candidates who plan their studies and professional commitments in good faith, based on officially published schedules.

Secondly, a significant number of candidates flagged incorrect questions and discrepancies in the answer keys used for evaluating the written examination. As per the Commission's own provisions, representations were duly submitted by candidates seeking correction. Naturally, aspirants expected that these objections would be examined carefully and that revised answer keys would be published before the declaration of results. Regrettably, this expectation was ignored.

Instead, the Commission proceeded to declare the results of the written examination without addressing the objections raised. This decision has severely dented confidence in the evaluation process and raises legitimate questions about procedural fairness.

Most concerning, however, is an unusual and unprecedented pattern observed in the selection ratio for the interview stage. Against 31 advertised vacancies, only 48 candidates were shortlisted for interview—resulting in a ratio of roughly 1.5 candidates per vacancy. Such a narrow ratio is unheard of in the history of the Commission. Equally troubling is the fact that this ratio was never disclosed in the original advertisement, denying candidates the opportunity to make informed decisions.

By adopting such practices, the Commission is effectively robbing deserving candidates of a fair chance. A recruitment body entrusted with shaping the state's administrative and technical workforce cannot afford to operate in a manner that appears opaque or arbitrary.

Equally disturbing is the Commission's apparent silence. Despite repeated concerns raised through the press and public forums, there has been no official clarification or response. This silence only reinforces the perception that accountability is being taken lightly. If authorities remain indifferent to public discourse, it sends a dangerous message that citizens must resort to litigation—even for basic procedural issues.

At this juncture, the Commission is expected to act responsibly; to respond publicly, to address the grievances raised, and to withhold the interview results until due process is followed. Ignoring these concerns will only escalate the situation and compel affected candidates to seek legal remedies.

This letter should be treated not merely as criticism, but as information and a warning. The power of the press may seem diminished, but public trust—once lost—is far harder to recover. It is in the interest of both aspirants and the institution itself that corrective action is taken now, before the damage becomes irreversible.

Yours etc.,
Name withheld on request,
Via email

Celebrating the Republic while overlooking its frontline

Editor, As the nation commemorates Republic Day, extolling freedom, equality, and justice, a quiet but pressing question demands our reflection. How complete is our freedom when those who safeguard public health remain unacknowledged?

Allied Health Professionals including laboratory technologists, pharmacists, radiographers, therapists, and others; constitute the often-invisible backbone of diagnosis, treatment, and disease surveillance. Yet, their invaluable service frequently goes unnoticed. Shakespeare cautioned against the pain of being thankless to one's own; today, that caution resonates profoundly in the corridors of our hospitals and health centers.

Employment without timely remuneration, clear administrative guidance, or adequate structural support remains an unfulfilled promise. The discrepancy is especially stark in remote and rural postings, including regions such as Meghalaya's Garo Hills where many professionals operate without access to safe or official accommodation. Vacant policies alongside occupied quarters compel frontline workers to fend for themselves in unfamiliar terrains, exposing a widening chasm between policy declarations and lived realities.

Equally disheartening is the recurring experience of

Allied Health Professionals being bypassed during official visits, where ministers and senior authorities often refrain from engagement. Opportunities to listen, observe working conditions, or even acknowledge their presence are routinely missed. A republic that champions dialogue, representation, and inclusivity cannot justify such deliberate distance from its frontline workforce.

Republic Day is not merely a ceremonial homage to constitutional birth; it is a moral litmus test. It interrogates whether the exalted principles enshrined in our Constitution, justice, equality, and dignity, have been faithfully actualized in practice. Administrative delays, neglect of welfare provisions, and the silencing of frontline voices erode not only workforce morale but also the very foundation of public healthcare delivery.

A republic is ultimately measured not by parades or pomp, but by how it treats those who serve quietly, faithfully, and without pause, even on the very days the nation celebrates its freedom.

This reflection is written in the interest of public welfare, grounded in faith in constitutional values, and without any intent to defame individuals or institutions.

Yours etc.,
'Name withheld on request'
Via email

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

Optimism on economic front

THE Economic Survey 2025-26 presents a rosy picture of the national economy and asserts that we are "relatively better off than most other countries" due to the nation's strong macroeconomic fundamentals. It however warns that this does not guarantee insulation from external economic developments, and expresses "cautious optimism" amid global uncertainties. The outlook seems good. The survey projects India's potential growth rate to 7 per cent — up from the 6.5 per cent three years ago when it was still recovering from the aggressive global Covid-related hits. The survey says India runs a trade deficit in goods and that its net trade surplus in services and remittances would not suffice to offset this. The survey admits that the Indian rupee "underperformed" in 2025. India benefits from its "large domestic market, strong foreign exchange reserves." These provide buffers in an environment where global "financial volatility is imminent and geopolitical uncertainty is permanent." India's priority, it says, is boosting manufacturing. Notably, the survey proposes an age bar for social media use, stressing a cut-down in online teaching to reduce digital addiction.

The survey claims the government remains well on track to achieve a 4.4 per cent fiscal deficit target for FY 26. The target would be achieved through public investment and consolidations. "The external environment will require India to prioritise both domestic growth maximization and shock absorption." It notes that India's relatively late entry into AI has its positive side. It offers an "unprecedented advantage," allowing it to avoid energy-intensive and financially risky models adopted by the previous players. India would instead pursue a more resource-efficient and inclusive AI path aligned with the country's public objectives. The central government's capital expenditure has increased by four times from the 2.63 lakh crore in 2018 to 11.21 lakh crore and the projected capital expenditure for this fiscal is 15.48 lakh crore. Infrastructure is a key growth driver. The NH infrastructure grew by about 60 per cent in the last 11 years. The railway infrastructure expanded, it says but does not elaborate much on this, and claims a 99 per cent electrification has been achieved. India has emerged as the world's third largest domestic aviation market, with the number of airports increasing from 74 to 164 under the Modi dispensation.

Agriculture and services sector are cited as the largest contributors to GDP. These, along with the other economic engine, manufacturing, "should fire together." Swadeshi, the survey says, is a "legitimate policy instrument" when trade is longer reciprocal and the market no longer neutral. India's foodgrain production growth is driven by rice, wheat, maize and coarse cereals. With a good monsoon season, this production has reached 3,577 lakh metric tonnes, an increase of 254 LMT over the previous year. The expanding network of free trade agreements that India finalized with other nations are supporting the country's trade strategy by providing reliable market access amid global uncertainties. India's total exports reached a record \$825 billion, registering a 6.1 per cent year-on-year growth. Notably, India recorded the lowest inflation rate since the start of the CPI series, with the latest average headline inflation recorded at 1.7 per cent. The mood, overall, is one of optimism about the future.

Letters to the Editor

The Youth of Today

Editor,

Our children are the future of our country and of our state. Yet, on observing the behaviour of many young people today, one is compelled to ask—are we truly satisfied with the way things are shaping up?

A small mistake, when pointed out, often results in an angry outburst. Many children react impulsively, committing acts they may later regret. Parents, on the other hand, live in constant fear—afraid that disciplining their children too strictly might provoke extreme anger or rebellion.

A walk through the streets of Shillong presents a worrying picture. School-going children, still in uniform, daringly lighting a cigarette in public. They sit in cafés with friends, sipping cappuccinos and smoking as though it were fashionable. And this is not limited to boys alone. Parents must also be vigilant about their daughters, many of whom casually take a puff or two without any sense of concern.

There are several hang-out spots where such behaviour is common—small restaurants and cafés such as those near Dhanketi or under Iahui in Laitumkrah. Are our daughters unaware that smoking increases the risk of infertility? Are we failing to sensitise our children about the dignity and responsibility that comes with wearing a school uniform?

Are schools in Shillong—both rural and urban—imposing strict disciplinary measures on students who indulge in such shameful acts? Should such behaviour not warrant suspension or even expulsion?

Yes, we too experienced our teenage years, but we never indulged in such behaviour openly. We respected our elders and would have never dared to act this way in their presence.

Today, routine inspections—sometimes at home and in schools—have become a necessity. Children may be carrying lighters, matchboxes, cigarettes, cigars, condoms, or makeup kits. Let us intervene early, before they reach a far more dangerous stage—one where drugs become a part of their lives and there would be no turning back.

Yours etc.,
Dr. B. Laiphlang,
Via email

Addressing school/college drop-out an imperative

Editor,

The editorial "Going beyond the GDP Hype" (ST January 29, 2026) made interesting reading. Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) alone is misleading because it is like measuring the size of a pie without asking how many people share it. Per capita GSDP adds context and shows how big

It has become customary to observe every milestone with celebrations. As is the usual routine, Meghalaya Day (January 21) is observed with official functions which include traditional songs and dances. We hardly spend time to reflect on the trajectory that the State has taken in its 54 year journey. Are we the people better off than we were 54 years ago? Are our rural habitats more connected and developed today? What parameters do we use to measure development? I have said this times without number that Meghalaya lacks data on key development sectors such as health, education and livelihoods and above all on the number of families that have dipped below poverty line. As a society we should not be shelling responsibility for the increasing number of drug addicts but should be sitting together to look for the reasons why so many young ones take to drugs—a route that suggests that the drug user has reached the end of the road; has lost hope; sees no light at the end of the dark tunnel.

Every now and again we hear claims about Meghalaya's achievements played out on national platforms. Those of us in the State don't really know whether those achievements mean anything at all to those struggling to live their lives in distant villages. This is the era of awards and state governments seem to work only towards featuring in one or other of those awards which resemble a shallow race towards nothing.

The key measures for the development of a state involve a multi-dimensional approach that encompasses economic growth, social improvement, infrastructure building, and sustainable practices. But the intrinsic measure of development is in enhancing the quality of life of the citizens and not just increasing income. Sadly, in Meghalaya incomes of the poorest are further decreasing because of the unsustainable nature of their work whether it be farming or quarrying. Every quarry takes away prime forest land and sometimes even farmland. The destruction of forests means depleting water sources but quarrying continues as it becomes a source of huge earning for quarry owners and a means of subsistence labour for those working in those quarries. There is no study as to how many quarries Meghalaya can have without upsetting the environmental equity.

each slice is, but still does not tell us if slices are distributed fairly. I think there is a need for changing the method of GSDP as the best practices are to use GSDP for scale, per capita GSDP for prosperity and complement both with inequality and quality-of-life indicators for a true picture.

According to 2023-24 SDG Index Meghalaya recorded one of the highest dropout rates in India at the secondary school level in 2023-24, with an average of 21.7% for classes 9-10. Early reports for 2024-25 suggest the crisis is continuing, prompting reforms such as reviving residential schools and expanding Eklavya Model Residential Schools (EMRS). College dropout data is less systematically reported, but concerns remain about transition rates from secondary to higher education. As far as college dropouts are concerned there is limited official statistics as most reporting focuses on school-level dropouts. Higher secondary dropout rate reduces the pool of students entering college. The barriers are financial constraints, lack of local higher education institutions and migration for better opportunities. Hence the government may kindly consider expanding scholarships and vocational programs to reduce college attrition. Everyone knows that the causes of dropouts is because of economic hardship, geographical isolation, early marriage and child labour particularly affecting

girls in rural areas, language barrier as institutions often instruct in English/Hindi while many students speak Khasi, Garo or their mother tongue.

Then we come to the illegally operated coal mines which have never closed for a single day since rat hole coal mining was banned in 2014. The fact that this extractive activity continues to this day means that the Government is hands in glove with the coal mine owners. In short, there is no rule of law in Meghalaya. So, what is the police force there for? Have they been specifically tasked to apply the law only in certain areas of policing such as thefts and murders and to shut their eyes to illegal coal mining? So, on Meghalaya Day, what are the police celebrating? The collapse of the rule of law vis a vis illegal coal mining?

True that there have been some positive developments insofar as connectivity between Shillong and Tura is concerned via the Nongstoin highway which also means that travellers are not held ransom to the erstwhile single connecting link via Assam. For the completion of this road project, winding as it does like a snake and making the drive a roller coaster ride, we owe to Dr Mukul Sangma still under a cloud. As the Chief Minister of Meghalaya, that's one project he is remembered for. Dr Mukul Sangma also dealt with a strong hand the shenanigans of the multifarious pressure groups in Meghalaya who claim to represent the will of the people without asking for their permission and without being elected. Today these pressure groups seem to have got a new lease of life and the number of acronym-borne groups all claiming to work for the larger good of the people have increased exponentially. Clearly, a weak government tends to give birth to all kinds of elements that pick and choose issues but leave out the most important ones affecting the poorest.

Since Meghalaya is a data scarce state, would it not have been a bonus if one or other of these pressure groups got into the task of generating robust data on school dropouts at various stages of education—primary, upper primary, high school, higher secondary, school, college, university. This would actually address the basic problems of Meghalaya. It would inform us the reasons why children drop out of school. Is it poverty? Is it the lack of availability of schools within walking distance in the vil-

lage? Is it simply because the kids find no interest in school? Why do parents not consider education important and relevant? The Government assures free and compulsory education up to age 14. But are the uniforms and books also available for free? Are these government run schools available in the last village of Meghalaya? We need answers to these questions if we have to repair our broken social order.

It is said that education liberates the mind, encourages critical thinking and empowers individuals to question authority and power holders. So is education being intentionally deprived because an educated human being could pose dangers to electoral politics and the political playbook used in Meghalaya for decades? Also it is easier to brainwash the uneducated and make him/her repeat what a politician says than it is to win over a questioning mind.

In terms of healthcare, while there are claims that maternal and child mortality have come down and that better facilities are now available for pregnant mothers to stay closer to the health centres as they arrive closer to the delivery date, the Civil Hospitals leave much to be desired and there are no attempts to address the issues of poor emergency services. This paper has published cases where patients needing critical care have been left unattended. What kind of medical service is this and why are there no questions raised by the sundry pressure groups on such critical issues?

One Department that has lacked accountability, and continues to do so is the Public Works Department (PWD). The Chief Engineers of the past who have headed this Department should answer why the quality of roads constructed in every part of this state don't last more than a year? This Department is known for its shameless corruption spree and we the people have remained silent for 54 years. Not once have we raised our voices collectively against the quality of roads constructed even within the Greater Shillong area, forget the rural outback where the roads are so bad that sitting inside a vehicle feels like a horse ride. At the risk of sounding repetitive, I say this again. Most of us tend to outsource our problems to pressure groups but

forget that they will not speak out on an issue where they have vested interests. Some pressure group leaders are also contractors in government departments. So how do we know they are not the contractors for some of our roads? That's the irony, dear readers. We are caught between the devil and the deep sea unless we decide to own our problems and tackle the authorities one by one.

Look at the time taken for all projects in Meghalaya. A similar highway in Assam or elsewhere in the country would not have taken as much time as the Shillong-Dawki highway. It's not as if Meghalaya alone has difficult terrain. The reasons could be something else and we need to ferret out these reasons instead of being long-suffering, silent onlookers and taking everything lying down.

We need to take a pledge to make the Government work; to hold it accountable for service delivery; to ask tough questions on why service delivery at the lowest level is so decrepit. It's time to hold the Block Development Officers too accountable instead of addressing them as "Sahep." Actually our village headmen (Rangbah Shnong) have not asserted their authority and used the power vested on them to do regular auditing of schemes in their villages. The tragedy is when a Rangbah Shnong or an executive member of the Dorbar Shnong becomes a contractor. That is a conflict of interest which goes against the principles of village governance.

This article may look like a litany of grievances but is there anything to write home about Meghalaya? True there are concerns to hold the attention of the townsfolk but there is no respite for those in distant villages. Let's lend our voices to them since the MLAs seem to have lost their voices. In any case in a democracy we cannot expect the MLA alone to deliver. We the people too have a responsibility to question and seek accountability. For starters let's demand robust data sets on school/college/university drop-outs, human development indices and state of our roads. 54 years is a long time in the history of a state!

Tailpiece: Senior bureaucrats and technocrats should travel to the villages more often and see peoples' miseries first hand. The Secretariat is too comfortable a place and too far removed from the realities that define Meghalaya.

barriers—remote geography, economic hardship, and limited secondary institutions. High dropout rates at secondary level shrink the pool of college entrants, worsening transition to higher education. Without aggressive interventions, Meghalaya risks long-term skill deficits compared to the rest of the country.

The editorial rightly pointed out that "Meghalaya needs to buck up on data generation in key areas" as economic planning without data risks chasing GDP growth without improving per-capita welfare while social planning without data risks ignoring marginalized groups or failing to anticipate demographic shifts. Together, data ensures policies are targeted, fair and future-ready.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Shillong Takes the Stage

Editor,

Shillong's emergence as a global music destination is no accident, it is the natural result of decades of passion, culture, and crowd energy. In recent years, world renowned artists have taken the stage in our city: Ed Sheeran drew over 30,000 fans to Jawaharlal Nehru Stadium, underscoring Shillong's capacity to host performances of global scale; Bryan Adams electrified crowds with his iconic hits; and superstars such as Akon, Jason Derulo,

The Script, and the British pop group Blue have also performed here, bringing diverse international audiences to our hills and valleys.

Now, with Def Leppard and Scorpions set to headline major concerts, placing Shillong at the starting point of legendary global tours, the world is finally waking up to what we have always known, that Shillong is a cultural powerhouse.

Although this spotlight is not just an opportunity for celebration, it is a call to pave the way forward, to show the world—How it's done sustainably. If we are to benefit fully, the Government of Meghalaya must ensure sustainable, inclusive development that protects our ecology, respects local communities, and avoids the pitfalls seen in over commercialised destinations like Goa or Shimla. Concert tourism should be coupled with waste management, ecological safeguards, improved infrastructure, and equitable opportunities for local artists and local businesses, especially the grassroots workers.

Shillong's voice resonates globally, let its legacy be one of music, culture, and responsible progress.

Yours etc.,
Shivani Pde
Via email

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Without a Wall

By Akshita Thakur

"Black holes, quasars, supercomputers: nothing can compete with the complexity of even the most basic bacterial cell"

- Clifford P. Brangwynne

If we step outside on a misty morning, we can watch nature perform one of its miracles. Tiny droplets of dew begin forming on leaves, grass, and window panes as the cool air settles. Water simply condenses from the air, rearranging itself into shimmering beads. What if I told you that the very same phenomenon unfolds inside us, not on mountainsides or rooftops, but within our own cells, the building blocks of our body?

Biology textbooks taught us that cells are like a small bustling city, where organelles are like buildings that are surrounded by walls, separating the energy house of our cell, mitochondria, from the nucleus, the place where our genetic material is stored. But this picture was incomplete; cells also create reaction hubs without any membrane; known as membrane-less organelles (MLOs). Researchers have known about these organelles for well over a century. The nucleolus, for example, was described in the 1800s. They could see it under the microscope, dense, rounded but no membrane surrounding it: Stress granules, PML (Promyelocytic leukemia) bodies, and P-bodies are other examples that exist. They were seen as odd exceptions. Why do the components present in MLOs not mix with the surroundings? What organization could a cell use to form MLOs? We knew they existed but didn't know what the underlying principle behind their organization was. The mystery was held for decades. Until something changed in 2009.

Clifford Brangwynne and Anthony Hyman in Max Planck Institute of Molecular Cell Biology and Genetics in Dresden studied cells from a roundworm (Perinuclear granules in C. elegans embryos), visualized them under a microscope, and observed a structure blooming apart and then coalescing in lava lamp fashion. The structures (P granules) were behaving like oil droplets in water. We know that oil and water don't mix; even a vigorously shaken bottle will eventually separate them into two distinct layers. These distinct layers are both liquids, segregating from each other due to different chemistries. The separation was occurring naturally because of a process called liquid-liquid phase separation (LLPS). It was a widely known principle to physicists, but not applied to cells. This was a paradigm shift, viewing these droplets as liquids. Once seen, it made sense. A new field was born.

Inside cells, proteins and nucleic acids follow similar rules. Under certain conditions, they cluster together and separate from their surroundings, forming a dense, droplet-like structure through a dance of molecular interactions. LLPS is the primary mechanism believed to generate these structures. Scientists now call these structures "bio-molecular condensates and they may act as micro-reactors, bringing the right molecules together, and when the job is done, they dissolve. They can form and dissolve on timescales ranging from microseconds to several minutes or even hours, and that provides cells with extraordinary flexibility. This flexibility is what makes them so powerful and mysterious. Since 2009, the role of condensates has been extensively studied, leading to groundbreaking discoveries including their involvement in overall cellular maintenance, DNA repair, and regulating nucleic acids

under stress conditions.

This elegant system also carries a risk; while these condensates are functionally relevant, problems arise when the balance is disrupted. Proteins that generally form dynamic, reversible droplets can become misfolded or sticky, leading to solid aggregates. This is linked to several neurodegenerative disorders and cancer. Yet, condensates can be fascinating tools for scientists, because they gather molecules with precision and fall apart just as easily. One of the most important examples where this matters could be DNA repair. Although there is no consensus, many labs interpret the data differently.

DNA is the "instructional manual" of life, but it is vulnerable to sunlight and harmful chemicals, and it can break, just like a typo or tear in an instruction manual that can lead to errors if not repaired. DNA is double-stranded, its structure is like a twisted ladder, and double-stranded DNA damage is one of the most dangerous types, in which it is cut into two, if not correctly repaired, it can lead to cancer or neurodegenerative disorders. Fortunately, our cells are amazing; they have special processes to repair DNA, but repairing DNA is not as simple as replacing a spare part with a machine. The cell needs to bring multiple proteins to the right place and right time. But how does a cell manage to multitask?

"Here comes phase separation to the rescue," Ned Wingreen (Princeton University) said, emphasizing that when DNA suffers a double-stranded break, the repair proteins could form a droplet around it called a repair foci, repair it, and then eventually dissolve; though this idea is still under active investigation.

It is understood that repairing DNA is essential but studying it is another challenge. What if phase separation could be exploited to reconstruct the pathways in a simple and controlled system? Numerous studies have shown that the condensates are formed through predictable molecular interactions, and we can design such droplets that mimic the reactions happening inside our cells. These simple and controlled systems can provide a powerful way to dissect mechanisms involved in DNA repair in a highly tunable environment. It could bridge the gap between in vitro biochemistry and complex in vivo cellular biology.

Clifford Brangwynne said, "The cell is like a universe. Any place you point to with a very fine needle, you could spend a lifetime studying it. And people do." Cellular droplets are among the most fascinating discoveries in this universe, revealing to us the surprising and dynamic ways cells organize their inner world. Perhaps the most poetic twist is that phase separation in cells is not a modern way of looking at life; it may have helped create it. In the 1930s, biochemist Alexander Oparin proposed that early Earth's organic molecules separated into primitive droplets called co-acervates. These droplets concentrate materials, enabling reactions that would have been impossible in dilute oceans. The discovery of bio-molecular condensates in modern cells supports the idea that life may have begun in droplets rather than membranes. A tiny, ancient dew drop could have been the first cradle of biology. In nutshell They highlight that cells use multiple strategies to coordinate their chemistry and these droplets remind us that cells can achieve remarkable organization without a wall.

(The writer is PhD Student, Plaksha University, Mohali)

"Always turn a negative situation into a positive situation."

— Michael Jordan

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Politics of Hate and Division

AS elections to the Assam State Assembly draws near the rhetoric of hate towards the Bengali speaking Muslims who are termed as "Miyas" is gaining traction with Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma leading the charge. It was on the eve of another election in Assam in February 1983 that the Nellie massacre occurred. In what was a planned and targeted attack on Muslims within a few hours thousands of people were killed. Official figures claim that 2,191 people were killed but unofficial estimates suggest that there were over 10,000 deaths. Then too the victims were Bengali speaking Muslim peasants. Nellie should have been a stern reminder that it cannot be repeated but people and institutions have short memories. Today's politicians have weaponized fear and use it for vote bank politics. Fear of the illegal migrant has permeated the minds of the average Assamese speaking population (Muslims included) that they see no wrong in the manner in which the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) has been used to exclude names of Bengali speaking Muslims from the electoral rolls. Add to that the plight of all those who are still awaiting justice following the National Register of Citizens' (NRC) exercise.

While it is agreed that illegal migrants from any country cannot be allowed to live in this country. However, there is a historical past when Assam was part of the Bengal province and people from both sides of the divide lived and worked within that province until India was partitioned in 1947 and sharp borders were drawn that divided peoples' homes and families. This is true of other parts of North East India too such as Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh. There is no denying that people from Myanmar and Bangladesh cross over and obtain identity documents. But this is a failure of those guarding the borders and of the system itself. There is a way of extraditing such illegal migrants. But that demands that the country that is supposed to take back its citizens recognises them as such. There is a process involved and people cannot just be pushed back and nor can they be treated inhumanly. But that is the clarion call from no less than the Chief Minister of Assam, which has prompted activist Harsh Mander to file an FIR at Dispur Police Station citing Sarma's recent press conference urging BJP workers to file mass voter list objection against the "Miyas" if only to trouble them.

In the Garo Hills posters, allegedly issued by the ISIS-K militant outfit threatening the Garo people have been put up at different places. It warns the Garos living in the plain belt areas to vacate their land before 2027 or face severe consequences. While Police attribute this to some kind of trouble mongering but considering that these are areas that border Bangladesh, the threats cannot be dismissed lightly especially at this juncture when Bangladesh faces an internal crisis if not an implosion. The politics of hate works both ways. Victims often become perpetrators of violence and there is no knowing what people who find themselves at a dead end are capable of. At this juncture the judiciary should step in and put a stop to the politics of hatred and division which violate the key principles of the Constitution.

Letters to the Editor

Need for Justice with Balance: UGC Regulations 2026

Editor,
I write to share a thoughtful concern regarding the recently notified UGC Regulations, 2026, intended to address caste-based discrimination in higher educational institutions.

At the outset, it must be acknowledged—honestly and without hesitation—that discrimination in universities is not an imagined problem. For generations, students from Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes, and Other Backward Classes have faced exclusion, humiliation, and unequal treatment, often in subtle forms that escape official notice. Any serious attempt to confront this reality is not only welcome but morally necessary.

At the same time, policies meant to heal long-standing wounds must be framed with care, balance, and empathy. Universities are not merely administrative units; they are deeply human spaces—made up of young minds, vulnerable ambitions, and fragile trust. Rules that govern them must therefore inspire confi-

dence across communities. The concern being voiced by many students and teachers today is not about the goal of social justice, but about the structure of its implementation. The proposed Equity Committees, constituted without representation from the general category, risk being perceived as exclusionary. Perception matters, particularly on campuses where trust is as important as regulation. A mechanism seen as one-sided, even if well-intentioned, may unintentionally deepen anxieties rather than reduce them.

There is also unease over the broad and undefined scope of "discrimination" under the new framework. Without clear guidelines, safeguards, and an independent appeal process, there is fear that academic disagreements or personal conflicts could be misread, leading to tension instead of resolution. Students need protection, yes—but they also need reassurance that fairness will be impartial and humane.

Social justice works best when it brings people together, not when it makes them wary of one another. A more inclusive approach—one that combines representation, transparency, time-bound inquiries, and dialogue—would strengthen the credibility of the regulations and

The 5 Top Public Health Stories in Meghalaya in 2025

By Sandra Albert and Glenn Kharkongor

Initiatives by the State department of health have led to major improvements of public health in the state. These were supported by various research and community projects conducted by institutions of higher education. The top five public health breakthroughs in Meghalaya in 2025 were:

1. Improvement in maternal and child health

For decades the women of Meghalaya had suffered from poor maternal services resulting in high maternal mortality and reflecting poor antenatal care, iron-deficiency anemia, high teenage pregnancies, and low institutional deliveries.

Meghalaya's State Health Policy, 2021, given the acronym MOTHER (Measurable Outcomes in Transforming Health sector through a holistic approach with focus on women's Empowerment) placed emphasis and focus on maternal health. The Government's rescue mission reviewed maternal deaths and identified a list of problems. These were taken up through the CMSMS scheme (Chief Minister's Safe Motherhood Scheme) by a set of initiatives to improve services. These ranged from upskilling health care professionals in Emergency Obstetric Care (EmOC) to equip healthcare providers (like MBBS doctors) with skills to manage life-threatening complications during pregnancy, childbirth, and postpartum.

At the community level, a welcome initiative was the provision of transport for pregnant women to reach a health care facility for delivery. Transit homes were also established for those who lived in remote places. The Mother App helped track health status of pregnant women to improve follow-up of high-risk pregnancies. These measures and wage compensation up to Rs 1000 helped increase institutional deliveries to more than 70%.

As a result, maternal deaths fell from 228 in 2021-22 to 96 in 2025. Neonatal and infant mortality also declined during this period. Meghalaya's health policy aligns with Sustainable Development Goal 3.2, which aims to reduce Neonatal Mortality Rate, Infant Mortality Rate, and the Under-5 Mortality Rates to national target levels by 2030.

Note: the neonatal mortality rate (NMR) pertains to deaths within the first 28 days of life per 1,000 live births, infant mortality rate (IMR) refers to deaths in the first year of life per 1,000

live births, and the under-five mortality (U5MR) rate is based on deaths in the first five years of life per 1,000 live births. The maternal mortality rate (MMR) is measured by the number of maternal deaths due to pregnancy, labour and delivery per one hundred live births among women aged 15-49 years.

Meghalaya's governance model in maternal health received the jury favourite award at the Creative Bureaucracy Festival held in Berlin, Germany, in June 2025. Meghalaya's entry was cited for effectively blending policy innovation with grassroots implementation, while prioritising dignity, care, and inclusivity. The Creative Bureaucracy Festival, known for highlighting people-driven innovations in governance, featured participants from over 50 countries. The award was received by Dr Sampath Kumar, IAS, principal secretary, health.

2. Immunization rates have markedly increased

Childhood vaccination remains one of the most cost-effective means of reducing child mortality. The Universal Immunization Programme (UIP) of the Government of India provides free vaccinations against diseases like tuberculosis, pertussis (whooping cough), measles, diphtheria, tetanus, polio, hepatitis B, and newer vaccinations against rotavirus diarrhoea and pneumococcal pneumonia. In recent years, there has been a dramatic rise in childhood immunization from under 60% to near 90%+ coverage.

Infant mortality from infectious diseases has fallen considerably in recent years. But there are other less known factors. A study by the Indian Institute of Public Health Shillong (IIPHS) and the Ministry of Health demonstrated that vit B1, thiamine deficiency among mothers was leading to infantile beriberi, which may lead to death from cardiac failure. Thiamine given to mothers is a cost effective intervention that can save lives, and the state government has rolled out a supplementation programme. The Early Childhood Mission is working on several interventions to improve wasting and stunting among children.

3. Traditional healing is being mainstreamed

The Meghalaya Mental Health and Social Care Policy, 2022, is the first such state policy in India. The policy mentions the word 'culture'

72 times and the word 'traditional' 27 times, indicating that the policy is grounded in cultural and traditional healing approaches.

The state health department commissioned the NICE Institute for Family Health, Hyderabad to conduct training of traditional birth attendants (TBAs) in the Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills. More than two hundred TBAs were trained in the health monitoring of women in pregnancy, conducting deliveries and care of the newborn infant.

A book "Tribal Health and Wellbeing in Meghalaya, India" was published by Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) in June 2025, which highlights the need to integrate traditional health practices with formal healthcare. The book was funded by a grant from the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Foundation, Germany.

4. Adolescent health and wellbeing

The Meghalaya Programme for Adolescent Wellbeing, Empowerment and Resilience (MPOWER) is a World Bank-supported, multi-sector initiative under the Meghalaya Basin Development Authority (MBDA). It aims at improving the well-being, empowerment, resilience, and future prospects of adolescents aged 9-19 in the state. The goal to improve human capital outcomes of adolescents is pursued through three themes: life skills education, mental health, and career guidance.

It aims to achieve its objectives by reducing school dropout rates, improving learning outcomes, strengthening life skills, mental health awareness, and career preparedness. It will support out-of-school adolescents to re-engage with education or work pathways and promote sexual and reproductive health education to reduce teen pregnancies.

The project is expected to benefit around 500,000 adolescents across Meghalaya, both in-school and out-of-school, and uses an age-based skills and competency framework to guide interventions and outcomes. MLCU has developed the framework in coordination with the World Bank and the departments of Social Welfare and Education. The first step of training master trainers will be conducted by MLCU in early 2026.

5. Leptospirosis and scrub typhus

Meghalaya's hilly, forested terrain, teeming with mammals, where people raise livestock alongside crops, is an ideal setting for germs to jump from animals to humans. Northeast India has emerged as one of the country's hotspots for zoonotic diseases, responsible for more than a third of all reported outbreaks between 2018-23.

On October 21, 2025, Nature India broke the story of a new surveillance system in Meghalaya to track regional epidemic diseases. This is a five-year project of IIPHS in collaboration with CMC Vellore and the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, Shillong, funded by the DBT/Wellcome Trust India Alliance.

The story is taking shape at the Zoonotic and Vector-borne Disease Centre (ZVDC) at IIPHS. NESAC, ISRO supports the team at IIPHS Shillong by offering training and expertise in Remote Sensing and GIS Tools for epidemic surveillance. The ZVDC tracks diseases in real time using a One Health approach. For the first time, human leptospirosis has been diagnosed in Meghalaya. Ten laboratory-confirmed cases were reported in the Dec 2025 issue of the Indian Journal of Medical Research by a team of investigators from Roberts Hospital and IIPHS.

Leptospirosis is a zoonotic disease, which means it's transmitted between animals and humans. Infection can be caught by contact with animal urine or reproductive fluids from infected animals such as rats, dogs, horses, pigs, and cows. Leptospirosis is treatable by appropriate antibiotics, and early treatment can prevent severe complications. Scrub typhus is an infectious disease caused by bacteria from the bite of mites found in scrub and forested areas. There is sudden high fever, headache, muscle pain, and a dark scab at the bite site. Without early treatment with antibiotics, it can lead to severe complications and even death.

Over the past few years, Meghalaya has made measurable progress in healthcare. Despite progress, mortality rates in Meghalaya remain above the national averages, highlighting the need for continued investment in healthcare accessibility. Challenges of vaccine hesitancy persist in some areas due to fears, myths and or religious beliefs. Geographic and last-mile challenges continue because of remote terrain and scattered populations.

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"Why Children Are Losing Faith in Education and How We Can Restore It"

By Dapbianglin Sohkhlet

Having taught in rural schools myself, I have come to realise that the rising dropout rate among secondary students is not caused solely by poverty. Financial hardship plays its part, but beneath it lies something far more psychological: a quiet erosion of belief, motivation, and hope.

In many households, parents often, without intending harm, instill discouraging ideas in their children. I have heard it repeatedly: "Education is of no use nowadays. It does not guarantee a job. It is a waste of money. It is an investment with no return." For many families, teaching a child to earn a livelihood seems more practical than sending them to school.

When I speak to parents, they tell me they only want their children to be "knowledgeable enough" to write their names or to talk without fear. Beneath this lies a painful truth: many parents have lost faith in education as a pathway to opportunity. Their own experiences with unemployment and insecurity shape what they teach their children. The weight of hopelessness falls not just on the youth, but on entire families.

This despair is also visible in students. I remember a Class 9 student once asking me, with heartbreaking simplicity: "What is the use of studying when, at the end, you don't even have a rupee to buy anything for yourself?" That question, captured the very crisis we face: children are beginning to believe that education cannot transform their lives.

I have even felt the sting of doubt. With a Master's degree and a Doctorate in progress, I have been questioned, laughed at, and criticised for my choices. People have mocked my dedication, telling me my years of study will lead only to failure, disappointment, and a certificate hanging uselessly on a wall. Many times, such remarks drenched my heart in fear and doubt. But must we live in fear forever? No. This is where the difference between education and knowledge becomes essential. Education, to some, may seem like a gamble with no promise of return. But knowledge is immeasurable. It is larger than the world itself. Education may be tied to exams, certificates, and expectations, but it also builds knowledge and frees the mind if sincerely pursued.

Knowledge is strength. It guides our choices. It teaches us the value of life. When we learn, we are not merely reading or writing; we are creating something within ourselves. Knowledge becomes a quiet source of joy, a spark of motivation that tells us there is a solution for every doubt and a path through every fear. Knowledge teaches humility, humanity, kindness, observation, and courage. It prepares us not only for employment but also for living a meaningful life. The first thing we learn in school is discipline, which shapes our path in life. Every successful person is not built by skills alone; it is discipline that makes them who they are today. A knowledgeable person knows that when discipline is taught from a very young age, life will prosper.

This is what we must tell our children. We must teach them to trust their worth, their abilities, their potential. We must remind them that at the end of every tunnel, there is always light. To be independent, we need education. To shape our minds and our character, we need it even more to be disciplined in life.

A school uniform is not just a piece of cloth; it represents unity, discipline, and identity. A classroom is not merely a room full of children; it is a room of dreams, of young thinkers, of hope itself. It is a place where futures quietly begin.

We must teach our children that life is not shaped by money alone. A farmer is not knowledgeable because he already possesses it, but he encompasses the knowledge and education that has been passed down from generation to generation.

Children seek knowledge by observing everyday what their elders have done, and they follow it daily, they understand where, when, how, and why. Knowledge is built through practice, patience, observation, and resilience, not through titles. Yet society often misunderstands this and labels farmers, carpenters, and craftsmen as "jobless," forgetting that their mastery comes from years of discipline and hard work.

To parents and children who consider dropping out of school, it is important to understand this truth: hard work, patience, dedication, and discipline are what truly shape a human life. Education at the secondary level is not just about books or exams; it is a foundation that disciplines a child at a critical age. It teaches structure, responsibility, and respect, qualities that guide a person throughout life. Through education, a child learns the value of time, the value of knowledge, and the value of effort. When we respect those who teach us, we also learn to respect those who gave us life. Education teaches respect for parents, elders, and society. It builds manners, self-control, and a sense of order in life.

In every profession, mastery is achieved through practice, and practice is sustained by patience and consistency. We will never understand how if we do not first learn the where, when, and why. Whether in farming, craftsmanship, or academics, discipline is the root of success, and education helps plant that discipline early in life.

Only those who pursue education sincerely; who truly seek knowledge, understanding the heavy burden of being questioned and judged. It is not simply the weight of harsh words; it is mentally exhausting. You keep trying, yet fear whispers inside you: What if what they say is true? When I was a child, a person who learned was more respected than a person who earned. Today, someone who learns but does not immediately reap the benefits is often seen as a burden, a failure, a disappointment, or an unproductive investment. This shift in values has wounded many young hearts. But I am blessed with parents who became my greatest motivators; parents who fought every discouraging voice to show me the power of education and knowledge. Because of them, I regret nothing. I know that every tree grows at its own pace, and every person blooms in their own season.

And so, I plead with society: stop comparing children. Comparison destroys confidence and crushes potential. Every child is unique in their abilities, their interests, and their fields of knowledge. Let them grow in their own time, in their own way, and towards their own dreams.

To the students: Come to school not because you must, but because you deserve a future. Your efforts are seeds; they will grow even if you do not see them yet.

To the parents: Your belief is your child's first education. Speak hope, not fear. Your words build their courage.

To the teachers: You are the guardians of futures. What you give cannot be measured in certificates. You give the possibility.

A community that values learning lifts itself. Education is not a burden; it is a bridge. It is not an expense; it is an investment in hope, dignity, identity, and courage. Schools are not just buildings; they are the beginning of everything a child can become.

"Education is not the path to perfection; it is the courage to begin, and every child deserves that chance. For a mind that learns is a mind that rises, and when a child rises, a community rises with them. The true poverty of a society is not the lack of money, but the lack of belief in its children."

Remember, "the future is not written for us; it is written by us, one lesson at a time."

uphold their core spirit.

This moment calls not for political silence or street-level anger, but for mature engagement. Campuses deserve reforms that are firm yet fair, sensitive yet strong.

Justice must be done—but in a way that feels just to all.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Breakthrough for NES

Editor,
I wish to share a significant development regarding the ongoing public demand for the restoration of The North Eastern Service (NES) Of Akashvani on shortwave radio. On Tuesday, January 27, 2026, I had the privilege of engaging in a direct telephonic dialogue with the CEO of Prasar Bharati, Gaurav Dwivedi, to discuss the technical and strategic necessity of reviving this service. The CEO was gracious enough to grant me his time and has committed to a formal confirmation regarding our proposal on Wednesday, January 28. In a detailed follow-up dossier sent to his office and marked to over twenty high-ranking officials, including the Di-

rector General of Akashvani and the Minister of Information and Broadcasting, I have laid out a clear technical roadmap. The proposal advocates for the installation of a new 100kW Ampegon TSW2100 shortwave radio transmitter at the shortwave radio transmitter site, located in Mawjong, to be operated at a 50kW capacity.

As highlighted in my previous letters to this daily (March 27th, 2025, January 3rd, 10th and 14th, 2026), the current 100W FM radio transmitter of NES is a shadow of its former self, reaching only a few kilometres within Shillong. For a service founded on January 3, 1990, to unite the eight Northeast Indian states, the "Seven Sisters and One Brother", this "Line-of-Sight" (LoS) limitation is a geographic failure. Only shortwave radio, utilising Near Vertical Incidence Sky-wave (NVIS) propagation, can "rain down" signals over the rugged terrain of Northeast India, bypassing the physical barriers that defeat FM radio and cellular signals.

Furthermore, leaving our traditional shortwave radio frequencies of 4970kHz (60.36m) and 7315kHz (41m) vacant is a matter of national security. As we face increasing signal encroach-

ment from foreign broadcasters and the infamous Chinese shortwave radio stations and jammers, India must reoccupy its sovereign airwaves. The infrastructure in Mawjong, the land and the towers, are ready. We only need the modern "heart" of the radio station to be restored. I remain hopeful that tomorrow's confirmation from the CEO will signal the end of "The Ghost of Centralisation" and the beginning of a new era of connectivity for Northeast India.

Yours etc.,
Hamemanbha Lyngdoh
Lawai,
Via email

CBSE on the right track

Editor,
The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) has made a commendable move by making the appointment of full-time mental health and career counsellors mandatory in CBSE schools. Obviously, students are always under severe stress due to academic pressure. It is relieving that the CBSE has recognised the stressful situations students are going through. Living in a highly competitive atmosphere,

students are always expected to perform in the best way. In their attempts to meet expectations and achieve targets, a large number of students succumb to mental break down. Tightly scheduled course structure with no outlet to ease pressure makes learning an arduous process. The students who put in their optimum efforts to perform brilliantly in board examinations must move to the next level of cracking medical and engineering entrance exams. Let's hope the CBSE's attempts to soothe the frayed nerves of stressed-out students will go a long way in maintaining their equilibrium. A counsellor for every 500 students is compulsory and mental health support is a non-negotiable part of affiliation compliance for schools.

However, the success of the programme depends on several factors such as the expertise, qualifications and experience of counsellors and how well they can deal with students' mental health problems.

Yours etc.,
Venu GS,
Kollam

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