

"Early childhood education is the key to the betterment of society."

—Maria Montessori

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Parliament, discussions

THE Winter Session of Parliament opens today, signifying introduction of several bills for passage, including one that would allow private sector participation in nuclear energy pursuits and another that aims to promote autonomy for universities and other higher education institutions. Given the comfortable majority for the ruling NDA in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, the government may have its way in respect of all the 14 bills. At the outset, however, the opposition has raised its protest over what it termed as attempts by the Modi government to "derail" parliament. Their principal concern was over the curtailment of the session's duration to 19 days; meaning discussions can take place for only 15 days, or less, as holidays and other constraints emerge. This would be the "shortest-ever" winter session of Parliament.

While the duration of the sessions is being reduced, as was evident in previous sittings too, a problem with parliamentary functioning in recent years is of a sharp decline in the quantity and quality of discussions. The political process itself has seen a qualitative degradation in recent decades, with the number of eminent personalities having a wealth of ideas progressively reducing. As a result, the discussions are marked more by disruptions and mutual recriminations, while the subjects that deserve threadbare analysis are sidestepped. Bills are passed in a hurry without lively discussions. That two-thirds of the LS members are 'graduates' means little. Even the upper house, where eminent non-political personalities can be brought in through nomination and via assembly route, now has fewer numbers of the elite breed. All these undercut the quality of discussions. While the Congress party had over the years shown a Nehruvian penchant to accommodate the best brains in the nation-building process, the saffronisation of the polity worked in reverse mode. A narrow mindset is all too pronounced. The quality of those at the top percolates down to the lowest level in any establishment. Democracy should not degenerate to a level where the cream of the society has no voice in the affairs of the nation. Loudmouths in Parliament need not necessarily grasp the intricacies of vexed issues. There today are lesser numbers of parliamentarians who can effectively communicate to the outside world. This speaks poorly of Indian society.

When the duration of parliament sessions is curtailed, it's natural for the opposition to sense danger. Notably, the opposition ranks themselves have lesser numbers of outstanding parliamentarians. The voice of the Left that once boasted of stalwarts in its ranks is reduced to a whimper. All these reflect in the level of debates. The government easily gets away with its act. In order for democracy to survive odds and remain as the best governance mechanism, the political process must undergo tectonic shifts. In national interest, the best brains from various sectors must be drawn in. Passage of legislation in assemblies and parliament must be serious business. The shouting brigade, or resort to verbal jugglery, is no guarantee to upholding the reputation of a dignified house. In the minimum, issues must be discussed threadbare before bills are passed.

Rote over Reason: A Review of the CM Impact Guidebook

By Dr. C. R. Kharlukhi

While going through the secondary school science syllabus and the State Board Class X question paper of this year, a mismatch was detected between what the syllabus projected to achieve and what the Meghalaya Board of School Education (MBOSE) Secondary School Leaving Certificate (SSLC) question paper 2025 actually delivered. The mismatch will be clear if we first go through the two documents separately and then connecting them together to see the bigger picture.

The syllabus for Class X science was downloaded from the website of the Education Department, Government of Meghalaya. It was prepared by the Directorate of Educational Research and Training (DERT) since February 2024. The syllabus was based on Learning Outcomes (LOs) prescribed by the NCERT, NIPUN Bharat and the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (NCF-SE) 2023 and aligned with the NCERT Textbooks (Meghalaya Edition). According to the document, learning outcomes articulate what a student should know, understand and be able to do after completing a topic or a lesson. They serve as measurable and observable indicators of the knowledge, skills, and abilities that students should acquire. Learning outcomes provide a framework for assessment and evaluation.

As an illustration, with regards to the subject science, students of Class 10 are expected to have learning outcomes such as – differentiating and classifying materials, objects, organisms, phenomena, processes based on properties and characteristics; planning and conducting investigations and experiments to arrive at and verify facts, principles, phenomena or to seek answers to queries on their own; applies scientific concepts in daily life and solving problems and exhibits creativity in designing models using eco-friendly resources. It is indeed encouraging to see a well-designed outcome-based syllabus by the DERT, of which the accomplishment of the stated LOs will bring about a positive impact in the way students learn science. When science is taught keeping these LOs in mind, then students will learn beyond recall and acquire scientific values, capacities and dispositions such as curiosity, creativity, evidence-based thinking, and sound decision-making. Considering the dismal performance of the State in the recent PGI grading, DERT's move towards an outcome-based syllabus is undoubtedly a step in the right direction.

As mentioned earlier, LOs provide a framework for assessment and evaluation. Naturally, it is expected that the MBOSE question papers for Class X examinations would be designed to measure the achievement of the LOs that have been carefully mapped in the syllabus. But surprisingly, that was not the case. This is where you will notice the mismatch that has been mentioned earlier. This mismatch will be clearly understood when we look at the following points –

1. The Education Department, Government of Meghalaya, has published a Guidebook, an initiative under the Chief Minister's Initiative to Maximize Pass Achievement and Classroom Triumph (CM IMPACT). This guidebook was introduced with good intentions, that is, to solve the problem of the consistent gaps in performance and varying results across the different districts, to enhance educational outcomes and to help students excel academically and reach their full potential. With this goal in mind, the guidebook contains a list of questions with related answers, from MCQs to Long Answer questions for Health and Physical Education, Social Science, English, Mathematics and Science and Technology. The idea is that students can familiarize themselves with the type of questions that might appear in the examination.

2. In addition to the list of questions and answers, a question paper design (not a detailed blueprint, as mentioned in the guidebook) of the Board Examination was also included in the guidebook detailing the sections of the question paper (Sections A, B, C and D), the type of questions (Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), Very Short Answer, Short Answer and Long Answer questions), the marks for each question, the number of questions to be attempted and the number of questions given and the total marks for each section. At one glance, the design seemed comprehensive, all the details are provided, making it easier for paper setters to design the question papers accordingly; because the very purpose of a question paper design is to guide paper setters prepare the right questions. However, upon a closer analysis, one will find that the design fails to highlight the most important and crucial criteria, and that is, the Learning outcomes or competencies that are to be tested from students. A valid question paper must reflect the outcomes it intends to measure. Since LOs form the basis of assessment, their absence from the design raises few questions –

- i. How will paper setters identify which LOs to assess?

- ii. How much weightage should be distributed between the Lower Order Thinking Skills (LOTS) such as knowledge and understanding and the Higher Order Thinking Skills (HOTS) such as application, analysis and evaluation?

- iii. On what basis are the question papers prepared?

The answers to these questions will become clear when the MBOSE SSLC Question Paper for Science and Technology, 2025 is examined.

3. The MBOSE SSLC Question Paper for Science and Technology, 2025, as indicated in the question paper design given in the guidebook, has four sections –

- a. Section A contains 30 MCQs in which students must attempt all questions. Twenty-one questions (70%) of the thirty questions, were

found to be taken directly from the CM Impact guidebook and remaining questions from the textbook.

- b. Section B contains thirteen (13) Very Short Answer (VSA) type questions, of which students must answer only ten (10) questions. Out of the 13 questions, it was found that 10 (76.9%) questions were taken from the guidebook and remaining questions from the textbook. However, students could attempt only the ten questions taken from the guidebook, which would mean that they attempted 100% of the VSA questions taken from the guidebook.

- c. Section C contains eight (8) Short Answer (SA) type questions, of which students must attempt only six (6). It was found that out of the eight SA questions, six (75%) of them were from the guidebook and the rest from the textbook. However, since students must attempt only six questions, we can also conclude that they would attempt 100% of the SA questions taken directly from the guidebook.

- d. Section D contains five (5) Long Answer (LA) type questions, of which students must attempt only three (3). It was found that all (100%) of the five questions were guidebook questions.

4. The above findings regarding the MBOSE SSLC question paper for Science and Technology, 2025 reveal the following points –

- a. The high percentage of questions taken directly from the guidebook creates doubt regarding the genuine achievement of LOs by the students. With ready-made questions and answers available months in advance, students could easily memorize the answers even without understanding. This goes against the direction of the New Education Policy (NEP) 2020 which advocates for a shift from rote memorization to a more competency-based assessment, evaluating a student's ability to apply knowledge rather than just their capacity to recall facts.

- b. The reason for not highlighting the LOs to be tested in the question paper design of the guidebook is now clear. Even though the guidebook had a mix of LOTS as well as HOTS questions, it becomes meaningless since the answers are already provided. As an illustration, a numerical problem in the question paper (Question Number 55 b) used exactly the same values as the problem in the guidebook (Question Number 15 ii). Students therefore need not think critically, they simply recall the solution.

- c. Now think of students who appeared and will be appearing the Board Examinations through a Central Board. They are not so privileged as their MBOSE counterparts as they do not have ready-made questions with ready-made answers. They will be truly tested on their HOTS. The question arises – Is this fair? Will it cause a problem in the Class XI admission? A competent student with 85% score passing from a Central Board examination may just be overlooked over a rote-

memorized Impact student with 90% score.

- d. Another serious observation from this discussion is the mismatch between the LO-based syllabus and the Guidebook-driven question paper. The question paper failed to deliver what the syllabus intended the students to achieve.

- e. Efforts to train teachers with the new pedagogies of teaching according to the NCF-SE 2023 would be meaningless if teacher's efforts in the classroom are not appreciated. What is the point of teachers working hard and helping students understand and apply concepts if at the end of the day their students are not genuinely evaluated?

- f. Another cause of concern is the rippling effect that this kind of evaluation will create. The students' tendency to be spoon fed, their habit of rote-memorization and their inability to think on their own (not a fault of their own but because they were not made to think) will surely have a negative impact in their higher studies.

- g. In effect the first objective of the CM Impact Guidebook to Maximize Pass Achievement has been successfully achieved, from a 55.80% pass percentage last year to a record breaking 87.10% pass percentage in the 2025 SSLC Examination. But as the analysis suggests, this improvement is likely the result of spoon-feeding rather than genuine academic progress.

- h. The second objective of the Guidebook is Classroom Triumph. Has this objective been achieved? To answer this, we must ask the following questions –

Was the question paper outcome-based where LOs are being identified in the question paper design and aligned with the syllabus?

Did the guidebook serve only as a referral to the type of questions that students may expect in the examination and NOT be the question paper itself?

Were the students really evaluated on their HOTS and not only on their LOTS?

If the answers to these questions is a resounding YES then we can say there has been Classroom Triumph. But, sadly, the answers to these questions, based on the points discussed, is a sad NO. If this trend continues, where rote memorization is prioritized over genuine understanding, where recalling of facts is awarded over analytical thinking, where quantity is given prominence over quality, then the examination process becomes superficial where students' capabilities and competencies are not being tested, thereby questioning the achievement of learning outcomes.

To really create an "impact" on students' learning, there must be a shift from memory-based evaluation to competency-based evaluation as advocated by the NEP 2020, where the guidebook no longer becomes a source of questions for the Board's question paper but serve only as a reference to the type of questions that students might expect in the question paper. Only then can the system empower students and prepare them for a rapidly changing world.

India mulls options after Bangladesh seeks Hasina's extradition

By Nilova Roy Chaudhury

India will mull over a wide variety of options after it acknowledged that it has noted the verdict and the sentence delivered against Sheikh Hasina, the deposed Prime Minister of Bangladesh, and that it has received a formal request for her extradition.

After a judicial tribunal in Dhaka pronounced former Bangladesh Premier Hasina guilty of committing "crimes against humanity" and sentenced her to death, in absentia, on November 17, the Indian government received a formal request from the Bangladesh interim government seeking her extradition to that country, under terms of the India-Bangladesh bilateral extradition treaty, signed in January 2013. New Delhi is examining the request, the second such formal 'note verbale' from Dhaka since Hasina had to flee from Bangladesh on August 5 last year, and is considering all the legal implications of the request. "Yes, we have received the request and this request is being examined as part of ongoing judicial and internal legal processes," India's Foreign Ministry spokesman Randhir Jaiswal said, adding India had "noted the verdict."

India is not in any hurry to act on the matter, not only because Sheikh Hasina has been an invaluable and long standing friend of India, but also because she sought and was provided shelter in this country as a friend and a democratically elected political party head and Prime Minister, not a criminal. Additionally, there are a variety of legal implications which New Delhi will take into account, including, primarily, the interim nature of the current Bangladesh government and whether the constitution of the ICT itself would bear international legal scrutiny. Only once the validity of the hurriedly convened judicial process in Dhaka is established would the Indian government be legally obligated to act. Those formal legal processes, prior to the actual process of extradition, would provide Sheikh Hasina a chance to present her defence against the charges, something she could not do in the just concluded ICT trial in Dhaka in which she and former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal were charged, tried and sentenced to death. The third person accused in the case, former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun, turned approver and was given five years in prison.

"We remain committed to the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including peace, democracy, inclusion and stability in that country, and will continue to engage constructively in this regard with all stakeholders," Jaiswal added, attempting to diplomatically defuse any unpleasant exchanges between the neighbours especially after the Bangladesh Foreign Ministry, in a post on X, had said, "If any country gives shelter to these individuals convicted of crimes against humanity, it will be an extremely unfriendly act and an affront to justice."

The decision of the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) has seen considerable turmoil inside Bangladesh, with violence erupting between those supporting the judgement, including the religious fundamentalists and the BNP and those, like supporters of the Awami League, opposing it, claiming the judgement was flawed. The judgement will further worsen the difficult law

and order situation prevailing in that country.

It is ironic that the ICT was formed by Sheikh Hasina in March, 2010, shortly after her electoral victory, to try those accused of committing War Crimes in 1971. The tribunal on November 17 also ordered the confiscation of all properties belonging to Hasina and Asaduzzaman in favour of the state. Another aspect of the situation which India will be watching closely is what happens to the petition that Sheikh Hasina herself filed in October with the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague, in which she accused the Mohammad Yunus-led interim government of Bangladesh of having committed crimes against humanity.

Through her lawyer, Steven Powles KC of Doughty Street Chambers, London, Hasina filed an Article 15 Communication with the Prosecutor of the ICC, requesting that the Prosecutor initiate an investigation into retaliatory violence committed against members and office-bearers of the Awami League party and members of the previous Cabinet and government.

If the ICC initiates an investigation based on the petition, which was filed well before the verdict of the ICT was delivered, it will bolster Hasina's defence and could prove to be an embarrassment for the Yunus government. In the petition Hasina claimed that the crimes committed by the Interim Government after the protests in Bangladesh, which resulted in her being forced to flee the country in August 2024, amount to crimes within the ICC's jurisdiction. The communication highlights the alleged killing of 400 Awami League leaders and activists since July 2024, many of them beaten or lynched by violent mobs.

Bangladesh ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC on 23rd March 2010 and the statute entered into force for Bangladesh on 1st June 2010. India, however, has not signed or ratified the Rome Statute of the ICC because of several concerns, including over State sovereignty, the powers of the UN Security Council and the exclusion of use of nuclear weapons from the list of war crimes.

The Yunus-led interim government banned the Awami League party on May 10, 2025 and, when it announced that elections would be held in 2026, stated that the political party would not be permitted to participate in the scheduled national elections for the Jatiya Sangsad (parliament) due in February 2026. The Awami League, its supporters and civil society organisations have opposed the ban, which they claim will lead to a flawed democratic process. India has also urged the widest participation for the polling process to be fair.

The ICT verdict, while not entirely unexpected, will further strain the already difficult nature of bilateral relations between India and Bangladesh since the political turmoil forced Sheikh Hasina to leave Dhaka last August.

For the people of Bangladesh, their conflicted internal struggle for identity, whether to be primarily Islamist and fundamentalist or whether to be primarily Bengali and secular and the idea for which their nation was created, will continue.

Letters to the Editor

Lack of maintenance on GS Road despite toll collection

Editor,
Through your esteemed publication, I wish to draw attention to the deplorable condition of GS Road, which continues to remain poorly maintained despite being a toll road. Commuters pay substantial toll charges with the expectation of safe, well-maintained infrastructure. Unfortunately, potholes, broken signage, and inadequate drainage have made travel hazardous and inconvenient. Under the National High-

ways Act, 1956 (Sections 5, 6, and 8A) and the Model Concession Agreement, the toll operator is legally obligated to ensure proper upkeep of the road. Collecting toll without fulfilling this duty amounts to a breach of contract and statutory provisions. The concessionaire is not merely a collector of revenue but a custodian of public safety and service standards.

In the recent past the Courts too have taken cognizance of the issue. For instance in a landmark case in Kerala, NHAI & Anr. v. O.J. Janeesh & Ors. (SC, 18 Aug 2025) the rights of toll paying commuters was reaffirmed.

The Kerala High Court had suspended tolls at Paliyekkara (NH-544, Edappally-Man-

nuthy) due to severe potholes, congestion, and safety risks. The Supreme Court too affirmed this suspension and introduced the principle of "no service, no toll" stating that toll rights are tied to safe, motorable roads. It also noted that toll collection during neglect undermines public trust and equates to unfair taxation. It also acknowledged that that commuters already pay taxes, and collecting extra tolls while conditions deteriorate is impermissible.

I urge the concerned authorities and the toll operator to take immediate corrective measures. If they fail, enforcement agencies must intervene, impose penalties, and even consider termination of the concession

agreement. Citizens deserve accountability when public money is involved.

Yours etc.,
Sanjeeb Kakoty
Via email

Weakening Electoral System and Political Parties

Editor,
In recent elections across several states, the country has witnessed multiple violations of electoral guidelines. Transparency, which is the foundation of a healthy democracy, appears to be fading. On the other hand, opposition parties seem to lack self-introspection and effective strategies. The

Election Commission too has raised concerns among citizens due to some of its actions, which many believe have created doubts in the public mind. For the people of a democratic republic, voting is the most important tool through which they choose their representatives. If this right is compromised, or if the electoral process lacks transparency, citizens cannot be confident that the leaders elected are truly the ones they voted for. The frequent changes in rules that previously ensured transparency also raise questions and create suspicion about hidden motives. Opposition parties must fulfil their responsibilities by correcting their own mistakes, learning from past experiences, and

actively working to ensure free, fair, and transparent elections. Strengthening the electoral system is essential for safeguarding democracy.

Yours etc.,
Arshad Bastavi,
Mumbai

ONE: A structural response to systemic neglect

Editor,
The editorial "One: A Bold Move" (ST 29, November 2025) is striking because it frames the One North East (ONE) movement not just as another regional alliance, but as a structural response to systemic neglect. ONE is less about

short-term electoral gains and more about redefining federalism from the periphery inward. By uniting leaders across Tripura, Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, and beyond, ONE is building a new axis of symbolic capital. It is saying our voices matter collectively, not as fragmented appendages of national parties. The Manipur ethnic conflict (2023) and the Centre's slow response are presented at the turning point. The editorial rightly suggests that unresolved trauma and displacement have crystallized the need for a common platform. From Tripura's land rights to Naga peace process, the editorial highlights how decades of unfulfilled agreements have eroded trust. ONE positions

itself as the corrective. The editorial is essentially arguing that ONE is both pragmatic and symbolic: pragmatic in pooling regional strength to negotiate with Delhi, symbolic in asserting dignity and agency for indigenous communities. It is bold because it challenges the status quo of national parties using regional outfits as proxies, and instead insists on direct representation of regional priorities.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via email

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"All you need in this life is ignorance and confidence; then success is sure."

— Mark Twain

The Shillong Times

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Rebooting Governance in Meghalaya
CHIEF Minister Conrad Sangma is traversing to different corners of Meghalaya to ensure that governance comes closer to the people, a one-man army can hardly achieve much when officials down the line lack commitment to carry out their basic duties. Few if any take their jobs as an article of faith to deliver governance to the last mile. There are too many things wrong with Meghalaya and these are evident in the education and health sectors. While the authorities at the state level have tried their best to bring in innovative methods in healthcare and reduction in maternal and infant deaths, the fact remains that children and women in rural Meghalaya continue to suffer from malnutrition and undernutrition and that is because poverty weighs heavily on families.

The cost of living in Meghalaya is far higher than in other states and this is a common refrain by all central government officials transferred to Meghalaya. There is a huge difference in the prices of vegetables and groceries between Shillong and Guwahati. The poor and they constitute a huge number in this state cannot afford fruit, milk, eggs and even meat for their children. Hence the sources of protein and vitamins especially vitamin C that occurs in fruits like oranges are beyond the reach of ordinary families. An orange costs between Rs 10-12 each. Bananas are expensive, not to mention apples and other fancy fruits which are out of reach of most rural families. At one time nutrition was met by the multiple crops grown in jhum fields such as green leafy vegetables, sesame seeds and corns that provide iron, calcium, phosphorus, magnesium, potassium among others and other root vegetables like Colocasia that are grown without any chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Now jhum fields with multiple crops are replaced by commercial farming for mono-cropping. There will be fields that grow only cabbage, cauliflower or potatoes and mostly for the market. The effect of this change in cropping patterns has not been studied as yet. Meghalaya is also lacking in data on the number of people living below poverty line (BPL) as of 2025. According to the 2011 data there are 5,54,131 BPL cards issued but the number of beneficiaries numbered 7,45,152 persons.

The Below Poverty Line (BPL) list is created based on socio-economic criteria established by each state government. Families with an annual income below Rs 75,000 in urban areas and an annual income below Rs 60,000 are included in the BPL household records maintained by the central government. Additionally, landholding for BPL families should not exceed 1.5 acres of irrigated wet land, 2.5 acres of irrigated wet land from other sources, 3 acres of dry land used for commercial crops, or 5 acres of dry land under other crop cultivation. This specification is rather generous because in Meghalaya a BPL family of 4-5 family members is unlikely to own land or even a homestead and in the urban areas would be living in one or two roomed homes. Poverty alleviation should be the focus of the Meghalaya Government apart from creating numerous entrepreneurs. Poverty has multiple effects and education is the casualty as parents can no longer afford to send their kids to school. Addressing poverty is imperative.

Students' perceptions on four-year undergraduate program

By H Srikanth & Batskhem Myrbob

The enlightened public in the state is aware of the competing discourses that preceded the introduction of the Four-Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP) in 2023 in the UG colleges of Meghalaya. NEHU hurriedly prepared and approved the syllabi for FYUP. However, responding to the concerns of the UG teacher representatives, the Academic Council had then advised the university to implement the FYUP a year after. But the Vice-Chancellor, who was adamant on immediate implementation, notified it after garnering the support of a few college principals who endorsed his decision for a variety of reasons. Although the then Minister of Education was on record stating that several colleges were not ready for FYUP, for reasons best known, the state government also endorsed the NEHU's decision. After so much wrangling, the FYUP was rolled out, and it is now in its third year. The students of the first batch of FYUP are now in their fifth semester. As FYUP will enter the fourth year in the next academic session, the Meghalaya Chapter of All India Save Education Committee (AISEC) felt the need to undertake a pilot study to understand the experiences and perceptions of the students and teachers. AISEC received feedback from over 300 students studying in the fifth semester in over 15 colleges in and around Shillong and also in other parts of Meghalaya. Here, we share some key points emerging from their responses.

Earlier, under the three-year degree programs, the students were focusing on a major and two minor papers. But under the FYUP, besides the major and minor papers, the students should study additional papers from the courses designated as Ability Enhancement Courses (AEC), Skill Enhancement Courses (SEC), Multi-Disciplinary Courses (MDC), Vocational Education & Training (VET) and Value Added Courses (VAD). The number of papers that the students have to study has increased from 18 to 33. The credits that the students have to secure for a three-year degree under FYUP increased from 72 to 120. Only those students who secure a CGPA of 7.5 are entitled to move to

the fourth year of FYUP. In their fourth year they have to earn an additional 40 credits by completing five major papers, two minor papers and one dissertation. The students who are not interested in research have to study three advanced major papers to get a four-year honours degree.

The pilot study shows that all first-batch FYUP students were admitted to the degree program without the mandatory CUET program. Only 24% of respondents said that they attempted the CUET exams. Under public demand, till date, the UG colleges are admitting the students to UG programs even though they did not give CUET. But it is not sure whether the exemption would continue indefinitely. From the students' responses, the AEC, SEC, VAD courses are offered mostly by the teachers within the college. More than 50% of the student respondents said that even papers under VET are taught by different teachers in the colleges. The vocational papers such as baking and confectionery, fashion design, piggery, mushroom cultivation, bee keeping, beauty care, carpentry, etc., are handled by teachers within the college, although they were appointed for teaching the core courses. Only a handful of colleges in the state have engaged training institutes, professional bodies and subject experts for imparting vocational education.

While one may appreciate the introduction of interesting papers in AEC, SEC, MDC, etc., NEHU did not make any efforts to come out with textbooks for teaching those papers. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents maintained that there are no textbooks for new courses introduced under FYUP. Only 17% of students have claimed that they rely on textbooks. Nearly 47% of the respondents declared they depend on notes provided by teachers. That the students have been exploring internet sources becomes clear from the fact that 27% of the respondents have indicated that they rely on internet sources as well. But interestingly, the students showed little interest in opting for Massive Open

Online Courses (MOOCs). Only 11% of the respondents said that they opted for online courses. Explaining the reasons, 57% said that they preferred direct teaching by teachers to online teaching, and 8% said that the online courses are cumbersome and involve additional costs. Lack of orientation, connectivity problems and inconvenient timings are also possibly other factors which prevented them from opting for online courses.

To be eligible for a three-year degree under FYUP, the students have to do an internship / project in the fifth semester. In Meghalaya, there are no industries and big business companies where the students can work as interns. From the students' responses, we understand that some did an internship in government and semi-government bodies, others reported that they have done internships in some NGOs, schools, colleges, laboratories, dairy / fish farms, villages, restaurants, and other odd places. The number of days they have done internships varies considerably. While the majority stated their experience as somewhat useful, there are quite a few who were not happy with the experience. While 40% of respondents admitted they did not spend any money for doing an internship, 33% percent said that they spent a little amount and another 27% stated that they had to spend a substantial amount to the agencies as an internship fee.

The students have to pay different fees—annual fee, exam fee, lab fee, hostel fee, internship fee, etc. Most students were informed that the college fees had increased substantially after introducing FYUP. Although many get scholarships, they are not adequate to meet the increasing costs of education. The study shows that the annual fee that they had to pay varies from college to college, and from course to course. Only thirty percent of student respondents, who come mostly from Arts subjects in non-Shillong colleges, said that they pay less than ten thousand rupees as annual fee. Fourteen percent said that they had paid between Rs. 10,000 and Rs. 25,000.

But 28% of respondents said that they pay between Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 45,000, and another 28% stated that they had to pay more than Rs. 45,000 as college fee every year. While few seem to have no problem with the fee, most respondents complained about the fee structure in the colleges.

Recently, there have been news reports complaining about the high dropout rate in the UG colleges. Responding to the query on dropouts, 49% of the respondents mentioned that there have not been many dropouts in their classes, 51% stated there have been dropouts in the department, with some 8% showing over 40% dropout in some classes. When asked whether they have backlogs, 18% admitted that they have backlogs. When probed why they have backlogs, 49% of the students who have backlogs complained about the heavy syllabus, 16% admitted that they did not put in enough effort, 29% mentioned other causes, and only 6% blamed the teachers for their poor performance.

When the students were asked to rank the FYUP implementation between 1 and 10, 27% of respondents said that it is below average, 41% stated that it is satisfactory and 32% rated it high. However, when asked whether they have any complaints against the FYUP, 80% of the students came out with one or another complaint. The students are critical of the unwieldy curriculum and syllabus. As they are forced to study many other papers, the students say that they have not been able to focus on major papers. Because of the inadequacy of teachers and classrooms, more often than not the syllabus is not completed. They reported that even though the colleges charge high fee, they are not improving the infrastructure. Their responses show that the exam pressure has caused too much stress and anxiety. Many are afraid of the backlogs, or poor scores. The students now in third-year of FYUP are definitely not as excited as they were when they joined FYUP in 2023. Do the authorities in NEHU and the state government, who sing paeans to the NEP 2020 every time they talk of educational reforms in the state, listen to the voices and concerns of the students?

India's silent debt time bomb: When households borrow faster than they save No country can sustain its growth unless consumption of the rural poor rises

By R. Suryamurthy

There is a number in the government's latest disclosures that should unsettle anyone paying attention to India's economic trajectory. Household financial liabilities — the debt Indian families owe to banks, NBFCs and other lenders — have soared 76% in just four years, rising from Rs 77.7 lakh crore in March 2021 to Rs 136.6 lakh crore by March 2025. And here's the uncomfortable truth: the country has entered a phase where borrowing, not saving, is increasingly underwriting the Indian growth story. That fundamental imbalance is a ticking macroeconomic risk, even if it remains politically convenient to ignore.

The Lok Sabha replies tabled on December 1 offer a rare, consolidated snapshot of India's household balance sheet — and the picture is neither benign nor temporary. The rise in debt is not happening in isolation; it's taking place in a context where net household financial savings, the economy's traditional shock absorber, have collapsed from 11.7% of GDP during the pandemic's forced-savings year (2020-21) to just 5.0% in 2022-23 before inching back to 5.2% in 2023-24 and 6.0% in 2024-25. Even after the small recovery, India's household saving rate is still dramatically lower than its pre-pandemic average of 7-8%. And that should worry policymakers more than they admit.

Meanwhile, liabilities have vaulted upward at a far faster clip. RBI data shows that financial liabilities grew at 18.5% in FY23 and 18.4% in FY24 — nearly double the growth rate of financial assets in some years. Asset stocks rose from Rs 228.7 lakh crore to Rs 352.6 lakh crore between 2021 and 2025, yes — but liabilities raced ahead, narrowing the safety margin that households depend on during downturns. This is the kind of creeping imbalance that doesn't break an economy in one dramatic moment; it corrodes resilience quietly.

And the most striking part? India is not only borrowing more; more Indians are borrowing.

In March 2018, the number of "live unique borrowers" in the formal financial system stood at 12.8 crore. By March 2025, that number had exploded to 28.3 crore. The average debt per borrower has climbed from Rs 3.41 lakh to nearly Rs 4.78 lakh in seven years — a rise of more than 40%. These are not minor, cyclical fluctuations. They are structural indicators of a society where consumption, asset building, and even routine expenses increasingly require credit support.

RBI notes that the bulk of new debt has flowed into mortgages and vehicle loans — which, on paper, sounds healthy. But even asset-backed borrowing carries risk when it is underwritten by rising EMIs, stubborn inflation, uneven income growth, and a labour market still struggling to generate consistent wage increases for the middle class. If incomes do not keep pace, "asset-backed" can quickly turn into "stress-backed."

What is more troubling is the long arc of data. Household liabilities remained broadly stable at under 4% of GDP between 2014-15 and 2019-20. Then the pandemic hit, savings spiked temporarily, and after that — debt simply shot up. By 2022-23, household liabilities had reached 5.9% of GDP. In 2023-24 they rose further to 6.2%, the highest in over a decade. Only in FY25 do we see a drop to 4.7% of GDP, and the government presents this as a sign of "early deleveraging."

That may be true. Or it may reflect households delaying borrowing due to higher interest rates, not because their financial position has meaningfully improved.

Another shift is happening beneath the surface: households are abandoning traditional bank deposits and flocking to mutual funds. Mutual fund investments have jumped from Rs 0.6 lakh crore in 2020-21 to Rs 4.7 lakh crore in 2024-25 — a nearly eightfold increase in absolute flows. As a share of gross financial savings, mutual funds have gone from 2.1% to a staggering 13.1% in just four years. Gross financial savings, by contrast, have barely crept from Rs 30.7 lakh crore to Rs 35.6 lakh crore over the same period.

This behavioural shift — from guaranteed returns to market-linked volatility — reflects a mix of desperation (to beat inflation), greater financialisation, and clever industry marketing. But it also means that Indian households are now exposed to market cycles in a way they weren't a decade ago. When markets turn, savings buffers will crumble faster.

The government is quick to reassure Parliament that rising liabilities are partly tied to "physical asset creation," citing data from the RBI's Financial Stability Report. That is correct, but incomplete. The issue is not where households borrow, but how fast they borrow relative to incomes — and the fact that savings are not keeping up. A mortgage-driven rise in liabilities may be justified if wages, job stability, and savings are also rising. But wages have stagnated in several sectors, especially in the informal economy that still accounts for most employment. In the absence of rising incomes, asset-backed borrowing only masks the underlying vulnerability.

There's a bigger debt story too, one that undercuts the government's attempts to project fiscal prudence. India's external debt has more than doubled from Rs 29.7 lakh crore in 2015 to Rs 63.0 lakh crore by March 2025. And Rs 63.9 lakh crore by June 2025. Combine sovereign, corporate, and household leverage, and the picture resembles an economy running hotter on credit than the headline GDP figures acknowledge.

The danger is not that debt is inherently bad. A developing economy needs credit. The problem is the direction of travel — debt rising faster than incomes, liabilities rising faster than assets, and savings sitting well below historical norms. That is not a stable foundation for long-term growth; it's a sign of fragility wrapped in optimism.

Yet, political messaging continues to celebrate high GDP growth while glossing over the erosion of household balance sheets. For an economy where household consumption accounts for more than half of GDP, weakening financial buffers are not a side story — they are the story.

The government, to its credit, has not hidden the data. But it also hasn't framed it honestly. Phrases like "early signs of deleveraging" and "increased asset creation" subtly downplay the scale of the problem. A hard look at the numbers tells a different story: India is becoming a credit-dependent society faster than policymakers expected, and far faster than they are willing to publicly acknowledge.

What would a more honest economic strategy look like? First, rebuild savings. This requires boosting disposable incomes — which in turn requires real wage growth, job-rich sectors (not capital-heavy ones), and social protection that reduces the need for precautionary borrowing.

Second, improve credit quality. The rise in borrowers is not dangerous by itself. What's dangerous is rising debt among households without financial buffers. Regulatory vigilance must keep pace with the scale of credit expansion, especially among NBFCs where risk concentration is higher.

Third, restore the link between GDP growth and household welfare. For too long, India has treated high GDP prints as a proxy for rising prosperity. But the numbers in these parliamentary replies show a divergence: growth is increasingly being financed by household leverage, not household income.

India's economy may be expanding on paper, but the financial footing of its households — the engine of consumption, savings, and long-term stability — is weakening. No country can sustainably grow on borrowed optimism. If India doesn't confront its household debt problem now, it won't collapse spectacularly tomorrow. But it will chip away, year after year, at the financial security of the very people whose aspirations are supposed to define the India Story.

The warning signs are already in the data. The question is whether policymakers want to read them — or wait for the debt cycle to make the consequences impossible to ignore. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Restore Integrity in MPSC Exams: A Call for Strict Reforms

Editor,
Recent examinations conducted by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) have raised serious concerns about the fairness and transparency of competitive testing, particularly in certain district centres such as West Jaintia Hills. Reports have surfaced that in exams for posts like Junior Co-operative Officer (JCO), Inspector of Statistics, many candidates allegedly used mobile phones and other unfair methods inside the examination halls.

For years, MPSC exams were held only in Shillong, known for its strict monitoring and disciplined environment. With the intention of making the process more accessible, the Commission expanded centres to other districts, including West Jaintia Hills and West Khasi Hills. While the goal was equal opportunity, evidence now suggests that the expansion has unintentionally created gaps in supervision and opened doors to malpractice.

Eyewitness accounts claim that candidates managed to carry and use mobile phones inside exam halls to search answers and communicate. Disturbingly, it is alleged that some invigilators themselves facilitated this activity, reportedly acting as intermediaries by collecting phones before security checks and then returning them once candidates were inside the hall. There are also concerns that some invigilators were closely related to candidates, raising questions of conflict of interest.

Although multiple individuals are aware of these practices, they lack concrete proof such as photos or videos, partly due to fear of intimidation and retaliation if they speak publicly. In smaller communities, where familiarity and influence run deep, raising concerns can expose individuals to threats or pressure. Silence should not be misinterpreted as absence of wrongdoing.

These allegations strike at the heart of merit and fairness. When cheating is allowed to flourish, sincere aspirants who study diligently and attempt exams in strictly monitored centres like Shillong are unfairly disadvantaged. Competitive examinations shape the future of public service in Meghalaya. If the process becomes compromised, the credibility of recruitment collapses and public trust is lost.

To protect the integrity of the system, MPSC and the Government must urgently enforce stronger measures, including:

Full checking for all individuals entering exam premises, including invigilators. A complete ban on mobile phones and electronic devices.

Verification to ensure invigilators are not related to candidates.

Internet restrictions and use of jammers in examination zones.

CCTV surveillance and independent observers. Strict action and transparent investigation wherever malpractice is reported.

Meghalaya's youth deserve a system where hard work and honesty—not privilege or manipulation—determine success. The future of public

service must be built on integrity.

Yours etc.,

Name withheld on request,

Via email

How Road Safety Measures Should Be Implemented

Editor,

The news report "NEHU intensifies safety measures after car hit case" published in ST Nov, 29th actually shows how road safety measures are just knee jerk reactions instead of scientifically addressing them. The tragic on-campus accident where two young students were seriously injured due to drunk driving reflects how low we are on driving behaviour and culture as a society. People still consider basic safety measures like wearing a seat belt or helmet as ways to save themselves from a cop and not from an accident. In a country which loses 1.5 lakh people every year to road accident, road safety should have been taken more seriously. It is no less than a pandemic.

Having worked in the field of road safety for more than a decade I feel that just putting up 30 kmph signages within the campus and making helmets compulsory will not help address the issue. Had people adhered to traffic signages we would not be seeing so many violations. It is not just in our psyche to follow rules.

The following should have been done at the aftermath of the tragic accident.

A thorough road safety audit of the campus, identifying blind spots, danger-

ous curves, need for speed breakers and at which points, positioning of convex mirrors at blind turns etc.

Installation of speed gun cameras with the ability to capture number plates which will deter anyone from over speeding

On campus guards armed with breath analyzers conducting random checks for drunken driving

Road safety training and sensitization programs both for students, staff and campus guards. With periodic refresher programs in collaboration with traffic police.

I hope the university authorities give some thought to these points and make the campus safe for road users both driving vehicles and pedestrians.

Yours etc.,

Anubrata Choudhury

Via email

Gratitude to our foot soldiers directing traffic

Editor,

Every morning in Shillong, as engines rev and horns echo across narrow roads, one can see the same expression on countless faces — urgency, stress, and the quiet desperation of beating the clock. The rush through Shillong's traffic has become more than a daily commute; it is an unintentional metaphor for the rat race of life itself. The race is on, and the traffic only reflects the larger race we all are running.

The reasons behind the chaos are many and familiar — systems that react only when the water has already reached the nose, roads too small for the number of

vehicles they carry, and drivers too often governed by impatience rather than discipline. Yet, amid all this, there is one group that ends up absorbing the frustration of an entire city: our traffic police. They are blamed for the jams much like blaming our veins for high cholesterol — a criticism misdirected and unfair.

So perhaps it's time for a pause, if not on the roads, then at least in our perspective. Let us recognise the traffic foot soldiers of Shillong who stand for hours breathing the fumes, enduring the noise, and facing the anger we generate — yet calmly guiding us through the very chaos we create each day. They deserve not our scorn, but our gratitude.

Yours etc.,

Shekhar Singh,

Shillong

A gentle reminder about representing Northeast culture

Editor,

I read your report "NE takes centre stage at IFFI finale" (ST, Nov 29) with a sense of happiness. It is good to know that the cultures of our Northeast were given space at such a large national festival. Seeing the mention of Wangala and other folk dances of North East made us feel proud, because these traditions are part of our everyday life, not just performances.

At the same time, I felt a small worry in my heart. Many of these dances... especially Wangala... carry deep meaning in them, as I understand, for the commu-

nities they belong to. For us, Wangala is not just a beautiful dance for the stage. It is a thanksgiving celebration, a moment when families come together to honour

Misi Saljong (The Sun God who blesses us with good harvest and prosperity) after harvest. It has a warmth and a spirit that cannot always be shown in a short stage item.

The same is true for the other dances from the Northeast. They are beautiful to watch and enjoy but behind the beauty there are stories, beliefs, and a lot of feelings that people outside our region may not know. I sometimes feel that when these dances are presented without any explanation, their real meaning gets lost. They become colourful sights, but not understood as living traditions.

I say this with respect: events like IFFI can help the rest of India understand us better if they add a little more context... maybe a short introduction or a simple narration about each dance. This small step can help audiences appreciate not just the costumes and music, but the heart behind them.

I thank the organisers for bringing the Northeast into the national spotlight. I only hope that in future, our stories and meanings are also shared, so that people see not just the performance but the people behind it.

Yours etc.,

Jairaj,

Via email

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

*"If everyone is moving forward together,
then success takes care of itself."*

— Henry Ford

The Shillong Times

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Freebies, economy

IN a democracy, the voice of reason has better chances of being drowned in the cacophony of populism. When the breed of selfish politicians devoid of a larger urge and commitment to the nation's well-being usurp power, they go for the kill to remain in their positions and keep the voters on their side. Freebies to the large mass of the poor, state after state, are now increasingly becoming the fancy, the lollipop, for politicians to hold out, win votes and retain power. In a scenario of over-indulgence, question marks arise on the future of India as a nation.

Notably, former Reserve Bank governor, Duvvuri Subbarao, has raised his voice against such excessive indulgences. The freebie culture, he stated, may win elections, but it won't build nations. His immediate reference was to the Bihar assembly elections in November, where the BJP-JDU combine has retained power by, among other strategies, distributing a dole of Rs 10,000 each to over a crore of women in the run-up to the polls. The rival RJD attempted to be one up, by "promising" a payment of Rs 30,000 to these women if it won power. As Subbarao noted, the political class has suspended "all fiscal arithmetic" in their craze to win power. The pathos of this indulgence was fully evident only when it turned out that the huge sum that was distributed by the ruling RJD-BJP alliance was drawn from funds borrowed as loan for the state exchequer from external sources. In fact, states such as Karnataka, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Kerala and Maharashtra, which have in recent years indulged in similar liberal distribution of poll-related doles or freebies to the voters, are all struggling to balance their budgets. Big chunks of the revenue to the exchequer go to feed such fancies of the ruling politicians and to pay interests to the borrowed crores. The liability keeps swelling year after year. As Subbarao notes, these governments are pushing today's "consumption burden to tomorrow's taxpayers. Any government has accountability for no more than five years. It could be a deluge thereafter.

Such an ugly scenario has been building up over the past few years. Sonia Gandhi initiated the free/subsidized foodgrains scheme during the UPA-II, around which time J Jayalithaa of Tamil Nadu courted voters with saris and TV sets. Other southern states liberally offered much more, while the assembly polls in Maharashtra and later Bihar took the wind to the north. This would now be unstoppable. Notably, the Supreme Court had made an attempt to regulate the freebie politics, but this did not succeed. Modi watched the scenario quietly, rather than invoking the legislative mechanism to stem such indulgences. He hesitated initially, but is now one with the political sharks to exploit its "electoral potency" for his party. Subbarao, while as RBI head, had earned laurels for keeping the Indian economy in good form while the global economy was battered by the American-induced Great Recession of 2007-09. Boastful statements about India being the world's third largest economy now is tamed by the fact that some two-thirds of its 1.4 billion population live on freebies and subsidies.

Not another Cement Plant; Not in the Nongkhlieh Area!

By H.H. Mohrmen

Daistong and the Giant Imprint of Human Feet

Daistong also has some very important monuments connected to ancient tradition. On top of the hill at Daistong, there are three big slabs of stone placed as steps one on top of the other. These big stone slabs are similar to the dolmen of the maw kynthei, except for the fact that they don't have mawkhram. The three big flat stones on the top of the hill resemble the altar found in Aztec culture. The locals call the stone slab "ki kjet u Sajar" or the footprint of U Sajar Niangli because on one of the slabs there is a big imprint of a human foot of a giant size. The footprint is believed to belong to the legendary U Sajar Niangli, who was one of the military leaders that rebelled against the Jaintia king of his time.

The Rich Cave Heritage

The caves are not only exotic, but they also support cave life that is unique to the region. The caves in this area have big chambers, deep dams, and beautiful formations (not only stalactites and stalagmites) which are found only in Meghalaya. Scientists have also discovered new fish and bat species that are endemic to the region, and if mining is allowed, all these important natural heritages will disappear.

Meghalaya is also exploring other avenues to attract tourists to the state, but why are we ignoring cave tourism?

The Existing Cement Plants and Companies in East Jaintia Hills

East Jaintia Hills already has ten cement companies operating in the area. These include Star Cement Ltd (Star Cement Meghalaya Ltd), which operates from Lumshong, P.O. Khliehriat. It also has an integrated cement and clinker facility. Star Cement claims that its state-of-the-art integrated plant is strategically located in the idyllic town of Lumshong in Meghalaya, along with three grinding units — two at Sonapur near Guwahati, Assam, and one at Mohitnagar near Jalpaiguri, West Bengal. The current production is 7.7 MTPA, with a workforce of about 4,000. The company intends to increase its capacity to 25 MTPA by 2030 (Company's website).

The other major player in the area is Meghalaya Cements Limited (Topcem / Meghalaya Cements) located at Thangskai (near Lumshong). Goldstone Cements Ltd is located at Musiang

Lamare / Khliehriat (Lumshong area). JUD Cements Ltd operates at Wahiajer Village / Thangskai. (East Jaintia Hills). Hills Cement Company Ltd with the brand Taj Cement has a presence in areas such as Mynkree / Khliehriat. Amrit Cement (Amrit Cement Industries Ltd) has its main plant at Umlaper. Green Valley Industries Ltd has its main plant at Nongsning / Sutnga / Chiehruphi. Meghatop Cement Private Limited is another company registered in the area. Another major entity is Adhunik (Adhunik Cement Ltd / Megha Technical & Engineers Pvt. Ltd. affiliates) at Lumshong / Thangskai in East Jaintia Hills. Jaintia Cement is also situated at Latyrke under Saipung block.

There is one prominent cement brand operating in the district that is missing from the list. Dalmia, although the company has a brand presence in the state, it does not appear in the information provided by various internet sources. The reason is that Dalmia, for its operation in the state, uses the Adhunik plant at Thangskai, which it bought from the company.

How Many Local Youths Do These Companies Employ?

I still remember the only time I visited a few cement plants in the area was when local youths who had been laid off by the companies approached me for help in protesting their termination. I asked the manager of one of the companies why the local youths were dropped. His reply was, "Your people do not have industrial culture." He may not be entirely wrong, but, even then, the companies have a moral responsibility towards the local people on whose land they operate. They should provide the youths with training to prepare them for the jobs. The Companies must release a white paper stating how many local employees these companies actually employ.

It is also painful to note that not only have these companies largely failed to provide employment to local youths, but they have now gone even further by taking away jobs that local people could have done. Companies now operate their own trucks to transport cement and clinker, thereby depriving local truck owners and transporters of their livelihood.

How Has the State Benefited From These Companies?

It is ironic that not one of the cement companies has its corporate office in Meghalaya, thereby denying employment to local people. Why is Khliehriat, Jowai or even Shillong not a preferred location for the companies to set up its corporate office? Even more concerning is the lack of transparency regarding the distribution of their Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) funds. The Companies Act 2013 mandates that companies must allocate 2% of their average net profits over the previous three financial years toward CSR activities. Yet it is unclear how these companies have spent their CSR funds, even the Star Cement website does not transparently provide such information.

Another pertinent question arises: despite having ten cement plants operating under its jurisdiction and despite the companies also functioning as transport operators, why is the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council unable to pay its employees regularly? What has happened to the royalty that the companies are supposed to pay to the Council for both major and minor minerals used by the industry? Now companies like Star Cement are only using their plant at Lumshong to produce clinkers. The question is how does the state government benefit from the GST when most of the cement production of companies is from their grinding units which are located outside the state?

Growing Landlessness

It is already proven that in areas where the cement companies operate, the local people have become landless. Everybody is making hay while the sun shines, before they miss the bus. It is also ironic that there are cases where even the churches are competing with the public to sell their mineral-rich land to the companies. People in the areas where the cement plants operate do not even have space for a kitchen garden. They have sold their land—except for the plot where their house stands—for a song. The question is: what does the future hold for the local people in the Narpuh area? Does the government want to go the Narpuh way?

The government will lose and not gain anything if companies continue to set up shop in the region. The question is also: how many more cement plants do we want to operate in the region? When are we going to say enough is enough?

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Setting Negativity Aside...! The Prime Minister spoke a few days ago, standing tall and confident at the start of the winter session of Parliament, and he asked the opposition to set their negativity aside. It sounded wonderful. It sounded noble. For a fleeting moment, I almost clapped. Almost. Because before anyone can set negativity aside, one must first understand what positivity really is.

Positivity is harmony. It is peace. It is prosperity. It is love, compassion and kindness. It is laughter shared over a cup of tea, neighbours chatting at the gate, and friends agreeing to disagree but still meeting for a meal. It is warmth. It is goodwill. It is a gentle smile across a crowded street. It is the willingness to listen without preparing a counterattack. It is everything we once had, and everything we have somehow lost in the last ten years.

So, when the Prime Minister spoke of negativity, my mind travelled back. I remembered a time when my closest friends could sit across a table and argue till midnight about politics and religion, and afterward we still hugged and laughed and went home smiling. We teased each other. We joked about our differences. We celebrated our disagreements because we believed disagreement meant thinking. We valued the debate. We valued the freedom to speak. We valued each other.

Today, the same friends avoid each other. They glare. They block each other on phones and on WhatsApp. They whisper behind their backs, and they forward videos that are neither true nor kind. And I stand in the middle of that empty table where we once sat and wonder how this great nation of unity allowed itself to be divided so easily.

What happened to us? When did we let this poison creep in? When did we forget who we were? I recall neighbours who once shared meals and festival sweets. I recall Diwali diyas being exchanged with Christmas cake and Eid biryani. I recall balconies decorated with lights from every faith, laughter echoing through the compound, and families walking together to buy fireworks or set up Christmas trees. Today, those same neighbours do not speak. They cross the street to avoid each other. They shut their doors without even a nod. Children who once played together are now warned quietly at home not to mingle with those from the other side.

Who taught us to hate so efficiently? Who whispered into our ears that our neighbour is the enemy? Who told us that patriotism is proven not by loving our country but by hating someone else's belief or identity? It did not happen by accident. It happened through careful sowing. Seeds of division were planted and watered every day. The soil was prepared through television shouting matches, where one side screamed and the other side was muted. Fertiliser was poured through endless propaganda that repeated a lie until it started sounding like truth. And like obedient gardeners, we protected those seeds, believing

they would produce unity, but instead they grew into thick thorny bushes that scratched us all. And now the country is asked to set negativity aside.

What a lovely call. What a noble request. But, I wonder, with all sincerity, who should really receive that advice.

Should it be the opposition? Or should it be spoken to the side of the House that holds the largest numbers and the loudest microphones?

Maybe before giving such a sermon, the good Prime Minister might consider installing a giant mirror facing himself and the treasury benches.

A tall shiny one. One that shows every face clearly. One that reflects not the polished smiles seen on posters and billboards, but the real expressions behind them. Let every member look into it before pointing a finger across the aisle. Let them ask themselves one question. Did I bring unity or division? Did I add peace or spread anger? Did I bridge or did I break? Did I heal or did I wound? Did I lead with love or with fear?

And while that mirror stands proudly in the well of the House, perhaps another could be placed in every newsroom and television studio. A mirror that asks every anchor gently, did you inform or inflame? Did you encourage thinking or did you manufacture rage? Did you bring out the truth or did you twist it? Did you use your voice to build a nation or to shout it into pieces?

And maybe yet another mirror could quietly appear in every home. Because the truth is, this division did not grow by itself. It grew through us. This month, the world prepares for Christmas. A season of peace. A season of healing. A season where even enemies called for truce on battlefields. A season where a carpenter's son preached love as the only real revolution. And as the first star appears in a winter sky, we are reminded that peace begins not with demands from others but with transformation within oneself.

So yes, let us set negativity aside. But let us begin with the negativity that sits within us. The negativity that is fed to us daily. The negativity that we have allowed to become our identity. Because positivity is not a speech. Positivity is an action. It is an effort. It is daily work. It is choosing forgiveness instead of fury. It is restarting friendships. It is crossing that street to shake the hand you once ignored. It is putting down the phone and pouring a cup of tea. It is knocking once more on the door that has been closed for too long.

If those mirrors in Parliament and elsewhere could speak, they might whisper gently. This Christmas season as a month of peace dawns, set your own negativity aside first. Then ask the country to follow...!

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

Congress claims of Meghalaya getting into debt-trap - baseless

Editor,

The news "State's loans amount to 40 percent of GSDP: Cong warns of debt trap" (ST December 2, 2025) not only made interesting reading but is also amusing because it is not factual. According to Policy Research Studies Legislative Research, commonly referred to simply as PRS, an independent, non-partisan research initiative based in New Delhi. PRS provides analysis of legislation and policy to help Members of Parliament (MPs), state legislators, journalists and citizens better understand complex governance and fiscal issues. Besides the Ministry of Finance, Government of India, independent assessment such as those by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Ernst and Young (EY) India's national average debt-to-GDP ratio is

currently estimated at around 81% of the Gross Domestic Product (FY 2024-25) and not 28% as stated by the Meghalaya State Congress President Vincent Pala. Both IMF and EY, project India's general government debt-to-GDP ratio to gradually decline toward 77% by 2030.

These agencies along with the Finance Department, Government of Meghalaya - Annual Financial Statement, NITI Aayog's Macro and Fiscal Landscape of Meghalaya reports that the State's debt-to-GSDP (Gross State Domestic Product) ratio is projected at about 33% for FY 2025-26. Key figures from Meghalaya's Budget 2025-26 indicates a GSDP of Rs 66,645 crore (current prices, FY 2025-26). The outstanding debt revised estimates stand at Rs 21,900 crore FY 2025-26. Hence the debt-to-GSDP ratio works out to 33% (calculated as debt divided by GSDP).

The Fiscal Deficit is targeted at 3% GSDP (Rs 1970 crore) and a Revenue Surplus of 7.6% of GSDP (Rs 5035 crore). The contextual insight is Meghalaya's debt-to-GSDP ratio (33%) is lower than the national average of 81%, reflecting relatively moderate borrowing com-

pared to overall economic output. The State has maintained its fiscal deficit within the 3% ceiling recommended by the Finance Commission of India, which is considered a healthy benchmark for states. A consistent revenue surplus (above 7% of GSDP) provides fiscal space for capital expenditure and reduces reliance on borrowings. In FY 2025-26, Meghalaya plans to repay Rs 2405 crore of debt, further stabilizing its debt profile.

A comparative note shows that Meghalaya's debt ratio of 33% is among the lower ranges for Indian states, many of which hover between 30-40%. States with higher infrastructure spending (like Punjab or Kerala) often show debt ratios above 40%. Assam's ratio estimated for 2025-26 which is below 40% is higher due to infrastructure and social spending commitment. Meghalaya's ratio estimated for 2025-26 is in the range of 36 and 38% is no doubt a rising debt but still below high-debt states like Punjab, Kerala and Assam. Manipur's ratio is estimated at 32-34% which is moderate because the state is supported by central transfers. In the case of Tripura, it is in

the range of 33-35% which is stable though welfare schemes add pressure.

It is important to take note that the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) framework recommends that states keep debt-to-GDP below 40%. Most North Eastern States are within or close to this threshold. States like Punjab (53%), Rajasthan (47%) and West Bengal (45%) are far more indebted than the North Eastern States. What are the drivers of debt? Heavy reliance on central transfers and grants, limited industrial base, so fiscal deficits are covered by borrowing. Infrastructure and welfare spending push debt upwards in Assam and Meghalaya while hydro power revenues help Sikkim maintain stability with a ratio of 31% debt-to-GSDP.

Lastly, Paul Krugman, a Nobel Prize winning liberal economist argues that overall size of national or State debt is less relevant than the Debt-to-GDP ratio. He notes that the debt-to-GDP ratio was high after World War II, similar to current levels (120.73% in the USA). He emphasises that government debt should not be compared to household debt. Unlike

individuals, governments do not die and can generate revenue over time. Governments need to service their debts by paying interest and repaying principal when bonds become due. However, they do not necessarily have to pay off the entire debt. He further points out that historically, it is unusual for governments to pay off large debts completely. For example, Great Britain has held onto debt incurred as far back as the Napoleonic wars. He believes that high debt levels can be managed as long as the debt does not rise too much faster than revenue. Krugman's perspective highlights the importance of managing debt in relation to the economy's overall size and revenue generating capacities.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Need for Strict Implementation of Road Safety and Traffic Rules

Editor,
This is in continuation

to the letter that appeared in these columns (ST December 2, 2025) regarding the need for implementing road safety measures in our city. I fully agree with the writer that mere installation of signages or making helmets compulsory will not be enough to address the larger issues of road safety and traffic discipline. The reality is that many drivers and bikers in our city take traffic rules far too lightly. It is common to see drivers using mobile phones while driving and moving slowly or erratically without considering those behind them, some are even drunk while driving and others drive speedily. Cars frequently stop or park anywhere and in many localities vehicles are parked even on narrow roads without any regard for the inconvenience caused to others.

Another frequent scenario is the overtaking even during traffic jams, switching lanes causing obstruction to vehicles coming from the opposite direction. Overloaded taxis, inappropriate use of indicators and signals, and general disregard for basic traffic rules have become everyday occurrences. These

behaviours not only create avoidable traffic congestion but also significantly increase the risk of accidents.

Unless these issues are addressed with the seriousness they deserve, the city will continue to witness rising accident rates and unnecessary traffic jams. The only solution is strict implementation and enforcement of traffic rules and safety norms. For this to happen effectively, there must be clear accountability and responsibility at all levels—both among road users and the authorities. Through your esteemed newspaper, I wish to appeal to the concerned authorities to take stronger, more stringent and consistent action, and to the public to adopt responsible behaviour on the roads and only then, can our roads be safer for everyone.

Yours etc.,
Shan Lyngdoh
Via email

Declining reading habits

Editor,
Reading habits are declining rapidly, especially

among the younger generation. Smartphones and social media have shifted attention away from books, leading to wasted time and weakened focus. Libraries today witness far fewer visitors than before. As a result, people are gradually losing creativity, critical thinking, concentration, and the ability to remain mentally engaged for long periods. On the other hand, constant scrolling on smartphones creates anxiety, stress, and a craving for new stimulation every moment. Parents and teachers must encourage children and students to limit smartphone use as much as possible. Reading habits should be promoted through engaging programs, competitions, and activities that make books appealing. Once individuals experience the joy and depth of reading, they will develop a natural desire to read more on their own.

Yours etc.,
Arshad Alam,
Via email

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

“Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.”

— John F. Kennedy

The Shillong Times

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Poverty: Enemy of Education

THE news that 24 children from Meghalaya, aged between eight and thirteen years have been repatriated from Chikkaballapura district in Karnataka following their rescue from the Sowmya Kesanupalli Student Home in Perumale should shock the people of Meghalaya. It shows Meghalaya in poor light yet again. Here is a narrative of people taking extreme steps so that their children get basic education. What this incident reminds those in government is that free and compulsory education does not look after all aspects of requirements for a child's education. Parents struggle to buy uniforms and books. There are enough Christian missionary run institutions and also Seng Khasi schools besides government run schools so why are parents not enrolling their children in these schools? The reason could be that most schools charge fees and at the beginning of the academic calendar. The cost of uniforms and books too are major deterrents for parents to enrol their kids in school. Some months ago, a number of male students were also brought back from Karnataka, courtesy the initiative of the Social Welfare Department of that state, after two boys from Meghalaya died of food poisoning there. They were served stale food left over from some festival. These male students too were recruited by the Lei Synshar Society. Hence this is the second time that the Society has been guilty of sending children from poor families to distant places without taking stock of their living conditions.

After that incident it should have been the task of the Education Department to dig deeper into the functioning of the Leisynshar Cultural Society an indigenous faith outfit which in collaboration with the RSS regularly recruits these kids from poor families and sends them to study to different parts of this country. Since then, there should have been stronger regulatory frameworks in place to prevent children from being sent out. The Leisynshar Cultural Society should have been kept under the scanner to check its activities and to find out where all it has sent children to study under such harsh circumstances. That the Organisation was not made answerable exposes the weakness of the law enforcement system and also the weak social controls in the tribal society today. If the State Government had taken note of the very poor families and helped enrol them in some schools locally would the children have had to undergo so much trauma?

The fact that there are too many poor families that cannot educate their children closer home also exposes the broken societal and clan system among tribals where the clan has lost its ability to look after its poorer members. What's the point of the clan if some semblance of equity cannot be enforced where the affluent donate to educate their poorer clan members? Education is a fundamental right of every child. The fact that some are denied this right due to stark poverty requires judicial intervention. The state is provided adequate resources to provide free and compulsory education. So why has the state consistently failed? Parents send their children to distant states because it means one less mouth to feed and clothe and pay the fees for. Has Meghalaya become a state where the poor don't matter? The MDA2 Government has to take appropriate action against the Leisynshar Cultural Society.

Letters to the Editor

Congress indulges in finger-pointing game: Conrad gives fitting reply

Editor,

Apropos of the news “Cong a divided house: Conrad on Pala’s (One North East) claims” (ST December 3, 2025), Meghalaya Chief Minister, Conrad K. Sangma, used the phrase “Congress is already a divided house,” as a political counter to Congress’ criticism of the newly formed One North East regional front. His statement reflects an attempt to highlight internal discord within the Congress party rather than directly engage with their accusations. The context of the statement is that Meghalaya Congress chief Vincent H. Pala had alleged that One North East was a BJP-RSS designed to weaken anti-BJP forces in the region. Conrad Sangma countered by saying no external effort is needed to divide Congress, since it is “already divided from within.” He emphasized that Congress leaders may sit together but have separate internal agendas. Sangma’s political positioning framed One North East as a unifying platform for the North Eastern Region, not as an anti-Congress or anti-BJP front, but as a positive initiative for regional cooperation. By calling Congress “a divided

house”, Sangma’s strategic messaging shifts the narrative from defending One North East against accusations to questioning Congress’ own cohesion. The remark suggests that Congress’ internal factionalism weakens its credibility in opposing regional initiatives.

In Northeast India, alliances and fronts often emerge to amplify regional voices in national politics. Sangma’s statement positions National People’s Party and allies as more stable and forward-looking compared to Congress. It’s a classic political move – deflect criticism by pointing to the accuser’s weaknesses. This also signals that the NPP may be in touch with some Congress leaders, hinting at possible cross-party negotiations. From one perspective, the statement underscores real challenges within Congress, which has faced factionalism nationally and regionally. This is a rhetorical device meant to delegitimize Congress’ criticism of One North East and strengthen the narrative of regional unity under Sangma’s leadership. Ultimately, the remark is less about Congress itself and more about framing the NPP-led initiative as constructive and inevitable, while portraying Congress as internally unstable.

In the meantime, the Congress may leisurely spend some time listening to the song “Before You Accuse Me (Take a look at yourself)” written by Bo Diddley in

Organic Farming in Meghalaya: Promises, Contradictions, and the Road Ahead

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

During the recently concluded 4th Organic Youth Summit at Courtyard Marriott, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma called for coordinated and sustained efforts from all stakeholders to advance Meghalaya’s organic farming mission. The drive to make the state organic, in fact, began during the tenure of former Chief Minister Mukul Sangma, who launched Mission Organic in 2015. It was a good initiative that got disrupted in 2022 when the ban on chemical fertilizers was lifted ahead of the Meghalaya Assembly elections. The then Agriculture Minister, Banteid Lyngdoh, pointed out that a section of farmers in the state—especially in East Khasi Hills—had been severely affected by the ban on the use of fertilizers. Therefore, in order to help the farmers, the Department of Agriculture decided to renew the use of fertilizers for certain crops like potato, tomato, and cabbage. Ever since the announcement lifting the ban on chemical fertilizers, there has been no news of the restrictions being reinstated. As a result, the situation right now is a little confusing. On the one hand, the Chief Minister talks about promoting organic farming in the state, but on the other hand, the decision to support inorganic farming—which was made for political exigencies—has still not been withdrawn.

Recently, Timothy D. Shira, the new Agriculture Minister, urged farmers and young entrepreneurs to embrace modern technology and value addition in agriculture to transform Meghalaya’s rural economy under the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative. According to him, each district should grow crops best suited to its soil and climate, which is the concept of “one district, one crop.” In fact, there is already a list of notified ODOP crops for every district in the state. For example, the crop identified for East Khasi Hills is Khasi Mandarin, while for West Garo Hills it is cashew—both important cash crops. However, what is worrying is that these are plantation crops grown as part of a monoculture system. Such systems are highly susceptible to pest attacks, thereby necessitating the use of chemical pesticides. Monoculture also leads to a decline in soil fertility, compelling farmers to depend on chemical fertilizers. For these reasons, organic farming places great emphasis on crop diversity as a key soil and pest manage-

ment strategy. Unless the implementation of the ODOP scheme avoids the expansion of monoculture practices at the expense of already existing multi-cropping systems (e.g., jhum, bun and homesteads), there is disconnect between the declaration to promote organic farming and the actual initiatives on the ground.

To be fair, the MDA government under Conrad Sangma did introduce the 2023 Meghalaya State Organic and Natural Farming Policy. Except for the lack of measures on income support for farmers who will face financial losses during the transition to organic farming, and problems related to certification (which, by design, excludes farming practices like jhum and bun), the policy is generally quite progressive—especially with its emphasis on linking food production with health and nutrition. Malnutrition is a major problem in the state and the latest NFHS-5 (2019–2020) survey revealed that around half or more of children and women are stunted and anaemic. From anecdotal evidence, I have been informed that the most malnourished blocks in the state coincide with those that are heavily invested in chemical-intensive farming and have received exemptions to purchase chemical fertilizers. Of course, this is only anecdotal, and it would be useful for someone to confirm this with a rigorous scientific study. The success of the policy will therefore have tremendous implications not just for farmers but for the entire population of the state.

The news report on the 4th Organic Youth Summit carried several quotes not only from the Chief Minister but also from important stakeholders, including representatives from APEDA (Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority) and IF-OAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements). The support of these bodies will be crucial for promoting organic farming in the state, since these agencies develop guidelines for the certification and export of agricultural products, which are key to improving farmers’ incomes. The ultimate goal must be to improve farmers’ incomes, especially in light of inflation and the rising cost of living. In 2016, the Union Government announced that it intended to

double farmers’ income by 2022. It has been three years since the deadline, and based on the math, farmers should now be enjoying three times the income they had in 2016. Only the farmers themselves can tell whether the promise has been fulfilled or if it was just another jhumla.

While everyone spoke the right things, there was a conspicuous absence of any mention of climate change in the context of supporting organic farming in the state. Meghalaya is already reeling under the effects of climate change, especially with increasingly erratic rainfall patterns. This year, alarmingly, the state experienced a rainfall deficit of approximately 50% below normal during the monsoon period. But the decline in rainfall during the pre-monsoon period is equally troubling. Even this year, delays in pre-monsoon showers have had a severe impact on crops such as beans in Ri Bhoi. What makes farming systems in the state particularly susceptible to climate change is the lack of irrigation facilities.

Agriculture in Meghalaya has always been rain-fed—largely because its hilly topography makes irrigation projects, like those seen in other parts of the country, less viable. As long as rainfall is predictable and adequate, this strategy works. However, with rainfall becoming highly erratic and failing during critical periods, there is an urgent need to develop irrigation facilities, both surface and groundwater. In this regard, the state is severely lagging behind. A recent report by the Jal Shakti Ministry, cited in newspapers in February of this year, highlighted that despite a low extraction rate—only 3.55% of the potential—water sources are depleting, which could pose long-term risks to the state’s water security. To tackle this crisis, the Meghalaya government launched the Rs 353-crore MegARISE project in 2024, and irrigation has been identified as the third most important priority under the 2019 Meghalaya State Water Policy. As a matter of fact, in 2015, when Mukul Sangma announced Mission Organic during a meeting in Ampati, he informed the audience that a project worth Rs 4,500 crore had been sanctioned to address the state’s water woes, noting that the original idea of the IBDLP (Integrated Basin Development and Livelihood Promotion) was

to create water bodies in the state. Thus, the announcement of substantial funds for augmenting the state’s water resources is not new.

At the same time, irrigation is not solely the responsibility of the state government. Under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution, the Autonomous District Councils in the state have been empowered to legislate on issues related to the use of canals or watercourses for agriculture. However, none of the three Autonomous District Councils—the Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills, or Garo Hills—has enacted any legislation on this issue. Considering that climate change entered mainstream policy discussions only in the last few decades, the absence of past legislation on the issue is understandable. However, the effects of climate change have intensified in recent years, and every indication suggests that the situation will only worsen. To ensure that agriculture—which remains the main occupation for the majority of the population—does not suffer, it is high time that irrigation becomes a central component of any intervention aimed at supporting agriculture, especially organic farming. The ADCs will have to do their part and cannot depend solely on the state government. The increased discussions on organic farming in Meghalaya are a good sign, indicating an attempt to create a more sustainable and resilient food system to cope with climate change while ensuring food and nutritional security for the population. Apart from the state’s own programs and policies, there are several central schemes that Meghalaya can take advantage of, including the recently launched Pradhan Mantri Dhan Dhaanya Krishi Yojana (PMDDKY), which aims to increase agricultural productivity, promote sustainable agricultural practices (e.g., organic farming), reduce dependence on the monsoon rains, and improve farmers’ livelihoods. However, despite numerous announcements of various programmes and policies, much remains to be done on the ground. We will only know if any of these initiatives are successful when farmers in the state are able to earn a good income while also ensuring environmental sustainability. Until then, much work remains to be done.

(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)

Mars Migration: Building Humanity’s Second Home

By Achaljit Kaur

Imagine a painting where Earth sits in the center, once blue and bright, but now surrounded by piles of plastic, rising smoke, and cracked, dry land. The oceans look darker, the forests thinner, and the sky is smudged with grey. It looks less like a planet and more like a graveyard of its own mistakes. This is no longer just imagination, rather a warning, that our home is slowly collapsing and as Earth struggles to breathe, scientists are asking a bold question: “If our planet is dying, can Mars become humanity’s next hope?”

We now live on a world approaching irreversible breakdown. Evidence shows that Earth’s life-support systems are “shifting toward instability, perhaps irreversibly,” as suggested by the faculty of the University of Hawai’i at Mānoa in their 2024 study, indicating that global ecological decline has passed the point of natural recovery. They added in 2023 alone, 7.3 billion people were exposed to dangerous temperatures directly amplified by climate change, showing that environmental collapse is no longer the future but it is the present reality. Rising drought further weakens ecosystems, where mortality risk is always present across numerous ecological systems and increases sharply with shifting climate patterns, a conclusion detailed in Bioscience by W. E. Moss et al.

As suggested in the 2024 PNAS Nexus article by C. Fletcher et al., we are entering a “malignant era of global distress... disease, thirst, hunger, impoverishment, and political instability”, signalling the early stages of planetary-scale social collapse. The article further suggests that we are looking toward a world where temperature rises by 3 degrees permanently, leading to decadal mega-drought, freshwater scarcity, catastrophic sea-level rise, and the displacement of up to 1.2 billion people by 2050, accelerating a humanitarian crisis of unprecedented scale.

With no major economy on track to limit warming to 1.5 °C as promised, collapse isn’t distant but it is unfolding. So the chances of saving this world might be negative and in the near future we need to look for a new home. As humanity looks beyond Earth for long-term survival, the most promising candidate is Mars.

Mars is not just a red dot. It is a blank page. The ongoing robotic mission are already shaping how life on mars might unfold. Before humans land, machines have been preparing the groundwork that is mapping terrain, identifying resources, and effectively shaping the earliest forms of Martian territory. We can say, Mars is like a house no one has lived in yet, workers arrive; they sweep, measure, check water connections, even paint the walls. That is sort of what robots are doing on Mars. They are the builders, preparing the space so humans can one day live there.

NASA Researchers describe this process as aerometric power (meaning each rover track, scan, and drill transforms Mars from an unknown world into a mapped, workable domain). Honestly, this technology is not just assisting migration, rather building it. A big factor of future Mars migration is the planet’s natural resource potential. Studies show that Mars is viewed as a new “resource frontier” where future missions may extract materials for survival, science, and industry. Statistically, shipping endless supplies from earth is impossible, it would be like trying to carry a year’s groceries in a backpack every day. So, In-Situ Resource Utilization, ISRU—Using the resources that are already available where you are, instead of bringing everything from somewhere else) is essential for migration. ISRU focuses on using what Mars already has, to produce fuel, oxygen, and water like cooking a meal using ingredients already in the kitchen instead of ordering from outside. With an atmosphere of 95% CO₂, it provides a vital oxygen source. NASA’s MOXIE experiment demonstrated this by successfully producing breathable oxygen from Martian air using solid-oxide electrolysis almost like converting water to soda. This achievement marks a major step towards independent human presence since it reduces dependence on earth. MOXIE mission highlights that larger oxygen production systems could allow return trip fuel generation

and help permanent settlements independent of Earth.

Future ISRU systems aim to use Martian water, ice and hydrated minerals to expand the range of possible products. With water available, methane fuel, plastic and construction materials and even fertilizers for agriculture is possible. These capabilities are crucial because they turn Mars from a distant target into a livable home with infrastructure, emergency reserves, and mission longevity. Without ISRU, migration would be symbolic but with-it Mars becomes a functional ecosystem in which human life can grow. NASA explains that Martian soil and CO₂ can be used to make fuel, grow food, and build things which is crucial for turning Mars into real settlements.

Another challenge for Martian migrants is radiation exposure. Weirdly, Mars has no magnetic field and a thin environment, so the radiation levels are much higher than that on earth. Long term exposure can damage DNA and increase cancer risks. This makes protection important for colonization. NASA’s Curiosity rover found that parking near a big Martian rock is like standing in the shade on a sunny day the rock blocks some of the “space rays,” cutting radiation by about 4%, and the really sneaky rays by around 7.5%. The reduction may seem small, but it proves that building near caves, lava tubes or cliffs can act like standing under a giant natural umbrella. Ongoing curiosity updates support this idea, and mission updates suggest that rock walls, crater rims, and overhangs could be key elements of early Martian shelter design.

This therefore shows that Mars migration will rely on a combination of technology and terrain, where engineering works together with natural features. Early settlers may position habitats in sheltered geological structures, supplementing them with artificial shielding and underground designs. Over time, robotics, ISRU systems, and environmental adaptation will shape a new model of living. Slowly, Mars is shifting from a faraway world to a future home.

As Mars migration becomes engineering reality, one of the final hurdles is radiation-safe housing. Simulations show that habitats built with Martian regolith (Martian soil or dust) and hydrogen-rich polymers outperform aluminum shielding. Models indicate that a dome using 10 g/cm² of regolith plus 5 g/cm² of Lithium Hydride or polystyrene could greatly cut cosmic radiation like bubble-wrap layers protecting something fragile. This means settlers could build effective shields with Martian resources instead of importing heavy materials from Earth.

Beyond radiation, habitat strength and environmental performance determine our life on mars. 2025 research published in Aerospace by Prof. Janabadi and colleagues explains that 3D-printed regolith shells with modular support cores maintain strong thermo-mechanical stability in extreme Martian conditions. You can think of it as a gingerbread house, baked to withstand the damage. Mars has temperature over 60°C daily. So basically, habitat shells must stand repeated thermal cycling something regolith composites achieve with even thick layers. Fiber reinforcement, and curvature, like wearing a sweater, raincoat and windshield together. Dome shapes also distribute loads efficiently, resists dust storms and reduce failure points, making them ideal for large-scale settlements. I like to see them as igloos or beehives, weight spreads naturally, keeping the structure stable.

In a nutshell these studies give hope for migration. Instead of imagining habitats as Earth copies, research now shows that locally sourced, optimized, and autonomously built structures will be the foundation of settlement. By combining radiation shielding, structural strength, and environmental adaptability into regolith-based systems, we can bridge the gap between exploration and long-term habitation. If we build smartly, Mars might become the home we wished Earth could stay in and one day, Earth may just be the place we left behind. Who knows one day our grand-kids summer break will be visiting earth with sunscreen, radiation suits, spaceships and all.

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

1957 which was released in 1958 as the B-side to “Say Boss Man.” It was later revived and included on Cosmo’s Factory (1970), one of Creedence Clearwater Revival (CCR) bringing the blues classic into their swamp-rock repertoire. The context of the song is a witty blues counter charge “before someone points fingers, they should examine their own faults.”

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh
Via Email

Unconstitutional functioning in Mawkyrwat District Sports Association

Editor,

The Mawkyrwat District Sports Association (MDSA), the primary governing body for sports in the South West Khasi Hills District, is currently facing a crisis that goes beyond ordinary administrative lapses. What has emerged over the past decade is a sustained breakdown of democratic functioning, accompanied by serious non-compliance with statutory obligations and sports governance norms. This crisis has raised fundamental questions about the legality, legitimacy, and transparency of the Association’s operations.

One of the most serious concerns pertains to the

absence of elections and renewal of office bearers for nearly ten years. Under both the Societies Registration framework and the governance principles of the State Sports Council, periodic elections are not optional—they are a mandatory requirement. By failing to conduct elections for such an extended period, MDSA stands in clear violation of democratic norms and statutory rules. Office bearers continuing indefinitely without electoral mandate amounts to administrative impropriety and undermines the very legitimacy of the Association.

Equally grave is the failure to convene either an Annual General Meeting (AGM) or any General Body Meeting (GBM) for approximately a decade. In any registered association, the General Body is the supreme decision-making authority. It is responsible for electing leaders, approving accounts, formulating policies, and reviewing the performance of office bearers. When the General Body is not convened for ten years, it effectively nullifies the checks and balances necessary for transparent and accountable governance.

The non-convening of these meetings has deprived the affiliated clubs—who are the rightful members of the Association—of their statutory right to participate in decisions that directly

affect them. Such denial of participation violates fundamental principles of natural justice and fair representation. Without democratic forums, the Association risks operating as a private entity controlled by a few individuals, rather than as a public sports institution answerable to its members and guided by its constitution.

The affiliated clubs have repeatedly raised these issues before the President of MDSA, who also serves as the Deputy Commissioner of the District. Their demands have been clear, reasonable, and grounded in statutory norms: convene a General Meeting and conduct fresh elections before the commencement of the MDSA League 2025–2026. Such a stand by the clubs is legally justifiable. Members of any registered association have the right to demand accountability, transparency, and adherence to democratic procedures.

The role of the Deputy Commissioner, as the ex-officio President of MDSA, is particularly significant in this context. The President bears both statutory responsibility and moral duty to ensure that the Association functions within the framework of its constitution and the laws governing sports bodies. Failure to intervene in the face of glaring violations may amount to administrative inaction and could further deepen the crisis of

legitimacy within MDSA.

Restoring legality and democratic functioning within MDSA requires immediate corrective measures. These include convening a duly constituted General Body Meeting, conducting free and fair elections for office bearers, reviewing administrative decisions taken during the non-compliant period, and reinstating transparency through proper audits and reporting. These steps are not merely administrative remedies—they are legal necessities required to restore confidence and integrity within the Association.

In conclusion, the ongoing crisis in MDSA represents a fundamental breakdown of governance, legality, and institutional accountability. The decade-long absence of elections and General Body meetings is incompatible with the principles of democratic administration and statutory compliance. If MDSA is to uphold its role as the guardian of sports development in the district, it must urgently return to the path of lawful, transparent, and participatory governance. The future of the district’s athletes, clubs, and sporting culture depends on immediate and decisive action.

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

"Eighty percent of success is showing up."

— Woody Allen

The Shillong Times

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Putin, possibilities

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin's visit to India, the first after his 2022 invasion of Ukraine, assumes special significance. The Russian parliament's ratification of the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistic Support pact between India and Russia shortly before Putin's visit has raised the relations between the two nations to a new level. What could be expected during this visit are new trade, energy and defence deals, including the leasing of a nuclear-powered submarine at a cost of \$2 billion. All eyes are on the energy deals that the two countries sign during this visit, as the US has already 'punished' India in this context with huge punitive tariffs for exports from here, seriously hurting our exports and trade relations with the West. In a parallel diplomatic outreach, India is continuing its talks with the US to reduce the hiked tariffs.

Russia has been India's close friend since the Cold War era when the US and USSR were engaged in a bitter rivalry. Jawaharlal Nehru's fancy for non-alignment with world powers, however, effectively meant a joint front against the US, with the USSR leading a pack of under-developed nations set against "imperialism" — a euphemism for American supremacy. This set the US against India; and in favour of Pakistan. The end of the Cold War era and disintegration of the USSR in the 1980s, followed by the age of Liberalization and Globalisation, edged India closer to the US since the 1990s when the Narasimha Rao-Manmohan Singh combine charted a new course for the nation. Matching, Russia under Putin distanced itself from India. A new opportunity for a strengthening of ties between these two nations arose with the US sanctions against Russia's energy deals. Prime Minister Narendra Modi saw an opportunity in this and signed energy deals with Moscow, which benefited India in economic terms. President Trump's decree in August, imposing hefty tariffs on India for the violation of the American sanctions on Russia abruptly created a wedge between the US and India. In this context, chances are that India would be compelled to do some tight-rope walking vis-à-vis its fresh energy negotiations with Russia. Yet, the importance that India attaches to Putin's visit is proof that the browbeating by Trump would not cow down New Delhi.

Defence sector has seen major deals between Russia and India for many years. Even as Putin kept a distance with New Delhi for a period, the defence-sector ties remained strong. India continued purchase of Russian military hardware for its defence requirements. Citations are that the West has more sophisticated weapons and fighter jets on its sales list. India's negotiations with the West too would continue in terms of such acquisitions. However, with the US adopting strong postures against India and strengthening its ties with Pakistan, an added concern for India is China's negative mindset. Though Modi visited China and attempted to reset India's ties with the red neighbour, its success is yet to be ascertained. Russia too has strengthened its ties with China in recent times. Overall, a sense of uncertainty about bilateral relations is all too pronounced now. Putin's gestures in Delhi would hopefully help clear the air.

Letters to the Editor

A Hopeful Step Towards a Drug-Free Meghalaya

Editor,
I read the news item published in The Shillong Times on December 4, 2025, and felt it necessary to express a few earnest thoughts on the recent initiative taken by Sankardev College, the Drug User Community, and the DREAM Mission to conduct a statewide drug use survey. The presence of our Hon'ble Chief Minister and senior officers during the MoU signing sent a clear message that the matter is finally being taken up with the seriousness and urgency it deserves. For many of us, this brings reassurance that the safety of our young people is at last receiving the level of attention it demands.

The survey will undoubtedly serve as a crucial foundation for formulating effective and evidence-based strategies to confront this alarming menace. What adds further strength to this initiative is the humane and thoughtful way it has been

shaped. By involving groups like MUF and MeduNet, the government and partnering institutions have acknowledged that addiction cannot be addressed through fear or punishment alone. Real solutions begin when we listen, when we try to understand the silent struggles people face, and when we treat every affected person with dignity. For countless families across Meghalaya who quietly endure the pain of a child struggling with addiction, this approach brings a ray of hope.

At the same time, this moment reminds us that the road ahead is long. The Government alone cannot win this battle. Every school, every church, every NGO, every locality, and every responsible citizen must accept this as a shared duty. Awareness programmes, sincere conversations with young people, counselling support, attentive parenting, and vigilant communities are not just suggestions—they are essential if we want to protect our children. As elders, teachers, and guardians, we cannot look away and expect someone else to shoulder this responsibility. The proposal to create

Drug-Free Localities is encouraging, but its success will depend on genuine community ownership and sustained action. A dedicated government fund for anti-drug initiatives would further strengthen the efforts of many small organisations and communities that wish to contribute but often lack the necessary resources.

Let the initiative taken by Sankardev College inspire others across the state. And may our collective seriousness, responsibility, and goodwill bring us closer to the day every Meghalayan longs for—a day when our children grow up safe, our homes are peaceful, and our beloved state stands united in overcoming the drug menace.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

Paying to Park, Paying the Price

Editor,
The recent imposition of paid parking in parts of the city under the Meghalaya Urban Parking Policy 2025 raises fundamental questions

about democratic governance and the rights of citizens to equitable access to common resources. The policy sets higher rates in commercial zones and lower rates in residential areas. While the government frames this as congestion management rather than revenue generation, the implementation reveals a troubling narrowness in how we value public space and who benefits from state decisions.

The idea that citizens should now pay a "fair share" of parking costs hides a more regressive reality. Car ownership in Meghalaya is far from evenly distributed across income groups. By commodifying public street parking, which was historically free, the policy places a heavier burden on lower-income residents and workers, especially those living in older, denser neighbourhoods without private parking. Wealthier citizens can absorb these costs or rely on private alternatives, turning what should be a shared public resource into yet another financial barrier. Introducing fees without improving public transport

or pedestrian infrastructure further reduces this policy to a cost imposed on the public rather than a genuine mobility solution. And in a city where congestion comes from narrow roads, poor planning and limited transport options, it is obvious that parking alone will not untangle Shillong's traffic.

Taxi associations from Rynjah and Nongmehsong have already opposed this implementation, recognising the direct pressure it puts on their daily earnings. For workers in the informal economy, public space is not a convenience but an essential infrastructure for survival. Introducing charges without meaningful community consultation signals a worrying disregard for the people who depend the most on these spaces.

Citizens also deserve clarity on how revenue collected from paid parking will be used, and whether it will genuinely support mobility and public-space improvements. It is also hard to ignore the contradiction of turning parking spaces like the MUDA lot into vending zones, especially when the

government is looking ahead to expanding and exploring new parking infrastructure across the city.

What makes this even more concerning is our collective silence. As citizens, we rarely question policies that directly affect our everyday lives, and issues like these fade into the background until they become permanent. If we do not raise our voices on decisions that reshape our streets and our mobility, then who will?

Shillong deserves policies shaped through dialogue and grounded in public interest, not decisions introduced without the participation of the people they affect most.

Yours etc.,
Nicholas Jason Langrai
Via email

Need for Responsible Use of Narrow City Lanes

Editor,
Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to highlight a growing

Behind the steep fall of Indian Rupee are many factors including fall in exports RBI should give a critical look at the macro factors working towards decline of currency

By Anjan Roy

The Indian currency has depreciated beyond the psychological level of Rs 90 to a dollar in course of trading during Wednesday. It closed at 90.22 at the close of trading.

It now looks as though the Indian rupee is inevitably set for continuous depreciation. Some traders and financial markets operators are airing such views to the financial press. But in the worst of times, in 1992, when the rupee was first put to float, it showed surprising strength. It did depreciate sharply, but then it stayed calm for a long while.

In March 1993, when the rupee became fully market based it stood at 31.52 to a dollar. A decade later, it had depreciated to Rs 48.39 but then it rebounded robustly to Rs 40.28 in 2007-8, just before the global financial melt-down. After the global financial meltdown, rupee depreciated again to 47.44 in 2009 again to recover somewhat in a year.

The next phase of rupee depreciation had come after the taper tantrums since when the rupee has been going down.

In contrast, the Chinese renminbi had remained rock solid against the US dollar for what now seems ages. Why is that so? The answer can be found in the sharp differences in the fundamentals of the two economies. China has developed a massive manufacturing industry and it has grown immensely in the intervening years, which sets it apart from all others. Exchange rate fluctuation reflects several aspects of the functioning of an economy. The current fluctuations in the rupee exchange rate are the end result of uncertainties in the global markets and economy; more fundamentally, these could also reflect the divergences between the domestic economy and the global economy.

The current slide in the exchange rate of the Indian rupee against the US dollar points at these twin factors — while the global turmoil and uncertainty put pressure on the rupee, the inflation differential between India and its major trading partner also played a role. The adverse impact of these factors have further been compounded by the continuing low factor productivity.

The shortcomings of the real economy are now being morphed into a financial market fall through the exchange market. Rupee's depreciation against the dollar is a reflection of the troubled global economic situation and its transmission into the Indian economy.

The primary trigger this time came from the sharp hike in withdrawal of funds by the foreign institutional investors — FIIs. The FIIs have taken out close to \$1 billion in November alone.

When the global economic situation becomes uncertain, such as at present, large investors re-work their investment

positions. Generally, they show a marked preference for dollar denominated assets because the dollar remains the single most important currency and it is least prone to depreciate against other currencies.

Foreign institutional investors are withdrawing their funds from the Indian stock and debt markets and at the same time taking their money out of India. As they convert their sales proceeds into the US dollar, the rupee comes under stress and depreciates.

This is the nexus seen every time there are disturbances on the global markets and prospects. The Indian rupee had depreciated considerably during the global financial melt-down in 2008-09. In course of that instability the rupee had lost from around Rs 40 to a dollar to much lower levels around Rs 50.

Thereafter, the rupee had come under pressure in the years known as "taper tantrums" as the US Federal Reserve was working to reverse its monetary policy stance of large accommodation to prop up the US dollar and subsequently cutting down the large fund infusion.

During the years of taper tantrums, the rupee had fallen from around Rs 50 to over Rs 60 to a dollar.

Now, once again, the Indian economy is facing uncertainty as the US slaps high tariffs on Indian goods exports to the USA. These tariffs drive Indian exports out of the US market by making these costlier vis-à-vis the exports from other countries.

In fact, Indian exports to the USA, one of the largest markets, have dropped. This means India earns less dollars and therefore there would be lower flow of dollars into the country compared with dollar outflow on account of withdrawal of funds from India by the foreign institutional investors or FIIs.

In addition to these market level plays, there are some fundamental factors at work too. Some of the perceptible market players have pointed at these factors. Indian inflation rates at 5%+ compared with the inflation rates of less than 2% in other major economies, make for a reflection of these factors on the currency.

Others have also pointed at the productivity levels in India and overseas economies. That is, for every unit of inputs Indian labour produces less of the end product. That means we are less efficient than producers abroad and it reflects on the overall competitiveness.

All these factors are combining to drive the rupee value down, but as of now, the basic factor which is giving rise to the sudden loss of value of the rupee is the spurt in sales by FIIs in the Indian stock markets and subsequent remittances from India to their more lucrative markets in the USA. (IPA Service)

should be more mindful in choosing routes appropriate for our vehicles. Avoiding these narrow lanes, especially during peak hours, would greatly ease congestion and ensure smoother movement for everyone. A small change in individual behaviour can have a significant positive impact on collective commute experience.

I urge the concerned authorities to also consider issuing route advisories or signage to help motorists make informed decisions. Improving discipline among two-wheeler riders regarding overtaking rules would further enhance safety and traffic flow.

Shillong's roads demand patience and cooperation. Let us all play our part in making them safer and more efficient.

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

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

Of Political Somersaults & Speculations

THERE are speculations galore about some of the more prominent faces in Meghalaya's stormy politics. Some of the stormy petrels whose words make news are Dr Mukul Sangma and Paul Lyngdoh. There are speculations galore about their future political moves. Then there's the Meghalaya Congress President, Vincent Pala who has jumped into the whirlpool of controversies and added his twist to the story of the combined North East Political grouping under the clever nomenclature of One North East (ONE). Pala calls the new initiative a machination of the RSS to leverage from that combined force as a strategy for the BJP to benefit from without wasting its own time and resources.

Such snide remarks from opposing forces is fair game but what the common voter rather than the political players are interested to know is what are Dr Mukul Sangma's next calculated moves. During his tenure in the Congress and the Trinamool Congress he has bad-mouthed the BJP and called it a fascist party that has scant respect for the diversity and spirit of secularism and no respect for minority tribals. So his joining the BJP upfront can perhaps be ruled out. Knowing his adversarial stances vis a vis the National Peoples' Party (NPP) it is unlikely that he would throw in his weight behind the newly emerged - ONE. So what are his next moves? Would Mukul Sangma create a new regional party considering that the TMC is almost deadwood in Meghalaya? And what about Charles Pynogrope the TMC President and his political future? Pynogrope has not burnt all his bridges with the Congress so his return there is imminent. So far the Congress Party is the only one with a pan-India reach - a national party like the BJP. The Congress's fortunes are right now being tested and voters wonder if the Party will redeem itself and what it would take for the Congress to win back peoples' confidence.

The BJP has proven that public money can be used just before the elections to pay out to what is an alarmingly growing population of the 'very poor' - which has a woman's face. Economists have long ago arrived at the term - 'feminisation of poverty.' Women have to provide for their families when the male members don't earn enough to help pull the family through day after day. Hence any amount that accrues to their accounts is a blessing in disguise and women are inclined to vote for a Party that ostensibly empathises with their hardships. In this game of one-upmanship the Congress Party has lost out. Without money they cannot offer any visible help to the growing number of poverty stricken population in this country. The BJP moreover has the RSS who are its eyes, ears and hands reaching out to the rural outback of the country including in tribal areas like Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram amongst others. In this convoluted political scenario when the Congress is not scoring any political points and does not seem to have a resuscitation plan, can the Meghalaya Congress be seen as a political competitor? How political stalwarts like Mukul Sangma, Paul Lyngdoh and Charles Pynogrope move on the political chessboard will be watched with interest.

Letters to the Editor

MCA election: New Ideas vs Old Seat

Editor,

With the polls for the Meghalaya Cricket Association set for December and representatives from every district gearing up, the entire cricket community now waits with bated breath to see whether we'll actually get new leadership... or just the same old faces doing their usual victory lap.

As a cricket enthusiast, I'm hoping for change and that too real change, not the "new packaging, same product" kind. Because judging from the nominee list, a few people seem to have turned their seats into permanent property. And yes, maybe it's time we asked what exactly their achievements have been. (Spoiler: travelling around to watch IPL and international matches and posting about it doesn't exactly qualify as achievements and administrative brilliance.)

Change is supposed to be constant, right? Yet somehow, when it comes to certain individuals running the show, the only thing that's constant is them (by hopping from one post to the next). And when the same people stay in power forever, things tend to slide into compla-

cency and all the delightful problems that come with it.

Fresh ideas and fresh people that's how any organisation moves forward, hence, we need people with good cricket knowledge, integrity and ability to speak their mind not just another "Yes Sir" chorus line (which, let's be honest, we already have plenty of). So I say bring in the ex-politicians (politics is everywhere even in places where there is no politicians), let's bring in the ex-bureaucrats, technocrats, coaches, and former players who've actually contributed to the sport and put them in positions where they can contribute to the sports.

Imagine this: ex-coaches and ex-players in the apex and technical committee. Radical, right? And maybe, just maybe, we could have a real former player with actual credentials representing players in the apex body, instead of someone randomly plucked from outside the fraternity just to fill a seat. And how about appointing coaches based on contribution, experience, knowledge, and qualifications rather than on recommendations and friendly nudges?

So here's hoping this election is about progress, not the same routine dressed up as change.

Yours etc.,
Leonard Wankhar,
Via email

Intellectual revival and the Shillong Lit Fest

By Dominick Dauni Roising Rymbai

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any".

Insofar as the use of the words renew and revive, revival sounds better. Its like re-igniting a fire from the dying sparks of charcoal/deadwood. The fire is from around the hearth (sawdust ka lyngwiar dpei). And "Lit" is Gen Z language for something exciting, cool and fun.

It's been over 10 days since the 3-day Shillong Literary Festival 2025 ended. A lot of water has flowed from the Ward's Lake into the Botanical Garden and reached the Bay of Bengal. The hangover of the LitFest still lingers and there is no cure for such a hangover. Much has been written and discussed about the Festival in the Op-Ed pages of The Shillong Times and on social media platforms but here's my own take on it.

To be human and humane is to have a living body, a thinking mind and an empathetic soul. For the body, we have the Meghalaya Games. And the various investment in sports infrastructure around Meghalaya (not just in Shillong city) by the Conrad Sangma-led government. What about the mind and the soul? Is anyone seriously thinking about this?

Something to activate the demographic dividend?

Why can't we have a year-long calendar of events, culminating in the Shillong Literary Festival. The primary target audience will be our Gen Alpha and Gen Z. We do need to consider the millennials and the baby boomers too. Competitions like inter-school and inter-college quiz, debates, essay competition and story writing, maths olympiads, coding and, science exhibitions can be held as part of campus pre-events. Going beyond Shillong, Tura and Jowai and, assisting in the spread of tourism and developmental activities, the events can be held cluster-wise at different villages. Examples can be Tuber, Mynso, Shangpung, Nartiang, Nangbah-Wahajer, Bataw, Jalaphet, Padu and Nongtalang in the Jaintia Hills; Mannad, Umduhlu, Rangblang, Nonglang, Nongkhaw, Mawthengkut in the composite West Kha-

si Hills; Umden-Diwon, Bhoirymbong, Mawhati and Patharkmah in Ri Bhoi; and, Lawbah, Pynursla, Nongkrem-Smit, Mawmaram, Jongksha in East Khasi Hills. Likewise, places like Adokgre, Kharkutta, Rongram, Selsella, Darenggre, Phulbari, Zikzak, Baghmara, Chokpot, Siju, Songsak and Dambo-Rongjeng may be considered in the Garo Hills.

Of the dates, it will do a lot of good, if the Government of Meghalaya (as the primary sponsor) ensures the organisers/curators fix the Festival's dates after the year-end examinations of schools and colleges. The Education Department can help with this.

Mathematics and Science: Besides Literature, the Liberal Humanities and, the Fine & Performing Arts, we cannot be dismissive of Maths and Science. Mathematics has applicability across the Sciences. On the December 18 and hopefully other days too, we should take heed of what our Poet Laureate Soso Tham wrote to his son Primrose G. Gathphoh; when the latter disliked Mathematics and was stationed in Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), forced to help fight the white man's Great War of 1914-1918. "Love it (Mathematics) henceforth. For unless you are strong in Mathematics, your mind will be weak, you will never be able to bear the strain of doing hard work requiring hard thinking. But if you have loved Mathematics, a very dry subject, you will be strong to do much very dry work which is always the work of men in high position of life." Also, he added, "If you want to be strong, you must have plenty of rough exercises. Don't you know if you would be mentally strong, you require hard mental exercise? Mathematics therefore, is the subject that will help you in future years in hard and dry thinking and solving most difficult problems in your life and work. Remember that as we grow older, problems of life and work become more difficult. He therefore who is mentally strong will best be able to solve them with the greatest ease."

As far as Science and Technology is concerned it can help mitigate our various challenges, particularly

those affecting our beautiful God-gifted landscape. We should be encouraging some of our best and curious minds - those with an aptitude for Science to work extra hard. Then study at the Department of Environmental Science and Engineering at IIT (formerly Indian School of Mines), Dhanbad, Jharkhand.

Language and History: For nearly 200 years, our stories and our lives have been dictated to and the narrative written by outsiders. And some of the indigenous insiders who have done so have nearly always had their own self-interests. The common people are totally out of the picture. While it's good to be selfish and smart its equally bad to be selfless and stupid!

There are two Day-3 discussions that have ignited our short attention span. In the first hour, it was Our Hills, Our Histories featuring the academic and cultural heritage aficionado in Dr. Madeline Tham and, the young economist and budding historian Daniel Chalam, in conversation with the distinguished History Professor, Dr. David Reid Syiemlieh. In the afternoon, it was Whose History Is It Anyway?, featuring a Lotha Naga poet-politician - Mmholnung Kikon and Prof. Sanjeeb Kakoty, moderated by Dr. Glenn Kharkongor a medico-academician. Both discussions say a lot about ourselves; we, the minority population but large-hearted indigenous people of India's North East.

The living documented Constitution of the Republic of India, with its Sixth Schedule and Article 371, gives ample room for us to live with rights, duties, the pursuit of happiness and, safety and security, in our united but diverse nation-state. On Day-2 the discussion on the 2-volume books, From Isolation to Integration: Navigating the Geopolitics of India's North East (1990-2023), author Patricia Mukhim rightly said that the indigenous people themselves need to be consistently pro-active, in their demand to include Khasi and Garo in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution. It was heartening to hear the spoken words of Prof. Ailynti Nongbri on the work being done by the Khasi Authors'

Society in standardisation of spellings in the Khasi Alphabet.

Us and the world

We should be proud of our own languages and mother tongues and need to speak, read and write them. It all starts from the family. For our literature, we need good translators/interpreters from Khasi and Garo to our official languages - English and Hindi, and ultimately onwards to the world-wide web of Arabic, Chinese (Mandarin), French, Russian and Spanish.

Through translators, we should be hearing more from the Garo Hills, the composite West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi and the Jaintia Hills. For example, a discussion on the book History of Garo Literature by Prof. Milton S. Sangma, is a good starting point. An enactment of a drama-comedy Bamphalar act, a popular Jaintia theatrical tradition as the curtains-downer of a particular day would be educative. Geographically, the Khasi-Jaintia-Garo Hills (Shillong plateau) are considered to be an eastern extension of the Chotanagpur plateau of Eastern India as well as the south-eastern foothills of the Himalayas. We need to hear more from other parts of India's North East, with whom we already have close natural affinity.

From the mainland, how about bringing indigenous tribal literature from other parts of India? The Hyniewtrep Niaw-Wasa people have common cultural and genetic threads with the Munda people of Eastern India. Bringing the well-known Tata Samvaad festival held annually at Jamshedpur to Shillong would be a good beginning.

Technologically, it is a well-connected world today. We need to take ourselves to the world. And bring the world to us too. With the Cherry Blossom trees (Japan) and the K-pop sub-culture (South Korea) connections, perhaps, we can always dream of Hariko Murakami and Han Kang in our midst at the next Shillong Literary Festival. We can also add the intrepid Arundhati Roy and the inimitable Shashi Tharoor on the list of speakers, even if it is done through online-based communication apps.

Disclaimer: Views expressed are strictly personal. Email: dauni.roising@gmail.com

Shillong requires urgent traffic guidelines

Editor,

As we are all aware, traffic congestion has become part of daily life for Shillongites and it is causing grave inconvenience apart from loss of precious hours which no one takes note of. In this connection, I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authority for immediate examination of the following suggestions:

1. Increase frequency of SPTS/STEM buses.
2. Cover all localities.
3. Make school bus use compulsory (Engage SPTS/STEM buses) for all schools including elite schools that continue to refuse to use school buses.
4. Set different school timing for different schools.
5. Identify embarkation

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

Inheritance disparity: A case for tribal daughters

By Chiranjib Haldar

When custom is effusive, the constitution remains silent and when tradition is silent, the constitution dons the arbiter's mantle. In a momentous reiteration of statutory principles, the Supreme Court of India has elucidated that the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 does not apply to Scheduled Tribes unless expressly extended to them by a Central Government notification. In a recent ruling, the highest court kept in abeyance a sweeping direction of the Himachal Pradesh High Court which had applied the provisions of the Hindu Succession Act to the states' tribal communities. In another landmark judgement, the Bombay High Court emphatically reaffirmed that tribal daughters cannot be denied inheritance rights in ancestral property unless a valid custom excluding them is pleaded and proven by those asserting such exclusion. The Court reversed the concurrent findings of the Trial and Appellate Courts, holding that the burden of proving exclusion lies on the sibling asserting it and not the daughter claiming her rightful share.

Both these verdicts endorse the legislative intent of the Hindu Succession Act and emphasise the recognition of tribal customary laws in matters of succession and bequest. The implications of these recent verdicts are far reaching and successive regimes may not have paid heed to legal clarity in protection of tribal customs. They safeguard tribal identity and customs, consistent with a constitutional shield for Scheduled Tribes. It

the burden of proof to the plaintiff.

Equality cannot wait. The judgments reaffirm that even in matters governed by ethnic laws, the Constitution reigns supreme. Himachal Pradesh High Court had directed that daughters in tribal areas of the state should inherit property in accordance with the Hindu Succession Act, 1956 and not by adhering to tribal customs. Under customary inheritance laws in Kinnaur Lahaul-Spiti and Chamba districts, property passes strictly to male heirs. Daughters may become heirs only in the absence of a son and they cannot sell, gift or transfer the property. Once married, ownership reverts to the patrilineal family. The still ubiquitous *wajib ul urj* law, which came into existence in 1926, bars even widows from inheriting their husband's property, which is transferred to the sons. Social activists believe these customs perpetuate economic dependency and social inequality for tribal women. A pioneering figure in grassroots governance in Himachal, veteran women's rights advocate Ratna Manjari has called for an end to this gender bias in tribal property laws.

A balanced legal reform, preserving cultural identity while ensuring gender justice is both feasible and obligatory. Jurists need to comprehend that tribal traditions can evolve without losing their essence. Tribal equality in the far flung districts and hamlets cannot wait for another generation. Barring matrilineal societies, a campaign for tribal wom-

*The still ubiquitous **wajib ul urj** law, which came into existence in 1926, bars even widows from inheriting their husband's property, which is transferred to the sons. Social activists believe these customs perpetuate economic dependency and social inequality for tribal women.*

distinguishes that uniform civil laws cannot inevitably supersede traditional governance systems in tribal areas. And that brings us to another moot question: should Parliament decide whether to extend the Hindu Succession Act to Scheduled Tribes albeit with contextual adaptations to poise parity and cultural autonomy?

Another important area to focus on for the legislature ought to be gender justice. While omission of the Hindu Succession Act conserves tribal autonomy, it also raises apprehensions about gender equality. In several tribal societies in Himachal Pradesh and North East India, customary inheritance rules favour male heirs, leaving women reliant on familial measures rather than statutory privileges. The judiciary's recurrent pleas to Parliament highlight this gap in legal protection. By abnegating the appellate court's directions, the Supreme Court and Bombay High Court have only upheld the principle that judicial orders cannot override explicit legislative provisions. Simultaneously, the judgments align with evolving jurisprudence advising the Centre to appraise passé prohibitions that may propagate inequality within tribal communities and women's inheritance rights.

The Bombay High Court has made it amply clear that custom cannot be a smokescreen for patriarchal denial of property rights and where customary exclusion is not substantiated, the default must be equality, not exclusion. A Scheduled Tribe woman from the Gond community had to prove that she had a customary right to inherit property. The Court remanded the matter for a fresh trial, underscoring that the lower courts committed a grave legal error by shifting

en's right to inherit ancestral property is a concomitant process though hardly covered in mainstream media. In Himachal Pradesh, polyandry is still a part of an ancient tribal custom prevalent in parts of Kinnaur and Simla districts. The state's revenue laws recognise this practice named *jodidara* and is accepted under sections 494 and 495 of the Indian Penal Code (IPC). While keeping landholdings undivided was the rationale behind this clandestine practice, the present has more to do with tribal laws of primogeniture varying from region to region.

The recent rulings highlight the subtle equilibrium between tribal autonomy and constitutional equality. The Constitution of India, through Articles 14 and 15, guarantees equality before law and prohibits discrimination. However, the Fifth Schedule and Article 244(1) preserve the distinct customs, traditions and governance systems of Scheduled Tribes. By excluding Scheduled Tribes from the ambit of the Hindu Succession Act, Parliament sought to respect their unique customary laws. But this also means that tribal women may not enjoy the same legacy rights as other Hindu women under Section 6 of the Hindu Succession Act, which grants equal co-parcenary rights to daughters. However certain tribal communities have specific practices and customs of primogeniture both patrilineal and matrilineal. The Supreme Court's judgment thus reflects judicial restraint and is a synergistic approach. It reiterates the law as it stands while concurrently conceding the need for future legislative review.

Chiranjib Haldar (9831143930) (The writer is a commentator on politics and society.)

Gen Z's future of work is purposeful, digital and flexible

As Generation Z - those born between 1997 and 2012 - enters the workforce in growing numbers, Canadian employers are encountering a cohort whose expectations and behaviours signal a fundamental shift from current norms.

Unlike previous generations, Gen Z brings pragmatic sensibilities shaped by the unique social, economic and technological landscapes of their upbringing.

Gen Z grew up amid economic uncertainty, technological upheaval and heightened social awareness. Unlike millennials, who entered the job market with "great expectations" for rapid promotions and pay raises, Gen Z is more pragmatic.

And so if Canadian organisations want to attract, engage with and retain this generation of talent, it's essential to understand what makes them tick.

Purpose and values and why Gen Z stays

Recent research shows that this generation values job security, work-life balance and mental health above all else. These preferences are shaped by formative experiences, including observing their Gen X parents navigate dual-career households and witnessing economic disruptions and automation-driven restructuring.

For Gen Z, stability is seen as essential for their well-being at work.

This generation is ambitious, albeit in ways that diverge from traditional hierarchical advancement. Rather than prioritising vertical mobility, they seek roles that provide flexibility, meaningful contribution and alignment with personal values.

Central to Gen Z's workplace vision is a desire to work for organisations that prioritise diversity, inclusion and corporate social responsibility. This generation is the most racially diverse in Canadian history and has grown up in a more socially conscious environment. They tend to hold strong views around equal treatment and environmental sustainability, often expecting their employers to "walk the talk." One report suggests that Gen Z employees

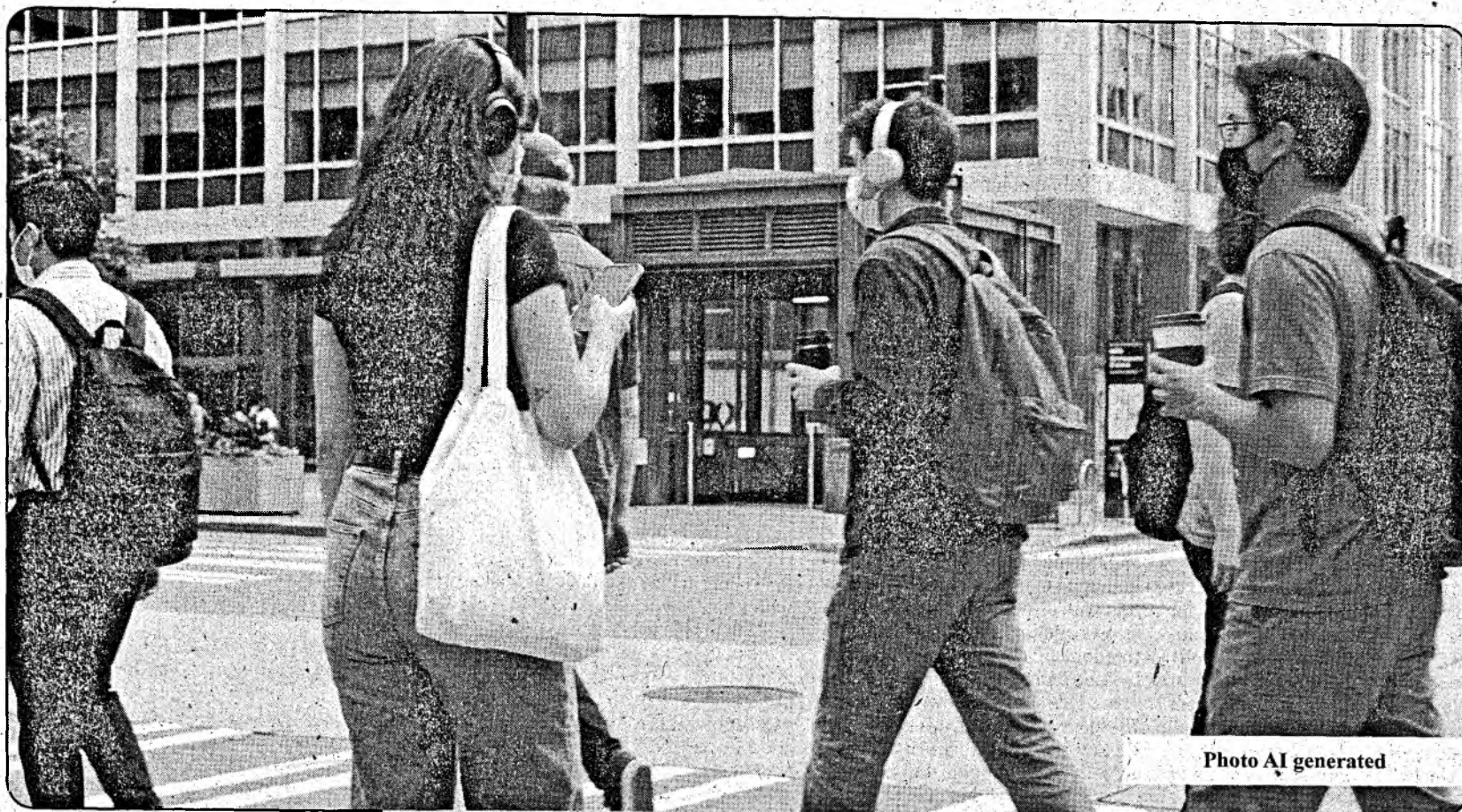


Photo AI generated

are significantly more likely to remain with organisations that offer purpose-driven work, with retention likelihood increasing by a factor of 3.6 when such alignment exists.

The rise of 'conscious unbossing'

One notable trend within Gen Z is the preference for collaboration over authority.

A recent survey reveals that nearly half of Gen Z professionals favour promotions that do not entail supervisory responsibilities. This reluctance stems from the perceived drawbacks of traditional leadership roles, including heightened stress, rigid scheduling and diminished autonomy.

Some Gen Z workers even indicate a willingness to accept reduced compensation to avoid managerial obligations. This phenomenon, described as "conscious unbossing," presents a structural challenge for organisations anticipating leadership gaps as baby boomers retire and mil-

“While AI and automation can improve efficiency, Gen Z places a premium on trust and authentic relationships. Employers should ensure transparency in algorithmic decision-making and maintain opportunities for personal interaction, as these elements are critical to engagement and retention for this cohort that values connection as much as convenience.”

lennials ascend to senior positions.

This means a reconceptualisation of leadership, emphasising project-based authority, mentorship opportunities and expertise-driven influence rather than hierarchical control.

This generation is also the first to grow up entirely within a digital ecosystem, resulting in expectations for seamless technological integra-

tion across work processes. Gen Z actively leverages AI tools for skill development, yet formal organisational training often lags behind these self-directed practices. If organisations don't offer structured, technology-based learning, digital gaps among employees will grow.

Employers will need to invest in continuous learning opportunities

such as micro-credentialing, AI-driven platforms and intergenerational mentorship that can enhance skill acquisition while respecting Gen Z's preference for autonomy.

Flexible work arrangements also constitute an important characteristic of Gen Z workers' employment preferences. Having studied and entered the workforce during the COVID-19 pandemic, they view remote and hybrid work arrangements as normal rather than an exception.

Flexible scheduling and outcome-based performance metrics are perceived as baseline expectations rather than discretionary benefits. Employers that adhere rigidly to traditional work structures risk attrition among Gen Z employees. Instead, employers should prioritise policies that emphasise results over physical presence.

How employers must adapt or risk losing talent

To attract and retain Gen Z tal-

ent, Canadian employers should adopt evidence-based strategies that include redefining career pathways by moving away from traditional linear models toward frameworks that emphasise lateral mobility, project leadership and skills-based advancement.

As AI and algorithmic HR systems become more prevalent, employers must consider how these tools align with Gen Z's ways of working. They expect technology to enhance - but not replace - the human side of work.

While AI and automation can improve efficiency, Gen Z places a premium on trust and authentic relationships. Employers should ensure transparency in algorithmic decision-making and maintain opportunities for personal interaction, as these elements are critical to engagement and retention for this cohort that values connection as much as convenience.

Sustainability is another priority for Gen Z. For this generation, climate action is not a marketing slogan, but a moral imperative. Employers must move beyond superficial "greenwashing" and embed sustainability into employment practices, from eco-friendly benefits to green office policies.

These initiatives should be inclusive, ensuring that environmental efforts also advance equity and deliver tangible benefits for all employees. Gen Z expects organisations to demonstrate measurable progress on both ecological and social fronts. Likewise, diversity and inclusion will remain critical for Gen Z, even in politically polarised environments.

And because this generation values guidance but prefers collaborative, non-hierarchical relationships, mentorship must also evolve. Employers should expand mentoring programmes to include underrepresented groups, creating pathways for career stability and growth.

Understanding Gen Z and taking the steps to meet these new professionals where they are will help employers create the necessary trust for meaningful growth. *(The Conversation)*

(Authored by Eddy Ng, Queen's University, Ontario)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 7, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon trine Rahu brings progress, support, and positive transformation throughout the year. You'll excel at work with strong cooperation from seniors and subordinates. A leadership role or key responsibility could come your way. Financially, new sources of income open, and investments mature. Business partnerships or collaborations succeed. On the personal front, love and family life bring happiness; married natives enjoy peace and understanding. Students and job seekers experience success in exams or interviews. Socially, your reputation improves, and people seek your advice. You'll feel spiritually uplifted, guided by faith and inner strength. It's a year of steady success built on focus and persistence.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) The doors of progress are going to open for you. Your income will rise. You will have achievements at your workplace. Everything that was stuck up till now will gather momentum. There are chances of buying movable and immovable property. Your boss and seniors will be happy with your work. You will win over everyone's heart with your work. Your enemies and opponents might overwhelm you, some of your work will get criticized, but you will not be affected by it and keep on doing your work with all sincerity. You will receive good news regarding career and progress of your children. You will give a stiff challenge to competitors and commercial opponents and put difficult objectives in front of them.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will keep your life balanced. You will plan expansion of business on a large scale. It is a very favorable phase for business- or business-related activities. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. If you keep on working with devotion, success will come your way for sure. You need to keep extreme focus on your work and business. Your financial position will be stable. It is a good time for affairs and love relationships. Love marriage is indicated. You will help your friends and loved ones in business and work. And friends will also help you financially. Auspicious events will keep taking place. Keep your spirits up.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) You will be making best use of your talents and capabilities. You will shine in your work. You will also increase your profits. You will take tough decisions in business and trade, which will keep your influence and dominion intact. You will be in a strong and stable position financially. You will find inspiration for new work. Do not trust others in money matters. You will also extend a friendship to a relative or friend. You will have good gains from family side. Auspicious functions will keep taking place. Your noble deeds will bring you good name and fame. Friendly relationships will be established with those in authority. Creative and productive thoughts will occupy your mind.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) You will receive some good news from a relative. It will lift your spirit. Something will come to the fore that you wanted to keep a secret. Money might be stalled, but you will make all efforts to obtain your aim. Change in your attitude and behavior will take you towards betterment. You will be active in achieving your aim. Guests may arrive. You will be busy welcoming them. You will make plans to buy a new house. The differences that were continuing between husband and wife will get resolved. The blessings of elders in the family will help you to move ahead. You will be elated.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) There will be marked improvement in your health. You might take part in a function. There can be some minor alterations between partners, but matters will get resolved quickly. You will contact your near and dear ones. There will be happiness in married life. You will move towards your objective with concentration. You will be successful in government related work. Your hard work and dedication will yield positive results. You will also do socially useful work whose results will be long-lasting. There will be your influence at work. Your subordinates will obey your orders. Matters relating to courts that were going for some time will be decided in your favor. You will get positive and fruitful results if you use your intelligence and thinking power. There will be financial gains. You will also make investments in property and shares.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) There will be increase in positive domestic environment. You will feel more energetic. You will do each work with full sincerity, hard work and responsibility and will get the desired results. Those doing jobs will be busy pleasing

their bosses. But you will focus your attention on future goals. There will be mutual understanding between husband and wife. There will be profit in your business and your self-confidence will improve magically. The path of money going out is stronger than that of money coming in. But you will have common sense to arrive at a correct decision. You will undertake business-related trips which will prove beneficial in the long run.

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) You will be sharing your feelings with your closed ones. Your chance of meeting an influential person will pave the way for success for you. You will do all your work with sincerity. You will be given a new responsibility at work. You will also listen to people's problems very sympathetically and try to find solutions to them. You will meet an old friend or relative and feel happy. You will get respite from worries. Your work will be completed soon. Due to your team's efforts long pending disputes and problems will be settled. Your personality will grow, and you will get credit for things. You will establish a good balance with your partner and businesspeople. You will try new practices in business.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) There is going to be some significant turn regarding your career. You could be promoted all of a sudden. There are chances of being successful in competitive exams. You will invest in your children and will get the blessings of your parents. A meeting with some important person will fill you with enthusiasm and energy. You will get your work done with ease in government related matters. You will be known for your dedication and sincerity in the workplace. Those doing jobs will get the desired work. You will also meet an old friend or acquaintance which will make you nostalgic by evocation of past.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) Your work will be completed with ease. You will also get support from some senior officials. You will be very ambitious in your job. You will be highly extolled and will have special interest in spiritual matters. Plans for doing something special will be made. Your hopes and expectations will soar. And your attitude towards life will be positive. Your efforts will be fruitful. You will also get the blessings of your parents and elders. You will also suddenly come across an old friend. You will talk about your past and feel nostalgic. There will be improvements in your health. You will come into contact with new people. In matters related to division of property time, will be in your favor.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The number of contacts will expand. It will prove beneficial for you. You will achieve your aims and objectives on time. You will be in strong and secure financial condition. There will be an inclination to do something new at every moment. You will not compromise with self-respect at any cost. You will also read new interesting literature. If you have given a loan to someone, you will be able to recover it with ease. Be prepared to search for solutions to your problems. You will be busy with prayers, meditation and religious work. Don't be careless at any cost.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) Your dominance at your workplace will continue. If you decide to do something, you will be able to do it at any cost. There will be an increase in your fame and respect. There will be a significant change in your daily routine. Your efforts will be fruitful. Money that has been struck for a long time will accrue to you. You will be busy but will retain amicability in personal relationship. Most of your time will be spent on amusement and entertainment. In government matters you are moving towards success. The worry that was there for a long time will be put to rest. You should evaluate yourself according to your capability. There will be visitors, and you will be busy looking after them well.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) The path of money going out is stronger than that of money coming in. You will get full credit for some worthy deed. You may touch a peak of success, as this phase is quite favorable. Your family members and colleagues will extend their full support to you. You will enjoy vehicles and property comfort, and affection from your mother as well. You may get promotion in service. You will work on your strategy to reach greater heights professionally while also discharging your domestic duties with responsibility. You may have to attend some functions and perform some religious ceremonies. It will keep you busy.

How the internet became enshittified — and how we might be able to deshittify it

Remember when Twitter used to be good? I reckon it peaked somewhere around the first COVID lockdowns.

In those days, there was a running gag on the site where everyone would refer to it as a "hellscape". And it did invite some of the worst that humanity has to offer. Opinions, as the old joke goes, are like assholes: everybody has one.

But if you curated your Twitter feed effectively, you could have immediate scrolling access to the best journalism and cultural commentary, excellent podcasts and comedians, film criticism and book reviews, the latest trends in food, music or clothing, decent information about public health, live stream feeds of smart people on the ground at the most pressing events of the day, not to mention the wisecracks and insights of your friends.

It was like being perpetually part of an in-crowd. The promise of a world where potentially anyone could feel connected, in touch, popular.

Then came the rumpus that the increasingly fascist-curious Elon Musk was scheming to buy the platform. Not possible, we thought at first. It would be a terrible business decision. And anyone interesting or important would flee overnight.

Then Musk did buy Twitter, horribly rebranding it as X. Then we speculated (or hoped) it would drive him bankrupt. Then it didn't. Then, through deliberate and explicit effort, it went to shit.

Musk decided he would raise money by selling the coveted blue-checks, a form of authentication previously reserved for those who had developed their influence organically. He changed the algorithm to reflect his own views and fired moderators tasked with weeding out misinformation and hate speech. As a result, the platform formerly known as Twitter was soon full of ads; gore, porn, toxicity, AI slop and scams of all variety.

Yet, as if trapped by their established followings or perhaps some contagious fear of missing out, people stayed. Calls to migrate en masse to other liberal-coded platforms largely failed.

For some reason, this logic seems to be taking over all social media, even the internet itself. Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, Amazon, Google, Apple, Uber, Spotify: everything

turns to shit. And no one is able to escape.

To paraphrase a song about another way we get trapped by misplaced desires: welcome to the Hotel Crapifornia. You can check in any time you like, but you can never leave.

An inhuman nightmare

In 2022, Canadian journalist, novelist and activist Cory Doctorow coined the term "enshittification" to describe the degeneration of the internet.

Back when the internet was good, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Doctorow was every hipster's hero. His blog Boing Boing was required reading for anyone interested in emerging technologies. If you wanted to be recognised as cool, you entered the coffee shop conspicuously carrying a copy of his latest book. It seemed that no one knew more about where technology had come from, and where it was likely to go. He was our prophet.

His 2003 novel *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom*, for example, was a dystopian story of a post-scarcity world where monetary currency had been replaced with what Doctorow called "whuffie" - essentially a measure of how much others respect you.

This was just before social media stormed into all our lives, with its vertiginous economy of likes and followers, attention and influence.

All these years later, Doctorow's Enshittification: Why Everything Suddenly Got Worse and What to Do About It is an attempt to explain how the great dream of the internet - its powerful democratising potential, its incredible capacity to generate human communities and circulate human knowledge - turned into an inhuman nightmare.

We were offered a world of connection and cooperation - an open-source paradise of instant and free access, liberated from the fetters of both corporate ownership and state control.

What we got was a world of ruthless monopolies and oligarchs who control a colossal surveillance apparatus capable of tracking our most private behaviours, producing a population of powerless, compliant consumers - people who have no choice but to keep using their abysmally bad products, because there is

nowhere else to go.

Prisoners of our own devices

"Enshittification" is not just a clever term for the grumpy complaint of an ageing Gen-X tech-head. Doctorow wants to develop it as a formal concept that explains the process by which internet platforms, applications and innovations go from being loved by their users to being despised.

Beginning with the case studies of Facebook, Amazon and the iPhone, then expanding out to more or less every platform on the internet, Doctorow proposes that enshittification has three basic stages.

First, platforms are good to their users. People genuinely want to participate. A community develops, but not much profit is made.

Second, in an effort to monetise this new community, platforms are good to companies. They offer them access to markets through advertising or shipping or proprietary arrangements.

Finally, they find a way to screw over those business customers as well as their users to claw all excess value back for themselves.

That is how we arrived at what Doctorow calls "a giant pile of shit".

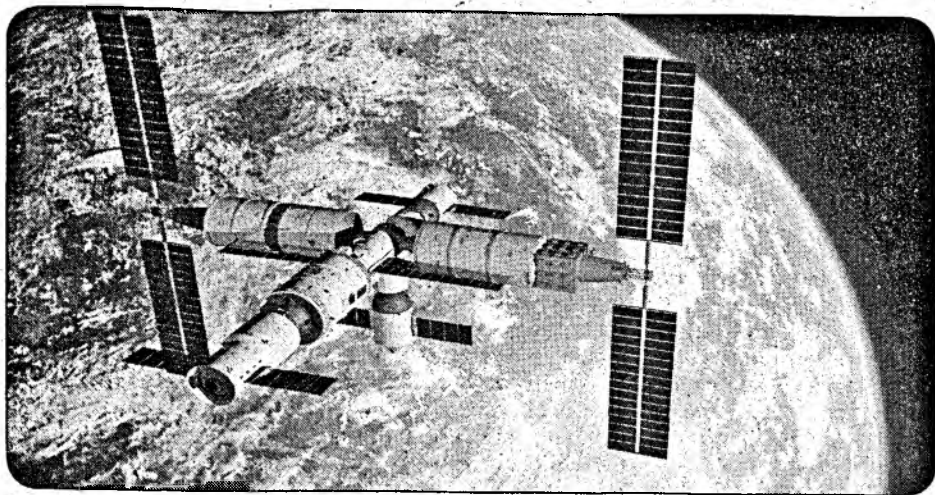
Amazon is the easiest example to explain. It started by providing a service that people wanted: fast cheap delivery of products. It then attracted business customers by providing a means to increase profit and market share. But then, like a medieval warlord, it crushed all competition and used its market dominance to compel tributes from its business customers, in the form of fees that absorbed and exceeded whatever extra profit they may have made in the first place.

At this point, Amazon has absolutely no reason to improve its service. In fact, in order to siphon off even more value by cutting costs, it has every reason to make its service worse.

For Doctorow, the problem is not that some or many internet platforms follow this kind of enshittifying procedure; it is that almost all of them do. And given the ubiquity of the internet in our daily lives, particularly with the advent of the smartphone, our entire world has become enshittified.

We are now in what Doctorow calls the "enshittoscene". To return to the musical reference mentioned above: we are all just prisoners here, of our own devices. *(The Conversation)*

Space debris: Will it take a catastrophe for nations to take the issue seriously?



China routinely sends astronauts to and from its space station Tiangong. A crew capsule is about to undock from the station and return to Earth, but there's nothing routine about its journey home.

The Shenzhou-20 capsule will carry no crew, because one of its windows has been struck by space debris. Astronauts noticed an apparent crack on November 5, during pre-return checks.

Space journalist Andrew Jones explained how experts on the ground had studied images of the damage and concluded that a piece of debris smaller than 1mm (roughly 1/25th of an inch) had penetrated from the outer to inner layers of the glass.

Simulations and tests confirmed a low probability that the window could fail during the high-temperature re-entry through Earth's atmosphere.

Although a worst-case scenario, it was one that officials deemed unacceptable. A rescue mission-Shenzhou-22-was launched to bring the astronauts back from the station.

Experts have been warning about the threat posed by space debris for years. The ever-growing number of space programmes by states

and private entities is now contributing to an increasingly congested environment in orbit.

The European Space Agency estimates that there are more than 15,100 tonnes of material in space that has been launched from Earth. There are 1.2 million debris objects between 1cm and 10cm, and 140 million debris objects between 1mm and 1cm.

In low orbit they will be travelling around 7.6 km/s (roughly 17,000 miles per hour), damaging anything they hit. This is how a piece less than 1mm in size was able to penetrate the thick glass of Shenzhou-20's capsule.

Given the mounting number of objects in orbit, this is likely to be a more regular occurrence. It's costly in terms of damage to equipment, and increasingly a threat to life. When a piece of debris hits another object in space, it can also create more space debris, adding to the problem.

A number of countries are able to track what's in space, but given that these may include classified satellites, there is a reluctance by states to share details.

China's space programme is overseen by its military, in

line with a view that space is inherently linked to national security. This only adds to the geopolitical tensions between states around the use of space.

Treaties and responsibilities

The outer space treaty from 1967 sought to outline how space should be governed. But it is outdated and does not account for the increased presence of debris or the proliferation of private space launches. Nor does it address responsibilities when it comes to the sustainable use of space.

A total of 117 states are parties to the treaty, yet while efforts are ongoing to develop new norms around space governance, including the creation of the Inter-Agency Space Debris Coordination Committee, the organisation may offer a platform for cooperation and research but does not result in binding decisions for state action.

The lack of any global agreement on space debris, and more importantly repercussions, makes tackling the problem of space debris ever harder.

Technology is being developed to address space debris-but this generally

appears as concept mission plans with only a few trial tests being launched anywhere globally.

Examples include the idea of a harpoon to collect large pieces - although the recoil of such an instrument means the spacecraft that deploys it could become a new piece of debris.

An alternative is the highly technological approach of a big net. This will work in the sense that if you can slow the debris down, it will fall into the atmosphere and burn up.

The problem with these methods is the lack of sustainability, sending one satellite up to bring only a few pieces down uses up fuel, which is adding to climate variation.

An appropriate and efficient solution would be a constellation of satellites that stay in orbit and bring debris down. The process, of course, is still something to be researched.

A ground-based solution is the laser broom, which uses laser pulses to slow down objects orbiting Earth, potentially allowing them to re-enter the atmosphere and burn up. However, it is yet to be tested and comes with its own potential problems such as atmospheric warming and missing its target.

Yet without addressing the geopolitics of space governance, the removal of space debris is moot as a focus on national interests, security concerns, and the increasing presence of the private sector means that pollution in Earth orbit is happening faster than we can clean it up.

Any collisions cause many more pieces to be produced than can be collected, some notable examples include the destruction in 2007, by China, of its own Fengyun-1C satellite as part of an anti-

satellite weapon test. This added an estimated 3,500 pieces in orbit.

In 2009, a Russian satellite called Kosmos 2251 collided with an Iridium communications satellite, generating roughly 2,400 pieces of debris.

In 2021, Russia carried out its own anti-satellite missile test, destroying the Kosmos 1408 satellite and generating a further 1,787 pieces. These mostly came back through the atmosphere, but 400 pieces were left in orbit.

Whether such an anti-satellite weapon could be repurposed for space debris removal is unlikely but has potential.

It will require concerted global cooperation and effort to not only indicate what spacecraft states and private companies have in space, but to commit to de-orbiting every future spacecraft at the end of its life, reducing future debris.

The current space debris mitigation standards by the European Space Agency highlight that any satellites must be de-orbited within 25 years of the end of operations.

While this also is intended to apply to miniature "cubesats" - the process of bringing them back down has yet to be demonstrated.

Ultimately this debris will cause problems for all space launch agencies and private companies, as there is a limit to our ground-based tracking and warning abilities. This makes addressing the global governance of space critical.

However, it may take several high-cost satellites being taken out of commission, or potentially loss of life, for this issue to be taken seriously. *(The Conversation)*

Managing food allergies & dietary restrictions during the holidays

A plate of freshly baked cookies, a glass of perfectly garnished eggnog. For many, these images may conjure up warm memories and the anticipation of the forthcoming holiday season.

But for those with dietary restrictions, these goodies - and other holiday treats - can contribute to other emotions as well. During a season filled with parties and food, navigating the holidays while avoiding certain foods can be harrowing.

Well-intentioned hosts may prepare a selection of treats in a kitchen that includes flavours of the season.

But without clear communication, detailed food labels and assurance of good practices to prevent cross-contact of foods, navigating a holiday tray, or buffet line involves risk.

As an allergy researcher, my focus is on understanding the impacts of a food allergy diagnosis on people, families and communities, and what types of food allergy supports are most meaningful.

Many Canadians are increasingly aware of the foods they are eating, for reasons including but not limited to food costs, health and medical dietary restrictions.

This latter reason can include efforts to reduce sodium or refined sugars, or avoid certain carbohydrates such as lactose or gluten for those with lactose intolerance or celiac disease, respectively.

But for the seven to nine per cent of Canadians with food allergies, the need to avoid is critical because of the risk of an acute allergic reaction. The most severe presentation of allergic reaction is anaphylaxis, which is potentially life-threatening.

Allergies & diet restrictions during holidays

Canadian research shows that, unlike holidays like Halloween and Easter during which children "hunt" for candy, rates of emergency department visits due to anaphylaxis during the winter holiday season are similar to the rates seen throughout the year. But that doesn't mean food allergy restrictions don't have an impact during these holidays.

Dietary restrictions can involve the need to avoid a range of foods. Health Canada has identified 11 priority allergens that are commonly associated with food allergies and allergic reactions: milk, eggs, peanuts, tree nuts, crustaceans and molluscs, fish, mustard, sesame seeds, soy, sulphites, and wheat and triticale.

Notably, many of these foods commonly appear as ingredients in a holiday recipe, or as a single food item.

In a series of interviews with 21 families, colleagues and I identified that families dealing with food allergy learn quickly how to "decline something politely" stressing that they cannot eat the food, rather than being a picky eater.

Nonetheless, they note feelings of grief, depression and anxiety as they strive to navigate events with their extended family and social circles. In some cases, families who manage multiple food allergies feel isolated, while some note that they are not invited to events because of their food allergy.

There are many ways that both those with dietary restrictions, and hosts, can lessen these impacts.

Practical actions

For anyone with a dietary restriction, there are certain actions that make holiday visiting more enjoyable and safer. First, be certain to clearly communicate, in writ-

ing, any dietary restrictions to the host, at the time of accepting the invitation.

Detailing which food options work within your dietary restrictions provides opportunity for the host to consider the menu, and to ask any questions at a calmer time than with a room full of guests.

You may also wish to bring a holiday treat that meets your restrictions. Eating a small snack ahead of any festivities can keep hunger at bay in case there are limited safe food options available. When in doubt about a food, do not consume it. Even if you have previously consumed the food, ingredient lists change occasionally.

Specific to those with food allergies, additional steps are warranted. Before leaving home, ensure that you have at least one epinephrine auto-injector that a trusted person can easily locate and use if anaphylaxis is suspected. In addition to co-existing medical conditions, such as heart disease or asthma, research supports that alcohol, exercise, medication/drugs and possibly emotional stress may influence reaction severity.

Hosting this holiday season?

Welcoming guests can be joyful. But as the Canadian Psychological Association notes, there may be expectations of perfection, which - when not achieved can contribute to stress. When inviting guests, ask about any dietary restrictions and bear these in mind while planning menus. Single food items or simple dishes may help your guests navigate food choices. Having a list of ingredients on hand, and adding labels and dedicated serving utensils to each dish, are similarly helpful. *(The Conversation)*

Schools with excess teachers...

(Contd from P-1) while institutions providing minimal service or not functioning properly continue to receive disproportionate benefits.

The Deputy CM affirmed the government plans to review these inconsistencies to ensure effectively performing schools receive proper recognition and support, both in terms of funding and student outcomes.

Separately, the Deputy Chief Minister clarified that the CM Impact guidebook, intended for matric exam preparation, is solely a guide and not a formal school textbook.

He urged parents and the public not to be misled, confirming the book was prepared and approved by MBoSE. During the celebration, Tynsong commended the school administration for fifty years of service and their role in providing quality education to Mawkisyiem and surrounding villages.

Iew Mawlong redesign after...

(Contd from P-1) To illustrate how long-dormant projects can finally take shape, he cited the Crowborough site, which lay stagnant for nearly four decades before being converted into a five-star hotel.

The turnaround, he suggested, reflects what can be achieved when the state sustains its efforts despite resistance or delays.

Tynsong noted that several infrastructure commitments in Shillong are progressing in similar fashion, paced by negotiation, technical challenges and legal procedures.

"The time will come, and it will happen," he said confidently, stressing that the government's direction is clear. Amid ongoing debates around the issue, he urged parents and youth to be wary of misinformation, warning that misleading narratives often surface when sensitive matters reach critical stages.

Assam bid to set up police outpost...

(Contd from P-1) Despite sending follow-up and reminder letters, the HBDRF reports receiving no response from the government. Passah warned that this continued silence worsens challenges for residents, cautioning that the government appears to be "taking it lightly" and stressing that the Forum "deserves to know the progress."

Due to this lack of movement, the HBDRF plans to seek another meeting with the Chief Minister. If positive action remains absent, the Forum intends to mobilize stakeholders in Block One to press for implementation of their demands.

Tourism-based textile...

(Contd from P-3) silk—Eri, Muga, mulberry, and Tasar—he noted with pride that Meghalaya's mulberry silk has begun receiving recognition even in China. He urged the northeastern region to focus on projecting its textiles and crafts to international markets and suggested that similar platforms be established in Europe.

Singh called on the Meghalaya government to develop a model sericulture framework to enhance the production and market value of local weaves and crafts.

He reaffirmed the Centre's commitment to supporting the Northeast, stating that the region is witnessing a new era of empowerment, recognition, and opportunity, unlike past decades when its youth faced neglect and discrimination.

Hawkers continue to reappear...

(Contd from P-3) displaying thrift clothes on the railings for sale.

While the government's earlier move to shift hawkers from Police Bazar to the MUDA parking lot was widely appreciated, the broader process of relocating hawkers from other areas has slowed down.

Urban Affairs Minister Sniawbhalang Dhar recently defended the delay, stating that the government wants to relocate hawkers to locations where they can have a "good and sustained livelihood".

It may be noted that in February 2024, the Shillong Municipal Board conducted a survey, identifying 1,400 vendors across different parts of the city.

JNC seeks action...

(Contd from P-3) that by December 15, they would respond with concrete actions and initiate engagement with higher authorities.

The union further insisted that the findings of the inquiry conducted by the government over the past few months must be made public through the media.

Bamon warned that if no action is taken as promised by the DMHO by December 15, the organisation will resort to strong measures.

Ghaziabad most polluted in Nov, Delhi 4th worst: Report

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: Ghaziabad was the most polluted city in India in November, with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 224 microgram per cubic metre and air quality remaining above the national standards on all 30 days, according to a new analysis.

Noida, Bahadurgarh, Delhi, Hapur, Greater Noida, Baghpat, Sonapat, Meerut and Rohtak joined Ghaziabad among the 10 most polluted cities, the report by think tank Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air said.

Uttar Pradesh accounted for six of these cities, followed by Haryana with three and Delhi.

Except Delhi, all other cities in the

top 10 logged higher PM2.5 levels than the previous year.

Delhi ranked the fourth most polluted city with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 215 microgram per cubic metre in November, almost double its October average of 107. The city saw 23 very poor days, six severe days and one poor day.

The influence of stubble burning was lower this year, contributing an average of 7 per cent to Delhi's pollution in November, compared to 20 per cent last year. The peak contribution reached 22 per cent, well below 38 per cent recorded last year, CREA said.

Except Bahadurgarh, none of the top 10 cities saw even one day within the safe daily limit under the national

standards. Several other cities, including Charkhi Dadri, Bulandshahr, Jind, Muzaffarnagar, Gurgaon, Khurja, Bhiwani, Karnal, Yamunanagar and Faridabad, also reported PM2.5 levels above the limit every day.

"Despite a significant reduction in stubble-burning influence, 20 out of 29 NCR cities recorded higher pollution levels than the previous year and many still did not register a single day within NAAQS limits. This clearly indicates that the dominant drivers are year-round sources such as transport, industry, power plants and other combustion sources. Without sector-specific emission cuts, cities will continue to breach standards," said Manoj

Kumar, Analyst at CREA.

At the state level, Rajasthan had the highest number of polluted cities, with 23 of 34 exceeding the national limit in November.

Haryana had 22 of 25 such cities, and Uttar Pradesh had 14 of 20 above the standard. High levels were also reported in 9 of 12 cities in Madhya Pradesh, 9 of 14 in Odisha and 7 of 8 in Punjab.

Shillong in Meghalaya was the cleanest city, with a monthly average PM2.5 concentration of 7 microgram per cubic metre.

The top 10 cleanest cities included six from Karnataka and one each from Meghalaya, Sikkim, Tamil Nadu and Kerala. *(PTI)*

Bakery training culminates...

(Contd from P-3) highlighted that DDUCC's vocational programmes support the National Education Policy 2020 by promoting community-level skill development. Certificates were distributed to all participants.

Forum formalised for...

(Contd from P-3) reflecting a long-standing commitment to preserving forests, water sources, wildlife and cultural heritage.

The latest convening led to the formalisation of the MCCAIF, with 10 office-bearers—including two women—selected by consensus to represent Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills. The constitution of the MCCAIF was also unanimously finalised following extensive discussions and consultations.

Sanjay Sharma, Regional Head of the Foundation for Ecological Security (FES) for the North East, encouraged the MCCAIF to be "the drivers of community-led conservation" and to continue the legacy of their forefathers in protecting biodiversity and natural resources.

During the meeting, Fowler Darnei was elected president of the MCCAIF, who shared his personal journey from hunter to conservationist and urged federating CCAs to "work unitedly for preservation of the forest, water resources, culture and traditional practices".

Attention Syiemlieh, who was elected secretary of the MCCAIF, stressed that while office-bearers have been entrusted with responsibilities, "it is through the collective efforts of the general body that can bring about the success of the MCCAIF".

The official MCCAIF logo was also finalised during the session.

Prestine R. Marak, who was elected vice-president of the MCCAIF, noted that representatives from the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia regions had united to form the forum, while emphasising that the three tribes "should make efforts towards the success of the MCCAIF by working and planning together".

Freezing temperatures in J&K, Himachal as cold spreads through northern India

NEW DELHI, Dec 6: A cold wave swept through the northern states of Jammu and Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Haryana on Saturday, with a few places in hill states registering sub-zero temperatures. The night temperatures in Kashmir dropped several degrees below the freezing point with a thick layer of fog engulfing parts of the valley, while the Shimla Met Office predicted light rain and snow in isolated places in the mid and high hills of Himachal Pradesh on Sunday.

In Jammu and Kashmir, Shopian was the coldest place as the mercury there settled at a low of minus 6.4 degrees Celsius, while a low of minus 4.1 degrees Celsius was recorded in Srinagar, officials said.

The gateway town to the valley, Qazigund, recorded a low of minus 4.2 degrees Celsius, while the mercury settled at minus 3.5 degrees Celsius in north Kashmir's Kupwara, and minus 0.2 degrees Celsius in south

Kashmir's Kokernag. Pahalgam recorded a low of minus 4.4 degrees Celsius, while Gulmarg lodged minus 2.6 degrees Celsius and Konibal town in Pulwama district recorded minus 5.2 degrees Celsius.

The meteorological department said the weather would remain generally cloudy but dry on Sunday, and a brief spell of light snowfall at isolated places in the higher reaches of north and central Kashmir is likely on Monday.

In Himachal Pradesh, a yellow alert for dense fog was issued in parts of the reservoir area of the Bhakra dam in Bilaspur district and over some parts of the Balh valley in Mandi district during early morning till Monday.

The Spiti district was coldest at night with a low of minus 5.4 degrees Celsius while Kangra was the hottest during the day recording a high of 26 degrees Celsius. Even as temperatures

remained low, officials noted on Saturday that there was no significant change in the minimum and maximum temperatures in the state.

A thick blanket of pollution hung over the Delhi on Saturday, while the minimum temperature settled at 6.8 degrees Celsius, 2.7 notches below normal.

The maximum temperature in Delhi was at 24.6 degrees Celsius, 0.7 notch below normal, the IMD said.

The national capital's air quality stayed locked in the 'very poor' category, with an AQI of 330.

According to the Central Pollution Control Board, an AQI between 0 and 50 as 'good', 51 to 100 'satisfactory', 101 to 200 'moderate', 201 to 300 'poor', 301 to 400 'very poor' and 401 to 500 'severe'.

Evening relative humidity stood at 56 per cent, while morning humidity climbed to 95 per cent.

The weather department predicted shallow fog for Sunday morning. *(PTI)*

"Success seems to be largely a matter of hanging on after others have let go."
—William Feather

The Shillong Times

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Aviation rules, disruptions

THE massive cancellation of hundreds of IndiGo flights for the past one week has come as a rude shock to passengers. The entire aviation sector has been severely hit. A refund by itself is small comfort to the millions of affected passengers. Nor would the government decree to put a cap on airfares in this context mean much. A strict enforcement of the rules vis-a-vis pilots' duty hours, related mainly to night duty and weekly rest, created this situation in which the largest airline was caught off-guard. In such a rescheduling, it could not find sufficient numbers of pilots to fly its planes. Faced with a serious crisis, the government has agreed to relax the rules for IndiGo, following which a rebooting was resorted to and the situation slowly eased by the weekend. Meanwhile, the abrupt cancellations obviously resulted in a situation of other airlines quadrupling the fares, leading to governmental intervention and imposition of a cap on fares. This too is small comfort for the harried passengers.

Holding the reputation of being India's largest airline, IndiGo carried some 65 per cent of the air passenger volume daily and is cited as the second largest airline in Asia. It operates around 2,700 flights to over 130 destinations, including over 40 foreign cities. Started in 2006 as a private entity by a Punjabi entrepreneur, it attained the status of the largest airline in a matter of six years. IndiGo is rated as the sixth busiest airline in the world and runs on impressive lines. However, rules are important for the airlines and their pilots, more so in relation to safety of flight operations. But no airline can implement rules of this kind all of a sudden. It cannot get larger numbers of pilots in a jiffy with a magic wand. This would involve proper training and extensive experience. The Director General of Civil Aviation faces criticism from airline pilots' association for the "selective and unsafe relief" it now gave to IndiGo. The association has a point when it stressed that such rule relaxations have not just destroyed regulatory parity but also placed millions of passengers at heightened risk.

Policy shifts, or sudden introduction of new rules by the civil aviation ministry had in the past caused a hard landing for this sector, bleeding the aviation companies no end. Among the victims of this style of governance was the well-run Kingfisher airline, which ended up in huge losses and decimation of its existence. Its mascot, owner Vijay Mallya, indulged in loan repayment default, put the entire financial burden on Indian banks and scooted from the scene. He's enjoying his life abroad. The UPA periods had seen massive corruption in the civil aviation sector, with an NCP minister messing up the aviation front by extending undue favours to foreign airlines on Indian skies and allegedly making huge gains for himself. Now, the government, rather than shifting the blame for the present crisis on the company's CEO, a foreigner, must rather own up the blame for this massive aviation sector disruption.

A School Culture Rooted in Nature and the Seasons

By Glenn C. Kharkongor

Frontline magazine carried a pictorial article on a tribal school in Nagaland in the Oct 25, 2025 issue. Titled "Badze Leshuki, Nagaland's Rooted Classroom", it described a school for Angami children in the forest near Kohima. Badze means "spaces where people sit to chat, rest, and recuperate" and Leshuki means "school". Badze also refers to "conversing", according to Theyie Keditsu, the founder of the school.

Dr Theyie is well-known for her passionate promotion of mekhala, the traditional weaves and textiles of Nagaland. She set up the Centre for Indigenous Knowledge and Alternative Learning to Promote Naga Culture in 2013. A poet and college teacher, she started the school in 2022, and regards the New Education Policy 2020 as an empowering document.

The curriculum is rooted in the indigenous knowledge systems of Nagaland. It is designed around agricultural cycles and the seasons. The children tend vegetable patches and jhum fields. They cook meals and wash dishes. Every meal is a lesson on the vegetables, fruits and grains of the day. They sweep, mop and dust, and clean the toilets. Much of the learning is outdoors. There is no homework.

Examples from Tamil Nadu and Odisha

The Vidyodaya Model School, in the Gudalur valley of Tamil Nadu, is close to the Bandipur National Forest. The area is home to the Paniya, Kurumba, Katunayaka and Irula tribes, some of whom live in the forest. The school, founded 34 years ago, caters to tribal children who found little use for government school education.

The school incorporates tribal history, culture, songs and stories in the curriculum. Children are encouraged to speak their languages and dialects. Group work is encouraged rather than individual work, but each student may work at their own pace. Co-curricular activities are given equal importance, and assessments are based on a holistic model.

When some of us visited the school, we found friendly,

confident children. They were seated on the floor and kept their books on low tables. Some of the learning materials have been written and illustrated by the teachers and children, like "The Food Book". More than 3,000 children have so far studied in this school.

Mitra Residential School, in Kachapaju, Odisha is located in the Niyamgiri Hills, home of the Mal-Kondh tribe who speak the Kuvi language. The dream of the tribal elders was to have a school where their language, culture and traditional ways would be respected and nurtured, and children would grow up proud of their parents and community. The people of 16 villages formed an association and started the school in 1998. Two families provided land. All the villages undertook manual labour to erect the first building.

I visited the school a few years ago. I watched as the tribals broke stones for the road to the school. They used the ancient method of making holes in a line on the boulders, filling the holes with dry straw, then lighting the straw. Cold water was thrown on the hot boulder, cracking it into pieces.

A decision was made to celebrate and prioritise the Kuvi language, encouraging its use in informal and formal communications, composing songs and stories and printing books written by children, teachers and community members. Students from the school have become teachers, doctors, nurses and engineers.

The school calendar is based on the days of the weekly markets, which are holidays. School vacations are scheduled around tribal festivals. While the conventional curriculum is used, agriculture, health, arts and crafts are added. There is much music, dance, drama and nature walks. Periodic evaluation of the school and its curriculum is conducted by tribal leaders.

A system in need of overhaul

The Meghalaya State Education Commission Report 2025 seems to have sidestepped these aspects of school education. The word

'tribal' appears 27 times in the report but these mentions pertain mainly to demographics, geography, or schemes. On page 25 we find this quote, "Under NEP 2020, Meghalaya is moving towards using the home language as the medium in foundational years, at least in oral and bilingual forms, to make education more accessible to tribal children. Textbooks in Khasi and Garo for primary classes are being developed and the curriculum also includes tribal history, folklore, and indigenous knowledge, which helps validate students' cultural identity within the school system."

Just to validate one's cultural identity is a rather narrow view of tribal education. Phrases like "moving towards" and "being developed" indicate the slowness of progress. When are we going to have something new and relevant to showcase to our people? Meanwhile students from our community are exploited elsewhere.

In March 2025, two students from Meghalaya died at Gokula Educational Trust in Bengaluru due to suspected food poisoning. 22 students had to be brought back home. A few days ago, 24 girls were rescued from Sowmya Kesanupalli Student Home in Karnataka. These girls, aged 8-13, mostly from daily wage earner families, were promised a quality education. They only had to pay the cost of travel. The girls were served stale and unhygienic food, and had to fetch water from a river. They sometimes ate from dustbins, and were often beaten.

In schools in Meghalaya, it is a common practice to withhold promotion unless fees are paid. This results in the humiliation of young children and loss of precious self-esteem. Such outdated practices reflect our broken system. We continue to pursue a school education that is still largely rooted in Macaulay's devious scheme.

Ideologists, whether political, religious or cultural, all know that the best way to obtain control of a human being's attitudes, beliefs, and

behaviours is to influence their early learning environments. The home, place of worship, and school are the locales in which cognitive, social, and moral formations take place. These early influences carry their own power and authority, and are not easily shed or tempered in adulthood. Most individuals remain captive to these for life and then pass them on to their next generation.

Recommendations from statutory bodies

The NCERT National Curriculum Framework as far back as 2005 and the National Focus Group on SC/ST Children stated that mainstream, textbook-centric education is inadequate, even damaging for tribal children. It was recommended that their education should adapt to their language, culture, community context and lived reality of tribal children. They not only need learning that connects to life outside school, but also dignity and identity. NCF 2005 advocates "learning without burden," making learning a joyful, meaningful process rather than a burden of memorization and exam pressure.

The National Education Policy 2020 uses the word 'tribal' 13 times and goes much further. A reassuring passage calls for "inclusion of traditional Indian knowledge including tribal and other local knowledge throughout into the curriculum, across humanities, sciences, arts, crafts, and sports... Teachers must be grounded in Indian values, languages, knowledge, ethos, and traditions including tribal traditions."

Another passage states, "tribal knowledge and indigenous and traditional ways of learning, will be covered and included in mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, yoga, architecture, medicine, agriculture, engineering, linguistics, literature, sports, games, as well as in governance, polity, conservation. Specific courses in tribal ethno-medicinal practices, forest management, traditional (organic) crop cultivation, natural farming, etc. will also be made available."

Our state board should take up these oft-repeated recommendations, and consider the examples of successful tribal schools elsewhere in the country.

Strengthening Khasi language in the Digital Era: Technology, Community, and Open Knowledge

By Medari J Tham

Language not only reflects our identity but also serves as a medium through which our culture is transmitted and preserved. In this technological age, where connectivity has no borders, language usage has expanded exponentially. For instance, WhatsApp alone handles nearly 100 billion messages daily. This raises an important question as to how has Khasi, as a language, fared on digital platforms compared to other languages in India and across the globe. Understandably, English continues to dominate, accounting for about 49.1 per cent of all websites, followed by Spanish, German, and Japanese at six per cent and below. In the Indian context, Hindi accounts for just 0.1 per cent of web content, while Khasi's online presence remains negligible.

Although Khasi was removed from UNESCO's endangered languages in 2012 and declared "safe" due to its widespread use in education, media and religious domains, it is imperative that language preservation and propagation efforts accelerate amid this global surge in digital language use. Being aware of the current status of Khasi's digital presence and tapping into the opportunities offered by language technology and open knowledge platforms will ensure that the language continues to thrive as an integral part of our identity.

The presence of online Khasi newspapers, news channels, blogs is encouraging and indicates that language usage is vibrant and active. Khasi has also made its mark on social media through platforms such as YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram. YouTube statistics are especially striking: Batesi TV has about 11 lakh subscribers with 97 crore total views; T7 News Channel has around 7.7 lakh subscribers and 58 crore views; U Nongsain Hima has a little more than 7 lakh subscribers and 54 crore views.

The growing field of Natural Language Processing (NLP), where machines learn to understand human language using artificial intelligence and linguistics, has transformed the digital landscape of languages worldwide. English, being the technological lingua franca, has advanced rapidly, with tools such as spell and grammar checkers, automatic speech transcription for video subtitles, voice assistants like Siri, Google Assistant, and Alexa, and conversational AIs like ChatGPT and Gemini enhancing writing and communication. Given these developments, it is important to ask to what extent have these technological advancements influenced the Khasi language and the Khasi-speaking community, and what opportunities lie ahead for language preservation in the digital era.

ChatGPT now supports dozens of major world languages and can attempt to understand and generate text in many others, including Khasi, though with varying reliability. Other conversational AIs—such as Google's Gemini, DeepSeek, and Meta AI—also provide some level of Khasi support, each with different degrees of fluency and accuracy. Google Translate, one of the world's largest multilingual translation systems with over 500 million daily users and support for more than 100 languages, added Khasi to its platform in June 2024. While the platform offers many features—such as camera translation, speech translation, document and website translation, offline support, phrasebook functions, and transcription—Khasi currently benefits mainly from text-based translation. This is due to the limited availability of digital data for Khasi, making it a low-resource language from an AI perspective.

There is, however, a growing number of native researchers contributing to Khasi language technology through tools such as part-of-speech taggers (which automatically assign grammatical tags to words), shallow parsers (which identify noun phrases and verb phrases), automatic text summarization, and English-to-Khasi machine translation systems. The backbone of conversational AI and translation technology is the Large Language Model, which relies on massive datasets. For languages such as English, German, and Mandarin, available digital resources amount to billions or trillions of tokens collected from the Internet. This abundance has been a decisive factor in enabling models like ChatGPT and Gemini to perform strongly in these languages.

Corpus development for Khasi through building machine-readable collections of texts and

speech has gained momentum in recent years. Researchers are increasingly recognizing the need for large, diverse, and openly accessible datasets to support modern AI tools. For Khasi, continued growth in corpus size, diversity, and availability will be crucial for improving translation systems; speech technologies, and future NLP applications.

In April 2025, the Government of Meghalaya signed an MoU with the Digital India Bhashini Division to integrate Khasi and Garo into the Bhashini platform. Bhashini, an initiative under the Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology (MeitY), aims to leverage AI-powered language technologies to build an inclusive digital ecosystem that transcends linguistic barriers. This partnership marks a promising step toward the inclusion of non-scheduled languages alongside the 22 scheduled languages already supported by the platform. Bhashini offers services such as text-to-text translation, video translation, voice translation, text-to-speech, speech-to-text, and other AI-enabled features. While Khasi is already listed as a supported language in the mobile application, the actual functionality currently available for Khasi is limited to text-based translation.

One of Bhashini's key initiatives is community-driven crowdsourcing, where volunteers contribute speech samples, translations, and validations of AI-generated outputs. For Khasi, crowdsourcing could involve thousands of speakers providing English-Khasi translations, recording speech samples, and validating AI outputs. Community participation will accelerate corpus development and ensure inclusivity by representing diverse accents, dialects, and natural speech patterns. Such efforts can significantly reduce the time required to develop language resources.

Another promising opportunity for Khasi speakers lies in contributing to Open Knowledge platforms. The recently concluded Bahu Bhasa 2025 festival, organized by Open Knowledge Initiatives (OKI) at IIT Hyderabad, brought together experts working on language diversity and equitable access to knowledge. This platform was successfully planned by OKI which is actively engaged to strengthen and expand the open knowledge and technology ecosystem. Discussions explored how policy, governance, and digital technologies influence language use. One session highlighted how AI tools such as aakhor AI have empowered Assamese users with digital typing, content creation, and inclusive knowledge access. Other discussions showcased community-driven projects in documentation, preservation, and revitalization with examples from Wiki Loves, Bengali Wikisource that are part of the Wikimedia movement, one of the world's most remarkable volunteer-driven efforts to make knowledge freely accessible to everyone.

In another session, the Language Technologies Research Center (LTRC), IIT Hyderabad, demonstrated its work on machine translation among Indian languages, including Khasi. The Science Gallery Bengaluru (SGB), part of the Science Gallery International Network pioneered by Trinity College Dublin, highlighted the importance of public engagement in science—moving beyond traditional museum formats by blending art, design, technology, and research.

Another strong example of community-driven engagement is OSM Kerala, an OpenStreetMap community in Kerala built on the principle that mapping should belong to everyone. It is a vibrant and active volunteer group contributing to the mapping of Kerala's geography, infrastructure, and cultural landmarks on OpenStreetMap, the world's largest open, crowd-sourced mapping platform. The common message across these discussions was clear: digital inclusion, language preservation, and equitable access for small languages are achievable when communities take the lead.

In this context, the State government's hosting of a Regional AI Impact Conference on December 3, 2025 is timely. It presents a unique opportunity to accelerate the digital presence of Khasi (and Garo), strengthen AI language tools, and empower students, researchers, and the wider public.

(Dr. Medari J. Tham works in Language Technology and can be reached at medaritam16@gmail.com)

Letters to the Editor

Intent behind renaming Raj Bhavan must translate to action

Editor,
Apropos of the news "Governor's House renamed as Lok Bhavan" (ST 5th December, 2025) the renaming of Raj Bhavan to Lok Bhavan in Shillong is symbolically significant. The term Raj Bhavan carries colonial and monarchical connotations—"Raj" evoking rule and authority. Lok Bhavan translates to "People's House," signalling a deliberate move toward democratization of language and a more citizen-centric identity for constitutional offices. This aligns with a broader national directive to rename Governor's residences across India, reframing them as spaces that belong to the people rather than symbols of elite power. Such renaming can be seen as an attempt to bridge institutional distance—making governance feel more accessible and less hierarchical. However, the impact depends on whether the change is accompanied by substantive reforms in transparency, civic participation, and accessibility. A name alone cannot restore trust unless the institution embodies the values it now claims.

Yours etc;
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

A Flight of Frustration

Editor,
I want to share my recent travel experience with Indigo and express how their poor service caused significant inconvenience, showing little regard for passengers' time or concerns. I woke up early on December 4, feeling refreshed and ready for my morning flight from Shillong to Kolkata via Indigo Airlines. The message from the airline the night before had confirmed that everything was on schedule, and I arrived at the airport with plenty of time to spare. As I went through security and check, I couldn't help but feel a sense of excitement and relief. I had an urgent meeting in Kolkata with a high-ticket client and was eager to get there as quickly as possible.

But as the minutes ticked by, I began to sense a change in the atmosphere. The flight was delayed, and then delayed again. 15 minutes turned into 30, and then 45. Still, no clear announcement from the airline.

I looked around and saw families with young children, weary and frustrated, trying to make sense of the situation. Some were on their phones, frantically trying to contact the airline or book alternative flights. Others were just sitting, staring blankly into space, wondering what was happening.

And then, came the words I dreaded: "The flight has been cancelled."

I couldn't believe it. How could this happen? Why hadn't the airline communicated with us sooner? What were we supposed to do now? I joined the throng of passengers, all trying to get answers and assistance. But it was like talking to a brick wall. The airline staff seemed overwhelmed, unhelpful, and uninterested. All they could offer us in the end was a refund for the flight.

As I waited, I couldn't help but think about how this could have been avoided. A simple SMS notification, a clear announcement, a bit of empathy and support—it would have gone a long way. But it seemed that Indigo Airlines had forgotten one crucial thing: that they are in the business of serving customers, not just operating flights.

As I left the airport, feeling frustrated and defeated, I couldn't help but wonder if I would ever trust Indigo Airlines again.

As I reflected on this horrid experience, I realised that there were a few key takeaways:

Communication is key: The airline's failure to communicate effectively was the root cause of the chaos.

Support is crucial: Passengers need help and guidance, especially in difficult situations.

Contingency planning is essential: Airlines should have a plan in place for handling delays and cancellations.

I sincerely hope that Indigo Airlines will take note

of this incident and make changes to improve their customer service and communication. Until then, I'll be thinking twice before booking with them again.

Yours etc.,
Aric Chakma,
Via email

Inconsistent Actions of Synod Sepngi

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I wish to draw the attention of the public—especially the Christian community in our State—to a grave concern regarding the recent conduct of the KJP Synod Sepngi in relation to the funeral service of the late Rev. G.P.L. Gadew.

Rev. Gadew, a senior pastor highly respected by many, passed away merely three weeks after he was placed under suspension by the Synod on allegations of encouraging "Tangjait", an act the Synod deemed to be in violation of one of its resolutions. Yet, to the surprise of many, the same Synod—which has never conducted funeral services for any minister under suspension—chose to officiate the funeral service in this case.

What has disturbed many believers even more is that the Synod had ample opportunity to revoke his suspension before the funeral, particularly since its Executive Committee held an emergent meeting on 4 December 2025, just a day prior to the funeral. If the

Synod had revoked the suspension at that time, it would have brought immense relief and dignity to the grieving family and community. Instead, the mixed signals have only deepened doubts about the fairness and consistency of its leadership.

This is not the first time such a situation has arisen. The late Rev. P.B.M. Basajawmoit faced a similar fate four years ago—he died while still under suspension. In that instance, the Synod refrained entirely from conducting his funeral service, leaving the responsibility to the Mawlai Presbytery alone. If the Synod insists on uniformly upholding its resolutions, why was one case treated so differently from the other?

The Christian community deserves transparency and fairness from its highest ecclesiastical body. Believers cannot be expected to follow blindly when actions appear inconsistent and decisions raise questions of bias. Moreover, if the Synod's Moderator—who conducted and presides over a service for someone still technically under suspension, does this not mean he has violated the very resolutions the Synod used to suspend others? Should such an act not warrant scrutiny under the same yardstick?

In the interest of moral integrity and institutional credibility, the Synod owes the public an unqualified apology for the confusion and pain caused. Without

such accountability, the spiritual trust and future standing of the Synod may be at serious risk.

Yours etc.,
Bashanlang Kharumnuid
Shillong - 8

Accountability needed for delayed results

Editor,
Through your esteemed daily, I wish to highlight the irregularities during the recent MPSC examination for typists. At one examination centre, the test began much later than the scheduled time, and the invigilator made no effort to verify or correct the delay. Candidates were compelled to rush through the paper, and when we requested a brief extension to compensate for the late start, the invigilator refused.

This raises a fundamental question of accountability. Should candidates suffer for an error not of their making? Such lapses cast serious doubt on the fairness and transparency of the recruitment process.

I urge the authorities to inquire into the matter and ensure proper conduct in future examinations.

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

Stop Illegal Coal Mining

THE Meghalaya Government may be making tall claims in many areas of so-called development but when it comes to enforcing the rule of law the state fares miserably. For once the BJP has made the right noises and called out the continued violation of the National Green Tribunal ban on coal mining since 2014. That the ban is a bad joke is evident from the 4000 MT of coal that had disappeared and which was said to have been washed away downstream by the non-existent rain at the time. The fact-finding team of the BJP has even put a price on the head of the Police, the Deputy Commissioner and the MLA for allowing free movement of coal-laden trucks. BJP Vice President, Bernard Marak a known NPP baiter seems to have unearthed what the police have been trying to hide. Marak claims that roughly 60 coal trucks ply daily from Garo Hills alone while the transport challan is paid for only two trucks, thereby allowing revenue leakage on a large scale.

Alongside the report of the fact finding committee delving into illegal coal mining is the news that some miners might have again died inside a coal mine in East Jaintia Hills. While there are denials all around including terming the incident as a rumour there are hushed voices that speak of what could have been another mine disaster. Last year a miner from Assam died inside a mine from what could have been a mining accident. The incident was never reported. What little was known was from the family members of the dead miner who came to receive his dead body. The manner in which the dead body of the miner was handed over to his family members was surreptitiously executed. A special vehicle was sent and the family members were told not to stop on the way or breathe a word about the incident until the dead body reached the home of the deceased. For the Government of Meghalaya to say that there's no illegal coal mining is a blatant lie.

Law and order does not seem to be a priority with the Government and there is complete lack of accountability in terms of how laws are implemented. Meghalaya has always had poor conviction rates which are far below the national average according to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB). Hence in Meghalaya, most criminals often with heinous offences against them walk out quietly because there is no evidence that they committed the crime/s they were arrested for. Meghalaya also has one of the highest recidivism (re-arresting criminals that have walked out of jail due to lack of evidence) rate in the country, according to the latest report of the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB).

In Meghalaya, many cases remain under investigation for years, leading to evidence degradation and weakening of cases. The Raja Raghuvanshi case is an honourable exception perhaps because the matter made national headlines and the whole country was agog and waiting for police to act in what seemed like an open and shut case of premeditated murder. It's time the Government stops misleading the people of Meghalaya and also stops denying that illegal coal mining continues, by trotting out flimsy excuses and doing a poor cover-up job.

UG teachers views on 4-year undergraduate program

By H. Srikanth & Airpeace Rani

When Prof. P.S. Shukla, the Vice-Chancellor of NEHU, notified the launching of the Four-Year Undergraduate Program (FYUP) in UG colleges in 2023, Meghalaya College Teachers Association (MCTA) spearheaded a movement against the enforcement of the FYUP in the state without the approval of the NEHU Academic Council. MCTA was not opposed to implementing FYUP per se, but it then felt that NEHU was not ready for the FYUP and hence it should implement the program in the next academic year. Their agitation was supported by NEHUTA and the Meghalaya Tribal Teachers Association (MeTTA). But the VC, who was in a hurry to implement it the same year, ignored the views of the stakeholders. A negative campaign was carried out to malign the teachers' association, as if MCTA teachers had no concern for the future of the students. When the MCTA teachers refused, the colleges engaged teachers employed by the college management to teach the NEP courses.

Most parents then had a positive opinion about NEP 2020 and felt that the children in Meghalaya would lag behind the rest of the country if they didn't go for the FYUP the same year. Considering the plight of the students, MCTA withdrew their protest after the post-facto approval of FYUP by the Academic Council. Since then, all teachers in the UG colleges under NEHU have been involved in implementing the FYUP. As important stakeholders, teachers' views on education do matter. Hence, the Meghalaya Chapter of All India Save Education Committee (AISEC), which initiated a pilot study of FYUP, tried to understand teachers' experiences and perspectives on implementing FYUP. The feedback given by about 80 UG teachers from across 15 colleges in the state presents interesting facts about the FYUP in the state.

Prior to implementing FYUP, the UG colleges in NEHU were running a three-year honours degree program. The curriculum prescribed only 18 papers, and the students were expected to secure 72 credits. The NEHU ordinance then prescribed

that each department should have a minimum of four or five teachers—four in normal departments, and five teachers in subjects like English, Khasi, etc. This number was suitable for the earlier system where the teaching load was comparatively less. But this arrangement became meaningless once the FYUP came into force. Apart from major and minor papers, the FYUP introduced several papers categorized as Ability Enhancing Courses (AEC), Skill Enhancing Courses (SEC), Multi-Disciplinary Courses (MDC), Value Added Courses (VAD), and Vocational Education and Training Courses (VET).

Many of the papers are new, and most of the college teachers are not familiar with the content of those papers. Under FYUP, to secure a three-year degree under FYUP, the student has to study thirty-three papers. For securing a four-year honours degree with or without research, the students should study five to eight major and two minor papers. The teaching load has almost doubled after the introduction of FYUP. However, there has been no noticeable increase in the number of teachers. The government colleges and a few elite colleges in the state have appointed one or two additional teachers to teach specialized AEC or SEC courses on a permanent or temporary basis. In principle, barring a few exceptions, most colleges continue with the age-old formula of four / five teachers prescribed by NEHU under the old system. The Academic Council, which is overactive in passing the new curriculum and syllabi for FYUP, has remained silent on the question of amending the NEHU ordinance about the minimum number of teachers to be appointed in each department.

Consequently, one can observe wide variations in the number of papers that the teachers are teaching at different UG colleges. The pilot study conducted by AISEC shows that only 14% of teacher respondents state that they continue to teach only those papers they were teaching earlier. But

49% of teacher respondents informed, they teach one more additional paper, while another 27% of teachers said they teach two more papers. The remaining 10% of teachers claimed that apart from major papers, they handle AEC, SEC and MDC courses as well. The students in several colleges admit that different VET courses are handled by their teachers. Some teachers appointed for teaching subjects such as Political Science, Khasi and English were asked to handle courses such as baking, piggy and beauty care. In some colleges, although not appointed for that purpose, some teachers who are gifted in music are asked to handle VET courses in music.

Handling so many courses becomes an enormous challenge for the teachers. Sixty-six percent of the teacher respondents stated that they have been facing problems in teaching new courses. They have complained about the lack of textbooks, unfamiliarity with the course content, and the absence of orientation programs. Seventy-seven percent stated their workload has increased substantially after the introduction of FYUP. Sixty-three percent complained they don't get sufficient time to complete the syllabus on time for a variety of reasons, such as lack of sufficient time, absence of classrooms, frequent disturbance of classes, and the additional burden of teaching several papers. Most teachers are of the view that they could not do justice to the major papers if they are to teach other secondary papers. They contend that in a state like Meghalaya, internships make little sense as neither students nor the organizations where the students joined as interns know what they have to do.

Apart from teaching, the college teachers take up several other responsibilities as members, and convenors of different committees. They have to hold the internal tests and correct the final semester scripts. Eighty-seven percent of the teacher respondents stated they had to correct the scripts of papers other than the core papers they have to teach. Only 25% of the respondents said they corrected

fewer than 100 scripts every semester. But 34% stated that they have to correct between 100 and 250 scripts, and another 33% stated that they correct between 250 and 450 scripts. The remaining 10% of teachers said they correct over 450 scripts every semester. A teacher teaching Environment Studies in one college claimed that he had to correct 1500 scripts.

The teachers are concerned about increasing dropouts in the colleges after introducing the FYUP. Only 9% of teacher respondents favoured the admission through CUET on the grounds that it helps in attracting quality students. But most of them feel the CUET is an unnecessary exercise that goes against the marginalized communities and increases the dropout rates. Nearly 77 percent of the teacher respondents are of the view that the UG colleges in the state do not have the required infrastructure and adequate qualified faculty to handle research component or advanced major papers in the upcoming fourth year of FYUP.

To sum up, the pilot study undertaken by the Meghalaya Chapter of AISEC points at different loopholes in the FYUP system. The VC, who was obsessed with NEP 2020 and hurriedly introduced FYUP without adequate preparations, is now nowhere around. The individuals and authorities who lent support to him have little idea of the problems that the students and teachers are facing in the affiliated colleges under the FYUP regime. The enforcement of CUET, unwieldy syllabi, exam pressure and increasing cost of education would lead to the decline in the enrolment in the UG colleges. Growing disenchantment with FYUP might compel several affiliated colleges to discontinue their affiliation with NEHU.

It is high time the college managements, authorities in NEHU and the state government stopped eulogizing the NEP 2020 and take concrete steps to understand and resolve the mess that they have created by their hasty and unplanned implementation of the FYUP. Stop experimenting with the students and teachers. They are not guinea pigs.

Indigo's Rogue Behaviour - The Roots Lie in Regulation and Tainted Capitalism

By Ajit Ranade

When IndiGo cancelled thousands of flights this December—stranding lakhs of passengers, destroying travel plans, and exposing India's vulnerability to a quasi-monopoly airline—it was tempting to blame it all on one company's "rogue behaviour". But scratching the surface reveals a deeper malaise: a chronic weakening of India's regulatory institutions, and a form of tainted capitalism where dominant private players face little real accountability. The crisis was not an aberration; it was an inevitability.

Indian regulators are meant to be quasi-judicial bodies—impartial, evidence-driven, and powerful enough to discipline the biggest corporations. In principle, they play a role analogous to courts: interpreting rules, enforcing compliance, and protecting public interest. In practice, most regulators resemble departments inside ministries, staffed by junior officers who simply cannot stand up to billion-dollar incumbents.

Contrast this with the United States, where even a junior federal judge could issue adverse rulings against the sitting President Donald Trump, against his whimsical tariffs. In India, the median regulatory staffer is neither empowered nor insulated. They are expected to regulate conglomerates whose annual profits exceed the regulator's entire budget—and whose influence networks reach deep within the government.

The result is predictable: regulatory hesitation, delayed enforcement, and a culture of looking away until a crisis becomes impossible to ignore.

Long before the present airline fiasco, take the case of telecom, inching toward duopoly, which also offers a clear example. Over the past two decades, spectrum auctions were repeatedly followed by post-hoc rule changes—in pricing, revenue sharing, adjusted gross revenue (AGR), and merger norms. Policy shifts came not through transparent processes but through continuous firefighting and lobbying. Companies bet on getting rules changed later, because history suggested they would. Regulation was characterised by volatility, not predictability.

This is the antithesis of the rule of law. When rules are unstable, discretionary, and revisable under pressure, firms learn that the real game is not competition or efficiency, but regulatory capture.

The NITI Aayog-CRISIL report on airport PPPs (Public Private Partnerships) shows the same tension. India needs nearly 50 billion dollars in airport investment over the next decade. Yet foreign participation is declining, not because the sector is unattractive, but because investors fear arbitrary regulation, delayed clearances, unpredictable tariffs, and lengthy disputes.

AERA, our regulator of airports, is theoretically an independent, quasi-judicial authority. But tariff-setting—its core mandate—has become a high-stakes litigation maze. Concession agreements contain ambiguities, while operators, often part of large conglomerates, deploy legal and political influence. As the NITI report notes, even basic issues like expansion triggers, equity lock-in, and termination payments remain unresolved or inconsistently applied.

When regulators are weak, the operator becomes the real policymaker.

The December meltdown of IndiGo was not "bad luck" or a "perfect storm". The roots go back to 2019, when the pilot union challenged exploitative rostering and fatigue norms in court. That legal battle eventually led to DGCA's stricter Flight Duty Time Limitations (FDTL)—a long-delayed reform aligned with global safety norms. The irony is sharp: a labour union had to step in where the regulator failed. And the corrective action came five years too late triggered a staffing crisis that IndiGo did not resolve proactively. It is a separate arguable matter whether setting working hours is within the mandate of the regulator.

In aviation, safety decisions are paramount. Yet IndiGo behaved as if compliance was optional, dragging its feet on inventorying crew shortages and adjusting schedules. DGCA learned of these lapses internally, but its junior staff either did not escalate or felt unable to push back. After all, how does a 28-year-old deputy director

"warn" India's largest airline, which carries nearly two-thirds of all domestic passengers?

This is a structural imbalance. When one company becomes too big to regulate, the public becomes hostage.

The IndiGo crisis also reveals something uncomfortable about India's political economy: labour cannot negotiate except through courts. Pilots—highly skilled professionals—could not achieve basic fatigue protections through bargaining. They needed a judicial intervention.

If this is the fate of pilots, imagine the condition of informal workers, gig workers, or teachers in private colleges. In India's celebrated growth story, capital has become organised, concentrated, and politically entrenched; labour has become fragmented, precarious, and voiceless.

A society where only capital can speak is not merely unequal—it is unstable.

Another example of a quiet regulatory failure is in the higher education sector. India's education regulators—AICTE, UGC, State councils—have long been unable to discipline powerful private institutions. Excellence and fidelity to education goals is by exception, not the rule. Capitation fees, faculty shortages, infrastructure violations, and quality lapses persist because regulators fear litigation, political backlash, or simply administrative overload.

The result is a parallel universe where rules exist but only for the weak. Big institutions innovate new ways to bypass norms, while smaller ones collapse. Parents and students have no real grievance redressal. The problem is not only rogue institutions. There are far too many examples across sectors, of how regulators have the title of judges but the autonomy of clerks.

India's development narrative often celebrates private enterprise, and rightly so. But when regulatory checks are weak, capitalism becomes tainted, especially aggravated by cronyism or monopolistic behavior. What follows are discretionary concessions and selective enforcement, monopolistic dominance that stifles competition, or regulatory capture that substitutes private interest for public interest.

The IndiGo episode is not an aviation story. It is an economic governance story. A system with a strong rule of law would have the following: (a) compelled airlines to disclose staffing adequacy months earlier; (b) penalised schedule overextension; (c) ensured transparent tariff and slot allocation; (d) protected whistleblowers inside DGCA; (e) institutionalised class-action remedies for passengers.

Instead, passengers bore the costs, airlines deflected the blame, and regulators scrambled to respond after the damage was done.

The Way Forward: Rebuilding the Capacity to Say "No"

India does not suffer from a lack of regulations. Strengthening the regulatory spine will need the following reforms: (1) Institutional autonomy with fixed tenures, independent budgets, non-transferable leadership. (2) Professionalised cadres with domain specialists, not just bureaucrats. (3) Legal empowerment that leads to swift penalties, binding directives, and statutory protection for staff acting in good faith. (4) Transparency and accountability by publishing all concessions and enforcing open consultations. All approvals should be digitised. (5) Preventing dominance in sectors like airlines, telecom, and digital markets.

IndiGo's meltdown, telecom's flip-flop policy history, the fragility of airport PPPs, the helplessness of education regulators—all point to one truth: India's regulatory state is not yet strong enough to discipline the giants it has created, nor can they rein in monopolies.

Until regulators regain independence, authority, and credibility, India will continue to oscillate between private excess and public helplessness. Rogue companies will be blamed, but the deeper fault will lie in a system where rules are flexible for the powerful and rigid for everyone else.

Strengthening the rule of law is not anti-business. It is the only way to build a capitalism that is fair, stable, and genuinely democratic.

(Dr. Ajit Ranade is a noted economist). (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

Letters to the Editor

Sorry State of Customer Service

Editor,
As I reconnect with Shillong and resume living here, I increasingly feel that goods are produced and services rendered not because businesses must compete for customers, but because the public has few alternatives and is forced to accept whatever is offered.

It is in this context that I wish to recount a few personal experiences related to customer service and grievance redressal.

A reputed PSU bank in Police Bazaar has held my mother's family pension account for nearly forty years. Over that long association, service has generally been functional with only minor hiccups—reasonable expectations from a government bank handling a basic pension account. However, in November, the pension was abruptly suspended. The most likely reason was the life certificate we submitted digitally through the official app during the first week of the month. For reasons known only to the bank, the submission was either not accepted or not processed. When we approached the branch, the staff themselves appeared unsure of what had gone wrong or how the matter could be resolved. One is left to wonder: can bank authorities truly afford to be so nonchalant when a customer's livelihood is suddenly blocked?

That same week, when Upper Mawprem and adjoining localities were already grappling with a water crisis, I experienced a power outage that lasted over forty-two

hours. Meghalaya's electricity helplines are inactive at night, forcing complaints to wait until morning. Although a few personnel arrived near sunset, they remained disengaged, offered no explanation, and casually said they would return "in fifteen minutes." Darkness fell—and then silence. They never came back.

Meanwhile, the helpline operator continued offering empty reassurance with repeated chants of "Aayega, aayega," while practical help arrived only the next day after relentless follow-ups. The electrician eventually diagnosed the issue: the wire connecting the pole to our meter had burned out, and I was told I would need to buy the replacement wire myself. When I pointed out—somewhat light-heartedly—that equipment before the meter legally belongs to the department, he smiled and replied, "Bhaiya, woh zamaana chala gaya." My choices were simple: purchase the 11-meter wire personally or visit the office, request it, and then hand it over for installation. It goes without saying which option proved quicker.

Yet, this was not always the reality. Years ago, interactions with both the bank and the electricity department felt different. Bank officials were knowledgeable and could guide customers confidently. Electricians arrived promptly, identified faults competently, and took responsibility—assuring us that expenses outside the meter would be borne by the Board.

So what has changed? Where have all those competent employees and technicians—the ones who understood both their roles and their responsibilities—gone?

While others may have endured far greater hardships than mine, should we resign ourselves to the steady erosion of basic competence in grievance handling? A bank is unable to manage or even foresee a pension suspension, despite being the sole authority over disbursement. Citizens were left without electricity for nearly two days in the heart of Shillong. These are not extraordinary demands—they are fundamental expectations of public service delivery.

Ironically, a brief glimmer of efficiency came from an unexpected source. I received a call from Jio Fiber stating that I had raised a complaint about service disruption. Suspecting a scam, I denied making any request. A little later, another call came—this time apparently legitimate—explaining that an automated monitoring system had detected a connectivity failure and generated a service ticket. When I told the caller that I was living in what felt like medieval conditions without electricity, he understood the situation clearly and spoke with confidence. There were no vague promises—only clarity, accountability, and process. For a moment, he felt like a character from a sci-fi series offering a rare moment of rescue from systemic chaos.

Which leads to the inevitable question: Why is customer service in Shillong still governed by verbal assurances instead of accountability? Why are employees neither trained nor empowered to take real ownership of grievances, communicate transparently, and resolve issues effectively?

Until these questions are addressed, "service" will remain little more than a

word—promised often, but delivered rarely.

Yours etc.,
Narottam Subedi
Shilling-2

Need for Better Fire Safety in Shillong's Wooden Homes

Editor,
I am writing to express my concern about the fire safety situation in our city. The recent incident in Goa, where a massive fire caused heavy loss, has made many of us think about how vulnerable our own neighbourhoods are.

A large number of homes and shops in Shillong are built with wood. This gives our city its unique charm, but it also makes these structures much more likely to catch fire. Many of these buildings do not have proper fire safety systems. Even basic measures like fire extinguishers, safe electrical wiring, emergency exits, and regular inspections are missing in many places.

Shillong is a crowded city with narrow roads which makes it harder for fire services to reach quickly. If a major fire breaks out, it could spread fast and put many lives at risk. We cannot wait for a tragedy to remind us of what we already know.

I therefore request the authorities to conduct strict fire safety checks across the city. Building owners should also take responsibility and install basic fire protection equipment. Public awareness campaigns are needed so that people know how to prevent fire hazards and how to respond in an emergency.

We love our city and its old wooden buildings, but

we must also protect them and the people living in them. It is time to act before a disaster happens.

Yours etc.,
Devansh Agarwal
Via email

Allegations of malpractices by MPSC

Editor,
The letter, "Restore Integrity in MPSC Exams: A Call for Strict Reforms," published on December 2, 2025, raised serious concerns about the fairness of the MPSC's Inspector of Statistics and Junior Co-operative Officer examinations. Reports from the ground now point to alarming irregularities, including:

- Use of mobile phones inside examination halls
- Assistance allegedly provided by invigilators
- Possible leakage and compromise of question papers
- Instances of mass cheating reminiscent of outdated practices

While many deserving candidates have rightfully earned their place, it is time to reflect honestly: Did the examination environment uphold equal competition? Merit is not merely a number—it decides your career progression. Every candidate must ask: Do I truly deserve where I am today?

The recently declared results only strengthen earlier concerns and reveal the extent of the alleged malpractices. Expanding exam centres to Jowai, Nongstoin, and Tura is a welcome move for accessibility, but decentralisation must never come at the cost of integrity. Fairness cannot be optional.

Stronger safeguards are

now essential. Beyond simple frisking and mobile bans, measures such as temporary internet blackouts, compulsory CCTV surveillance, and strict action against both cheating candidates and complicit officials are necessary. Invigilators or government staff who aid wrongdoing must face legal consequences, not just departmental warnings. Finally, the MPSC must urgently transition to computer-based testing (CBT) and secure its question-setting process to prevent leakages and restore faith in public recruitment.

The MPSC's silence on these allegations is deeply disappointing. In a state known for its values, such incidents are unbefitting and have unfairly cast suspicion on candidates who earned their success through genuine merit.

The government often reminds citizens that government jobs are limited. If so, it bears an even greater responsibility to ensure that these few positions are filled through transparent, fair, and corruption-free examinations. The youth of Meghalaya deserve a system that rewards hard work—not manipulation.

I earnestly urge the authorities to address these concerns with urgency and restore public faith in our recruitment 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

Rules, the people

THERE'S an overdose of sweet-talk by politicians, mainly those who run governments. They have no compunction promising the moon and yet not acting on even their implementable promises. Their strategy is to keep hopes alive. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's latest assertion is that "rules are meant to do good to the people, and not to harass them." As the chief executive who ran the nation for over 10 years and previously as CM for repeated terms, he should know as much. In reality, however, the rules or laws the parliament enacts under the PM's direct watch are often half-baked, drafted by bureaucrats who are divorced from the social mainstream, and passed even without proper discussions.

The quality of debates both in parliament and state legislatures have degenerated over the years. Intelligent minds have only a marginal presence in these houses. The cream of society is excluded from the political process, where muscle-flexors and loud-mouths rule the roost. The voice of sanity is drowned in the cacophony of loose talk and mutual recriminations. The result is that adequate thought is not going into the making of new laws. This is unlike the time of Jawaharlal Nehru, who, with his western education and public life tempered by the heat of the Freedom movement, kept with him an enlightened lot in the governance system. His daughter Indira Gandhi as prime minister ruptured the good systems for personal advantage. The downside began then and there. Today, the scenario is beyond repair. Modi as prime minister has not demonstrated any significant interest in reforming the system to the people's advantage. The systems are being taken for a ride by the bureaucracy and politicians. Massive corruption is the result in which they join hands to rob the exchequer. People are fed with a regular diet of bombastic claims and big talks from the podium. Now Modi asks parliamentarians at the NDA parliamentary party meeting to focus on reforms, but his seriousness about meaningful reforms is questionable.

Modi made these remarks in the context of the massive disruption of the aviation sector in recent days, when over 1200 flights were cancelled by the main airline, IndiGo, as it struggled hard to implement new rules introduced by the government in the name of flight safety. With additional rest hours granted to pilots, the airline could not match it with an immediate increase in the number of pilots to fill the gaps thus created. Granted that a high court order forced airlines to implement the new rule with a sense of urgency but the government or its Director General of Civil Aviation should not have remained in a state of paralysis. They should rather have intervened as they did lately, and granted a reasonable time for the airlines to implement the new rule. It appears the civil aviation ministry run by TDP, a BJP ally, has complicated matters. Perhaps ulterior motives were involved. This was a scenario similar to the note demonetization goof-up. A sense of uncertainty has gripped the aviation sector. A simple statement, or even an apology, does not repair the serious hurt.

Letters to the Editor

Needed a holistic perspective to education

Editor,
After going through the article on the Four-Year Undergraduate Programme (FYUGP) authored by Mr. H. Srikanth and Airpeace Rani, published on December 9, 2025, in The Shillong Times, I felt strongly that a response was needed. The writers have presented the situation with appreciable honesty. Many of us in the teaching community could instantly relate to it. What has been written there is what we hear every day in our staff rooms, in the corridors, and even in casual conversations with students.

There is no question that the ideas behind NEP 2020 are attractive. A four-year degree with research, flexibility, and skill development is something any modern education system should welcome. In places where colleges have the staff, space, and facilities, students are indeed benefiting. But as the article rightly pointed out, a good plan means little if the ground is not ready for it.

And that is where Meghalaya is struggling. Reports have shown that less than 10% of our colleges were actually prepared to start FYUGP. Most colleges simply did not have enough trained teachers or the rooms, labs, and support systems needed for such a big change. When a reform arrives before

the system is ready, the pressure naturally falls on the people within it.

Teachers are now handling more than ever before—major papers, minor papers, AEC, SEC, MDC, vocational classes, and everything in between. Many are taking subjects they were never trained for, only because there is no one else. Still, they continue to teach with patience and responsibility. It was heartening to see the article acknowledge this silent effort. Teachers rarely speak about their own load, but the reality is that they are carrying most of this reform on their shoulders.

Students, on their part, are feeling the weight too. Many tell us that the work just keeps coming, and the assessments seem endless. Several of the skill courses do not match our local setting. We know our rural Meghalaya does not have the industries or training spaces needed to support these subjects. It is quite natural for students to ask, "How does this help me here?" Is it not a fair question?

There is also the worry caused by the high failure rates reported in some North-eastern universities in the first year of FYUGP. The 'Multiple Exit' option, which was meant to help, sometimes feels like another pressure point for students who are already struggling.

These concerns should not be seen as complaints. They are simply facts that many academicians across the country have been warning about. FYUGP came too quickly, without giving col-

Water Abundance vs. Water Scarcity: Meghalaya's Paradox of Policy and Reality

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Now that winter is already upon us, water scarcity is going to become a major concern, especially in the rural areas. Sources will start drying up, forcing households to travel farther to collect water for domestic consumption. Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) attempts to solve this problem by attempting to provide safe and adequate drinking water through individual household tap connections by 2024. In 2022, the Government of Meghalaya was awarded the 'Best Performing State' for the implementation of the JJM. But a year after the deadline, the results have been mixed: in some areas water security has improved, while in others there are complaints that the pipelines have been laid but there is no water flowing through them. This is surprising considering the state receives a substantial amount of rainfall every year, which should augment the water sources that feed those pipes throughout the year.

Annual groundwater extraction in the state is just over 3%, which is less than the 20% to 40% withdrawal rates that signal medium to high water stress conditions. Annual potential water availability is also considerably high. If one considers the average annual rainfall of 280 cm, population of 34 lakhs (projected from the 2011 Census data), and total area of the state, i.e., 22,720 square kilometres, total annual potential water availability is 19,277 m³ capita-1. This is far above the 1700 m³ per capita threshold below which, according to the Falkenmark Index, water stress conditions arise.

So, in theory, the state should have surplus water resources that just require a sound extraction and management strategy. But the reality on the ground is not commensurate with theoretical expectations. If one were to conduct a study on household water security in any part of the state, they would invariably still find households suffering from severe water insecurity, especially during the dry season, i.e., from December to February. And with pre-monsoon rainfall having failed in the last few years, the water scarcity period could in future be extended by at least another month. The situation, therefore, is worrying, and there needs to be a water policy which considers the various challenges that the state is facing and proposes ways to tackle them. The 2019 Me-

ghalaya State Water Policy appears to be an attempt to do just that. The Policy is quite comprehensive and tackles a whole host of issues, ranging from water supply and sanitation, conservation of water resources, tackling the challenges created by climate change, to creating a participatory system for water management. There are, though, a few odd sections that contradict each other.

Maintaining water for minimum ecological needs (so that ecosystem functions like evapotranspiration, habitats for aquatic creatures, etc., are not disturbed) has been identified as the second most important priority sector for water allocation under the policy. However, at the same time, under 'project planning and implementation', there is a suggestion for considering inter-linking of rivers so that surplus water can be transferred to areas that are water scarce. Inter-linking of rivers or inter-basin transfer of water was part of the National Perspective Plan (NPP) prepared by the Ministry of Irrigation in 1980. The idea was revived in 1999 when the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance came to power, and in 2024 Prime Minister Narendra Modi laid the foundation stone for the construction of the Ken-Betwa project that aims to divert water from the Ken River in Madhya Pradesh to the Betwa River in neighbouring Uttar Pradesh. A problem with such projects is that they displace people (7000 families will be affected by the Ken-Betwa project) and submerge a large amount of area. But the biggest casualty will be the local ecology. The habitat of aquatic animals will be disturbed, and the local hydrological cycle will be affected in a way that is not clearly understood. Therefore, to claim that maintaining water for minimum ecological needs is a very important priority and then to suggest river interlinking projects is highly contradictory.

Under the 'participatory water resources management' section, it has been suggested that the community should consider reclamation of the abandoned degraded mines and quarries while also taking up cleaning of rivers from time to time. But under the section on 'conserving, harnessing and promoting efficient use of water resources', although

there is discussion of protecting and preserving water resources, including through control of jhum cultivation, there is no mention of mining (limestone and coal) and quarrying (sand and stone), which are responsible for degrading much of the state's water resources. The Lukha River in East Jaintia Hills is infamous for turning blue because of the acid drainage from the coal mines. It is important to recall that it was the Dimas Students' Union who filed a case in the NGT against the unregulated rat-hole mining in Meghalaya which was turning the Kopili River acidic.

There is also no mention of infrastructural projects that are destroying water bodies like in the case of the Myntdu River in Jowai. Recently, the Meghalaya State Pollution Control Board (MSPCB) has asked the National Highways & Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (NHIDCL) to pay a penalty of Rs 15 lakh for allegedly polluting the Umngot River. Instead, the focus is on jhum cultivation, which reveals the lack of awareness of community rules that specifically prohibit farming near water sources in order to prevent their contamination. So, not mentioning the main culprits for destroying and contaminating the water resources in the state and instead blaming jhum suggests a bias which will not serve well the objectives of the policy.

The rest of the things are pretty standard with some new innovations being introduced. An intriguing concept is the implementation of the "beneficiary pays principle" under the Payment for Environmental Services (PES), where upstream communities will be compensated by downstream communities for conserving the water resources, stopping degradation, and revitalizing the catchment upstream. This is a good concept and sounds promising but will depend on the payments made to the communities and the kind of conditions under which the areas to be conserved are to be managed. I have been informed that a big concern expressed by many communities in relation to carbon credit projects (a form of PES) in Meghalaya and elsewhere is the duration of the contract under which the area will be taken up for conservation and locked for a certain period of time,

extending around 40 years or so. In Manipur, lands for such projects are being solicited from the community (indigenous tribal communities in the hills) on the promise that once land comes under the project, it cannot be appropriated by the valley based State government anymore. There is no doubt catchment protection is essential for water conservation, and communities have to be adequately compensated for it. But the specific modalities of implementation will determine whether the community will receive a fair outcome.

The PES system also reveals a perspective that treats water resources (or for that matter any ecological resources) as being eligible for commodification and therefore amenable to pricing. There is a whole section on 'water tariffs' which argues that pricing of water ensures its efficient use and conservation. There is mention of giving the freedom to Water Users Associations (WUAs) in irrigation projects to fix rates for water charges subject to approval by the Water Regulatory Authority. Water tariffs will also be fixed for both rural and urban areas in consultation with the Regulatory Authority to manage the quantum of water allocated to the consumers. Urban households are already paying for water—either to the municipality, locality, or the private water tankers—but rural households are not doing so at the moment. This could change very soon. Personally, I am distressed by this suggestion. In 2010, the human right to water and sanitation (HRWS) was recognized as a human right by the United Nations General Assembly. So, asking the most vulnerable populations (particularly in rural areas) to pay for it is highly troubling. The 2019 Meghalaya State Water Policy is quite comprehensive and deals with a lot of subjects while laying down the framework of how water governance will look like in the future. Some parts are laudatory, but there are areas which are riddled with contradictions and concerns. How the good and the bad parts are reconciled will determine whether the Policy will succeed or remains only on paper. The future of water security of the state depends on it.

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

Genuine praise for Shillong's civic sense

Editor,
On December 8, while scrolling through Facebook, a post prompted me to share with others the civic sense of the people of Shillong that attracted the attention of a traveller most probably from another part of India. He was videoing the procession of people celebrating the yearly festival of Seng Kut Snem this year. The traveller was surprised to see thousands of people walking in a queue in Police Bazar and maintaining discipline despite the traffic congestion. Free cold drinks were being served by the Jiva Cares team but there was almost no littering of paper cups in the streets. Some people were even seen picking up the paper cups accidentally thrown in and around the area and putting them in the waste bins. This has completely overwhelmed the tourist who said in the video that anyone who is prone to littering should not come to Meghalaya. This is really a praiseworthy remark for Meghalayans.

Yours etc.,
Deepak Chhetry,
Via email

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

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Just an Indigo Thought..!

Chaos reigned in the skies. Flights delayed. Flights cancelled. Passengers stranded like refugees clutching their boarding passes as if they were ration cards. Screens flashing the merciless word Delayed. Cancelled. Again and again, each repetition stabbing another heart.

As I watched this unfolding drama, a thought tiptoed into my mind. Why this sudden fury directed at Indigo. A private airline that has for years been the pride of Indian skies. The most punctual. The most efficient. The most dependable. The one shining star in a sky otherwise clouded with delays, losses, and government bailouts. What had changed overnight.

The official story sounded noble. Pilots must not fly beyond duty hours. Safety first. Fatigue rules. Protect passengers. Alertness matters. Wonderful words. Beautiful packaging. Sold to us with patriotic urgency.

But let's turn a page: India has the highest number of road accident deaths in the world. Thousands die every year. Every year. Our highways are graveyards without crosses. And many of these deaths happen because drivers fall asleep. Not because they are reckless. Not because they are drunk. But because they are exhausted. They gulp tea at every dhaba to stay awake. They chew tobacco until their cheeks go numb. They splash cold water on their faces. They sing loudly to themselves at two in the morning. They keep

lowed to drive per day. Once he hit that number, he had to stop. Not could stop. Not should stop. Had to stop. The police could stop the van at any time and ask to see his log. If he exceeded his limit, the trip would be cancelled. We would be penalised. His licence would be suspended. The law protected rest. Protected life. Protected human dignity.

I was stunned. Here was a system where the law first protected the driver before protecting the passenger. A system where safety was not theatre but culture. A system where enforcement was not selective but consistent. A system where life mattered more than power.

And back home we treat human beings like machines. We push them till they break. We ignore until they die. And we forget until the next accident splashes across the newspapers.

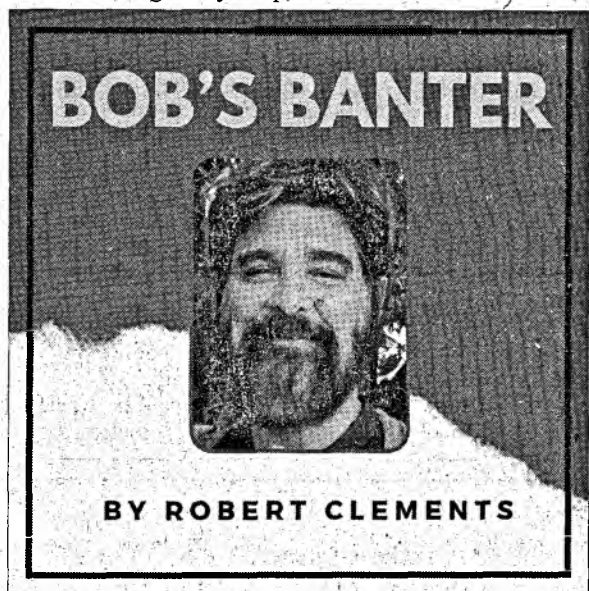
Yet, rather than turning our legal spotlight onto the real killers—the sleepless highways—we swung it upward like anti-aircraft guns to shoot at a private airline. A successful one. A respected one. An independent one.

And here is where the thought crystallises.

Indigo did not fail. It was made to fail.

Because success today is dangerous. Because a private company outperforming those the government loves, is embarrassing.

So, ground the pilots. Halt the flights. Create chaos. Fill the nation with anger. Then step aside and whisper, Look, they cannot handle



BY ROBERT CLEMENTS

their eyelids open with the music of desperation. And they drive on, because stopping means losing a day's earnings. Because rest is a luxury they cannot afford.

And thousands die. Families break. Children become orphans. Yet nobody shuts down a transport corporation. Nobody grounds a bus company. Nobody holds emergency press conferences. Nobody demands that truck drivers be forced to rest. We simply shrug. And move on.

And now back to the skies again. The same system that sleeps through highway carnage woke up with sudden fury to declare war on pilots. Pilots who have never caused a single accident due to fatigue. Pilots who fly with the precision of surgeons. Pilots who undergo training so rigorous that few public officials could survive a week of it. Pilots who can hand over controls to copilots or auto pilot, unlike truck drivers who cannot hand their steering wheels to anyone for even a minute.

Why then this emergency. Why this sudden purity of conscience.

And then, out of nowhere, memory walked quietly into my mind.

Some years ago, while travelling in Europe, I hired a vehicle from Belgium to take our small group around. The driver was a cheerful fellow named Pete. A tall man with a booming laugh, a fondness for Belgian chocolates, and a surprising fascination for Indian cricket. Every few hours he would pull out a notebook and carefully fill in some numbers. Curious as always, I asked what he was writing.

He explained that he was legally required to record every mile he drove. There was a maximum he was al-

lowed to drive per day. Once he hit that number, he had to stop. Not could stop. Not should stop. Had to stop. The police could stop the van at any time and ask to see his log. If he exceeded his limit, the trip would be cancelled. We would be penalised. His licence would be suspended. The law protected rest. Protected life. Protected human dignity.

It is a classic play. Break something. Then claim you are fixing it. The magician distracts with a shiny object while the real trick happens behind the curtain.

Passengers became pawns. Weddings missed. Interviews lost. Medical appointments destroyed. Vacations ruined. Tempers exploded. And all the while, those who lit the fire stood quietly behind bulletproof glass, watching the smoke rise.

And so the quiet Indigo thought returns.

If safety were truly the priority, then why not start with the drivers on the ground rather than the ones in the sky? We could have avoided national chaos. But chaos was needed. Chaos served a purpose. Chaos weakens. Chaos confuses. Confusion hides motive.

Meanwhile truck drivers continue to doze behind wheels. Families continue to die. Newspapers continue to print statistics that shock no one. And those with power continue to sleep peacefully every night.

Because there is no political value in saving exhausted truck drivers. But there is value in punishing the successful. There is value in frightening every business owner watching silently from the balcony.

The real turbulence was never in the air. It was on the ground.

It is only a thought. A quiet one. An Indigo thought. But thoughts have wings.

Will you think about it? 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 bobbsbanter@gmail.com

**"Time is more valuable than money,
because time is irreplaceable."**
—John C. Maxwell

The Shillong Times

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Concert Rivalry: Big Deal

JUDGING by the point and counterpoint between the chief ministers of Assam and Meghalaya it would appear that there are no bigger issues than holding world class concerts where western singing idols decorate the stage and woo the crowd. In fact, every state of India's North East is trying to outdo the other in terms of hosting events and bringing in singing sensations from the west. Interestingly, before the concerts, gate-keeping groups are heard prescribing decent outfits for the audience. When states promote western rock stars they have to put up with the pécadilloes of those stars because those are the kind of get-ups that bring them stardom. If they came dressed like staid gentlemen or high society ladies they would not be where they are today. Hence the dichotomy of inviting singing stars from the west while at the same time expecting the home-grown youth to still cling to their cultural dress-codes that keep body parts from making shy appearances is anomalous.

Interestingly, after the Post Malone concert in Guwahati, Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma has been making claims about making Guwahati a bigger event venue than Shillong. His cheerleaders have not been far behind in stating that Guwahati is the regional capital and has more to offer than all the states put together. When Meghalaya CM Conrad Sangma was asked for his response to Biswa Sarma's braggadocio, he merely stated that competitive rivalry was welcome. When states begin to compete to give their best is when healthy competition happens. Each state has its plus and minuses and it is not the star singer who is best placed to certify whether a concert was worth the ticket amount paid. Rather it is the audience that has paid through its nose for the tickets who is the best judge of the quality of the event and whether they got their money's worth.

What is worrisome is that entertainment apart from claims of bringing in revenue for the state and other spin-offs could also be a distraction from the many ready examples of poor governance that plague the daily lives of citizens. India's North East suffers from decrepit governance where roads are built to last just one season. Come monsoons and the roads develop crater-sized holes that are dangerous for vehicles. And these are right inside the city limits. Many households in Shillong city still don't have regular water supply and have to purchase water for their daily needs from private water suppliers. This despite the tall claims of the Jal Jeevan Mission Project being successful. The health system is barely coping. Electricity, which is a dire need across all institutions, especially banking and technology parks handling high-paying clients across the globe, fails at the most crucial morning hours. Depending on generators or inverters is neither efficient nor sustainable for hotels and business establishments. Education in all the eight states of NorthEast India shows poor learning outcomes but these are not even talking points. Instead, all the energy is directed at successfully running a concert as if that alone can resolve the persistent problem of lacking basic facilities. Concerts are to entertain the elite. What do the poor get out of them?

The Monstrosity of Gaza's Genocidal War Crimes & America's Complicity

By Melarbor L Thabab

As a Christian, I am duty bound to write about this genocide and apartheid of the new millennium. On October 7, 2023, Hamas terrorists broke through the Gaza fence and killed innocent civilians including Israeli women, children and defence forces resulting in the deaths of around 1,219 people. This a brazen highly condemnable terrorist act. There were unverified warnings from Egypt and Israeli Mossad that Hamas is planning to attack Israel but the troops were allegedly told to stand down before and during the attack with minor resistance. There were unverified allegations that some of the Israeli hostages that were taken by Hamas were shot dead deliberately to prevent unbalanced hostage exchange and also the Israeli Prime Minister needed a distraction because of corruption charges against him facing stiff opposition from his adversaries and Israelites with mass street demonstrations and that this attack will ween them away from this opposition. Prior to this attack the Prime Minister had consented to the transfer of 7 billion dollars from Qatar to Hamas based from reports, in an attempt to divide the ruling Fatah in the West Bank against Hamas which rules Gaza.

The Israeli response started on the same day that Hamas attacked Israel. Initially, Israel attacked Hamas positions with Hamas responding using its rockets. From January 2024 onwards, the tide changed when Hamas ran out of rockets and Israel switched from bombing specific targets to random carpet bombings of entire communities, towns, cities thereby killing innocent civilians irrespective of age and sex. 7 hospitals, 16 churches, uncountable schools, colleges, offices, residential buildings, journalists, paramedics and aid workers were all bombed in Gaza in the name of killing Hamas whom Israel alleges that Hamas is hiding in all these places.

Besides carpet bombings, Israel employs a policy of sweeping starvation of the Gaza people by blocking humongous quantities of water, food aid and medicines. Starvation of infants and children was observed in the homes and hospitals. They allow babies to rot in incubators in the hospitals by cutting off the electricity supply. Lack of medicines resulted in deaths of the sick and children in hospitals and in their homes. When eminent activist Greta Thunberg and her crew went

by boat to deliver aid to the starving Gaza people, they were threatened with military action, arrested, harassed and deported.

The Cost of War Project reports that 232 journalists have been killed in the Gaza war, that is 13 journalists killed per month, more than WW1, WW2, Vietnam Yugoslavia and Afghan wars combined. Medical Aid for Palestinians reports that 1,722 healthcare workers were killed in Gaza that is 2 health workers killed per day. 15 Palestinian medic aid workers were killed and their bodies, along with their emergency vehicles, were found buried in a mass grave in Rafah, Gaza in late March 2025. Starving children are homeless, their parents and relatives killed with nowhere else to go. Chemical weapons like white phosphorus are used in this war as was seen on the burnt skin of the infants and children. Infants and children are seen buried under the rubble with most of them taken out dead. Little children- infants fleeing the bombing, in the streets, in their semi destroyed homes, those gathering food aid are shot dead as trophy killing by Israeli snipers which are seen bragging on social media platforms competing amongst themselves about how many infants and children they have killed per day. This is Nazi-like treatment of Jewish children where the "Once Victim" is now the "Perpetrator". The Israeli forces stated that those children were tagged with bombs, hence were shot dead. Israel violates this ceasefire and continues to bomb Gaza because Gazans are defenceless with no means of retaliation. This point is evident in its conflict with Iran when Israel quickly sued for a ceasefire since advanced Iranian missiles were hitting them.

Unconfirmed reports state there are more than one hundred thousand estimated civilian deaths with more than twenty thousand children killed in the 2 years and 2 months of this war. Instead of punishing Hamas only, 2 million people of all ages are collectively punished through blood guilt irrespective of religion using killings, starvation and displacements. During the ceasefire, there are many restrictions on food, water and medicines. International journalists are banned from directly reporting from Gaza since the war starts till now on the frivolous excuse that they may get bombed.

Israel has the most technologically advanced weapons funded by America, with American made precision weapons and a long-standing battle tested military. Israel specifically eliminated Iranian scientists using a careless driver, used mobiles which blew up in a Hezbollah stronghold, blew up flats of Iranian scientists, specifically targeted buildings, specifically killed terrorists leaders of Hamas and Hezbollah in targeted bombings yet it makes nonsensical claims to have mistaken bombed innumerable number of times, the densely inhabited civilian areas, schools, hospitals, churches like the oldest church in Gaza; St Porphyrius, killing 24 people including infants, children, women and nuns using this naked sorry of an excuse.

Zionist Americans and Christian Zionists in the USA are blind to the starvation, apartheid and genocide of innocent Gazans, imprisonments, rape, torture and custodial deaths. Palestinians are scared of the IDF, the Mossad and their nuclear bombs such as when the Israeli Heritage Minister had suggested nuking Gaza. The Prime Minister in a leaked 2003 video said that the Zionist have a higher cause in which all the rules of morality are thrown away which is evident from his abhorrent treatment of Gaza. This regime does not care about Muslims or Christians in which it bombed multiple churches and mosques in Gaza and killed Muslims and Christians alike.

When traumatized Gazans carried white flags to collect food, moved out from bombed homes, were forced to flee to other secure places, even their infants and children; were shot dead in spite of all this suffering. This is possible because of the evil teachings in the Talmud, the main book of Rabbinical Judaism which considers all non-Jews as sub-humans. Palestinians are considered as "vermin and animals". Benjamin Netanyahu, the Prime Minister, indicted by the ICC for War Crimes with an arrest warrant against him has compared Palestinians as Amalekites from the Old Testament of the Bible whom the Jews nipped them, root and stem and stopped their bloodline altogether. That is their mindset which enabled this regime to commit heinous war crimes.

Focus on Palestinian Children: They are the only kids in the world who are prosecuted in military courts.

These children are stripped, searched, sexually abused in jails, have no access to their families, denied representation transferred to other jails with adults and beaten during arrests and inside the jails. They are held without trial or secret trial, without evidence or shady evidence. They can spend a year in jail just for insulting the honour of an IDF soldier, imprisoned for 10-20 years for throwing stones at IDF soldier(s) and denied visits by the Red Cross. According to a survey, 65% of children are arrested at night and 69% of children are stripped and searched. No other country of knowledge in the world does these vile repulsive actions against children.

According to a poll conducted by the Washington Post, 61% of American Jews stated that the crimes committed in the Gaza War constitute war crimes and 40% of them state that it is a genocide. Norman Finkelstein, a white Ashkenazi Jew, said that "Israelis are an obnoxious, narcissistic and supremacist lot". Dave Smith and other Jewish groups like Jews for Palestine spoke against these atrocities against the Palestinians.

American people; their lawmakers and their government are in the grip of the rich Jewish oligarchy who donate generously to politicians to fight, legislate and vote for Israel in the US and at the UN coupled with political talk shows and podcasts to blind the world from the genocide and ethnic cleansing in Gaza in which America is complicit with its military and financial aid in this Gaza war. America has turned a blind eye to the genocide. America talks about transferring the Gazans from their homeland to other countries, establishing its military base, resorts and casinos at the expense of the Gazans. Jews and non-Jews in Israel and America who spoke against the genocide are silenced or cancelled. The Zionist American Jews blackmail US politicians, influence them and cover up their crimes which the US government knows but is mute. More than ten thousand Israeli soldiers suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Around three hundred Israeli soldiers have attempted suicide with sixteen of them having succeeded and many more unreported cases because of family shame. Crimes like these are never easily forgotten. Israel is not removing terror but creating new Hamas and terror outfits in the region with more hatred and animosity towards the benefactor, the USA and Israel.

Yunus administration faces mounting questions amid political uncertainty Bangladesh faces serious economic challenges, public frustration

By Tajul Islam

The political situation in Bangladesh has entered an era of heightened complexity and instability, shaped most dramatically by the events of August 5, 2024. On that day, former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina fled to India, reportedly fearing for her life as the Meticulous Design movement intensified across the country. With mass demonstrations and violent clashes threatening thousands of lives, the sudden departure of Hasina created a power vacuum that was swiftly filled by Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus; who assumed leadership as Chief Advisor of the interim government.

While many initially viewed Yunus's rise as an opportunity for reform and national healing, the months that followed have raised significant concerns about governance, transparency, and the rule of law. Actions taken by the interim administration have drawn critical scrutiny from political analysts, civil society groups, and segments of the public, all questioning whether the new leadership is living up to its promises—or replicating the flaws of the previous regime.

One of the most controversial actions of the Yunus administration has been the revocation of legal immunity previously granted to Muhammad Yunus during the Awami League era, including protection related to a major tax evasion case involving BDT 666 crore. While in principle, removing such immunity could have signalled a commitment to accountability, the reality proved more complex. Soon after revoking his own legal protections, Yunus granted extensive tax exemptions to 31 institutions under his ownership and control, shielding them from any tax obligations until 2029. For many observers, this move contradicted his publicly declared anti-corruption stance and raised serious concerns about preferential treatment.

The tax-exempt institutions encompass a broad network of organizations connected to the Grameen ecosystem and the Yunus family. These include the Social Advancement Fund (SAF), Grameen Trust, Grameen Telecom Trust, Grameen Fund, Grameen Energy, Grameen Distribution Limited (GDL), Grameen University, Grameen Fisheries Foundation, Grameen Agriculture Foundation, Grameen Business Development, Grameen Software Limited, Grameen Cybernet Limited, Grameen Kallayan, Grameen Shamogri (Grameen Products), Grameen Udyog (owner of Grameen Cheque), Grameen America, Grameen Foundation USA, as well as the Yunus Family Trust, Professor Muhammad Yunus Trust, and the Yunus Center. The exemptions also extend to major corporate entities such as Grameenphone and multinational joint ventures like Grameen Danone Foods. Critics argue that granting such extensive tax waivers to a large number of Yunus-affiliated institutions erodes public trust and undermines the principles of transparent and accountable transitional governance.

Another issue that has drawn attention is Yunus's frequent international travel. Over the past 15 months, he has undertaken 14 foreign trips, each accompanied by sizable delegations funded by public money. At a time when Bangladesh faces economic challenges and rising public frustration, these expenditures have been widely criticized as unnecessary and irresponsible.

This criticism stands in stark contrast to Yunus's own promises. During his first address to the nation as Chief Advisor, he pledged a government firmly committed to transparency, accountability, and anti-corruption measures. He announced that all advisors would soon publicly disclose their assets—a promise that has yet to be fulfilled. Instead, his administration has prioritized granting tax relief to institutions under his direct authority, creating an image of double standards.

Respected economist Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya of the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) lamented the situation, highlighting an uncomfortable parallel with Sheikh Hasina's unfulfilled pledge to disclose her cabinet's assets. He noted that many had hoped the interim government would establish a new benchmark for transparency, but those expectations have so far gone unmet.

Meanwhile, the overall law and order situation in Bangladesh has continued to deteriorate since the political rupture of August 5, 2024. Despite efforts by the interim administration to project stability, incidents of violence, communal attacks, and mob vigilantism have escalated across the country. The gruesome exhumation and burning of the body of Nurul Haque—known locally as Nural Pagla—in Rajbari last September shocked the nation and exposed the growing erosion of state authority.

Attacks on Hindu communities have intensified, stoking fears among religious minorities. The increasing assertiveness of Islamist groups has also become a point of concern, raising questions about whether the interim government has failed to contain extremist elements.

A recent report from the human rights organization Manobadhihar Shongskriti Foundation (MSF) presents an alarming picture. According to MSF, November alone witnessed 43 incidents of mob lynching, resulting in 38 deaths. During the same month, 345 cases of violence against women and children were reported, along with 72 incidents of political violence. While the number of political retaliation cases remained unchanged, there was a significant increase in arrests of members of the banned Chhatra League, the student wing of the Awami League. Additionally, 11 statues were vandalized across the country, underscoring a rise in cultural intolerance and targeted attacks.

With national elections tentatively scheduled for mid-February 2026, the country waits anxiously to see whether the interim government will uphold its commitments. Although officials insist that elections will be held as planned, recent developments suggest uncertainty. The Election Commission, expected to announce the election schedule in early December, has delayed the announcement until the second week. Additionally, a high-level election workshop planned for December 3—titled "What to Do to Maintain Law and Order in a Smooth Election Process"—was abruptly postponed. These signs raise legitimate concerns about the government's preparedness and willingness to conduct timely elections.

As Bangladesh looks ahead, the central question remains whether Muhammad Yunus will steer the nation toward credible democratic transition—or whether the interim government's controversies will deepen the existing political and social crisis. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Despair and hope of NEP 2020

Editor,
In the last couple of days we have seen reports and write-ups on NEP 2020 in the Shillong Times. On Dec 9, 2025 the Shillong Times published an article titled "UG teachers views on 4-year undergraduate program." The following day we read a letter to the editor with the prescription, "Needed a holistic perspective to education." Yesterday's front page had a news item titled, "Kharlukhi slams 'chaotic' NEP rollout in state".

All the authors and commentators are respected and knowledgeable individuals and their thoughts demonstrate a well-intentioned commitment to the cause of higher education in the state. These critiques, however, convey a despairing tone, citing a mountain of reasons as to why the Four-Year-Undergraduate-Program (FYUP) is difficult to implement.

The recently published State Education Commission Report 2025, has a chapter on higher education in the state. A reading of this chapter will show many dismal aspects of the higher education scenario in NEHU and its affiliated colleges. Two examples stand out: the skew

towards arts degrees and the apparently high dropout. These have been elaborated in a recent article in The Shillong Times.

If there is no attempt to change the status quo, higher education in Meghalaya will continue to languish in its present doldrums. The main victims of this struggling system are the students. Failure to bring in change will consign another generation of youth to an uncertain future: most likely continued unemployment and denial of their aspirations.

NEP 2020 offers the best opportunity for change. Most educationists seem to welcome the enlightened principles and provisions of the policy. After all, the FYUP is a proven success in other countries and a liberal arts approach is the recommended education for an undergraduate who is still in the developmental stage of cognitive, emotional, social, and moral formation.

The main difficulty is the implementation, and this is where we see the main opposition. Apart from this, there may be some sections of academia who are generally resistant to change, even in the face of convincing evidence, or who wish to guard some personal interest. This is a well-known malady in academic circles. Incidentally, I have been a life-long

academician, except for a few years in mission service.

I can attest to the fact that the changeover to FYUP is practically manageable in a low-cost manner. Of course, it is not a painless transition. Changing mindsets is the most difficult step. The other hurdles are re-arrangement of subjects and schedules for majors, minors etc. Briefing and planning sessions with departments and faculty are time-consuming because details have to be brainstormed over and slotted into place. The entire process from orientation to implementation took about three years in our institution.

Martin Luther Christian University has fully implemented the FYUP in all respects and the alignment of the postgraduate degree courses with NEP 2020 has also been completed. A detailed report on compliance with NEP was presented to our Board of Governors and approved by them. The report is being submitted to the Meghalaya Private Universities Regulatory Board (MPURB) shortly.

We would be happy to share our experiences in any formal manner with other institutions. I am sure that if all higher education institutions in the state come together on the common platform of NEP 2020, it will be a great contribution towards a better

future for our youth.

Yours etc.,
Glenn Kharkongor,
Via email

Exposing Violations in Weights and Measures

Editor,

Sometimes a minister should not hold back from speaking out his displeasure. Displeasure expressed for the right cause brings meaningful outcomes. Yes, I was more than excited to read in a daily that the minister of metrology, Sanbor Shullai, has finally put his foot down, giving the department a strict 60-day ultimatum to submit a full enforcement report. This comes after uncovering shocking violations in weights and measures that have gone "unchecked" since 1972. Imagine, 5-decade of failed enforcement and sheer laxity. All this while, countless ordinary citizens must have been cheated and taken for a ride in broad daylight. It is truly disgraceful.

This reminds me of a couple of incidents from about fifteen years ago shared with me by a few concerned friends. They had spotted the blatant practice of selling merchandise underweight in the market by manipulating the weighing machine and so

on. The situation worsened when traders transitioned from traditional weighing scales to electronic weighing machines.

It was not just about commonly used groceries being sold underweight, but also iron rods, pipes, metal sheets and various other construction materials that were supplied in quantities far less than what customers paid for. This fact deeply pained me. I realized how the unsuspecting poor customers had been looted all through. I made a discreet and consistent complaint to the concerned departments/police a number of times. Consequently, certain hardware dealers from marketplaces were caught red-handed and penalized. Those few raids proved that cheating was very "rampant." What I fervently wished then was for frequent surprise checks. The complete absence of raids and the lack of fear of being caught have given those fraudulent merchants the freedom to chop the pound of flesh from poor customers.

Let me recount another sad story of the Covid-19 pandemic. I was startled to see how "some" Fair Price Shop dealers heartlessly issued underweight rice to their gullible consumers. Instead of the allotted 35 kilograms, consumers often received 2 to 9 kilograms less. In some cas-

es, dal supplied by the government for free distribution was not issued at all. What is most disturbing is that these dealers did not even bother to weigh the ration properly. They just scooped rice with baskets and tins without any measurement and poured it into the bags of the BPL/APL consumers, a practice that has continued for ages without fear of punishment. One wonders why the state watchdogs of laws and rules prefer to sleep on their duty!

Well, when enforcement is lax, corruption tends to take deeper root. As emphasized by the outspoken Sanbor Shullai, regular surprise raids, strict penalties, and visible enforcement are the only ways to break this chain of deceit. If this 60-day ultimatum is followed by appropriate action, it will certainly mark the beginning of a new chapter, and the minister will receive the heartfelt "blessings" of the poor. Come what may, the government must always ensure that the plight of the unsuspecting consumer is never underweighted in this marketplace of deception.

Yours etc.,
Salil Gewali,
Shillong

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"Doubt kills more dreams than failure ever will."

— Suzy Kassem

The Shillong Times

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Economy's weak spots

CLAIMS about a fast-paced growth for India are often taken with a pinch of salt. While these claims are partly true in certain sectors of the economy and in relation to infrastructure development, the flip side is often downplayed. Noted economist and former RBI governor Raghuram Rajan, who has a ringside view of the growth process in India, has agreed that India's economic growth now at six per cent might rise by two per cent. But, he also made it clear, in a widely reported speech in Zurich, that India would still require some 15 to 30 years of steady growth to catch up with the US and China. In other words, his stress is that India would remain content with, at best, the "third largest economy" tag – over and above its present status as the "fourth largest" – after the US, China and Germany. He has an eminent point.

India overtook the UK to reach the present status in 2022 and outwit Japan this year. India might be able to overtake Germany too, whose economy, like Japan, is of 4 trillion, and become the "third largest" by 2028. But, China with a \$17 trillion economy and the US with a \$27 trillion economy are economic behemoths and unassailable. China's great leap forward was made possible by a tweaking of its economic policy, since the 1980s, when it embraced principles of a capitalist market economy. Since the turn of the century, its growth was unprecedented. Now, its economy and resultant military might are four times those of India's. India and China were on par in both these respects some 25 years ago. China's focused attention to economic growth has been possible due to the continuation of a well-oiled governance system overseen by the Communist Party. There are no flip-flops, unlike in India where leaders and policies could change frequently. The democratic system lacks the cutting edge; and more so with the presence of leaders who fail to act firm when the need arises. A weak-kneed or 'please-all' attitude that defines democracy now has its flaws. India's infamous Hindu Rate of Growth is by its very nature a slow growth. A large mass of human energy is wasted in the absence of a governmental initiative. Manmohan Singh with his strong grasp of economic fundamentals helped the nation reach a growth rate of nine plus, which however slowed down during his last phase in governance. Under the Modi dispensation, it fell further but the national economy is still weathering odds, unlike the weakening of economies of the neighbouring nations. China's economy too faced serious odds after the Covid-19 spell.

Claims about India's fast-paced growth are tamed by the ground-level realities. In terms of per capita income, India is at the lowest depth of around 140 in the comity of nations. The larger size of India's economy is juxtaposed with the scenario of poverty rampant across states, with some 80 per cent of the population living on BPL and other subsidies and freebies rolled out by governments. Salvation for the poor, disadvantaged sections is more like a mirage.

Traditional versus Modern Governance: Need for a composite model

By Patricia Mukhim

There is virtue in tradition provided that tradition does not entrap us but evolves with the needs of the times and encompasses the elements that define our modern existential crisis, namely roads, electricity, power, water supply, sanitation besides other needs that make life easier without having to rue over one or the other essential part of living not being within our reach. Traditional institutions reduced to only an honorary behemoth with no resources at their disposal and also no clear terms of reference as to what areas of governance those institutions are tasked with, become mere institutions dealing with petty issues between residents in a respective locality particularly relating to the purchase and sale of land and sometimes implementing the MLA scheme.

But traditional institutions today are meant to address civic governance which means not just collection of garbage from localities but also keeping those localities and the drains alongside the roads clean. As of today, only areas falling within the municipalities are being swept and the garbage collected to be dumped at the one and only Marten. A duly elected urban local body for the entire Shillong which should include the peri-urban areas such as New Shillong Township, Laitkor, Upper Shillong etc is urgently needed. Why should only a 10 km radius of the city receive the benefits of a Municipality while the rest of the city is left to lick its wounds? As a result, inhabitants of areas beyond the Shillong Municipality are the ones that dump their garbage in rivers when they miss the garbage collection trucks. Sadly, those entrusted with managing the Shillong Municipal Board hardly visit the rivers to see for themselves the mound of garbage dumped into these water bodies day after day.

There is a problem and that problem has to be addressed. Because of space constraints this article will focus on one river or tributary of the river Umkrah, namely the Umkrah river. The areas falling within the ambit of the River Umkrah, namely Lapalang, Nongrah, Umpling, Nongmynsong and Nongrim Hills have to be held to account. The Dorbar Shnong of these areas have obviously failed to address the issue of garbage management and have turned a blind eye to the conundrum. One excuse they all have is that the garbage that flows into their jurisdiction is from the next shnong run by another Dorbar Shnong. This was

flagged in repeated meetings but nothing has been done on the ground to address the issue. One thing that the Government has done is to construct fences along the river bank but a fence that demarcates one shnong from the other remains a project in suspension.

Chief Minister Conrad Sangma is keen that the Umkrah Riverfront should be spruced up to resemble a promenade in some of the first world cities like London or Paris where rivers flow across the city centre. But the problem with a third world country like ours is that aspi-

meeting hall dotted with resorts all around to be abandoned and now overgrown with weeds. The Khasi Hills District Council had invested about Rs 7 crore on those now abandoned buildings because they did not have a plan on how to get rid of their sewerage. Now if the Meghalaya High Court is strict about buildings having to be built at least 50 metres away from the high-water mark of a water body, as per an order of the bench comprising Chief Justice Sanjib Banerjee and Justice W. Diengdoh how is it that buildings in Nongmynsong

As of today, only areas falling within the municipalities are being swept and the garbage collected to be dumped at the one and only Marten. A duly elected urban local body for the entire Shillong which should include the peri-urban areas such as New Shillong Township, Laitkor, Upper Shillong etc is urgently needed. Why should only a 10 km radius of the city receive the benefits of a Municipality while the rest of the city is left to lick its wounds?

rations don't match up with peoples' behaviours. They may look civilised judging by the way they dress and behave in stylish environs but their habits away from the public eye remain ugly as ever. If an audit of the waste collected from the river is to be done it would include – clothes (pants, jackets etc), plastics with vegetable discards from kitchens, sanitary pads, Huggies, hundreds of liquor bottles and shampoo sachets, amongst other discards. Obviously, the localities (shnongs) along which the Umkrah flows are responsible for this but until some form of netting to separate one shnong from another is erected the blame game will continue. And our water bodies will continue to be a substitute for Marten. The idea of setting up nettings is to hold the individual shnong responsible for the garbage thrown by their residents.

One of the inherent routes of corruption is to allow the Dorbar Shnong to look the other way when a house is built right on the riverfront. The Meghalaya High Court had come down heavily on constructions by the River Umkrah. This has resulted in several buildings constructed by the District Councils ostensibly as some sort of

are built on the river (one of them a church) and the discharge from the kitchen and toilet passes directly into the river Umkrah?

One of the much proclaimed advantages of a traditional governance body is its ability to touch base with real issues on the ground and its ability to function without the bureaucratic red tape. Decisions are usually taken by consensus and there is a sense of collective responsibility and accountability. Very often, decisions are taken based on customary laws and practices. But is that the case today? There are some Dorbar Shnong which grant no objection certificates (NOCs) for various trades and activities based on how much the headman and secretary are paid. Look at the number of liquor shops from 4th Furlong to Demseinong-Nongmynsong. Such dorbar shnong don't really care about the welfare of the residents. They are too busy making money. But who can hold them accountable? We are yet to hear of a single Dorbar Shnong being censured by the District Councils. In short, they act as independent actors accountable to no one. Is this what we want in a situation where modern governance

which is able to deliver the basic requirements of residents based on social justice and equity is the need of the hour?

It is time to start discussions on reforms measures that are needed to bring about transparency and accountability in the Dorbar Shnong. For too long the issue of election to the Shillong Municipal Board has been kept pending on the fear that there could be a law and order problem if elections are held. For how long can people be held to ransom just because the state is unable to assure the rule of law for the conduct of a democratic election to a civic governance body? Modern governance frameworks like the Panchayati Raj Institution (you can give it a tribal name if you wish to) focus on transparency, participation, and data-driven decision making, promoting citizen engagement and is open to criticism. They are also brought under the Right to Information (RTI) Act and are accountable to the public. They cannot function in opacity.

Modern governance frameworks like the PRI have evolved significantly to address the complexities of today's societies. For too long traditional governance has hinged on hierarchical structures, where decision-making is concentrated among a few leaders. Generally, such leaders are untouchable and people have very little say in governance matters. Besides, the same leaders continue to hold office because no one wants to take additional responsibility for an unpaid job.

Another key distinction lies in the approach to policy-making. In traditional bodies, there is hardly any policy planning. Things are handled on a case by case basis. This can frustrate communities that face urgent issues but since this has been the tradition it is accepted. Modern governance on the contrary can make policies based on real-time feedback from residents. This allows it to adapt to the needs and challenges of the residents much more effectively. Meghalaya's problem is that the district councils don't want to release their hold over the Dorbar Shnong, despite the fact that the transition to the PRI would enable direct funding for the larger good of the community. This strangle-hold has to break because local governance that works on a transparent and participatory model is the need today!

History lessons Bangladesh appears to have forgotten

By Nilova Roy Chaudhury

History is much in the news and abounds in India, where the merits of a patriotic poem composed 150 years ago are debated in the national parliament; yet across India's eastern borders, in Bangladesh, the leadership and most citizens appear to have bypassed recorded history about how and why their country came into being less than 55 years ago.

It is interesting, therefore, that among the events to celebrate the 60th anniversary or Raising Day of India's premier paramilitary organisation, the Border Security Force (the BSF was formed on December 1, 1965), the country's oldest defence think tank, the United Services Institute (USI) chose to commemorate the role of the BSF in the creation of Bangladesh as part of its Military Heritage Festival.

Whenever the 'liberation war' ('mukti juddho' in Bengali) of Bangladesh in 1971 is mentioned, the Indian names that immediately spring to mind are, of course, those of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and Indian army officers led by General (later Field Marshal) SHF 'Sam' Maneekshaw, who planned the strategy for the 13-day war (December 3 – December 16, 1971) to defeat the Pakistani armed forces and allow the creation of a Bengali speaking nation.

Less remembered is the name of Khuro Faramurz (KF) Rustamji, the police officer who founded the BSF and led it to play such a stellar role in the 1971 liberation war of Bangladesh. In November 1971, months after it started

Rustomji sent a signal to one of his battalion commanders, "BSF is making history."

Virendra Kumar Gaur, then Deputy Commandant of the BSF's 83rd battalion, based in Tura in the just created Meghalaya state recalls the night of March 26, 1971, when he got a phone call from the border outpost (BOP) at Mankachar, under his command, that a group of East Pakistani civilians were seeking asylum. Minutes later, he got a call from Bagmara BOP, where another group of asylum seekers had arrived, saying civilians were being killed in East Pakistan. When another sentry called in with similar information from Dalu BOP, saying asylum seekers were scared they would be killed, Gaur realised that a crisis was brewing and called his superiors for instructions. He told sentries to seat the people along the BOP walls, so they would not be attacked. When similar reports of people seeking refuge kept coming from BOPs all along the border, instructions arrived that the East Pakistanis could be put up for the night in Indian camps, for their safety.

Gaur, who retired as IG BSF, recounted some key events as they unfolded over the next nine months, including how they assisted a Major Ziaur Rahman, who had mutinied against his Pakistani army superior officer in Chittagong and read out Mujibur Rahman's declaration of independence on March 27th, and helped to hold on to the command centre there. Pakistan finally recaptured Chittagong after its naval vessels bombarded the city and cantonment which Zia was guarding. Several family members of Major Zia's immediate family stayed in the rear quarters of Gaur's residence while this civil war raged inside East Pakistan.

The USI's Military Heritage festival also featured Ushnor Majumdar who, in his book 'India's Secret War: BSF and Nine Months to the Birth of Bangladesh', (Pen-

guin, 2023) was the first to document a comprehensive historical account of the BSF's role in the Bangladesh liberation war, which changed the course of South Asian history.

Majumdar, an investigative journalist, said he was inspired by the book 'Blood Telegram' by Gary Bass, who wrote about the 'Genocide' in the run-up to the creation of Bangladesh based on despatches from Archer Blood; the US Consul General in Dhaka in 1971, to do some research about India's role in facilitating the creation of Bangladesh. He, like most people, was unaware of the BSF's role in the nine months before the 1971 India Pakistan war.

Majumdar spoke about how Rustamji and his men went well beyond their charter of policing borders to respond sensitively to one of the world's worst ever humanitarian crises then unfolding next to India. For nine months, till the war in December, the BSF covertly gave support to the resistance forces through clandestine missions and black ops deep in East Pakistan, while they welcomed democratically elected Bengali politicians and helped establish them as the government-in-exile. They installed a clandestine radio station, 'Swadhin Bangla Betar Kendra' (SBKK or Free Bengal Broadcast Centre) which triggered the defections of East Pakistani diplomats and foiled the Pakistan Army's tactical trump card to damage Indian Air Force bases. Unique in the annals of history, India helped to set up and run the SBKK, but gave the government-in-exile the independence to run it with their own content.

Majumdar, who could access BSF files and other documents only after 2021, 50 years after the events, when the documents were de-classified, called his book the "first draft of that history" of which Rustomji spoke in 1971.

Ousted Bangladesh Premier Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Mujibur Rahman, probably lost office because of her intense focus on the history of that period and legacy issues concerning her family's role in their liberation struggle.

Most people of Bangladesh, born after 1971, are conflicted and feel that as the political situation unfolded after 1971, many of the 'heroes' of that era, including 'Bangabandhu' Sheikh Mujibur Rahman himself, are no longer heroes.

It is this sentiment that that the interim government in Bangladesh today, led by Mohammad Yunus, is choosing to foreground and consolidate, while pushing, for primacy of their religious identity (Islam) over their cultural identity (Bengali) on which their liberation struggle was based. Leaving people and culture aside, it is curious how the administration can choose to ignore the genocidal aspects of the country's history, by again forging links with the same Pakistan armed forces.

Ziaur Rahman, later Major-General who took over as President of Bangladesh after a coup, had to flee from Chittagong after intense Pakistan navy shelling in May 1971 allowed the Pakistan army to regain the cantonment. Zia later founded the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) to oppose the Awami League founded by Mujibur Rahman. The BNP, now led by Zia's ailing wife Khaleida and son Tareq, is widely expected to perform very well in nationwide elections which are scheduled there in February 2026. However, even the BNP has not protested the return of Pakistan navy ships to dock at Chittagong harbour.

Letters to the Editor

Pynthorbah Constituency Plunged into Darkness

Editor,
Pynthorbah struggles with regular power cuts despite 'no load shedding' announcement. Contrary to assurances from the Power Minister, residents and business establishments in Pynthorbah Constituency face an epidemic of continuous, long-hour, and multiple power cuts throughout the day. The incessant interruptions are bringing life to almost a standstill, raising serious questions over the stability of the power infrastructure and the credibility of official statements.

The Crippling Reality on the Ground
For the people of Pynthorbah, "no load shedding" has now assumed ironic proportions. The huge power cuts, sometimes dragging on for hours together, have reduced day-to-day existence into an unremitting battle.

Residential Distress:
Families are unable to complete basic chores, students preparing for exams are left in the dark, and dependence on unreliable inverters is spiking household costs.

Business Catastrophe:
The SMEs, which form the backbone of the local economy, are experiencing huge losses. Shops, printing services, and even essential service providers like barbers are crippled, leading to less productivity at the economic level. Food items in grocery stores and restaurants are vulnerable to spoilage; this means loss of investment.

Workload Pending:
These cuts are devastating particularly for those dependent on digital infrastructure, whether they be government offices, private firms, or even individuals relying on working from home. Critical data is destroyed, deadlines missed, and the general atmosphere rendered chaotic with unproductive work.

Assurance vs. Actuality,
The Official Stand: Recently, the Power Minister had assured the public in no uncertain terms that the power scenario was stable and there was no plan to implement load shedding. The frequent cuts, though, have been occasionally blamed by MeCL officials on essential maintenance and infrastructure upgrade work, not attributed to load shedding.

While infrastructure improvement is important, the increasing frequency of load shedding and unpredictability

of the outages hint at a systemic issue that goes beyond that. Residents believe that anything causing prolonged, unannounced disruptions cannot be termed anything but an outage, whatever the official name. The lack of proper communication, with minimal or no advance notice for such 'maintenance' shutdown, adds to the frustration and leaves the public unprepared.

Yours etc.,
Vincent Nongkynrih,
Via email

Meghalaya : Fresh Water a Wasted Resource

Editor,
The ST article titled "Water Abundance vs Water Scarcity: Meghalaya's Paradox of Policy and Reality" Dt 10/12/25 by Bhogtorm Mawroh is, I sincerely believe, a writeup that deserves the serious attention of Meghalaya's policy makers. Meghalaya is a piece of real estate that is blessed with many natural resources that are slowly revealing themselves as some of the most sought after in an environmentally conscious world and a planet with a growing

unease over threats from Climate change and Global Warming. We are a tribal upland state with established social traditions and customs that bring our people closer to nature than most other communities. As per claims of the Govt, 75% of the state's geographical area is covered in community owned forests. The climate as well as the pollution levels, in the state as a whole, well under control primarily because of this social capital. We are the envy of other more developed, industrialized and populous but environmentally threatened states. A fact that is just beginning to register itself in the rest of India and which we are just starting to realize, is a huge tourist asset and an economy builder for Meghalaya provided we have the will and policy to keep it that way.

Getting back to Bhogtorm's article mentioned above, the writeup dwelt on the abundance of yet another Meghalayan natural resource, but one the potential of which we are yet to recognize and which sadly at present we treat with complete indifference if not actual contempt. This is with regard to the fresh water the state receives annually from each and every monsoon. During such periods

fresh water in the form of rain literally pours from the heavens. Now based on the article mentioned above and the data presented therein, the following is the amount (in cubic meters) of rain Meghalaya receives each year together with the maximum usage made from it and the leftover which is allowed to go to waste: (a) Fresh water in the form of rain received each year – 655.418 million cu mt. (b) based on the water requirement of 35 cu mtr / per person / year, the domestic water needs for 34 lac population plus ground absorption comes to an app total of 119 million cu mtr. (c) Subtracting 119 million cu mtr from 655.418 million cu mtr, we have a spare / wastage of app 536.4135 million cu mtr of fresh water every year which simply flows down hill to add to the floods of Assam and Bangladesh.

Now there are predictions and quite credible too, that if oil was a cause of most wars during the 20th century, disputes over fresh drinking water will be the cause of much more terrible conflicts in the 21st Century. Universal thirst in the decades to come will make countries/ societies with fresh water the most envious and with this the rich too if they are capable of turning their freshwater resources into economic assets. One begins to wonder if the current covetous eyes of

Bangladesh on the NE States has anything to do with the above prediction? The point one is trying to make is that the earlier Meghalaya starts recognizing the blessings that pour upon us every monsoon, the better it will be for the economic interest of future generations and the development of the state. Identifying technologies on how to harvest this bounty from heaven will be a good starting point. Consultancies with countries such as Israel, that possess proven technology and expertise on water harvesting methods should be examined. The Israeli Embassy in New Delhi, just 100 meters from Meghalaya House, would be a good place to start. Secondly, concentrating on how we revitalize our springs and aquifers and how we go about cleaning our polluted rivers and streams will, in the long run, only add to our economic advantage. Thirdly and most important, wasting 536.4135 million cu mtr of fresh water every year, a commodity with an ever increasing value is simply criminal if not total lack of vision and foresight.

Yours etc.,
Toki Blah,
Via email

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A Callous Centre, Indifferent States

SHILLONG MP Ricky AJ Syngkon has called attention yet again in parliament to the Assam-Meghalaya border conflict at Langpih in West Khasi Hills. On this side of the border too it is the residents of Meghalaya who have faced the bullets in the same manner that five men were shot to death at Mukroh West Jaintia Hills in 2022 on allegations that they trespassed into Assam territory and were indulging in illegal timber transportation from Assam towards Meghalaya. That case has remained in limbo despite being ostensibly investigated by the CBI. The Meghalaya Government is yet to strengthen its border outpost at Mukroh even while Assam Police has a well-entrenched set-up and a no-nonsense police team guarding the inter-state border there.

Perhaps it is the provocative nature of the Assam Police which led to the July 2021 outburst at the Mizoram-Assam border where "miscreants" shot and killed six Assam Police personnel and injured 65 others who included civilians residing along the border. When that happened Assam went into a hyperbolic mode and raised a storm seeking the central government's intervention. Union Home Minister, Amit Shah was quick to respond and call for restraint. Not much is heard from the same Home Minister when people were killed at Mukroh by Assam Police. What's evident are the double standards of the central government to act with haste when it comes to BJP-ruled states but to ignore states ruled by its allies.

The border problems between Assam and Meghalaya have become a playbook for electoral gains. Each state makes an election issue out of the miseries of people living precariously at the borders and even having to harvest their crops under police protection. The MDA-1 government gave hopes that it was serious about resolving the matter with the central government as the referee but that is all for public display. Earlier the talks were held somewhat frequently but now there has been a long and lingering silence on the matter even as those living along the Assam-Meghalaya border whether in West Khasi Hills, Ri Bhoi or Jaintia Hills are living lives of quiet desperation. A case in point is that of Mukroh where five men, who their family members claim were going to harvest their farm products, were mercilessly gunned down by Assam Police without giving them time to surrender. Did those men coming from impoverished homes indulged in some crime? What was the crime? Do police have 'shoot to kill' orders at the borders? What if Meghalaya Police did the same to encroachers in Langpih, West Khasi Hills or the borders with Karbi Anglong in Ri Bhoi district? One thing that stands out is that the Assam Police are trigger happy while on the Meghalaya side it would appear that the police are more on the defensive. It is doubtful if Meghalaya Police would shoot anyone even if the person were to trespass inside Meghalaya. The question is will there ever be a solution to the border disputes? If not, why not? Are there no maps to establish the designated territories of each state? Why make the border dispute an ongoing drama?

One Northeast: A Grand Claim Built on a Hollow Architecture

By Lang Kupar Kharपुरi War

When Meghalaya Chief Minister Conrad Sangma unveiled One Northeast, it was presented as a bold new experiment in regional unity—an idea supposedly born from the unmet aspirations of the eight Northeastern states. Words like "unity," "identity," and "indigenous rights" framed the announcement as if the region were stepping into a historic new chapter. But anyone familiar with the political history of the Northeast knows that One Northeast is far from new. It is, in fact, the latest revival of a political project first attempted by Conrad's father, the late Purno A. Sangma.

The late P.A. Sangma spent years exploring ways to build a shared political platform for the Northeastern states, most notably through the North-East People's Forum (NEPF) in the mid-2000s. His effort reflected a genuine belief that the region needed a collective voice in national politics—a sentiment that resonated with many leaders at the time. But the NEPF emerged in a complex political environment, shaped by shifting national alliances, changing electoral currents, and the competing priorities of different Northeastern parties.

Contemporary reporting illustrates how these pressures affected the forum. In 2004, The Telegraph noted that the NEPF recalibrated its strategy following the Congress party's strong national performance under Sonia Gandhi, which altered the political calculations of several member-parties. By 2008, former Assam Chief Minister Prafulla Mahanta publicly called for the revival of the NEPF ahead of the general elections, indicating that the platform had lost momentum as regional actors pursued divergent interests.

Rather than a failure of intent, the NEPF experience highlighted the structural difficulty of sustaining a pan-Northeast formation at a time when each state's political landscape was shaped by distinct ethnic, electoral, and party compulsions. Yet, despite its short-lived nature, the NEPF marked an important attempt to articulate a regional imagination—an experiment that now echoes, in a different form, through Conrad Sangma's One Northeast initiative.

Seen against this backdrop, One Northeast looks less like a new idea and more like a revival of an earlier regional experiment—one that Conrad Sangma has reshaped and presented through the National People's Party (NPP). The NPP has spent years promoting the idea that it represents the entire Northeast, using the slogan "One Voice. One Northeast" to support that claim. But despite significant effort and expenditure, it has struggled to build a stable base in Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Nagaland, and even in large parts of Meghalaya.

The NPP's main strategy for expansion has not been building a strong grassroots

base or trust from the ground up, but poaching MLAs from opposition parties. This has happened repeatedly in Meghalaya—especially after elections—where legislators have crossed over to the NPP, helping the party shore up numbers and control governments. These defections may strengthen the party inside the Assembly, but they do not create genuine support among ordinary voters.

In the Khasi Hills in particular, the NPP continues to face deep scepticism and erosion of trust. Many people see the party as one that grows by engineering political shifts rather than by earning a mandate. In that sense, One Northeast looks like an attempt to escape the NPP's image problem by rebranding its ambitions under a broader, seemingly neutral regional banner, even though the underlying political habits remain the same.

An Alliance of Convenience, Not Conviction

A closer look at the parties involved reveals the initiative's true shape. Rather than an organic coalition reflecting the region's many aspirations, One Northeast appears to be a carefully assembled group of parties already tied to the BJP-led NDA. Pradyot Manikya's cooperation with the BJP in Tripura, Conrad Sangma's longstanding alliance with the BJP in Meghalaya, and the presence of leaders with deep links to the ruling party at the Centre paint a clear picture.

What is marketed as a unified Northeastern voice looks increasingly like a familiar bloc of BJP-aligned partners. This alone casts serious doubt on the platform's autonomy and raises questions about whose interests it ultimately serves.

The Shadow of Proxy Expansion

Because of these alignments, many observers suspect that One Northeast may function as a proxy for BJP expansion into regions where the party has historically struggled—particularly Christian-majority states like Meghalaya and Mizoram. A regional platform led by local allies offers a softer and acceptable entry point for the BJP-RSS. If that is the underlying strategy, then the initiative is less about defending regional identity and more about extending the BJP-RSS political influence through a regional façade.

A Homogenizing Blueprint in a Deeply Diverse Region

The danger intensifies when one considers how the initiative imagines regional unity. The Northeast is not a monolith; it is a landscape shaped by tribal sovereignties, intricate customary systems, distinct ecological practices, and linguistic worlds that are as varied as its hills and valleys. These differences are not incidental—they are foundational

to the political and cultural architecture of the region.

For years, national policies have often grouped the entire Northeast into a single category, ignoring these important variations. The fact that the Constitution had to create the Sixth Schedule is proof that a uniform approach could never fully work here. Yet this habit of treating the region as one block has continued, and it has often led to tensions over autonomy and identity.

While One Northeast is a political platform and not a government policy, it risks repeating the same pattern. By presenting the region as one large, united voice, it overlooks the diverse realities on the ground. Instead of encouraging meaningful conversations among communities, it promotes a top-down version of unity that seems to benefit political leaders more than the people it claims to represent.

Land Rights: The Promise vs. the Record

The gap between promise and reality becomes most obvious when we look at land rights—a central part of indigenous identity in the Northeast. This is where One Northeast's claims clash directly with the NPP-led Meghalaya government's own actions.

One of the most debated moves under Conrad Sangma's leadership was the creation of the Invest Meghalaya Agency (IMA), which was later renamed the Meghalaya Investment Promotion Authority (MIPA) through the Meghalaya State Investment Promotion & Facilitation Act 2024. The original IMA immediately raised red flags across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills because many of its provisions were seen as enabling the formation of land banks and making it easier for private investors to acquire land. Critics argued that this could weaken the protections offered by the Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971 and even bypass the safeguards guaranteed under the Sixth Schedule.

To make matters worse, the acronym "IMA" sounded almost identical to the Khasi word for "danger," reinforcing fears that the legislation posed a real threat to tribal land ownership. Pressure groups like the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) and the Hynniewtrep National Youth Front (HNYF) launched strong protests, arguing that the law would allow the state to sidestep the Autonomous District Councils and push through land transfers in the name of "investment."

After months of sustained public pressure, the government amended the law in March 2025. The most controversial clause—explicitly allowing land banks—was removed, and the Act was updated to say it would not override existing land-transfer laws. However, civil society groups pointed out that

one key feature remained unchanged: the legal indemnity clause for MIPA members. This clause protects agency officials from legal action for decisions made "in good faith," which many activists believe could weaken accountability and transparency in land governance.

Because of this, mistrust has not gone away. Protest groups argue that even with amendments, the Act still centralises control, sidelines traditional institutions, and creates opportunities for investment-driven land changes that could erode customary protections. The fact that the Chief Minister had to publicly assure the Assembly that MIPA would not bypass indigenous land laws showed just how deep public concern had become.

In short, the IMA-MIPA episode highlights a wider contradiction: while Conrad Sangma and the NPP speak of protecting indigenous rights through One Northeast, their own policies in Meghalaya have tested the strength of tribal land protections. This gap between words and actions continues to shape public mistrust.

A Slogan Searching for Substance

In its public presentation, One Northeast aspires to be a movement—a unifying force capable of articulating the collective will of a region long sidelined in national politics. But movements are built on conviction, coherence, and community participation. What stands before the public today is instead a scaffold: hastily assembled, rhetorically inflated, and politically expedient.

A platform that invokes unity while drawing its strength from ideologically similar parties with the RSS-BJP cannot authentically represent a region defined by pluralism. A coalition led by those who have compromised land protections cannot credibly defend indigenous rights. And an initiative conceived without grassroots consultation cannot claim to embody regional aspiration.

Unity Cannot Be Manufactured From Above

If real unity is ever to emerge in the Northeast, it will not come from branding exercises, political alliances, or top-down declarations. It must rise from communities themselves—through dialogue, mutual respect, and the strengthening of indigenous institutions rather than their absorption into larger political designs led by elite political families.

Until such conditions exist, One Northeast remains what it currently is: a grand claim built on a hollow architecture, a political tool searching for legitimacy, and a regional dream redirected to serve interests of a few in the name of regional identity.

The writer is Assistant Professor, Department of English, North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Email: langkuparwar@gmail.com

Bangladesh Elections on February 12, 2026 matter a lot to India

By Nitya Chakraborty

The announcement by the Bangladesh Election Commission to hold general elections in Bangladesh on February 12 next year is a major development in the evolving politics of South Asia, especially with respect to India. The EC statement was welcomed by all the contesting political parties. The nomination process will be over by January 20 and from January 22, the election campaign will start and end on February 10, two days before the polling day February 12.

Significantly, the voters list consisting of 12.77 crore Bangladeshi citizens has not created any controversy as is happening in India now. Mainstream political parties like Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), Jamaat E Islami and National Citizens Party (NCP) have been working to finalise candidates for the 300 member national assembly. The NCP has been the first party to officially announce the names of some candidates.

The Awami League which ruled from 2009 to 2024 until the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government on August 5 last year, has been excluded from participation in the forthcoming national elections. There has been no major protests by the Awami League within the country after the election announcement by the EC but Sheikh Hasina herself came out with strong statements from her hideout in India terming the elections as illegal as well as the Election Commission as an illegal body. The fate of large numbers of Awami League supporters on polling day remains unclear. Some recent opinion polls have put AL supporters at 15 percent higher than the NCP.

Apart from the national elections for electing the new national assembly, the Bangladesh voters will also take part in the referendum on the July charter for framing a new Constitution for the country. If the referendum is in favour of the charter, a new Constitution Reforms Council will be set up to frame the Constitution. A new Council will also be formed on the basis of the proportionality of the elected political parties.

The July Charter contains very ambitious objectives for setting up a value based transparent government and administration. The real test is whether the new political leadership will be able to implement the agenda in letter and spirit. The experience of political governance in Bangladesh since its formation in 1971 is that the ruling political parties have consistently failed to provide transparent governance. Despite a democratic agenda, the governing parties are steeped in corruption while the common people's interests are ignored. That has been the history of both Awami League and BNP regimes in the last five decades.

In the last sixteen months since the ousting of the Awami League government of Sheikh Hasina, there have been tumultuous changes in the positioning of political parties in Bangladesh. The students' body leading the anti-quota movement was the vanguard of the July movement leading to the fall of the Awami League government. An impression has gained ground that this body which formed the political party National Citizens Party (NCP) in February this year, would be a leading force as a political party in the 2026 elections. But the developments in the last nine months since the founding of NCP show that it has failed to emerge as a viable political party, while Jamaat has made big inroads. In the recent elections to the students unions in the universities, students wing of Jamaat won convincingly and defeated both BNP and the NCP bodies. In fact, NCP candidates were nowhere in the picture.

At the campaign level, NCP leaders are divided on the programme, though it was the first to announce the first list of candidates for the February 12 elections. BNP and Jamaat have already made big progress in choosing the candidates for their constituencies. Dhaka based observers believe that while BNP with its organizational spread and united leadership under Begum Zia, is set to occupy the leading position in the elections, Jamaat may

emerge as the next party after BNP marginalizing NCP to a great extent. There are reports that some NCP leaders are working to align with BNP at the individual level while a few others are working for understanding with Jamaat.

Jamaat in the electoral history of Bangladesh never got more than eight per cent of the votes though the party had nuisance value in creating disturbances for the ruling government. Now with the hope of winning the elections, Jamaat E Islami leaders have sobered and project themselves as responsible leaders. Jamaat had understanding with BNP in earlier elections but this time, BNP is looking at Jamaat as a threat and refusing any truck with the party. BNP is confident of getting majority on its own in the absence of its traditional rival Awami League.

The Bangladesh Election Commission has introduced reforms to enhance participation and operational preparedness, including mechanisms for out-of-country voting. To strengthen election security, the Election Commission plans to integrate the armed forces into its election security framework. Despite these efforts, the pre-election environment remains fragile, with isolated but politically significant episodes of political violence, questions about the neutrality of local officials, and lingering distrust of security forces.

With barely two months to go until the February 12 polls, the Election Commission has emerged as both a key institutional actor and a flashpoint for partisan criticism. The proposed Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance 2025 (RPO) includes significant changes aimed at enhancing transparency and rebuilding voter confidence. The revised RPO raises campaign spending limits, reintroduces the "No Vote" option, and empowers the Election Commission to annul constituency results in cases of irregularities. Following months of public consultation, the Election Commission also canceled the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) for the upcoming election, citing operational challenges and concerns over credibility. It further ruled that alliance candidates must contest using their parent party's electoral symbol, rejecting proposals to permit joint symbols for coalitions. From all reports of EC's preparedness, there is reason to believe that the Commission really wants to hold free and fair elections in Bangladesh. That will be a great victory for democracy in Bangladesh. In South Asia, democracy is under trial in many countries including India. In Nepal, general elections are due in March 5 2026 following the downfall of the K S Oli government in October this year. In Nepal too, the Gen Z demonstrators who toppled the Oli government are working hard to establish a political party to fight the conventional political parties. In Pakistan, the Election Commission is under scrutiny and many political observers pointed out the partial attitude of the Commission towards the ruling parties as against the opposition party of Imran Khan. In Sri Lanka, the new Left government is functioning well up to now with no major protest relating to stifling of the democratic process.

For India, the political outlook is not that rosy for whoever wins the February 12 polls in Bangladesh. BNP is sceptical of the Narendra Modi government but among the three main parties, BNP is the only one which can be trusted to work towards normal diplomacy. Jamaat and NCP are out and out anti-Indian parties. But Sheikh Hasina's stay in India and her political activities are still sore points with the BNP. New Delhi has little option but to start a fresh phase of negotiations with the new political rulers in Bangladesh after the polls are over and a new government is formed. No sensible political leader of Bangladesh heading the new government can ignore the role of India. India has the advantage but Indian leaders have to approach Bangladesh with a more friendly face based on the ground realities of the political situation in the neighbouring country. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

When the real game isn't on the field

Editor,

The recent postponement of the Meghalaya Cricket Association election to the 19th, as directed by the Meghalaya High Court, definitely doesn't hint at anything unusual happening because election processes are always this dramatic, right? Still, the SCA, being a major stakeholder in terms of players, representation, and infrastructure, has every right to question the MCA if it feels the process isn't as transparent as it should be. Other districts should be the same if they feel hard done by. After all, transparency isn't too much to ask for.

What makes the situation even more interesting is that one of the oldest cricket associations in the country, formed in 1937, somehow has no representation among the candidates. And just to spice it up, the SCA suddenly withdraws its candidate. Was

it under pressure or pure coincidence? Who knows but the whole thing certainly raises eyebrows.

Then comes the shifting of the voting venue from Shillong (headquarters of MCA) to Nongpoh, with "accommodation issues" cited as the reason. A perfectly believable explanation if one is willing to suspend disbelief.

If any negligence or wrongdoing has occurred in the election process it will reflect poorly on the present leadership, the same group that proudly highlights its prominent personalities and government-linked advisors. But perhaps this isn't their first stumble. After the previous Secretary resigned, the then Vice President stepped into the Secretary's chair despite there being a duly elected Joint Secretary. Maybe just maybe there was unanimous agreement, and other associations do it too but to the average onlooker, it felt odd.

As a cricket enthusiast and keen observer, all I can hope for is that this elec-

tion is conducted fairly, and transparently. Whoever gets elected must remember that the MCA is not a personal family heirloom. Leadership should work like a relay, pass the baton at the right time and let the race continue smoothly. Clinging to the baton for too long only slows the whole team down.

And to the outgoing members please don't try to wriggle your way into yet another comfortable, symbolic nominated position especially now that "words are farcical cushy nominated post is being prepared for an outgoing member", as the whippers go. You've had your innings, now it's time to step aside, let the next set of players take the crease, and allow the association to grow under fresh leadership. If people refuse to walk off when their time is up, the whole team ends up stuck in a never-ending over and no match has ever been won that way.

Yours etc,
Leonard Wankhar
Via email

SIR for protecting the health of democracy

Editor,

There are enough reasons why the Election Commission of India has chosen to conduct the Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. It is not a casual exercise but a dedicated attempt to protect the integrity of democracy. All would agree that free and fair elections are the heartbeat of a republic.

Yet it is perplexing to watch certain political parties throw tantrums and cry hysterically in protest against the SIR. One wonders whether such protests are not encouraging people with ulterior motives. Can we turn a blind eye to the fact that the electoral voter lists in many states have been weighed down by outgrowths. Please note, such outgrowths might turn out to be "malignant."

India, surrounded by neighbours who often look

upon her with fierce animosity, should not be caught napping. I think this alertness is not merely the duty of the state but the responsibility of every single citizen. Was EC not startled to come across lakhs of forged or duplicate voter cards in Bihar? West Bengal is in convulsion due to the detection of large numbers of discrepancies and suspected fraudulent entries in the electoral rolls during SIR. How could this have happened? Such anomalies seem hardly possible without the backing of political forces. Why don't our leaders understand that it is exclusively intended to prevent illegal immigrants and never to target genuine citizens, which is in the greater interest of national integrity.

Due to decades of unchecked influx of illegal immigrants, Assam has now been facing challenge after challenge. This is no exaggeration but the ruling government often finds it difficult to deal with forces that rejoice at tragedies. Instead of shedding tears for victims of the Pulwama massacre

and the Delhi blast, some clap in praise of the heartless perpetrators. What is all this about? Is it not a serious concern? Well, one shudders to imagine the consequences if our leaders are driven by a hunger for vote banks rather than the safety of the people and of the nation.

Here one feels strongly that the outburst around the Special Intensive Revision must therefore rise above narrow politics and prejudices. It is not a weapon to be wielded against opponents. It is a shield to protect the sanctity of the electoral process in the larger interest of citizens.

Sadly, we have witnessed enough violence and bloodshed in the name of elections and the consequences thereafter. Be warned, "humanity" would be wounded if the wrong forces find shelter and start flexing their muscles.

Yours etc,
Salil Grewal
Shillong

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CDC abandons science in its new advice about vaccines and autism

The United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has revised its long-standing guidance about vaccines and autism.

The guidance once stated clearly and correctly that the evidence shows no link between vaccines and the development of autism.

Now it claims "studies supporting a link (between vaccines and autism) have been ignored by health authorities". It also says: The claim "vaccines do not cause autism" is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism.

Health Secretary Robert F. Kennedy Jr directed the CDC to make these changes, despite promising at his confirmation not to alter the CDC's vaccine advice.

With this change in wording on the website the CDC has been dragged to a new low. The CDC once stood as a global benchmark of scientific integrity. Sadly, it now risks becoming a megaphone for misinformation and a tool for those whose goal is to undermine science.

Let's look at the updated CDC statement about vaccines and autism, and how this is at odds with how science works.

Science can't prove universal negatives

Saying "studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism" is in direct conflict with how science works.

Using science, we can demonstrate that two things are linked, by showing consistent, reproducible associations that stand up across multiple study designs. We can also test a hypothesis repeatedly and from many angles.

Therefore, for example, when high-quality studies using different methods, populations and measurements, all fail to find a link between vaccines and autism, the rational conclusion is there is no causal connection.

But we cannot prove the universal

"The guidance once stated clearly and correctly that the evidence shows no link between vaccines and the development of autism. Now it claims 'studies supporting a link (between vaccines and autism) have been ignored by health authorities'. It also says: The claim 'vaccines do not cause autism' is not an evidence-based claim because studies have not ruled out the possibility that infant vaccines cause autism"

absence of a link.

If we were to accept this notion, someone could always claim they aren't convinced by the current evidence because maybe the next study will find something. Using this same logic, it's impossible to rule out the Earth is flat or that fairies exist.

It's wrong to reverse the burden of proof. Another dangerous premise in the CDC's new framing on vaccines and autism is it reverses the burden of proof.

In science, the person making a claim, especially one that argues against the available consensus, must provide the evidence for it.

The rhetorical manoeuvre on the CDC website suggesting proof is required to show the absence of a link, however, flips this principle on its head. It suggests it's reasonable to expect scientists to defend against an infinite list of hypothetical possibilities.

But as US astronomer Carl Sagan famously put it, "extraordinary claims require extraordinary evidence". In science, if you want to assert something that contradicts the scientific consensus, the burden is on you to produce evidence strong enough to justify overturning what we already know.

The more implausible a claim is, the higher the bar in provid-

ing high quality, reproducible and methodologically sound research to support it.

By asking the CDC to alter its website guidance, RFK Jr wants you to accept the opposite: that he or anyone can make any claim and it's the responsibility of everyone else to disprove these claims.

It's also unclear what evidence would change RFK Jr's mind on vaccines and autism. This leaves the door open for him to claim any amount of evidence that doesn't support his preferred narrative is insufficient.

But what about the study that claimed to be proof?

Speculation about a link between the measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccine and autism began with a fraudulent and now-retracted 1998 Lancet paper by the discredited doctor Andrew Wakefield.

Even if you accepted everything in Wakefield's paper as true (it wasn't) and assumed he was an honest researcher (he wasn't), you would still be left with nothing more than a case series of 12 children. This study design is incapable of establishing a causal link between the MMR vaccine and autism.

Subsequent investigations also uncovered a long list of damning

findings about Wakefield, including: 1) **He hid major financial conflicts of interest:** Wakefield was paid large sums by lawyers preparing a lawsuit against MMR manufacturers, money he failed to disclose. He was contracted to find evidence supporting a link between MMR and autism.

At the same time, he had filed patents for a single-dose measles vaccine and a diagnostic test that stood to profit if public fear about MMR increased.

2) **He committed serious ethical violations:** Wakefield falsely claimed the study had ethics approval. It did not. Children with developmental conditions were subjected to invasive procedures, including colonoscopies and lumbar punctures, without valid clinical justification or proper oversight.

3) **He misrepresented how the children were recruited:** The paper claimed the children were consecutively referred, implying an unbiased clinical sample. In reality, several were recruited through anti-vaccine groups or families involved in the lawsuit funding Wakefield, meaning the sample was deliberately cherry-picked to support his predetermined hypothesis.

4) **He altered and falsified data:** Comparisons between medical records and the published paper revealed extensive falsification: symptoms that began before vaccination were rewritten as occurring after MMR gastrointestinal findings were exaggerated or invented diagnoses were manipulated to fit his fabricated "autistic enterocolitis" syndrome normal clinical results were presented as abnormal.

The tragedy in all this is that a fraudulent study that never should have seen the light of day continues, even now, to erode confidence in life-saving vaccines. This has led to reduced vaccination rates, the resurgence of preventable childhood illnesses, and unnecessary deaths.

It has also inflicted immeasurable harm on autistic people and their families by fuelling stigma and misinformation. (The Conversation)

Why tensions between China, Japan unlikely to be resolved soon

Though China and Japan are experienced in dealing with diplomatic crises, relations between the two neighbours appear to have reached a new low. And this time, their conflict may not be easily resolved. What's behind the latest crisis and what's driving the escalation? The current round of tensions was triggered by Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's remarks in the Diet (Japanese parliament) on November 7, suggesting a move by Beijing to use military force against Taiwan would trigger a Japanese military intervention. Presented as a "worst-case scenario", such a Chinese attempt would constitute a "survival-threatening situation" for Japan, she said, justifying its right to collective self-defence to support its US security ally in restoring peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.

Diplomatic crisis

Taiwan was a Japanese colony from 1895 to 1945. Later, it harboured Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists after their defeat by Mao Zedong's communist troops in 1949.

Today, Beijing considers Taiwan a province of China, though it has never been under the Communists' rule. Statements to the contrary are considered an intervention in China's domestic affairs, crossing a red line for Beijing's elite.

Demanding a swift retraction of Takaichi's remarks and an apology, Beijing's brigade of "wolf warrior diplomats" launched a war of words against her. With the Japanese prime minister not backing down, Beijing then retaliated with a mix of political, economic and military pressure.

China's Communist leadership warned its citizens against travelling to Japan, and students were told to reconsider their plans there, apparently because of safety concerns. Imports of Japanese seafood were reduced or put on hold, while concerts and movie screenings featuring Japanese artists were cancelled.

China's Coast Guard and Navy

vessels also passed through the waters of the Senkaku islands, a territory administered by Japan but claimed by China as the Diaoyu islands.

Amid all this, an international campaign to blame Japan for the current crisis was rolled out to isolate Tokyo. A formal protest was issued to the UN, and in talks with Chinese President Xi Jinping, global leaders were pressured to align with his Communist government against Japan.

The diplomatic turmoil reached a climax in early December with Chinese military planes directing their radars at Japanese fighter jets.

Tension spills into trade

China and Japan are key trading partners. This year alone, a fifth of Japan's inbound tourism came from China. Beijing's tightening the screws on Japan will therefore have a measurable impact on the Japanese economy. Some estimate the economic fallout could reach JPY 2.2 trillion.

Nevertheless, Beijing's measures still fall short of past episodes of conflict between the two.

In the early 2000s, Japanese prime ministers' pilgrimages to the Yasukuni war shrine and revisions of Japanese history textbooks triggered massive anti-Japanese protests across China.

In 2010, Beijing stopped exporting rare earth minerals to Japan in retaliation for Japanese authorities arresting a Chinese captain and his crew after they rammed their ship into a Japanese Coast Guard vessel. Japan's "nationalisation" of the disputed Senkaku islands in 2012, buying the isles from their private owner, triggered a significant increase in China's military presence in the East China Sea.

In light of Japan's wartime past and China's economic and military rise, diplomatic disputes have been a default in Sino-Japanese relations since both countries normalised their ties in 1972. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 14, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon sextile Venus creates a warm, affectionate, and successful year ahead. You'll complete key projects with elegance and precision, earning praise from colleagues and clients. Financially, this is a prosperous phase—loans, business ventures, or investments bring satisfying results. Those in art, fashion, or public relations gain fame. Partnerships—both professional and romantic—strengthen through loyalty and trust. Family life radiates harmony, and you'll share joyful moments with siblings and elders. Spiritually, you feel guided and protected, finding deeper faith through prayer or travel to sacred places. Maintain your generous nature and avoid overthinking minor issues; happiness flows naturally this year.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) The work that was held up for some time will get done. You will feel relieved finally. People will start understanding you and your talent will finally get noticed. You can get a job promotion too. Your financial resources will open up, and you will feel more secure. You will make use of your talent and earn money with your own efforts. Negative thoughts that were going on in your mind will finally get removed. Both will understand each other's feelings. You will also extend a helping hand towards someone in need. Those in politics or media will see their influence get stronger. You will make contact with new people. And will give maximum time to your family.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You will be getting the support of people in all spheres of life. You will also get the blessings and life lessons from your elders. A decision taken by you after a lot of thought will bring very good results. Your area of influence will widen. You will earn money with your own efforts. You will have success in love affairs. Things are changing for you. Your enemies and foes will be active but will not be able to harm you. You can expect better results in business. You will also establish a better relationship with subordinates, boss and officials. You need to be more cautious in money matters. Your respect and prestige will move upwards in society.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) The work that was held up will get done. Your tasks will be completed. You will expedite impossible tasks with your wisdom. You will also spend money liberally. Work conditions will improve. You may get help from such corners of which you had never even imagined. Success will come up to your door. Your financial condition will be quite strong. Very good results from financial point of view are expected. Your business too will rise and grow. Your boss and superiors will be satisfied with your work at the workplace. You will develop a healthy balance between the busy schedule at work and family life. Journey will be successful. You will be able to achieve all you desired due to your hard work and toil. You will invest wisely in financial matters.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) The week will begin on a bright note. All your held-up work will be completed. You will get an important post. Victory is written all over. There is yoga of promotion in your job. Your officials will be supportive. You will begin a new job. Days will bring joy and wealth. You will get success in every job. People associated with media and technical field will reap lot of benefits. You will also benefit from your inheritance. You will spend your time having fun with your friends and close people. Politics will attract you. You will achieve success in your business. You will also see some positive changes in yourself. Decisions taken after deep thought will help you earn money.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) The week promises to bring positive results for you. Meeting with influential people will open doors of destiny for you. You will manage to get the support of your officers and subordinates. Many plans will occur to you, and you will make an outline of those plans. You will be ambitious and achieve your goals. You will have good monetary gains. You will also enjoy worldly pleasures. Meeting with loved ones will lighten your mood. You will be guest somewhere. Till you get success, you will not let go. You will also get success in competitive exams. You will also develop your own self. You will have the desire to learn something new; you will feel that your performance has become better than before.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is going to be a week full of achievements. There will be success in all your work. Those who are planning to start a new business venture will be able to do so. New job opportunities too are coming your way. There will be

Libra : (September 23 - October 23)

It is going to be a wonderful week. Money that was lent to someone will come back. Your financial condition will be strong and stable. Contact will be established with a person living for away. Your bosses will encourage you and you will implement new ideas. You will have good gains in your business. The time is good for enhancing your knowledge. The passage of time is also very favorable for you. Government related work will get done. You will also remain busy with religious work. Relations with friends and relatives will be fruitful. You will buy new clothes, jewelry and other things.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) As you begin to take control over lot of things in life, you will feel lot of positive changes in yourself. Your talent will come to the fore and people will take notice of you. You will prove your worth too. You will also take some steps that will prove to be just right, and people will have respect for your capabilities. Works that had been planned will be completed. Family life will be blissful. There will be amazing bonding with your mate. You will also make profits in shares and buy and sell property. But you will be lost in your own world. You will feel new energy. Your boss and family will be helpful to you. You will be happy and feel delighted. You will also take advice from your faithful friends.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) There are indications and 'yoga' of receiving unexpected gains and windfalls for you this week. You will reap rich dividends from some investments you made in the past. Your financial position is going to improve drastically. Your spirits will be high, and you will remain cheerful. You will find yourself financially strong and in a better position during this time. Take business-related decisions only after giving a lot of thought. You will also have good marital relations with your partner. You will also welcome guests at your house. Students will excel in studies. Feelings of patriotism and national interest will engulf you. Through hard work and gift, you will achieve everything that you have ever desired for.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Your enthusiasm, zest and zeal will help you in achieving what you dream your work will get done. You will get attention and appreciation from people. Friends will be ready to help you. Your area of influence will widen. Through hard work and gift, you will achieve everything that you had desired for. Romance will bloom and you will get success in your love interest. Your positive thinking and attitude will take you ahead in life. Company of close friends will be helpful in your progress. Cooperation, support and blessings of the elderly will help you a lot. You will get a new job offer.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is going to be a wonderful week. Positive changes brought about in business and occupation will yield positive results. Time movement is favorable with respect to career and job. Special thing to be noted is that during this time you will give your full time to family and friends. You will minutely examine and decide on various aspects related to life. Your mind will be focused on studies. New political contacts will be made at this time. Your bag will remain full when it comes to accomplishments. You will feel close to your loved ones. You will decide on objective for yourself and start working towards it. A very enjoyable period.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) It is going to be an amazing week for you. You will have a passion to perform tough tasks. You will work passionately and truthfully towards your relations. Money will come to you. You will deal with your emotions and sensitivity properly during this time. You will also meet an influential politician or senior officer. You will also get into a fight with someone at your workplace. It will not be of any worth. Avoid complicating things. You will devote yourself to a task, but the result of that task will not be much. There are strong chances of getting a reward from long-term plans. You will hear good news related to your friend or relative. Your self-confidence will increase by leaps and bounds.

With Nvidia's second-best AI chips headed for China, US shifts priorities from security to trade

This week, US President Donald Trump approved previously banned exports of Nvidia's powerful H200 artificial intelligence (AI) chips to China.

In return, the US government will receive 25 per cent of the sales revenue, in what has become a hallmark of this administration to take a sales cut of a private company's revenues.

The H200 is Nvidia's second-most powerful AI processor. It's roughly six times more capable than the H20 chips previously available to buyers in China. These aren't consumer gadgets powering the latest cat meme generator or helping you with the weekly pub quiz. They're the computational engines behind advanced AI systems that increasingly drive autonomous weapons. This includes drone navigation systems, automatic gun emplacements and targeting algorithms in modern warfare.

Think less the futuristic world of the Terminator movies, more the very real AI-powered targeting systems already being deployed, including in Ukraine and Gaza.

At the end of a year that has seen the US and China locked in a bitter trade war in which Trump lifted tariffs on China as high as 145 per cent at one point, the decision to allow these sensitive exports is stunning.

This policy reversal fundamentally challenges how export controls work. It also raises urgent questions for US allies such as Australia, caught between economic dependence on China and deepening defence alignment with an increasingly unpredictable United States.

How we got here

Having access to advanced semiconductor chips is crucial in the global race toward advanced artificial intelligence. In October 2022, the Biden administration put strict semiconductor export controls in place. These rules targeted advanced AI chips and chip-making equipment destined for China.

This was dubbed the "small yard, high fence" approach. The aim was to restrict (build a "high fence" around) a narrow range of sensitive technologies, while still allowing broader trade with China.

The Biden administration placed 140 Chinese entities on export blacklists. It also restricted 24 types of manufacturing equipment and banned US engineers from supporting ad-

vanced Chinese chip facilities.

These measures had real impact. Between 2022 and 2024, Chinese AI companies struggled to access needed computing power, forcing them to innovate with older hardware.

A different strategy

Trump's approach is fundamentally different. In July, his administration allowed Nvidia to sell H20 chips to China in exchange for 15 per cent of revenues. This was widely seen as a concession to China linked to negotiations over US access to rare earth minerals.

Trump's latest move to approve the far more powerful H200 chips for export to China reflects his abandoning the rulebook on trade. Strategic security decisions are being transformed into transactional "deals" where everything has a price.

AI warfare is already here

AI chips now power targeting systems, guide munitions and make split-second decisions on battlefields worldwide.

Ukraine's forces use AI-equipped drones that autonomously navigate the final approach to targets, even in heavily jammed environments, reportedly improving strike accuracy from 30-50 per cent to around 80 per cent.

According to a Guardian report, Israel's "Lavender" AI system identified 37,000 potential Hamas-linked targets, accelerating airstrikes but reportedly contributing to significant civilian casualties.

China's People's Liberation Army is reportedly deploying AI for drone swarm coordination, autonomous target recognition, and real-time battlefield decision-making.

The Pentagon's Project Maven synthesises satellite and sensor data to suggest targets that US forces may subsequently destroy.

This isn't science fiction; it is today's battlefield reality.

A new kind of laundering

Modern semiconductors are "dual-use" technologies. The same chips training AI chatbots can guide cruise missiles. The same microcontrollers regulating washing machines can navigate attack drones.

British researchers have found a significant number of foreign components in Russian drones used in Ukraine have come from the US and

Europe.

Some were literally harvested from household appliances. Russian procurement networks reportedly bought chips intended for repairing washing machines, erased the manufacturer's name with acetone and inserted them into kamikaze drones.

These components travelled through third countries such as India and Kazakhstan before finding their way to Russian manufacturers.

You can't ban washing machines without crippling consumer economies. But washing machines contain microcontrollers perfect for military drones. Export controls can become an elaborate game of whack-a-mole, where each restriction spawns new workarounds.

Australia's dilemma

As a consequence of joining the AUKUS security partnership, Australia has restructured its export control regime to align with US priorities.

But Australia is in something of a bind. China accounts for about 30% of Australia's total merchandise trade. Meanwhile, the US increasingly demands policy alignment as the price for accessing its defence technology.

What does US relaxation of export controls on advanced AI chips mean for Australia? Are we obligated to follow? Australia's alignment with AUKUS was grounded on partners sharing similar views about threats, and adopting a consistent response.

However, the US recently released National Security Strategy identifies migration to Europe as a bigger "civilisational" threat than Russia's military threat. Clearly, Australians see this very differently.

When security becomes a bargaining chip

Export controls work when they're consistent, predictable, and clearly tied to national security. They fail when they become bargaining chips or revenue generators.

Trump's H200 deal transforms the "high fence" around sensitive technologies into a turnstile for the right price.

There are pressing questions for Australia. Do US-aligned export controls serve Australian interests? Or are we outsourcing sovereignty to a partner whose decisions are increasingly arbitrary and transactional? (The Conversation)

How Chinese food & the movies became a time-honoured tradition for American Jews

There is a meme that circulates every holiday season, an image of a sign in a restaurant window. "The Chinese Restaurant Association of the United States would like to extend our thanks to the Jewish people," it says.

"We do not completely understand your dietary customs but we are proud and grateful that your GOD insists you eat our food on Christmas." Is the sign real? Perhaps not; the fact-checking site Snopes found no evidence of the association even existing. But the joke's popularity points to a tradition cherished by many American Jews - Chinese food on Christmas.

But why would Jews, who do not celebrate Christmas, have Christmas traditions? Like many minority groups, Jews have always created ways of adapting to the societies in which they live, but whose culture they do not totally share.

And one thing that means is a collection of Christmas traditions, varying by time and place. Many of them came up in interviews for my book "Beyond Chismukkah: The Christian-Jewish Interfaith Family in the United States."

Old World festivities

Long before Jews came to the United States, some of them celebrated Christmas - participating in many of the cultural traditions, even as they avoided the religious part of the holiday.

According to Jordan Chad, author of "Christmas in Yiddish Tradition," Jewish folklore about the holiday appears as early as the late 1300s. Plenty of Jewish communities in Europe spent Christmas Eve dancing and drinking, feasting and gambling - as many of their Christian neighbors did, when those neighbors were



not in church.

Other scholars have argued that these traditions grew out of attempts to avoid studying Jewish religious texts on a Christian holiday. But Chad demonstrates that, over centuries, those customs came to celebrate the revelry of the season - though not the birth of Jesus.

Even in the 20th century, scholars such as Yaniv Feller have found, many middle- and upper-class German Jews embraced a secular Christmas, complete with a tree, a traditional dinner and presents. After all, some of those Christmas traditions stem less from religion than folk traditions and industrialization.

Given that long history, Jewish Christmas traditions are not necessarily a sign of Americanization.

That said, in the United States, Christmas is so culturally powerful - a day that almost everyone has off, and that the majority of Americans spend with their kith and kin - that many non-Christian immigrants celebrate it in a secular way, with family visits, Santa and a tree. They do not necessarily do the religious parts of the holiday, but they may well deck the halls. Certainly, my own Hindu relatives do.

And many Jews celebrate Christmas in some way be-

cause they are part of interfaith families - whether their own immediate family or extended relatives with whom they spend the day. Today, estimates place the American Jewish interfaith marriage rate as high as 50%.

Kosher-style Christmas

For plenty of contemporary Jews, however, it is profoundly important not to celebrate a secular version of Christmas.

Starting in the 1970s, in fact, when American Jews were particularly worried about rising rates of interfaith marriage, many of the rabbis willing to perform ceremonies for Jewish-Christian couples made them promise to not have a Christmas tree. This happened despite the fact that, at the time, many American Jews did have Christmas trees in their homes.

Even if Jews do not want to deck the halls, though, many still have the day off. Meanwhile, their non-Jewish friends, families and co-workers are busy and much of the world is closed. And so many Jews have developed their own ways of marking the day.

The Chinese food tradition is particularly famous. In fact, during Supreme Court Justice Elena Kagan's 2010 confirmation hearings, when

Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham asked her where she had been on Christmas Day, she responded, "Like all Jews, I was probably at a Chinese restaurant."

The first written mention of Jews eating Chinese food on Christmas Day comes from 1935, when, according to The New York Times, a man named Eng Shee Chuck brought chow mein and toys to a New Jersey Jewish orphanage.

His generosity was probably not why Jews started going to Chinese restaurants on Christmas; it is more likely that they were already doing so. The two communities lived cheek by jowl in many American cities, where immigrants of different sorts ended up in the same neighborhoods. And Chinese food contains little dairy, meaning it rarely violated Jewish dietary laws against mixing milk and meat.

Most Chinese cuisines do use pork and shrimp, which is forbidden by kosher laws. But many Jewish customers were happy to make an exception, especially if the forbidden food was tucked in a dumpling or otherwise out of sight - at least outside their own homes.

As new research by New York University graduate student Shiyong Lu demonstrates, Chinese restaurants

were also eager to cater to American Jews: They wanted to develop white, American clientele, and here were some right in their neighborhoods.

As restaurant owners learned that Jews often eschewed pork, some began to offer traditional dishes with chicken instead - allowing more observant Jews to eat "kosher style," without eating explicitly forbidden food. Today, there is wide variation in Jewish dietary practices, making Chinese food even more accessible for most Jews.

By the end of the 20th century, "Chinese food and a movie" had become the trope of Jewish Christmas. Because most Chinese immigrants were not Christian, their restaurants are often open on Dec. 25. And indeed, they are often filled with Jews.

Movies, volunteering and more

The same tends to be true for movie theaters. In 2012, I saw *Les Misérables* on Christmas Day in a theater that seemed to be a who's who of the Atlanta Jewish community.

In fact, the movies and the Chinese food are often paired, whether out on the town or at home, streaming with take out.

Another Jewish Christmas tradition is simply to go to work, so as to let Christian colleagues have the day off.

Many Jewish doctors and nurses are on call, or staff the emergency room or the intensive care unit, so that their colleagues can be home.

Still other Jews perform charitable deeds on Christmas: They staff soup kitchens and food banks, bring holiday cheer to nursing homes and hospital patients, or deliver gifts to children in shelters. (The Conversation)

754 Tura households...

(Contd from P-3) The map of the eight localities where land settlement was undertaken was prepared through a joint survey conducted by the Revenue Branch, Deputy Commissioner's Office, Tura; District Urban Planner; District Urban Affairs Unit, Tura; and DPMU-West Garo Hills, MBMA.

The eight localities are: Dakopgre Ronggi Songgital, ITI Upper Matchakolgre, Meghalaya Survey School locality, Sepoy Colony DC Office locality, Deringgagre locality, Chinap Asrang locality and Nikwatgre locality.

Under phase one of the land settlement, the eight localities covering an area of 211.5 bighas have been granted leases from the Deputy Commissioner (Revenue), West Garo Hills, on behalf of the state government. The lease agreement between each household and the government will be for a period of 30 years. The maximum area of land to be allotted per household or family will be 0.69 bighas or 10,000 sq ft.

Every household leasing land will pay a fixed annual amount to the government as land tax (Rs 2,000 per bigha), with reference to the settlement in Williamnagar at Balsri Gittim and Warima localities in 2022. Each household will also pay a fixed one-time settlement amount, which may be paid in a maximum of three

Women lead way in...

(Contd from P-3) solutions.

The Merry Maidens now serves as a powerful model of how women-led grassroots efforts, when backed by government interventions, can deliver long-term solutions to waste management challenges while advancing inclusive and sustainable development in the state.

In line with the government's push to strengthen waste management systems, Meghalaya is witnessing encouraging progress in several districts.

Enhanced waste segregation, community-led composting programmes, and strengthened environmental monitoring are reshaping local waste management practices. Among the most notable outcomes of this transformation is the rise of women-led initiatives supported by state agencies.

Spotlight on evolution...

(Contd from P-3) He also spoke about his role in helping remove Khasi from the list of endangered languages.

On the long-standing demand for the inclusion of Khasi in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution, Dr Lamare emphasised the need for a visible mass movement, wider adoption of Khasi as a medium of instruction across subjects, and focused advocacy for one language at a time.

Touching on socio-economic opportunities, he highlighted the potential of religious tourism at Nartiang to strengthen the local economy and benefit the state. Looking ahead, he revealed plans to revisit the Anglo-Khasi War of 1829 in his future research.

Thanking the audience for their thoughtful and engaging questions, the noted author also acknowledged the influence of his grandmother and several mentors, including Joseph Bacchiarello, H.W. Sten, Navakanta Baruah, and Frank Palmer, on his literary journey.

Prabha Khaitan Foundation is dedicated to promoting literature, education, the performing arts, culture, gender equality, and women's empowerment through author interactions, book launches, literary festivals, and cultural events. Jyoti Agarwal and Pooja Goenka serve as the Foundation's representatives in Shillong.

During the event, Kong Silbi Passah felicitated Dr Lamare and Prof Dkhar. Oil India Limited supports the Foundation's initiatives across the Northeast.

Meghalaya Nuggets

Pre-Christmas get-together in Shillong spreads message of interfaith harmony



SHILLONG, Dec 13: The message of love, respect and co-existence among different faiths and communities was shared during a pre-Christmas get-together promoting harmony here, as Shillong prepares to celebrate the festive season of Christmas. The programme was organised by Cabinet Minister Sanbor Shullai in collaboration with the Monitoring Can Implementation Committee of 19th South Shillong. People from all walks of life attended the celebration, during which assistance was also extended to various churches and Christmas celebration committees. Speaking on the occasion, Shullai said that people may belong to different faiths and religions, but in the end all living beings—whether humans, animals or even insects—are created by one soul of God. He also said that he carries different holy books when he travels outside the state, as he gets ample time during flights to go through scriptures such as the Ramayan, Quran Sharif and the Holy Bible. Shullai added that similar harmony get-togethers are also organised during Puja celebrations. The highlight of the event was a performance by the Cathedral Band, which enthralled the audience as people from different faiths and religions came together to attend the programme.

Rediscovered Somnath Jyotirlinga fragments draw devotees in city

SHILLONG, Dec 13: A rare and deeply significant spiritual moment unfolded in the city on Friday as residents witnessed the divine darshan of the rediscovered fragments of the original Somnath Jyotirlinga, believed to have been lost for nearly a thousand years. The event, held at Gyan Villa, Riblong, drew devotees from across Shillong and concluded with the distribution of prasadam. The sacred relics arrived in Shillong as part of an all-India spiritual journey facilitated by The Art of Living (AOL) and its founder, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. This nationwide yatra aims to reconnect devotees with a profound chapter of India's ancient spiritual heritage, culminating in preparations for a fresh consecration. The fragments of the Jyotirlinga, preserved for centuries by the Agnihotri Brahmins under the guidance of the Kanchi Shankaracharya, were brought to AOL centres, including Bengaluru, earlier in 2025, for public blessings and special observances. They were also central to this year's Maha Shivaratri celebrations, drawing thousands who sought darshan of the sacred remains. Friday's event in Shillong was described by organisers as a historic revival of spiritual energy, offering a rare opportunity for devotees to feel connected to a millennium-old legacy associated with Lord Shiva. The atmosphere at Gyan Villa remained serene and devotional throughout, as chants, rituals and quiet reverence marked the brief but momentous stop of the sacred relics in the hill city.

Shillong to commemorate martyrdom of Guru Tegh Bahadur today

SHILLONG, Dec 13: Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara Sahib, Shillong, has announced that the Sikh Sangat of Shillong, along with devotees and representatives from across Meghalaya and other Northeastern states, will observe the martyrdom of the Ninth Sikh Guru, Sri Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, on December 14. The commemoration will be led by Giani Kuldeep Singh Gargaj Ji, Jathedar of Sri Akal Takht Sahib, the highest temporal authority of the Sikhs, who will be the principal participant at the event. His participation is expected to draw members of the Sikh community from across the region. Representatives of the Sikh Pratidinhi Board, Eastern Zone (Dhubri Sahib), including its president and board members, as well as members of various Sikh organisations from the Northeast, are also expected to attend. General secretary of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC) S. Jagdip Singh Kahlon and other Sikh leaders are likely to be present. The programme will focus on remembering the sacrifice of Guru Tegh Bahadur Ji, who was martyred in 1675 while defending the principles of freedom of conscience, human dignity and the right to practise one's faith. Meanwhile, Gurjit Singh, president of Guru Nanak Darbar Gurdwara Sahib, Shillong, has invited members of the Sikh Sangat and representatives of other faiths to attend the commemoration. The organisers have appealed to devotees from Meghalaya and the wider Northeast to participate in large numbers.

NEIGRIHMS upgrades its medical imaging capabilities

SHILLONG, Dec 13: NEIGRIHMS has significantly upgraded its medical imaging capabilities with the inauguration of high-specification radiological equipment across its departments, enhancing the facility's ability to perform complex interventional procedures. The new additions include two Digital Radio Fluoroscopy (DRF 1000 mA) machines installed in the Radiology Department at the Regional Cancer Centre (RCC). Additionally, a Digital Mobile C-Arm (25 kW) with Digital Subtraction Angiography (DSA) was inaugurated at the Main Radiology & Imaging Department. NEIGRIHMS Director Dr Nalin Mehta served as the chief guest for the inauguration. The new technology will allow the Radiology Department to expand its offering of vascular and non-vascular interventional procedures for patients across Northeast India, building on the services the Interventional Radiology unit has provided since 2001.

Govt disburses new FOCUS+ instalment

SHILLONG, Dec 13: Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma on Friday announced that the government has begun disbursing another instalment of the FOCUS+ scheme, confirming that beneficiaries have already started receiving the amount. "We have just started releasing another instalment of the FOCUS Plus scheme. Some of the beneficiaries must have already received it, and the others will receive it in the days to come," the chief minister said. Reiterating his administration's commitment to inclusive development, Sangma added, "This is another commitment that our government has given and I want to assure that our government is here to work for every section of society." The FOCUS+ programme remains one of the government's flagship initiatives aimed at providing targeted financial support to rural households and strengthening grassroots livelihoods across the state.

JJM prog implementation incomplete in Meghalaya

By Our Reporter

SHILLONG, Dec 13: Implementation of the Jal Jeevan Mission (JJM) remains incomplete in Meghalaya, even as contractors await the clearance of an estimated Rs 700 crore in pending dues from the state government.

The state has achieved 83.15% coverage, according to the JJM dashboard. Since the Mission's launch, 5,37,402 households have received tap water connections, falling short of the intended target of 6,46,304 households.

Of Meghalaya's 6,456

villages, 4,285 have achieved 100% household tap connection status. Work is currently in progress in 2,160 villages, while 11 villages have yet to see construction begin.

Crucially, the dashboard confirms that no district in the state has achieved 100% coverage. While districts like South Garo Hills, East Garo Hills, and South West Garo Hills are close, reporting just over 90% connections, West Garo Hills and East Jaintia Hills remain the worst performers, with household connectivity hovering between 72% and 74%.

Modi govt weakening Constitution: Kharage

NEW DELHI, Dec 13: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharage on Saturday accused the Modi government of weakening the Constitution whose foundation is social justice and said its policies have reversed previous Congress governments' initiatives on education and jobs for Dalits.

Addressing the Congress party's first meeting of its Scheduled Castes (SC) Advisory Committee, he said the BJP government has weakened reservations, does not promote equality, instead justifies discrimination.

"We will not allow Baba Saheb (Ambedkar)'s Constitution to be weakened at any cost," Kharage said.

He said the Congress, even before Independence, pledged to mitigate the discrimination prevalent in society and recognised that the state's role in eradicating it.

It was with this thinking that two major laws were enacted: the Protection of Civil Rights Act, 1955, which made untouchability and all its forms punishable offences, and the SC/ST (Prevention of Atrocities) Act, 1989, Kharage said. The government of Rajiv Gandhi enacted the SC/ST Act which stated for the first time that atrocities against Dalits are not just crimes, but an assault on social justice, the Congress chief said.

Later, Congress governments strengthened it further by imposing restrictions on anticipatory bail for the accused, expediting investigations for victims, higher compensation, and arrangements for Special Courts, he said.

Noting that education is the greatest weapon for Dalit empowerment, Kharage said the Congress recognised that education is the path to social equality.

"Therefore, we initiated Post-Matric Scholarship Scheme, Pre-Matric Scholarship, Hostels for SC boys and girls, Top Class Education Scheme, SC reservations in IITs, IIMs and medical colleges, programmes like Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan, Mid-Day Meal, and RTE (Right To Education), which rapidly increased the school attendance of Dalit children.

"Today, there are lakhs of SC doctors, engineers, teachers, officers, and entrepreneurs in the country - their journeys began with these very policies," he said. (PTI)

Reversing blood sugar levels can reduce heart attack risk by 60 pc

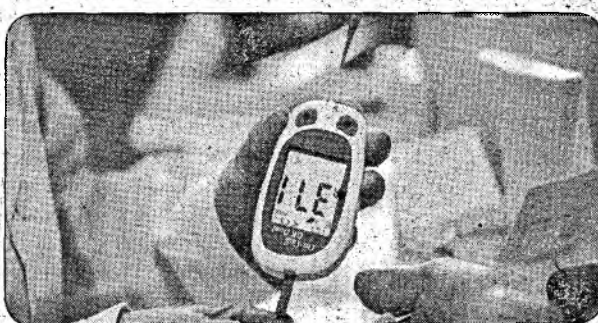
Prediabetic patients, who lower their blood sugar levels and can achieve remission, can effectively reduce the likelihood of serious heart problems by nearly 60 per cent, according to a study.

The research, published in the journal *The Lancet Diabetes & Endocrinology*, showed that bringing blood glucose back to normal levels - effectively reversing prediabetes - cuts the risk of death from heart disease or hospital admission for heart failure.

People who had achieved remission from prediabetes had a 58 per cent lower risk of cardiovascular death or hospitalisation from heart failure.

This effect persisted decades after normalising glucose levels, suggesting a lasting impact on regulating blood glucose, said researchers from King's College London, UK.

This finding is especially important in light of recent research showing that lifestyle changes alone - including exercise, weight loss, and dietary improvements - do not lower cardiovascular risk in people with prediabetes.



"The study challenges one of the biggest assumptions in modern preventative medicine.

For years, people with prediabetes have been told that losing weight, exercising more, and eating healthier will protect them from heart attacks and early death.

While these lifestyle changes are unquestionably valuable, the evidence does not support that they reduce heart attacks or mortality in people with prediabetes," said lead author Dr. Andreas Birkenfeld, Reader in Diabetes, King's College London and University Hospital Tübingen.

"Instead, we show that remission of prediabetes is associated with a clear reduction in fatal cardiac events, heart failure, and all-cause mortality," Birkenfeld

added.

Prediabetes is a condition where blood glucose levels are higher than normal but not yet high enough to be diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. Previous studies had shown that combined lifestyle interventions, including increased exercise and eating a healthy diet, did not reduce cardiovascular disease.

This suggests that delaying diabetes onset alone does not guarantee cardiovascular protection unless important metabolic changes occur.

"The study findings mean that prediabetes remission could establish itself - alongside lowering blood pressure, cutting cholesterol, and stopping smoking as a fourth major primary prevention tool that truly prevents heart attacks and deaths," Birkenfeld said. (IANS)

Proposed transfer of...

(Contd from P-3) citing SP Jyrwa's key role in containing the drug menace. Marwein praised Jyrwa as one of the best officers the district has had and requested the government halt the plan, stating that the officer still has unfinished business fighting drugs and other local problems.

Marwein echoed the concern that appointing an officer from outside the state would create significant communication issues, preventing the police department from securing the necessary cooperation from the general public.

National Lok Adalat...

(Contd from P-3) patronage of Chief Justice Soumen Sen, Patron-in-Chief of the Meghalaya State Legal Services Authority, and under the supervision of Justice HS Thangkiew, Executive Chairman, and Justice W. Diengdoh, Chairperson of the High Court Legal Services Committee.

Chief Justice Soumen Sen attended the Lok Adalat at Tura in West Garo Hills district and interacted with lawyers and litigants.

On the other hand, Justice HS Thangkiew and Justice W. Diengdoh attended the Lok Adalat proceedings at the High Court of Meghalaya, the District Court in East Khasi Hills, Shillong, and the District Council Court of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council.

*"The more sympathy you give,
the less you need."*
—Malcolm Forbes

The Shillong Times

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Congress sans agenda

CONGRESS leader Rahul Gandhi, slowly recovering from the shock his party received in the Bihar assembly polls, has asserted that he would uphold truth and strive to defeat "Modi and Shah." This looks more like wishful thinking. The BJP is unassailable in several states; and the principal opposition, the Congress, is losing its relevance, including in the prime Hindi belt states of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. Its position in Madhya Pradesh is a shade better but the party tasted a humiliating defeat in the last LS polls. So too with Maharashtra, not to speak of Gujarat and Rajasthan. The reason for the successive electoral defeats for the party is the lack of any organisational heft for it in state after state. The BJP too does not have much of an organisational might, but two factors help it today — the mass appeal of prime minister Narendra Modi and the ground-level push by the RSS, a cadre-based entity.

Losing the Hindi belt was suicidal for the Congress for the past several years. Sonia Gandhi as party chief had managed to energize the party with her aggressive push. Rahul Gandhi, it would seem, did not carry this forward. His sense of sincerity to the cause is beyond question, but things do not fall in place. The Hindutva plank that the BJP zealously pursues has taken the Hindi belt and beyond by storm through a clever invocation of the religious feelings bordering on spirituality. The Ram Temple issue, for instance has been used by the BJP effectively to neutralize the Mandal mania. The Kamandal plank helped the BJP seize power at the Centre too. The Congress under Rahul Gandhi has failed to come up with a matching political agenda or strategy to whip up the feelings of the masses. Casual exhortations and challenges to the Modi establishment by themselves serve little purpose. As long as the Congress leadership fails to learn lessons from the recent history of political activism, it is unlikely to stage a come-back.

The failure of the Congress party to groom strong leaders with mass appeal in various states is another reason for its failure to win polls. BJP too does not have strong leaders in many states. Its chief ministers are mostly colourless personalities. Modi makes this up with his direct public engagements. Like Indira Gandhi, he plays to the gallery and poses as a saviour of the poor multitudes. The poor are kept on a tasty diet of promises. His social welfare schemes are an attraction to the ordinary masses. There is hardly any Congress leader in most states who is capable of countering the Modi-BJP offensives. States like Bihar have gone from the Congress hands due to the party's failure to groom strong regional leaders. Karnataka is an exception. Kerala too retains a strong Congress presence through the leadership skills of its state-level leaders. They are giving a strong fight to the well-entrenched CPI-M, as is evident also from their present sweep of the local body polls. Or Revanth Reddy in Telangana, who won the last assembly polls for the party. This is how it should be for the Congress.

Meghalaya: When the Earth Remembers - Our Past, Our Preparedness, Our Hope

By Jairaj Chetty

(Based on a compilation from different sources)

Across India, a quiet undercurrent of unease has begun reshaping everyday conversations. One hears it in the way people linger a little longer at tea stalls, speaking in lowered tones; in the staff rooms of schools where teachers pause between discussions of lessons and students; in the hum of busy market corners where casual chatter now carries a subtle edge of concern; and in the gentle murmur of families settling in for the night, wondering aloud about the safety of the world beneath their feet.

This shift in mood began soon after the newly revised Earthquake Design Code and seismic zonation guidelines (2025) — widely reported in national newspapers — redrew the country's seismic landscape with a clarity that is difficult to dismiss. What was once a matter of technical maps and distant research has entered public consciousness. The new zonation places much of the Northeast, including Meghalaya, within regions marked for significantly higher seismic vulnerability, prompting people to rethink long-held assumptions about safety, stability, and preparedness.

It is not panic that drives these conversations, but a growing awareness — a collective sense that the earth beneath us has a memory and a message, and that it is time we listened.

For Meghalaya, this knowledge is not new. It feels more like an overdue acknowledgment of what our hills, homes, and collective memory have whispered for generations.

Anyone who has lived here knows these stories well:

- Nights when a sudden tremor sent utensils rattling.
- Windows trembling in their frames.
- Fine cracks creeping across old walls like quiet messages.
- Slopes giving way after days of unrelenting rain.
- Families stepping out into the cold, holding each other as they waited for the vibrations to fade.

These are not tales from a distant past. They are reminders — gentle yet persistent — that this land speaks, urging us to remain alert, aware, and prepared.

Where Beauty Rests on a Moving Earth
The Shillong Plateau — famed for its rolling hills, sculpted valleys, and cascading waterfalls — rests atop one of the most active geological regions in the Indian subcontinent. The plateau

is framed by major tectonic structures: the Dawki Fault in the south, the Oldham Fault in the north, the Kopili Fault stretching across Assam and Meghalaya, and the Dhubri Fault linking deeper tectonic pressures. These systems accumulate strain quietly, sometimes for decades, only to release it in seconds.

Nothing illustrates this more dramatically than the Great Assam-Shillong Earthquake of 12 June 1897. It was not merely an earthquake; it was a reshaping of the land. The northern edge of the plateau surged upward, rivers abandoned their ancient channels, cliffs collapsed, and settlements across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills were reduced to rubble. Eyewitnesses described the earth rolling like waves and church bells ringing without human touch — the sound, they said, rose from the ground itself.

More than a century later, the event remains one of the world's most powerful intraplate earthquakes, studied extensively for its extraordinary force. And even today, in the subtle tremors beneath Meghalaya, one senses the lingering memory of that upheaval.

The shaking did not stop with 1897.

The Rongrengiri earthquake of 1951 rattled the Garo Hills.

The 2016 Imphal earthquake jolted Shillong before dawn.

Between such events, the land continues to shift. Seismic records indicate nearly 250 earthquakes of magnitude 4 and above within a 300-km radius over the past decade — roughly one every two weeks.

Our elders often say, "This land is alive."

Science now echoes what they have always known.

What Remains at Stake When Preparedness Is Ignored

Recent reports in The Shillong Times, The Indian Express, and other publications have outlined the consequences of a major earthquake in the Northeast. One hazard assessment suggested the possibility of a significant event this century. Scenario-based analyses estimated that if a large earthquake struck today, financial losses could be staggering.

These are not predictions meant to instill fear. They are reminders of what needs protection.

Hospitals and Health Facilities

Several hospitals in Shillong, Tura, Nongpoh, and Jowai operate in buildings that need seismic strengthening. In a disaster, they must stand — lives depend

on them.

Schools and Learning Spaces

Many older school buildings predate modern seismic guidelines. A major quake during school hours could be devastating.

Rapid Urban Growth
As towns across Meghalaya expand, construction quality becomes critical. A single weak structure in a crowded area can trigger cascading damage.

Roads and Connectivity
Strong shaking can trigger landslides, cutting off entire districts and slowing rescue efforts.

Cultural and Heritage Structures — What We Stand to Lose

Meghalaya's cultural identity is embedded in its landscape: traditional Khasi and Garo homes built with ancestral wisdom, monoliths standing silent in village grounds, colonial-era structures that reflect an older Shillong.

A powerful earthquake threatens not only these structures but the heritage and emotions they embody. These are not mere buildings; they are living archives. Once lost, they cannot be recreated, leaving irreplaceable voids in our collective memory.

Tourism and Local Livelihoods — A Fragile Lifeline

Tourism forms one of Meghalaya's strongest economic pillars. Homestays, cafes, guides, transport operators, artisans — thousands rely on it. Yet tourism is fragile. It rests upon safety, perception, and trust.

After a major quake:

Visitors may hesitate to return. Natural attractions may be closed or damaged. Small businesses may struggle for survival. A scenario referenced in national reporting suggests that economic losses in the Northeast could exceed Rs 1 lakh crore under certain assumptions. Whatever the precise number, the message is clear:

Preparedness will always cost less than recovery.

Lessons From Countries That Live With Earthquakes Daily:

Japan, Chile, and New Zealand face thousands of earthquakes every year — yet large-scale disasters are comparatively fewer. Their success lies not only in engineering but in the discipline of preparedness.

- Buildings are designed to bend, not break.
- Schools conduct regular drills.
- Evacuation routes are widely known.
- Communities practice readiness as a way of life.

Their message speaks to us: Earthquakes are natural. Disasters are not.

What Meghalaya Can — and Must — Do Now

Protecting Meghalaya does not begin with vast budgets. It begins with clarity of purpose.

- We need awareness — understanding our risks.
- We need honesty — identifying our weak structures.

- We need steady action — taken consistently.

Preparedness includes:

- Enforcing seismic building codes.
- Retrofitting vulnerable structures.
- Conducting regular school and community drills.
- Training local volunteers.
- Designating safe open spaces.
- Sharing accurate public information.

Preparedness is not solely a government duty. It belongs to families, schools, neighbourhoods — to every citizen.

Only then does a vulnerable region become a resilient one.

Why This Cannot Be Delayed

A scenario study once cited in The Assam Tribune suggested that parts of Shillong's commercial areas could face severe damage in a strong earthquake. Whether exact or approximate, the implication is unmistakable:

- Our vulnerability is real.

- The cost of inaction will be high.

- Our population has grown.

- Our buildings have multiplied.

- Our dependence on infrastructure has deepened.

- But preparedness has not kept pace.

Earthquakes follow no timetable. They follow only the laws of the earth.

Yet This Remains a Story of Hope

Meghalaya has always been defined by resilience. In moments of crisis, communities here instinctively come together — checking on neighbours, sharing essentials, offering help without being asked. That spirit is our greatest strength. If we pair that spirit with preparedness, we can safeguard our tomorrow.

When the next tremor comes — and history says it will — may it find us calm, aware, and united, not shaken by fear but steady with readiness. In remembering the movements of the earth beneath us, we are not learning fear — we are learning responsibility, and with that responsibility comes the power to protect the Meghalaya we cherish.

(The author is a retired Headmaster)

The schism of memory: Is history being polarised?

By Chiranjib Haldar

At a recent literature festival, RSS Akhil Bharatiya Prachar Pramukh Sunil Ambekar lauded that many positive changes have been introduced in history textbooks and the epithet 'the great' is no longer used to describe Mughal emperor Akbar or Mysore patriarch Tipu Sultan. He reiterated gleefully that though the National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT) has made phenomenal changes in history text books till Class XII, 'nobody has been removed from these textbooks as the new generation should know their cruel deeds and should also know because of whom we were victimised.' Some historians have also harped that understanding history through an indigenous lens is essential for a clearer sense of national identity.

The Indian History Congress has claimed that the NCERT modules distort partition history, promoting a communal bias. By portraying the Congress as complicit in the nation's slicing and exonerating the British in tandem, the NCERT was spreading 'falsehoods, with a clear communal intent.' In a resolution adopted unanimously, the History Congress has reprimanded NCERT's new Partition Horrors Remembrance Day modules and warned that juvenile minds were being fed 'distorted, polarising history.' Is it just the fracturing of memory and historiography at loggerheads where versions etched for centuries are being remodeled into a regime's favourable version? We can witness for ourselves the deliverance of History as a battleground for skirmishes.

We never thought that History would become a battleground of ideologies and narratives. The NCERT modules prepared separately for middle school (class 6 to 8) and senior secondary levels (class 9 to 12), describe Muhammad Ali Jinnah as 'the culprit of partition', who demanded it. Congress Party is a willing recipient and Lord Mountbatten as one who formalised and implemented it. They also state that the British 'tried their best to preserve India as one until the end.' The Indian History Congress (IHC) opposed to this narrative, arguing that it tainted history and dealt a sledgehammer blow. 'Turning history completely upside down, the modules hold not only the Muslim League but also the Indian National Congress responsible for the Partition of the country. Quite in tune with the loyalist stance of the communal forces during the freedom struggle, the British colonial rulers are given a clean chit in these modules,' the IHC resolution underlined vehemently.

Sessions of the Indian History Congress have long been known for partisan, political claptrap and skulduggery. Dignitaries, especially in critical sessions, are carefully chosen, keeping in mind their political leanings and sotto voce questions letting the cat out of the bag. Earlier, letting go of India's Mughal past had raised a furore among historians and chroniclers. The deleted chapter 'Kings and Chronicles: the Mughal Courts' and other themes removed include the portion on Mahatma Gandhi's life and assassination, Maulana Azad's contributions, communal riots, caste and gender inequalities and Dalit writings. Denial of these histories purges on our sense of self. Diversity of interpretation has always been behind history slugs.

One needs to introspect Maulana Abul Kalam Azad's sermon "...partition swept away the muck, but a little dirt still remains".

Historians also allege that the modules selectively omit key facts. The two-nation theory propounded by Hindutva icon V.D. Savarkar in 1937, in his presidential address to the Hindu Mahasabha is brushed under the carpet. 'India cannot be assumed today to be a unitarian and homogenous nation, but on the contrary, there are two nations in the main, Hindus and Muslims, in India.' India's genius was never in purity, but in its alchemy turning diversity into strength. The Mahabharata thrived on moral ambiguity,

Ashokan edicts were carved in Greek and Aramaic alongside Brahmi. Our challenge isn't choosing between Chola or Akbar, Hindi or Tamil, but reclaiming what our childhoods knew instinctively that identity isn't a checkbox but a kaleidoscope, where light looks truest when fractured through many prisms.

Pedagogy of history is processional, which entails relating to processes instead of detached events. Rajendra Chola and Akbar, both rulers who saw themselves as divine are reduced to political pawns. The Chola who carried the Ganga south is now claimed as either a Tamil hero or a national icon. Akbar, who entwined faiths together through Din-i-Ilahi, is either feted as secular or doomed as despotic. The utmost sardonicism is that neither ever imagined 'nation building'. We imposed that modern fixation on their stories centuries later. Truth resists simplification, their conquests were brutal and their legacies were complex. But their shared civilisational arc holds the real moral. This isn't your past versus mine. It's ours, in all its messy magnificence.

The resolution, passed by the IHC executive committee, further claimed that the portrayal of nationalist leaders as 'culprits' was misleading. It is ironic that sectarian communalists are never included in the list of those responsible for Partition. But among the chief 'culprits' are said to be the nationalist leaders when the entire spectrum of the national movement, Moderates, Extremists, Gandhians, Congress Socialists, Communists, Revolutionaries all believed that India had a long civilisational history of being able to live together with difference. The Indian National Congress, which since its inception in 1885, struggled relentlessly against religious communal division and Mahatma Gandhi are projected as one of the main perpetrators of partition. Do we call this a travesty of history?

Causation in history: is thus a series of sequential interrelated developments and occurrences. Invoking violence of the monarchs in the present is a culture of despising the past rulers which entails shock and vitriol against historical personages in order to divide people in current democracies. Colonial historiography made cautious attempts to deride the Delhi Sultans and Mughals as barbaric and ruthless to whitewash the atrocities and subjugation the British unleashed on the Indian populace. No monarchy is pacific or benign in the true sense and thus Mughal acts of cruelty cannot be isolated from other contemporary rulers who were equally vicious. The 'chastising' of the syllabus can be understood as a defamation of Mughal rulers because it tends to focus on xenophobia and religious identity. This may be a flaw because history validates how rulers like Alauddin Khilji or even Akbar manipulated the Sharia (Islamic Law) to their own liking. The fundamental issue is the fallacy of viewing mediaeval dynasties through the prism of Islamism.

While the NCERT text links Partition to subsequent conflicts such as Kashmir and terrorism, historians argue it promotes 'a hateful polarised future' instead of a balanced reckoning with the tragedy. Reading pages of history detailing how India was repeatedly invaded and subdued through power and brutality only reinforces a narrative that portrays us as a people meant to be ruled. This does little to help us truly understand or reclaim our past. Most of us refuse this new hopscotch, jumping between squares labeled 'us' and 'them'. The poacher turned gamekeeper conundrum only works when lines blur. Like Tagore's vision, like our childhood parks, like sufi and jazz strains the real India exists in the spaces between. Our school reunions are one such space where history lives in microcosms.

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

Letters to the Editor

Of misleading and defamatory news headlines

I am writing as a concerned citizen regarding the news article published on December 12, 2025, in a local Khasi daily, with the headline: "Da ki lak shu bam ei U CEO ka Municipal, hynrei sha ophis pat um ju wan." This translates literally to: "CEO of Shillong Municipality eats lakhs of rupees but never comes to the office."

While the report mentions real concerns raised by the VPP Youth Wing, led by Marbudd Dkhar, about not being able to meet Mr. P.K. Boro, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), at his office, I find the wording of the headline deeply troubling even if it was meant in a figurative way.

At first glance, the phrase "eats lakhs of rupees" suggests that the CEO is taking public money for himself in a wrong or corrupt way. It sounds like he is misusing funds, not simply receiving a legal salary. Even if the words were meant to point to his pay, the expression is misleading and can be misunderstood. In everyday talk and news reporting, such language often points to theft or abuse of power, not fair wages.

This is also a concern under the new Bharatiya

Nyaya Sanhita (BNS), 2023, where Section 356 deals with defamation. It says that harming someone's name by saying they are corrupt or dishonest is a crime, unless it is true and done for public good. While people can and should question public officials, such criticism must be based on facts and spoken responsibly. A headline using sharp, accusing words like "eats lakhs" may go too far especially when the report itself gives no proof of financial misuse.

Also, the CEO manages three or more Departments under the Meghalaya State Government. His job entails several responsibilities and may need him to travel, attend meetings, or visit sites outside the main office. Being away does not always mean he is avoiding work. Still, it is fair for citizens to expect better access and transparency.

The media has an important role in watching over those in power. But this duty also means being clear, fair, and accurate. Headlines form first impressions fast. When they use unclear or emotional phrases especially about money and duty they can create false anger and harm trust in both leaders and the press.

The editor must think carefully before using figures of speech in headlines that could mislead or accuse without proof. A better headline could have been: "Public

Raises Concern Over SMB, CEO's Absence from Office." At the same time, one might thoughtfully ask: Is it effective for a single officer to lead multiple departments? How does this arrangement impact day-to-day governance and public access? These are questions worth reflecting on, not to assign blame, but to strengthen systems and service delivery.

Let us continue to uphold truth and fairness not only in what we report, but in how we frame our news captions.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

Messi's Kolkata Meltdown: When GOAT Dreams Drown in VIP Chaos

The recent fiasco surrounding Lionel Messi's visit to Salt Lake Stadium in Kolkata on December 13, 2025, as part of his GOAT India Tour, stands as a stark indictment of our event management priorities and the unchecked VIP culture that plagues public spectacles in India. What was meant to be a joyous celebration of football's global icon descended into chaos, with frustrated fans vandalizing the historic venue after being denied even a glimpse of the Argentine maestro. Messi, fresh off his MLS tri-

umph, departed the stadium after a mere 22 minutes, leaving behind smashed fiberglass seats, torn canopies, and a deep sense of betrayal among thousands of paying supporters.

This was no mere logistical hiccup; it exposed a systemic rot where the elite—politicians and dignitaries—were ushered into prime enclosures while ordinary fans, many of whom had travelled miles and spent their hard-earned money, didn't even see a strand of GOAT's hair. Videos circulating online show the unchecked surge of the crowd, a direct result of poor crowd control and inadequate security planning by the organizers and local authorities. Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's apology is a step forward, but it rings hollow without accountability. Why was the All India Football Federation (AIFF) not informed about the event, especially at a venue as iconic as Salt Lake?

Messi's brief appearance should have been a unifying moment, not a flashpoint for rioting born of dashed dreams. This is all the more poignant as our domestic game languishes in disarray: the Indian Super League, heralded as a revival force, now teeters on the brink with its 2025-26 edition indefinitely suspended amid acrimonious standoffs between the All India Football Federation, club owners, and broadcasters over media rights and

revenue shares. Stadiums echo with sparse crowds, grassroots talent drains away untapped, and bureaucratic tangles throttle the sport's momentum, leaving a nation of aspiring enthusiasts adrift in frustration. It's time to rally for sweeping changes and prioritize the passion of the people over the privileges of the few. Only then can we host global stars without embarrassing ourselves on the world stage.

Let this debacle be a wake-up call for future events and Indian Football. The AIFF and state government owe the fans a thorough inquiry and concrete changes—not just apologies.

Yours etc.,
Anil Thapa,
Via email

Lets Rock Shillong!

Being a hardcore rock fan, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Hon'ble Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, Meghalaya Tourism, and the entire event management team "The Circus" for bringing the legendary band Def Leppard to Shillong. The announcement of an international act of this stature reflects strong vision, collaboration, and confidence in Meghalaya's ability to host world class cultural experiences. I was genuinely shocked when I first saw the poster on a relative's What-

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Mathematics of the Kur: A Sociological Perspective

By Mankular Lamin Gashnga

When Laws Fail Consistently

THE Meghalaya High Court keeps giving directions to the State Government on various issues related to the environment. One of them is to ban plastic bags that are below 120 micron thickness. The High Court needs to send its own officials to do a reality check of its repeated exhortations which remain mere paper tigers. Across Lewduh and all other markets in Shillong and even in rural areas the black plastic bags which scientists say are carcinogenic because of the black colour used, are still widely sold and given out to customers without any fear of violating the law. Way back in 2019 Chief Minister, Conrad Sangma had publicly announced at a function in the State Central Library premises that single use plastics would be banned but six years down the line those plastics are still widely used and continue to clog drains and land up at rivers.

Mere legislation without the spine to implement those laws in letter and spirit have the reverse effect of turning citizens into law breakers since there is no punishment for breaking such laws. The question is why is the Government beholden to the plastic production lobby. Who in the Government is benefitting by promoting this lobby? Arguments that the Government should provide alternatives before banning single use plastics are banal and reek of a mindset that resists change – even change that benefits the environment. Once a law is passed, it should be strictly implemented. People will learn to carry their own bags as they used to do before the advent of the ecologically damaging single use plastic.

The recent reports about the Green Deposit Scheme implemented in tourist destinations is a short term measure because at the end of the day the plastics deposited at the exit points will need to be disposed of somewhere in the village where the tourist spot is located. Ultimately the plastic waste will be burnt and produce pollution for the villagers who have had nothing to do with polluting the environment at all. This is because the villages don't have recycling units for non-biodegradable waste such as plastics. In fact villages have no waste disposal system in place. The Khasi Hills District Council has come up with a Waste Management and Sanitation legislation but the rules are yet to be crafted. The problem again is that the Council has no resource to create waste management systems so simply having an Act is pointless. Ultimately it is the State Government that must put in place such a system. But again, the State Government does not own land to create landfills or waste processing units. So unless the Dorbar Shnong or the Syiemship decides to create a landfill and a proper waste disposal and processing unit in every village, garbage will become one of the biggest challenges for the present and future governments in Meghalaya. Time has come for MLAs to be elected on the agenda of waste and sanitation management, pollution control and waste processing and the spine to ban single use plastic. Failing this Meghalaya will sooner than later be a state where waste management has failed so badly that tourists will not want to visit here to see garbage everywhere and mountains of garbage piled up for want of landfills and waste processing units.

Consanguinity within the Khasi context is a highly developed and internally coherent social system. The term used for this formulation is rta, a word widely employed in the War-Amlam dialect. In standard Khasi usage, comparable terminology is rare. One notable instance appears in the writings of Radhoh Sing Berry, who used the phrase “para ba fangba kya pylla” (“those who fall within correct relations”) when admonishing the observance of proper conjugal conduct. He further elaborated: “Wat iapoi kha bad ki bym dei kynsi” – do not initiate conjugal relations with those who are not kynsi, that is, those who are not related, in a manner analogous to brothers- or sisters-in-law, as such relations are taboo.

However, in Radhoh Sing Berry's usage, the term rta functions primarily as a weighing scale/measuring rod, rather than as a formal system for calculating degrees of consanguinity. He did not develop it as a technical framework comparable to rta. For the purposes of this article, therefore, I deliberately use the term rta, as it more accurately captures the systematic reckoning of kinship relations and is academically equivalent to the widely used colloquial expression “kheiri kur kheiri kha” – the calculation of maternal lineage (kur) vis-à-vis paternal lineage (kha).

The Calculation of Rta
The calculation of rta may be broadly outlined through the following principles, which together define the permissible and prohibited degrees of conjugal relations within Khasi society:

1. Members of one kur may enter conjugal relations with members of another kur without reckoning consanguinity when the relationship is entirely new and when no prior conjugal relations have existed between members of the two kurs. Once such a relation has occurred, however, all subsequent relations must be reckoned on the basis of that first union, which becomes the foundational rta. Conjugal relations are permitted only between persons related as bakha or kynsi.
2. Conjugal relations within the same kur are strictly prohibited, with no scope for pardon. Such violations risk snem (curse), social excommunication, or even exile (ksha).
3. Conjugal relations between persons who are neither bakha nor kynsi (meinah or panah) are forbidden and risk the imposition of sang (taboo).
4. Conjugal relations between paternal cousins are prohibited.
5. Certain affinal relations are also prohibited, such as between a man's younger brother and the elder sister of his sister-in-law, or between a man's elder brother and the younger sister of his sister-in-law.
6. Conjugal relations are normatively restricted to one

man and one woman.

7. Marital or conjugal relations must be socially recognised and presided over by elders of the respective kurs.

8. Conjugal relations between a man's maternal nieces or nephews (pyrsa kur) and his own children are prohibited during his lifetime (Hatdoh Lamin Pohsem, unpublished MS.) – or, according to some oral traditions, for at least three generations, on the understanding that blood relations are still too close for healthy reproduction and hence to avoid what is termed kyliang khaw.

Taken together, these principles define the entire relational network among Khasi kurs. While the terminology used to describe these relations may vary across dialects, the underlying logic and social function remain consistent throughout Khasi society.

Multi-Stratum Kinship and Social Mathematics

It is important to emphasise that rta is not a simple or dualistic system. It is fundamentally multi-stratified. Dr. Fabian Lyngdoh describes Khasi kinship as a triple-stratum relationship, noting that each individual simultaneously exists as kur, kha, and khun-kha. This triangular structure demonstrates that Khasi kinship is not a linear or two-way system, but a relational matrix in which identity and obligation are continuously recalculated.

In simpler terms, rta functions as a social calculus that allows individuals to locate themselves in relation to every other member of society – to tip kur tip kha. It is a method of knowing where one stands socially, morally, and biologically. This is why rta is best understood not merely as custom, but as a form of applied social mathematics.

Rta, Religion, and Cultural Autonomy

Crucially, the reckoning of rta is not religious in origin. It can be argued that traditional Khasi religion adapted itself to an already functioning system of lineage reckoning, and religious elements were incorporated into the moral framework only in later stages of societal development.

Neither had the widespread conversion of the Khasis to Christianity ever interfered with the foundations of the Khasi kinship system, despite the existence of biblical consanguinity laws – such as those found in Leviticus. This tacit acceptance suggests that the Khasi system is internally coherent and morally sufficient.

The calculation of rta may therefore be regarded as an early and ingenious attempt at what we would now describe as a scientific approach to social organisation. Its foundational concern was the avoidance of incest and inbreeding. This is what

I describe as social mathematics or mathematical sociology – a layered calculation (syrtap, tap, pylla) of blood relations designed to promote social stability and biological well-being.

Matrilineality, Cognatic Descent, and Consanguinity

While Khasi society is commonly described as matrilineal, it is incomplete as an explanation of Khasi consanguinity as blood relations are reckoned on both maternal and paternal sides. Paternal blood ties are not nullified; they are simply limited in generational scope.

In this sense, Khasi society is better described as cognatic rather than strictly unilineal. Consanguinity on the maternal side is perpetual, while paternal consanguinity extends only to a certain number of generations. Matrilineality thus functions primarily as an identity marker rather than as a denial of paternal kinship. This is also consistent with biological science, as a child inherits equal genetic material from both parents.

Rta, Science, and Sociology

Academically, rta is not a philosophy or belief system. It is a calculation science. It emerged through long-term observation, social trial and error, aimed at reducing disease, morbidity, and social disorder. Its guiding principle is straightforward: the greater the relational distance, the healthier the potential offspring.

Neither can it be equated with eugenics, as it is not grounded in ideological prescriptions of human worth but in practical social reasoning. Contemporary genetics itself acknowledges the limits of predicting health outcomes or guaranteeing freedom from genetic disorders. To dismiss rta as “unscientific” is therefore to misunderstand both its function and its scope.

From a sociological standpoint, rta performs a clear structural function. It regulates conjugal relations, maintains social boundaries, and historically contributed to physical and social well-being. In this respect, it offers a compelling example of “structural functionalism”, illustrating how cultural mechanisms evolve to meet essential societal needs.

Rta, Non-Khasi Marriages, and the Role of Tang Jait

A critical question arises when a Khasi individual marries a non-Khasi. This is where the institution of Tang Jait – the adoption or formation of a new clan – becomes indispensable.

The Khasi Social Custom of Lineage Act, 1997 defines Tang Jait as a ceremony for adopting a Jait for persons born of a Khasi father and a non-Khasi mother who have been assimilated into the Khasi community. The ceremony may be performed according to prevailing custom by members of the father's

kur, in the presence of village authorities.

Tang Jait allows the rta system to remain coherent within new family configurations. Without it, the entire calculus of consanguinity becomes ambiguous.

Institutional Negligence and Its Consequences

Despite its importance, there have been serious instances of institutional negligence regarding Tang Jait. The JHADC has failed to formally acknowledge or systematise this practice, despite historical and ethnographic evidence of its existence. This is because of claims that the so-called “Jaintias” are not Khasi and therefore there is no Tang Jait in the system. However, an elder of the Sari clan once told me in a very matter-of-fact manner that the Sari clan originated due to a non-Khasi mother. This is clear evidence that there is Tang Jait also among the Pnars. Moreover, numerous clans, including Bamom (Brahmin) and certain Dkhar clans, clearly imply non-Khasi maternal origins. Even today, new clans are formed “unofficially” when Khasi (Pnar/War) men marry non-Khasi women. This reflects not a failure of tradition, but a failure of administration.

A second instance of negligence is visible in sections of the Christian Church. As mentioned in a letter to the editor ST dated December 8, 2025 by Bashanlang Kharunuid, the suspension of the late Rev. G.P.L. Gadew, for offering prayers at a Tang Jait ceremony conducted under KHADC authority raises serious questions. If a Presbyterian pastor cannot pray for a Presbyterian family at a lawful customary ceremony, then the Church must clarify its position whether it is against Khasi custom and identity.

If either the JHADC or the Church rejects the legitimacy of Tang Jait, they are obligated to answer a fundamental question: to which kur should a child of a non-Khasi mother belong? Silence on this issue creates confusion rather than moral or cultural clarity.

Conclusion

Existing codified customary laws have yet to integrate comprehensive rules of consanguinity. As a result, many Khasis rely on informal knowledge transmitted by elders, leaving room for uncertainty and inconsistency. It would therefore be prudent for both traditional authorities and church institutions to formally incorporate Khasi consanguinity rules into educational, legal, and pastoral frameworks.

This article does not seek to condemn any individual or institution, nor does it claim absolute authority over Khasi custom. Its aim is to contribute toward a clearer understanding of rta – a foundational yet under-examined system that continues to shape Khasi society. A deeper engagement with this system is essential if Khasi tradition is to evolve with clarity, coherence, and confidence.

Land, Identity, and Urban Growth: Rethinking the New Shillong Expansion

By Evangeline Dkhar

The recent approval to acquire 35 acres of land in Tynring, for the New Shillong Township has reignited a longstanding discussion in Meghalaya:

What does development mean when land is not just Property, but Identity?

The land will connect the Administrative City with the Knowledge City and support the planned relocation of the Central Jail. While these plans promise better infrastructure and connectivity, they also raise questions about the intersection of urban development and traditional land systems. In the Khasi Hills, land carries social, cultural, and ecological significance, making its acquisition more than a legal or economic decision. If we take a look at land in the Khasi Society, land is ‘Beyond Ownership’. Among the Khasis, land is deeply rooted in matrilineal traditions, where inheritance generally passes through the youngest daughter, Kar Khaduh. Khasi land is rarely privately owned in the Western sense; it is held collectively, reflecting family and community responsibilities.

The main categories of land here includes:

- *Ri Raid: Community land managed by the Dorbar Shnong or village council.
- *Ri Kynsi: Ancestral clan land inherited matrilineally, and managed collectively.
- *Law Kytang / Sacred Groves: Protected spaces that sustain biodiversity, cultural practices, and spiritual traditions.
- *Privately registered land: A more recent trend, often creating tensions with customary practices (NESFAS, 2020; Soireide, 2022).

This system ensures that land is tied to heritage, social cohesion, and ecological knowledge, while preventing quick alienation to outsiders.

Taking a look at how modern plans meet traditional realities.

The New Shillong project highlights the tensions between urban planning and customary land governance. The ownership of the 35 acres in Tynring—whether clan, community, or private—remains unclear. In a society where land rarely belongs to a single individual, community consultation is essential. Residents fear that rapid urbanization could weaken institutions that have long protected communal and ecological interests. Losing land in this context is more than losing property—it risks eroding heritage, social cohesion, and ecological stewardship.

Supporters argue that urban expansion is necessary. Better roads, public facilities, and organized planning are essential for Shillong's growing population and economy. Yet critics caution that development without cultural sensitivity may result in, weakening of traditional governance structures, social and economic displacement of local communities, loss of cultural and ecological landscapes and increased vulnerability of sacred groves and water sources.

The challenge is to ensure that urban growth respects social and cultural systems, rather than treating land purely as a commodity.

Community Perspectives

Local communities provide nuanced insights. Older generations emphasize the cultural and spiritual significance of certain forested areas and water bodies, while younger residents see potential in infrastructure and employment opportunities. Both stress the importance of inclusive planning and fair benefit-sharing. Village councils advocate partnership models where communities retain some decision-making authority while participating in development projects, ensuring that modernization does not erode traditional governance.

Similar tensions exist in other indigenous contexts:

- *Maori in New Zealand: Urban expansion fragmented landholdings. Empowering Maori trusts allowed communities to participate meaningfully in development.
- *Pacific Islands (Samoa, Vanuatu): Projects succeeded

when local governance structures were respected and benefits shared collectively (AusAID, 2007).

*Africa (Zimbabwe, Kenya): State-led urban expansion on communal land often caused conflicts where traditional governance was bypassed.

The key lesson that we learn from here is that development works best when it incorporates indigenous governance and customary land systems from the outset.

Ecological and Cultural Considerations

New Shillong's development intersects with environmental concerns. Sacred groves, streams, and forests are vital for biodiversity and traditional livelihoods. Urbanization threatens these areas unless planning integrates protection of cultural and ecological spaces. Sustainable development could include: Protecting sacred groves and forested areas, Preserving water sources for villages and agriculture and Integrating green spaces in urban planning. Such measures reinforce cultural continuity and maintain ecological balance.

Meghalaya can model inclusive urban planning by integrating customary land systems.

Transparent Consultation: Engage Dorbar Shnong, Hima, women custodians, and youth in planning.

Clear Land Ownership Records: Identify whether land is Ri Raid, Ri Kynsi, or privately registered.

Collective Compensation: Ensure benefits reach the community rather than select individuals.

Protection of Cultural and Ecological Sites: Safeguard sacred groves and water sources.

Local Participation Guarantees: Prioritize jobs, skills training, and entrepreneurship opportunities for residents.

How do we balance modernity and tradition?

Urban growth is inevitable, and Shillong must expand to meet the demands of a modern economy. However, development without cultural sensitivity risks social fragmentation and loss of heritage.

The debate over Tynring illustrates that urban planning is not just technical; it is a negotiation between identity, tradition, and progress. A socially sustainable city integrates local communities into the process, ensuring that modernization does not come at the cost of cultural continuity.

The expansion of New Shillong can be a symbol of modern Meghalaya if it grows in harmony with its people and culture. Development that respects traditional land systems, preserves cultural heritage, and involves local communities in planning ensures that progress aligns with social and cultural values. Cities thrive not just on roads and buildings but on trust, cooperation, and respect for the past. The Tynring land debate demonstrates that urban growth and cultural continuity can coexist, setting a precedent for sustainable and inclusive development.

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(The writer is Assistant Professor, Sociology, Shillong)

Letters to the Editor:

Alarming Water Crisis in Mawprem!

Editor,

The densely populated village of Mawprem and its adjoining areas have been pushed into a state of distress due to an acute and unacceptable shortage of water for the past six consecutive days. Shockingly, this crisis has struck barely a week after a similar abrupt disruption, yet again without any prior warning to the public. For a basic necessity like water, such repeated failures are nothing short of inhuman.

It was reported through your esteemed daily that the current disruption is due to the bursting of a main water pipeline at HQ 101 Area, and that water supply would remain suspended for four days. But does merely issuing a public notification absolve the Government of its fundamental responsibility? If corrective measures were truly effective, how has a four-day disruption now stretched to nearly double the promised duration? This glaring gap between assurance and action exposes a

serious lack of preparedness and accountability.

While the PHE workers may be putting in their efforts, the ground reality reflects otherwise. Residents—children, elderly persons, and patients alike—are forced to struggle daily for every drop of water. Life cannot be paused while authorities calculate timelines.

Even more disturbing is the deafening silence of our elected representatives—the Shillong MP, MLA, and MDCs. In a crisis of this magnitude, their inaction is unforgivable. At the very least, temporary emergency measures, such as arranging private water tankers to refill public water tanks, should have been taken to ease the suffering of the very people who elected them.

This letter must be treated as an SOS call—a desperate appeal from citizens who feel abandoned. Water is not a luxury; it is a basic human right. Continued neglect of this crisis will only deepen public anger and erode trust in governance.

We demand, not request immediate intervention!

Yours etc.,
Krishna Chettri,
Via email

Need to observe decorum in public life

Editor,

Through the columns of your esteemed daily, I wish to express my deep concern over a recently circulated video showing the MLA of Mawlai Constituency publicly scolding an engineer for arriving late to a scheduled inspection of a road construction project.

There is no dispute that punctuality, discipline, and accountability are fundamental to effective public service. However, these principles must be upheld within the bounds of institutional decorum. Publicly humiliating an officer especially with the apparent intention of recording the episode for circulation on social media undermines the dignity of public institutions and reduces the serious business of governance to a spectacle.

The incident also exposes a troubling double standard. It is not unusual for members of the public to wait for extended periods for politicians attending programmes as chief

guests, yet such delays are seldom questioned or criticised. Accountability cannot be selectively enforced, nor can discipline be demanded of officers alone while elected representatives remain beyond similar scrutiny.

Regrettably, the growing trend of public rebuke amplified through social media appears less aimed at administrative reforms and more at garnering cheap publicity. Political leadership must be measured by vision, integrity, and the ability to deliver effective governance, not by performative acts designed for digital applause.

It is hoped that this episode will prompt serious introspection among those in public office and reaffirm the need for restraint, maturity, and respect in the exercise of authority. Only then can public leadership command both credibility and moral authority.

Yours etc.,
Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via email

A transformative victory

Editor,
As a resident of Nongkseh,

I take immense pride in the remarkable achievements of the Nongkseh Sports Social & Cultural Club, whose historic triumph in winning the SSA First-Division League and the SSA Super Cup 2025 has etched a golden chapter in the annals of Shillong football.

These victories are not merely trophies added to a cabinet, they symbolize years of perseverance, belief and collective effort. More importantly, they reflect a larger transformation in the footballing landscape of Shillong—one that has been shaped and strengthened by the unwavering involvement of the community.

The resurgence of football enthusiasm in Nongkseh has been nothing short of inspirational. The active participation, encouragement, and passion of the residents played a decisive role in motivating the players and the club management alike. Football once again became a shared emotion, a unifying force that brought together people of all ages and backgrounds under one banner.

One of the most powerful sights this season was the SSA Stadium witnessing full-capacity attendance after many years. The packed stands, the

chants and the sea of supporters clad in club colours were a testament to how deeply the club's journey resonated with the people. It reaffirmed the idea that when a community stands firmly behind its team, extraordinary things can happen.

The success of Nongkseh Sports Social & Cultural Club goes beyond silverware. It has rekindled hope, revived interest and set a new benchmark for community-driven football in Shillong. The club has shown that with unity, grassroots support and vision, local football can thrive and inspire.

Perhaps this marks the beginning of a new era in Shillong football—one where clubs are powered not just by talent on the pitch, but by the heartbeat of the community off it. If that is the case, Nongkseh Sports Social & Cultural Club deserves to be celebrated as the catalyst of this promising change.

Yours etc.,
Fabian R Thangkiew,
Via email

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Rural jobs revamp

CLEARLY, the restructuring of the rural employment guarantee scheme is a step in the right direction. The introduction of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) in 2005 was a visionary decision to help the rural poor escape situations of joblessness and poverty. At the same time, it also helped in money circulation in villages to a significant level. Mostly poor women are engaged in this scheme, which helps them and their families survive financial odds. India still remains a largely poor nation though sections of the population are well-off. Subsidized ration keeps the poor in some shape. That some 20 years have passed since the introduction of the rural work facility makes it imperative that a relook is done through a proper and extensive review of the existing system.

The government justifies the overhaul of the scheme on the ground that the original law no longer reflected the current rural realities. As it notes, aspects like misuse of funds through inflated worker participation, weak monitoring and creation of low-quality assets or temporary improvements, required a revamp. The good side of the changes need to be appreciated and flaws, if any, rectified through discussions. The new system proposes a technology driven rural employment system wherein monitoring will be easier. Digitised payment system would improve accountability and transparency. Digital wage payments would ensure those who oversee the scheme in each village would not take a cut on one pretext or the other. An AI-based fraud detection system is to be introduced into the system. The revamped scheme prioritises water-related works, erection or maintenance of rural roads, setting up of markets, climate-resilient assets etc. This might raise agricultural productivity and reduce job-related distress migrations. Mandatory unemployment allowance in situations when work could not be provided, as in a rainy season, is appreciable.

The number of work-days has been increased from a standard 100 days to 125 days – but, the new system removes the provision for more work days that had been made for certain tribal areas and drought-hit regions. The funds for the scheme would be mobilized on a 60-40 basis for states, other than those in the North-East where this ratio would be 90-10 for the Centre and states respectively. A provision has been made to avoid labour shortage during seasons of agricultural operations, by exempting such phases from the scheme's implementation period. Such changes will be well-appreciated. The name change, however, causes a lot of heartburns; and rightly so. The Mahatma Gandhi name has disappeared, and the scheme would now be known as G RAM G, with its elaboration being The Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin). The Mahatma holds a unique place in public minds. His care for the ordinary masses and his clean public life were unique. It's common knowledge that the Sangh Parivar sought to undercut his importance in the post-Independence era. Gandhiji's death itself was at the hands of a Hindu fundamentalist. The Congress mostly upheld his legacy. Times, however, are changing. Yet, this name-change should have been avoided. It serves no purpose.

When Policy Forgets the Teacher: Reflections on NEP and Academic Life

By Bhogtaram Mawroh

tions in journals that are not of high quality. And even if there are some good papers, unless they are the first author, it is clear that they have just been added for formality, especially if the first author is their student.

But then every now and then one finds people who deeply care about the work they do. This usually happens when scholars from around the country and outside come together to share their work. Then there are workshops where experts in the field share their work, full of interesting facts and perspectives that open the possibility of what kind of work can happen within the discipline. Movies like *A Beautiful Mind*, where Russell Crowe portrays a disturbed genius, John Nash, who found solace in going back to teaching while still struggling with schizophrenia, were also quite inspirational. And then there are books written by stalwarts in the field that not only change the discipline but also change the language spoken by people in everyday life without the common public realizing it. So, despite all the problems that exist in academia, there are also those who give hope that academia can make a difference. At least that's what I thought when I decided that I wanted to become a teacher.

My first ever job was teaching 10+2 students in a local college where my salary was just around 2,000 rupees per month. Even in those days, the amount was meagre. But the syllabus was light, and I did not have many classes, so I had no issues. Then I joined my PhD and was also appointed as a guest lecturer, which involved taking a maximum of a couple of classes a day. I soon realized that the materials I had were not enough to teach the course, even though I had studied the same papers during my postgraduate days. I frantically started searching for materials and found some good books which helped me prepare, but the process was extremely stressful. I would prepare for my classes during breaks and even back in the hostel where I was staying. Before long, I immediately understood that if I had to do justice, I would have to read a lot and prepare extensive

reading materials for the students. All in all, teaching the postgraduate course was a good experience, and I was looking forward to doing it again someday.

I wanted to do my postdoc but needed something in between until my application got through. At that moment, I was under serious financial stress and wanted to get a job no matter the remuneration. I saw an application for a teaching position in Arunachal Pradesh and decided to apply. I cleared the interview, and not long after, I arrived at the college carrying my trunk full of books, excited but also relieved. The principal put me up in an empty classroom near the girls' bathroom because the accommodation was not ready. I was not happy, but I decided to straightaway focus on my lessons.

This time around, I was teaching 10+2 as well as undergraduates, so my workload increased. I was working all the time, during school hours and even after. In the evening, when the principal, a Catholic priest, would be doing his rounds, I would still be working on preparing my lessons in the dark since constant blackouts were a common occurrence in the area. Internet connectivity was also weak, and I was finding it difficult to search for materials for my lessons. I had the books, but they were not enough for what I wanted to teach the students. Not very far from the college was a natural pool where the teachers would go for a swim during free hours. I would join them, but I would be thinking about the lessons the whole time. This went on for a few months. While the principal liked my work, I was under a tremendous amount of stress, constantly worried that I was not getting enough time to prepare for the classes. Finally, I parted ways with the college and came back home. This was almost ten years ago. That experience taught me that teaching, when stretched beyond reasonable limits, becomes unsustainable. I wanted to be a teacher, but I just couldn't handle the stress of taking too many classes that left me with no time for anything else.

In time, I would have been asked to shoulder additional

administrative responsibilities, which would have made it worse. And the constant fear of failing my students made me feel even guiltier. I am not claiming that those who continued teaching are not sincere, but the stress of taking too many classes and additional responsibilities is a very real problem. So, when I read the report by AISEC, it immediately brought back memories of my own struggles as a teacher. Some parents might not sympathize with the plight of teachers, claiming that teachers are not supposed to complain about doing their job, despite the fact that many teachers are temporary and their pay is very low. The same parents will regularly complain about their own stressful working environment and insufficient pay.

It is against this background that the rollout of the NEP, in the words of Rajya Sabha MP Wanwei Roy Kharlukhi, appears "hasty and unplanned" resulting in overburdened colleges and students alike. According to him, colleges are suffering from acute fund shortages, lacking new laboratories, classrooms, libraries, digital infrastructure, and additional faculty required for interdisciplinary subjects. The last part is very crucial because it has enormously increased the burden on teachers, which has made it difficult for them to fulfil their duty. And when teachers are demotivated, it doesn't take long for the lessons to also suffer, which ultimately harms the students. There will be some who will "batai stad" and explain how teachers are just lazy. In my experience, such people are like the charlatans I have described above from my university days. So, I wouldn't trust them.

Teachers are an important pillar of the education system. But first of all, they are human beings who deserve a decent life where they can do their best for their students and their family. It is possible that such a balance can be achieved. Increasing their workload, however, is going to destroy any chance of that. We must therefore listen to AISEC and to W. Kharlukhi and find a just solution to the education problems in our state.

(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

Tirupati Dupatta and Christmas Cake..!

This year at the Christmas fairs, I began to notice something unusual. Or perhaps it was not unusual at all, but simply more visible. Instead of drifting lazily from stall to stall, humming carols and greeting familiar faces, shoppers were huddled around cake counters with the seriousness of detectives examining evidence in a crime scene.

"Does this cake have enough nuts?" one auntie asked, tapping the box as though she expected the almonds to knock back in protest.

"It looks stingy on raisins," another complained, her voice carrying the weight of a personal betrayal.

A third peered closely and announced with certainty that the cherries were smaller than last year, as if cherries too had decided to quietly join the inflation club. And so began what I can only call the Great Christmas Cake Inquisition of the season.

Boxes were opened. Lids lifted. Plastic covers peeled back. Fingers pointed. Heads nodded knowingly. Nuts were inspected. Raisins were suspected. Cherries were

has been bruised.

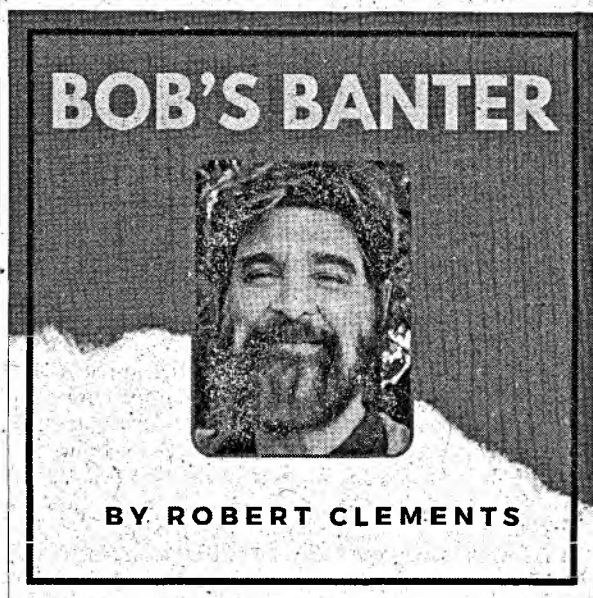
If a religious institution can sell a polymer dupatta in the name of faith, who can blame a shopper for doubting whether the cake has real cashews or cleverly coloured peanuts pretending to be something more?

This year has made it painfully clear that dishonesty now walks confidently through the front doors of our institutions. It no longer sneaks in through the back. Chanakya cleverness is praised. Cheating is normalised. Shortcuts are admired. Those who bend rules are celebrated for their smartness, while those who choose integrity are mocked for their foolishness.

We clap for jugaad. We wink at manipulation. We excuse corruption if it benefits us. And slowly, without realising it, we lower the bar for what is acceptable.

In such a climate, it is not surprising that suspicion becomes the default setting. People no longer trust easily because trust has become expensive. It costs too much emotionally to believe and then be betrayed.

And yet, Christmas arrives quietly every year, refusing to shout over the noise. No aggressive market-



judged. One might have thought the future of the nation depended entirely on whether the plum cake had the correct ratio of dry fruits. Meanwhile, in the background, a choir sang softly about peace on earth and goodwill to all. No one seemed to be listening.

As I stood there watching this intense examination of innocent cakes, a troubling thought settled in. Maybe we are not suddenly obsessed with nuts and raisins. Maybe we have started examining the cake so closely because everything else around us has begun crumbling.

That thought was reinforced when I opened the newspaper later in the day and saw the headlines. The silk dupatta that many devotees had bought at Tirupati with deep faith and devotion, believing it to be pure silk offered in reverence, had apparently turned out to be not silk at all. It was reported to be a cheap polymer masquerading as holiness.

Earlier, there had already been murmurs and controversies surrounding the famous Tirupati ladoos. And now this. A fake dupatta in a sacred space. When fraud and cheating enter religion, something far more dangerous than financial loss occurs. Trust is damaged. And once suspicion takes root, it does not remain confined to one shrine or one faith. It spreads like icing sugar in the wind. One temple scandal and suddenly people begin to wonder about churches, mosques and gurudwaras. If deception can walk confidently into the holiest of places, what hope remains for the rest of society?

We live in a time where nothing is taken at face value anymore. Labels are questioned. Claims are doubted. Promises are read with a magnifying glass. And perhaps rightly so.

I thought again of those cake shoppers poking at plum cakes with almost forensic focus. Maybe they are not really looking for nuts. Maybe they are looking for reassurance. Reassurance in a world where trust has become fragile and belief

ing. No loud declarations. Just a simple story repeated again and again.

A child in a manger. No palace. No privilege. No deception. No grand claims. Just truth wrapped in vulnerability.

That child never pretended. He never exaggerated. He never sold a fake product to believers. His life was pure. His message transparent. His purpose honest.

In a world obsessed with appearances, He dealt in substance. In a culture that glorifies shortcuts, He chose the long road of obedience and sacrifice. In a society comfortable with half truths, He spoke truth without compromise.

Perhaps that is why His story still unsettles people. It exposes us. It reminds us of what we once valued and have since misplaced.

So, when you stand at a cake counter this Christmas and find yourself checking for missing nuts, pause for a moment. Think beyond the cake. Think of that Babe in the manger.

Then make a quiet promise to yourself. Put the nuts back where they belong.

The nuts of integrity. The nuts of honesty. The nuts of fairness and transparency.

Put them back into your conversations. Into your work. Into your business dealings. Into your parenting. Into your citizenship.

Because a nation does not crumble overnight. It crumbles slowly when values are diluted and deception is tolerated.

And perhaps, just perhaps, when we stop selling polymer dupattas as silk and stop pretending peanuts are cashews, we might rediscover something far richer than dry fruits in a cake.

We might rediscover trust.

And that, more than any plum cake, is what would truly make this Christmas sweet..!

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

Shillong's Shameful Water Crisis

Editor,

Through the esteemed columns of your daily, I wish to draw urgent attention to the unbearable plight of consumers under the Greater Shillong Water Supply Scheme (GSWSS), where several localities have been left without water supply for over a week. This is not merely an inconvenience, it is a humanitarian failure. The prolonged disruption has exposed the lackadaisical and indifferent attitude of the Public Health Engineering Department and the Shillong Municipal Board, who have once again shown their true colours.

When drinking water crisis arises especially due to the appointment of inexperienced personnel to head crucial divisions, is it not the sole and mandatory responsibility of the concerned department (PHED) and the Municipal Board to immediately deploy water tankers and ensure supply to RCC tanks across affected localities to tide over the emergency? It is deeply distressing to witness that the government of the day appears least bothered about the suffering of its citizens. Where are the water tanker vehicles when citizens need them the most? Are they meant only to exist on paper and official files? Who will take responsibility for this administrative mess and public hardship? The silence

of the authorities is all the more shocking when the city is in the midst of preparations for Christmas, one of the most important festivals for thousands of families in Shillong and the cleaning drive being conducted in various localities.

Denial of access to safe drinking water at such a time reflects a serious moral and governance failure. The public must not remain silent on this burning issue, especially when several crores have been pumped into this project. Democratic accountability demands that citizens speak out, and the concerned Minister should take moral responsibility for this failure and step aside. Governance without accountability only deepens public distrust. I urge the affected people of Shillong not to remain mute spectators but to raise their collective voice until immediate corrective measures are taken. Access to water is not a privilege, it is a basic right.

Yours etc.,
H.T. Wells,
Shillong-2

Why Meghalaya Needs the Protection of Article 371

Editor,

In Meghalaya, discussions have emerged regarding the potential for special constitutional provisions, drawing parallels to Ar-

ticle 371 provisions in other states. The core of this conversation often revolves around safeguarding indigenous rights, land ownership and customary laws, which are legitimate aspirations for the state's unique cultural landscape.

Article 371(A) for Nagaland, for instance, explicitly protects Naga customary law and procedure, and the ownership and transfer of land and its resources from parliamentary acts, unless the state assembly decides otherwise. This form of robust constitutional asymmetry offers a model for true local autonomy, something the current Sixth Schedule structure has struggled to deliver in practice when faced with national regulations like the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act. Empowering our Autonomous District Councils with such definitive powers would ensure that decisions regarding our ancestral lands and traditional economic practices remain with the local communities.

Granting similar tailored provisions to Meghalaya, designed in consultation with the diverse communities could be a significant step toward preserving the unique cultural identities and interests of the Khasi, Jaintia and Garo communities. It could support local decision-making and help ensure that development approaches are in harmony with the community's specific needs and traditions.

While some may express concerns about potential administrative complexities

and the adequacy of these sites. The absence of trained guides, proper waste disposal systems, and crowd control measures reflects poor planning and administration. The Tourism Department should take immediate steps to improve infrastructure, ensure cleanliness, regulate vendors, and promote responsible tourism. Public awareness campaigns can also help visitors respect and protect these spots.

I hope this issue will receive attention through your newspaper and prompt and timely action.

Yours etc.,
Hilarious Umdor,
Shillong -8

Mismanagement of tourist spots in and around Shillong

Editor,

I would like to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to the growing mismanagement of tourist spots in and around Shillong.

Popular places such as Ward's Lake, Elephant Falls, and Shillong Peak often suffer from overcrowding, poor cleanliness, lack of proper signage, and inadequate facilities for visitors. Littering, plastic waste, and unregulated vendors have become common sights, which not only inconvenience tourists but also damage the natural beauty of these locations.

Despite Shillong being a major tourist destination, there is little monitoring

or maintenance of these sites. The absence of trained guides, proper waste disposal systems, and crowd control measures reflects poor planning and administration.

The Tourism Department should take immediate steps to improve infrastructure, ensure cleanliness, regulate vendors, and promote responsible tourism. Public awareness campaigns can also help visitors respect and protect these spots.

I hope this issue will receive attention through your newspaper and prompt and timely action.

Yours etc.,
Sushmita Ghosh,
Shillong-4

Smoking in public places: A Social concern

Editor,

Through your paper, I want to share my concern about the increasing habit of smoking in public places. We all know there are two kinds of smokers—active smokers who smoke by choice and passive smokers who end up breathing the smoke without wanting to. I am not against anyone who smokes; that is their personal choice. But smoking in public and affecting others is something that really needs attention. Even though many "No Smoking" signs are put up around the city, people hardly seem to care. Authorities also do not take the rules seriously.

Many of us might have

faced similar situations. For example, the sidewalk near the entrance of Nazareth Hospital in Shillong is always crowded, yet many attendants smoke there as if it is normal. Some even sit along the roadside, smoking and spitting. The authorities should put up clear signboards and monitor the area properly. A similar thing happened to me recently in a restaurant. There was no smoking area, yet a group of customers at the next table lit their cigarettes and smoked openly. What surprised me more was that the waitress and receptionist did not say anything. I thought of telling them to stop but decided not to, just to avoid an argument. As a non-smoker, the experience was uncomfortable and irritating. People need to understand that there is a proper place and time for everything. I have friends who smoke, but they do it quietly and respectfully. The real issue is not smoking itself, but the lack of discipline in public.

The COTPA Act, 2003, clearly bans smoking in public places and also imposes fines. But unless the law is taken seriously, nothing will change. Smokers may not worry about their own health, but I worry about mine and about the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. I request the authorities and the public to take this issue seriously and act before it becomes an even bigger problem.

Yours etc.,
Gangmei Zeppuh,
Via email

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*"Decision making is easy when
your values are clear."*

— Roy Disney

The Shillong Times

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Administration flops: Court Intervenes

THE water crisis in large parts of Shillong city caused by a major leakage of a water pipe at 101 area where a major road construction project is underway has exposed a weak flank in administration – namely the absence of an emergency response system. The destruction of a water pipeline that supplies water to large parts of Shillong while an accidental act required an emergency response system to be in place and for the Public Health Engineering Department (PHED) to respond immediately and restore the water supply within the shortest possible time. For that to happen the PHED should have a standard operating procedure (SOP) in place which it is supposed to follow in case of a natural disaster. The destruction of a major pipeline is nothing less than a disaster and that requires that SOPs are followed.

The SOP includes carrying out timely repairs where necessary. For doing this the Executive Engineer in charge of the district needs to maintain a proper inventory in terms of materials, spare parts needed and skilled manpower. A crack team of trained and skilled human resource team for repairing the fault was imperative. The PHED should have an alternative source to feed the areas that are being starved of water supply. Alternatively, water should have been supplied to the overhead tanks that distribute water to homes. How the PHED manages this should have been well within its SOP. The present water crisis has exposed a major faultline which is that all infrastructure is not in place and the human resources have not been adequately groomed to attend to an emergency vis a vis water supply. When road construction work happens along areas which are also the pathways of major water pipes supplying water to a populated area, such exigencies as have happened at 101 area are inevitable. So why is the PHED caught napping? The Department should have ensured that minimum inventory of water supply and spare parts as may be required by Executive Engineers in the event of a disaster are ready and available and also a roster of staff to be deployed during the disaster. The SOP should include preparation of an Action Plan which encompasses management, coordination, implementation and monitoring of repair work for water supply on an emergency basis. Unfortunately, nothing of the sort has happened and the time for restoring water supply kept getting extended in typical officialdom without any accountability.

It is therefore only fair to the citizenry that the High Court should step in when the government has failed to respond adequately to this water crisis. However, what is likely to happen is that once water is restored everything will be forgotten and things will drift to "business as usual." Neither the Chief Engineer PHED nor the Minister in Charge of the Department will be held accountable as they should in other more developed states. It is this sheer lack of accountability in the governance system that emboldens those in government to shirk their duties and push the blame elsewhere, knowing that they will never be reprimanded. Here the role of the elected representatives too leaves much to be desired. Many MLAs remained silent spectators to this crisis because it did not affect their constituencies. When will legislators learn their basic responsibilities and call out bad governance?

Babu Soso Tham, Khasi Language and Eighth Schedule

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

December 18, 2025, marks the 85th Death Anniversary of Babu Soso Tham and to pay homage to the bard of Hynniewtrep land and poet laureate, I wish to pen down on the subject above.

Babu Soso Tham and his Students: Babu Soso Tham began his writing career together with his students of Government High School, Shillong then. In his book, *Ki Poetry Khasi*, (which later became *Duitara Ksiar or Golden Duitara*), the first English poem which he translated together with the class X students inside the class room was "Drive the Nail Aright." In typical Soso Tham style, he challenged the entire class to writing poetry and confessed that he knew nothing about the art, foot, rhyme and rhythm of poetry. He further explained through the powerful analogy of dry/dead bones of dead cows strewn on the hill tops and slopes, as no one ever taught him to fertilize the paddy field of Khasi Language. Amid laughter the entire class came to life and every student contributed to his book of *Khasi Poems*.

S. J. Duncan who was one of his students, wrote during the celebration of Soso Tham's 25th Death Anniversary organised by the Khasi Students' Association in 1965, "I vividly remember that between the year 1913-14, I witnessed first hand that Babu Soso Tham was anxious to let go of something. That his heart was restless and waiting with bated breath on the opportune moment to share with students and the entire community of what he had conceived or processed in his thoughts for so long. Therefore, I now confessed that what I witnessed had come to fruition and that what Babu Soso had collected bit by bit and filled himself with knowledge, today it turned out to be goldmines of Khasi literature and it will certainly uplift the standard of Khasi writings and language."

Another renowned Khasi poet, Oscar M. Wahlang, who had also translated into English, Soso Tham's epic poetry, *Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniewtrep or Olden Days of Hynniewtrep*, wrote about Soso Tham and his golden era (U SOSO THAM HA KA AIOM KSIAR), between 1955-56, "Soso Tham's greatness lies in his translation works and he was the master translator... Behind his epic poetry, 'Ki Sngi Barim u Hynniewtrep,' was Soso Tham; but who was Soso Tham and the knowledge about his persona was

scantly written. His contemporaries will never reveal the true Soso Tham. Irrespective of what was told or written about him, his works clearly pointed out that there existed the young Byron in Khasi Hills. Ki Sngi Barim U Hynniewtrep was his intoxication as he himself confessed of not knowing the art of writing poetry, until this lack of knowledge compelled him to commune with Sana Pani (a water falls located near Lower Mawprem and can be seen from Mawlai) which would eventually breathe into him songs and poetry... Certainly Soso Tham had vomited the books which the Khasis had devoured in ancient times and put them back into written words..."

The Evolution of Khasi Language: Without delving into historical details and the role of Christian Missions and Khasi renaissance in the development of Khasi Language, there are two major components of Khasi Language, namely, the spoken and written forms. Moreover, there are also branches of Khasi Language or dialects or ki 'tien shnong, spoken in a village or cluster of villagers or thain across the Hynniewtrep region. According to R. S. Lyngdoh, "In olden times the Khasis were not familiar with the modern concept of written language, but they had the wisdom to store their knowledge in the green leaves of nature that surrounded them. The present generation may have developed the language and published numerous books, but they will not be able to attain wisdom if they forget what was written on the leaves. This made Soso Tham consider the entire ecology/environment as the library or encyclopaedia of knowledge for the Khasi people". G. A. Grierson was the first linguist to study about the branches of Khasi Language and he found only three branches, viz, Lyngngam, Synteng and War. Today local and indigenous linguists with profound knowledge on the subject are able to collect and document on many branches within the larger Khasi Language. Recently, Esther Syiem had collected and documented about several branches and these are, Nongtalang, Darrang, Umladang, Iapngar, Nongbri, Mnar, Nongkreim, Khat-ar Blang, Nongskhen, Umñiuh Tmar, Shella, Mawsynram, Phlangwanbroi, Warding bad Mawpen while Badaplin War conducted a detailed study and analysis on these

Khasi dialect like Mawlai, Jowai, Nongbri, Nongwar and Pariang.

Similarly, Dorismelincy Byrsat published her most fascinating study on the variation between the standard Khasi Language and Nongstoin dialect. She noted the sudden rise of research or analytical study and documentation on the various branches or dialects spoken across the Khasi and Jaintia Hills. However, the publication of the same for public reading and promotion of usage of Khasi Language and its variations is yet to get accelerated.

On the other hand, S. S. Majaw opines that it is easier to speak than to write in Khasi. Therefore, the usage of Khasi language must not be enslaved or constricted by grammar and other rules of linguistic studies. They must only act as guiding light for speakers and writers. We must not create a Babel for Khasi Language.

The other contributing factors to the evolution of Khasi language are borrowing and innovation of new Khasi words. Throughout generations, Khasi language has been enriched by words borrowed from other languages and cultures with which the Khasis had come in contact with. At the same time the innovation of new words is crucial for its development.

Bakhiamon Rynjah defended the idea of borrowing as it does not imply that the Khasi Language is either weak or impoverished, rather the borrowed words greatly enhanced the development of Khasi language. In the study of the Khasi Dictionary by U Nissor Singh it is found that out of total 6595 words, 417 are borrowed from Indo-Aryan, 34 from non Indo-Aryan, 32 from English and 2 from Arabic. Whereas in the Dianshonhi by Rev. Larington Kharkongor, it is found that out of a total of 8033 words, 316 words are borrowed from Indo-Aryan, 56 from non Indo-Aryan, 53 from English, 2 from Arabic and 1 Nepali.

Also, the innovation of new Khasi words must be encouraged and in the photo book by Tarun Bhartiya entitled *Em, No, Nahi*, which was launched last week, it is found that a new Khasi word was created for Uranium which is "Moraniuh." Don-dor Girl Nongkhlaw, who translated the Short Guide to Uranium, which is appended to the photo book, explained

that the word Moraniuh is the combination of three syllable, Mo, Ra and Nium. "Mo" or "Mu" meaning stone in Pnar, "Ra" refers to the decay inside and "Nium" is a Khasi word for pervading illness that seeps inside the human body. Thus, "the Khasi translation renders Uranium as Moraniuh, "a stone that causes decay and illness from within."

The Demand for Eighth Schedule: In 1976 (three years before the formation of Khasi Authors' Society), the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council passed a resolution demanding the inclusion of Khasi Language into the 8th Schedule of the Constitution of India. The demand for recognition of Khasi language gained momentum with the visit of the Expert Committee constituted by the Sahitya Academy to look into the development and usage of Khasi Language in 1977 and 1985 respectively. The Expert Committee had submitted its report and findings in 1985.

The voices for recognition of Khasi language are getting louder with the Khasi Authors' Society demanding the declaration of Khasi as associate official language in the State in 1997. However, the inclusion of Khasi Language in the 8th Schedule needs consideration by Central Government, but to the utter disappointment of the Khasi people; the Government of India has only prepared a standard reply on the matter in the Lok Sabha thus - "There have been demands from time to time for inclusion of Khasi in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution. The Central Government had received a proposal in this regard. As the evolution of dialects and languages is a dynamic process, influenced by socio-cultural, economic and political developments, it is difficult to fix any criteria for languages, whether to distinguish them from dialects, or for their inclusion in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution."

It must be noted that the Government of India had constituted two important Commissions: the Palwa Committee (1996) and Sitakant Mahapatra Committee (2003). But the Government of India is yet to accept the recommendations of the Sitakant Mahapatra Committee. Is this the reason why Khasi Language has not yet gained official recognition? And if so what are the reservations against granting recognition to Khasi language?

A Nail Without a Hammer Talent Without Political Will in Meghalaya

By Roy Kupar Synrem

"A nail is useless unless driven by the hammer. In the same way, talents are useless unless driven by people in power." This is the quote I came across in a Book titled "Grains of Thoughts" by Dr. B. P. Toi. The book is a collection of thought-provoking quotes which the author has compiled as grains of wisdom and reflections for the readers. As a concerned citizen of the State, I felt it apt and necessary to expand the said quote in the context of the State and its leadership by putting down my views and opinions of how the talent of our youths are being wasted in the absence of a Policy to nurture, guide and support them.

The quote stated above captures the disconcerting truth about the dilemma of thousands of talented youths in Meghalaya today. It is a fact that talent by itself is never enough. Past experiences repeatedly show that individual brilliance flourishes only when supported, guided, and propelled by institutions and political will. In the absence of such support, even the sharpest minds remain unused—like nails scattered on the ground, never driven into purpose.

Meghalaya is not a State lacking in talent. From

excels—are another example of wasted potential. The State produces gifted athletes and artists, yet lacks world-class training facilities, professional coaching, sports science support, and transparent selection systems. Recognition often comes only after individuals succeed elsewhere, raising the uncomfortable question: why must talent leave Meghalaya to be valued?

Perhaps the most damaging consequence of weak political will is the steady out-migration of skilled youth. Doctors, engineers, teachers, entrepreneurs, and creatives leave in search of better opportunities, not because they lack love for their homeland, but because the State offers limited platforms to grow. This brain drain is not inevitable; it is the direct result of policy inaction and governance apathy.

People in power play a decisive role in shaping the destiny of our youths and the State as a whole. But when leadership prioritises short-term political gains over long-term human development, talent becomes collateral damage. When budgetary allocations for youth, research, innovation, and culture remain minimal, it sends a clear message:

"There is no long-term planning to identify talent early, provide structured mentorship, or create pathways from education to employment. Skill development programmes exist largely on paper, disconnected from market realities and local economic needs."

sports and music to academics, entrepreneurship, traditional knowledge, and civil service aspirations, the youths of Meghalaya have demonstrated promise time and again. Young sports-persons excel at national levels despite minimal facilities; musicians gain recognition far beyond the borders of the State; students from remote villages crack competitive examinations with little institutional backing. These are not isolated miracles—they are proof of a deep and widespread reservoir of untapped ability which is neither nurtured nor given space to bloom.

Yet, talent alone does not create opportunity. It requires a "hammer"—clear policies, sustained investment, political commitment, and a governance ecosystem that recognises, nurtures, and retains human capital. Unfortunately, Meghalaya has long suffered from a policy vacuum and a lack of political urgency when it comes to youth development.

One of the most glaring failures lies in the absence of a comprehensive, outcome-driven youth and talent policy. While schemes and policies are announced periodically, they are often fragmented, poorly implemented, or limited to token gestures just for photo-ops. There is no long-term planning to identify talent early, provide structured mentorship, or create pathways from education to employment. Skill development programmes exist largely on paper, disconnected from market realities and local economic needs.

Education, the primary engine of talent development, reflects this neglect. Schools and colleges struggle with inadequate infrastructure, shortage of trained teachers, and outdated curricula. Rural and interior areas remain particularly disadvantaged, forcing capable students to migrate or abandon aspirations altogether.

Sports and arts—areas where Meghalaya naturally

potential is not a priority. When merit is overshadowed by patronage, talented youths lose faith in the very institutions that are meant to support them.

"Driving the nail" requires intention, precision, and force. For Meghalaya, this means crafting a clear youth development vision backed by legislation, adequate funding, and accountability. It means investing in education reform, sports infrastructure, growth centres, and local industries that can absorb skilled youth. It means creating transparent systems that reward merit and innovation, regardless of background or connections.

Most importantly, it requires political courage—the courage to see talent not as a photo opportunity, but as the State's greatest asset. Meghalaya's future does not lie in its minerals, forests, or geography alone; it lies in the minds and abilities of its young people.

A nail left unused eventually rusts. Similarly, talent left unsupported withers into frustration and lost potential. Meghalaya can no longer afford this waste. If those in power choose to become the hammer—firm, focused, and purposeful—the State's talent will not only find its place but will hold together the very structure of its development.

The present State government's initiatives and steps for youth development by implementing schemes and projects worth thousands of crores of rupees depends on effective implementation, fair access and measurable outcomes in terms of jobs, education, enterprise and skills. Whether these schemes and projects can truly translate into real opportunities that our young people can access locally, develop skills with real market values and build careers or businesses? Only time will tell. But what is life without hope?

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

Letters to the Editor

Education ultimately rests on the well-being of teachers

Editor,
Apropos the article "When Policy Forgets the Teacher: Reflections on NEP and Academic Life" authored by Bhogtaram Mawroh and published in The Shillong Times, it deserves sincere appreciation for bringing into the open a side of educational reform that is too often ignored - the side lived daily by teachers.

Much is written and spoken about policies, frameworks, and outcomes, but rarely do we pause to ask how these ideas are actually carried into classrooms, and at what personal cost. The author does precisely this. By drawing upon lived experience, the article gently, yet firmly reminds us that teachers are not abstract units within a system, but human beings working under very real constraints.

The article speaks of increasing workload, additional papers, and expanding responsibilities without a matching increase in staff or facilities. This is no exaggeration. It is a reality many teachers quietly endure. What is often missed is that teaching does not begin

and end with the classroom hour. It requires time to read, think, plan, and reflect. When teachers are burdened with continuous classes and administrative duties, this essential preparation is the first casualty.

I say this from personal experience. After retirement, when I joined a private school, I consciously prepared at home for my Sociology classes in Class XII and English in Class IX. I read, reflected, and planned each lesson with care so that students could understand concepts in depth, not merely memorise answers. That effort was possible only because there was time and mental calm to prepare. Without such space, even the most dedicated teacher is left struggling to keep pace.

The article also draws attention to the lack of basic academic support - limited library resources, poor internet connectivity, frequent power cuts, and the absence of proper spaces for study and preparation. Expecting teachers to deliver quality education under such conditions is unfair, yet this expectation has quietly become normal.

Most moving is the article's acknowledgments of the emotional burden teachers carry—the stress of unfinished syllabi, the guilt when students struggle, the pressure of deadlines, and the insecurity of temporary appointments. When teach-

ers speak of these realities, they are often dismissed as complaining. The article rightly shows that fatigue should never be mistaken for lack of commitment.

This is not an argument against reform. It is a reminder that reform must have a human face. Teachers are often called the backbone of the education system. But even a backbone needs care, balance, and rest. Ignoring this truth weakens the very structure we seek to strengthen.

Such voices deserve to be heard. One hopes that those who shape policy will read this article not defensively, but thoughtfully - and remember that education ultimately rests on the well-being of those who teach.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj
Via email

Neither substance nor solutions

Editor,
The article that appeared in the Shillong Times on Dec 17, 2025 titled, "When Policy Forgets the Teacher: Reflections on NEP and Academic Life," by Bhogtaram Mawroh makes painful reading. It is a lamentation on the plight of teachers. One of course, sympathises with the difficulties of teachers, especially in Meghalaya.

But all professions can complain about working conditions. Being employed comes with all sorts of occupational hazards. Those who find fulfilment in work are those who can rise above the ups and downs of the workplace. Those who work in central universities and colleges on central pay scales are a financially privileged lot. But we find all sorts of complaints even from those individuals. Complaints do work, but only up to a point. After that it's only a prescription for hoarseness.

The article in question was unique in that it was a personal litany of complaints. I'm not sure that lives described in such negative ways serve any useful purpose. I would recommend that this august newspaper limit such accounts of personal sorrow. Autobiographical accounts should be about constructive experiences that we can learn from or be inspired by. Enough of this personal hand-wringing.

The author is an articulate person with a PhD. But we didn't hear anything positive or constructive. Surely some ideas or solutions can be suggested, however small. In the last line he has conveniently passed the buck by saying, "We must therefore listen to AISEC and to W. Kharlukhi and find a just solution to the education problems in our state." If someone else is going to find the solution, what was the purpose of his

life story and the article?

Education in India is about regulatory bodies, institutions and teachers. The major stakeholders, the students, are hardly ever mentioned. They are not beneficiaries, mostly victims, tossed about on the tides of the system. Students are at the mercy of teacher egos and strict controls. There is little value in their so-called higher education. No wonder half of them drop out in Meghalaya. The title of the article reminds us that the system is teacher-centred. We need some articles on student-centred solutions.

Yours etc.,
Alphonse Lyngdoh,
Via email

On Smoking in Public Places

Editor,
I am writing in response to the letter by Gangmei Zeppu, published on December 17, 2025, regarding smoking in public places. I agree wholeheartedly with the concerns about the impact of smoking in public spaces, but I also feel that our city faces a larger issue with the overall disregard for signage and rules.

Often, I joke that people in Shillong don't seem to read English, given how many people ignore simple traffic signs. For instance,

the "No U-Turn" sign is often treated as a mere suggestion, just like the "No Parking," "No Overtaking," and "No Entry" signs that are constantly ignored by drivers. It's almost as though these signs exist in a parallel world, and the rules simply don't apply. This same behavior, unfortunately, seems to spill over into other areas of public life as well, including smoking.

The fact remains that public spaces, whether in our office, on the street, or in parks, are meant to be shared by all. We must learn to be considerate of others. Ignoring rules or inconveniencing others for the sake of a personal habit is not acceptable.

If we truly wish to make Shillong a cleaner and more harmonious place to live, we need to start taking public health and etiquette more seriously. It's not just about enforcing rules, but about understanding that public spaces exist for everyone. Whether it's smoking, littering, or any other behaviour, it's time we became more responsible citizens.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Yours etc.,
Joe Thangkhiw,
Shillong

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"Every moment of resistance to temptation is a victory."

— Frederick William Faber

The Shillong Times

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Births, balancing

THE world's main worry in the second half of the 20th Century, namely the uncontrolled population growth, has not only subsided for the most part, but a reverse push for increasing the birth-rate is currently on. Not just the developed West, but under-developed Asian nations too are now in a mood to encourage more births. Curiously, China that zealously pursued population control norms for decades, is now on a reverse drive -- after maintaining the status of being the world's largest population for decades. While India has edged past China to claim this position, the Communist neighbour has begun taking a series of steps to increase the nation's birth-rate. Its latest manifestation is in the form of a substantial hike in the taxes for condoms.

The Malthusian theory introduced in the 18th Century had warned of a growing mismatch between the availability of resources and growth in population. Unbridled population growth, it said, would cause a strain on resources. It cited the natural ways to control population, like pestilence, wars, famine etc., that resulted in wiping out millions of people from the planet. Population, he argued, grew geometrically while food supply increased arithmetically. He proposed actions like late marriages to reduce the population. However, he had not anticipated the future changes in social behaviour, like the growing tendency in wealthy western societies to avoid marriages. Not just the west, but nations like Russia and Japan too face similar situations. It would appear that the trend is catching up with China too, with youths showing lesser interest in marriage and procreation. The modern world offers all the charms of life on a platter. More so the developed societies.

Asian societies that are more tradition-oriented too are changing their perceptions about marriage. With women also becoming a large part of the workforce in mega cities, owning an accommodation is not affordable to many in urban sprawls like Tokyo. Maintaining a family involves a heavy cost. Chinese youths in big cities too are caught in a similar plight. Muslim nations however keep reporting a steady growth in their populations as the religion encourages procreation. In India, where its present 1.40 billion population grows at the rate of one crore a year, the decline of the fertility rate to 1.9 births per woman is raising serious concern, the replacement level being higher at 2.1. This signifies a reversal of the population growth-trend. Notably, a chief minister has gone on record to urge families to have three children. Thomas Malthus had stated in 1798 that nature has its own ways of controlling population -- like famine, pestilence and war. Covid-19 came but vaccines blunted its edge in a few months. In nations like India, subsidized food supply through ration shops keeps the poor alive. Wars of the modern kind kill fewer people as these are fought from the skies, and inflict mainly economic disaster for rival nations. It's but natural that a disinterest among the new societies for procreation comes as a new, natural balancing act.

Hollowing out tradition; Education in a bubble

By Patricia Mukhim

Travelling to the rural outback of Meghalaya used to be a bonus because the greenery is lush and the forests beckon. Today we are greeted by barren hills that have been cut and sliced and diced by JCBs because boulders have to be gouged out and so must sand be mined from the bosom of our once thriving rivers. While construction demands that boulders, stone chips and sand be available, what is painful in the case of Meghalaya is that roughly about 300-400 trucks of boulders are traded to Bangladesh on a daily basis. As I have reiterated time and again, we are selling our entire environment to Bangladesh. Naturally the climate has changed and so has the countenance of many of our rivers. Those within Shillong city have become public drains. They are receptacles for septic tanks that release raw faecal matter directly into the rivers, not to speak of kitchen waste water.

Now when the Meteorology Department informs us that we are getting 52% less rainfall we mean that this is due to climate change. But who has pushed the climate to the edge if not us thoughtless, selfish and cruel humans! Any attempt to point to this crude exploitation of nature beyond its capacity to rejuvenate itself is termed as 'elitist' and of not understanding the need for generating livelihoods by selling boulders, sand, limestone, coal and perhaps at some distant stage even uranium. I find it a little troubling that the people who make such a brouhaha about uranium mining have nothing to say about the ruthless exploitation of the environment by those extracting and exploiting nature for commercial purposes without following any environmental laws. Meghalaya is in fact a lawless state. Anyone can do anything if he/she has the money to shut the mouths of meddlesome pressure groups.

This deep concern for the environment resurfaces every time we discuss climate change and how we are adapting and how climate resilient we are. I was having a conversation with Dr Abbas Kazim MPH, MBA currently attached to NEIGRIHMS. Dr Kazim is trying to understand whether the indigenous healing system practised by tribal healers is still largely prevalent and whether climate change has had any impact

in terms of biodiversity loss and whether plants and trees they traditionally relied on for medicines are still available. We know that Khasi healers rely on indigenous methods of healing through use of leaves, roots, fruits, seeds and the bark of certain trees but it is doubtful if any study has been conducted so far about the dwindling population of such healing plants. The problem is that the traditional healing system has not been documented because healers don't want to part with their knowledge system for fear that someone else would take away their livelihood.

It is only in recent times that several traditional healers congregated at Martin Luther Christian University (MLCU) where a seminar on Tribal Health and Well Being was organised by the University and jointly sponsored by the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation and the Indian Institute of Public Health. MLCU has come up with a book which is a treasure trove of knowledge and a product of extensive research by the University faculty over a period of several years. The book also titled, Tribal Health and Wellbeing in Meghalaya, India is perhaps the first of its kind that minutely documents everything that traditional healers have shared. The book is meant to address gaps in knowledge due to paucity of material on traditional healing practices. At the seminar the traditional healers displayed the different herbs, leaves, flowers, fruits, seeds etc. to an interested audience and also explained how each was used to heal a particular ailment.

But Meghalaya need not have sunk this low insofar as transfer of knowledge to the younger generation is concerned. When we were growing up our mothers and grandmothers would tell us the names of plants, herbs and fruits and tell us what each one is used for what purpose. For instance, the leaf called Langtana jong in Khasi is very good at controlling bleeding due to cuts and wounds. It is pounded and put on the wound and will not only stop the bleeding but also remain on the cut until it dries. There are herbs like Ja-ngeu, Jatira, Ja-lynsir, Ja-lyniar, Jamyrdoh etc., that were a necessary part of our diet. Some were bitter

but elders would tell us that bitter herbs are good to flush out worms from our systems. In fact, Sohphlang -- a root is known to be very good at eliminating worms.

A good question is -- how many of our young people today can recognise these medicinal herbs and roots. Recently on my visit to a school in the distant Raibah Village beyond Mawsynram, I was deeply impressed by the fact that the students knew the names of the herbs and the healing powers of each one. Of course, their elders walked alongside the students and one could see their mothers and grandmothers prompting them in case they were stuck on something. This is an excellent example of a bridge between the young and the old which is a precious link to tradition.

Ironically when we speak of culture and tradition today we tend to stress on the externalities only such as the dress, dances, musical instruments and songs and forget indigenous wisdom and health practices that saw our ancestors thrive to this day. They had a cure for everything. Young guava leaves crushed and mixed with water could cure diarrhoea and dysentery. They had a special kind of lemon (soh kwit) that they rubbed on the body and feet if someone had fever and the fever would subside. Garlic cooked in mustard oil would be used for curing sore throat and cough. Now you cannot even find mustard oil in most homes since we have started cooking with expensive oils.

Khasi society had bone setters and people who could heal muscle pain and spasm. That was a time when you didn't have a pill for every ill. People lived far away from hospitals and health care centres and nursed their own fears and phobia about allopathic medicine. I guess it also has to do with psychology. Our bodies listen to our minds and if the message is that taking a herbal potion can heal an ailment then I guess the body listens. I am not discounting the power of allopathy but we cannot rule out the healing power of herbs, roots, seeds, fruits etc which is also what Ayurveda is all about.

The education system today has divorced us from our roots, particularly schools and colleges located in urban

centres. In rural Meghalaya indigenous knowledge still resides but for how long if the education imparted is so disconnected from our roots? Nature rambling and taking students to nearby forests once in a while will actually make them touch base with their roots. It is in such informal settings that students will ask questions and take back some knowledge home which they will then share with their parents and this would ignite a healthy conversation. There is so much indigenous wisdom that needs to be recorded before it is lost forever.

The book mentioned above states that the estimated use of tribal medicine across rural households in Meghalaya was 79.1% with 31.5% reporting frequent use and 65.6% reporting that they sometimes used it. Tribal medicine was believed to be efficacious by 87.5%. Tribal medicine was reportedly used for both minor and major ailments however the preference was more for minor ailments.

The purpose of this write-up is amongst other concerns the loss of bio-diversity due to rampant deforestation for operating quarries and for burning wood to convert to charcoal. Biodiversity loss also means that the indigenous herbs, trees, flowers, fruits and seeds 'would have disappeared too. Is anyone even concerned about this? We have the District Councils but they seem to live in a parallel universe quite oblivious of their primary and sacred duty to protect the environment. The dorbar shnong, many led by those motivated by money rather than conservation, have done us great harm.

The question to ask and debate about is -- what are we leaving for our future generation when greed seems to be the driving factor and tradition just a ruse to continue to exploit the environment? I wish the District Councils respond to this article. The MLAs don't care which way the wind blows as long as people are fooled to elect them again and again. Show me one MLA that has taken up the cause of the environment in the Assembly! Not one! That's Meghalaya the land that clouds our minds, dims our eye-sights and clogs our ears. Hence we see no evil and hear only good music that makes us sleepwalkers! The environment be damned!

When NASA Sent a Mixtape to the Aliens

By Ananya Sunder

In the summer of 1977, while most people were listening to disco and trying to figure out Star Wars, NASA launched two small spacecraft called Voyager 1 and Voyager 2. They were simple-looking robots built to explore the outer planets, carrying cameras and sensors and a lot of hope. But the strangest thing they carried was not scientific equipment. Bolted to each probe was a golden record, a kind of cosmic mix-tape, waiting for someone or something to find it. It was a message from Earth to any curious beings drifting between the stars. The chances of it being discovered are tiny, yet we sent it anyway. We wanted to say hello, even though Voyager 1 will take nearly forty thousand years to pass near another planetary system.

The Voyager Golden Record is one of those ideas that feels both scientific and poetic. It stands at the intersection of engineering and imagination.

For decades, humans have built rockets, telescopes, rovers, and orbiters. These machines help us map worlds we may never touch. They also help us ask a deeper question. If we are not alone, how do we introduce ourselves?

The Golden Record sits right in the middle of that conundrum. It is a scientific object but also a cultural one. In a way, it is our planet's self-portrait.

In the late 1970s, scientists understood something clearly. Extraterrestrial life exists, it is very far away. Talking to it is almost impossible. Radio signals fade with distance and require us to aim correctly. Languages are meaningless without a shared context. Basic biology might not even resemble ours.

So the problem was simple. How do you say "We exist" in a way that any civilization, no matter how unfamiliar, might understand?

NASA did not expect the Voyager spacecraft to end up as a pen-pal system. The main mission of Voyager was to study Jupiter, Saturn, and eventually the outer reaches of the solar system. The Golden Record was more symbolic. It was a backup plan for communication across unthinkable distances. It was also a test. If we had the chance to introduce Earth to someone out there, what would we say? What would we choose? What would we leave out?

Even today, the idea remains important. Humanity is growing more aware of its place in a very large universe. We have found thousands of exoplanets. Several of them lie in the "habitable zone" where liquid water might exist. About one in five Sun-like stars may host an Earth-like planet. These numbers suggest that life could be more common than we imagined.

If that is true, then communication becomes both a scientific and philosophical challenge. Any attempt to speak to another civilization forces us to think about our identity. What does it mean to represent Earth? Who gets to speak for billions of people? How do we compress our complexity into something as small as a record?

Dr Carl Sagan and his team at Cornell University were given only a few weeks to decide what would go onto the record. They had to create a message that could last billions of years. Their solution was both scientific and surprisingly human.

The record contains a carefully curated collection representing life and culture on Earth. It includes 115 images encoded in analog form, natural sounds such as wind, rain, waves, birds, and whales, and spoken greetings in 55 languages, ranging from ancient Akkadian to modern Chinese Wu. A ninety-minute global music playlist captures diverse musical traditions, from Bach

and Senegalese percussion to an Indian raga. The record also features messages from President Jimmy Carter and United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim.

This was far more ambitious than any earlier attempt. The record did not try to explain human politics or solve mathematics problems or define chemistry. It tried to capture what it feels like to live on Earth. Its strength comes from its variety. The greetings alone represent billions of people. One begins with "Namaste," another simply says, "Hello from the children of planet Earth."

The project team rushed to find speakers for languages across continents. Some were professors. Some were community members. A few were found through friends of friends in the final hours. They could say whatever they wanted as long as it was short.

NASA's hope was simple. Even if the words were impossible for someone else to translate, the pattern of voices would show that Earth is a place of many cultures.

The Golden Record solves the communication challenge by offering layers of meaning. If another civilization finds it, the images provide a visual introduction. The sounds show what our planet feels like. The music shows creativity. The greetings reveal social diversity. A single plaque could not do that.

The record also lasts far longer than any radio transmission. Radio waves spread out and weakened. A physical artifact, however, can drift through space for hundreds of millions of years. Voyager-1 is currently more than twenty-four billion kilometers from Earth. It is the farthest human-made object we have ever launched. Its record is still there, lying in wait.

The record does not assume the finder understands English or even human logic. It is meant to be decoded piece by piece, just as we decode light from distant stars. In that sense, it is humble. It offers clues instead of instructions.

The Golden Record is not just a scientific object. It gives ordinary people something valuable.

First, it reminds us that science can be imaginative. It can be a dream. Not every experiment has to produce immediate results. Some can simply carry hope forward.

Second, the record is a reminder of unity. The greetings show that Earth contains many voices. When we communicate as a planet, we speak together. This is something we often forget during daily life.

Finally, the idea pushes us to think long term. The record will outlast every city, every generation, and possibly even our species. It is a message in a bottle written for an audience we may never meet. Yet we wrote it anyway. That mindset can help everyone look beyond short-term problems and think about the future with a little more wonder.

If there is something worth remembering, it is this. The Golden Record was never only a message for whoever might be out there. It was a moment for us to look inward and choose what we wanted to share. It hints that our variety is not something to fix, but something to preserve. And it proves that science can stretch beyond problem-solving and into wonder.

Voyager 1 is still drifting farther than any human-made object has ever gone, carrying that archive of life on Earth. The record turns at its steady sixteen and two thirds revolutions per minute, keeping our sounds intact. Even if no one ever listens, it still represents the best attempt we had to say: this is us, as we are.

(The writer is a student of BTech First Year, Plaksha University, Mohali).

Letters to the Editor

On Islamic terror

Editor,
Islamic terrorism initially spread worldwide through organized groups such as ISIS, LeT, Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda and others with the perception that ordinary Muslim individuals were not involved in violent acts. Recent incidents, however, mark a paradigm shift, as individuals unaffiliated with these groups such as MBBS doctors in the Delhi blast, attackers at Bondi Beach in Australia and the pre Christmas attack in Germany have been found involved. These developments have led to widespread global sense of insecurity among non-Muslims leading to cancellations of Christmas celebrations in parts of Europe. Therefore, non Muslim communities need to come together and formulate strategies to confront these perceived threats to their survival.

Yours etc.,
NK Kehar,
Shillong-3

The Messi Mirage

Editor,
In cricket-obsessed India, football limps along on under-funding and mismanagement. The AIFF's latest fiasco: tenders for ISL commercial rights (Rs 37.5 crore annual guarantee over 15 years) and I-League (Rs 6 crore) closed on October 16, 2025, with zero bidders from private firms or governments--despite the low stakes for nurturing talent. Enter the irony: a Rs 100-

150 crore Messi tour across four cities in early December 2025, promising GOAT magic with tickets up to Rs 50,000. Over 50,000 fans showed, but chaos ensued--overcrowds, denied entries, and political overtones souring the vibe. "SPEND THOSE 150 CRORE ON INDIAN FOOTBALL!!!!!!"

Worth it? No. That cash could've funded academies or fixed the ISL gap. Instead, India slumps to 142nd in FIFA rankings (December 2025, worst in a decade), behind Latvia and Liberia. Even the expanded 2027 AFC Asian Cup (24 teams) eluded them: top-seeded Blues crashed 1-2 to Singapore on October 14, 2025, exposing systemic rot--absent stars, shoddy prep, flailing youth and clubs.

Salvation; not celeb stunts or investor-repelling tenders please. AIFF needs governance reform, long-term focus. As ESPN quipped: "Millions for Messi, none for the beautiful game." Reliance or state backing could help--if AIFF loosens grip and adds commercial smarts. Otherwise, football's dreams stay as bloated and brittle as event budgets. The ball is in the AIFF's court; it's time they stopped kicking it away.

Yours etc.,
Anil Thapa,
Via email

MNREGA renamed

Editor,
Government has introduced MNREGA in a new form with two main differences. Now the total number

of days of employment will be 125 instead of 100 and second is that states will contribute 40 percent and not 10 percent as it was earlier.

The NDA government's proposal to overhaul the programme, without holding any consultations with the States, has raised legitimate concerns over the future of the rights-based guarantee law. It is not just about erasing Mahatma Gandhi's name and renaming it as the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Aajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-G RAM G) Bill, 2025;

The new legislation promises to provide a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment in every financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work. Within six months from the date of commencement of the scheme, States will have to make a scheme consistent with the provisions of the new law. The financial liability would be shared between the Centre and the State governments in the ratio of 60:40. The fear is that it would end up replacing a rights-based guarantee law with a conditional, centrally controlled scheme opposed to the interests of both the States and the working class.

Under RAM G, the Centre will determine the state-wise normative allocation for each financial year, based on "objective parameters" as may be prescribed by the central government itself. Any expenditure incurred by a State in excess of its allocation will be borne entirely by the State government. Experts have

warned that a legal employment guarantee is now sought to be reduced to a centrally managed publicity scheme, at the expense of the States. Despite the Centre's claim of increasing guaranteed employment from 100 to 125 days, the Bill, in reality, opens the door to the exclusion of large sections of rural households in the name of the "rationalisation" of job cards. The rebranded avatar resorts to cost-shifting and restrictive conditions that run counter to the spirit of federalism.

The increase in guaranteed workdays needs to be seen in the context of how MGNREGA has functioned in practice. Although the Act specifies of "not less than 100 days," of employment, bureaucratic and technological constraints have turned that floor into a ceiling for most households. Additional days have been permitted only in narrowly defined circumstances -- for tribal households in forest areas or during officially declared disasters. By codifying 125 days as a statutory entitlement, the new Bill appears to correct this anomaly.

The Bill's emphasis on weekly wage payments is perhaps its most worker-friendly feature, addressing one of MGNREGA's chronic failures: delayed wages. Faster payments can significantly enhance the scheme's credibility and utility for households that rely on it for subsistence. Retaining compensation for delayed payments is also an important continuity, signalling that worker rights have not been entirely subordinated to administrative convenience.

Yet here too, the absence of greater clarity on enforcement raises questions.

Taken together, the VB-G Ram G Bill reflects a government attempt to reconcile competing imperatives: expanding social protection, managing fiscal exposure, supporting agriculture, and imposing administrative discipline. The risk is that in seeking balance, the Bill blunts the transformative edge of a rights-based guarantee. Rural employment schemes work best when they are simple, predictable and responsive to need. If the new framework shifts too far towards conditionality and ceilings it may deliver neither robust welfare nor fiscal comfort.

The challenge for Parliament is not merely to pass the Bill, but to refine it so that the promise of "Viksit Bharat" is built on a foundation of genuine rural security rather than false promises.

The fiscal design is another difference. It imposes additional burden on the states but offers them little say in decision making. The Centre met the entire cost of wages in MGNREGA and up to 75 per cent of the material component outgo in works. In the proposed VB-G RAM G, the cost sharing will be 60:40 except the 90:10 formula for North-Eastern states. Given some states' precarious fiscal situation and shrinking revenue generating capacity, this will be a tight call. In the case of the Pradhan Mantri Fasal Bima Yojana, the failure of many states to make timely payments of their 50 per cent premium subsidy share has

led to its sub-optimal performance. There is no doubt that the flagship MGNREGA needed reform in tune with time. But the abrupt overhaul, without prior consultation, does raise questions about the motive. The VB-G RAM G undermines the fundamental guarantees that MGNREGA provided.

For the time being, the Bill has not been rushed and wisely referred to a joint parliamentary panel for wider discussions. The ferocious reaction to the scrapping of a flagship scheme named after the father of the nation Mahatma Gandhi is not unexpected. However, the scheme that replaces it raises many other critical concerns. MGNREGA provided India's rural people entitlements beyond 100 days of work, helped reform rural governance and empowered them to fight for and secure their right to work. Barring transparency in implementation and social audits, the Bill does away with most of these entitlements. It is important to note that the MGNREGA was passed in 2005 amidst chants of "rozgar guarantee zindabad" with a historic consensus between all parties. The government's attempt to stealthily repeal the law is not just a disservice to the dignity of labour, but also undermines the basic tenets of democratic consensus-building.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Raihan,
Via email

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"There are some defeats more triumphant than victories."

— Michel de Montaigne

The Shillong Times

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Culture of Violence, Extortion Returns

THE news report that HNLC cadres have been arrested for causing an IED explosion at the premises of the Dhar Company premises at Shymplong, East Jaintia Hills which killed one person, followed by the media release of the HNLC stating upfront that anyone who refuses to pay them will face a similar fate is alarming. The fact that a banned outfit that is at present in talks with the Government of India is also operating untrammelled without any hint of fear of the law indicates that militancy in Meghalaya is far from over. First things first. If an outfit is ostensibly in peace talks with the state, can it simultaneously carry out its subversive activities? The talks are based on certain terms, one of which is that the HNLC must stop its terror activities. Without basic respect for the code of conduct, it would appear that the HNLC is playing a game with the Government of India and vice versa.

This sort of playbook used by both parties confuses the common person. That businesspersons of all hues have been paying not just the HNLC but other pressure groups operating in Meghalaya is an understated fact. It operates under the radar and the police won't confront this issue as long as the 'victims' pay their way through. Why shake up the hornet's nest when only to get stung? It would be wrong to believe that the HNLC no longer holds sway in Meghalaya. Now how does this play out in a situation where young entrepreneurs enter the market and are subjected to extortion? Would they have faith in the rule of law and in the government which is voted to uphold the rule of law? Extortion as we are well aware has a profound impact on individuals and communities, affecting not only their financial well-being but also their emotional and psychological health. The fact that the HNLC this time targeted the Dhar Construction Company which is almost monopolistic in that it gets all road construction projects in the state, may induce a sort of lethargic response from civil society and perhaps even law enforcers. But this is not the only company that is extorted. In such a climate can any industry survive and do business? If not, where are the job creation opportunities? It's a vicious cycle that if not addressed timely will ruin Meghalaya's economy as businesses may pack up and the ones that continue will sustain themselves by raising the price of goods be they construction materials or essential commodities.

Extortion has many lasting impacts on businesses. It can lead to financial instability, debt, and even bankruptcy, but worse it can also cause emotional trauma, anxiety, fear, and depression especially if the extortionists carry out their threats as they did with the IED blast inside the premises of a construction company. This is because extortion relies on periodic, and symbolic violence to ensure compliance and demonstrate what the extortioner is capable of. This creates a climate of terror among communities and victims targeted by extortioners. It remains to be seen how the Government responds to this emerging threat.

Community Policing: The bailout that Meghalaya Crime Enforcement needs

By Toki Blah

Let me be very clear from the very onset, that this article is directed mainly at the growing crime rate in Meghalaya today and on some basic and common sense ideas on how to manage this social crisis. "Growing crime rate" is not criticism of the Government nor the Meghalaya Police but is simply meant to draw the reader's attention to the changing profile and sophistication of crimes we encounter today. Change comes with the passage of time and hence crime as it exists today is no longer the same as it was 53 years ago when Meghalaya attained statehood. Then, petty theft, an odd murder here and there and perhaps intercepting moonshine supply were the major social offences the state had to deal with. Today the character of criminal activities has increased many-fold. Drug smuggling and addiction, theft and burglaries, murders, illegal immigration, child trafficking, kidnappings, break-ins and sex offences especially on minors, form most of the cases the police are called upon to deal with. Police response many a time has been reactive or focused primarily on the punitive aspect of each case. Reading between the lines one is forced to conclude that if the police could have had prior information of the crime, if their intelligence inputs on potential crimes or criminals were enhanced, then perhaps preventive action could have been more effective. The crime could have been prevented. So here is where the above call for "some basic and commonsense idea on how to manage this social crisis" comes in. The first question that then pops up is, why do we as citizens of Meghalaya think, the police to be the sole, single agency mandated and interested in managing crime? Are there no others with the same mandate?

So, if citizen safety and social harmony is the goal, how did we as an indigenous tribal society manage it 300 years ago before the advent of the modern police force? In the past we as a society depended mainly on our own indigenous village level institutions of governance for protection. Yes, we are speaking of the traditional Village Council system of governance that prevails in all three District Councils of Meghalaya. The 6th Schedule is quite clear on the concept of a village Headman. All of us are well versed with the concept of the Rangbah Shnong and lo-

cal Dorbar Shnong. (within the context of this article, the term Dorbar will loosely be used to cover all the three systems of grassroots governance prevailing in all the three District Councils of the state of Meghalaya).

The Dorbar therefore is an integral part of the culture and identity of both the Achik and Hynniewtre people. We have been creeping on with the system since time immemorial and the Dorbar as a grassroots institution of governance has efficiently delivered on the expectations of the people. The traditional responsibilities of the Dorbar are to maintain law and order, peace and tranquility within the village. Today a Village Dorbar has also been mandated with implementing flagship programmes of the government in the field of Social Welfare and participatory development. We as indigenous tribal communities can therefore take pride in the fact that what the 73rd Amendment wished to introduce in grassroots governance was already our forte and that is the main reason why Meghalaya was exempted from the Panchayat Raj System.

It is now satisfactorily established that the basic traditional profile of the Meghalaya Dorbar is to usher in social harmony, public safety and civic satisfaction to all residents within its jurisdiction. In modern Independent India, enforcing the law, especially aspects of the law that deal with public safety; law and order and prevention of crime has been entrusted to a constitutionally created entity called the Police. Now we suddenly realize that both the Police and the Dorbar system are stakeholders sharing the same goal. The natural alignment therefore is for both to support and complement each other. Question is why has this not happened? We see instead Dorbars shying away and reluctant to actively associate themselves with the Police. "No entry" of policemen into the shnong seem to be the preferred dogma. The usual excuse trotted up is that a Khaki uniform will cause fear and terror among the women and children. Time has arrived to question this notion and to find out who actually stands to lose if the Shnong starts cooperating with the police.

Today 99% of our police force comprise our own tribal people; a police patrol will always have a local female constable, so why should

this upset the women and children of the village? This argument makes no sense. Truth is the people with a reason to be disturbed from a Police-Dorbar collaboration are the local hooligans, present in every shnong. This group is usually made up of habitual trouble makers, alcoholics, drug addicts, drug peddlers, police history sheeters, people who seek dark unlit corners to pass the evening by. These are the usual suspects who first create those small symptoms of disorder (e.g., vandalism, public drinking, loitering) that in turn create an environment that make local citizens, especially women and children, feel unsafe and emboldens further crime.

The New York Police go by the Broken Window Theory, where petty crime if not nipped in the bud, will often lead to more serious crimes. The sad part is that the Dorbar, usually composed of mature males and females, who should know better, fall into a false sense of security by believing that these small acts of hooliganism by local bad elements, if left alone, will fade away on their own. This never happens! Crime instead blossoms, grows and thrives under such misplaced "Let them be" beliefs.

Let's accept the fact that the sort of crimes our society faces are not endemic to only Meghalaya but they manifest the world over. Law enforcement agencies and governments have discovered that the best way to control the complexities of modern crime, most of it organized, is for the law enforcement agencies (the police) to work in tandem with local communities. This concept is called Community Policing which has proved its worth where ever it has come into force. Its potency lies in the coming together of stakeholders sharing the same goals, working together to make things happen.

Community policing is not just a law enforcement strategy—it's a philosophy of partnership. It emphasizes that police and citizens are co-creators of safety and order working together to prevent crime, resolve conflicts, and improve quality of life. Community policing focuses more on collaborative prevention of crime than on reactive enforcement that responds only after the crime has been committed. While this feels nice and comfortable in theory but for this philosophy to practically

take off, especially in Meghalaya's case, a paradigm shift is necessary on how the partners view and approach each other. To me the first aspect in this proposed partnership against crime that needs to be seriously addressed is the issue of trust between the partners. Trust is the foundation of cooperation and hence the Police must be seen as fair, transparent, accountable and non-bossy in all their dealings with the Dorbars while Dorbars must start showing more tolerance, understanding and readiness to accommodate the police. With this trust will also come the realization of the need for shared responsibility towards a shared goal—the prevention of crime. Communities and police jointly identify problems and solutions. It means moving away from the negative "us vs them" model to a more proactive paradigm of "we together against crime." It has worked elsewhere. No reason why it shouldn't work for Meghalaya.

Crime and police journals the world over are currently speaking of ways and means of taking Community Policing to its logical end as per the local circumstances prevailing. All however are of the opinion that creating the appropriate community structure or institution to meet the needs of this new law enforcing paradigm is the greatest hurdle they face. In India the PRI grassroots governance institutions created under the 73rd Amendment are found to be increasingly handicapped by political and caste factors and it is these disabling components that make it that much harder to come about with an effective community policing system. In Meghalaya these handicaps do not exist. Our Dorbars are non-political as well as being free of any prejudicial social impediment such as caste. Secondly, as pointed out above their vocational mandate is similar to that of law enforcing agencies. All that is required is the political will and vision to give the final nudge and bring about this natural amalgamation between the Dorbars and the Police. It will perhaps require some training, some capacity building and some vision enhancing exercises for both partners, especially at the ground level. All in all however, it is something that is urgently required so as to bring in a unified effort to contain and manage crime, not after it has happened but most important, preventing it before it happens.

Encouragingly, there are examples that show a better path. Green School Bali in Indonesia stands as a shining example of nature-centred education. Set amid forests near a river, the school follows an annual academic calendar that blends regular subjects with hands-on learning through gardening, ecology, renewable energy, and community projects. Students learn not only from books, but directly from nature, developing both academic skills and a deep respect for the environment. Your article gently reminds us that education should prepare students not only for earning a living, but also for living a meaningful and responsible life. This growing gap between learning and life deserves serious and honest attention, before education becomes impressive in appearance but hollow at its core. As the old proverb wisely says, "Knowledge without wisdom is like a lamp without light."

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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When mountains are treated as empty land From the Aravallis to Northeast India

By Anusuya Baruah

It is disheartening that the people living in modern-day India have to constantly voice their concerns just to stop the elimination of the forests, hills, and mountain systems. Discussions centred around the Aravalli range is not a single instance of the environment being ignored; rather they point to a more profound and widespread lack of understanding about the whole process of envisioning, planning, and implementing what is called 'development' in the country. The ancient Aravallis in the western part of India and the delicate hill systems in Northeast India are getting more and more perceived as the unoccupied land that is just waiting for 'productive' use rather than as the intricate ecological structures that are vital to environmental stability and human life.

The Aravalli range,

part of this disconnect is very clear. The occurrence of landslides in the region has shifted from being rare to becoming common. Floods in Assam, though periodically affected by the factors mentioned, are likened to the worst emergencies called natural disasters. Cities like Shillong, Aizawl, and Kohima are suffering from acute water shortages and unstable slopes; the reasons being improper handling of the hillside and environment, and lack of regulation in the latter. Unlike in the case of the Aravallis, such crises are not even seen as failures of policy and they are not at all recognized as the trade-offs of development that are to be borne. The fact that both regions have such a negative image and yet they are both intact in terms of having traditional practices of ecological restraint which have been there for a long time makes

Its degradation has already contributed to declining water tables, rising temperatures, and expanding aridity in adjoining regions. Yet, despite decades of scientific warnings, mining, construction, and real estate expansion continue to hollow out the range in the name of economic growth.

among the oldest mountain systems in the world, functions as a vital ecological barrier against desertification, a critical groundwater recharge zone, and a regulator of regional climate. Its degradation has already contributed to declining water tables, rising temperatures, and expanding aridity in adjoining regions. Yet, despite decades of scientific warnings, mining, construction, and real estate expansion continue to hollow out the range in the name of economic growth. What is particularly alarming is that such destruction is routinely justified as development, even when it undermines the very environmental foundations upon which human habitation depends.

This kind of situation

the situation even more troubling. In the Aravalli region, mountain ecology would always have a place in pastoral and agrarian practices, functionally coexisting with them. In the Northeast, the native people would develop their land with sustainable practices and have their land even governed through formal law, customary law, ritual sanction, and ecological knowledge. The mountains, the trees, and the water were not just resources; they were parts of the moral and cultural paradigms that restricted their exploitation. The reduction of such frameworks started with the colonial era and continued through the other phases.

The necessity for citizens to come together to demand the safeguarding of

The fact that both regions have such a negative image and yet they are both intact in terms of having traditional practices of ecological restraint which have been there for a long time makes the situation even more troubling. In the Aravalli region, mountain ecology would always have a place in pastoral and agrarian practices, functionally coexisting with them.

is not restricted only to the northwestern part of India. The same is true for north-eastern India where hill systems are performing equally important if not more complex ecological functions. The hills of Meghalaya, Nagaland, Mizoram, and Arunachal Pradesh are acting as natural barriers providing protection from floods, landslides, and soil erosion, besides being the ones sustaining the very delicate river systems that nourish the Brahmaputra and Barak valleys. It is still the same story with large-scale hill cutting; unregulated mining, aggressive road construction, and poorly planned urban expansion steadily destabilizing fragile landscapes. The similarity between the Aravallis and the Northeast hills lies not merely in ecological vulnerability, but in the underlying mindset that governs policy decisions. Both regions are subjected to a model of development that is profoundly disconnected from geography. Mountains are viewed as obstacles to connectivity, forests as impediments to growth, and rivers as engineering problems to be controlled. Such thinking reflects not progress, but ecological illiteracy—an inability or unwillingness to understand the basic principles of physiography, hydrology, and environmental balance.

In the Northeast, the im-

mountains and forests indicate a critical democratic failure. Environmental precautions should, in fact, be set beforehand and not be aftermath. However, when the public protest becomes the only means of ecological preservation, it indicates that the regulatory bodies have relinquished their duty. The same holds for mining sanctions in the Aravallis and infrastructural projects in the Northeast hills. The issue of education is equally significant. The issue is not a lack of data—India has no shortage of environmental reports—but a systemic disregard for ecological knowledge in governance. Development divorced from geography is not development; it is deferred disaster.

Protecting mountain systems is not a sentimental or optional exercise. It is central to climate resilience, water security, and long-term economic stability. Short-term gains extracted from fragile landscapes will inevitably be outweighed by the costs of disaster mitigation, displacement, and ecological repair. Until geography is restored to the centre of policy-making, the Aravallis will continue to crumble—and the hills of the Northeast will follow the same perilous path.

The writer is a PhD scholar, Cotton University, Guwahati-Assam. Email: anusuyabaruah29@gmail.com

Letters to the Editor

Reconsideration of juvenile laws in cases of heinous crimes

Editor,
I write this letter in deep anguish and outrage over the recent case involving the murder of a 4-year-old child from Nongrah, Shillong, allegedly committed by a 13-year-old boy. As further evidence emerges, the brutality of the crime has left the public shocked and struggling to comprehend how such an act could be committed by someone so young.

While the Juvenile Justice system in India exists to protect and rehabilitate minors, this case forces us to confront an uncomfortable question: should age alone determine punishment when the crime involves extreme sexual violence and murder? A child of four had no voice, no defence, and no chance to survive. Therefore, justice must speak firmly on her behalf.

It is deeply disturbing and outrageous that the accused in such a heinous crime may face only a limited period of prison time purely due to his age in accordance to the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015. Ju-

venile laws were designed to reform children who commit minor or impulsive offences and not to create a loophole where perpetrators of the most brutal crimes escape proportionate accountability. Also, reports that the accused was exposed to pornographic content highlight a wider failure of parental/guardian supervision, digital regulation, and early psychological intervention and while such exposure may explain behavioural distortion, it can never justify or excuse a crime of this magnitude.

This case demands immediate judicial and legislative attention. I urge the judicial system and lawmakers to re-examine and reform juvenile justice provisions for heinous crimes, allowing courts to assess intent, psychological maturity, and brutality on a case-by-case basis. This will ensure that the perpetrator, despite his young age, should be tried as an adult for the heinous crime he committed. The law must strike a balance between rehabilitation and justice, without undermining public faith in the legal system. If justice appears diluted in such cases, it risks losing public trust and moral conscience. I urge lawmakers and legal authorities to re-examine existing provi-

sions and initiate meaningful reform.

Yours etc.,
Mebaphylla Rymshon,
Via email

Knowledge without wisdom is facile

Editor,
With reference to your Special Article "Hollowing out tradition: Education in a bubble", published in The Shillong Times on December 19, 2025, you have raised a concern that many parents, teachers, and thoughtful readers quietly feel, but seldom express openly.

Education today appears impressive on paper. Marks are high, results are celebrated, and careers are planned early. Yet, somewhere along the way, learning seems to have drifted away from real life. Students spend years inside classrooms, but often remain distant from nature, community life, and the simple human values that shape responsible living.

The focus of education has largely shifted to scoring well, securing ranks, and getting jobs. There is nothing wrong in aspiring for

success, comfort, and professional growth. However, when education becomes limited to examinations and certificates alone, it begins to lose its deeper purpose. Children gather facts and information, but not always the wisdom needed to live with care, responsibility, and respect for the world around them.

Many students learn about the environment without ever feeling close to nature, and study social lessons without truly understanding the people and communities around them. Knowledge often remains confined to textbooks instead of shaping thought, behaviour, and character. This separation between formal education and lived knowledge is not new. I recall an incident narrated to me during my college days by my younger brother, who was pursuing his B.Sc., which left a lasting impression on me. During a zoology practical class, a dead snake preserved in a bottle was brought for identification. To everyone's surprise, neither the lecturer nor the demonstrator nor the students could identify it with certainty. The discussion soon turned into guesswork.

At that moment, a laboratory peon, who had been

watching quietly, identified the snake without hesitation. He explained its local name, whether it was poisonous, and how people in his village traditionally distinguished it from similar species. His knowledge was accurate and practical, shaped by lived experience and passed down through generations, rather than acquired from textbooks. That moment powerfully reminded me that valuable knowledge often exists outside classrooms, yet remains unseen and unrecognized.

Your article also rightly links this loss of traditional knowledge with environmental damage. In regions like Meghalaya, deforestation and unregulated mining have not only harmed ecosystems but have also erased generations of understanding related to forests, medicinal plants, wildlife, food habits, and sustainable living. When forests disappear, wisdom disappears with them.

My argument is not against modern education or science, both of which have brought immense benefits. The real concern lies in our failure to connect modern learning with local realities and traditional wisdom. Education should enrich life, not distance itself from the land and culture it is meant

to serve.

Encouragingly, there are examples that show a better path. Green School Bali in Indonesia stands as a shining example of nature-centred education. Set amid forests near a river, the school follows an annual academic calendar that blends regular subjects with hands-on learning through gardening, ecology, renewable energy, and community projects. Students learn not only from books, but directly from nature, developing both academic skills and a deep respect for the environment. Your article gently reminds us that education should prepare students not only for earning a living, but also for living a meaningful and responsible life. This growing gap between learning and life deserves serious and honest attention, before education becomes impressive in appearance but hollow at its core. As the old proverb wisely says, "Knowledge without wisdom is like a lamp without light."

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

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Idioms can trouble even fluent English speakers!

Being a linguist - and someone who has tried to learn several languages (including English) in addition to my mother tongue (Flemish Dutch) - I have an annoying habit: instead of paying attention to what people are saying, I often get distracted by how they are saying it. The other day, this happened again in a meeting with colleagues.

I started writing down some of the expressions my colleagues were using to communicate their ideas that may be puzzling for users of English as a second or additional language.

In a span of about five minutes, I heard "it's a no-brainer," "to second something," "to bring people up to speed," "how you see fit," "to table something" and "to have it out with someone." These are all expressions whose meanings do not follow straightforwardly from their lexical makeup - they're called idioms by lexicologists.

Idioms are part of daily communication. But this anecdote also suggests that we take it for granted that such expressions are readily understood by members of the same community. However, when it comes to people who are new to said community, nothing could be further from the truth.

Idioms and the limits of language proficiency

Research conducted at the University of Birmingham several years ago revealed that international students for whom English is an additional language often misunderstand lecture content because they misinterpret their lecturers' metaphorical phrases, including figurative idioms.

More recent research confirms that English idioms can remain elusive to second-language learners even if the expressions are intentionally embedded in transparent contexts.

One of my own recent studies, conducted with international students at Western University in Canada, also found that students incorrectly interpreted idioms and struggled to recall the actual meanings later on after being corrected.



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This shows just how persistently confusing these expressions can be.

It's worth mentioning that we're talking about students who obtained high enough scores on standardised English proficiency tests to be admitted to English-medium universities. Knowledge of idioms appears to lag behind other facets of language.

When literal meanings get in the way

The challenge posed by idioms is not unique to English. All languages have large stocks of idioms, many of which second-language learners will find puzzling if the expressions do not have obvious counterparts in their mother tongue.

There are various obstacles to comprehending idioms, and recognising these obstacles can help us empathise with those who

are new to a community. For one thing, an idiom will inevitably be hard to understand if it includes a word that the learner does not know at all.

However, even if all the constituent words of an expression look familiar, the first meaning that comes to a learner's mind can be misleading. For example, as a younger learner of English, I was convinced that the expression "to jump the gun" referred to an act of bravery because, to me, the phrase evoked an image of someone being held at gunpoint and who makes a sudden move to disarm an adversary.

I only realised that this idiom means "to act too soon" when I was told that the gun in this phrase does not allude to a firearm but to the pistol used to signal the start of a race.

I also used to think that "follow suit" meant taking or

Research conducted at the University of Birmingham several years ago revealed that international students for whom English is an additional language often misunderstand lecture content because they misinterpret their lecturers' metaphorical phrases, including figurative idioms. More recent research confirms that English idioms can remain elusive to second-language learners even if the expressions are intentionally embedded in transparent contexts

ders from someone in a position of authority because I thought "suit" alluded to business attire. Its actual meaning - "to do the same thing as someone else" - became clear only when I learned the other meaning of suit in card games such as bridge.

The idea that idioms prompt a literal interpretation may seem counter-intuitive to readers who have not learned a second language because we normally bypass such literal interpretations when we hear idioms in our first language.

However, research suggests that second-language learners do tend to use literal meanings as they try to make sense of idioms.

Unfortunately, when language learners use a literal reading of an idiom to guess its figurative meaning, they are very often misled by ambiguous words.

For example, they will almost inevitably misunderstand "limb" in the idiom "to go out on a limb" - meaning "to take a serious risk" - as a body-part rather than a branch of a tree.

Recognising the origin of an idiomatic expression can also be difficult because the domains of life from which certain idioms stem are not necessarily shared across cultures.

For example, learners may struggle to understand English idioms derived from horse racing ("to win hands down"), golf ("par for the course"), rowing ("pull your weight") and baseball ("cover your bases"), if these sports are uncommon in the communities in which they grew up.

A language's stock of idioms provides a window into a community's culture and history.

Same language, same idioms? Not exactly

Idiom repertoires vary across communities - whether defined regionally, demographically or otherwise - even when those communities share the same general language.

For example, if an Aussie were to criticise an anglophone Canadian for making a fuss by saying "you're carrying on like a pork chop," they may be lost in translation, even if there isn't much of one. At least, linguistically that is.

Although people may have learned a handful of idioms in an English-language course taken in their home country, those particular idioms may not be the ones they will encounter later as international students or immigrants.

The moral is simple: be aware that expressions you consider perfectly transparent because you grew up with them may be puzzling to others. We need to have more empathy for people who are not yet familiar with the many hundreds of potentially confusing phrases that we use so spontaneously. (The Conversation)

(Authored by Frank Boers, Western University)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 21, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Venus square Saturn highlights patience, discipline, and long-term reward. You'll work harder than usual, but the outcome brings prestige and recognition. At work, your integrity and persistence stand out; a promotion or project leadership may follow. Handle rivalries calmly, they fade before your consistency. Financial matters improve gradually; property or savings yield value later in the year. Domestic peace strengthens, and unresolved family issues settle favorably. Love deepens through trust, leading many toward engagement or marriage. Health remains sound through balanced living. You'll discover spiritual calm and draw others with your quiet confidence.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) It will turn out to be an exciting week. You will enjoy wonderful health. Even your financial position is going to be stable. Good gains in business are indicated. You will explore your professional contacts and make best use of them. You will also fulfill your responsibility properly. Your bosses will be happy with your performance. You will get support of your family members and friends. You will get rid of domestic problems. At this time, business trips will be pleasant. You will have full satisfaction. You will be successful in doing any work. You will receive blessings from your elders.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) You are going to have a very favorable time. You will make progress in all aspects of your life. You will meet influential people and get their support. Your performance at your workplace will also be appreciated. You will organize your work properly and smoothly. Additional responsibility may be given. Your bosses will also encourage a lot. Financial position is going to be stable and strong. A property dispute might also get resolved. Your partner/spouse will keep on supporting you. Unmarried people will fall in love. You will also earn good money. The speed of work will increase. You will make progress in your life due to your intellect. You will also plan to go on a trip with your friends.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) It will turn out to be a very promising week for you. You will be dedicated to your work. And will be able to complete it in time. You will also grab attention of one and all at your workplace. In your job or business, you will achieve your goals and targets. You will work hard and will have time for your family members too. You will get happiness from spouse/partner. There will be something positive happening in your relationship which will make you feel elated. There will be joy and cheer in family relations. Students will focus on their studies, and they will get success also in exams. Meeting with people, enhancing social activities will give you success. Your name and fame will rise.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It will turn out to be a fantastic week for you. All the ups and downs you are facing in your work will end and you will complete your work smoothly. You will also get support of your bosses and superiors. Your colleagues will also cooperate with you. You will have monetary gains. It will turn out to be fruitful. According to your ability, you will get the money. Property related disputes will be resolved with mutual consent. Love birds will have a wonderful time. Husband and wife will also have amazing relationships and bonding. Students will get success by doing hard work. In exams/interviews success will be achieved. You could also get attracted to spiritual matters. Everyone will support you fully. You will be happy in all situations.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) There will be lot of positive developments in your favor this week. You will continue to work hard and acquire practical knowledge. You will be very busy with your official work. You will be able to give time to your family from your busy schedule. You will also get success in an important exam/interview. The results will come in your favor, and it will remove your tension. It is a favorable period for you. You will also get money that was blocked somewhere. Your romantic life is going to be amazing, and you will spend quality time with your partner. An auspicious event is expected in the family. Your economic side will remain strong. You will also meet an influential personality. Your income will rise. There will be an atmosphere of happiness at home and at the workplace also.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) This week is very favorable to have positive results in money related matters. Your work plans will be successful. Your focus on work will be gained. Peace will be there in the family and there will also be fulfillment of new

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) It will be a very enjoyable week for you. The time will be spent wonderfully with your family members. You may surprise your partner with an act much to his/her pleasure and comfort. Your good nature and qualities will come to the fore. You will believe in making others happy through your gestures. They will feel a lot more positive and will get success. You will remain busy with your work and will have little time for family matters. Yet you will try to fulfill your dreams with full loyalty and responsibility. You will also obtain a victory in every task. There will be a happy atmosphere at home. Your deeds will fetch your respect. You will be miles ahead of people in terms of achievements and thoughts.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) New doors of opportunities are opening for you this week. The time is very joyful for you. You will get success in whatever you do. Your financial position is going to be stable. And you will get appreciation from people for your deeds and acts. Your behavior will be gentle. You will be forthright in matters related to your business. Women will get full worth of their efforts and will also perform their work properly. Your daily life will proceed smoothly. You will get satisfaction with romance and love. Your desires will be fulfilled. The mood of students will be good. They will work hard to get success. You will desire to learn something new. You will go for some new research.

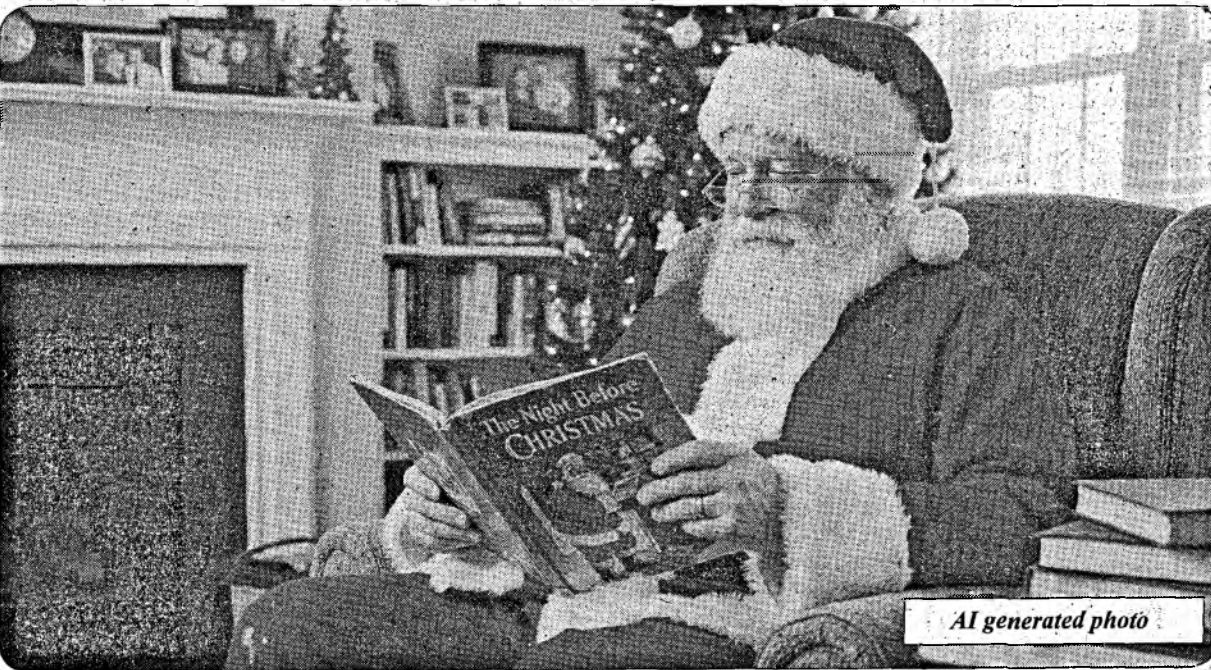
Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) The beginning of the week is going to be fantastic. These are the days for doing something good. Your efforts will be appreciated, and you will be rewarded suitably for your efforts. You will continue to do brilliant work. You will also get gains from investments that you made in the past. You will be successful in love matters. Your relation will blossom into full fledged romance. Newlywed couples can go on a tour. They will spend time understanding each other. Your entire attention will be on your house and family. You will feel relaxed. And enjoy time with loved ones.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) The favorable placement of planets is promising gains for you. You will make profit in business/work. You will also love peace and solitude. But it does not mean you will not be in touch with people. You will just relax a bit to feel fresh and rejuvenated. You will enjoy your work. There will be peace and calm in the family. You will also make plans for some new things. Your long-cherished desire will be fulfilled. Results of exams will be in your favor. You will walk on the path of spirituality, and develop religious inclinations. You will also remain disciplined and teach some values to your family members.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) It is going to be a very well spent week. You will have amazing time with your near and dear ones. You could come very close to someone you know already. You will introspect and analyze yourself. And it will bring about a change in your communication and behavior. You will also get employment opportunity. You will also gain in partnership. Your bank balance will add on. The loan that you are given will be recovered. There will be an increase in efficiency and dexterity of doing work. Your entire attention will be on your objective. The time will be very peaceful and natural. You will also enjoy wonderful health.

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

The truth about Santa Claus



AI generated photo

Christmas can be a magical time of year for kids. Writing wish-lists, seeing Santa at the shops, leaving carrots for the reindeer out on the porch. And then of course, the presents under the tree.

So what happens when the penny drops and a child realises the guy who brings toys in a sleigh is not real? Perhaps an older sibling, friend or even a parent breaks the news. Perhaps the child works things out for themselves.

This can lead to some big feelings - sadness, disappointment, perhaps even betrayal. How can you work through this?

Believing in Santa is OK

Research shows us magical thinking - such as believing in Santa - supports many components of social and emotional development.

This includes imaginative play and creativity. Research tells us children who are able to pretend play are more socially competent with peers and able to engage in classroom activity. These playful experiences boost language, empathy and self-control.

Between ages three and eight, kids start to tell fantasy apart from reality, but believing in Santa during this time still helps them enjoy healthy pretend play.

Believing in Santa can also support language development - writing letters or talking to him at the shops. And it introduces moral lessons, as Santa (in theory) rewards good

behaviour.

But not believing in Santa is equally OK!

Not believing in Santa is also a normal developmental milestone.

Children typically learn the truth at about seven years of age. Some kids experience brief sadness or betrayal.

Despite this, research shows most children maintain trust in their parents and the disappointment over Santa is mild and fairly short-lived. Some children may even experience relief if the story just wasn't adding up for them.

It's normal for kids to be disappointed

Disappointment is a healthy emotion that teaches coping skills and emotional resilience. Remember, disappointment triggers emotional responses before logical thinking. This can make the initial experience feel intense.

This means a child may be upset when their older brother says, "Santa's just Mum and Dad". But they will then quickly get over it. This may of course be helped when they realise the presents still come on Christmas Day.

What can parents do?

Children who learn gradually about the reality of Santa are less upset than those told abruptly. This may not be possible if an older sibling is around.

If your child is upset, validate their feelings - "I know this is disappointing" - and then shift the focus to other positive values like gratitude or giving. For

example, "how would you like to surprise Nanna with one of your special drawings to show her how much you love her?"

Does Santa make kids behave?

Research also suggests belief in Santa alone does not prompt good behaviour from kids at Christmas. But enjoying wider festive traditions can make some difference between children being "naughty" or "nice".

Parents, not Santa, are the real influence on children's behaviour. When adults remind kids to "share your toys with your sister, Santa is watching" or "stop fighting with your brother or Santa won't come", it works because of the parent's intervention not the myth alone. Meanwhile, other rituals around Christmas, such as family gatherings or tree decorating, can encourage kindness and cooperation, because they teach children the importance of doing things for and with others.

What's really important?

When children stop believing in Santa, parents can turn this moment into an opportunity shifting from one magical guy to meaningful family rituals and shared experiences. So whether Santa is 'real' in your house or not, involve your kids in meaningful holiday traditions such as decorating, baking, storytelling, music, family and friend gatherings and religious observance - and have yourselves a merry little Christmas. (The Conversation)

(Authored by Cher McGillivray, Bond University)

Research reveals consequences can be severe when managers don't act

Most people recognise that we shouldn't actively harm others at work. Yet people tend to assume that failing to act is relatively benign or inconsequential.

Imagine witnessing an employee being belittled by a coworker. As a manager, should you step in, or could staying on the sidelines give employees room to resolve conflicts themselves?

Our new research demonstrates that "perceived managerial inaction" - the belief that a manager has failed to act in response to a negative experience - can have devastating consequences in the workplace. We examined how employees react when they believe their manager has failed to respond to a harmful or disrespectful incident.

Across an experiment and surveys involving hundreds of employees, we measured whether people felt their manager had a duty to intervene, whether they believed that duty was violated and how this shaped their trust, well-being and behaviour.

What is perceived managerial inaction?

Because of their formal position, of authority, managers have the obligation to protect their employees from harm and maintain a safe and ethical work environment.

We use the term perceived employee-directed managerial inaction to describe situations in which employees believe their managers have not acted to prevent or address potential harm to them.

Three conditions need to be present for employees to perceive managerial inaction

1. There was a potential for harm to the employee.
2. The manager was aware



of this potential for harm, and

3. The manager violated perceived managerial responsibilities or obligations by failing to act in response to this potential for harm.

When these conditions are met, employees interpret the absence of a response as a meaningful choice.

Why it matters for individuals & organisations

Perceived managerial inaction has real, measurable effects on employees' well-being and their relationship with the manager.

Our research reveals that even a single instance of perceived managerial inaction can result in profound consequences. Employees can lose trust in their manager, even if there was a pre-existing positive relationship and their manager had demonstrated positive leadership behaviours.

Perceived managerial inaction can also undermine managers' effectiveness. Our studies indicated that it can motivate employees to protect themselves from the manager by withdrawing support, engaging in negative gossiping and resisting work-related requests.

Organisations also face risks, as there is increasing momentum to hold them accountable for managers' inaction.

As high-profile cases show - such as the California lawsuit alleging that Activision Blizzard managers failed to "take reasonable steps" to protect employees from discrimination - inaction can escalate from an interpersonal issue to a legal and reputational one.

Addressing common misconceptions

Many managers underestimate the impact of doing nothing. Our research highlights four misconceptions that often keep leaders from acting and the reality behind them.

Misconception 1: Inaction is benign, and employees won't notice or negatively react to managerial inaction.

Reality: Employees can be highly attuned to inaction because it has significant implications for how they perceive their manager and navigate their work environment.

Misconception 2: Inaction can empower employees or help them grow.

Reality: Even if managers

withheld action with positive intentions, employees experience inaction as a violation of managerial responsibilities.

Misconception 3: The negative effect of managerial inaction is short-lived.

Reality: Managerial inaction can cause short- and long-term damage to employees' well-being, managerial effectiveness and organisations at large.

Misconception 4: The negative effect is limited to the employee who perceived that the manager failed to act.

Reality: By failing to address harmful experiences, managers may inadvertently signal that mistreatment will be tolerated, which can normalise mistreatment within the workplace and increase its frequency.

Practical recommendations for managers

Managers are not only responsible for their actions, but also for failing to act to protect employees from harm. If inaction occurs or is perceived to have occurred, managers can take steps to repair trust and prevent harm:

1. Talk to the affected

employee about inaction and address the source of the harm.

Listen to and support employees, including acknowledging their experience and any harm that occurred. Provide a clear explanation for why you did not act, without being defensive. Be honest, if you were not sure what was happening at the time or if you did not know how to act.

Take appropriate steps to remedy the situation: apologise, acknowledge responsibility and clearly communicate the steps you will take to repair harm and prevent future occurrences.

2. Recognise that the impact of the situation may include coworkers and the team.

Those who witnessed or heard about the incident may need support or benefit from debriefing the incident. If the negative experience involved employee mistreatment, reinforce that any mistreatment is against organisational norms and will not be tolerated and consistently apply negative consequences.

3. Set an appropriate tone for the team to mitigate the negative impact of inaction.

Set clear expectations for appropriate organisational conduct and encourage employees to voice unpleasant work experiences while also addressing employees' concerns.

Managers must recognise that "with great power comes great responsibility." Fulfilling managerial obligations is critical to support employees as well as avoid negative implications for managers and organisations.

Action, even if it is not perfect, can enable managers to fulfil their responsibilities and help create workplaces where people feel safe and valued. *(The Conversation)*

Study unravels breast cancer risk factors among Indian women

A new study conducted by scientists at the Indian Council of Medical Research (ICMR) has decoded the specific risk factors for breast cancer among women in India.

Breast Cancer is among the top three cancers amongst women in India. The incidence of breast cancers in the country is expected to rise by about 5.6 per cent annually, translating to an estimated increase of 0.05 million new cases per year.

The team from ICMR's National Centre for Disease Informatics and Research (NCDIR), Bengaluru, conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on 31 studies covering a total of 27,925 participants, with 45 per cent being diagnosed with breast cancer.

The findings, published in the journal *Cancer Epidemiology*, showed that "reproductive timing, hormonal exposure, central obesity, and family history influence breast cancer risk primarily among Indian women".

"Women with late menopause (more than 50 years), first pregnancy after 30 years

of age, higher age at marriage, multiple abortions and central obesity (with waist-to-hip ratio more than 85 cm) are at significant risk," the researchers said in the paper.

Among lifestyle factors, poor sleep quality, irregular sleep patterns, sleeping in a lighted room, and elevated stress levels were also positively associated with risk in individual studies.

In contrast, higher levels of physical activity showed an inverse association.

The analysis found that women over 50 years had a three-fold higher risk, and women aged 35-50 years had a 1.63-fold increase in risk, highlighting the importance of early screening for women in their forties.

However, variations in age group classifications across studies may explain the observed heterogeneity.

In high-income countries, breast cancer incidence rises significantly after the age of 50, with the majority of cases occurring in postmenopausal women.

In contrast, India exhibits a relatively higher incidence

of breast cancer in younger women, typically between their 40s and 50s.

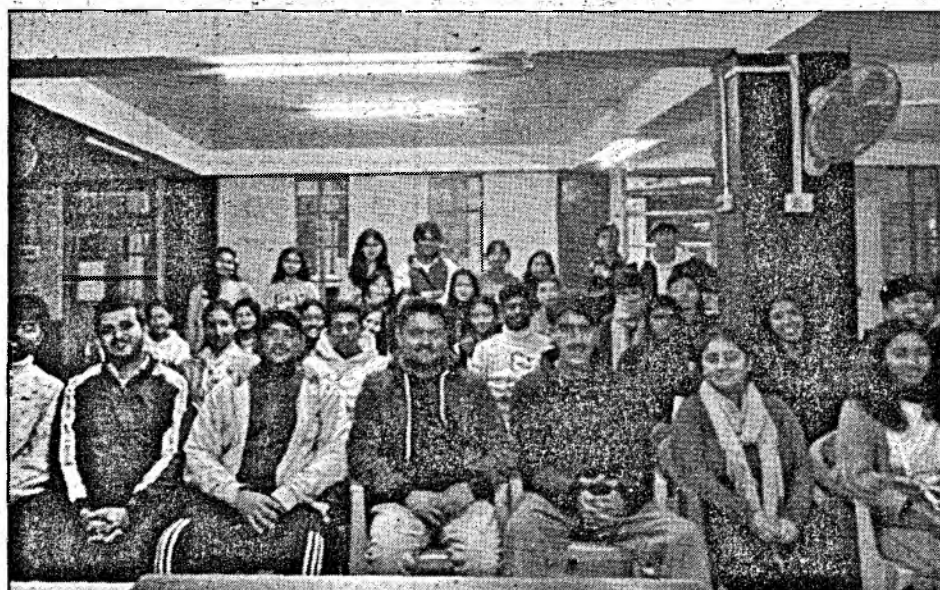
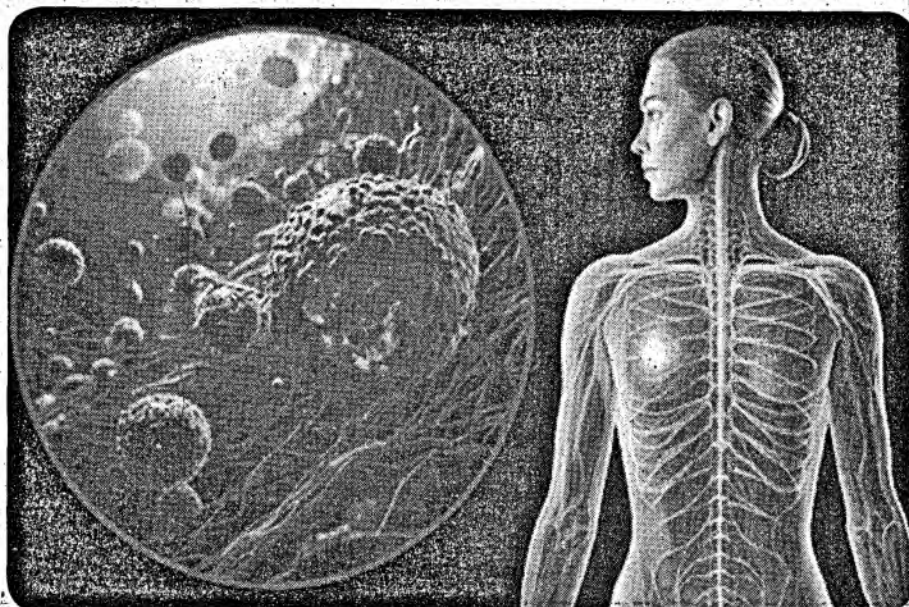
"Genetic susceptibility, earlier reproductive transitions, and distinct lifestyle factors may contribute to this disparity.

These findings highlight the importance of early screening programmes for women in this age group to enable timely detection and intervention," said the researchers led by Saravanan Vijayakumar from the ICMR-NCDIR, in the paper.

The study stressed that it is important to consider low BMI as a potential risk factor for breast cancer prognosis and treatment outcomes, as these findings highlight.

As India has a high prevalence of abdominal obesity, lifestyle interventions aimed at reducing waist circumference may be beneficial for preventing breast cancer.

Notably, the review, also highlighted the critical need for large, extensive, population-based prospective cohort studies in India to define breast cancer prevention and early detection strategies with greater precision. *(IANS)*



Participants of a general meeting of the All Shillong Gorkhali Chattr Sangathan, which was held in the city on Saturday. During the meeting, new office-bearers of the organisation were elected while discussions on the organisation's future social initiatives were also held.

Conrad goes candid...

(Contd from P-1) While agreeing that the mining method was problematic, he criticized the abrupt nature of the ban, which affected the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of families without a transition period. He noted that the state is finally moving toward a scientific mining process, with four legal mines recently granted permission after years of legal and administrative groundwork.

USD 10 billion vision

Looking ahead, Sangma is "bullish" about his economic roadmap. He has developed a vision document targeting a 10-billion-dollar economy for Meghalaya by 2028-2032. This plan integrates growth in tourism and sports with social justice goals. "When we reach 10 billion, every home should have water, every family should have a house, and every home should have electricity," he stated, highlighting that economic goals must ensure equity for all citizens.

The man behind the office

Outside of the Secretariat, Sangma remains a devoted family man who makes it a point to attend his daughters' school events. He is also a well-known enthusiast of classic rock, citing Bryan Adams and the Scorpions as his favorites—a trait he shares with many of his generation in Shillong who grew up learning to play the guitar. Interestingly, despite the fast-paced nature of modern sports, he remains a staunch fan of Test Cricket, preferring its traditional format over T20s.

The Chief Minister's message to the youth and his subordinates remains one of service and empathy: "Treat your subordinates the way you would expect your boss to treat you."

Netizens react

The interview has generated a mix of reactions on social platforms, with viewers weighing in on both the content of the interview and the nature of the discussion.

"Impressed by how Sangma spoke about local realities with nuance and confidence," wrote one Reddit user, highlighting the value of leaders from the Northeast engaging in broader national dialogue.

"I'm from Nagaland and I can honestly say he is the pride of Northeast," a user commented on the YouTube video. "Need more Cool politicians like him in central India," another user wrote.

A section of netizens expressed hope that leaders like Sangma could elevate visibility for Northeast concerns on the national stage, even suggesting that this interview points to the possibility of greater influence for the region in Indian politics.

"That's how an educated CM talks. Open to discussion on every topic. Kudos to Sir," a user commented on YouTube. "Glad to say that we have a CM who is very intellectual, smart, approachable. Had met him for an event and he was quick to respond lending a supporting hand to us," another user commented.

New definition of Aravalli Hills triggers protests; activists fear destruction of ecology

GURUGRAM / UDAIPUR, Dec 20: Environmental activists on Saturday held protests in Haryana's Gurugram and Rajasthan's Udaipur against the new elevation-based definition of what constitutes the Aravalli hills, which they feared could prove detrimental to the ecological balance of one of the country's oldest mountain ranges.

In Gurugram, a large number of activists, members of social organisations and locals gathered outside the residence of Cabinet minister Rao Narbir Singh and staged a peaceful protest.

The protesters held banners and placards, and raised slogans such as "Save Aravalli, Save the Future" and "No Aravalli, No Life". They expressed deep concern over the Supreme Court order ratifying the new definition.

The top court, on November 20, 2025, accepted the recommendations of a committee under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change on the definition of Aravalli Hills and Ranges.

According to the new definition, "Aravalli Hill is any landform in designated Aravalli districts with an

elevation of 100 metres or more above its local relief" and an "Aravalli Range is a collection of two or more such hills within 500 metres of each other".

"This decision could encourage mining, construction and commercial activities, increasing the risk of destruction of the natural beauty of the Aravalli Range. We believe this decision could be detrimental to its ecological balance," said a protester.

Activists said Aravalli mountain range is a natural protective shield for the Delhi-NCR region, and plays an important role in

preventing pollution, desertification and water crisis.

They demanded that the government declare Aravalli a completely protected area and bring in a strict and clear policy for its conservation.

"Nature cannot be compromised in the name of development, as the conservation of Aravalli is linked to the secure future of coming generations. Toxicity of air is gradually becoming widespread," said Sanjiti, a protester.

In Udaipur, a large number of lawyers took to the streets, protesting against the new definition of Aravalli.

Raised slogans, they marched from Udaipur court premises to the district collectorate, where they submitted a memorandum addressed to the President and to the additional district magistrate.

The lawyers said the future of Rajasthan and Udaipur would remain secure only if the Aravallis are protected.

"The government should take immediate and concrete measures to ensure conservation of the mountain range," said lawyer Manish Sharma, one of the protesters. *(PTI)*

Shullai inaugurates feeder...

(Contd from P-3) road connectivity reaches residents right up to their doorsteps.

Later, while speaking at Upper Kench's Trace, the MLA said that the existing road there is extremely narrow and congested, with some stretches measuring barely nine feet in width, making vehicular movement difficult.

He said a detailed project report (DPR) with an estimated cost of Rs 1.83 crore was prepared, following which the project was finally sanctioned.

The road, once completed, will benefit not only residents of Upper Kench's Trace but the entire Riat Laban Dorbar Pyllun.

"It will be widened to 18-20 feet, include proper drainage, and provide parking facilities. The road will also extend up to the main gate of the Army area falling under Kench's Trace," Shullai said.

PWD Executive Engineer S. Lyte, Deputy Executive Engineer Happy Pakynten, Rangbah Shnong of Lumshatsngi Kench's Trace Wallambok Lyngdoh, other officials, members of the Dorbar Shnong and local residents were also present during the programme.

Group files plaint...

(Contd from P-3) to the media persons, the leaders stated that the decision to file the FIR stemmed from the alleged high-handed manner in which non-tribals were running the market, notably failing to provide employment opportunities to local youths.

They claimed that despite repeated meetings and assurances, including engagements with high-level individuals, promises to employ locals remained unfulfilled.

The association further alleged that the cattle market's presence had yielded no benefit for local youths, many of whom remain unemployed.

As a result, the leaders said, the association could no longer remain silent and was compelled to seek legal intervention against the market's alleged operation without proper authorisation from the relevant government authorities.

108 services staff seek...

(Contd from P-1) such as Provident Fund, medical insurance, Employees' State Insurance and leave, stating that the absence of such provisions has caused distress among workers.

The union also expressed disappointment over what it described as unfulfilled assurances by NHM authorities to release increments and arrears before Christmas, noting that no such payments had been made till date.

Referring to recent statements by the Health Minister that the 108 service is functioning smoothly, the union said the assessment does not reflect the working conditions of employees. It maintained that the service continues to function effectively because of the sustained efforts of workers over the years, despite the lack of benefits and job security, and emphasised that the service remains vital for providing emergency medical assistance to the public.

MEMRIWU has once again appealed to the government to either directly take over the management of the 108 service or regularise its employees without delay. The union has sought immediate intervention from the Health Minister and Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma to resolve the pending issues.

State's leaders share message of...

(Contd from P-1) Welcoming the gathering, Andrew Simons said Christmas stands as a reminder of the enduring values of love, peace, compassion and humanity. He said the message of Jesus Christ symbolises hope for humanity and calls upon people to serve one another with kindness and selflessness, fostering harmony and brotherhood in society. He added that the occasion provided an opportunity to renew commitment towards spreading joy, understanding and unity.

Addressing the programme, Speaker Thomas A. Sangma said it was a moment of joy and privilege to celebrate Christmas at the new Assembly premises. He described Christmas as a season of reflection and renewal that reminds people of God's love and encourages kindness, understanding and compassion. He also thanked the Members of the 11th Meghalaya Legislative Assembly for attending the programme.

Deputy Speaker Limison D. Sangma said that in Meghalaya, Christmas is not only a religious festival but also an integral part of the state's social fabric. He observed that while Christmas has deep religious roots, it has evolved into a broader celebration of joy, love and hope, inspiring generosity and care for those in need.

In his message, Neil Vimal Kumar said Christmas signifies hope and the revelation of God to humanity, reflecting God's closeness to people and enabling them to understand divine love through His presence.

Later, Chief Minister Conrad K. Sangma, Speaker Thomas A. Sangma and the Members of the Legislative Assembly present participated in the ceremonial cutting of the Christmas cake.

Nothing is impossible, the word itself says 'I'm possible'!

—Audrey Hepburn

The Shillong Times

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Tense Bangladesh

THE run-up to the February 12 general elections in Bangladesh has been extremely tense—a situation punctuated by the gunning down of prominent youth leader Sharif Osman Hadi by unidentified assailants in Dhaka on December 12. His funeral on Sunday, after an unsuccessful attempt to save his life through hospitalization in Singapore, reflected the deep tension within. Chief adviser to the interim government, Muhammad Yunus, was personally present and addressed the large crowd, paying tributes to the deceased. Osman Hadi was in the forefront of the student offensive that ousted Sheikh Hasina and her Awami League from power last year. The scenes of violence against Hindus by anti-India elements in Bangladesh after Hasina's ouster from power might assume a fresh vehemence now, if the latest incidents are any indication. India is watching the developments closely. The situation has reached a point wherein India suspended its visa applications in Chittagong after an incident at the office of the Assistant High Commission on Thursday. If violence spirals, the February elections might face serious odds.

The evolving situations in Bangladesh cannot be seen or tackled in isolation. Islamists, backed by Pakistan, are at work there, with several other external entities including China seeking to fish in the troubled waters. Attempts are on to strengthen anti-India feelings among the masses. Long years of close associations between the Hasina-led government and the Indian establishment had not been to the liking of these forces. Under the circumstances, the religious twist was a natural corollary. There have been incidents of physical assaults, temple desecrations and even sexual assaults on hapless people of Indian origin. Yunus has repeatedly promised India to check such persecutions, but this could be beyond his call. Islamist fundamentalists have been getting encouragement from Pakistan's generals, and more so after Hasina exited from the scene.

Notably, in relation to Bangladesh, Pakistan has its axe to grind against India. The Pakistani generals, who were waiting for an opportunity to play around in Bangladesh ever since its formation half a century ago, are believed to have conspired to fan the anti-establishment sentiments there, leading to Hasina's abrupt ouster from power. The demand from Dhaka to deport her from exile to face the courts there has not been responded to by the Indian government. She cannot be thrown to the wolves. India has as much of a commitment to Hasina and her family that led the liberation movement against Pakistan and the sway of its notorious generals in the 1970s. Issues are now getting intertwined, with Pakistan leading two fronts against India—one in Kashmir Valley from the sensitive western border and the other through proxy fighting from the eastern side. In these emerging situations, anything is possible. Operation Sindoor did not tame Pakistan. India stresses that this engagement has not been stopped yet, but only suspended. Irrespective of whether or not the big brother is in the loop, for India, the route to tackling the odds in Bangladesh is through tackling Pakistan. A deficit on this front could mean a season of continued regional uncertainties.

How EAPs have worsened Inequality in Meghalaya

By Avner Pariat

Meghalaya has been a recipient of substantial Externally Aided Projects (EAPs). A Google Search defines them as "Funds provided by international financial institutions (like the World Bank, ADB) or foreign governments to developing countries for large-scale infrastructure, social, or environmental projects, acting as crucial additional development finance where domestic resources fall short, often with concessional terms (low interest, long repayment) and channelled through the central government to state agencies, helping build key assets like metros, roads, dams, and rural development." The first one that came to my attention (and I think that of most people's) was the Supporting Human Capital Development Project, a \$100 million dollar loan issued by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). Since then, we have had numerous other funders such as the World Bank, JICA, KfW Development Bank and the list goes on. Yet, beneath the official narratives of growth and connectivity, a troubling pattern emerges. There is mounting evidence that these EAPs are acting not as levellers, but as engines of inequality, exacerbating the very divides they aim to bridge. This article seeks to examine three critical pathways through which this occurs in Meghalaya: Elite Capture, Skewed Employment, and the hidden burden of Repayment Obligations.

In Meghalaya's unique socio-political ecosystem, where traditional tribal systems (clanship, syiemship, nokmaship) hold significant sway, the phenomenon of "elite capture" is particularly potent. EAPs, which channel vast resources through state and local governance structures, are exceptionally vulnerable to this dynamic. Elite capture occurs when the benefits of development—especially in the form of infrastructure contracts and land acquisition—are systematically diverted by a powerful minority. In Meghalaya, this often manifests in several ways.

First, the tender processes for lucrative contracts (construction, supply, and consultancy) under EAPs frequently favour established businesses, often belonging to influential clans, or political families. This sidelines smaller local entrepreneurs, concentrating wealth and economic power. Is it any wonder that big "professional" construction companies are now in a

feeding frenzy throughout the state? This creates a politically undesirable situation in the long run where favoured contract winners can aid and abet the political capture (via electoral bonds, campaign funding) of the electoral mandate. Is it any wonder that big firms like Grant Thornton, KPMG, etc get large sums of money per year for "consultancy" while local talent is never optimised and instead languishes within the government departments? This design has serious flaws and is why India has such a bad Gini Coefficient score (used to measure inequality).

Second, the critical stage of land acquisition can also be manipulated. Projects in road connectivity, water supply, or tourism infrastructure may be slated for areas where local elites (MLAs, MDCs, local heads, bureaucrats) have landholdings or commercial interests, rather than in the most needy or remote villages. When determining who receives the benefits of EAP funding, local figures in authority prioritize their kin or supporters, leaving out the landless, women-headed households, or the marginalized. Through this, the elites reinforce their power with modern financial clout, creating a self-perpetuating cycle of patronage and exclusion. The intended beneficiaries—the poor, the working classes and the socially vulnerable—watch on as the machinery of development rolls by, serving interests other than their own.

A primary justification for EAPs is local job creation. However, the employment generated is often transient and skewed, failing to foster sustainable livelihood transitions. Most EAPs in sectors like road construction, power, and building create a surge in demand for low-skilled, daily-wage labour. While this provides temporary cash inflow, it is precarious work with no social security, skills advancement, or long-term prospects. Conversely, the skilled and semi-skilled positions—site supervisors, engineers, accountants, and machine operators—are frequently filled by non-locals. This is due to a real gap in local technical capacity. The result is a "leakage" of the project's higher-value economic benefits. Local youth may find themselves as helpers or manual labourers on projects crossing their own land, unable to access

the training or upward mobility that would break cycles of poverty. Furthermore, EAPs may create jobs for which the local educational system has not prepared the majority. This creates a small, privileged class of English-educated, urban youth who benefit, while the vast majority, educated in the state's vernacular and often struggling system, remain in the informal sector.

Many politicians have repeated the refrain of EAPs leading the state into a "debt trap". While very simplistic (economist Sumarbin Umdor has highlighted that public debt is necessary for growth), the long-term fiscal implications pose a significant threat to equity. A significant portion of EAPs in India, including those in Meghalaya, are not grants but loans contracted by the government. These loans must be repaid with interest. Although terms are favourable, repayment constitutes a future claim on the state's fiscal resources. Here lies the hidden peril: if an EAP does not generate substantial, broad-based economic growth that expands the state's revenue, its repayment will inevitably compete with other essential public expenditures. In the future, the Government of Meghalaya will face a fiscal squeeze where funds that could have been allocated for pro-poor initiatives—healthcare, investments in public schools, pensions, or support for small farmers—are instead diverted to service debt for projects whose benefits were captured by a few. The poor, who benefit most from direct social sector spending, effectively bear the long-term cost of projects that disproportionately aided the affluent. Again, I am not parroting the simple-minded politicians because I believe loans are a good thing if we know how to use them. I am of the opinion, however, that currently the EAP loans are not being managed well and would need a number of socially conscious managers instead of a few IAS officers. After all, this is our money and we should have a say in how it is used.

Recommendations:
1. Mandatory Social Equity Audits & Participatory Planning: Every EAP must begin with a rigorous, independent assessment of potential inequality risks. Planning must move beyond token consultations to structured, empowered participation

from community-based organizations (CBOs), women's collectives, and representatives of marginalized groups. Traditional institutions must be engaged as partners in equity, not just as signatories.

2. Transparent, Decentralized Benefit Governance: Create publicly accessible online portals detailing all project contracts, budgets, and beneficiary lists down to the village level. Implement Community Scorecards and Social Audits led by civil society, allowing citizens to track spending and outcomes. Procurement policies should mandate a large quota for local, small-scale contractors and suppliers. Workers must also be consulted and not just the contract winners. Public debt must be monitored and investments that expand the revenue base must be prioritized.

3. Building Local Capability, Not Just Infrastructure: Every EAP must have an integral, well-funded Local Capacity Building and Skilling Component. This means partnering with local ITIs, polytechnics, and NGOs to create training pipelines aligned with project needs—from carpentry and masonry to GIS surveying and environmental monitoring—ensuring skilled jobs go to locals.

Externally Aided Projects are neither inherently good nor bad. They are powerful tools whose impact is determined by the hands that wield them and the systems that guide them. The current trajectory risks using precious resources to etch existing inequalities deeper into the state's socio-economic landscape. However, by confronting the demons of elite capture, demanding employment justice, and accounting for the true cost of debt, Meghalaya can harness EAPs for their intended purpose: to lift all boats, not just the yachts!

Sidenote: One of the consequences of EAP funding is that they have allowed for skewed salaries and financial benefits to accrue to a few people whose main business it is to "sound smart". Even within the same agency now you might find people who make Rs 3 lakhs per month while the actual drudge work might be done by people getting paid Rs 30,000 per month. This is not ideal and creates resentment amongst the employees. Silent mass resignations follow soon after and highly capable people leave on account of this. None of this imbalance in payment would have been possible without the advent of EAP money.

What is Christmas?

By Ubahunlang Dkhar Tmar

In the book of John Chapter 1:1, it is written "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God". The same voice resonates through the devout man of God, the prophet Isaiah who prophesied the birth of Jesus Christ about 750 years (7th centuries & a half) before the actual birth of Christ. In his prophecy he gave key details regarding this birth which can be found in the book of Isaiah chapter 7:14, 9:6-7, 11:1. This is not a co-incidence but a divine intervention, we can also read this in the book of John Chapter 3:16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him shall not perish but have everlasting life".

The birth of Jesus Christ is not a myth but an established historical fact approved by both Biblical and Non-Biblical Scholars. The birth of Christ was also accounted for and narrated in the book of Matthew Chapter 1:18-25 and Luke Chapter 2:1-20.

From a historical point of view and numerous academic debates and counter-arguments regarding the actual date of the birth of Christ, one fact remains clear, and

lies and friends, exchanging cakes, attending concerts, merry making, which is much more of a social and cultural extravaganza. In its Biblical and theological essence, Christmas is not material, it is spiritual.

The birth of Jesus Christ is a historic moment not only on the earth but the entire universe, Christmas is the greatest gift of all gifts. It is that moment in the annals of the history of humankind that God came down to Earth and chose to be among his beloved and special creations to redeem them from their sins, iniquities and all the ills and malaise of the world that came about as a result of that exit from the Garden of Eden.

The true meaning of Christmas is about re-establishing a firm relationship with God and to realise his purpose and his unfathomable love (agape) to each one of us from different backgrounds of life and lineage.

The embedded message of Christmas is also about Peace, for the Son of Man is also the Prince of Peace. In John 14:7 Jesus said "Peace I leave with you; my piece I give you. I do not give as the



that is, Jesus Christ was a phenomenal giant figure who walked on this earth with his followers and well-wishers; there are historical documentations that attest to this historical Jesus, from both the Christian, Roman and the non-Roman sources. Jesus Christ, the Son of God came to proclaim the word of God, curing and healing the sick, the poor, the maimed, performing astounding miracles that shook both the Roman world and the Orthodox Judaism till his death and his resurrection.

According to the Gregorian Calendar, Christmas is that momentous occasion at the fag-end of the year, now commonly viewed and accommodated as a public holiday which is the annual religious festival of the Christians, commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ about two millennia ago in Bethlehem, a town in ancient Judea, which is now under the territory of the Palestinian Occupied West Bank of Israel.

The early Christian churches and traditions never celebrated Christmas for theological and cultural reasons. There are those who associate the celebration of birthdays as a pre-Christian pagan tradition! It can also be a political reason, where during the first three centuries' Christians lived under Roman rule where the abuse and persecution of Christians was accepted as a normal occurrence. It was until the time when the Roman Emperor Constantine I (306-337AD) who played a vital role to legalize Christianity as a religion that the first Christmas celebration was recorded on the December 25, 336 AD (anno domini) and from then on it has spread to different parts of the old and the new world.

Christmas is now more of a dominant cultural and commercial phenomenon especially in capitalist and liberal democracies. It has crept and diffused to every nook and corner of the world, with various shades of celebrations and modifications. People from all walks of life celebrate Christmas.

Christmas is not only about exchanging gifts, decorating the Christmas tree, attending church services, partaking in meals with fami-

world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid!

Christmas is also about Trust and Faith. Both Joseph and Mary trusted God and walked by faith and avoided the wrath of Herod; the Roman appointed ruler of Judea who sought to eliminate the baby Jesus for he felt threatened after he learnt from the three wise men about the birth of the King of Kings. In this context it also reminds me of a verse from Proverbs Chapter 3:5-6 "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thy own understanding, in all thy ways acknowledge him and He shall direct thy path". Christmas also gives us that divine opportunity to re-establish hope, to self-introspect, to gather and reconnect family and friends and enrich the true meaning of humanity. But the question still lingers and remains; Why did God choose to come down to earth, to become flesh and blood and face the harshest trials and tribulations to live among the people for the redemption of Sin?

At long last, Christianity is not only a religion per se but a way of life; to walk and work with God. Jesus Christ came to this world to establish this heavenly precept and dictum. The great teachings of Jesus Christ can also be found in the 'Sermon on the Mount' in the four Gospels, Matthew, Luke, Thomas and Mark. These teachings and sayings contain the crucial fundamentals on the conduct of life and pursuit of salvation.

To conclude, we can extrapolate that these teachings of Christ can also have a positive socio-political ramification that deals with the ethics and morality of governance; institutions of various hues and shades and society at large. For the ills of society and polity can only be pruned and eradicated by well-entrenched moral, ethical principles and integrity of mind, body and spirit. Almost all great learned men and women of science and literature understood this fundamental pre-condition. Albert Einstein once said "... only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life".

A Blessed Christmas to One and All.

Letters to the Editor

What's next for Bangladesh?

Editor,

The war of narratives has begun as tension between India and Bangladesh rises even as relations are at their lowest ebb. Sharing a 4,096 kilometre border with North East India it has always remained a porous one. On this side of the fence, we troubleshoot the problems of illegality in entering a foreign space coupled with cattle smuggling to human trafficking. This time the ballgame has changed for Sheikh Hasina, who has taken shelter in India since the coup rattled the leadership which she and her father dreamt of. We must survive with our neighbours, considering the world is divided and Donald Trump is tightening visa rules, which according to his understanding can strengthen Homeland Security.

Sinister elements are ruling the roost in Bangladesh and anti-India remarks from National Citizen Party (NCP) leader Hasnat Abdullah is adding fuel to the fire thus paving the way for a new intelligence war which could shape geopolitics in the region. Bangladesh's importance as a vital trade route through the Chittagong

port and Chinese investments in two ports namely Chattogram and Mongla and Saint Martin's Island are key assets which India's laser pointer should be aiming at. Other factors that can break the region is the rise of religious fundamentalism which is slowly sinking into young minds.

Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence, or ISI, should not be allowed to influence political parties in Bangladesh through strategic and tactical destabilization in Northeast India. Authors Deep Halder, Jaideep Mazumdar and Sahidul Khokon have woven strong points for policymakers if they would pay heed in their book 'Inshallah Bangladesh: The Story of an Unfinished Revolution'.

Yours etc.,
Christopher Gatphoh,
Shillong-10

Cautious approach needed for both bills passed by Parliament

Editor,

Amidst pandemonium in both Houses of Parliament, two important bills—one related to nationalisation of insurance and second seeking to allow private companies

to set up nuclear power plants were passed.

In the modern world, where the social security offered by joint families has almost eroded, insurance plays a crucial role in the well-being of a family. As such, insurance companies must command an exceptional level of public confidence because the insured person needs to trust the insurance company to fulfil its financial obligation if they are no longer alive. India had nationalised life insurance, and the Life Insurance Corporation of India was formed only after several private insurance companies shut shop. Events of a similar pattern happened in the general insurance business. However, people gained confidence in insurance companies after the nationalisation and insurance penetration, though slow, picked up pace. Though the government allowed private insurers in 2000, it insisted on local partners having a major stake to ensure stability.

With the passage of the Sabka Bima Sabki Raksha (Amendment of Insurance Laws) Bill, 2025, the government lifted the safety valve that was in place for 25 years, allowing 100 per cent foreign investment in the insurance sector. This will attract global insurers to either

set up new business or take over the existing business, resuming the much-needed dollar flow in the country and creating new jobs. However, the government must ensure that the fight for market share among the insurers does not end up eroding people's trust in insurance.

Similarly, the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill, which allows private companies to run small modular nuclear reactors to produce power and reduce the liability of equipment makers, will also have a long-term effect. On the positive side, it will increase power production in the country exponentially. When data centres for artificial intelligence—which is set to herald a new wave of industrialisation in the world—have become power guzzlers, India cannot remain a power-deficient nation and squander the opportunity to benefit from the new technological change. The reform will bring in capital and initiative to the nuclear power industry, bringing in dollars as well as jobs.

It suggests other measures meant to spur private sector investment in the industry. It sets a Rs 3,000 crore liability cap on private operators, with the government bearing

responsibility for any liability from accidents beyond that limit. This gives government authorities major influence over the functioning of the regulatory body and it sets different insurance requirements for public and private sector entities. These steps might have the right intent behind them to excite private sector players about making major investments in the sector. But they risk setting up an unbalanced structure where the government bears the bulk of the responsibility for security, safety and economic liabilities while the private sector benefits from incentives with relatively less accountability. Moreover, it also compromises the autonomy of the regulator. Ultimately, what the private sector needs is the assurance of reliable returns because of large enough consumption. That will need public trust, which, in turn, requires laws that are the same for all players: is the SHANTI bill such a neutral adjudicator? The bill must pass this crucial test to succeed.

The advantages of a safe and stable nuclear energy ecosystem should be abundantly clear by now. France, which gets two-thirds of its electricity from nuclear power, is much less vulnerable to volatile oil and gas

prices than any other major nation. That enables it to both lead the global transition to clean fuels and stay insulated from some of the effects of global conflicts like the Russia-Ukraine war and instability. The French example, with its tough regulatory framework and dominance of State-owned enterprises, also offers valuable lessons on what India must do as it seeks a similar expansion of its nuclear-generation capacities.

On the flip side, however, nuclear power in the hands of private companies, whose sole motive is profit maximisation, raises concern over potential nuclear hazards in the world's most populated country. The recent IndiGo crisis is an example of the profit-driven pursuit of private companies. If something similar occurred in the nuclear industry, lakhs of people would pay for the mistake with their lives. The government must tread with caution on the implementation aspect as these two bills will decide how it will be remembered by posterity.

Yours etc.,
Yash Pal Ralhan,
Via email

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Right to 'Good' Roads

THE news that Moolamyliang village located in Saipung Block, East Jaintia Hills will not be able to celebrate its annual Christmas festivities which have become synonymous with a booming tourism culture as people visit the village to witness the Christmas spirit there, is depressing to say the least. The reason for not holding its Christmas celebration where the entire village participates is owing to the dilapidated road condition which has deteriorated to a point where it is impossible to drive over it without being enveloped in a dust cloud. This shows the inequitable development in Meghalaya and the lack of accountability of the State Public Works Department which constructs roads that do match up to the standards prescribed by the Indian Roads Congress which specifies the width of the road and drainage. In large parts of Meghalaya road construction does not include side drains, hence during the monsoons all the water flows onto the road and erodes the poorly laid bituminous layers which all too often don't conform to the quality and thickness required.

Even within Shillong city roads are built to last one season only so that contractors continue to make money from road repairs. Travelling to rural Meghalaya is dangerous as roads are constructed to fit one vehicle only. When an oncoming vehicle meets with another from the opposite direction, one of them must drive to the side at the risk of falling into a drain or a precipice. Unfortunately, no PWD engineer has been questioned or punished for poor road construction, nor has any contractor been blacklisted for roads that show signs of eroding and developing craters within 6-7 months. Is this not why the social audit institution was created? Sadly, this institution like all others is in a state of somnolence instead of taking stock of all construction works of the State PWD. It is a well known fact that corruption is embedded in the PWD and PHE Departments. A walk through the forests of Meghalaya will reveal dozens of pipes lying unused. Obviously, the contractor who supplies water pipes to Meghalaya has made his/her money but the PHED is yet to fit those pipes to water sources.

Moolamyliang is at a distance of 10 Kms from Khliehriat, the District Headquarter and had become a model for reclaiming areas hitherto given to coal mining. The village had taken a conscious decision to make tourism a selling point as an alternative to coal mining. The village tries to emulate Mawlynnong known as Asia's cleanest village and the villagers have unanimously tried to maintain high standards of cleanliness and planted trees in areas that were earlier cleared for coal mining. Moolamyliang has been organising the Annual Christmas Lights Festival from December 18 to January 3 every year. During this period the entire village is lighted up with colourful light bulbs and every household takes part in this preparation. That this spontaneous, community driven event has to be shelved because of the decrepit road condition is a tragedy in the making. People of Moolamyliang must take this issue seriously and demand answers from their MLA and the State PWD.

Letters to the Editor

Customary Ruling Clan of Hima Sohra

Editor,
The word "Customary Ruling Clan" is a word mentioned in clause 11 of the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and headmen) Act, 1959. The recent appointment of Acting Chief by KHADC to a person from a clan other than the "Syiem" clan which is a customary ruling clan of Hima Sohra is uncalled for. It is an insult to the Syiem and the customary practices of Hima Sohra. The KHADC which was set up under the Constitution of India, with an aim to act as a guardian or to protect the traditional customs of the Khasi has put itself into shame and it has really acted over smart. The question I ask is, should we allow this style of functioning of KHADC which is currently run by a political party which used to claim to be transparent and clean but is now showing its lack of experience?

Yours etc.,
D. Diengdoh
Sohra

Objectionable letter

Editor,
This email has refer-

ence to a letter to the editor which was published in The Shillong Times on Dec 19, 2025. On reading the letter titled, 'On Islamic Terror' it appears that it makes quite inflammatory remarks which should not have been published and not given a platform by the newspaper in the first place.

Secondly, I would like to point out that giving such simplistic arguments about who is carrying out these terror attacks based on appearances is naive. In the world of geopolitics, false flag attacks and covert operations are not uncommon. I refrain from blaming any country or group based on doubts at this time. But it is clear that the hero of the Bondi beach tragedy was a man named Ahmed al Ahmed. Many Muslims too died in the Delhi blast carried out by the MBBS doctors. ISIS caused more damage in Syria and Iraq, which are Muslim majority countries than anywhere else in the world. Before making the conclusions such as those in the letter, a pragmatic analysis must be made about who really benefits from such attacks, rather than explain it by fanaticism on the part of the terrorists.

Finally, I reiterate a point repeated often in public by many- that Islam does not support the shedding of in-

U Kiang Nangbah and the Unbroken Thread of Jaintia Identity: Resistance, Language, and Selfhood

By Dr. Omarlin Kyndiah

In the hills of the Jaintias, where the Syntu Ksiar flows with quiet dignity past the memorial at Madiak Kmai Blai, memory is not merely preserved, it is lived. On 30 December 1862, in a market place Yawmusing of Jowai, U Kiang Nangbah was hanged by the British after a sham trial that history rightly remembers as a judicial farce. His crime? Refusing to accept foreign domination over his people's land, customs, and conscience.

Born to Ka Rimai Nangbah in Treppeale, Jowai, U Kiang Nangbah came of age in the shadow of empire. The Jaintia Kingdom once a sovereign Hima governed by the Syiem, with Elakas under Dalois, Patorships, and village councils (Waheh Chong) had been dismantled in 1835. The British annexation did not merely redraw administrative boundaries; it sought to erase a civilisational edifice built over a millennium. Though they initially ruled with a light hand, that restraint vanished by the late 1850s.

The imposition of house tax and income tax in 1860-61 was the spark. But the fuel had been accumulating for years: the prohibition of cremation - a core practice of the indigenous Niamte faith; the establishment of a police outpost adjacent to sacred cremation grounds; the confiscation of ceremonial weapons during the 'Pastieh Kaiksoo' dance; the shooting of a monkey in the Khloo Langdoh sacred grove by a constable named Solomon Dohling. To the British, these were minor administrative measures. To the Jaintias, they were acts of cultural hegemony.

At the Dohbar convened by Manik Pakyntein nicknamed Daloi Tyngkaen in Minkoi Pirdi, U Kiang Nangbah's response was unequivocal: "Natives do not pay taxes to foreigners." His words were not just defiance; they were a reassertion of sovereignty. When British officers ransacked the home of Lakhi Pridiang in Chilliengrai for refusing to pay, U Kiang Nangbah arrived and met force with resistance.

The rebellion that followed was not spontaneous. It was the culmination of deep communal anguish. The twelve Dalois, representatives from across the Jaintia Hills gathered at Madiak Kmai Blai beside the river Syntu Ksiar. There, according to oral tradition, a test of leadership was proposed: whoever retrieved the Phlang Letang plant from the river's depths would lead the movement. U Kiang Nangbah succeeded. Garlanded with the armour of the Daloi of Nartiang, he was unanimously chosen as leader.

From January 1862, he waged a guerrilla war that colonial records reluctantly

admitted was "prolonged and arduous." The British, who had dismissed earlier hill uprisings as "tribal disturbances," now deployed regular regiments. They called it a "Little War" - a euphemism that belied the scale of military mobilisation required to suppress it. Yet, as with so many anti-colonial struggles, betrayal from within proved decisive. U Kiang Nangbah was captured through the complicity of a traitor and executed without due process.

His death did not end the resistance. Fighters in Rymbai, Padu, Nangding, Nongbareh, Umkiang, Mynso, and Lamin continued the struggle. Oossa Marateang was hanged in January 1863. But by February, the movement, now leaderless and fragmented, was crushed.

Yet what the British could not destroy was memory. Through Paroms oral narratives passed from elder to youth - the story of U Kiang Nangbah survived. Unlike societies with written chronicles, the Jaintias entrusted their history to the living voice. Skeptics have dismissed oral history as unreliable, but for a people whose worldview is intergenerational and communal, Parom is not myth it is testimony.

From Colonial Erasure to Post-Independence Marginalisation

The political insignificance imposed by the British did not end with 1947. When India gained independence, the Jaintias found themselves absorbed into the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council in 1952. Though Khasis and Jaintias share linguistic and cultural affinities, they are distinct political and historical entities. The Jaintia Kingdom had a centralised structure; the Khasi Syiemships were more federated. The British had already differentiated them administratively; yet post-independence governance ignored this distinction.

The inequities were stark and deliberately lopsided. In 1953, under the Assam Land and Revenue Regulations, 1886, the United Khasi-Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council imposed house tax exclusively on Jaintia households, sparing the Khasi Syiemships. While the Jaintias bore this financial burden, their vibrant, privately owned markets generated over ₹2 lakh annually, twenty times more than the ₹10,000 collected from Khasi markets. By 1962-63, a telling 68.1% of the Council's total revenue came from the Jaintia Hills. Yet, despite this disproportionate contribution, development resources, government appointments, and administrative attention flowed overwhelmingly toward the Khasi

Hills, leaving the Jaintias not only taxed but marginalised, their sacrifices ignored and their needs sidelined in their own homeland.

This was not just fiscal injustice it was existential erasure. The Jaintias feared becoming a "subordinate group" within their own homeland. As early as 1900, they had formed the Jaintia Durbar, twenty-three years before the establishment of Khasi National Durbar. In 1928, they petitioned the Simon Commission against being classified as a "frontier tribe," which would relegate them to backwardness.

After independence, leaders like S. Bareh intensified the demand for a separate Autonomous District Council. Memoranda poured in (43 in total) arguing that only self-governance could preserve Jaintia political identity and prevent assimilation. In 1957, a delegation told Union Home Minister Gobind Ballabh Pant: "Nothing short of a separate District Council will suffice." They even warned that if denied autonomy, they would prefer direct central administration, lest they "be pushed to political oblivion."

The Jarman Commission (1963) finally heeded to these pleas. Its report acknowledged "prevailing tension and bitterness" due to "lack of uniformity in administration" and recommended bifurcation. On 1 December 1964, the Jaintia Hills Autonomous District Council (JHADC) was born - a hard-won restoration of political selfhood. It was not independence; it was dignity.

Language as the Heartbeat of Jaintia Identity

If U Kiang Nangbah defended the Jaintia body politic, then the Jaintia language sustains its soul. Often mischaracterised as a "dialect of Khasi," Jaintia is a distinct language within the Austro-asiatic family. Linguist Robbins long ago cautioned against conflating political convenience with linguistic reality: mutual intelligibility does not negate linguistic sovereignty.

The written record of Jaintia dates to at least 1900s, documented in the Linguistic Survey of India. But literacy in Jaintia is not confined to paper. It lives in Bam Phalar dramas. Over 1200 scripts composed in the last 78 years by the seven Poh Chnong localities of Jowai. It echoes in the radio broadcasts of All India Radio since 1947. It pulses in the poetry of Albin Pariat, the "national poet of the Jaintias," whose *Ka Kot Rwai Paar* (1937) immortalised both folklore and wartime longing. It resonates in L. Sunghoh's *I Rwai Lai Thma* France, a haunting ode

to the Jaintia Labour Corps who served in World War I and returned with dreams of linguistic revival.

Even missionaries recognised its uniqueness. Rev. G. Angel Jones, a Welsh missionary fluent in Jaintia, proposed a Bible translation in the language. But in a 1950s meeting of the Bible Society, members dismissed the idea, claiming Jaintias "could easily cope with Khasi." The proposal was dropped: another quiet act of linguistic marginalisation.

In 1975, the Jaintia Language and Literary Association (Ka Sein I Ktien Wei Thoh Jaintia) was formed to reverse this tide. Its Constitution declared a threefold mission: preserve, develop, and research the Jaintia language and literature. Under the guidance of scholars like Prof. B. Pakem, it standardised a 33-letter Roman script by retaining 28 letters from Khasi orthography but adding five unique characters to capture Jaintia phonemes. The system is rigorously phonetic: what is spoken is what is written.

Then came a historic breakthrough. On 25 January 2017, the JHADC constituted the Jaintia Alphabet Committee. Chaired by Prof. P.M. Passah, its sub-committee submitted a refined proposal in July 2018. Five years later, on 11 August 2022, the Jaintia Phonetic Alphabet was officially notified in the Meghalaya Gazette, a landmark act of institutional recognition.

Yet official status must translate into practice. The JHADC administers over 70 schools. It has the constitutional authority under the Sixth Schedule to introduce Jaintia as a medium of instruction. Even one weekly period dedicated to the mother tongue would plant seeds of revival. For a child, learning in their native language is not just pedagogical, it is psychological liberation. It says: Your voice matters. Your ancestors' words are worthy.

Conclusion
U Kiang Nangbah did not fight only for land or tax exemption. He fought for the right of the Jaintia people to exist on their own terms to cremate their dead, to dance their dances, to speak their language and to govern themselves.

Today, his legacy demands more than commemorative statues (though the one at Madiak Kmai Blai stands as a sacred marker). It demands active cultural stewardship. Language is not a relic; it is a river. If it is not fed by new voices, it dries.

The journey from 1862 to 2025 is not one of defeat, but of resilience. From the Dohbar at Syntu Ksiar to the Gazette notification of 2022, the Jaintia people have woven resistance into renewal. The thread remains unbroken. Let us now ensure it never frays.

and secure environment for our children. Our children are our pillars of tomorrow and therefore they require great care, supervision and nurturing. Starting from the hearth and home they need to be guided and be taught to be conscious and conscientious and learn about what is right and what is wrong. The home should be a place for them to feel free and safe. Likewise at school, alongside academic pursuit, morality and moral values and the ability to live in complete association with and respect for another, irrespective of one's gender is pertinent. They need to realise that every single life is precious and valuable and no one has the right to overpower and trample upon another. Right from a very young age, it is important to make them firmly believe that they must be selfless and compassionate.

As adults, it is our duty and responsibility to lead by example while at the same time we must question and introspect the way we lead our lives: Are we doing enough as parents, educators, friends, family and inhabitants of this world? At home, as a family, do we really spend adequate time with our children? How many of us actually have at least one meal a day together as a family? In school, are

students taught principles and values of righteousness in letter and spirit As a society do we fulfil our responsibilities of fellow feeling? In today's world especially, technology has become so advanced that it is important to impart moral values and guide our children towards becoming less dependent on digital content and social media and develop self-reliance, compassion and ethical thinking. Moral values must be cultivated through daily interactions and reflections on one's actions and interactions with fellow human beings in order to make them responsible individuals in the society.

Alongside academic pursuit, moral upbringing and the overall well-being of our children is not merely a duty but a necessity. When provided proper guidance children can become responsible and compassionate citizens. We must make our pillars of tomorrow resilient, empathetic and compassionate human beings because the future rests on their shoulders. Only then can we hope to have a happy and peaceful world.

Yours etc.,
Jennifer Dkhar,
Via email

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Winter Tales of Days Gone By – Ki Khana Tlang

By Kyntiewborlang Kharakor

Like Tungrymbai, this piece was tenderly wrapped and allowed to ferment. Months later, when the weather was favourable, it was finally unravelled; the leaves carefully stuffed in the bin to prevent the dogs from investigating. Fingers flat out like the bottom of a steel mug, pressed word by word to shape an overall even texture. The foul smell of "SELF-DOUBT" lingered in the room for a while (will readers like it? Is the recipe correct?). Next, it was stuffed in a black karai with a mug of water, refilled several rounds, and left to boil and simmer till the stench finally turned into an "insatiable smell of hunger" that hits the soul. At this particular point, the cook garnered enough confidence to proceed forward and fashion the real taste of winter.

"Bah Bah, Bah Hap, Bah Nah, Bah Rit, Bah Lung, Bu Rit, Titi, Bah Duh!!" – our roll call was taken during one post-exam November evening in Dr. K's clinic. Fondly, he teased Mei as "Ko Lok CRP"; being a Central Government officer, father had to man his DEP post in Tura for the whole year. A simple appointment for deworming tablets turned into a full-fledged interview. "U sumar brow ne u shim inter-

I tai i PCN lei ju lah peit sliam rel" (can't tolerate that eavesdropper). From success stories of SSLC toppers to crime news, humorous snippets to an embarrassing exposé, inspirational people, entertainment and weird talents – PCN had it all. Life was slow then – the boy who ate chillies for breakfast, lunch, and dinner became a hot topic of discussion for the whole week, till PCN aired another Sunday story that had all the makings of a blockbuster hit.

"Madan Lyngkhui" offered immense joy, pleasure, and an unforgettable gift every winter – a gift of cracked heels to all the children. The bamboo forest and Bahdiang's Rynsan Biskot could not muffle the echoes of screams in the late afternoons emanating from caning therapy sessions followed by an excruciating heel scrub. Bahbah's Si-syphian effort with a pumice stone, lemon-mixed glycerin, and KRACK cream treatment deserves every bit of praise and gratitude. He said, "If you wear your sweater inside out, 'Suid Tynjang' will kidnap you in your sleep and put you on top of a leaf in the middle of the forest."

In the midst of Anurag,

"Bih recited lines from the Khasi Primer – "B: Bol, Bek; U Bu bad ka Bih ki ia shongkulai dieng." Her playful taunts taught emotional endurance, AND she had a colour cable TV: the only one in a colony of a dozen tenants. Her heart is as big as her Assam-type verandah, with space for hordes of slippers on Sunday PCN nights (Peitngor Cable News): The slippers in her verandah dwindled and vanished when father got a transfer back to Shillong and bought an Akai TV and subscription of Bah Bil's Cable TV Network."

biw!"). Bahbah overheard an annoyed Meisan's complaint through the curtains. Dr. K is the faint 'cheer' to father's "CHHHHEEEERRRR!!!" – he always drops a hefty family discount on every clinical visit. It was a common thing, these roll calls; like Mr. Jairaj's articles/letters in The Shillong Times. I loathe the fact that I am the only male child without the prefix 'Bah' in my name. I demanded an explanation from my grandmother. As I tried to gently pass the warmth of my youthful hands onto her wrinkled cheeks, she took a vow of eternal silence.

Bih recited lines from the Khasi Primer – "B: Bol, Bek; U Bu bad ka Bih ki ia shongkulai dieng." Her playful taunts taught emotional endurance, AND she had a colour cable TV: the only one in a colony of a dozen tenants. Her heart is as big as her Assam-type verandah, with space for hordes of slippers on Sunday PCN nights (Peitngor Cable News). The slippers in her verandah dwindled and vanished when father got a transfer back to Shillong and bought an Akai TV and subscription of Bah Bil's Cable TV Network.

"Sawdong ka lyngwiar shawla" the eight siblings fought for the prime TV throne which offered warmth and the best TV stare mode. The taped-up remote on life support was always in the queen's hand during evening hours for Doordarshan Shillong. Ki Kam u Bah Besbha, Rymmuin Darling, Ka Pang Khyllah, Mano ba bha Shyengkrung, U Thlen and various other folktales, Tang Shikyntien, and the myriads of dramas performed by the SBUK were thoroughly enjoyed. Once, father brought home Bah Besbha.

PCN was such a hit that it was coined into a Khasi word, a synonym of 'Loni' (eavesdropper); as in, "Ia

Prerna, and Mr. Bajaj's 'dhum-ta-na-na-na' (Ekta Kapoor's Kasauti Zindagi Ki – mother's favourite), the youngest three dived off like kittens around the cosy floor. We woke up in our bed and it was all gone! ALL GONE! Suid Tynjang must have really carried and placed us on this fleeting leaf of time. Warm winter family nights, cracked heels and scaly cheeks, PCN... it stopped! When, where, How and Why... We forgot to leave a bookmark. It's like finding a needle in haystacks. As we flipped back through the overlapping layers and pages of our memory, one thing for sure marked the shift, and that was the onset of cellphones... and with it, the quiet disintegration of familial bonds.

While feeding fresh charcoal into the ashy embers to keep the fire alive, as the adamant woman and the kids are out on their alu-muri/alu-chat spree... the nostalgic aroma of tungrymbai wafts through the cold winter lanes, nudges the skylight, and slips into the cosy study. The scent trail shapeshifts into a key that unlocks the treasures deep inside the hippocampus. Forbidden to taste due to health reasons, I devoured it with my nose – the olfactory indulgence was my cheat code.

Like the weary hound who brought the delectable paste into the LURI LURA market, I wish to leave a lingering, eternal FRAGRANCE on the readers that etches itself into memory, refreshed every winter season, as they stumble upon this op-ed (with joy, hopefully!).

(The writer is a borderline-late millennial. Word to the wise – comparison is the thief of joy. Each generation brings its own flavour.)

"Every act of creation is first an act of destruction."

— Pablo Picasso

The Shillong Times

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Politics as business

REPORTS that the ruling BJP carried a hefty after-poll bank balance of nearly 7,000 crore, against the Congress party's over 500 crore, should surprise none. This is the recorded white money, a small portion of these parties' actual funds. For every big payment to a party, there's a quid pro quo while in power. Rules are bent, systems sabotaged, and favours extended to the eagles on the prowl. Receipts below Rs 2,000, which form the bulk of contributions to parties, are not part of this record. Politics today is the best business for many to make money. Ideologies have given way to 'blah-blahs' from public platforms that enthrall crowds, or distribution of doles and kits to select concentrations of masses from the lower rungs of the society, who, poorly informed as they are, are easy prey to unscrupulous elements practising vote bank politics. Democracy here has degenerated into 'shows' by crooked politicians, who purchase people with promises of goodies and welfare, win power and loot the exchequer in multiple ways. Democracy gets degraded into a play of money power. The poor, whose empowerment is possible only through a fast-paced economic growth to the nation, are made fools of the first order, they being at the receiving end of the politicians' lip-service.

The Congress party had earned mass opprobrium due to the CAG's expose of the large-scale corruption under the UPA-II. Narendra Modi spearheaded a campaign against the Congress-led ruling alliance in 2014, promised to end the corruption raj and wrested power for the BJP. But, the corruption at the levels of bureaucrats and politicians has only skyrocketed in recent times, a worst manifestation of which is evident in the judiciary. The accidental currency packs burning incident at a senior judge's residence in Delhi was only the tip of the iceberg; and curiously, he's being given a long rope. Modi has proven that he has no strength to re-energise the decaying systems. He makes this up with shows—like large-scale road constructions. However, there too, the CAG has a while ago noted huge financial cuts/misappropriations, possibly benefiting the ruling party or its leaders.

The life of the ordinary folks and the middle-income groups has not improved in any significant way even as India claims to be the world's third largest economy. The strength of this economy is the strength that the business class, the middlemen, the hugely corrupt breed of bureaucrats and politicians accord it. No more than 20 per cent of the society is leading a comfortable life and enjoying the benefits of national growth, either through good remuneration or through corrupt means. For the rest, life is a hard struggle. A steady enlargement of governmental controls, through new and harsh laws, makes life for the ordinary citizens more miserable. In the global happiness index, we fare poorly. Fundamental streaks are increasingly evident in governance. The RSS, which guides this governance from behind, is game with all these. The collective obsession of the present establishment is more on negativism, like erasing the legacy of the well-adored father of the nation, Mahatma Gandhi.

Letters to the Editor

A Student's Plea for Sanity Amidst the Noise at NEHU

I walked into North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) with a sense of pride. For a student like me hailing from far away hilly villages of Meghalaya, to study at a Central University is a privilege; it is supposed to be a place of higher thought, research, and the quiet pursuit of knowledge. But lately, when I walk through this campus, I do not hear the sound of debate or learning. I hear only the noise of coercion and when I am back home, people tell me, "You are one of the so-called educated NEHU students who behaved like barbarians".

It breaks my heart to say this, but we have lost our way. As students, our primary duty; our dharm is to study. We are here to build our careers and be leaders of tomorrow. Instead, we have turned the campus into a permanent political theatre and in doing so, we are destroying the very institution we claim to be "saving".

The Delusion of "Elected" Administrators. There is a fundamental misunderstanding gripping our student body today. We seem to believe that the University Administration is a political arena where we hold the franchise. We act as if the Vice-Chancellor's office is a constituency and the VC is a politician who must campaign in our favour.

We need to ask ourselves: Since when did the appointment of a Vice-Chancellor become an election based on student opinions, where they can appoint and remove him/her according to their will?

A VC is appointed based on statutory provisions, academic merit, and the decision of the Visitor (the President of India). It is not a popularity contest. By demanding resignations through strikes, lockouts, and intimidation whenever a decision displeases us, we are establishing a dangerous precedent of mob rule. If we treat the VC's tenure as something we can vote out with a protest, no competent academic will ever want to lead this university. We are not "fixing" the system; we are breaking the chain of command required for any institution to function.

The Irony of Representation.

The hypocrisy is stark. We demand "democratic accountability" from the highest office of the university, treating the VC like a rogue MP. Yet, we must look in the mirror: Since when is our own Student Union based on appointment without contesting elections?

We often see student leaders acting not as representatives of the students' academic welfare, but as shadow administrators, dictating terms with the arrogance of lifetime appointees. We demand the VC follow the rules, yet we break the rules of civil discourse daily. We cannot demand democracy while practicing autocracy.

The Death of Respect and "Akor"

Riwar Cup: Grassroots Football and Community Spirit in Tangmang

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

A few weeks ago, I was invited to be a guest of honour for the 4th Riwar Cup, organized in Tangmang village on 20 December 2025 by Pryshang Da Lade, a socio-economic organization aimed at creating an alternative space for indigenous tribal communities, and the Tangmang Sports Association. To reach the village, I had to cross Pynursla and negotiate the tricky stretches after Laitylyngkot until Lyngkyrdem, which are under construction for the Shillong-Dawki highway. In the last couple of years, the area has become infamous for massive landslides leading to loss of lives. The reason becomes clear as one travels through it.

Loose pebbles are scattered across the road, and piles of sand create a serious risk of skidding. Huge boulders are lying on the side of the newly dug road, with quite a few overhanging on the rock face, looking like they were going to fall on top of passersby at any time. In fact, around Rngain village, we saw a crane crushed under huge piles of boulders, a reminder of the danger that faced every commuter. As someone who doesn't believe in the existence of an uncaring and jealous supernatural being, I wondered if my safety depended on discovering faith and then renouncing it later when I could get back home safely. But in the end, superstition never saved anyone, and I reached Pynursla safely, still faithless and saved from having to give in to delusion.

To reach Tangmang village, one had to take a detour from the Pynursla junction. Instead of taking the road which leads to Dawki, we took the road on the right to Nongjri, also located along the Indo-Bangladesh border. After travelling a few kilometres on the road, we again took a diversion to the left and continued for around 15 kilometres until we reached the village, passing a waterfall and some breathtaking views along the way. I was in the village more than ten years ago when I came with my team to collect data for a project on medium and small enterprises. We stayed only for a couple of days and slept in a classroom by joining the benches together and covering them with blankets. This time, I had come just for a day. Riwar Cup is a football tournament which brings together War Khasi villages

to compete for the trophy. I am not sure, but I don't think War-Amlarem villages are currently taking part in it. Hopefully, in the future, all War Khasi villages from Khasi Hills to Jaintia Hills can compete in the tournament. Maybe Jirang, which is also a War Khasi village in Ri Bhoi, can someday send a team to compete. In this year's edition, there were eight teams each for boys and girls. All the players and their coaches stayed in the village during the three days of the competition, with their accommodation arranged in Tangmang Secondary School. During lunch, which was also served at the school, we saw sleeping bags spread on the floor, while a few tents were also put up on the compound. Everyone stayed together in order to foster a sense of unity and camaraderie among the participants.

The matches themselves were quite competitive, and although I could attend only the last day, what I saw really impressed me, especially the finals. Among the boys, it was Nongthymmai and Pynter who had reached the final. In the first half, the teams were quite evenly matched until Nongthymmai eventually scored a goal, after which the floodgates opened, with Pynter conceding a few more goals in the second half. What was really impressive about the performance by players from Nongthymmai was not just the skill they displayed but the organization and tactical awareness with which they played. It was "pass and move" football. An extra player was always available for a pass to relieve the pressure, and the goals were examples of perfect teamwork: overlapping runs, cutting the ball inside, and passing it to a player making a late run into the box to tap the ball into the net—highly simple but very effective. Game management was also quite good, something that was missing from the Meghalaya vs. Sikkim Santosh Trophy match, where Meghalaya allowed Sikkim to come back and win the game. It was quite clear that the players were coached, and they executed their skills perfectly. Pynter gave their best, but in the end, the quality of the opposition was simply too much to handle.

The other final, between

the girls, however, was very evenly matched. Nongmadan and Umsyiem fought hard against each other, but neither was able to get past the other's defence. When a loose ball broke near the box, the goalkeepers from both teams put their bodies on the line to prevent a goal. On one occasion, the young goalkeeper of Nongmadan got a boot to her head as she was lying on the ground grappling to hold on to the ball. There were moments when things got heated and opposing players started quarrelling with each other. It was here that the coaching team of Umsyiem did a commendable job in getting their players to respect the spirit of the game.

It was quite clear that players from Umsyiem had received some coaching. Their jerseys had an attractive dark green patterned design compared to the simple yellow and black striped jerseys of Nongmadan. The players also looked more athletic. The coaching staff was constantly asking the players to get into certain positions and was frequently swapping them to keep everyone fresh. Even before the game, while players from Nongmadan were busy practising their shooting, Umsyiem players huddled around the coach listening to instructions. But on the field, all of this preparation did not matter, and both sets of players were equally matched until the final whistle.

I particularly liked the goalkeeper from Nongmadan—very young and light on her feet, with good ball-handling skills. So, when the game entered the tie-breaker phase, I thought that Nongmadan had a better chance than Umsyiem because of her. In fact, she made a very good save from point-blank range and almost saved the final shot that gave Umsyiem the trophy. Still, I was quite impressed by her reading of the game, quick footwork, and most of all, her bravery in putting her body on the line for the team. Players from Umsyiem, if not already, will and should be looking to play in the SSA women's league. But I hope players from Nongmadan will also strive to improve themselves and find out how far they can go.

Compared to the men, women players from Me-

ghalaya are making rapid progress at the national level. Garhwal United FC won the Indian Women's League-2, the second-tier professional women's football league in the Indian football league system, thereby earning promotion to the first tier next year. They achieved this with seven players from Meghalaya in their squad: Sanfida Nongrum, Fragrancy Riwan, Ribansi Jamu, Bonifilia Shullai, Banisha Wahlang, Ribahunshisha Kharshing, and Iarapleng Nongrum. If the team does well next year and the players continue to progress, we could possibly have players from the state being selected for the national team. At the moment, Fragrancy Riwan and Ribansi Jamu have already become part of the national team set-up. Hopefully, more will join them in the future.

What was unique about the trophy ceremony was the fact that the organizers invited elders of the community to present the trophies to the winning teams. This was suggested by Rothell Khongsit, Chairperson of the Meghalaya Rural Tourism Cooperative Federation Ltd, who was the Chief Guest of the occasion. What disappointed me was that the runners-up trophies for both the boys' and girls' teams were presented by women, while the winners' trophies were presented by men. It was initially a mix-up, but then someone shouted that the boys' trophy was the biggest and therefore should be presented by men. Hopefully, next time we do not encourage such sexist remarks. Despite this isolated incident, the programme went very well and lasted late into the evening, while I returned to Shillong.

Football is the most popular game in the state, but our achievements are nowhere near our enthusiasm for it. We came close to winning the Santosh Trophy a few years ago but have not made it to the final since then, particularly in the men's category. However, the rise of women's football gives some hope that this might change. It is tournaments like the Riwar Cup, and many others played throughout the length and breadth of the state, that hold the hope that one day we can be champions.

(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)

drops. The only victims of this chaos are us, the silent majority of students who just want to attend classes and earn a degree that holds value in the outside world.

It is not the student's duty to run the administration. It is the student's duty to learn. We have crossed the line from activism into obstructionism. It is time to lower our voices, put down the placards, and pick up our books that have accumulated dust in the library. Let us restore the dignity of NEHU, not by shouting at our teachers, but by listening to them and letting them take charge. We students are still young and have a lot to learn.

Yours etc.,
A concerned student of NEHU Shillong.
Name withheld on request
Via email

UDP's inner strife?

Editor,
Recently, Paul Lyngdoh, the UDP party working President has conjured up the party's lack of decision-making nuances in the sphere of fairness and collective co-operation and mutual understanding. Such unsavoury comments from one of the key leaders of UDP denote tell-tale signs of fissures in the UDP's camp. Lyngdoh's remonstrance will lead many, not to forget his bete-noire, to cast aspersions on him for having been deprived of ministerial status, hence his sense of unwarranted grouse!

Nonetheless, if the assertion of Lyngdoh is anything

to go by and that his removal as cabinet minister was surreptitiously influenced by his party top leadership and the latter's, reported silence has lent credence to this exposure. Notably, to add layer to the optics, Lyngdoh further emphasized that on the UDP foundation day, the party President Metbah Lyngdoh had affirmed that there was no plan whatsoever for a change of ministerial faces as far as the UDP is concerned! But this renege on a commitment made at a Party meeting by the Party chief, unerringly demonstrates an overall unsound leadership and absence of core democracy. Paul's experience may perhaps be arguably compared to what Julius Caesar had uttered to Brutus: "Et tu, Brute," before dying as the former was being stabbed to death by Brutus himself, one of his most trusted friends!

Yours etc.,
Jerome K Diengdoh,
Shillong-2

Concerns over fairness in recent MPSC Examination

Editor,
Through this letter, I wish to draw the attention of the concerned authorities and the general public to the growing incompetence of the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) in conducting competitive exams in a fair and transparent manner.

The recent examination

conducted for the post of Typist has raised serious concerns among aspirants. Traditionally, such examinations are expected to be objective in nature, preferably based on Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs), to ensure transparency and uniformity in the evaluation process. However, with the examination being descriptive, this makes the awarding of marks highly subjective and open to bias, thereby defeating the very purpose of a competitive exam.

Further aggravating the method of selection was the practical test which was conducted at a very basic level and failed to adequately assess the actual typing skills and professional competence required for the post. When a subjective written examination is coupled with an overly easy practical test, it creates ample scope for favouritism and raises apprehensions that candidates with personal connections may be unfairly advantaged.

I urge the concerned authorities to take immediate cognizance of this matter, and introduce reforms to ensure transparency in the way exams are conducted. I hope this letter will serve as a wake-up call for the authorities to act responsibly and ensure justice to all aspirants.

Yours etc.,
Bansiewdor Mylliemngap,
Via email

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O Come, All Ye Fretful

By Ellerine Diengdoh

The air in Shillong has the consistency of a tired dream—thick with the smell of pine needles and the silent chill of a city that has forgotten how to breathe. I sit in a chair that doesn't quite fit my back, listening to the tenor sax of Stan Getz... it sounds like a man sobbing into a silk handkerchief.

As the "Season of Love and Miracles" settles over the hills, I find myself thinking about Santa Claus. When you strip away the red velvet and the bells, Santa is revealed as a capitalist snob. He is the patron saint of those who already have everything, checking a list that has nothing to do with "kindness" or "goodness", but everything to do with "credit-worthiness". He is a seasonal deity who only lands on the roofs of those who have long since forgotten the taste of hunger.

To the tourists, the fairy lights look like a celebration.

singing carols; but instead of "O Holy Night," we sit in the dark and swear "O Bloody Hell!"

Instead of water or light, we are given "Concerts". It is a fascinating distraction. The infrastructure is melting, the taps are dry, yet we debate about which man with a guitar deserves our last bit of oxygen.

While we are jumping to the bassline, who is learning? I look at the schools; they are shells. I know our children would like a school where the roof stays on the building—a low bar, perhaps, but one we haven't cleared. It is a fascinating system, egalitarian only in its misery. We send our children to learn from unpaid teachers about a future that was sold off before they were even born.

Perhaps that future lies in "New Shillong", the sequel. Shillong 1.0 is buffering; at 90%, so they are down-

This divide is a physical weight, most visible on the streets. I watch the hawkers—shadow-people who once inhabited the pavements—being replaced by a superior species called "The Car". This metallic beast does nothing but sit in the sun, smugly reflecting the light of a God it doesn't believe in, yet it enjoys more legal protection than a grandmother-trying to sell bits of vegetables to survive. While the poor are squeezed off the pavements, everyone is being squeezed off moisture. I read in the papers that the city is "grappling with a water crisis".

To me, they are just a way to decorate a skull. I have noticed that the divide between the rich and the poor is no longer a line. It is a gap so wide you could park a fleet of water tankers in it—if we could find one that wasn't a hallucination brought on by chronic dehydration.

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loading a new version. It is terribly optimistic—like buying a new pair of socks for a man whose feet have been amputated.

To get there, however, we need roads. But the PWD, the PHE, and the MePDCL behave like three jealous siblings fighting over the same patch of ancestral dirt. One lays the tar—smooth, black, beautiful—and the PHE immediately hacks it open to lay a pipe that will never hold water. Then the MePDCL, feeling left out, arrives a day later to dig a new crater for a light pole that will only illuminate the blackout.

Naturally, I assumed the cure for these woes was simply money. I asked a local where the government keeps the stash intended for "Infrastructure and Other Luxuries". He pointed to the public coffers. I expected to find gold; I found a vacuum instead. The money has undergone a physical change called "sublimation".

I look at the schools; they are shells. I know our children would like a school where the roof stays on the building—a low bar, perhaps, but one we haven't cleared. It is a fascinating system, egalitarian only in its misery. We send our children to learn from unpaid teachers about a future that was sold off before they were even born. Perhaps that future lies in "New Shillong", the sequel. Shillong 1.0 is buffering at 90%, so they are downloading a new version. It is terribly optimistic—like buying a new pair of socks for a man whose feet have been amputated.

state-mandated experiment in biological evolution—an attempt to see if we can evolve into cacti... solitary, defensive creatures who find nourishment in their own bitterness. So, for Christmas, I'd like the water to stop grapping and start flowing. It is terribly hard to wash one's hands of the world's rot when the tap only offers a dry, hollow cough.

Then, the darkness. I want electricity. I know I am being greedy, but electricity is quite useful for seeing things—like the wall you are about to merge with because it's pitch black by 5:00 PM. "Load Shedding" is apparently a local tradition, like

tion." It turned from "Public Funds" into "Private Assets" without ever passing through the liquid stage of "Building Anything Useful".

So, here we are—caught between a concert we can't afford and a pipe that won't flow. We are the only people on earth who can be told the coffers are empty while standing in a three-hour traffic jam of luxury SUVs. But hey, it's the Season of Miracles.

I'm going to go sit in the dark now. If the universe wants to speak to me, tell it to bring a flashlight and a bottle of mineral water.

Merry Christmas to you, and to the potholes!

"Faith is the bird that feels the light
when the dawn is still dark."
—Rabindranath Tagore

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KHADC Reneges On Tradition

THE action of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in appointing an 'acting' syiem who is a myntri by name Mynjurlang Majaw instead of the Syiem Khynnah or the Syiem designate, Marremdor Syiem who is to take over on the demise or ill health of the Syiem, has caused much heartburn among the people of Sohra. Marremdor Syiem has been attending functions along with the late Freeman Syiem who passed away recently. There are times when he is asked to represent the Syiem at certain events. The community of Sohra also accepts this transition wholeheartedly so why is the KHADC making exceptions to the rule? Even if the acting Syiem is not confirmed as Syiem of Hima Sohra as per the protocols cited by the KHADC, he can still remain the acting Syiem until he is confirmed so by due process. But to set aside the name of Marremdor Syiem is not par for the course and is seen as undue interference in what should have been a smooth transition in the appointment of a new Syiem following the demise of the old one.

The United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Appointment and Succession of Chiefs and Headmen) Act, 1959 clearly states that in case of emergency or the demise of a sitting chieftain (Syiem) an election is to be held where the electors are clearly mentioned. Such election is to be supervised by the District Council. So even if the KHADC intends to hold elections to the office of the Sohra Syiemship, there is no bar to having an Acting Syiem to take up responsibilities in the interim. But the KHADC refuses to acknowledge the present Acting Syiem thereby causing an administrative loophole. And if as alleged the acting syiem appointed by the KHADC from among the myntri also happens to be a political actor aligned with the VPP then that makes things really murky. The VPP was elected on the premise of ushering in clean politics. But there is nothing clean in appointing someone not from the "Syiem" clan as a "Syiem" for that is defying tradition.

However, these controversies are not new for the KHADC. In the past too Syiems have been arbitrarily removed and others appointed. KHADC cites many reasons for what is called "pynkhein syiem" or setting aside a duly appointed syiem and appointing another in his place. But what has often been alleged by those in the know is that when a Syiem refuses to toe the KHADC line especially on collection of tolls from markets, forests etc. he is immediately set aside and a person pliable to the dictates of the KHADC is appointed. When the "raid" and "shnong" under Hima Sohra are agreeable to having Marremdor Syiem as their present Syiem then why is the KHADC standing in their way? Is there a reasonable explanation or is the VPP looking at better revenue generation from Hima Sohra which is now a much-visited tourist destination? KHADC owes an explanation to the public on why it chooses to set aside a Syiem who is acceptable to the people of Sohra and wants to create unnecessary controversy.

Letters to the Editor

Unrest in Bangladesh worrying

Editor,

The continuing unrest and violence in Bangladesh are deeply worrying for us all being the closest neighbours. Bangladesh today seems to be burning, losing its balance at the cost of humanity. What is happening there is no longer just an internal political issue; it has a direct bearing on regional peace, border security, and India's long-term interests.

At such a time, history must be remembered honestly. Bangladesh came into being in 1971 with India's decisive help and sacrifice. India sheltered millions of refugees, extended diplomatic support, and lost many lives so that Bangladesh could emerge as a free nation. For this, Bangladesh should always but always owe India a lasting sense of gratitude—not out of superiority, but out of shared history and responsibility. Remembering this past is necessary to keep mutual respect alive.

Reports of killings, intimidation, and the breakdown of law and order are deeply disturbing. Mob lynching has no place in a civilised society. Targeting people because of their religious

background is a complete denial of humanity and justice. No civilised society in the world can excuse or ignore such acts. Those responsible must be punished seriously, for we know silence only allows such cruelty to grow.

The effects of this unrest are already being felt across the border. Fear and violence often force people to move, placing pressure on India's bordering states such as West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram. Local administrations and communities in these sensitive regions face added social and security challenges.

In this situation, India's recent diplomatic engagement and expression of concern are timely and necessary. Voices from opposition leaders and civil society within Bangladesh also show that the crisis cannot be brushed aside.

India must respond with firmness, wisdom, and restraint, guided by both humanity and national interest. A peaceful and stable Bangladesh is not only vital for its own people but equally important for the safety, harmony, and future of the entire region. Peace, safety, and dignity for ordinary people must remain above politics, for without these, no nation can truly move forward.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj,
Via email

The Magnificat and the Birth of Iisous Khristos

By Kyrsoibor Pyrtuh

end of apartheid, the end of bombings, the end of children being murdered... As we pour out our rage, our grief, our exhaustion, our confusion, our fears... summon our courage, our fierce love... and our imaginations. May the fire of justice rise from the belly of the earth. May the bombings cease. May liberation come. Now and always. Amen."

The Texts: Luke 1:49-53
This Christmas let us dwell on the Magnificat or Song of Mary which can be found in Luke 1: 49-53 and the Khasi (1871 New Testament) version is reproduced herewith— "Naba uta u badon-bor bad uba ka kyteng jong u ka long ka bakhuid, u la leh ki jingphylla ia nga: bad ka jingsynei jong u ha kita kiba shepting ia u pateng-la-pateng-byynriu: u pynih ia ka bor-bah da ka ksangti jong u; u pynsakymia ia kita ki baleh-khrau ha ka jingmut ki dohnud jong ki: u pynhier

generation to the next, who honours him as God. He has shown strength with his arm. He has scattered those with arrogant thoughts and proud inclinations. He has pulled the powerful down from their thrones and lifted up the lowly. He has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty-handed."

The narrative surrounding the texts above was the visitation of Mary. As per the Gospel of Luke, Mary went to visit her cousin Elizabeth and stayed with her for three months. In fact, Mary was also caused to conceive and carry a child via immaculate conception and by which she expressed her joys and hope. Shortly after Mary's three-month visit and the Magnificat, Elizabeth gives birth to a son, whom they named John. The birth of Iisous (Jesus) occurs later, in Luke 2, after Iosiph (Joseph)

"The Magnificat is also a song with a revolutionary message that justice and hope shall dawn upon the earth through the coming Messiah, Iisous (Jesus). It embodies the profound message that the coming of the Messiah signifies not only divine intervention but also the realization of justice and liberation for the oppressed."

ia ki ba-khrau-bor na ki khet jong ki, bad u pynkyntiu ia ki ba-rangli: u pyndap ia ki bathy-ngan da kiei-kiei-ruh ki ba-bha bad ia ki bariuspah te u pah-noh sudar."

The changes in sentence structure, vocabulary and spelling is evident when compared with the Khasi Bible CL Version 2016—"namar jong kiei kiba khrau kiba U Blei Badonbor Baroh u la leh na ka bynta jong nga. Ka kyteng jong u ka long kaba khuid; na kawei ka pateng bynriew sha kawei pat upyn-i ka jingsynei ha kito kiba pyndonburom ia u. U la kner ia ka-ksangti badonbor jong u bad u la pynsakma ia kiba sarong lem bad ki jingthmu jong ki. U la pynhier ia ki syiem bakhrawbor na ki khet jong ki, bad u la kyntiew shajrong ia kiba rangli. U la pyndap ia kiba thngan da kiei kiei kiba bha, bad u la pah noh thylli ia kiba riwspah."

The Common English Version is rendered thus— "... because the mighty one has done great things for me. Holy is his name. He shows mercy to everyone, from one

and Mary travel to Bethlehem for a census.

The Magnificat: The Anthem of Hope and Resistance.

Essentially, one universally acknowledged aspect of Christmas, regardless of rulers or ruled, tyrants or oppressed, Christians or non-Christians, is that it symbolizes hope, love and peace. But are we being ritualistic or are we approaching it with realism?

For a few within the privileged classes, Christmas often becomes more of a ritual than a genuine expression of these values. Economic inequality has not spared even the so-called egalitarian Khasi society, distorting its core ethos. Thus, for some wealthy individuals be they public servants, politicians or affluent members of community, donating a few thousands/lakh of rupees to buy blankets or warm woollen caps/clothes for the poorest during the Christmas season or sharing a meal just for a day, seems more like a self-serving act aimed at appeasing their god(s) and markets

rather than a sincere gesture of solidarity and empathy. Similarly, the churches' annual visits to the homes of impoverished and sick members, offering old clothes, oranges and prayers, while these individuals are left to fend for themselves for the rest of the year, starkly reveal the hollowed-out meaning of Christmas.

However, there are countless individuals whose lives are subjected to immense oppression and who endure injustice in all its forms whether social, economic, political or spiritual. Despite these hardships, many cling to religious hope, yearning for a dawn of hope and justice in their personal lives, families and communities. I believe that the Magnificat a song of hope, speaks directly to these oppressed souls.

Mary's song, the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-53), is a powerful anthem of hope and resistance. The central theme of the song is that God is lifting the lowly and scattering the proud. The Magnificat is also a song with a revolutionary message that justice and hope shall dawn upon the earth through the coming Messiah, Iisous (Jesus). It embodies the profound message that the coming of the Messiah signifies not only divine intervention but also the realization of justice and liberation for the oppressed.

Furthermore, the advent of justice and hope must be actively translated into concrete actions. It is not enough to merely speak of good tidings or to hold on to optimistic platitudes; true faith calls for tangible efforts to uplift the marginalized, challenge injustice and work towards a more just, equitable and empathetic society.

From the cradle to the cross, Iisous Khristos (Jesus Christ) confronted and battled against the manifest injustices which are being inflicted on humans. Throughout his lifetime he stood on the side of the marginalized, fisher folks, women and those at the bottom of the socio-economic and political ladder. He befriended the Samaritan woman who had become an outcast; he healed and fed those who were denied of basic health care and livelihoods. He lived among the people and died for them so that they can experience life, liberty and the enhancement of justice. Thus, the Gospel or Good News in a massive way appealed to the ordinary people and imbibed in them a sense of great hope.

But somewhere in all that cheer, Christmas itself has quietly slipped out the back door.

Christmas cheer is not intoxication. It is incarnation. That word has been politely pushed aside because it is inconvenient. Incarnation does not sell well. It does not glitter. It does not fit neatly into a shopping bag. It is not about God watching humanity from a safe heavenly distance, offering moral advice from above. It is about God stepping down into dust, into pain, into uncertainty. It is about the Creator becoming created. About infinity choosing limitation. About power choosing vulnerability.

The first Christmas did not happen in a palace. There were no trumpets announcing royal arrival. No chandeliers. No silk robes. No press conference. It happened in a cattle stall, among animals, smells, discomfort and poverty. The King of kings arrived not as a ruler to be feared but as a baby to be held. A baby who cried, needed feeding, and depended entirely on ordinary human hands.

That is Christmas cheer. It is deeply unsettling when you think about it. God did not arrive with answers first. He arrived with presence. He did not explain suffering away. He stepped into it. He did not remove uncertainty. He embraced it. The incarnation tells us that God did not consider our brokenness beneath Him. He came because love always moves toward need.

That is Christmas cheer. Not something you buy. Not something you drink. Not something you perform. It is something you receive. And once received, something you are meant to give.

That is Christmas cheer! So, here's cheers to the right Christmas Cheer..!

Yours etc.,
Dr Omarlin Kyndiah,
Via Email

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Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Christmas Cheer..!

Ask someone today what Christmas cheer is and chances are they will point you to a bar menu, a shopping mall, or a man in a red suit sweating under a synthetic beard, shouting ho ho ho at children who are more interested in his phone than his promise of gifts. Cheer, we are told, now comes chilled in glasses, wrapped in glossy paper, or piped through speakers at a volume that suggests joy can be manufactured if only it is loud enough.

Some believe Christmas cheer begins with a drink and ends when one can no longer remember how it began. Others believe it is measured by the number of shopping bags carried home, the size of the Christmas tree, or how brightly the house across the street is lit, preferably enough to be visible from space. Cheer has become competitive. Bigger trees. Louder carols. Longer credit card bills. The season of goodwill now comes with instalments.

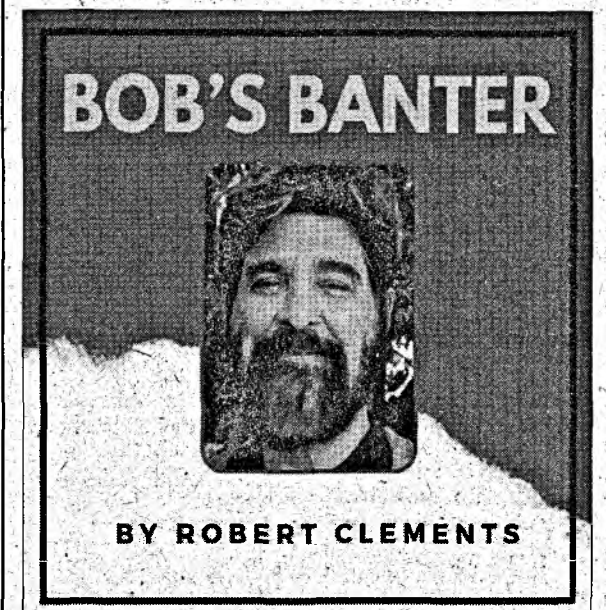
And then there are those who think Christmas cheer is hiring a Santa to wave

passion when we struggle as we do.

Christmas cheer is knowing that when you hurt, God understands. When you are afraid, He has been afraid. When you feel abandoned, He knows that pain. When you are overwhelmed by expectations you cannot meet, He understands that weight. And when you fail, He does not look away.

This is not sentimental comfort. It is radical hope. The incarnation says you are not facing life alone. It says heaven has stepped into your ordinary, your messy, your unfinished story. It says your tears are not ignored and your prayers do not echo into emptiness.

But Christmas does not stop at the manger. It moves deliberately toward the cross. That same baby grew up and chose to carry punishment that was not His, so that we could walk freely with God. Forgiven. Restored. Reconnected. The wood of the manger points quietly toward the wood of the cross. The vulnerability of the infant leads to the sacrifice of the man.



at crowds while retailers wave discounts at wallets. It all looks very cheerful. Very colourful. Very busy. There are smiles everywhere, mostly because the cameras are on. There is laughter too, often forced, sometimes fuelled, and usually exhausted by the time Christmas Day arrives.

But somewhere in all that cheer, Christmas itself has quietly slipped out the back door.

Christmas cheer is not intoxication. It is incarnation. That word has been politely pushed aside because it is inconvenient. Incarnation does not sell well. It does not glitter. It does not fit neatly into a shopping bag. It is not about God watching humanity from a safe heavenly distance, offering moral advice from above. It is about God stepping down into dust, into pain, into uncertainty. It is about the Creator becoming created. About infinity choosing limitation. About power choosing vulnerability.

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That is Christmas cheer. Not something you buy. Not something you drink. Not something you perform. It is something you receive. And once received, something you are meant to give.

That is Christmas cheer! So, here's cheers to the right Christmas Cheer..!

That too is Christmas cheer.

Not a shallow cheer that evaporates when the music stops or the lights come down. Not the fragile happiness that depends on circumstances behaving themselves. This is cheer that holds even when the year has been unkind. When relationships have strained. When losses have piled up. When prayers seem unanswered.

It is not momentary excitement but eternal hope. Not artificial happiness but deep joy. Not laughter fuelled by alcohol but peace rooted in forgiveness. It is the joy of fellowship with our Creator. The joy of knowing we are not alone. The joy of being loved without condition and without performance.

This kind of cheer does not deny pain. It walks through it. It does not demand constant smiles. It offers quiet strength. It does not insist everything is fine. It whispers that everything is held.

That He did not wait for us to improve before loving us. He entered the story, precisely because we could not fix it ourselves.

So yes, sing your carols. Decorate your homes. Share meals with family. Laugh loudly. Give generously. Celebrate freely. All of that has its place. Joy is not the enemy of faith. But do not mistake the wrapping for the gift. Do not confuse noise with meaning or busyness with joy.

And perhaps before telling children to be good because Santa is watching, we should remind ourselves of a deeper truth. God came down at Christmas not because we were good, but because we were not. He came because we needed Him. He came because love always moves toward need.

That is Christmas cheer. Not something you buy. Not something you drink. Not something you perform.

It is something you receive. And once received, something you are meant to give.

That is Christmas cheer! So, here's cheers to the right Christmas Cheer..!

Churning in Bangladesh

THE arrival of Tarique Rahman, son of former prime minister Khaleda Zia and ex-President Ziaur Rahman, from exile on Thursday is significant. Arriving from London after 17 years in self-imposed exile, the surge of his Bangladesh Nationalist Party supporters to welcome their acting chairman reflected the public mood in Bangladesh that's set for parliament polls in February. His 80-year-old mother who leads the party from the front is ailing. Clearly, Tarique Rahman will have an eminent space in the future political engagements there. Caught in a major political crisis, Bangladesh could see the worst unless the drift that marked the overthrow of the Sheikh Hasina dispensation in August last year is arrested. The interim government headed by a set of apolitical personalities under the guidance of Nobel Laureate Muhammad Yunus has its limits. With patently inexperienced people running the government for the past 16 months, and Yunus failing to guide them effectively, the scenario has turned from bad to worse. Leading figures, who led the attack against Hasina in an abrupt street offensive last year are put on the defensive or even liquidated. An anarchic situation is unfolding there. The 58-year-old Tarique Rahman has invoked Martin Luther King as he stepped down, bowed to mother earth and took steps forward. This is significant in a nation that is sought to be drawn into a fundamentalist grip by Islamist forces with patronage from Pakistan's notorious military generals and their ISI external intelligence network.

There's a world of difference between religious fundamentalism and human rights advocacy that sees humanity as one. But, how Rahman courses through hard-edged challenges from multiple fronts remains to be seen. The Awami League of Sheikh Hasina remains a strong political force, pitted against the BNP. Hasina had neutralized her rival's influence with several strategic steps, helping her and the Awami League run the nation for repeated terms. It is also not clear how Tariq Rahman, who inherits the legacy of BNP, would help readjust the bilateral ties between neighbouring countries, principally India, of which Bangladesh's landmass was formerly an integral part.

Hints are that Yunus is caught in a fix. After attempting to browbeat India with his occasional loose talk, he might now be in a mood to sing a different tune. For one, he's seeking urgent help from India for a huge rice shipment to feed hungry mouths there. Bangladesh is also dependent on India for its power supply and much else. The Bangladesh military brass is maintaining a pregnant silence. They may have a card or two up their sleeves, given Bangladesh's past military involvement in coups and in running governments. In the given scenario, no leader or government with a modicum of sense can afford to confront India. New Delhi is watching the developments in Bangladesh with considerable concern and interest. An early restoration of normalcy in Bangladesh is to India's interest as well. Continued disruption in social and political life there would be taken advantage of by fundamentalist forces that are getting patronage from Pakistan. This would vitiate regional stability as well.

'Lest we forget'

By Arjun D. Ryntathiang

"All wars are boyish and are fought by boys" — Herman Melville

The year 2025 marks the 100th birth anniversary of a brave-heart from these hills called Wellington Massar of the Assam Regiment. He lived for just 19 years and his legacy is slowly fading with the passage of time. This is an account of his achievements at the Battle of Jessami and the vital Battle of Kohima. The Battle of Kohima has been voted Britain's greatest battle over infinitely more celebrated British battles such as those of D-Day and Waterloo in a contest that was organised by the National Army Museum at London. Historian Robert Lyman, making the case for Kohima in a debate at the museum, asserted without exaggeration, "Great things were at stake in a war with the toughest enemy any British army has had to fight." It was ranked with Midway, El Alamein and Stalingrad as a main turning point of World War 2. The overall battle saw approximately 12,600 Commonwealth casualties and 58,800 Japanese ones, in what Compton Mackenzie has described as "fighting as desperate as any in recorded history."

The Japanese fighting man believed he was fighting in the proud tradition of the ancient samurai. Bushido, the "Way of the Warrior," had for centuries been the honoured code of Japan, calling upon all young men to be willing to die for their Emperor. This motivated the Japanese soldiers to fight to the death in a manner that the Allied troops judged fanatical. Death in battle was portrayed as a transcendental act and surrender was a disgrace to the soldier and his family. Into this maelstrom of battle was thrust Sepoy Wellington Massar.

Even before he joined the Assam Regiment, Wellington Massar showed a talent for sticking his neck out! When the British launched a campaign to eradicate kala-azar, a potentially fatal disease spread by a parasite, Massar was one of the 5 members of the Khasi tribe to volunteer to be infected and "treated." "He had already shown courage in the public service," recalled the Governor of Assam. "The result of this experiment was to establish scientifically the method of transmission of this disease and thus to provide material assistance in the campaign against it." When Wellington Massar was undergoing

training at the Assam Regimental Centre in Shillong, he was rather high spirited and was getting into trouble with the regimental police! While researching the life of Massar, I came across a quote that summed up his life. "It is a fact that men who do not fit in the barracks and are the despair of Adjutants and Sergeant Majors sometimes find their spiritual home on the battlefield and they thrive there until they are killed." So it was with Sepoy Wellington Massar.

The Battle of Jessami was fought from March 28 to April 1, 1944 by the First Battalion of the Assam Regiment, thus holding the advance of the Japanese 31st Division for 5 days thereby gaining time for the preparation of the defences at Kohima. The citation of 'Battalion Bad Boy' Sepoy Wellington Massar reads, "Throughout the battle at Jessami between March 28 to April 1, 1944 this sepoy on a light Machine Gun

hungry, many without boots and in tattered clothing. Wellington Massar among them to shore up the defences of Kohima. When Lt Col Bruno Brown, the commandant arrived, his ragged condition so moved Charles Pawsey, the Deputy Commissioner that he went to his bungalow and found him a sweater to wear! So one can quite imagine Wellington Massar's condition! Kohima became the furious heart of the battle and men on both sides were to endure unimaginable privation.

In the famous Battle of the Tennis Court in Kohima on 16 April 1944, a party of 4 men led by a local Naga corporal, Angami, jumped out of their trenches and raced down the slope and across the court. Major Albert Calistan asked Wellington Massar to give covering fire with his Bren Gun. Massar put his Bren Gun on the billiards table of the ruined clubhouse on the slope above the tennis court.

It gave him



showed courage and determination of the highest order. In spite of repeated attacks on his post by ever increasing numbers of the enemy supported by mortar fire and infantry gun, he remained cool and steady, maintaining a very accurate fire which took a heavy toll of the attackers. When his light Machine Gun had stoppages he continued to hold the attackers at bay with rifle and grenades. When the withdrawal was ordered on the night of April 1-2 he was the last man to leave his sector."

Fergal Keane writes in his book 'Road of Bones', "One of the last to leave was Sepoy Wellington Massar, the Khasi tribesman who had taken part as a human guinea pig in the fight to rid the hills of kala-azar. Massar had fought hard at Jessami; the pile of dead bodies outside his bunker attesting to his remorseless Bren-gun fire."

The survivors of the Battle of Jessami appeared in Kohima on April 3, 1944. They were all exhausted and

a good line of fire over the Japanese trenches, but once he started firing, Japanese in other positions could easily spot him. Before they left the trenches the men removed the pins from their grenades, giving them seconds to sprint the twenty yards to the Japanese trenches. The Japanese were taken unawares. The Japanese machine gun team were killed and documents and an officer's sword were captured. But as the raiders raced back, Wellington Massar's gun jammed! He was quickly spotted and shot in the leg, rolling off the table and crashing to the floor. Despite the pain, Massar levered himself back on the billiards table and resumed firing until the raiding party was back. Carried out of the clubhouse under cover of darkness, he refused to be taken to the Advanced Dressing Station. He would linger for several more days before being evacuated to Dimapur. He contracted gangrene and died on 18th May 1944, aged 19. [He is commemorated in CWGC, Imphal War Cem-

etry at plot 7.G.21.]

With half the battalion dead, sick or wounded, Lt Col Bruno Brown and Major Albert Calistan came back to Shillong to recuperate and rebuild. In August 1944 there was a medal ceremony for their dead hero Wellington Massar, with all of the survivors of Kohima drawn up on the square facing the Governor of Assam on a raised dais. Fergal Keane, the BBC correspondent who has made a detailed study of the siege of Kohima, states evocatively, "It was a scene from the imperial twilight. The ranks of sepoy in starched jungle greens, the white commanding officer standing in front of them and the King Emperor's Proconsul gazing with studied benevolence upon the entire scene." "Wellington Massar belonged to these hills," declared the Governor, Sir Andrew Clow. Lt Col Brown came forward and turned towards a diminutive woman in the crowd. "His bereaved aunt to whom we all offer our sincerest and deepest sympathy, is here in his stead, he announced and we can assure her that she has an undeniable right to feel as proud of her nephew as we are. Will your Excellency be pleased now to bestow this symbol of his Emperor's gratitude on Miss Florestie Massar."

Massar was awarded the Indian Distinguished Service Medal and a posthumous Military Cross for his bravery at the Battle of the Tennis Court. Japan has always been reticent about its war past. However, things are beginning to change. Recently, Japan's Emperor Naruhito, marking his 65th birthday in 2025 stressed the importance of telling the tragedy of WW2 to younger generations. "As the memory of the war fades today, it is important that the tragic experiences and history are passed on to the generations who do not know the war."

Tenacious men like Wellington Massar fill one with a sense of awe at what they endured on this forgotten Asian battlefield. If we can have statues of icons like U Tirot Singh, U Kiang-Nangbah, Pa Togan Sangma and Captain Clifford Nongrum, the Government of Meghalaya could easily erect a statue of this 'Khlawait' at an appropriate place to remind our coming generations of this incomprehensibly brave man of the greatest generation!

A Good Advertisement How it influences people and their decisions

By Aadi Batra

"Asian Paints - Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai" "Cadbury Dairy Milk - Asli Swaad Zindagi Ka" "Mile Sur Mera Tumhara, Toh Sur Bane Hamara" "Abki Baar - Modi Sarkar!"

Each of these ad campaigns transformed the way Indians feel, think and act. Asian Paints became a symbol of identity beyond colours. Cadbury chocolates were no longer a children's treat but a celebration for all age groups. Mile Sur Mera Tumhara led a campaign of national integration, and "Abki Baar - Modi Sarkar" played a defining role in shaping public sentiment for the BJP-led NDA's landslide victory in the 2014 General Elections.

Despite playing distinct roles that are commercial success, unity in diversity, and political gain, they share a powerful similarity. These campaigns were crafted by India's most iconic adman, the late Piyush Pandey, whose work proved that good advertisements not only help sell the message but shape culture and influence decisions.

Pandey had his own way of advertising his clients. While he was Executive Chairman and Chief Content Officer in Ogilvy India, all his advertisements spoke the language of the people. He used colloquial phrases, relatable characters, everyday humour and emotional appeal to win people's hearts and minds. In many of the ads, he used his personal experiences, like travelling in buses and trains or stories from his cricketing days, which connected with the middle-class audience in India. This way, his ads never seemed like a sales pitch but as stories people imagined themselves in. When we say an ad "touches us," we mean that it could connect with us emotionally and personally, rather than seeming like a mere commercial message.

There is an important question we must ask ourselves. "Why do such ads work?" And the simple answer is the science behind storytelling.

On the surface, a 30-second commercial may seem a bit short to influence a population. But research shows that we humans react to stories and emotional cues faster than logical arguments or product details. We, humans, are rather lazy in remembering facts, but we always remember feelings associated with the said facts. We may not recall how strong Fevicol glue claims to be, but we will always remember the people stuck to the bus because it captured the brand's personality better than any specification.

We may not pay attention to the nutritional value of the dairy milk, but we will remember the girl dancing on the field because her friend won the cricket match, which reflected pure, unfiltered joy, a joy Cadbury democratised across age and gender. The shades of colour on the walls of our homes may be blurry, but the idea of "Har Ghar Kuch Kehta Hai" becomes an intricate part of how we see and portray our homes. Similarly, Mile Sur Mera Tumhara did not just emphasize unity and diversity, but also made us feel united through music and shared emotion. And while we may read political manifestos published in newspapers and websites of political parties, after hearing the repeated slogan across platforms, a slogan like "Abki Baar - Modi Sarkar!" creates a familiarity that we trust, which did not just communicate a campaign; it sold a future through political participation.

The reason for this 'familiarity' and 'belonging' is what psychologists and researchers call the Mere Exposure Effect. The more we come across something, the more we tend to like it and trust it, sometimes unintentionally. Repetition is not the only thing that could persuade us; it is also the repeated feeling we associate with a message. When an ad repeatedly evokes joy, belonging, unity, or aspiration, our minds begin to treat that emotion as familiar and therefore trustworthy.

Pandey's campaigns, rather his stories, mastered this. They were not just repeating visuals; they repeated feelings. His ads did not sell just features; they sold feelings. These feelings gave a sense of belonging, whether it was through national integration, a simple chocolate bar or belief in projected growth or political future. Psychology further explains this as emotional contagion. It is the tendency to absorb emotions when we see them in others. When an advertisement expresses joy, excitement, pride, or unity, a viewer instinctively tries to mirror these emotions in their personal life. This emotional transfer strengthens the bond between the audience and the message of the ad.

Another key factor is narrative absorption. When people are drawn into a brief story, in our case a thirty-second ad, they lower their defences and accept the message more naturally. Pandey's storytelling created these small immersive moments where viewers were not just watching an ad, they were taking part in its world.

Whether it is commercial, social, or political advertisements, all ads shape the collective imagination of a society. They influence the products we buy, the social messages we want to put out as a nation or even the leaders we choose to elect to power. But what does it mean in the current context? In an era of AI-generated jingles, influencer marketing, and digital ads, all of these are forced onto us. The meaningful human interaction, connection or touch has been lost, and this has ensured that memorable advertisements, the ones that shaped a culture, fading away. Many companies now aggressively advertise their products, forcing them on consumers rather than selling them authentically. This is one of the reasons why people have started subscribing to ad-free media; not because the ads are bad, but because bad ads exhaust us.

By understanding consumer psychology, people can protect themselves from becoming passive targets. When we begin to ask ourselves questions like how repetition can manipulate us; how emotions can overshadow facts; how storytelling can influence our behaviour and identity and how slogans can trigger emotions and shape beliefs, we become conscious decision makers rather than mere targets of the ad agencies.

A good ad informs, inspires, and includes the audience, not overwhelms, guilt or tricks them. Pandey's legacy reminds us that an ad can unite an entire country, help us celebrate individuality and bring us joy without manipulating us, all at the same time. We all owe a tribute to him. Not only by honouring his creativity but by also ensuring that future advertisements carry the same qualities and a sense of humanity. If companies and political parties want our attention, they must earn it - not hijack it in the media. And if consumers want meaningful communication, companies must give creativity, ethics, and authenticity, not just marketing gimmicks.

Great advertising is not about selling a commodity more. It is about speaking the truth creatively, touching people's lives responsibly and of course, shaping society for the better.

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

Letters to the Editor

Pinewood Hotel is Dying and the Government is Watching

Editor,

The Government of Meghalaya loudly promotes "Responsible Tourism" a fancy slogan wrapped around eco-tours, homestays, and big music festivals meant to turn Shillong into a global hotspot. But beneath this polished image lies a harsh reality: while pouring crores into attracting stars like Ed Sheeran and building luxury hotels like Vivanta and Marriott, the government is allowing Pinewood Hotel, the soul of Shillong's heritage tourism, to wither away in bureaucratic neglect.

Built in 1898 by a Swiss couple, Pinewood is not just the oldest hotel in Northeast India. It is a living piece of history. It once sheltered British tea planters, served as a hospital during World War II, and hosted dignitaries like the Dalai Lama. For decades, tourists from mainland India dreamed of staying in this classic "Assam-type" heritage hotel.

Today, Pinewood runs on only four regular staff. Ev-

eryone else is on a temporary contract. The legendary Pinewood Bar is managed by a single bartender during peak season, left alone to serve hordes of frustrated guests and tourists. When government officers host private lunch or dinner parties, they pull Pinewood's already thin staff away leaving guests stranded in what was once Shillong's most welcoming place.

This is not mismanagement. It is deliberate erosion - a calculated withdrawal of support to clear space for private profit. When a government lets a historic institution like Pinewood operate without a permanent manager, with almost no staff, and no plan to replace key roles like bartenders or housekeepers, it is not an oversight, it is policy by omission. By cutting investment, moving official events to corporate hotels, and even privatising part of Meghalaya Tourism's own land, the government is ensuring Pinewood fades until its decay "justifies" its removal. This is not neglect. It is institutional sabotage dressed as fiscal prudence, where heritage becomes collateral damage in the rush to rebrand Shillong for global investors, not its own people.

While the Chief Minis-

ter's Grassroots Music Programme makes headlines, Pinewood, our true cultural treasure, is quietly sidelined. Revenue has plummeted, not because Pinewood lost its charm, but because government functions, once its life-line, now go to Marriott and Vivanta. Public money flows to these private chains, while Pinewood stands silent, its manager's post vacant since Mr Das retired.

Let us look at who enables this decay. The privatisation of the Mawdingdiang Pinewood Annexe, a piece of public heritage, was pushed through under the excuse of "modernisation," handing it over to private hands. At the same time, the Urban Development Department, working with the Shillong Municipal Board, gave away prime civic land for the Marriott Hotel, offering only the empty promise that "one floor" would house municipal offices.

These are not visionaries. They are leeches dressed as leaders, sucking the life out of public heritage to feed real estate deals, all while mouthing sweet words about culture and progress.

How can Meghalaya claim to be a "music capital" or a model of "responsible tourism" when it cannot even protect the place where

Shillong's history, hospitality, and identity truly meet?

Pinewood is not just a hotel. It is a mirror. And in its cracked windows, we see the true face of a government that rolls out the red carpet for five-star chains but abandons the soul of Shillong in its oldest home. If this is development, then it has no memory, no conscience, and no honour.

Yours etc.,

Thomas Jones Wahlang,
Via email

The root cause of the decline of humanity

Editor,

The news-item - "Intelligence agencies warn of plot to push infiltrators into India via Bangladesh," published on December 23 in this daily should put the entire population of the Northeast into a pensive mood. While Bangladesh is in turmoil for various reasons, certain forces are actively plotting strategies to even drive infiltrators into the peaceful states of the region. How can we brush this aside when the safety and security of the Northeast are at stake? Mind it, but the roar of vengeance that often echoes from across our neighbouring countries must not catch us off guard. Just look at how minor-

ity communities are picked up, inhumanely tortured, and even killed in broad daylight on false accusations. A poor factory worker, Dipu Chandra Das was inhumanely tortured and killed on charges of blasphemy. However, the investigations carried out by the Police and the Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) found no evidence to back those claims. They were false, fabricated, and unsubstantiated.

Noted lawyer from Bangladesh and human rights activist Parvez Hashem rightly points out that apart from minority Hindus, even Christians are caught between the devil and the deep sea. Over the last few months, Christians in Dhaka have faced terrifying bomb blasts that panicked an already vulnerable population. On October 8, a homemade bomb exploded at the gate of the old Holy Rosary Catholic Church. Then on November 7, St. Mary's Cathedral was bombed, with police discovering another device close by. Again, the next day, November 8, a blast struck St. Joseph's Higher Secondary School, where children study and hope for a better tomorrow. What is it that makes one see the innocent with such hatred?

Yes, I agree with Amir Yaseen Khan for stating in his letter dated December

23, titled "Objectionable Letter," that Islam never supports intolerance, cruelty, or bloodshed of any kind. An eminent Islamic scholar, from Assam, Maulana Nurul Amin Qasimi, also strongly condemned the 'violence against minorities in Bangladesh. He directly urged Bangladeshis to stop targeting Hindus, Christians, or Buddhists, emphasizing that such brutal attacks go completely against Islamic teachings of peace and tolerance.

Of course, every religion shows its believers the pathway to humanity and then divinity. Yet, tragically, the hatred against fellow brothers continues unabated. In just six months, how many innocent lives have been attacked and lost in these barbaric blasts or mass shootings --- be they Hindu, Muslim, Christian or Jewish. Are we not the human beings first? Do the same breath and the same heartbeat not echo through each of us? Why has compassion, a true human virtue, been replaced by hatred and ultimately bloodshed?

Yours etc.,

Salil Gwali,
Shillong

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

The science behind how your winter jacket keeps you warm

As the weather grows cold this winter, you may be one of the many Americans pulling their winter jackets out of the closet. Not only can this extra layer keep you warm on a chilly day, but modern winter jackets are also a testament to centuries-old physics and cutting-edge materials science.

Winter jackets keep you warm by managing heat through the three classical modes of heat transfer — conduction, convection and radiation — all while remaining breathable so sweat can escape.

In a fireplace, heat transfer occurs by all three methods: conduction, convection and radiation. Radiation is responsible for most of the heat transferred into the room. Heat transfer also occurs through conduction into the room's floor, but at a much slower rate. Heat transfer by convection also occurs through cold air entering the room around windows and hot air leaving the room by rising up the chimney. Douglas College Physics 1207, CC BY

The physics has been around for centuries, yet modern material innovations represent a leap forward that let those principles shine.

Old science with a new glow

Physicists like us who study heat transfer sometimes see thermal science as "settled." Isaac Newton first described convective cooling, the heat loss driven by fluid motion that sweeps thermal energy away from a surface, in the early 18th century. Joseph Fourier's 1822 analytical theory of heat then put conduction — the transfer of thermal energy through direct physical contact — on mathematical footing.

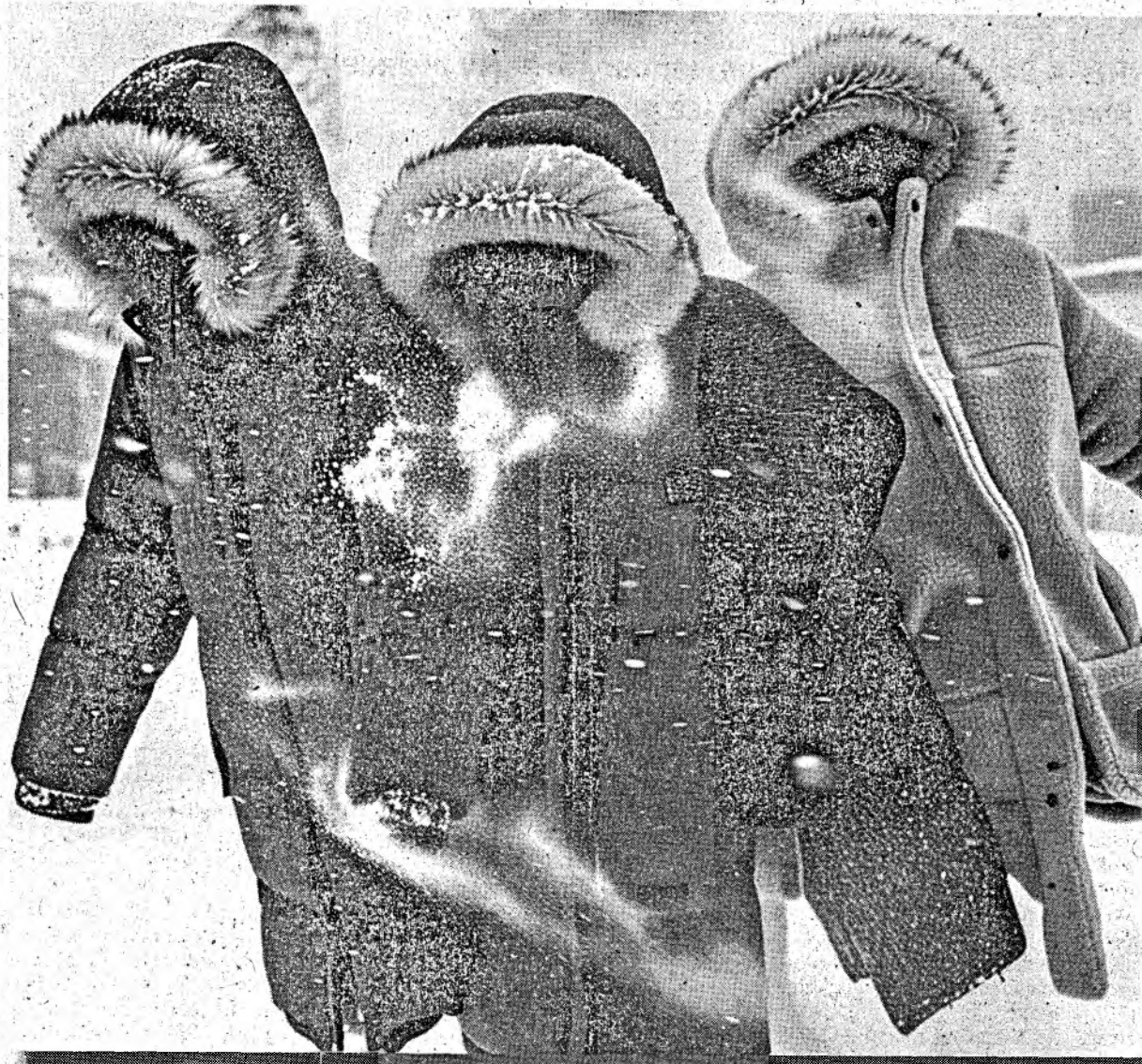
Late-19th-century work by Josef Stefan and Ludwig Boltzmann, followed by the work of Max Planck at the dawn of the 20th century, made thermal radiation — the transfer of heat through electromagnetic waves — a pillar of modern physics.

All these principles inform modern materials design. Yet what feels new today are not the equations but the textiles. Over the last two decades, engineers have developed extremely thin synthetic fibers that trap heat more efficiently and treatments that make natural down repel water instead of soaking it up. They've designed breathable membranes full of tiny pores that let sweat escape, thin reflective layers that bounce your body heat back toward you, coatings that store and release heat as the temperature changes, and ultralight materials.

Together, these innovations give designers far more control over warmth, breathability and comfort than ever before. That's why jackets now feel warmer, lighter and drier than anything Newton or Fourier could have imagined.

Trap still air, slow the leak

Conduction is the direct flow of heat from your warm body into your colder surroundings. In winter, all that heat escaping your body makes you feel cold. Insulation fights conduction by trapping air in a web of tiny pockets, slowing the heat's escape. It keeps



the air still and lengthens the path heat must take to get out.

High-loft down makes up the expansive, fluffy clusters of feathers that create the volume inside a puffer jacket. Combined with modern synthetic fibers, the down immobilizes warm air and slows its escape. New types of fabrics infused with highly porous, ultralight materials called aerogels pack even more insulation into surprisingly slim layers.

Tame the wind, protect the boundary layer

A good winter jacket also needs to withstand wind, which can strip away the thin boundary layer of warm air that naturally forms around you. A jacket with a good outer shell blocks the wind's pumping action with tightly woven fabric that keeps heat in. Some jackets also have an outer layer of lamination that

keeps water and cold air out, and a woven pattern that seals any paths heat might leak through around the cuffs, hems, flaps and collars.

The outer membrane layer on many jacket shells is both waterproof and breathable. It stops rain and snow from getting in, and it also lets your sweat escape as water vapor. This feature is key because insulation, such as down, stops working if it gets wet. It loses its fluff and can't trap air, meaning you cool quickly.

These shells also block wind, which protects the bubble of warm air your body creates. By stopping wind and water, the shell creates a calm, dry space for the insulation to do its job and keep you warm.

New tricks to reflect infrared heat

Even in still air, your body sheds heat by emitting invisible waves of heat energy. Modern jackets ad-

dress this by using new types of cloth and technology that make the jacket's inner surface reflect your body's heat back toward you. This type of surface has a subtle space blanket effect that adds noticeable warmth without adding any bulk.

However, how jacket manufacturers apply that reflective material matters. Coating the entire material in metallic film would reflect lots of heat, but it wouldn't allow sweat to escape, and you might overheat.

Some liners use a micro-dot pattern: The reflective dots bounce heat back while the gaps between them keep the material breathable and allow sweat to escape.

Another approach moves this technology to the outside of the garment: Some designs add a pattern of reflective material to the outer shell to keep heat from radiating out into the cold air.

When those exterior dots are a dark color, they can also absorb a touch of warmth from the sun. This effect is similar to window coatings that keep heat inside while taking advantage of sunlight to add more heat.

Warmth only matters if you stay dry. Sweat that can't escape wets a jacket's layer of insulation and accelerates heat loss. That's why the best winter systems combine moisture-wicking inner fabrics with venting options and membranes whose pores let water vapor escape while keeping liquid water out.

What's coming

Describing where heat travels throughout textiles remains challenging because, unlike light or electricity, heat diffuses through nearly everything. But new types of unique materials and surfaces with ultra-fine patterns are allowing scientists to better control how heat travels throughout textiles.

Managing warmth in clothing is part of a broader, heat-management challenge in engineering that spans microchips, data centers, spacecraft and life-support systems. There's still no universal winter jacket for all conditions; most garments are passive, meaning they don't adapt to their environment. We dress for the day we think we'll face.

But some engineering researchers are working on environmentally adaptive textiles. Imagine fabrics that open microscopic vents as the humidity rises, then close them again in dry, bitter air.

Picture linings that reflect more heat under blazing sun and less in the dark. Or loft that puffs up when you're outside in the cold and relaxes when you step indoors. It's like a science fiction costume made practical: Clothing that senses, decides and subtly reconfigures itself without you ever touching a zipper.

Today's jackets don't need a new law of thermodynamics to work — they couple basic physics with the use of precisely engineered materials and thermal fabrics specifically made to keep heat locked in. That marriage is why today's winter wear feels like a leap forward. (The Conversation)

'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, DECEMBER 28, 2025

'Birthday Forecast'

Moon square Mars energizes you to chase goals fearlessly. You'll face competition boldly and win with strategy and persistence. Professional disagreements may arise, but diplomacy turns rivals into allies. Finances demand planning—track expenses carefully while expanding ventures. Domestic joy increases through shared achievements and celebrations. Your partner supports you unconditionally, and property matters move ahead favorably. Spiritually, channel strong energy through yoga or creative expression. This year rewards courage, focus, and positive action in every sphere.

'This week for you'

Aries : (March 21 - April 20) You will enjoy mental peace and bliss. New sources of income will get explored. You will also get money from somewhere. You will work with dedication and sincerity. And new job offers will come to you. The matters relating to your family will get resolved. You will also meet old friends, and it will make you feel relaxed and happy. Your understanding with your mate will be wonderful. Your friends and family members will keep supporting you. Your opponents and enemies will get defeated. You will also make friends with people in authority. You can also enter new love relations leading to marriage.

Taurus : (April 21 - May 21) Your time is very favorable. You will have good relations with your bosses. Your ideas and plans will be implemented. You will also be given additional responsibility. Some changes in job profile are indicated. Your colleagues will work with you in team spirit. However, due to your strict attitude some may not like you. Your health will remain perfect. You will also enjoy better financial position. You will also enter new romantic ties and will enjoy wonderful bonding. Those who are single will get marriage proposals. You will crave love and affection from your loved ones. You may receive benefits in terms of investment, inheritance etc. You may start some new plans to receive profits.

Gemini : (May 22 - June 21) The time is result oriented. You will be getting good job offers and business proposals. People related to print, electronic media, advertisement and international business will be successful. You will be completely relaxed during this time. The time will be spent peacefully with your closed ones. You will pay attention to your investments. Good business prospects are in store for you. Your spouse will be a source of inspiration and keep guiding you. You will understand the value of time. You will also continue facing the reality of this world. A huge change will happen in your life. Your worries and tension will get removed. You will also make new friends who will prove to be an asset in the hour of need. You will be assigned important duties. The graph of your popularity will move upwards. You will be able to achieve your targets.

Cancer : (June 22 - July 22) It is a very promising week for you. You will achieve your targets. Your popularity at workplace will increase. You could be promoted in your job. You will also have financial stability and strength. Your self-respect and dignity will increase. Your colleagues will perform every task in office after consulting you. There will be stability in your career. Your efforts to acquire money will be successful. You will also get benefits due to the change in your life. This will ensure that you have a happy and secure future ahead. You will also enter new romantic ties leading to marriage. You will keep your relatives happy. You will also participate in fun activities. You will strike a balance between work and happiness.

Leo : (July 23 - August 23) Time will be highly beneficial for you. Some auspicious functions will take place, and you will enjoy your time with your family. Due to your busy schedule at work, you will be a bit tired. But you will complete your task. You will take proper care of your health. You will also be enthusiastic about something which will make you happy. You will achieve your targets. Do not engage yourself in any kind of extra work at this time, otherwise you may get nothing except trouble. All work will be completed as per your plan. You will also win an award. You will take part in a special event. Your efforts will bring good results. Marital life will be cheerful. You may also plan for an outing altogether. Time is very favorable.

Virgo : (August 24 - September 22) It is an official victory day. You will get an important post. All your held-up work will be completed. Your financial condition will also improve. There is yoga for promotion in your job. Time is very favorable. Senior officers will be very supportive. You will begin a new job. Days will bring joy

Libra : (September 23 - October 23) Some very positive developments will take place. You will get a work order from abroad. Those who are in business may enter new partnership or association which will be beneficial. At your workplace, have your important documents ready. You may clinch a favorable business deal. You need to limit your expenses. Your enemies will try but will not be able to harm your interests. You will spend some quality time with him/her. You will get blessings from your elders. Students will keep performing well. You will also receive the full support of your parents and in-laws. You will understand your duties and carry them out nicely.

Scorpio : (October 24 - November 22) The start of the week will be pleasant. These are good days in terms of money. You will be happy. You will also hear pleasant news. You will be mentally peaceful. You will come closer to your mate. And will spend quality time with your closed ones. Some auspicious functions will take place in your family. Your home atmosphere will be peaceful. You will also search for new options in your business. These are important days in terms of your reputation. You will set an example for society by your worthy and noble deeds. Your financial position will keep on improving.

Sagittarius : (November 23 - December 21) The whole week is going to be pleasant. Your financial position is going to be strong and stable. These are money acquiring days. You will be busy doing some adventurous work. You will give importance to everything. This is an important time from the point of view of worldly and spiritual perspective. You will move forwards with focused targets. Husband and wife will have cordial relations. Your tensions will come to an end. You may have to put a lot of effort into improving your situation. You will also receive profits from your investments and there are also chances of promotion in your job. You will achieve good results and the condition of studies for students will be favorable.

Capricorn : (December 22 - January 20) Time is in your favor, and you need to make best use of it. You will enjoy yourself with your family and friends. You will do lot of shopping for yourself and your closed ones. Work will dominate your mind, but you will complete it. You can also enter new romantic relationship. You will also make great efforts to revive relations. You will remain at the top in matters of love. Works done in partnership will be successful. At this time all the obstacles and hurdles will be removed. Keeping aside your ego will enhance your work, name and fame. Take adequate care of your health. There is possibility of growth in personal and professional life.

Aquarius : (January 21 - February 18) You will peacefully complete your tasks. Your family will support you and your children will care about your feelings. It is time to gain victory in your work. Your financial condition will improve. During this time all your incomplete tasks will be completed. Your self-respect will be high. You will get success in politics and legal matters. Love birds will have a good time. You will be blessed with a child. You will also get benefits from your contacts. Elders will keep giving blessings. You could get involved in charitable activities. You will also get new job opportunities; you will be victorious over new plans.

Pisces : (February 19 - March 20) You will change decisions that you take in haste and will have no regrets in doing it. Work that was stalled will be completed with the help of dear ones. Your respect in the social sphere will increase. You will be full of happiness and warmth in your personal ties. You will also understand the feelings of your colleagues, otherwise you will repent later. Your strong personality will leave a mark on officials. There will be an increase in your business. Meetings with people will be beneficial. You will be connected to the internet. Your efficiency will be commendable. New contacts will be beneficial. You will get the desired success. You could plan a short journey with partner.

Deepfakes leveled up in 2025: Here's what's coming next

Over the course of 2025, deepfakes improved dramatically. AI-generated faces, voices and full-body performances that mimic real people increased in quality far beyond what even many experts expected would be the case just a few years ago. They were also increasingly used to deceive people.

For many everyday scenarios — especially low-resolution video calls and media shared on social media platforms — their realism is now high enough to reliably fool nonexpert viewers. In practical terms, synthetic media have become indistinguishable from authentic recordings for ordinary people and, in some cases, even for institutions.

And this surge is not limited to quality. The volume of deepfakes has grown explosively: Cybersecurity firm DeepStrike estimates an increase from roughly 500,000 online deepfakes in 2023 to about 8 million in 2025, with annual growth nearing 900%.

I'm a computer scientist who researches deepfakes and other synthetic media. From my vantage point, I see that the situation is likely to get worse in 2026 as deepfakes become synthetic performers capable of reacting to people in real time.

Dramatic improvements

Several technical shifts underlie this dramatic escalation. First, video realism made a significant leap thanks to video generation models designed specifically to maintain temporal consistency. These models produce videos that have coherent motion, consistent identities of the people portrayed, and content that makes sense from one frame to the next. The models disentangle the information related to representing a person's identity from the information about motion, so that the same motion can be mapped to different identities, or the same identity can have multiple types of motions.

These models produce stable, coherent faces without the flicker, warping or structural distortions

around the eyes and jawline that once served as reliable forensic evidence of deepfakes.

Second, voice cloning has crossed what I would call the "indistinguishable threshold." A few seconds of audio now suffice to generate a convincing clone — complete with natural intonation, rhythm, emphasis, emotion, pauses and breathing noise. This capabil-



A photo created using an AI tool.

ity is already fueling large-scale fraud. Some major retailers report receiving over 1,000 AI-generated scam calls per day. The perceptual tells that once gave away synthetic voices have largely disappeared.

Third, consumer tools have pushed the technical barrier almost to zero: Upgrades from OpenAI's Sora 2 and Google's Veo 3 and a wave of startups mean that anyone can describe an idea, let a large language model such as OpenAI's ChatGPT or Google's Gemini draft a script, and generate polished audio-visual media in minutes. AI agents can automate the entire process. The capacity to generate coherent, storyline-driven deepfakes at a large scale has effectively been democratized.

This combination of surging quantity and personas that are nearly indistinguishable from real humans creates serious challenges for

detecting deepfakes, especially in a media environment where people's attention is fragmented and content moves faster than it can be verified. There has already been real-world harm — from misinformation to targeted harassment and financial scams — enabled by deepfakes that spread before people have a chance to realize what's happening.

The future is real time

Looking forward, the trajectory for next year is clear: Deepfakes are moving toward real-time synthesis that can produce videos that closely resemble the nuances of a human's appearance, making it easier for them to evade detection systems. The frontier is shifting from static visual realism to temporal and behavioral coherence: models that generate live or near-live content rather than pre-rendered clips.

Identity modeling is converging into unified systems that capture not just how a person looks, but how they move, sound and speak across contexts. The result goes beyond "this resembles person X," to "this behaves like person X over time." I expect entire video-call participants to be synthesized in real time; interactive AI-driven actors whose faces, voices and mannerisms adapt instantly to a prompt; and scammers deploying responsive avatars rather than fixed videos.

As these capabilities mature, the perceptual gap between synthetic and authentic human media will continue to narrow. The meaningful line of defense will shift away from human judgment. Instead, it will depend on infrastructure-level protections. These include secure provenance such as media signed cryptographically, and AI content tools that use the Coalition for Content Provenance and Authenticity specifications. It will also depend on multimodal forensic tools such as my lab's Deepfake-o-Meter. (The Conversation)

[The author, Brittney Price, is a Data Specialist]

Do marathons damage your heart? Study finally settles debate



A marathon pushes the human body close to its limits.

Legs tire, lungs burn and the heart works hard for hours on end. For years, that strain has raised an uncomfortable question: does running 26 miles actually damage the heart?

The strongest reassurance comes from a new ten-year study of 152 recreational marathon runners, published in the journal *Jama Cardiology*.

Researchers checked the runners' hearts before and after races, then tracked their heart health over the next decade.

They found that although the heart's right ventricle - the chamber that pumps blood to the lungs - showed a short-term drop in pumping ability straight after races, it recovered within days.

Crucially, over the ten-year follow-up period, there was no sign of lasting damage to heart function in these runners.

This finding is important because earlier studies had raised worries that long-distance exercise might damage

the heart.

Much of that concern came from blood tests taken after endurance events.

After a marathon, many runners show higher levels of a substance called troponin in their blood. Troponin is released when heart muscle cells are put under strain.

Doctors normally use troponin levels to help diagnose a heart attack. So seeing these levels rise after a race can look worrying and sometimes make it harder to tell whether someone is having a genuine medical emergency.

When troponin levels mislead

But context matters. In hospitals, raised troponin levels are only judged alongside symptoms, heart tests and scans.

After long-distance endurance exercise, troponin often rises even when there is no sign of blocked arteries, a heart attack or lasting heart damage.

Studies show that many healthy marathon runners have troponin levels above the usual medical cut-offs after a race, despite normal

heart scans and no symptoms of a heart attack.

This rise seems to reflect temporary strain on heart muscle cells, rather than permanent damage.

Heart scans using ultrasound or MRI show that these changes are usually linked to short-term changes in how the heart fills or pumps blood, which settles with rest.

The right side of the heart seems particularly affected during marathons. It pumps blood through the lungs, where pressure rises sharply during sustained exercise.

Several studies have shown that the right ventricle becomes temporarily enlarged and less efficient immediately after long races, before returning to normal.

What the new ten-year outcome study adds is reassurance that these repeated short-term stresses do not inevitably lead to long-term damage in most recreational runners.

Over a decade of marathon running, heart structure and pumping ability remained within normal ranges.

That does not mean endurance running is without

risk. Marathon running can expose hidden heart disease, particularly coronary artery disease.

A tragic example was reported recently in the UK press, where a 42-year-old runner with chest pain was initially reassured and later died from a heart attack. In that case, the problem was not exercise-related troponin release but underlying coronary disease that was not identified as the cause of the elevated troponin.

This distinction is vital. Chest pain, breathlessness or collapse during or after exercise cannot be dismissed simply because someone is fit.

In people with symptoms, raised troponin levels usually signal a very different process than the benign rises seen after a marathon in otherwise well runners.

Deaths during marathons are very rare. Large studies suggest there is about one death for every 100,000 runners, and this risk has fallen over time as medical support at races has improved.

When a sudden cardiac arrest does happen, it is usually linked to an undiagnosed heart condition, rather than damage caused by running itself.

Very high-level endurance exercise

There is still a debate about very high-level endurance exercise. While most recreational runners show no lasting harm, some studies have found signs of scarring in the heart - called fibrosis - in athletes who have trained at very high volumes for many years.

Heart MRI scans have shown that many older endurance athletes have small areas of scar tissue in their heart muscle. In the recent Ventoux

study - named after Mont Ventoux, one of the toughest climbs in the Tour de France - researchers looked at 106 male cyclists and triathletes over 50.

Almost half of these athletes had detectable scarring, compared with very few in non-athletic participants.

This scarring was linked to a higher chance of abnormal heart rhythms, including some that can be deadly.

But serious problems are still rare, and results differ a lot between people, suggesting factors like genetics, training intensity and how long someone has trained all matter.

Taken together, the evidence suggests that for most recreational marathon runners, the heart adapts rather than deteriorates. Temporary changes after races and short-term rises in troponin reflect stress, not injury.

Being fit doesn't mean you can't develop heart disease, and test results only make sense when considered alongside symptoms and medical checks. The marathon runner's heart is strong, but it still needs careful assessment.

For most recreational runners, the evidence is reassuring. The heart adapts to marathon running rather than breaking down under it.

Those temporary spikes in troponin after races reflect hard work, not damage, and decade-long studies confirm that with proper training, the heart stays healthy.

But fitness isn't immunity. Chest pain, unusual breathlessness or feeling faint during exercise always needs proper medical attention.

The marathon runner's heart is resilient - but it still deserves respect and careful monitoring. (*The Conversation*)

Fathers' microplastic exposure can raise risk of diabetes in daughters

A father's exposure to microplastics can trigger metabolic dysfunction in children, with daughters more at risk of developing diabetes, according to animal studies.

Microplastics are tiny plastic particles (less than 5 millimetres) resulting from the breakdown of consumer products and industrial waste.

While microplastics have already been detected in human reproductive systems, the study, published in the *Journal of the Endocrine Society*, is the first to bridge the gap between paternal exposure to microplastics and the long-term health of the next generation.

"Our discovery opens a new frontier in environmental health, shifting the focus toward how both parents' environments contribute to the health of their children," said lead author Changcheng

Zhou, Professor of biomedical sciences in the University of California, Riverside's School of Medicine.

"These findings from a mouse study likely have implications for humans."

Men planning to have children should consider reducing their exposure to harmful substances like microplastics to protect both their health and that of their future children," Zhou added.

For the study, the team induced metabolic disorders - such as increased blood pressure, high blood sugar, and excess body fat - in mouse models by feeding them a high-fat diet.

The findings showed that female offspring of male mice exposed to microplastics were significantly more susceptible to metabolic disorders than offspring of unexposed fathers, despite all offspring being fed the same high-fat diet.

"The exact reasons for this sex-specific effect are still unclear," Zhou said. "In our study, female offspring developed diabetic phenotypes."

We observed upregulation of pro-inflammatory and pro-diabetic genes in their livers - genes previously linked to diabetes.

These changes were not seen in male offspring," the researcher added.

While male offspring did not develop diabetes, they showed a slight yet significant decrease in fat mass.

Female offspring showed decreased muscle mass alongside increased diabetes, the team said.

Zhou emphasised that the study suggests the impact of plastic pollution is not limited to the individual exposed; it may leave a biological imprint that predisposes children to chronic diseases. (*IANS*)

Hair loss drug consumption by mothers may pose risks to infants

Mothers using minoxidil, a common hair loss drug, could pose a risk of infantile hypertrichosis - abnormal hair growth over the body, including in areas not typically hairy, a global analysis suggests.

Researchers from the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS), New Delhi, analysed 2,664 cases of minoxidil-suspected infantile hypertrichosis from around the world, 45 of which involved children aged up to 23 months.

22% of the 45 cases were linked to maternal exposure to minoxidil, 44.4% to accidental exposure and 33.3% to unknown causes, according to findings published in the *Archives of Dermatological Research Journal*. Further, 1,669 global cases in the general population involved eye disorder - 25 from India. Common symptoms included eyelid oedema (swelling), blurred vision, and central serous chorioretinopathy, in

which fluid builds up under the retina and impacts vision.

Originally developed as a hypertension medication, minoxidil was later reformulated as treatment for male and female baldness - it could be directly applied to the affected portion of skin due to its hair growth promoting side effect, the researchers said. However, widespread over-the-counter availability and a lack of regulation raises safety concerns around the use of the hair loss drug, despite proven benefits, they added.

Further, despite being recommended against use by pregnant and breastfeeding women, the researchers found cases of infantile hypertrichosis linked to maternal exposure.

"Among 2,664 global cases of minoxidil-suspected infantile hypertrichosis, 45 involved children aged 0-23 months: 22.2 per cent due to maternal exposure, 44.4 per cent accidental, and 33.3 per cent unknown," they said. (*PTI*)



Workers setting up an installation are silhouetted against the setting sun ahead of the 'Ahmedabad International Flower Show 2026', at Sabarmati Riverfront, in Ahmedabad, Gujarat on Saturday. (*PTI*)

Police team sent to Odisha over death of migrant worker: Mamata

KOLKATA, Dec 27: Days after a 30-year-old migrant worker from West Bengal was allegedly killed in Sambalpur district of BJP-ruled Odisha, Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday said a "zero FIR" was filed and a state police team went to the neighbouring state to carry out the investigation.

She condemned the "brutal oppression, harassment and violence" against Bengali-speaking people in "every BJP-ruled state".

The migrant worker was allegedly killed in Sambalpur district following an altercation over a bid on Wednesday.

In connection with the killing of the young man, Jewel Rana, West Bengal Police has already "registered a zero FIR at Suti police station and arrested six accused", Banerjee said.

"A police team from West Bengal has travelled to Odisha to carry out the investigation," she said.

"I strongly condemn the brutal oppression, harassment and violence against Bengali-speaking people in every BJP-ruled state. We stand firmly with those migrant Bengali-speaking families, which have been intimidated, victimised and subjected to inhuman treatment and assure them of all

possible support," Banerjee said on X.

Referring to the Sambalpur incident, she said migrant workers from the Jangipur region in Murshidabad have faced severe atrocities in BJP-ruled Odisha.

"It is deeply unfortunate that a young migrant worker from the Suti area of Jangipur in Murshidabad was again beaten to death in Sambalpur on December 24," she said on the social media platform.

Banerjee claimed migrant workers from Muslim-majority Murshidabad are "now returning home in fear".

"We stand with the families affected by this tragic incident, and financial assistance will be extended to the family of the deceased," she said.

"We unequivocally condemn the perpetrators involved in such acts in BJP-ruled states and reiterate our commitment to provide all forms of assistance to the victims," the chief minister said.

Speaking the Bengali language can never be a crime, the TMC supremo said.

Reacting to Banerjee's comments, BJP state president Samik Bhattacharya told reporters that "she

must first explain why the state's skilled and semi-skilled youth have to leave Bengal in search of livelihood." "Banerjee's remark lays bare the fact that migrants from Bengal districts including those from the minority community have been misled by her with regard to employment opportunities. Had there been jobs in Bengal and economic growth, there would have been no need for the youths to migrate to Odisha, Gujarat, Haryana, Gurgaon and other states in search of job," the BJP Rajya Sabha MP said.

Bhattacharya further added the TMC's jingoistic "outsider" (bahiragato) narrative has led to hostilities among a section against Bengali speaking migrants.

The very fact that Bangladeshis have crossed over to India and procured documents with TMC's support also aggravated the issue and in stray cases migrants from Bengal might have been targeted, he said.

"We appreciate the strong action taken by Odisha police against those involved in such attacks. We have faith in the police forces of other states which are not as partisan as the police force in TMC-ruled Bengal," he said. (*PTI*)

CPI(M) slams govt over attacks on Christmas celebrations in India

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: The CPI(M) on Saturday condemned the attacks on Christmas celebrations in several parts of the country and alleged that the government's "inaction" is "deliberate".

In a statement issued here after a meeting of the Politburo of the party held on December 26, the CPI(M) said Hinduva communal outfits such as the Bajrang Dal and other affiliates have carried out heinous attacks on Christians in various places, disrupting Christmas celebrations.

"The inaction of the government is deliberate and intended to facilitate such attacks. All this is part of the ongoing policy of the RSS-BJP to dismantle the secular state and establish a Hindu Rastra," the CPI(M) said.

The Politburo demanded that the government uphold the value of the Constitution, on which it has taken an oath.

"The perpetrators of these attacks must be immediately brought to book and punished," it said.

It also slammed the Union government over the scrapping of MGNREGA and said it has been replaced with a severely diluted VB-G RM G, fundamentally altering the character of the demand- and rights-based employment guarantee scheme.

"The newly enacted Act shifts the financial burden from the Centre to the states while denying the states any say in its implementation. The government used its majority in Parliament to pass the bill, which is detrimental to the interests of crores of rural workers," it said.

It further called the notification of four codes "yet

The newly enacted Act shifts the financial burden from the Centre to the states while denying the states any say in its implementation. The government used its majority in Parliament to pass this bill, which is detrimental to the interests of crores of rural workers'

another instance of its anti-worker policies" of the BJP-led Union government.

"These so-called labour law reforms are a gift to capitalist cronies close to the present government. The working class of the country is already mobilising in protest against these changes," it said.

Expressing deep concern over the situation in Bangladesh, it said the interim government has failed to stop attacks on religious minorities.

Further, on the violence that has broken out in Karbi Anglong district of Assam, leading to two deaths and destruction of property, the CPI(M) said the situation is being aggravated by clashes between groups along ethnic lines, questioning the "double-engine" government in Assam.

The Left party also slammed the bill granted to former BJP MLA Kuldeep Singh Sengar and the changes proposed by the BJP government to the definition of the Aravallis. (*PTI*)

PM calls discussions with chief secretaries 'insightful'

NEW DELHI, Dec 27: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday chaired a national conference of chief secretaries where he had insightful discussions on various issues relating to governance and reforms, officials said.

The conference marked another important milestone in strengthening the Centre-state partnership through structured and sustained dialogue on national development priorities, they said.

"Had insightful discussions on various issues relating to governance and reforms during the National Conference of Chief

Secretaries being held in Delhi," Modi wrote on X.

The event was attended by P K Mishra and Shaktikanta Das, principal secretaries to the prime minister, Cabinet Secretary T V Somanathan, members of the NITI Aayog, and chief secretaries of all the states and Union territories.

Based on the extensive deliberations between the Central ministries, departments, NITI Aayog, states and UTs and domain experts, the conference will deliberate on the theme 'Human Capital for Viksit Bharat', covering the best practices and strategies

for the states and UTs to follow, over the weekend.

Special emphasis is being placed on five key areas: early childhood education, schooling, skilling, higher education, sports and extracurricular activities.

According to the schedule of the conference, six special sessions will be held over the weekend on deregulation in states; technology in governance; opportunities, risks and mitigation; agristack for smart supply chain and market linkages; one state, one world class tourist destination; Aatmanirbhar Bharat and

Swadeshi and plans for a Left Wing Extremism future.

Besides, focused deliberations will be held on heritage and manuscript preservation and digitisation and 'Ayush for All - Integrating Knowledge in Primary Healthcare Delivery'.

Anchored in the prime minister's vision of cooperative federalism, the conference serves as the forum where the Centre and the states collaborate, designing a unified roadmap to maximise India's human capital potential and accelerate inclusive, future-ready growth. (*PTI*)

*"Endurance is nobler than strength,
and patience than beauty."*
—John Ruskin

The Shillong Times

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Attacks on Christians Disgraceful

SEVERAL rounds of attacks on Christians across the country on the eve of what is the most important event — Christmas — the birth of Jesus Christ reflects a growing culture of intolerance in this country. The Constitution of India guarantees the Right to Freedom of Religion as a fundamental right, enshrined under Articles 25 to 28. Article 25 ensures the freedom of conscience and the right to freely profess, practice, and propagate religion, subject to public order, morality, and health. Articles 26 to 28 further reinforce religious autonomy by granting rights to manage religious affairs, freedom from compulsory religious instruction, and protection of religious institutions.

The essence of Christian teaching is not to take revenge for that is the remit of the creator, God. Moreover, Christians number just about 28 million (2011 census) which is a mere 2.3 percent of the population of India so expecting them to fight back or even speak up in a situation where that would invite the wrath of the Hindutva brigade who are patronised by the present government, is expecting too much. The fact that no arrests are made and that the Prime Minister has not said a word to condemn the rampage by Hindu extremist groups is reflective of the tacit support and impunity that such groups enjoy under the present regime. These Hindutva groups are so emboldened that they accuse Christian leaders of conversion. The Constitution allows any religious group to propagate their religion. In other words it means Christians have the right to preach their religion as much as Hindus, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, Parsis etc., do. So why are Christians being singled out and why is Christianity called a foreign religion when it arrived in India as far back as 52 AD?

Christianity is the largest religion in the states of Nagaland, Mizoram and Meghalaya. Considering that there were attacks on a Christian institution in Assam again by Hindutva goons, it is important for the Christians of the region to speak up as one and make common cause against these attempts to trample on the fundamental right to worship as guaranteed by the Constitution. Keeping silent would only embolden those with the mindset of creating a reign of terror even in India's North East where they have found patronage. Right wing extremists believe that the Hindu majority have the right to impose their religion even on tribals who were never Hindus before they embraced Christianity. To equate the indigenous faith or a non-belief in any faith as being equal to being Hindu is a misnomer but this is what is being trotted out today. On social media, Hindutva groups label Christians by the offensive moniker of "rice bags" suggesting that Christian missionaries are enticing people to the fold by giving them rice and other goodies. Little do these right wing fundamentalists realise that they have antagonised huge sections of fellow Indians by relegating them to the status of "untouchables?" Why then do they rave and rant when such untouchables embrace a religion where the core teaching is based on love and acceptance? It's time to demand action against all these vandals.

Letters to the Editor

Christmas, Constitutional Values and Our Shared Ethical Traditions

Editor,
Through the respected columns of The Shillong Times, I wish to share a few reflections on the recent reports of disturbances during Christmas celebrations in some parts of the country. Such incidents are unfortunate, particularly because Christmas in India has long been marked by peaceful gatherings, acts of charity, and a spirit of goodwill that reaches beyond religious boundaries.

From the perspective of Christian social ethics, Christmas embodies values of peace, compassion, service, and love for one's neighbour—principles that foster harmony rather than confrontation. These values resonate deeply with India's constitutional vision, which upholds liberty of conscience and assures every citizen the freedom to practise their faith without fear or coercion.

India's civilisational traditions, including the inclusive philosophy associated with Sanatana Dharma, have long emphasised tolerance, coexistence, and respect for multiple paths to truth. The Bhagavad Gita reminds us that the Divine is approached in diverse ways: "In whatever way people approach Me, in that same way do I

respond to them; all paths lead to Me" (Gita 4:11). Such reflections affirm pluralism as an integral part of India's moral imagination.

Christians in India have, for generations, contributed quietly to the nation through education, healthcare, and social service, particularly among the marginalised. Peaceful expressions of faith, such as carol singing and community celebrations, have always formed part of India's shared cultural life and should continue to be protected.

At this moment, what is needed is reassurance and responsible leadership that nurtures trust among communities. Safeguarding the right to celebrate festivals peacefully is not only a constitutional duty but also a moral responsibility flowing from our shared ethical and spiritual heritage.

May the message of Christmas—peace on earth and goodwill to all—serve as a reminder of the values that bind us together as a nation.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."
—Matthew 5:9

Yours etc.,
Chingsan R Sangma,
Via email

Wellington Massar: An Epitome of Bravery

Editor,
Apropos the deeply moving and meticulously re-

I first came to Garo Hills some twenty-five years ago, when I was a PhD student. I lived for two years in a village in West Garo Hills, witnessing the intricate knowledge which farmers have of the natural environment they depend on. It made me aware of the tacitly required to split and weave bamboo, of how recognizing the chirping, buzzing, trilling, and humming of insects announces changes in the weather, and of the powers located in boulders, deep river pools, and vested with animals seen and unseen. As I tried to gain an understanding of the complexities of Garo of matrilineal kin relations, I came to appreciate the orality of men and women who typically had had little or no formal schooling, but whose language was lyrical and sumptuous. Over the years, I have been able to continue to visit my adoptive family in Garo Hills, make new friends, and become acquainted with new places. This year, for the first time in all those years, I was able to join in celebrations for Christmas in East Garo Hills.

It is December 24th, and the rock band plays 'Gloria in excelsis deo' ('Glory to God in the highest') in the Rongjeng Baptist church. We have about one and a half hour to go before midnight. The hymn is all too familiar to me, as it is also a staple in my home country the Netherlands. But tonight, in Rongjeng, the rhythm is accelerated, forced by the pouncing beats of a drum set, and the piercing chords of several electric guitars. The hymn, in my memory slow, melodious but also a little boring, has become a rock song. It is followed by a sermon, and more singing of hymns accompanied by electric guitars. At midnight, we wish each other "Merry Christmas", to then move out of the church onto its courtyard. There, we dance as a group to the quick rhythm of a drum, in a circular movement. Christmas in Rongjeng is fun.

"How do people celebrate Christmas in your country, I am asked?" Well, yes, some of us go to church. Yes, we do celebrate with close family and friends, but our Christmas celebrations do not include such large numbers of people as I saw in Rongjeng. And our Christmas meals do not have such a large variety

of tasty dishes, featuring meats, fermented soybeans, and savoury vegetables from the swiddens. And no, we do not dance around the bonfire until way after midnight, sometimes even in a churning mass with hundreds of people, in which class, age and gender dissolve.

Celebrating Christmas in Garo Hills evidences how Garo Christianity is a tradition in its own right, reflecting what constitutes society, and what means it lives with. Social media, enabled by 5G network access, have come to shape a Garo-cyberspace, creating connections across Christmases celebrated in preceding years, linking locations far apart in Garo Hills and beyond. And yes, Garo Christmas also integrates with its global counterparts, as one of the many constituent parts of this global tradition.

Christmas celebrations require food, and among Garos, as for most of the other communities of upland North East India, that means a substantial amount of meat. Pooling money, households on Christmas day, early morning, share the meat of a pig they have jointly bought and cared for. Pork, with its thick layer of buttery fat right below the skin, is no doubt a preferred meat. Depending on the financial leeway, beef, chicken and fish will also be part of the menu: In one pre-Christmas celebration I attended, I counted a spread of no less than twelve different meat dishes. It could even have been sixteen. Cooked or fried, combined with fresh greens harvested from one's own garden, or the subtle crops from the swiddens, the many meats had been turned in a wide variety of exuberant curries.

Food creates bondages. What we ingest could also have been eaten by one of our commensals. Food also excludes, and that notably holds for meat, which almost inevitably comes with strong cultural connotations attached. In the Netherlands, a small country, in which animal husbandry is typically large-scale, industrial, unsustainable, and cruel in terms of animal welfare, abstinence from meat can be a statement to oppose such treatment of animals and resources. In South Asia, meat is similarly

heavily culturally labelled. With the rejection of either beef or pork—or both—by the subcontinent's majoritarian communities, relishing these meats—as well as fish and chicken—creates a gustatory niche which Garos share with many of the other minority communities of the region.

In North East India, with its unprecedented linguistic, cultural and religious diversity, ethnic ties provide the comfort of being able to talk in one's own language and dialect. Ethnicity emerges in interpersonal connections, from shared upbringing, shared tastes, and shared interpretations of what carries value from the past, to perhaps be carried forward towards the future. Garo Christmas celebrations want to be inclusive, and refrain from drawing ethnic boundaries. Yet the social norms that shape the celebration, in which both women and men dance, no doubt goes against the conventions of those who are uncomfortable with this.

In North East India, people's experiences of ethnicity, centring on shared values, do not necessarily equal its political and administrative interpretations. Garo are in Meghalaya labelled as a tribal community, emphasizing their intricate connection to its soil, and how Garo ancestors were, among the first to negotiate an equation with its dense forests, and the ubiquitous more-than-human presences which shaped the western part of what is currently the State of Meghalaya. Tribe, as an English term, has widely diverging connotations the world over. For Garos, the legal and political relevance of being labelled tribal is beyond doubt, also since it enables administration of the region under the Sixth Schedule of the Indian Constitution. Yet, I have almost never heard any of my adoptive family and friends here actively self-identify as 'tribal'. Rather, they see themselves as included in groups of relatives, expanding in ever larger concentric circles to include those they feel close to, and want to be connected to. In Garo Hills, who counts as a brother, a sister, a mother, a father, a cousin, a niece, and uncle or an aunt certainly reaches far beyond the limitations

carried by such terms in the Netherlands.
Dancing around the bonfire, celebrating Christmas in Garo Hills shapes, reinforces and redefines relationships among those who take part. Commemorating the birth of Christ, more than 2000 years ago, unequivocally provides the motive for the celebration, but the rock rendition of traditional Christian hymns is a reminder that this is 2025, bringing those who want to be included together on their own terms. In Garo Hills, Christmas celebrates community, reaching far beyond the confines of formalized religion.
People the world over define themselves with reference to terms such as indigeneity, ethnicity and belonging, but what these entail varies from context to context. Too often, in political discourse, superficial interpretations are flaunted, foregrounding primordiality and ethnic closure. It is important to recognize that people in everyday life continue to nurture bonds which are meaningful, defining who they are, what they may want to escape from, and who they may want to be. In the Netherlands, influential politicians are peddling anti-immigrant sentiments, which belie the many involved trajectories of relationship building, across perceived ethnic boundaries, of the people they are negatively targeting. Celebrating Christmas in Rongjeng reminded me once again of the importance to foreground such everyday acts of bonding. The values and connections these reveal serve as a powerful reminder of how we as humans are endowed with the ability to forge meaningful relationships with others, allowing us to build our lives with the environments we depend on.

(Erik de Maaker is an Associate Professor at Leiden University in the Netherlands, and a visiting faculty at Royal Thimphu College (Bhutan). He is the PI of the 'Futuring Heritage: Conservation, Community and Contestation in the Eastern Himalayas' research project (<https://www.universiteit-leiden.nl/futuringheritage>), which is being conducted jointly by Leiden University, Ashoka University (Sonepat) and RV University (Bangalore), in close cooperation with policy makers and NGOs of the North Eastern Region).

kindly look into this matter.

Yours etc.,
P. Marwein,
Via email

Attacks on Christians

Editor,
The reported acts of violence and intimidation against the Christian community during Christmas celebrations in parts of Assam and Raipur deserve strong condemnation. Festivals are meant to bring people together in joy and harmony, not to spread fear and insecurity.

Christmas stands for peace, love, and togetherness. Any attempt to disturb such a sacred and peaceful occasion through intimidation is deeply painful and wounds our shared sense of humanity.

Though I belong to another faith, I deeply respect and value the freedom of every person to celebrate their religion. Having been brought up amidst Christian neighbours and friends, I have personally experienced the warmth, goodwill, and inclusive spirit that such celebrations represent. Every citizen deserves dignity and safety. Violence, in any form and against any community, has no place in a civilised society.

I sincerely hope that wisdom, compassion, and humanity will prevail.

Yours etc.,
Jairaj Chhetry,
Via email

Goons on the loose

Editor,
What a coincidence that

while the Prime Minister who is 'revered' as the Dear Leader goes to a church and attends Christmas service the BJP led-patronised goons attack, harass and intimidate local Christians on their way to Church or those making merry amongst themselves. The Constitution is supreme and guarantees the right to freedom of religion and the freedom to practice, preach and choose any faith that an individual chooses to. Unfortunately, since this right wing, majoritarian led-government came to power there has been a systematic dismantling of religious freedom, disregard for institutional norms and blatant abuse and misuse of parliamentary powers. The silence of sane voices amongst other communities displays that silence pays and while any statement would invite confrontation. This is a sad commentary on our democracy that our democratic rights are being rapidly eroded especially that of minority communities. Our right to worship is being trampled upon by lawless groups who know they can get away with such vandalism. Let's hope that the meaning of diversity is respected in letter and spirit in the coming new year.

Yours etc.,
Dominic S. Wankhar,
Via email

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

The Governor House of Meghalaya: Plato's Cave in Constitutional Clothing

By Joseph Bosco Syiem

I felt that jolt while reading The Governor House of Meghalaya: Plato's Cave in Constitutional Clothing (Parts One and Two) by Napoleon Mawphniang. I bought both the Kindle edition and a hard copy from Amazon assuming it would be another dense political critique—useful, perhaps, but safely academic. Instead, it read like a mirror held up to our public life, not to flatter us, but to expose what we have normalized. The author's central move is disarmingly simple: he takes the Governor's House—Raj Bhavan, the most ceremonial and least discussed "big institution" in our state—and asks whether we can justify it in the language of democracy, cost, accountability, and actual public need.

What surprised me most is not merely the book's criticism of the Governor's institution. Meghalaya has never lacked criticism in general. What surprised me is how the book dares to treat this office not as sacred constitutional furniture but as a public expenditure that must answer public questions. When we read an official Governor's address—full of policy, summaries and visions of growth—we see the pagentry of governance. We see an "August House," noble phrasing, and the reassuring rhythm of a state that appears to know where it is headed. The 2025 Governor's Address, for example, speaks of transforming Meghalaya into a 10-billion-dollar economy by 2028, improving roads, strengthening health infrastructure, expanding digital connectivity, and uplifting education and livelihoods (Government of Meghalaya, 2025). This is the outward picture: confident, forward-looking, administrative, complete.

But the book asks: does this outward picture correspond to where power and responsibility actually lie? Or are we watching shadows on the wall while the real arrangement remains unexamined—exactly as Plato's cave metaphor suggests?

Here is the uncomfortable thought that stays with us after reading: if the Governor's Address largely enumerates what the elected government is already doing, then what is the Governor's independent constitutional contribution in a normal year? The Address itself is revealing: it is presented as the Governor speaking, yet it functions as a government statement of work and intent. That does not automatically make it wrong; constitutional rituals exist everywhere. But the book insists that ritual becomes democratic injury when it substitutes for accountability. If speeches, ceremonies, and guarded estates become symbols of authority without measurable public service—then we are no longer dealing with harmless tradition. We are dealing with an institution living on inherited prestige while citizens struggle with very real shortages.

Parts One and Two do not only poke at symbolism; they provoke us to interrogate design. We often assume constitutional design is too high for ordinary discussion. We treat it like plumbing in someone else's building; better not touch. Yet the Constitution is not divine scripture; it is human architecture. And architecture must be evaluated by outcomes—especially when it is funded by public money and protected by administrative opacity. The book's most unsettling achievement is that it makes our silence look irrational. Why do we know the names of singers, footballers, and social media influencers, but not consistently know the name of our Governor? Why do we debate local council rivalries passionately but rarely discuss the most expensive ceremonial structure in the state? Why do we accept that citizens must disclose everything—documents, certificates, income, identity—while institutions can hide budgets and operational details behind vague claims?

And this is where the book becomes more than criticism: it becomes a challenge to our democratic self-respect. Because democracy is not merely voting every five years. Democracy is the daily habit of asking: Who holds power? Under what rules? With what cost? With what accountability? The Right to Information Act was created precisely because India recognized that secrecy is not a neutral administrative choice; it is a political weapon. The law's purpose is to make transparency the default

and secrecy the exception, justified with clear reasons (Right to Information Act, 2005).

Part Two, especially, shifts the tone from diagnosis to insistence. It argues that if we agree that governance should be transparent, then we must stop behaving like transparency is a favour granted by offices and start behaving like it is a democratic baseline. We may not all be lawyers or legislators, but we can become citizens who know how to file RTIs, demand line-item budgets, ask our MLAs to raise specific questions, and insist on public reporting for public spending. The book does not pretend this is easy. It treats reform as a political struggle, not a polite request. It also warns us—rightly—that institutions do not resist reform because they are confused; they resist because someone benefits from the current arrangement.

At this point, some readers will accuse the author of disrespect. "Why question the Governor's office? It is constitutional. It is tradition. It is stability." But the book's reply is sharper: tradition is not a defence when children sit in overcrowded classrooms and clinics lack basics. Stability is not a defence when public money is spent without public explanation. The Constitution is not insulated by questions; it is insulted by our refusal to ask them. A constitutional democracy should be able to withstand scrutiny of its institutions. If an office cannot survive scrutiny, perhaps the problem is not the scrutiny.

We should also be careful here. It would be unfair—and inaccurate—to argue that Meghalaya's governance "falls" solely because of Raj Bhavan. Our state's problems are complex: geography, infrastructure gaps, unemployment, governance capacity, centre-state constraints, historical injustices, and social fragmentation. One institution cannot be blamed for everything. The book, at its best, does not commit that simplification. Instead, it uses Raj Bhavan as a lens: if we can question this deeply normalized institution, then we can question many others too—departments that under-perform, schemes that exist mainly on paper, and public communication that looks impressive but avoids measurable accountability.

Hence the title's "Plato's Cave" is more than a literary flourish. It is an accusation about our civic imagination. We have become used to governance as performance: speeches, ceremonies, slogans, targets, "missions." We celebrate announcements. We circulate photographs of foundation stones. Meanwhile, actual service delivery remains uneven, and public trust remains fragile. When governance becomes performance, citizens become audience. The book tries to pull us back into citizenship.

So what do we do with this? The simplest response is to treat the book as entertainment—sharp, bold, scandalous—and move on. But if we do that, we prove its thesis: that we are more comfortable observing than acting. A more serious response is to do the one thing institutions fear most: turn critique into routine civic practice.

We can begin with small habits. We can read official documents more skeptically—including Governor's addresses—and ask what is substance and what is ceremony. We can demand proactive disclosures that are already envisioned by transparency law rather than waiting for courageous individuals to fight RTI battles one by one. We can ask our elected representatives to treat "ceremonial cost" as legitimate legislative concern, not taboo. We can insist that anything funded by us must be legible to us.

The book does not ask us to hate institutions. It asks us to stop worshipping them. It asks us to convert awe into audit, reverence into review, and inherited silence into democratic speech.

If enough of us read this book—and more importantly—behave differently after reading it, Raj Bhavan will no longer be a distant estate behind gates. It will become what every public institution should be in a democracy: a question that must answer back.

And perhaps that is the most hopeful thing a book can do in Meghalaya today: not give us more slogans, but return to us our own questions.

*"Instruction does much,
but encouragement, everything."*

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

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Ideology and politics

A sudden showering of praise on the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh by Congress veteran Digvijay Singh has sparked a major debate within the political spectrum. Ideologically, the Congress and the RSS that promotes the BJP are poles apart. It's rather unusual for a Congress leader to praise the RSS, also as the two sides always maintained a strong ideological divide. The RSS had the last laugh when its offspring, the BJP, wrested power from the Congress in the 1990s, by taking advantage of the Babri Masjid issue. The Congress philosophy is different. In true Gandhian spirit, it reaches out to all Indian communities. Mahatma Gandhi was shot down shortly after Independence by Nathuram Godse, who owed his allegiance to the Hindutva forces. Today, these forces in power are seeking to uproot the legacy of the Mahatma.

Digvijay Singh, a former chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, has been holding power at the behest of the Congress for the past over 50 years, and continues to do so as a Rajya Sabha MP. His praise of the RSS at perhaps the most-inappropriate hour for the Congress is pregnant with meaning. His take is that the RSS does well by grooming leaders from grassroots level to exalted positions in power, as in the case of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. What he fails to see is that the Congress party has done this as well in several cases though the posts of PM and party chief remained with the Nehru-Gandhi family. What should not go unnoticed is that the Congress of today is only a breakaway faction of the Indian National Congress; and it was known for a period as the Congress (Indira). The parent party ended in oblivion. Having been part of this breakaway group for long, Singh and the rest of the leaders of this entity – which eventually established itself as the real Congress – cannot feign ignorance of this 'family' link. Even today, the family is the glue that keeps the party erect. However, Singh at his advanced age of 78 finds the grass on the other side green. The Congress party is passing through critical times. The BJP has somewhat ravaged it in several states, while regional parties reign supreme in other states.

A revival for the Congress would involve a hard struggle ahead. Unity, in this context, is of prime importance. Large segments of the population are not enthused by the pro-religious tone that the BJP and its governments adopt. All hope is not lost for the Opposition. Prime Minister Modi is increasingly being on the defensive and losing 'friends' of a kind that had hailed him day and night. On the electoral front too, the 2024 parliament polls did not accord him and his NDA a majority. The Bihar polls were won by the BJP-JDU alliance by the cash gift magic, not by these parties' popularity. India requires a strong opposition. Integral to this concept is the presence of a strong Congress party. However, the praise of the RSS by a prominent leader like Digvijay Singh would only help undercut the strengths of the Congress and the Gandhian philosophy.

Who Is a Khasi? Tradition, Genetics, and the Politics of Identity

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Recently, something extraordinary happened that marked a clear break from tradition. After the demise of Freeman Syiem, the Syiem of Hima Sohra—whom I had met during my PhD—it was expected that the KHADC would appoint Marremdor Syiem as the acting Syiem until elections were held. Instead, the KHADC appointed Mynjurlang Majaw, a Myntri, as the acting Syiem. This was an unprecedented move, since tradition dictates that Marremdor Syiem should assume this role. The Lyngskor may, for a time, take charge of the Hima Dorbar, but the Syiem is always elected from among the Syiem clan, which was specially created for this purpose. This raises an important question: Is Mynjurlang Majaw a Lyngskor? And how can he serve as acting Syiem when a Syiem can only come from the Syiem clan? While many individuals may vie for the position of Syiem, this does not include any Lyngskor or Bakhras, who together make up the Myntris. This break from tradition is not an isolated aberration.

Not long after the VPP took charge of the KHADC, there were murmurs that it would attempt to change matrilineal traditions to suit the personal preference for patrilineality held by its Supremo, Ardent Miller Basajawmoit—a view also shared by the incumbent Member of Parliament, Ricky Syngkong (Syngkong being his father's kur). And, indeed, a PIL was filed against the 2024 KHADC Executive Order that amended the Lineage Act, stating that Khasi couples whose children bear the father's surname would no longer be officially recognised as Khasi. When the KHADC was asked to respond, it sought more time, which was surprising given that it should have been prepared with an immediate response. Will the KHADC put up a strong defence, or will it merely pretend to do so, allowing the Executive Order to be struck down?

Supporters of patrilineality argue that if both parents are Khasi, there should be no issue in recognising someone as Khasi on the supposed grounds that they belong to the "Khasi race" or share a similar genotype (genetic makeup) and phenotype (external appearance) that identifies them as Khasi. There are many problems with this line of argument. First, there is no such thing as a Khasi race. Khasis are an ethnic group, not a race. "Race" was a concept used

in the early 20th century by European colonialists to perpetuate the myth of white superiority over other groups, particularly those they colonized, including the Khasi. It is a discarded concept, and clinging to it only reveals ignorance—not only of Khasi history and culture, but also of broader scientific debates. The correct term is ethnicity: people sharing a sense of belonging through cultural similarities. Does this mean that genotype and phenotype do not exist? No, they do exist, but they do not define the identity of a community. The Khasis are a prime example of this.

The Lyngnam are a Khasi subgroup found in the West and South-West Khasi Hills. They appear more Garo than Khasi, and some of their cultural practices resemble those of the Garo rather than the Khasi. Yet, if you ask them, they will always identify themselves as Khasi. Based on linguistic evidence, they are the second-oldest group among the Khasi—older than the Pnar, Khyntiam, Bhoi, or Maram—and are therefore, in that sense, more "Khasi" than the others. Why, then, do they resemble the Garo? The answer lies in genetics. The Lyngnam have been found to be a mixed population, with male genetic lineages traced to the Garo and female lineages to the Khasi, specifically the Nongtrai. They speak a Khasi language and follow matrilineal customs closer to those of the Khasi than the Garo. Thus, phenotypically they may resemble the Garo, but linguistically and culturally they are Khasi.

Another example is the Bhoi, who are also a mixed group. In fact, "Bhoi" is still used as a term for Karbi who, over time, adopted the Khasi language and matrilineal customs. This is best illustrated by the phenomenon of surname equivalence. Karbi clans such as Ingti, Ronghang, Hanse, Be, Inglang, Timung, and Teron are considered blood relatives of Khasi clans like Muktiel, Markhap, Khyndeit, Muker, Lamare, Syngkli, Umbah, and Mynsong, respectively. As a result, members of these clans cannot marry one another for fear of committing sang (taboo). This occurred because when a Karbi became Khasi, they would join the corresponding sister clan among the Khasi to avoid marrying within the same bloodline. Many Karbi lived under Hima Jaintiapur for a

long time but later moved to Ahom territory because the Khasi were compelling them to adopt matrilineal customs. Why would the Khasi of old insist on this? Were they not concerned about the "purity" of the Khasi race? To answer this, we must go back 5,000–6,000 years, to when the Khasi first arrived in South Asia.

The Khasi are part of the larger Austroasiatic language family, which includes groups such as the Cambodians and Vietnamese, as well as smaller communities like the Palaung (linguistically the closest to Khasi), Khmu, and Semang. This population originated around the Yangtze River valley in southern China, where they were among the first to domesticate rice. They carried the Y-chromosomal haplogroup O2a1-M95, the genetic signature of the Austroasiatic population, which originated among Daic-speaking populations some 20,000–40,000 years ago.

They migrated into Southeast Asia, mixing with hunter-gatherer populations related to the Oge and Jarawa of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. One group moved south and became the Semang of Malaysia, who speak an Austroasiatic language but have a Negrito appearance. Another group moved west and reached South Asia around 5,000 years ago—these were the Khasi. Archaeological sites at Lum Sobpetbeng and Myrkhan contain tools similar to those found in southern China, dating back around 4,000 years. Around the same time, another group moved further west and mixed with local populations, becoming the Munda, today's Adivasi communities. Some Khasi families have children from these communities working in their homes. They come from the Assam tea tribes community, but they do not look Khasi at all.

One might argue that the Khasi maintained the "purity" of their race, but this too is untrue. Only about 30% of Khasi males carry the O2a1-M95 marker, while the rest derive from various other genetic sources. Around 40% of Khasi women carry mtDNA of Southeast Asian origin. This means that fewer than 20% of present-day Khasi could be considered "pure" by such criteria; the vast majority have at least one ancestor who was not originally Khasi but became Khasi by adopting matrilineal

customs.

The adoption of outsiders and matrilineal traditions are the original Khasi customs brought from southern China and is what distinguishes them from many other South Asian groups. Matrilineal systems, in fact, were once widespread across central and southern China and were also practised by Austronesian peoples. A few years ago, I met a Minangkabau woman, and a tribal chief from the Solomon Islands—both from matrilineal societies. One looked Southeast Asian, the other Negrito, yet both were proud of their matrilineal traditions.

A Khasi is someone who regards Khasi as their mother tongue and follows matrilineal traditions, which form the basis of the kur (tip kur tip kha) and the social and cultural practices of the community. Together, these define Khasi identity. One may belong to a Khasi kur, but if one does not speak Khasi or follow matrilineal traditions, then one is not Khasi. The KHADC Executive Order is precisely about this.

Undoing it would create confusion, allowing anyone to claim Khasi identity without any real connection to its culture or history. Is this not what Jaidhyntiew-touting groups constantly warn against—non-Khasi taking over? If defining who is Khasi becomes complicated, what happens to Scheduled Tribe status? The Khasi are recognised as an ST because they are a distinct community with unique culture and traditions. Once these traditions are discarded, someone may file another PIL demanding that only those who follow ancient matrilineal customs be eligible for ST status. Those who adopt patrilineal customs may still be called Khasi but not pakka-Khasi and could lose ST recognition. An even more dangerous question arises: if the KHADC order is rescinded, will it apply to the JHADC as well, since the Pnar belong to the larger Khasi group? If not, will it create an internal division—something that will weaken the community?

I suspect that these deviations from tradition are part of a larger game plan. They open up a host of serious problems. Perhaps that is precisely the plan. We will find out very 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)

When ethics collapse : A letter from the academia

By Arpita Saikia

It all started with a fake Gmail ID impersonating a renowned regional history association based in North East India. An email was circulated amongst 20 to 25 recipients announcing prizes for paper presentations at the association's annual conference. Strangely, no such prizes exist. Even more puzzling was the fact that three names dominated the list of winners in six of the seven categories, most of them named after renowned historians of the region such as Amalendu Guha, H.K. Barpujari, and Edward Gait.

This anomaly pulled me into an ever-deepening rabbit hole. The same trio turned out to be the founders and core members of a WhatsApp group with over 450 participants. One of them happened to be a post-

a challenge intensified by the demanding nature of academic research. Such anxiety-filled situations provide ideal conditions for the growth of what are known in academic circles as predatory journals. In theory, predatory journals are often associated with publishing articles in exchange for a fee, commonly described as pay to publish. However, the non-monetary dimensions of such practices receive far less attention. In some cases, the objective is to gain prestige rather than money, at least in the initial stages. Making fraudulent claims, forging associations with reputed organizations to attract submissions, and refusing to update calls for papers even after being asked to do so are all part of deliberate strategies of deception and manipula-

"Digging deeper began to reveal further irregularities and anomalies. To start with, the website was using the logo of a prominent world organization. Upon enquiry, the organization denied having any affiliation to the platform. In addition, the journal claimed affiliation with an international publisher, a claim that was categorically denied by them when contacted. The university, from which a member claimed association to, was also contacted. They also refuted the claim."

graduate student from a local University who also claimed affiliation to a foreign university. The group had its own website and had also recently announced the launch of a journal. While at first glance, the website exhibits an extremely professional façade but closer observation reveals flaws that one can hardly overlook.

Digging deeper began to reveal further irregularities and anomalies. To start with, the website was using the logo of a prominent world organization. Upon enquiry, the organization denied having any affiliation to the platform. In addition, the journal claimed affiliation with an international publisher, a claim that was categorically denied by them when contacted. The university, from which a member claimed association to, was also contacted. They also refuted the claim. Moreover, the editorial board of the journal displayed the names of global luminaries. Professors from abroad as well as from home were listed. However, a glossy editorial board does not guarantee authenticity. Emails sent to some of those named

tion. If financial gain is not the immediate motive, what then drives such unethical practices? The individuals behind these journals often prey on early-career scholars while simultaneously exploiting the willingness of senior academics, who may themselves be misled by impressive claims and appearances, to mentor and support younger researchers. Involvement in activities such as founding a journal or claiming association with well-known academics can significantly enhance resumes, particularly for younger scholars or students seeking opportunities abroad. In such cases, the motivations extend well beyond direct monetary benefit.

India currently ranks among the highest globally in predatory publishing. According to a study done in 2015, about 27% of predatory publishers are based in India. The issue of predatory journals was (and continues to be) so deep rooted that even the UGC approved list of journals was not free from it as shown by earlier studies where several journals in the list were found to be of

"A few stated that they had initially agreed to be associated in 'good faith' but later withdrew their consent after discovering 'unethical practices'. Others admitted that they had agreed based on the information shared with them at the time. These enquiries ruffled feathers followed by intimidating messages, legal threats, and warnings to this writer to stop further investigation. A few days later however, the logo of the world organization was quietly removed from the website."

produced mixed responses. A few stated that they had initially agreed to be associated in "good faith" but later withdrew their consent after discovering "unethical practices". Others admitted that they had agreed based on the information shared with them at the time.

These enquiries ruffled feathers followed by intimidating messages, legal threats, and warnings to this writer to stop further investigation. A few days later however, the logo of the world organization was quietly removed from the website.

This episode mirrors the growing problem of predatory and unethical practices in academia. Except that this case hit close to home. Early-career research scholars often experience frustration and stress while trying to find credible and reliable platforms for publication,

dubious nature. Apart from that, educational scams involving forged achievements and certificates by Indian students frequently make headlines. Such incidents invite global skepticism even towards genuine and honest aspirants.

What is needed is greater caution and accountability within academia. Scholars must remain alert, verify credentials, and avoid being influenced solely by prestigious names. When unethical practices come to light, they should not be ignored or normalized, but addressed through serious action. Research scholars undergo rigorous training where research ethics and predatory practices are discussed in detail. It is time that this knowledge moves beyond textbooks and is applied in real situations if academic integrity is to be protected.

Letters to the Editor

Little festive cheer for nameless students

Editor,
Almost a week has passed and we have had no response so far to the anguished plea of a NEHU student. A letter titled, "A Student's Plea for Sanity Amidst the Noise at NEHU" was published in the Shillong Times on Dec 24, 2025. At last a student has spoken, even though she/he wrote the letter as "Name Withheld".

I imagine that there are numerous nameless students in our state. School students who feel that there is no point going to school, college students who find themselves in meaningless degree courses and then drop out, and now a student whose dreams have been dashed by the imbroglio at NEHU.

It is a sad and poignant state of affairs, when the mis-steps, machinery and machinations of our education system has led to another generation of students feeling a sense of hopelessness. The State Education Commission Report has led to some public discourse, but no perceptible action so far.

Yesterday's Shillong Times carried a front-page article called "2025 in Review". It only highlighted tales of murder and rape. Horrendous as these crimes were, this priority speaks of our human tendency to focus on the sensational and salacious. The media merely reflects society's mindsets. Surely there were significant stories about education, health or rural economics in Meghalaya in 2025.

The sad situation of our youth should be a first-line agenda. Yet their voices have not been heard. The State Education Commission Report had no survey, views, or suggestions from students. Gen Z has made headline political news in Bangladesh, Nepal and Morocco and this generation of students and professionals have been the frequent subject of corporate discourse, but in our state it is still the oldies who dominate public fora.

"Name Withheld" was a witness to the humiliation of the NEHU Pro VC. This was the scene, "I watched in disbelief as my fellow students yelled at the Pro-VC, Prof Sumarbin Umdor. They pointed fingers, raised their voices, and screamed at a senior academic as if they were far more educated than he was. They treated a Profes-

sor, a man who has dedicated his life to academia, with the kind of disdain one wouldn't even show to a stranger on the street and forced him to resign as the Pro VC." The entire letter makes sombre reading.

Dr Sumarbin Umdor is well-known as a committed teacher and expert economist, an elder whom our Khasi society should be proud of. He doesn't need anybody's certificate. It is a symptom of a broken society, when we pull down our own respected leaders. What will we have after that? We have already seen the futility of demands made to the Centre. Who knows how long it will take for the Education Ministry to respond?

Meanwhile another generation of students will fall by the wayside and the state will lose the potential of their contributions, if we don't act soon. The government has brought in some promising initiatives, such as the Meghalaya Academy for Teacher Education and the MPOWER project for adolescents. Perhaps civil society can get organised and be a constructive partner to build a better future for our youth.

Yours etc.,
Glenn C Kharkongor,
Via email

Shameless Attack on Christians

Editor,

The repeated and unchecked atrocities against Christians in India on the eve of Christmas celebrations again presents a shameful stain on the moral fabric of our nation. Fringe elements operating under the banners of so-called cultural organizations such as Bajrang Dal and Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) continue to indulge in acts of vandalism, intimidation, and violence with alarming regularity only to walk away scot-free, emboldened by silence and impunity. This time, the brutality has crossed yet another red line: even a differently-abled person was not spared. What kind of society are we becoming when physical vulnerability evokes cruelty instead of compassion? What kind of nationalism celebrates strength while preying on the weak? What deepens this moral contradiction is that even as such acts of vandalism by saffron goons were taking place, the Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, made a visit to a

church in Delhi an image-heavy gesture that rings hollow when Christians on the ground continue to face violence, fear, and denial of justice. Symbolism without accountability offers little solace to victims.

Let it be stated clearly: an attack on the peace-loving Christian community is not merely an attack on a minority but it is an attack on the very foundations of Indian democracy. Our Constitution guarantees freedom of religion, dignity, and equality before the law. When these guarantees are selectively denied, democracy itself is wounded. The hypocrisy on display is impossible to ignore. These same fringe elements are quick to protest loudly and publicly against alleged atrocities on Hindu minorities in Bangladesh. Yet where is their remorse, their restraint, their respect for "hurt sentiments" when Christians are attacked within India? Do Christian lives not matter? Are their sentiments and faith less worthy of protection? If the situation in Bangladesh really hurts them, are Christians not equally hurt in their own backyard?

Selective outrage is not patriotism. Silence in the

face of injustice is not nationalism. And violence masquerading as cultural defence is nothing but moral cowardice. Those in power, law-enforcement agencies, and opinion-makers who turn a blind eye must understand this: history does not absolve silence. Every unpunished act of hate becomes an invitation for the next one. India's strength has always lain in its pluralism, its ability to protect the smallest minority with the same seriousness as the largest majority. If that promise is betrayed, we lose not only our credibility before the world, but our soul as a nation. The time to speak is now. The time to act is now. Justice delayed and denied will only deepen the fractures that threaten our shared future. I appeal to those who Choose Silence Over Conscience, please defend the integrity of India before it's too late. Let us build a strong India with a strong secular fabric.

Yours etc.,
HT Wells,
Shillong

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Racist Slurs against North-Easterners
STUDENTS and young professionals from the north-eastern states who are forced to move out of their hearths and homes to study or work outside the region have long felt slighted and in many cases have been subjected to racial abuse. The word “Chinki” to define all North-easterners because of their Tibeto-Burman or Austro-Asiatic features is not just disdainful but outright racist. Yet the chief ministers of the 7 states have never made an issue out of the fact that their people are subjected to such racial slurs. This issue has not been raised in parliament. Only now the two MPs from Meghalaya have made public statements against the crime committed on Anjel Chakma, a young MBA Final year student who became a victim of a violent racial attack in DehraDun on December 9 last and succumbed to his injuries on December 26.

Considering that Anjel Chakma a Buddhist by faith is not the first to have become a victim of racial attacks and that others too have died or faced extreme harassment, it is rather strange that the Home Minister of the country has said nothing to assuage the feeling of the people of North East India who feel alienated at the moment for reasons they are not responsible for – their looks. When Nido Taniam a young man from Arunachal Pradesh was similarly taunted because of his hair colour, he protested. Taniam was beaten to death with rods and sticks and died as a result. This happened in February 2014. Following this incident the UPA Government then set up a Committee headed by retired IAS officer MP Bezbaruah. The Committee submitted its report and recommendations in July 2014 by which time the NDA Government had come to power. The recommendations were categorised into four broad groups such as creating awareness about the North East; quick, strong and fair action by law enforcing agencies; institutional guidance, help, information, counselling and orientation for students of North East before they leave the region and legal and legislative measures to support the efforts.

The key recommendation was for creating strict laws to address racial abuse under Section 153 of the Indian Penal Code (now BNS) and the offence should be cognizable and non-bailable. The FIR should be duly registered and investigation completed within 60 days by a special squad. It was also recommended that a special prosecutor be appointed for such cases of racial abuse and the trial should be completed within 90 days. It was also suggested that the IPC would be amended to include, “word, gesture or act intended to insult a member of a particular racial group or of any race,” and that a panel of lawyers should be appointed for legal assistance and consultation over mobile phone or email. The suggestion was that 50% of the panel members should be women and also that preference be given to lawyers from the North East. Sadly, none of the recommendations have been implemented so far. State Governments of the seven states should demand that the Bezbaruah Committee Recommendations be brought out by the Ministry of Home Affairs and strictly implemented in letter and spirit.

Faith, Humility and Service - A Woman, a Man and a Son of God

By Dominick Dauni Roising Rymbai

Hail, Mary, full of grace/ The Lord is with thee/Blessed art thou amongst women/

And blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. So greeted the angel Gabriel to Mother Mary in the Gospel according to Luke 1:26-28. Being a virgin, with no relations to a man, Mother Mary had doubts. She replied, faithfully, that she was the Lord's servant and the word would be fulfilled. Nothing is impossible for God.

According to the 2011 Census, Meghalaya state, has Christian adherents as the majority population at 74.59%. The Hynniewtrep and A'chik indigenous people follow the matrilineal system. It's matrilineal, not matriarchal! Also, the society is not a typical patriarchy-laden set-up where women are generally, more or less, second-class citizens. Besides being sons and uncles, men play equally important roles as fathers.

Saint Joseph, a common man; a humble carpenter was plagued with doubts and fears: He had to rely on faith and respond accordingly to the divine messages sent through dreams. In spite of a non-consummate marriage, to remain betrothed to a pregnant Mother Mary and be a father to a child born of Immaculate Conception is unfathomable to an ordinary man. To be his chosen family's protector, especially from the blue-blooded Herod's threats and a responsible and participating parent to a young Jesus Christ was unthinkable. But he walked in faith and taught his carpentry trade to his son and enabled the latter's livelihood.

It's December. The Spirit of Christmas is all over the state far beyond Christmas Day - December 25. An image is revived. The image of the new-born Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in a humble manger at a humble cattle-shed or a cave-barn. He was surrounded by his earthly parents, witnessed by the outlaws - the shepherds and their animals and, the three well-travelled and knowledgeable Magi with their gifts. If one has been to a cattle-shed, one will know the over-bearing pungent smell there. What an image, what a beautiful story, what a practical lesson on life! Oh, to be a humble practising Christian!

Studying in a missionary school (Kliehriat High School, a Don Bosco institution) in the early-1990s, the Catholic female and male hostellers attended the mandatory daily Catholic Mass

(sometimes twice a day, too). There was no pressure whatsoever on the non-Christian boys and girls to convert. However, the Catholic boys and girls were supposed to serve as good examples. Also, the priests and nuns, neither discouraged nor encouraged, when one partakes in the cultural customs and traditions that defines a Hynniewtrep (native Pnar or War-Amwi speaker) person of the Jaintia Hills. The priests then, the Late Fr. Justin Lyngkhoh (Parish Priest) and the legendary Late Fr. Henry Fantin (Headmaster), didn't frown on or disparage anyone if one spoke confidently of participation in the Behdienkhlam festival of Raji Jowai and Raji Tuber, including the rites and rituals of the respective clan grouping.

One of the extra-cur-

riculum activities was to Jerusalem. The complaints persisted and ultimately, the final words. The very young petitioners were asked if they still remember the area and circumstances of the birth of the Son of God, Jesus Christ. The matter was, and still is, closed.

It's Christmas time. No doubt, the winter chill does call for warm clothes and thicker blankets. Social media platforms are flooded with a lot of charitable acts. With algorithm-controlled addictive scrolling, the benevolent actions make one feel like an Uncle Scrooge of the Disney cartoon Duck Tales or Shylock from Shakespeare's, 'The Merchant of Venice.' Of course, it is ethically and morally wrong to discount such big-hearted deeds. However, why just at Christmas time only? A once-a-year affair? Are

Lower Primary school, even a smart classroom, the rare meat-treats of pork/chicken chow, a spring/monsoon and autumn/winter outings, etc? With assistance from the community, dedicated school teachers like Shemphanglin Khardewas and Batskhem Thabab have shown what the human spirit can do. The big-heartedness of Jiwat Vaswani is acknowledged by the community. Going to the uranium-rich Domiasiat village of the composite West Khasi Hills, a physically petite but a tough woman, the late Spilit Lyngdoh Langrin, proved that money power cannot suppress the indomitable human will to serve the common good. Humbly and politely, she said No to uranium mining!

The first miracle, turning water into wine, at a wedding in Cana, Galilee was recorded in the Gospel according to John 2:1-11. Then and now, can one imagine running out of that liquid concoction at an important social function like a wedding. Imagine the embarrassment and shame to the host's family. Mother Mary had faith. She asked her special Son to do something about the situation. On His mortal mother's words, Jesus Christ made the first of His signs. And His hour was not supposed to have arrived yet. In our matrilineal society, a mother's words carry a lot of weightage. We live and die in our mother's name. From folk tales, it can be constructed, and also disputed, that we probably used to have female politico-administrative heads (Ka Syiem). A prime example being the legendary Ka Syiem Latypang of the Jaintia Hills. Most Hynniewtrep clans (Ki Kur Ki Jaid) have ancestral villages or places of origin. With migrations, a native village is considered the place where the mother permanently resides. In the Garo Hills, a woman, recognised as head of a particular clan (Mahari) with rights and power over the A'king (community) land and its natural resources, is given the village-head title of Nokma. Women, nurturers, care-givers, protectors and final-word mothers!

As per Catholic theology, being human, Mother Mary is not worshipped. Being the chosen Mother of the Son of God, she is venerated. Holy Mary, Mother of God/Pray for us sinners (irrespective of our creed)/Now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

(Disclaimer: Views expressed are strictly personal)
Email: dauni.roising@gmail.com

Tragic Stabbing of Tripura Student Exposes Deep-Rooted Racism Against Northeastern Indians

By Neha Desai

In a heartbreaking incident that has reignited national conversations on racial prejudice, Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura, was fatally stabbed in Dehradun, Uttarakhand, after confronting a group of men who hurled racial slurs at him and his younger brother.

The attack, which occurred on December 26, 2025, stemmed from derogatory remarks like "Chinki" and "Chinese," terms commonly used to demean individuals from India's northeastern states due to their Mongoloid features.

Chakma succumbed to his injuries, including stab wounds to the neck and abdomen, while his brother Michael survived a head injury. Five suspects have been arrested, but the tragedy has sparked widespread protests in Tripura and demands for a dedicated anti-racial violence law. This murder is not an isolated event but a stark manifestation of the pervasive racial discrimination faced by people from northeastern India when they venture into the mainland.

North-easterners, comprising diverse ethnic groups from states like Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Sikkim, Tripura, and Arunachal Pradesh, are often treated as "outsiders" in their own country. Their distinct physical appearances—epicanthic folds, fair skin, and straight hair—lead to stereotypes associating them with East Asian countries, resulting in exclusion, harassment, and violence.

Such biases are deeply embedded in India's social fabric, where "mainland" Indians frequently view North-easterners as alien, perpetuating a cycle of othering that affects education, employment, and daily life.

Historical Context of Racism in Northeastern India The social environment of northeastern India is shaped by a complex history of geographic isolation, colonial legacies, and internal conflicts, but the racism experienced by its people is largely external, inflicted by mainland attitudes.

Connected to the rest of India by the narrow Siliguri Corridor, the region has long been marginalized, with limited infrastructure development and economic opportunities pushing many youth to migrate to cities like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, and Dehradun for studies and jobs. However, this migration often exposes them to hostility. Notable past incidents underscore this pattern. In 2014, Nido Taniam, a student from Arunachal Pradesh, was beaten to death in Delhi after objecting to racial taunts about his hairstyle.

The case led to massive protests and the formation of the Bezbaruah Committee, which recommended measures to combat racism, including amendments to the Indian Penal Code. Yet, a decade later, little has changed. During the COVID-19 pandemic, North-easterners were scapegoated as "corona carriers" due to their perceived resemblance to Chinese people, leading to evictions, assaults, and spit attacks in various cities. Food habits also become a flashpoint for discrimination. Northeastern cuisine, which includes fermented foods and non-vegetarian dishes uncommon in other parts of India, is often labelled "dirty" or "smelly," reinforcing casteist and racial undertones.

Women from the region face additional gendered racism, including sexual harassment and assumptions of promiscuity based on stereotypes. These experiences contribute to a sense of alienation, with many North-easterners feeling like second-class citizens in India. Back in the northeast, such incidents exacerbate feelings of resentment and disconnection from the national mainstream. Tripura, home to indigenous tribes like the Chakmas, has a history of ethnic tensions, including insurgencies and displacement, but external racism adds another layer of trauma. Families like the Chakmas send their children away for better prospects, only to face the horror of losing them to prejudice. Protests in Agartala following Anjel's death reflect this anguish, with demonstrators calling for justice and systemic reforms.

The broader social environment in the northeast is one of resilience amid adversity. The region boasts rich cultural diversity, with over 200 ethnic groups speaking numerous languages, yet it grapples with underrepresentation in national narratives. Media often portrays the northeast through lenses of conflict or exoticism, ignoring everyday struggles and contributions. This invisibility fuels ignorance in the mainland, where school curricula rarely cover northeastern history or geography in depth, perpetuating stereotypes. Economically, discrimination hinders integration.

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Impact on Northeastern Society

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Northeastern migrants in urban centers face higher rents, job rejections, and social isolation, leading some to return home or form insular communities.

This brain drain reversal stifles regional development, as talented individuals opt for opportunities abroad or within the northeast, where initiatives like the Act East Policy aim to boost connectivity but fall short in addressing cultural divides.

Calls for Change and a Path Forward

The murder of Anjel Chakma has amplified demands for an anti-racism law, similar to those protecting Scheduled Castes and Tribes, to criminalize racial slurs and violence explicitly.

Activists argue that existing laws, like Section 153A of the IPC (promoting enmity between groups), are insufficient, as they rarely lead to convictions in racism cases.

Education campaigns, sensitivity training for police, and inclusive media representation are also proposed to bridge the gap. While racism against North-easterners is a national shame, it mirrors broader prejudices in India, including those against southern Indians, tribals, and minorities.

Addressing it requires acknowledging India's diversity beyond tokenism. As protests continue and Anjel's body is laid to rest in Tripura, his story serves as a poignant reminder: true unity demands dismantling the barriers of ignorance and bias that divide us.

Neha Desai, Pekar-jela A.D.C village, P.O-Nabashantiganj Bazar, P.S-Tarkajala district- Sepahijala, Tripura

Letters to the Editor

Tradition cannot be discarded at will

Editor,
The special article “Who is a Khasi? Tradition, Genetics and the politics of identity” by Bhogtoram Mawroh (ST December 30, 2025) made interesting reading. According to Hamlet Bareh the author of “The History and Culture of the Khasi People” ‘Kha’ means born of a mother and ‘si’ means ancient mother. The Khasi have a decentralized political structure, with chieftains (Syiem) and councils (Durbars) managing local affairs. This system reflected their emphasis on community consensus and clan representation. If this is tampered what happens to this system? The Khasi political system is not just administrative; it's deeply tied to their social fabric and clan-based identity. If the decentralized structure of Syiem (chieftains) and Durbars (councils) is tampered with, several consequences unfold:
Structural Consequences
Loss of Consensus-Based Governance: The Khasi system relies on collective decision-making through clan representation. Tamper-

ing weakens this, leading to more centralized or imposed authority that may not reflect community will.

Erosion of Clan Autonomy: Each clan (Kur) has a voice in governance.

Possible Outcomes

If system intact	If tampered
Consensus-driven decision	Centralized, imposed authority
Clan representation	Clan marginalization
Customary law upheld	Customary law weakened
Strong cultural identity	Identity reduced to ethnicity
High community trust	Trust deficit, fragmentation

If the system is disrupted, clans lose their role in shaping decisions, undermining matrilineal balance.

Weakening of Customary Law: Khasi customary law (Ka Tip Kur Ka Tip Kha) is enforced through these councils. Without them, traditional dispute resolution and justice mechanisms collapse.

Cultural & Social Impacts

Identity Dilution: Governance is part of Khasi cultural identity. If tampered, Khasi-ness risks being reduced to ethnicity alone, stripped of its institutional expression.

Trust Deficit: Community trust in institutions erodes when decisions no longer emerge from consensus. This

can fragment society and fuel conflict between clans.

Generational Disconnect: Younger Khasi may grow up without exposure to participatory governance, weakening cultural transmission.

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Wider Implications
Legal Conflict: Tampering often clashes with constitutional protections for Scheduled Tribes, sparking legal disputes.

Political Tension: Central/state/District Council interventions risk being seen as cultural intrusion, leading to resistance movements.

Resilience vs. Vulnerability: The Khasi system has historically adapted (e.g., under colonial rule), but repeated tampering could push it toward irreversible erosion.

If the Khasi decentralized system is tampered with, it risks losing its participatory essence, clan balance, and cultural legitimacy. What remains may look like governance, but it would no longer

be Khasi in spirit—it would be a hollowed structure, disconnected from the people it represents.

Yours etc,
VK Lyngdoh,
Via email

Beyond the Slurs: What really killed Anjel Chakma

Editor,

The brutal murder of Anjel Chakma, a 24-year-old MBA student from Tripura, has left us all in shock and pain. This young man from the Northeast came to Dehradun chasing dreams, only to lose his life to a savage attack on December 9. After 17 days of fighting injuries, he passed away in hospital. It's a heartbreaking loss—one that demands answers, not just anger.

As an Indian Gorkha from Shillong, I've faced my share of racism too—in mainland India, the Northeast, and even here in the hills. Being called names or stared at like an outsider hurts deeply. It builds walls where there should be bridges. But Anjel's death has me asking tough questions. Is racism the full story, or is something else at play? We must dig

deeper before jumping to easy labels.

First, reports say one of the main suspects is from Nepal. Yet, he allegedly hurled slurs like “momo” and “Nepali” at Anjel. Why would someone from Nepal use those exact words against a Chakma student? It feels off—like the taunts were borrowed from a script, not born from real hate.

Then there's the accused from the Northeast himself. Why would he call Anjel “Chinese”? People from our region know better; we're all too familiar with these lazy stereotypes ourselves. It raises doubts: Was this a group frenzy gone wrong, or something more personal?

And the two juvenile suspects? They're Paharis from the hills, with features much like Anjel's own. They look like they could be from the same communities we all hail from. If racism was the spark, why turn on someone who mirrors you?

I'm not denying the ugly slurs—“Chinki,” “Chinese,” “Momo”—that started the fight near a liquor shop. They echo the poison we fight every day. But rushing to pin this as pure racial hate risks missing the truth. Was it a brawl over something petty that exploded? Drugs, egos, or old grudges? A proper probe is urgent. The police have arrested five, includ-

ing the two minors sent to a juvenile home and one Nepali suspect still on the run. But we need facts, not headlines.

What's worse, some voices are already twisting this tragedy to widen cracks in the Northeast. Anjel was one of us—a son of the hills, studying far from home. Using his death to stir up old divides between communities won't bring justice. It only deepens the wounds.

I urge the Home Ministry and Prime Minister's Office to watch this closely. Shift the trial out of Uttarakhand if needed, as tribal groups are demanding, to ensure fairness. Let experts investigate every angle—medical reports show Anjel suffered paralysis and brutal blows to the head and spine. No cover-ups, no shortcuts.

Anjel deserved better. So do we all. In a country as diverse as ours let's honour him by seeking the real why, not just the easy who. Only then can we heal—and prevent the next heartbreak.

Yours etc.,
Anil Thapa,
Via email

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