

# Microplastics are in our brains; how worried should I be?

Plastic is in our clothes, cars, mobile phones, water bottles and food containers. But recent research adds to growing concerns about the impact of tiny plastic fragments on our health.

A study from the United States has, for the first time, found microplastics in human brains. The study, which has yet to be independently verified by other scientists, has been described in the media as scary, shocking and alarming.

But what exactly are microplastics? What do they mean for our health? Should we be concerned?

## What are microplastics? Can you see them?

We often consider plastic items to be indestructible. But plastic breaks down into smaller particles. Definitions vary but generally microplastics are smaller than five millimetres.

This makes some too small to be seen with the naked eye. So, many of the images the media uses to illustrate articles about microplastics are misleading, as some show much larger, clearly visible pieces.

Microplastics have been reported in many sources of drinking water and everyday food items. This means we are constantly exposed to them in our diet.

Such widespread, chronic (long-term) exposure makes this a serious concern for human health. While research investigating the potential risk microplastics pose to our health is limited, it is growing.

## How about this latest study?

The study looked at concentrations of microplastics in 51 samples from men and women set aside from routine autopsies in Albuquerque, New Mexico. Samples were from the liver, kidney and brain.

These tiny particles are difficult to study due to their size, even with a high-powered microscope. So rather than trying to see them, researchers are beginning to use complex instruments that identify the chemical composition of microplastics in a sample. This is the technique used in this study.

The researchers were surprised to find up to 30 times more microplastics in brain samples than in the liver and kidney.

They hypothesised this could be due to high blood flow to the brain (carrying plastic particles with it). Alternatively, the liver and kidneys might be better suited to

dealing with external toxins and particles. We also know the brain does not undergo the same amount of cellular renewal as other organs in the body, which could make the plastics linger here.

The researchers also found the amount of plastics in brain samples increased by about 50 per cent between 2016 and 2024. This may reflect the rise in environmental plastic pollution and increased human exposure.

The microplastics found in this study were mostly composed of polyethylene. This is the most commonly produced plastic in the world and is used for many everyday products, such as bottle caps and plastic bags.

This is the first time microplastics have been found in human brains, which is important. However, this study is a "pre-print", so other independent microplastics researchers haven't yet reviewed or validated the study.

## How do microplastics end up in the brain?

Microplastics typically enter the body through contaminated food and water. This can disrupt the gut microbiome (the community of microbes in your gut) and cause inflammation. This leads to effects in the whole body via the immune system and the complex, two-way communication system between the gut and the brain. This so-called gut-brain axis is implicated in many aspects of health and disease.

We can also breathe in airborne microplastics. Once these particles are in the gut or lungs, they can move into the bloodstream and then travel around the body into various organs.

Studies have found microplastics in human faeces, joints, livers, reproductive organs, blood, vessels and hearts.

Microplastics also migrate to the brains of wild fish. In mouse studies, ingested microplastics are absorbed from the gut into the blood and can enter the brain, becoming lodged in other organs along the way.

To get into brain tissue, microplastics must cross the blood-brain-barrier, an intricate layer of cells that is supposed to keep things in the blood from entering the brain.

Although concerning, this is not surprising, as microplastics must cross similar cell barriers to enter the urine, testes and placenta, where they have already been

found in humans.

## Is this a health concern?

We don't yet know the effects of microplastics in the human brain. Some laboratory experiments suggest microplastics increase brain inflammation and cell damage, alter gene expression and change brain structure.

Aside from the effects of the microplastic particles themselves, microplastics might also pose risks if they carry environmental toxins or bacteria into and around the body.

Various plastic chemicals could also leach out of the microplastics into the body. These include the famous hormone-disrupting chemicals known as BPA's.

But microplastics and their effects are difficult to study.

In addition to their small size, there are so many different types of plastics in the environment. More than 13,000 different chemicals have been identified in plastic products, with more being developed every year.

Microplastics are also weathered by the environment and digestive processes, and this is hard to reproduce in the lab.

A goal of a new research is to understand how these factors change the way microplastics behave in the body.

The researchers plan to investigate if improving the integrity of the gut barrier through diet or probiotics can prevent the uptake of microplastics from the gut into the bloodstream.

This may effectively stop the particles from circulating around the body and lodging into organs.

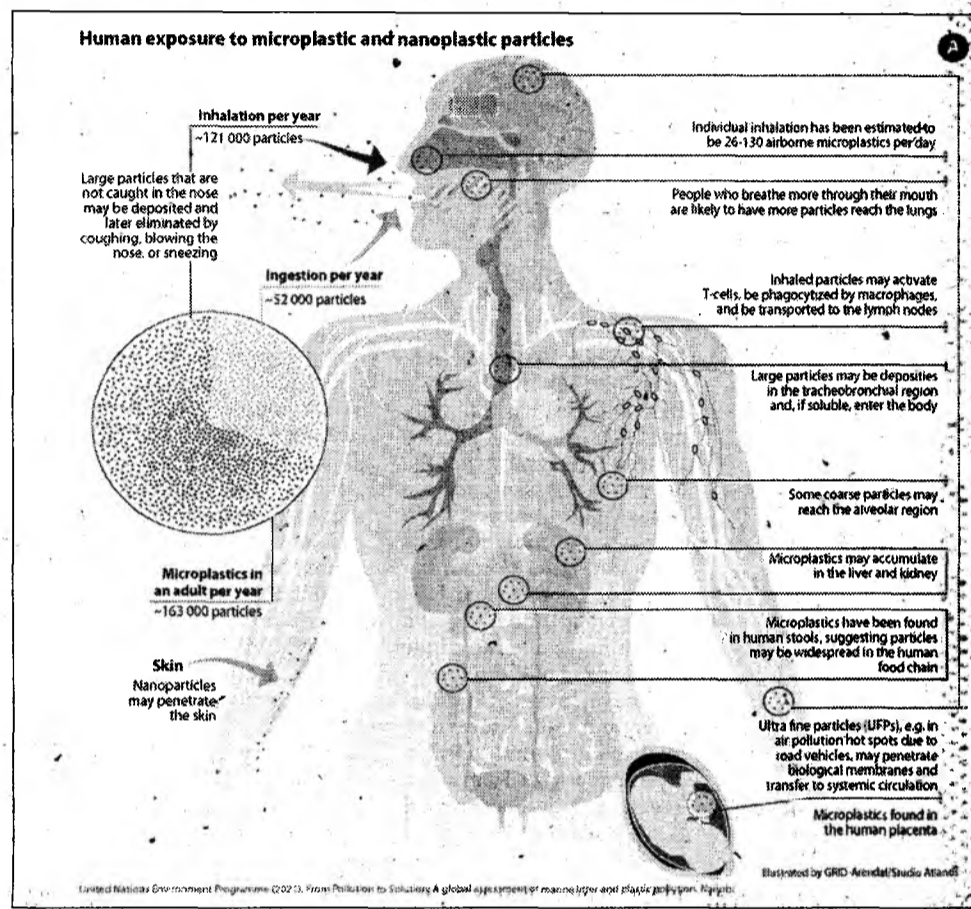
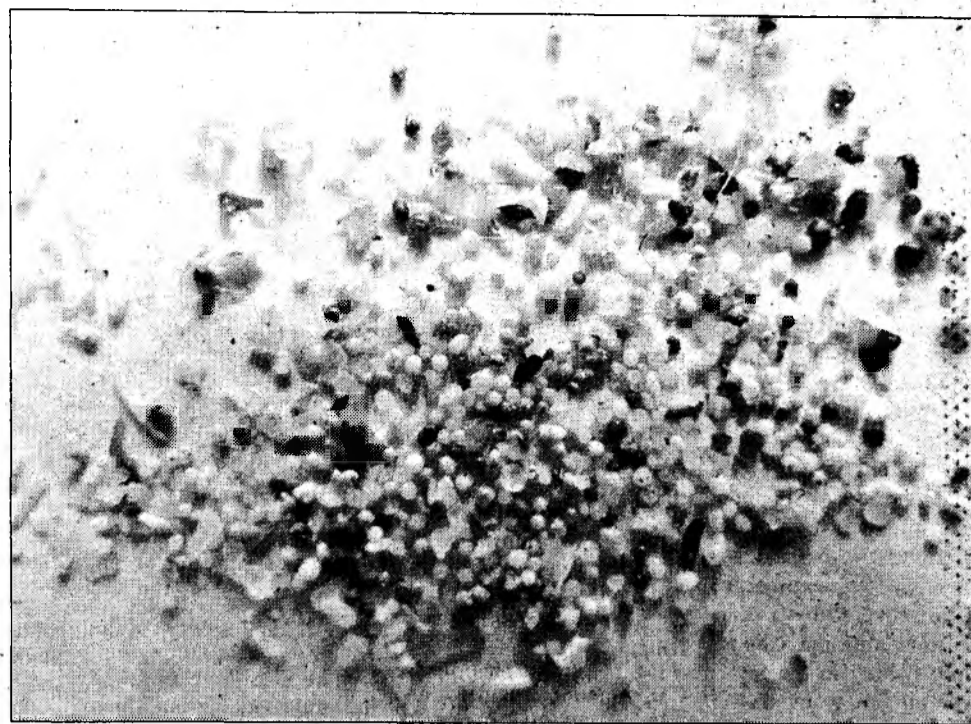
## How do I minimise my exposure?

Microplastics are widespread in the environment, and it's difficult to avoid exposure. We are just beginning to understand how microplastics can affect our health.

Until we have more scientific evidence, the best thing we can do is reduce our exposure to plastics where we can and produce less plastic waste, so less ends up in the environment.

An easy place to start is to avoid foods and drinks packaged in single-use plastic or reheated in plastic containers.

We can also minimise exposure to synthetic fibres in our home and clothing. *(The Conversation)*



## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 1, 2024

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Moon is forming an angle of 150 degrees with Saturn on your solar return chart which will bring mixed results for you during the year ahead. You will have vision to do big at your workplace but situation will not be favorable for you. Your competitors will make your life tough in your business. And even your colleagues will resist any new idea that you will try to implement. But your business associates/bosses will support you fully. And you will be able to execute all your plans. Financial position will also get better gradually. But rising expenses might upset your budget. You will think about taking a new job or enter into a new line of business. Your relations with family members will remain warm and cordial. Elders will keep supporting and guiding you. And you will enjoy perfect bonding with your mate. He/she will be accommodative, caring and understandable.

'This week-for you'

**Aries:** (March 21 - April 20) Excellent results on the professional front and personal growth are foretold. Those in sports, law and justice would benefit from the planetary alignment as they are infused with positive energy and gain recognition for their talents and hard work. It might be hard for you to work with others in a harmonious manner during this phase, and disputes with co-workers are possible. This is a time during which you have to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions in your relationship with family and loved ones. You have to pay attention to your image and avoid conflicts and arguments. Strong chances for visit to religious places.

**Taurus:** (April 21 - May 21) This period promises communication and intimacy with loved ones and family. You focus on having fun, enjoying romance, and expressing yourself creatively. Your attention turns to domestic matters most of the time and building, decoration and purchase of household assets for your home figures strongly now. Personal relationships are warm and comfortable as you spend a wonderful time with your family. A sudden job opportunity or money and property matters could be part of the financial gains. This can also produce an event that requires you to take charge and show your leadership skills. You feel fresh and re-energized after a long walk or light exercises.

**Gemini:** (May 22 - June 21) You would attend to children, family and loved ones with devotion and care. You feel emotionally attached with loved ones and family members. It's time to expand your social circle and to make more contact with groups and friends. It's time to get in touch with exactly what pleasures and comforts you. Short romantic trips entertain you and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. You are ready to perform and express yourself creatively and you would interact with people in business and this brings good results and monetary gains. This is a very significant time, when you are inspired creatively and emotionally. Avoid conflicts in the family as cooperation and harmony in relationships satisfies an instinctive need.

**Cancer:** (June 22 - July 22) This period is good for communication, finances, family and investments related matters. You are most successfully performing tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony with people around you. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Feeling secure and comfortable on the job is important to you now and you try to stick to the work schedule to complete the work in hand. You are coming across as especially smooth, and your good nature is bound to attract some attention. Take care of your health and adopt a regular routine of healthy eating and have fruits and vegetables to avoid stomach ailments.

**Leo:** (July 23 - August 23) This period is good for communication, finances, family and investments related matters. You are most successfully performing tasks that involve cooperation and team harmony with people around you. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Take advantage of the magnetic energy by surrounding yourself with people. Your career matters come to the fore. Take care of your health and adopt a regular routine of healthy eating and have fruits and vegetables to avoid stomach ailments.

**Virgo:** (August 24 - September 22) This is going to be an adventurous phase for you. You take more pride in your creations, love affair, children, and hobbies. Pleasure and amusement play an important role in your search for freedom of self-expression now. An overseas trip brings new opportunities and chances are you may find yourself

in a new atmosphere or a new environment. You take overseas projects in hand and enhance your funds. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefits you professionally and enhances your reputation and public standing. You exhibit individualism and brilliance in handling business ventures and collaborations. You need to drop comparison and rivalry in personal relations and competition in professional aspects as they lead to a feeling of inadequacy and stress.

**Libra:** (September 23 - October 23) This period brings joy, understanding and harmony in personal and professional relationships. It's a good time to travel, learn and do things you normally don't do. It is a favorable time for your own creations, ideas and for you to apply them in your profession. You may also display more responsibility towards your profession, and you positively use your talents with confidence. Financial gains are stronger than any other time. It's a time of creativity, drama, and passion. You will be more communicative and busy than usual. Remember, domestic relations cannot be resolved through discussion and analysis but through love, acceptance and freedom. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

**Scorpio:** (October 24 - November 22) There is a pleasant atmosphere at work and you enjoy the company of your loved ones. You express yourself with charm and grace, whether it's through what you say or what you write. Creative self-expression of any kind is favored this week. You instinctively know how to place yourself in the best light in order to make a good impression on others. Your mind often wanders to domestic concerns, and issues surrounding your home, family, and personal life. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful this week. You turn your attention to fitness and diet programs.

**Sagittarius:** (November 23 - December 21) There will be favorable results in domestic and professional life during this period. You might spend time in short frequent trips, communicating and visiting religious places. Your beloved would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. There are strong chances of relocation and a few more responsibilities at work place. There may be a development of romance at your work place. Your style of communication boosts your personality.

**Capricorn:** (December 22 - January 20) The planetary configuration will improve your professional prospects as you communicate cleverly and interact in a more positive way with people around. Your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities give you a big boost of confidence, and your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You tend to get mentally stressed and anxious causing health problems, detach yourself from problems and view them from a different perspective. Meditation and prayer would help you to overcome the recently generated problems.

**Aquarius:** (January 21 - February 18) This phase brings good luck and appreciations in family, business and love and romance. You would be attracted and impressed by intellectual people. Public relations work, promotion, and other such endeavors are favored now. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your position. As such, this is a great time to open up conversations about topics such as those revolving around the sharing of power, intimacy, and finances. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

**Pisces:** (February 19 - March 20) People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings financial growth. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Problems in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and directness. People in law, justice and related fields will have a great time as they use their talents and skills to meet desired objectives. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. You need to conserve energy to meet domestic responsibilities. Meditation and yoga would help.

## How can you help your child tidy up their room?

If you've ever opened the door to your child's room only to be greeted by a sea of clothes, toys and who knows what else, you're not alone.

Among countless reminders, pleading and threats, parents often find themselves in battle with their children when it comes to tidying up. For so many of us, it is an endless cycle of "try and let it go" and then "triggered and explode". The ongoing conflict this creates can be stressful for everyone.

But you are not doomed to live with piles of Lego, collected sticks and stones - or rooms full of old food and unwashed dishes until your children leave home. There is a different way to approach this.

### Why are children and teens messy?

There are developmental reasons for children being messy.

Children and teens don't fully develop the part of their brain needed for high-level organisation until adulthood, and can be easily overwhelmed by a tidying job.

This should not get them off the hook, though. Practising organisation skills is great for the brain. Research shows helping with tidying up from as early as 18 months is associated with improved prosocial skills (the ability to work with others).

It can also be hard to keep a room tidy if children have too many toys in their room. This means they have to rifle through things or tip out toy baskets to find a toy. Too much choice can also lead children to quickly move from one toy or activity to the next.

### Why you shouldn't just clear it up yourself

As a parent we can get caught in a cycle of feeling overwhelmed and frustrated and become disconnected from our child's perspective. For younger children, play is work - much of their learning happens as they play.

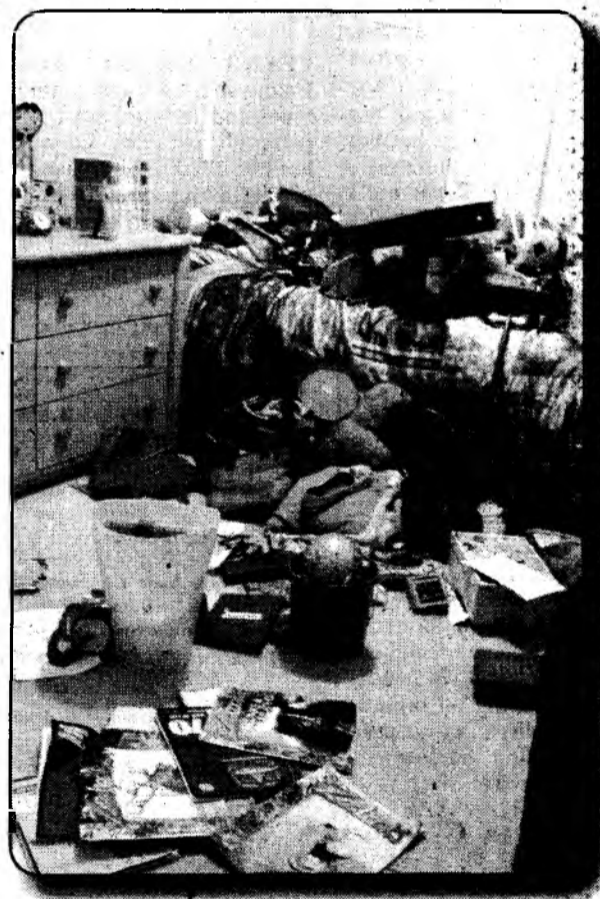
When we interrupt their play and tidy up their masterpiece, or throw out a special object, it can break trust and feel devastating for them.

For teenagers (and even younger children), having personal space is important to develop a healthy identity and sense of control in their world.

So when parents barge into their room and move their things, this can feel like a violation.

### How can you make tidying up easier?

- Make time to talk to your child about tidying up at a calm moment (when you're not asking them to clean anything). Don't make it a lecture - acknowledge how hard it is to keep their room tidy, ask for their ideas on what might help and decide together on a regular routine (perhaps they always give their room a quick tidy before TV, or it's a job on a certain day). Discuss what could get in the way and how you will work together.
- Have fewer toys in your child's room and a special place for these. This can make the room more appealing and organised, inspire play and creativity, and make tidying up easier.



- Notice moments when your children are doing any kind of cleaning up and acknowledge their efforts. Children love to feel noticed - we all do!
- Break the task down into smaller parts for older kids. For example, you could suggest, "what about packing all the Lego into that box" rather than just saying "clean up your room".
- Be playful with younger children. Cleaning up can be a time for connection. Get them to find all the red toys first, then see how fast they can bring you any socks that need washing.
- Notice the emotions your child feels when you are asking them to tidy up. See these emotions as an opportunity for connection and guidance. For example, "It's hard to clean up this amazing fort, you worked so hard on this. I love how cosy it is". And name emotions as you go. For example, "It's overwhelming when there is so much to clean. Are you worried about where to start?" Or problem solve together: "What could we clean up first?"
- With teenagers, use single word reminders, starting with just one thing that needs cleaning (for example, "washing?" Or "plates?"). Single word reminders allow a teen to save face and prevent battles. Watch your tone of voice and body language - try to stay warm, firm and kind. *(The Conversation)*

*"Be sure you put your feet in the right place, then stand firm."*

—Abraham Lincoln

## The Shillong Times

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### Politics over statue

POLITICS has degraded to a level that petty issues gain prominence over serious concerns. The politics in India had started gaining steam from the Freedom movement, followed by the zeal with which Jawaharlal Nehru and Vallabhbhai Patel sought to modernize young India through building steel plants for industrial heft and dams to boost agriculture. Those were inspiring times for a nation that was trying to find its feet from an era of colonial exploitation. Today, the scenario is different. Take for instance the snowballing protests in Mumbai over the collapse of a Shivaji Maharaj statue inaugurated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in coastal Sindhudurg district in Maharashtra eight months ago. The flurry with which the opposition parties are turning heaven and earth on this issue is proof they are motivated by petty politics. The assembly elections are round the corner there, and this is time for them to fish in troubled waters.

The fall of the 35-foot statue at Rajkot Fort in Malvan taluka abutting the Arabian Sea is believed to have been caused by strong winds in the rainy season on August 26. With the Opposition turning this into an emotive issue, whipping up the passions of the Marathi-speaking people, fuel was added to the fire with profuse apologies first from chief minister Eknath Shinde and then from visiting Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself. Shinde said he was ready to fall on the feet of Shivaji Maharaj and seek apology. Modi followed this with an apology to all followers of Shivaji, terming the 17th Century warrior king a 'revered god'. The opposition is pressing for resignation of the state government, saying, "now that they have admitted guilt and apologised, the government must resign."

The fall of the statue, however, raises larger issues. Its installation was a major project involving the state and central governments as also the Indian Navy. Every such governmental project is failing to stand the test of time because of weak constructions. While many bridges built during the British Raj are still in good form, new bridges are collapsing in state after state. The high-profile Ram Temple in Ayodhya and the new Parliament House in Delhi are no exceptions. With one rain, massive leaks were reported. Corruption and favouritism could be at the core of these problems. The contract for Shivaji statue's erection went into questionable hands. The statue itself was made by an RSS-linked person. Extraneous influences, not merit, are seen behind the award of every contract. Huge commissions are a norm. This is proof of how the political class that lead governments has degenerated over time. Leadership today is all about power and pelf, sans a commitment to serve the society or push the growth of a state or nation.

# Thank You for the Music

By HH Mohrmen

There was an incident last week which missed the spotlight; it was a case of media persons missing the boat for a ship. The incident was the convocation of a private university that could have been major news with possible international impact, but sadly, it did not happen. The incident was something that had never happened before in the world. No, it was not because of an error the university made in selecting the recipient of the honour it had offered, nor was it a criticism that the person selected had no contribution to society and hence did not deserve the honour. The incident was indeed the rarest of the rare case, as something like this had never occurred anywhere in the world.

### My first experience with the Musician

In the 80s and early 90s, during the heyday of organizing fetes in Jowai to raise funds for various causes, it was popular to invite musical groups or rock bands from Shillong to entertain the audience. The managing committees of schools and even localities raising funds for their community projects would always invite groups from Shillong. The more popular the band, the larger the audience it attracted, helping to raise funds for the cause. The groups invited to perform at these fetes largely depended on their popularity. Among the most popular bands of the time were Blood and Thunder, the Rebel Souls, the New Era and The Great Society to name a few.

### The Man in shorts

In the managing committee where I was a member, we had an elderly gentleman named Ma Karen Passah, who remained active even at a ripe old age. Whenever there was a discussion about who to invite to entertain the public during the fete, he would always insist on inviting "u tbian patlu." "U tbian patlu" in Pnar means a man who wears shorts. He had only completed primary education and did not know the artist's name, nor did he care what music the artist would play, but he always insisted that this particular musician be invited. Later, I learned that he liked the man in shorts because of his discipline—Lou Majaw was always punctual, a natural entertainer, and not one for nonsense. Ma Passah, too, was disciplined, punctual and a no-nonsense person and spoke very little. Like him, Lou was always on time, and that could be why this gentleman liked the musician.

The Great Society, led by

was certainly unusual.

**Lou deserves the honour**  
We are proud that Lou Majaw, the artist and our music icon, was honored by the USTM University. Anyone who has followed music in the state knows that Lou deserves it. He composed songs and released many albums under the banner of The Great Society. He is also known for organizing gigs every year to celebrate Bob Dylan's birthday, and during a time when being a musician was challenging because it didn't pay well, Lou shone brightly as part of that generation. While other musicians of his time have stable jobs to keep the hearth of their homes warm, Lou depends and lives solely

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### The news that didn't make the headlines

It would have been a major news item if reporters had spotted the unusual incident that occurred that day during the convocation. The adage, "If a dog bites a man, it's not news, but if a man bites a dog, that's news," did not apply that day. It should have made headlines because it was the first time in the history of the world that something unusual happened at the convocation. The strange incident was that one of the recipients of the honoris causa (honorary doctorate) did so while wearing torn-out shorts and socks of two different colors on each foot.

It was the first time in the history of any university in the world that a person receiving an Honorary Doctorate of Letters (D Litt) came in shorts and mismatched socks. The honoris causa given to the renowned musician and music icon of the state was not unusual, but the way this recipient accepted the honour

on his music.

During the convocation when he received the honour, Lou, as usual, did not say much, but those who follow him know he is a man of few words who lets his life speak for itself.

### The other musician's legacy

Another musical group from the State that has made a name for itself is the Shillong Chamber Choir. The group, started by Neil Nongkynrih, has made the city and the state proud. If Neil were alive, he too would deserve recognition for his contribution to the music history of the state.

I admire people who had the opportunity to study abroad. In Neil's case he not only studied music in the UK but could also have worked and lived there but he decided to return to his native land. The charm of the Western world, the opportunities it offers, and the prosperity it promises have tempted many to stay permanently in the

land of opportunities. With the kind of training and talent Neil had, it wouldn't have been difficult for him to migrate to the UK. More importantly, in the late 1980s, when he was in the UK, migration to that country was not as difficult as it is now. The question no one asked is, why did Neil decide to come back to his native land? What charm did Meghalaya hold for him that he was willing to leave the hills of Derbyshire and Scotland for the hills of the Khasi and Jaintia? To leave the Thames for Wahumkhrak, the Lake District for Umiam, Trafalgar Square for Khyndai Lad, and the ancient marvels of the UK for the sacred forests in the land of his birth?

Generally, people who have the opportunity to study and work in the western world can be broadly divided into two types. There are those who dream all their lives of getting an opportunity to study or even visit the western world and never return to their native land. But there are people like Neil, who went abroad to study, trained themselves well in their field of study, and then returned home to share what they learned. The very fact that he decided to return home was a major decision, and everyone knows he was right in making that choice.

It takes a person with strong willpower and a clear vision of what they plan to do with their lives to make such an important decision. It's not easy to leave behind all the charms of the western world and return to his land and people.

### Congratulations and Thank You

As we congratulate Bah Lou and express our pride in his achievement, we must remind ourselves that we missed the opportunity to say the same to Neil. They say if you want to express your gratitude to someone, it's better to do it while they are still alive, while they can still hear it with their own ears. Nevertheless, there is no better time than now to thank the duo for the music and entertainment.

We must all thank Neil for his decision to return and start the Shillong Chamber Choir and Lou for his music. It is clear that both musicians had a vision for what they wanted to do with their lives, and more importantly, they achieved their goals. It is for their achievements that we are now celebrating, and we will always cherish the rich legacy that these two great musicians left behind. Thank you for a life well lived; your legacy will live on.

## Supreme Court increasingly convinced about abuse of anti-money laundering law

### Recent pronouncements suggest a nuanced shift in judicial approach by apex body

By K Raveendran

The Supreme Court's recent judgments granting bail to Delhi minister Manish Sisodia and others in the Delhi excise and similar cases mark a significant shift in how the judiciary approaches money laundering charges, particularly those pressed by the Enforcement Directorate (ED). The rulings not only highlight the evolving judicial perspective but also shed light on the court's broader stance regarding the principles of bail and detention.

Sisodia's case has garnered immense attention due to his high-profile nature and the gravity of the charges against him. The Supreme Court's decision to grant bail has been described as a landmark moment in the court's approach, reflecting a shift towards a more nuanced interpretation of bail conditions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act (PMLA).

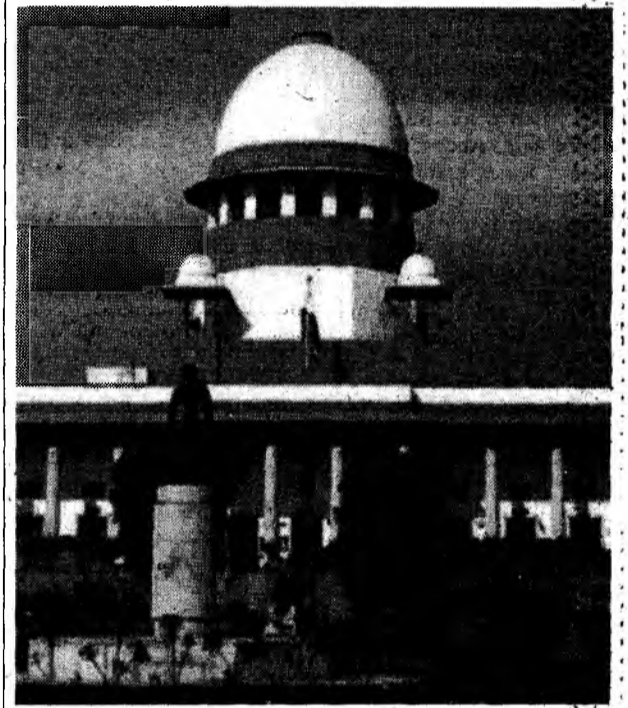
The approach becomes even more pivotal when considered alongside similar cases involving prominent political figures like K Kavitha, a leader of the Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS), and Prem Prakash, an aide to Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant So-

evidence is obtained through lawful means.

The recent verdicts align with a broader judicial trend towards ensuring that the legal process adheres to principles of fairness and due process. The court's focus on the admissibility of confessions and the conditions for bail reflects a commitment to upholding these principles, even in complex and high-profile cases involving significant financial crimes. This is particularly important in the context of the agency doing mercenary political work for the ruling party.

The PMLA, enacted in 2002, was designed to combat money laundering and ensure that proceeds from criminal activities are curtailed. However, its stringent provisions have increasingly been criticized for their use against political adversaries. The law allows for the attachment of properties, arrest without bail, and long detentions, which can be wielded as a tool to harass and politically undermine individuals or groups.

In recent years, there have been multiple instances where the ED has targeted



ren. Both are facing money laundering charges, and their legal battles offer a comparative lens to understand the court's evolving stance.

The Supreme Court's verdict emphasizes a critical principle in criminal justice: bail should be the rule, not the exception. The principle aligns with the broader judicial philosophy that detention before trial should be used sparingly and only in exceptional circumstances. It underscores that the presumption of innocence should be respected, and bail should be granted unless there are compelling reasons to deny it.

In Sisodia's case, the court examined the nature of the charges and the evidence presented by the ED and came to the conclusion that his prolonged detention amounted to a denial of his right to a speedy trial as the court noted there was not even a remotest possibility of trial being concluded in the future. It showed careful consideration of whether the presented evidence warranted continued detention. This is a departure from the more stringent approach previously adopted in cases under the PMLA, where detention was often prolonged based on the ED's assertions of the severity of the charges.

The Supreme Court's recent observations in PMLA cases provide further context for this ruling. Notably, the court has scrutinized the admissibility of confessions obtained during police custody. In a recent case, the court ruled that such confessions in one particular case could not be used as incriminating evidence in another case, reinforcing the importance of protecting the rights of the accused and ensuring that

politicians from opposition parties or those in rival state governments. High-profile cases have involved leaders from various parties, and the timing of these actions often coincides with critical political moments or elections, leading to allegations that the ED is acting at the behest of the ruling party.

Despite the agency's broad remit to investigate and prosecute money laundering, the conviction rate under the PMLA remains notably low. According to recent figures, out of the thousands of cases registered, the conviction rate is below 10 percent, suggesting a systemic challenge in securing convictions, which raises questions about the efficacy and impartiality of the investigative process.

The court's reality check on such abuse is particularly significant and might signal a shift in approach. The Supreme Court had previously upheld the ED's authority to arrest individuals without necessarily presenting detailed grounds for arrest in each case. New pronouncements, however, suggest a more nuanced application of these powers, emphasizing the need for a balanced approach that considers the specifics of each case.

The tension between these aspects of the court's approach highlights the complexities of balancing the need to combat money laundering with the imperative to uphold fundamental legal principles. It also reflects an ongoing effort to reconcile these interests, ensuring that the legal process remains fair and just while addressing serious financial crimes. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### A ticking time bomb

Editor,

I was stunned to read the figure of a mere 2.98% unemployment rate given by our Deputy Chief Minister, Prestone Tynsong when replying to a question in the Assembly recently. This means that unemployment in our state is practically non-existent. The Deputy Chief Minister quoted the figure arrived at by a so-called "reputed" agency by the name of Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE). I wonder what kind of methodology was adopted by this agency. Is it through sample survey? If that is the case then another question arises: What is the size of the sample? In any case, sample surveys, especially of small sizes have been thoroughly discredited. We just saw how widely off the mark the exit polls (based on sample surveys) of the recently declared parliamentary elections were. I also wonder why our Government depends so much for advice on outside agencies who do not know anything about the ground realities here. To get an accurate picture, I invite the Government to conduct a house to house survey with the cooperation of the Dorbar Shnongs. I am sure that with a few exceptions, every family with adult chil-

dren has at least one member who is unemployed and that youth unemployment is not less than 40-50% which is increasing day by day as tens of thousands graduate from schools, colleges and universities every year.

Nowadays, most of those employed cannot be said to be gainfully employed even in the Government sector. For example, the PHE department advertised for the contractual posts of Water Analysts and Laboratory Multi-Tasking Assistants for remunerations of Rs 15,000 and 12,000 per month respectively. Are not these kinds of remunerations for highly skilled technical personnel equivalent to slave wages? These wages are not even equivalent to the government's own notified minimum wages. This is the plight of thousands of young people employed as contractual workers in the government sector. In the private sector, the situation is even more dire. To cite an example, as per an advertisement in this paper recently, a private college sought the services of an Assistant Lecturer for a monthly salary of a measly Rs. 5000 only! And people are desperate enough to grab at every opportunity.

In rural areas, we can see that there is widespread under-employment and disguised unemployment, the principal reason being that large parts of the State have not adopted multi cropping

system until now. We can also see that most villagers are forced to sit idle for 4-5 months after they have harvested their single crop. The MNREGA scheme does help but it does bridge the gap only to an extent.

Coming back to the answer given by our Hon'ble Dy. Chief Minister in the Assembly, I find it very shocking that all our MLAs did not choke when they swallowed this kind of answer unquestioningly. Are these MLAs so cut off from reality that they do not see the armies of unemployed roaming around in their respective constituencies? Don't they realise that the high unemployment in our state is a ticking time bomb that may explode at any time?

Yours etc.,  
Samuel Swett,  
Shillong - 2

#### Empathy above all makes us human

Editor,

When gender-based violence and violence in the name of religion and country occupy the news and our mind space, we need to reassure ourselves with the scientific truth of human unity to rid ourselves of pettiness, prejudices, and pessimism. Often, this truth comes out before us like it did

after landslides hit Wayanad. Amid the dance of death and destruction in Wayanad, humanity dawned. Darkness gets a relief when the sun softly touches it at dawn. Our pessimism and doubt in goodness in human beings similarly got a relief. It was when we read the report that some people on their own rushed to the danger zone in Wayanad and saved others at the cost of their lives.

They did not select victims by their clothes. It was a celebration of the bond of love and the truth that all of us have originated from one mother, Mitochondrial Eve, and, therefore, we all are brothers and sisters, irrespective of our religion, race, caste, class, and gender.

Now, let us move to the stage of real drama. Multiple downpour-triggered landslides caused death and devastation, almost completely wiping out Mundakkai and Chooramala villages in the picturesque Wayanad district in Kerala on July 30. Gushing waters, tumbling boulders, and demonic landslides swept away sturdy buildings, a school, many houses, living quarters of plantation workers, roads, and the electricity infrastructure beside uprooting trees.

Sharath, a 22-year-old young man, saw that the roof of his home had been blown away after landslides hit Chooramala. Immediately,

he took his parents to a safer place. But he did not stop there. He went out looking for other stranded people. He rescued 18 before he went missing.

Prajeesh, a thirty something young man, ventured up the hill with his jeep the moment the first landslides hit Mundakkai, 3km uphill from Chooramala at the small hours of night. He ignored his friends' warnings to make a trip up and down a treacherous hill amid landslides. It was pitch dark as landslides thrashed electricity connections. He made the second trip after rescuing many lives in his first mission. After his successful second trip, rescuing several lives, he was last seen in his jeep, setting off for his third attempt.

Prajeesh managed to return twice from the dark and furious Mundakkai in his jeep full of people. On being entreated not to make another trip, he said, "Lots of people are stranded atop the hill. Don't stop me. I'll go anyway." Those were his last words.

Now comes a young mother. Bhavana, a mother of a four-month-old and a four-year-old, heard that many babies had lost their mothers in the Wayanad landslides. She immediately left for Wayanad on August 1 along with her husband to give the children who lost their mothers her breast milk. She said, "I am

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

"Most folks are as happy as they make up their minds to be."

— Abraham Lincoln

The Shillong Times

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Faulty unemployment data

THE Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) has certified that unemployment in Meghalaya stands at 2.98 per cent, which is below the national average of 6.78 per cent. This was stated by Deputy Chief Minister Prestone Tynsong in the Meghalaya Assembly. The question is whether this data is reliable and whether Meghalaya really has such low unemployment figures. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) definition says only those doing decent jobs should be marked as employed. Decent work sums up the aspirations of people in their working lives and involves, among other things, opportunities for work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for families, and better prospects for personal development and social integration.

The CMIE does not differentiate between those in decent jobs and those who are not. If the ILO criteria of decent jobs are applied, the unemployment rate will be much higher, economists critical of the CMIE survey say. CMIE uses the Consumer Pyramids Household Surveys (CPHS) which are high-frequency large-scale surveys that are widely used, particularly to assess the short-term changes in the economic conditions of households. The reason why states and other institutions have had to rely on the CMIE data is because the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation tends to withhold data. Even the National Statistical Survey Office (NSSO) does not give out data on the economic conditions of households, hence the CMIE data is the only one available. But there are problems in the Survey. The CPHS surveys households living in about 174,000 sample houses (about 111,000 rural and 63,400 urban) spread across most states in India. An alternative survey from the "People of India" module finds serious problems in the sample design and survey implementation of the CPHS. Although referred to as household surveys in the documentation, the CPHS are surveys of people living in sampled houses. The sample is designed to create a panel, with the same houses selected for repeated surveys. The entire CPHS documentation incorrectly uses the word household to refer to houses. This is the cause of much confusion. In CPHS waves since 2016, even if all persons living in a house change, the sampled house is treated as the same household, though it is marked that all the members have changed.

The definition of a household used in the CPHS is very different from the way households are defined in official surveys like those conducted by the NSSO where household refers to a group of people who normally live together and eat their meals together (commonly formulated as "eating from a common kitchen"). While this definition uses eating from a common kitchen as a key condition, the existence of a physical structure that is used solely as a kitchen is not a requirement. The CPHS documentation does not provide a clear method for identifying houses. In CPHS a household is defined by the existence of a physical structure in which a group of people live and there exist physical structures and facilities (such as a kitchen, a verandah or an electricity connection) that are shared by this group of people. Households that did not have such shared physical structures like a kitchen, for example "nomadic households", were not included in CPHS. It would be educative for Meghalaya to get the State's unemployment data from local universities such as NEHU to clear all doubts.

Inclusion of Khasi Language in the 8th Schedule : Resolution of 1976

By G Allan Lyndem

(This year the Shillong Records Collection Centre (SRCC) is commemorating its Golden Jubilee Year and as part of its on-going commemorative events the Centre wishes to publish and share with the public the Resolution on the 8th Schedule which was moved by L. Gilbert Shullai, the founder of SRCC, in the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council in 1976.)

After nearly two years of Meghalaya attaining statehood the Experts' Committee of the Sahitya Akademi visited the State for the first time and held its meeting to assess the feasibility for accord recognition to the Khasi language. In the above meeting which was held on Dec 20, 1973, the committee was of the opinion that Khasi had so far not fulfilled all the criteria laid down for the purpose and thus regretted its inability to recommend for recognition by the Sahitya Akademi.

Two years after Dec 20, 1973, a Resolution was moved by L. Gilbert Shullai, Member of the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council then, on the March 24, 1976, urging the Council to recommend to the State Government to take up the matter with the Government of India for inclusion of Khasi Language in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution. The motion received overwhelming support from other Members of the Council irrespective of party affiliations. Notably, those who spoke and supported the Resolution were Messrs A. Alley, Alwot B. Diengdoh, E.B. Lyngdoh & B. Wanniang, following which the Resolution was adopted and the Chairman of the Council declared the Council's recommendation to the State Government, then led by All Party Hills Leaders Conference (APHL), to take up the matter with the Government of India for inclusion of Khasi Language in the 8th Schedule to the Indian Constitution. Below are snippets of the Resolution:

"... Now before we speak about the Khasi Language, I feel compelled to say anything about the Khasis. India is a very big country. We cannot say for sure what nation settled first in India since its creation. Very similar is the case with the North East India. But we Khasis have always been in these hills according to the legend of the 'Nine' in the heaven above and the 'Seven' here on the earth below.... If we take India as a whole, as far as can be known, the first people who came were the Negroid who came from the west across Arabia and Iran. This was thousand of years ago before the end of the BC era and the beginning of the AD era.... After the Negroid came the Proto-Australoid. They came from the Eastern Mediterranean and the lan-

guage spoken by them was an Austric dialect. This language was divide into two groups - (a) the Austro-Asiatic and (b) the Austronesian.... It is said that the Khasi language also falls under the Austro-Asiatic Group. Regarding the coming of the different peoples speaking different languages, there was an effort to write in the form of an Article in the

of half-cup and 'jingbam' in place of snacks. In the same way the drivers, conductors and the passengers in the city buses use and easily understand the word 'iaid'. The word 'khublei' especially is more widely used and understood.....

With the passing of time, Khasi literature is making much progress and I believe

Missionaries. It was for this reason that Khasi language is written in the dialect of the people of Sohra but it does not mean that Khai language is exclusively the dialect of the people living in and around Sohra. Khasi dialects are different in different localities or villages. For example: for the sentence - 'There is a man who has two sons', in the Sohra dialect it would be: 'U don uwei u brier uba don ar ngut ki khun shynrang'..... the local dialects at Mairang or at Shangpung or at Dawki or at Nongstoin or at Nongtalang or in other places are different from one another. In the Magazine (1965) of the Khasi Students' Association, this sentence..... in the dialect of the people living in the Jirang area it would be: 'Ah umi u karu u ah ir bei ji hun hyntrymei'.... All the local dialects spoken in these Hills belong to the Austric Group of Languages. Their unity cannot be denied and the differences are at best dialectic variations of Khasi literary language based on the local dialect spoken in Sohra....

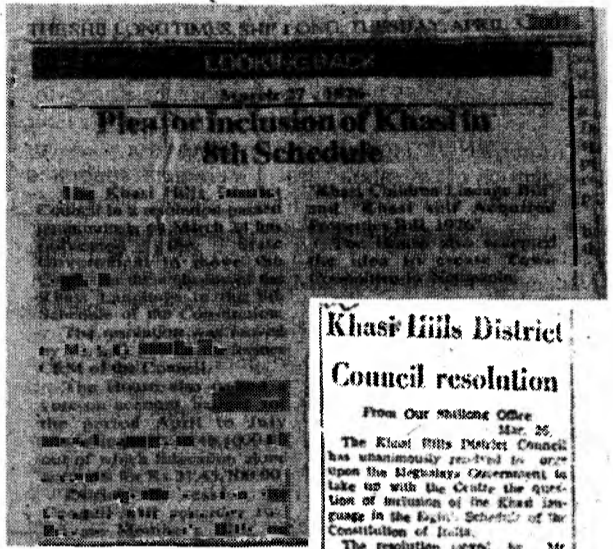
As it is at present, there is no Austric Language in the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India and we hope that the Government of India will please to include Khasi Language, which is one of the branches of the Austric family, in the Eight Schedule..... We would request the Government of Meghalaya to take up the matter with the Government of India so that our Khasi language may get a rightful place in the Eight Schedule to the Constitution of India. With these words, I move the Resolution and I request the hon'ble members of the House to accept it.

The above Resolution was adopted and recommended to the APHL-led State Government to take up the matter with the Congress-led Central Government. It may be recalled that the above APHL-led Government in Meghalaya ended on November 21, 1976 and the Congress-led government took over and remained in power till the end of Legislative Assembly tenure in March 1978.

After one year from the day (24th March, 1976) of the above Resolution, a fresh Committee of Experts (constituted by Executive Board of Sahitya Akademi) visited Shillong on 25th March 1977 making a detailed observation about the visit and also wrote to the State Government for its views.

As it is at present, the ruling party in Meghalaya an ally of the ruling party at the Centre is yet to provide a tangible update and a determined view on the matter.

(The writer is presently the custodian of the Shillong Records Collection Centre)



Khasi Students' Association Magazine (1962-63) and this same Article was again printed on the 24th March 1976 issue of "U Kyroh Ka Ri Lum".....

In speaking about the Khasi language we cannot but speak about its literature. Dr. H. Barsh in his book- 'The History and Culture of the Khasi People' wrote about the literature and education and said "Khasi literature was put down in writing in the Roman Script....yet Khasi literature in its present form has shown substantial development and in this short span it has been able to produce its own luminaries who in their own several fashions have given us the first fruits of Khasi thoughts and feelings"..... the statement given by Shri Balraj Sahni in the 'Filmfare' (July 13, 1962), in which said - "I feel strongly that Roman Script, in which English is written, should be the obvious choice and, if progressive minded people were to make an effort, this script would be accepted in all parts of the country....."..... in 1919 both Khasi and Assamese were recognised up to Degree standard..... If we refer again to the Article 351 and the Eighth Schedule to the Constitution we will see that our Khasi language contributed something. At present there are many Khasi words like 'shiteng', 'jingbam', 'iaid', 'khublei' which are used not only by the Khasis. The tea sellers and those who take tea whether in tea stalls or government offices generally use the words 'shiteng' instead

that the North Eastern Hill University will give an honoured place to Khasi Language. At present there are many Khasi books in different subjects. "Khasi-English Dictionary" (1973 Edition) written by Rev. Father E. Bars is a living witness that Khasi Language is not a poor language. Another, "Khasi-English Dictionary" (1968 Edition) was written by Mr. I. Kharkongpor.

Our Khasi language is also rich in adverbs- for example, when a stone falls on water, it is not necessary to say that a big stone or small stone falls on water, only the adverbs 'plum' and 'plom' one can understand whether the stone is big or small. "A stone falls (plum) on water" means a big stone because 'plum' indicates that it is big. Again, "a stone falls (plom) on water" means a small stone because 'plom' indicates that it is small.....

I feel that I must remind the house that Khasi language is not the language spoken only by the Khasis of Sohra. The Khasis speak in different dialects but they are one Nation. Khasi literature is written in the dialect spoken in Sohra.....when the Britishers came to our Hills they first settled at Nongkhlaw but on account of the war they had to shift to Sohra and so it became the Headquarters of the Britishers and the

Are you a spinal cord injury survivor?

By Karen Lyndem

Where are all the survivors? Why do they seem so hidden outside of health care centers and their homes?

Spinal Cord Injury is one of the most common causes of disability incapacitating an individual to lead a normal life. The 'World Spinal Cord Injury day' that is observed on the 5th of September 2024, is an initiative of the International Spinal Cord Society (ISCoS) to build awareness and promote the inclusion of disability throughout the world. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), annually around 250,000 to 500,000 people suffer a Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) globally and the majority of the causes are preventable like road traffic crashes, falls, or violence. In our state of Meghalaya,

Because of an accident that involved him being electrocuted while working on household wiring, all of his limbs were inevitably amputated. That would be enough to drive anyone to a state of resentment and depression. But he had hope. And because opportunities presented themselves to him, he made the best use of them. His sponsors helped him to procure prosthetic legs, following which he worked hard to gain some level of independence. They assumed that he could. And so he showed them that he could.

Iarap is now working a full time work-from-home job and is the sole breadwinner of his family. He lives with his mother and brother on a steep slope and, because of his grit and determination



according to the UDID Statistics of 2024, out of 29,536 registered Persons with Disabilities (PwDs) 10,451 of them have a locomotor disability, which, among other causes of locomotor disabilities, includes Spinal Cord Injuries. This accounts for 35.4% of total PwDs, which is the highest among the twenty one disability categories mentioned. Among the districts of Meghalaya, the East Khasi Hills District has the highest number of persons with locomotor disability compared to the other districts, at 21.33%. Yet, what happens to these survivors post hospital treatment? How have they adapted to life?

Following a Spinal Cord Injury, a person may be debilitated either temporarily or permanently, and consequently, may experience psychological and emotional trauma as well. Therefore, maintaining a positive outlook is extremely important for patients with such conditions. When sickness or injuries cripple us, some form of grief is always guaranteed. Acceptance is a very important step in the healing process. But many people who have disabilities may understand acceptance as a form of 'learned helplessness', where they come to accept themselves as invalids- they are hopeless because they are helpless. But are they to blame for all of it? If their mobility depends on accessibility, how inclusive have we made our society?

There is an advertisement titled 'Assume that I can'. It features Madison Tevlin, a teenage girl with Down Syndrome, addressing the camera. She audaciously says "Parents, you assume that I cannot live on my own. You don't encourage me to live on my own. So, I don't live on my own. Your assumptions become reality. Coach- you assume that I cannot hit harder, you don't train me to hit harder. So, I don't hit harder. And teacher- you assume that I cannot learn Shakespeare, you don't teach me Shakespeare, so I don't learn Shakespeare. But Hey! If all your assumptions become reality, then assume that I can live on my own, so I live on my own. Assume that I can hit harder. So that I hit harder. Assume that I can learn Shakespeare. And maybe I will learn Shakespeare. Assume that I can... so maybe I will". The video moves on to show her accomplishing those feats.

Iarapborlang Chyne is a 35 year old quadruple amputee.

to learn to walk again, he now seamlessly navigates with his prosthetic legs. In fact, Iarap hopes to one day be able to procure runner blades so that he could train to run. There are many cases like Iarap, who want to believe that their hope can turn into reality.

At PMR Centre, Laban; our team consists of a Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation doctor (MD PMR), physiotherapists, occupational therapists, lab technicians, a counselling psychologist and Medical Social Workers. As a team, we aspire to assist our patients with their physical and social rehabilitation. After the physical trauma and the medical interventions- the hospital visitations and the doctor's consultations, the onus of rehabilitation falls on the patient. We cannot begin to imagine how difficult and daunting it can be to adapt to a life with an impairment. That is where Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation can step in- to aid Spinal Cord Injury survivors to facilitate their rehabilitation. PMR Centre has incorporated the latest technologies such as Hydrotherapy to improve balance control; Virtual reality technology to improve cognitive and body coordination, and other fledgling rehabilitation protocols for comprehensive SCI training. But apart from that we also provide group and individual therapy sessions for patients and caregivers to enhance mental and emotional well-being. Last but not the least, we help our patients who are physically disabled to attain necessary paperwork and registrations which will be contributory to their holistic healing.

On September 5, 2024, PMR Centre will be organizing a 'Back Care Camp' at the centre from 10 am to 1 pm, that is open to all. The aim of the program is to cater to persons with back issues and also to facilitate those with Spinal Cord Injury to come forward to seek medical attention, awareness and advice. Subsequently, there will be an 'In-house Group Therapy Session' for SCI survivors and their caregivers.

We serve to instill hope in Spinal Cord Injury survivors, emphasizing that 'healing' is multi-dimensional and that they are not alone.

"With man it is impossible, but with God, all things are possible"- Matthew 19:26.

(The writer is a social worker at PMR Centre, Laban).

Letters to the Editor

Horrors of rape cannot be politicised

Editor, The month of August has seen horrific cases of violence against women and young girls in India. Every case is tragic, but the 31-year old medical trainee, brutally raped and killed at R G Kar Hospital, has been in the eye of the storm. I wish all the victims had powerful organizations like the IMA to support them. One's heart breaks for all of them, but we do not know as much about the others, as we do about the Kolkata victim. One does not have to be virtuous to merit compassion and support. Any living being (not just humans) brutalized, anywhere in the world, deserves our empathy. But it feels worse when the victim is virtuous. From interviews of her parents, neighbours, and others, the Kolkata medical trainee sounds truly selfless. A devoted daughter, hardworking student, and altruistic neighbour, she was humble and angelic -- never troubling her parents for anything. An only child, she took care of not just her parents and neighbours, but even the stray animals she would feed. Speaking to a journalist, her weeping neighbour described her as a humble person. In this age of capitalist medicine and greed, she was unique in her vocation for

this noble profession. A gift to her patients, she worked thirty-six long hours before lying down to rest on that fateful night of August 9. To have to work thirty-six hours at a stretch is inhumane. The brutality of the attack is truly stunning. The misogynistic sadism in the rapist or rapists is chilling. How deeply they hate women to have derived sick pleasure from torturing Abhaya before killing her. What surprises me is the fact that there were no warning signs. If indeed, Abhaya knew too much about the corrupt activities at RG Kar, surely her life was in danger? Her parents are so powerful in their dignity, resilience, and grief-- after being misled that it was a suicide, made to wait for three hours, etc. Frozen with pain, they cannot bear to enter Abhaya's room. Yet they have been noble enough to say that all who are protesting are their children -- the words of grieving parents, powerful in their generosity. Her father has been ethical enough to refuse CM Mamata Banerjee's money offer, which some have called a bribe. Before a tragedy of such epic proportions, money cheapens the person making the offer. The world's prayers, I hope, console Abhaya's inconsolable parents, and all the rape victims (some of them very young), and their loved ones. If I were Mamata Banerjee, I would resign immediately,

instead of making bombastic speeches!

Yours etc.,  
Deepa Majumdar,  
Via email

A blind man selling kwai - cigarettes

Editor, A few days ago, in the busy market of Shillong, I came across a blind man and watched him moving through the crowd, selling betel nuts and just a "single" packet of cigarettes from a small plastic bag. He was continuously calling out, "Kwai-cigarettes! Kwai-cigarettes!", trying to catch the attention of passersby. The contents of that bag couldn't have been worth more than Rs 150. If he had more money, I'm sure he would have carried several packets of cigarettes, some pan masala and other similar stuff to sell. The stick in his hand was his only guide and support. I had never seen a blind person selling items like this before. The thought of what it took for him to do this filled me with both admiration and sadness. What truly struck me was realizing what could have compelled this blind man to journey all the way from his village in Mawngap to Shillong. Many thoughts raced through my mind. What I could conclude is that the man has seemingly no one to support him. Being blind, he could have easily stood

on the roadside and begged for money. But instead, he chose the path of dignity. He may have lost his sight, but his will and perseverance remained unshaken. From the bottom of my heart, I salute his incredible courage! To learn more about him, I walked alongside him. When he spoke, his voice was soft and gentle. It revealed a tale of sorrow that I chose to hold close to my heart. I immediately offered him some money--an amount he couldn't see but could only feel--and he looked toward the heavens, thanking me with a depth of gratitude that left me truly humbled. He even asked about me, a simple gesture that spoke volumes about his humility. I don't think I've ever been thanked as sincerely as I was by this blind man. At that moment, I realized just how much he must have been struggling for so many years, perhaps just to ensure a plate of rice. A part of me wanted to do more for him, to bring him home and find a way to ease his burden, even if just for a little while. Well, for the next few days I searched for him in the market hoping to offer more help. Through this letter, I appeal to those who believe in compassion and service to the needy to do something for this blind man from a village near Mawngap. Any help, whether it's supporting him financially or providing him with a suitable job, would

make a world of difference in his life. Let's not turn a blind eye to the needs of a man who literally risks his life at every step just to fill his stomach.

WhatsApp 8014869199 for a photo to identify the blind man from Mawngap.  
Yours truly,  
Salil Gwali,  
Shillong

Extrajudicial killing the new economic weapon?

Editor, The economy in the Northeastern region is taking a hit in the solar plexus along the Indo-Bangladesh border, under the current tension. The fear that the exodus of people along fractured lines has made us forget that friendly relations with our neighbours is imperative and Bangladesh's largest export destination is India. Asian Confluence, a think-tank recently hosted a webinar on the theme "India-Bangladesh Relations: Exploring Opportunities for the Future with Perspectives from the North-East Region of India." The panelists averred that one way of approaching the problem is to understand the need to survive together in a dynamically changing world. Nations are just bleeding out their resources and trade relations if we are following Uncle Sam's way. Developed during the

Obama administration, a kill list called, 'The Disposition Matrix', was curated which had a database of information for targeted strikes of known suspected enemies of the US and with the death of an Awami League leader Ishaque Ali Khan Panna found under mysterious circumstances as per media reports that too inside Indian territory it shows how the nature of checks and balances are trampled upon. It is worthwhile mentioning that in 2023 the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijja sent shock-waves in the intelligence community with strong diplomatic ties between India and Canada hanging in uncertainty. Political complexities should never compromise values and bilateral connections because in dire circumstances, the neighbourhood would be the first one to lend a helping hand. COVID-19 did teach us that the hard way. The book, 'How the West Fuels War and Poverty in the Developing World' by Vijay Mehta discusses that methods of disarmament and development through sustainable means can create a new world.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Shillong-10

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"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery."

— Mark Van Doren

## The Shillong Times

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### Caste and RSS

THE RSS, holding its annual brainstorming session in Palakkad this time, has made it clear it would not allow a caste census, with a warning to the Congress-led Opposition that it should not use this as a political weapon in its election campaigns. The terse warning to others is also that, "we will draw the line," and will not allow others to cross it. The RSS understands the political import of this crucial campaign plank in the coming elections at a time when the BJP has been put on the defensive after its uninterrupted 10-year rule. Hence, RSS couches its threat with an explanation that the Hindutva, pro-nationalist entity is not against the cause of social welfare.

Doublespeak is what the RSS excels in, but its class character is known to all. It makes all-out pushes to create a Hindu India at the expense of the non-Hindus, the minorities, while smartly widening the concept of a 'Hindu' by arguing that it considers all those born here as Hindus. A religion is a religion. Hoodwinking doesn't help. The dichotomy in the RSS's propositions and action on the ground is there for all to see. The RSS is wary of a caste census having the potential to sharpen the divisions in Hindu society. This, it feels, is not in national interest. At the same time, it has been engaged in calculated attempts at dividing the society on Hindu and non-Hindu lines. The Babri Masjid issue should have been left to the courts to pass a judgement. If so, the government was duty-bound to act accordingly and settle the vexed issue once and for all. But, various RSS outfits under the banners of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the BJP took the law into their hands and razed the old mosque. This single act made Muslims lose their sense of security and hopes of a fair play, the hallmarks of any civilized society. India stood vertically divided. That the BJP reaped a rich harvest from this reckless act in terms of political outreach and eventually won power at the Centre, cannot be denied.

There are those who argue that the pro-Census stand taken by some regional political parties in the North as also the Congress in the last parliament polls undercut the mass base of the BJP in UP, Bihar etc. This is the reason why the Congress would take this campaign forward, if only to slight the BJP that it is against caste census, and to win more votes. The spadework for this is already evident, alerting the RSS. Yet, the claim by Bihar's Lalu Prasad Yadav that "We will hold the ears of the RSS-BJP guys, make them do sit-ups and get the caste census done," should evoke only laughter. He is largely toothless today.

## Growing crimes against minors & Meghalaya's legal dilemma surrounding adolescent love

By Kenneth Nongsie

The news report from the Shillong Times dated September 1, 2024 highlights a contradiction in Meghalaya's matrilineal society, which values females and upholds the tradition of considering daughters a blessing to the family. However, despite this societal structure, the state faces a paradox as sexual crimes against young girls (below 18 years) have increased over the years. According to Meghalaya Police statistics on POCSO Act cases, the number increased from 118 in 2015 to 404 in 2023. While the incidence of crimes against young girls has risen, some cases are consensual but conflict with the law. This dichotomy necessitates a critical analysis of the legal framework, social practices, and their efficacy in addressing consensual relationships in the state.

**Concern About the Delay**  
The establishment of special courts, as per the provisions of the POCSO Act, was a step towards ensuring speedy trials and swift justice for sexual abuse victims. However, the state is not moving in the right direction. The staggering number of pending cases highlights a systemic backlog obstructing justice. As of 2024, there are 1,747 cases still pending across various districts under the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act (report by the Shillong Times dated 1 September 2024). The judicial system is under immense pressure to ensure justice and timely disposal of cases. This backlog persists despite the resolution and closure of 894 cases.

The inception of six POCSO Special Courts, with only two in East Khasi Hills where Shillong is the capital, is insufficient for a population of 2,966,889 people (as per the 2011 census), which is expected to increase further. The Shillong Times report indicates that a major contributor to the delays is the frequent cancellation of hearings, often due to the non-appearance of the accused, survivors, or witnesses. Various factors, such as illness, examinations, and other personal reasons, have been cited for these absences, further prolonging the trials. According to a news report by the Highland Post dated December 11, 2023, the state needs around 21 years to dispose of these cases.

The backlog of cases will have a significant impact on the administration of justice. The quote "justice delayed is justice denied" competently

describes the situation, as the prolonged wait for case resolutions undermines the very essence of justice. This delay not only affects the victims, who are left waiting for closure and justice, but also erodes public confidence in the judicial system.

The current situation indicates that the problem lies not with the laws themselves but with the systemic inefficiencies. The existing legal framework under the POCSO Act is robust and designed to protect children

state's teenage pregnancy rate stands at 7.9%, higher than the national average of 6.8%. One of the factors driving adolescents into relationships is the lack of love and attention at home.

Enforcing the Act in such a context becomes particularly challenging. On one hand, there is a need to protect minors from exploitation and abuse. On the other hand, there is a reality of consensual relationships among adolescents that the law currently does not dif-



ferentiate from exploitative acts. This has led to legal actions in cases that may be considered consensual, particularly when involving relationships between young men and girls (aged 16 to 17 years), thus raising questions

about the balance between child protection and respecting personal relationships.

*"The POCSO Act, 2012 aims to safeguard children from sexual abuse and exploitation. However, the implementation of the Act faces unique challenges across Indian states, including Meghalaya, where social practices may conflict with its provisions. Adolescent love is common in the state, driven by mutual feelings and consent. Unfortunately, these relationships occasionally lead to teenage pregnancies, further complicating matters."*

victims and their families suffer from the delayed and uncertainty, which can have lasting psychological and emotional effects.

#### Adolescent Love in Conflict with the Law

The Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (POCSO) Act, 2012 aims to safeguard children from sexual abuse and exploitation. However, the implementation of the Act faces unique challenges across Indian states, including Meghalaya, where social practices may conflict with its provisions. Adolescent love is common in the state, driven by mutual feelings and consent. Unfortunately, these relationships occasionally lead to teenage pregnancies, further complicating matters. The

time, and when she became

pregnant, the medical officer reported the matter to the police due to her minor status. The court's decision to quash the charges reflects the ongoing debate about the flexibility of the POCSO Act regarding the age of consent.

Additionally, the Meghalaya High Court, in one of its judgments, has recognized the consent of sexual relationships involving adolescents. Another judgment held that, considering the physical and mental development of adolescents aged around 16 years, it would be logical that such a person is capable of making a conscious decision regarding their well-being concerning the actual act of sexual intercourse.

From these judgments, it is clear that the judiciary plays an important role in interpreting laws within the understanding of societal problems and cultural conditions with the thoughts and needs to balance the approach to protect children from sexual offences while also considering the evolving thinking capabilities of adolescents to engage in relationships.

**The Way Ahead**  
Sexual crimes in Meghalaya are rising, and it is alarming to see adolescents indulge in sexual relationships without knowing the effects of these relations that impact their health and careers. The lack of knowledge of adolescents on the age of consent has legal implications, and the male counterparts must face legal action as per the law. The only way to eradicate this social evil is to start imparting sex education within the family and in schools to educate the children. Outreach programs in society through various engagements, such as social media and women's groups, sex education as part of the curriculum, and a separate subject on the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences Act, 2012, in educational institutions will go a long way. Traditional institutions hold the power to maintain welfare and settle societal disputes. The state government must work with these institutions in implementing schemes or programs, as these institutions can be vital in educating youths to take the right steps. It takes careful consideration of social realities, cultural norms, and legal efficacy to address the complexities of the POCSO Act in Meghalaya. It is essential to protect children while recognizing the complexities of adolescent love.

request for increased salaries and recognition. These are emotionally satisfying and draining for me as the routines and reflections of this year began to come together.

But as the dark months of winter will begin, we might once again find ourselves struggling, as I do. However, it's important to be patient with ourselves and our students. Performance reviews and submitting final grades on top of the never-ending emails can send even a more experienced teacher into a spiral.

Around this time, I'm setting boundaries for myself. The pressures of the school year, the holidays, and mental health challenges can make winter feel impossible to get through, and I found that little treats and moments of self-care, time with family, friends and loved ones will help us persevere through this time. Winter break brings with it a sense of relief. My colleagues and I often feel the most positive in spring and before winter breaks. It is normal to have some anxiety about the academic year, but a lot of us can take time to enjoy the camaraderie, changes in attitude and contentment as teachers for what the rest of the year will bring.

Teaching can indeed be an emotional roller-coaster! Educators often experience a wide range of emotions, from the joy of seeing students succeed to the frustration of dealing with challenges like classroom management and administrative tasks. I only hope the world sees us and cheers for us so we can balance ourselves as we ride through these emotions.

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

## Teaching: an emotional roller coaster

By Gerandia Marbaniang

If you're walking into your own classroom for the first time, you'll feel a wide range of emotions. Your Bachelors, Masters, D.El. Ed, B.Ed. training courses would have helped you be prepared for the job and taught you the basics on best practices for curriculum and classroom management, but the emotional element of teaching is a beast that can only be tamed with time. I should know—I finished a total of 15 years of teaching and my experience is a fairly typical example of the emotional roller-coaster.

In the beginning of the year, there is excitement and anxiety in the first few weeks that can be overwhelming and many teachers find themselves working late and staying up into the wee hours of morning to ensure that they're prepared. But it's important to learn to cope with the labour and the emotional labour of being a teacher.

Now, stepping into the classroom and presenting lessons to my own students was more draining than I anticipated. Learning to manage all the responsibilities of the role was taxing on the mind and also on the heart. Developing systems and patterns that work for you can help lighten the weight of all the responsibilities.

In time, you can expect to have adjusted to the work and most likely you will have settled into a routine of preparation, presentation, and assessment. But you need to remember to take care of yourself through this time of year, because in the blink of an eye, the next few months turn into winter, which can lead to seasonal struggles associated with the cold and darkness.

The weeks until Christmas break may seem like some of the hardest to work through. The anticipation of freedom, the cold, and the exhaustion can lead to difficult, emotional days. Students work slower, focus less, and seem to misbehave more. This takes a toll on my emotional well-being, and I have come to understand that it's important to develop daily rituals for self-care to prevent complete burnout.

In the days leading up to the holidays I found myself struggling to manage teaching and grading, as well as the pressures of holiday, weddings to attend and travel planning. For the majority of teachers, this stress is temporary and is overcome with the release of winter break.

After the break, you may again experience the anxiety felt earlier in the year, but this time you should have more confidence. Students are rested as they'll be for the half of the year. They'll pick up the pace in work and focus. This period is the most enjoyable for me in my year one.

Well, we teachers need to be prepared, as not all students have gone to a happy home for the winter break. Some return from dysfunctional homes, and we need to watch out for indications of stress and trauma and we also need to talk to our counsellor about any warning signs from students.

In these cases, we also need to remember to take care of ourselves as we take care of others. It's important to focus on our own mental health because student trauma can bring up emotional triggers for us teachers as well.

We all love spring; it is fun and therapeutic. This is when the phrase "teacher tired" can become all too real. Fatigue can lead to depression, but I found that having a fulfilling life at home helped with the pressures of teaching. We need to have a solid routine of rest, relaxation, spiritual practice and exercise. For me, reading scriptures and taking a walk helped through

this time of anticipation and stress.

Grades, high absences and spring fever can make these weeks stressful and long. And when the end of the year arrives, we may be shocked because we've lived and breathed teaching for so long that it can be hard to adjust to a life that isn't driven by our teaching schedules. It may feel surreal that the year has ended, but we should certainly enjoy the well-earned break.

In my 15 years of teaching, I was motivated by both the successes and failures and the determination to do better each year. It was important for me to take time to reflect and plan for the year. Reflection is a powerful learning tool if channeled into improvements.

We can expect to experience eagerness and anxiety again at the beginning of the new school year, but also relief at being able to rely on our experiences from the previous year.

During the early years, I questioned myself a lot—just because something had worked the previous year, it didn't mean that it was the best practice. I needed to improve yearly.

This time of year, is a period of increased reflection, and it was such that I looked around to see who notices our roller-coaster ride as teachers. Many students are ready to be back in school and eager to have the stability of a routine again. Parents are happily handing over their kids to us for shaping their futures. The Education Department is ready to flood us with the "Urgent" activi-

ties while our government remains silent on the

request for increased salaries and recognition. These are emotionally satisfying and draining for me as the routines and reflections of this year began to come together.

But as the dark months of winter will begin, we might once again find ourselves struggling, as I do. However, it's important to be patient with ourselves and our students. Performance reviews and submitting final grades on top of the never-ending emails can send even a more experienced teacher into a spiral.

Around this time, I'm setting boundaries for myself. The pressures of the school year, the holidays, and mental health challenges can make winter feel impossible to get through, and I found that little treats and moments of self-care, time with family, friends and loved ones will help us persevere through this time. Winter break brings with it a sense of relief. My colleagues and I often feel the most positive in spring and before winter breaks. It is normal to have some anxiety about the academic year, but a lot of us can take time to enjoy the camaraderie, changes in attitude and contentment as teachers for what the rest of the year will bring.

Teaching can indeed be an emotional roller-coaster! Educators often experience a wide range of emotions, from the joy of seeing students succeed to the frustration of dealing with challenges like classroom management and administrative tasks. I only hope the world sees us and cheers for us so we can balance ourselves as we ride through these emotions.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Unemployment in Meghalaya

Editor,  
I would like to throw some light regarding employment and unemployment statistics in India. The Government of India through the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) conducts the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) annually. The annual reports as well as the Quarterly Bulletins are available in the official website of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation ([www.mospi.gov.in](http://www.mospi.gov.in)). For all states including Meghalaya, the latest available data pertain to the period July 2022 - June 2023. For this period the unemployment rate for Meghalaya stood at 6% whereas for all India it was 3.2%. This is the unemployment rate according to the usual status (principal status plus subsidiary status) or the adjusted unemployment rate. Principal status means the status (working, unemployed or not in the labour force) in which a person is for the major part (more than 180 days) of the year. Subsidiary status means the status in which a person is for a lesser part (less than 180 days) of the year. The labour force includes all those who are working in a principal as well as subsidiary capacity plus the unemployed. The unemployment rate is the percentage of those who are seeking work or available

for work out of the labour force. It excludes those who are unemployed for the most part of the year but working in a subsidiary or marginal capacity. Considering that most of the poor and unemployed cannot afford to remain unemployed for long, and therefore, they would work in any kind of job that they could find, the official 6% unemployment rate can be considered as an underestimate of the extent of unemployment in Meghalaya.

The PLFS 2022-23 was conducted in 104 villages and 56 urban frame survey blocks or census enumeration blocks (CEB) in Meghalaya. The CMIE was conducted in 44 villages and 21 CEBs in Meghalaya in 2020. During lockdowns the interviews were conducted telephonically. Although I do not have the sample size for the latest wave of survey, there is no reason to suggest that the sample size has increased. Although the CMIE has a selected sample size of about 170,000 households, the response rates range from 70-80%. In contrast the number of households actually surveyed in PLFS 2022-23 was 101,655 in the entire country. I would also like to add that there are a number of surveys conducted by NSSO like the Household Consumption Expenditure Survey 2022-23 and the Multiple Indicator Survey 2020-21 which provide information regarding the level of living

of the people of India besides other surveys.

Yours etc.,  
Dr. V. Pala  
Department of Economics  
NEHU,  
Shillong

#### Women's safety across India paramount

Editor,  
In her article, titled, "Women's Safety: Enough is Enough", dated August 28, President of India, Droupadi Murmu, while writing on the Kolkata rape-murder case of August 9, rightly acknowledged, "What is more depressing is the fact that it was not the only incident of its kind; it is part of a series of crimes against women." The following incidents are the testimonies. In June 2017, a 17-year-old girl was raped in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh. A former BJP MLA was convicted for the rape. He was also found guilty in the death of the victim's father. In January 2018, an eight-year-old girl was allegedly abducted, drugged, gang-raped, tortured for a long time, and then bludgeoned to death in Kathua in Jammu and Kashmir. As per the report, two serving BJP state ministers were seen attending a rally organised in support of the accused in this crime.

In September 2020, a 19-year-old Dalit woman was allegedly gang-raped in Hathras, Uttar Pradesh. She died two weeks later. The brother of the victim alleged that she was cremated without the family's consent.

Those incidents happened before Droupadi Murmu became President of India on July 25, 2022. But, similar incidents happened after that where her statement of August 28, could have made a difference.

Eleven convicts with the charge of gang-rape and murder of seven members of Bilkis Bano's family were greeted with garlands and sweets by some members of the Viswa Hindu Parishad when the convicts were released from jail in August 2022. A 19-year-old receptionist at a resort near Rishikesh, was allegedly killed by the resort owner and two accomplices in September 2022. The main accused in this case is the son of a former BJP Minister in Uttarakhand.

In April 2023, a 13-year-old gang-rape survivor's parents were attacked by her rapists in Unnao, Uttar Pradesh, and then her thatched house was torched, and two infants were flung into the flames.

A video went viral in May 2023. It showcased the condition of women in Manipur. The video showed two disrobed women being paraded and assaulted before being taken to a field by a

mob of Meitei men.

Many horrific incidents happened in August 2024, apart from the August 9, Kolkata rape-murder case. On August 8, the mutilated body of a nurse at a private hospital was found in Rudrapur, Uttarakhand. She was allegedly strangled to death, and her head was smashed with a stone after being sexually assaulted when she was returning home from work.

On August 12, the body of a 14-year-old Dalit girl was found in a semi-naked condition in a pond in Muzaffarpur district, Bihar. She was allegedly gang-raped and killed.

On August 13, a teenage girl had allegedly been gang-raped inside a stationary private bus at the inter-state bus terminus in Dehradun, Uttarakhand.

On August 22, the body of a 10-year-old girl was found in Kolhapur, Maharashtra. She had allegedly been raped and murdered. Again, on August 22, a minor girl had allegedly been gang-raped in Assam's Dhing.

On August 24, two minor girls were allegedly sexually assaulted in Badlapur, Maharashtra. Unlike Kolkata, the other incidents happened under various "double engine" governments. But that should not stop anyone from speaking against them.

The rally in support of the gang-rape and murder accused as happened in Kathua and honouring of gang-rape and murder convicts in pub-

lic as was done with the convicts of Bilkis Bano case are simply more than enough for our imagination.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

#### Memory worth sharing

Editors,  
The write up, 'Inclusion of Khasi Language in 8th schedule: Resolution of 1976,' by G Allan Lyndem made interesting reading with the mention of some widely spoken Khasi words and their meanings. Going through some Khasi words reminded me of that forgotten past when I had memorised some lines in Khasi written in red in the MTC buses of those days. The lines printed in the buses in those days are vivid in my memory. Some of the lines include - "Ki nong shong kali khlem tiket, yn pyinshom, da ka ain. Wat tah shum. The lines may not be correctly spelt by me as I cannot speak Khasi but these lines I can recite even today effortlessly.

Yours etc.,  
Deepak Chhetry  
Tura.

*"The one exclusive sign of thorough knowledge is the power of teaching."*

— Aristotle

## The Shillong Times

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### Teachers' Day: A sterile celebration

TEACHER'S Day is a significant moment in time when for once a teacher's role is being evaluated and listed at official functions, particularly those hosted by the Government. Private school teachers remain the most underpaid and retire without any benefits yet there are high expectations from them. This unequal system needs to be addressed if we are to improve educational outcomes which currently are abysmal with many students in rural Meghalaya preferring to remain out of the confines of a suffocating classroom and work for a living at an age when they have not even reached adolescence. Come September 5, and we have a ritual where a Government programme is organised; some teachers are felicitated and awarded and the rest have to listen to the drone of speeches from the podium. In their respective schools, more so in private institutions, students pay their tribute by way of performances and recitations, all intended to make teachers feel good at least on this single day in a year.

How meaningful would Teacher's Day have been if students were given a free rein to speak about both the strengths and weaknesses of their teachers through a series of role-acting. Would teachers be open to seeing both their virtues and their flaws since they are after all human and cannot be expected to be without faults? Would that exercise help the teacher to change tack and be a better teacher or would that instead be taken as impudence? Teachers must know that students speak of them behind their backs. While they praise some teachers for their communication skills and expertise on the subject, they also complain of others whose subjects they find difficult to understand. With no two-way communication between students and teachers, how will a teacher's flaws ever be corrected? And if a teacher carries on unsuspectingly with the same sterile method of 'teaching' to students who are today so technologically advanced they can find out answers in a jiffy, how will educational outcomes ever improve?

Today the teacher is more of a mentor who will fill in the learning gaps. And this is where personal interface with students is critical. There are slow and fast learners so comparing one student with another is mean. A slow learner should feel free to ask questions and to ask the teacher to repeat the explanation. For that the teacher has to have empathy. Increasingly the role of the teacher today is that of a facilitator who will throw up a topic for discussion and let students give their views. This is active learning since each student has to think of an answer or at least have a view of the issue discussed. The teacher's role would be to ensure that everyone participates and that some students do not get into a shell because they are intimidated by the topic. Above all, this sort of discussion ensures that an issue is seen from many different prisms. It encourages cooperative learning which is the antithesis of competition and of one emerging the best and the others being made to feel like failures. If Teacher's Day helps teachers understand themselves better and open to learning it would have been a meaningful observance.

# Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan & role of teachers today

By Uma Purkayastha

'Teachers' Day' is meant to be observed as a day for paying tributes and salutations to teacher for their humanitarian services to the society. The main architect of Teachers' Day was Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan the second President of India (1962-1967), a great educator cum philosopher, who was also a very successful teacher.

Dr Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born on September 5, 1888. In 1962, when he became the President of India, some of his students and friends requested him to allow them to celebrate his birthday but he replied, "Instead of celebrating my birthday, it would be my proud privilege if September 5 is observed as Teachers' Day." The proposal was accepted by the Government of India, and since 1962, 'Teachers Day' is being observed all over India on September 5 every year, to pay tribute to the great teacher Dr. Radhakrishnan, as well as to the entire teaching community.

Dr Radhakrishnan, an eminent philosopher and teacher was also a great educational reformer. His message to the teachers and taught was:-

1. Knowledge gives us power, love gives us fullness.
2. Books are the means by which we build bridges between cultures.
3. True teachers are those who help us think for ourselves.
4. The end product of education should be a free, creative person who can battle against historical circumstances and adversities of nature. The great educator also opined that a good teacher should try to equalize his/her mind and soul with the standard of the children, he/she teaches and should read their minds, their likes and dislikes etc., thoroughly to make teaching effective.

He further said, "No subject is dull or hard if the teacher is not dull or hard." The great educator made these observations over a hundred years ago but the teaching process in our country, and the teacher-student relation is still a top-down one. Teachers expect students to fear and obey them instead of winning them over with love and affection. This results in students disliking school and a good number of them drop out every year! It proves that our teaching system does not resonate with a good percentage of ordinary students who suffer from inferiority complexes and fear

psychosis in their schools and wish to escape that predicament. The ultimate result is the moral degradation of society!

Teachers therefore have a major responsibility to save the budding hopes of the nation from dangerous degeneration which is in an alarming situation. In this critical situation teachers are the only saviours who can lead delinquent children from the path of destruction to constructive purposes by applying interesting teaching techniques with love and empathy.

A good teacher can mesmerize even delinquent children by using the best strategies. Where the parents fail, the teacher succeeds, if he/she is able to understand the children's psychology and has empathy. Teaching is a technical subject and teaching skills are more important than academic qualifications. While a renowned scholar may fail to capture the interest of students, one with minimum qualifications may succeed in breaking through if he can create interest among students.

It is natural for school children to be imperfect at every step because they are still immature. Children are sent to school at the early age to mend their habits, and learn manners, etiquette etc., to be good, future citizens. Unfortunately teachers use the cane to discipline children. While punishment can make students learn from their mistakes but corporal punishment is a poor deterrent.

In the past, the educational reformers have raised their voices against physical punishment and explained how children suffer from fear psychosis and therefore don't want to go to school. Its not only physical punishment but some teachers inflict mental harassment with their harsh words. This creates a phobia among students which results in school dropouts; and from that frustration they are tempted to dangerous addiction. The society as a whole suffers! Teachers therefore have a significant role to stop children from dropping out and to help the young generation from the crises they are in today.

'Teachers Day' is not only a day for recognising the contributions of teachers but it should also be a day of introspection for teachers as to what they have done for society; what more needs to

be done and how to proceed ahead for all round development of the student community and to help the society as a whole. Above all, it is a day to reflect on how to make teaching more lively and interesting to students.

Rabindranath Tagore, from his own childhood experiences said, "Due to excessive pressure of learning multipurpose subjects, and fear of punishment, the children always feel tense and become victims of mental imbalance. They become abnormally rude and peevish, and revolt in trifling matters. Though they learn something, and become educated; but at the cost of their spontaneous gayness" [Shikshar Milon]

Hence while teachers are crucial their role is to bring out the best in the child. A good teacher should have sincere feelings and affection for children and only then will they learn. It is a reciprocal process of imparting and grasping knowledge between teachers and the taught. So it is imperative for teachers to maintain an affectionate and loving relationship with students, so that the children could see their parents in their teachers and are tempted to come to school.

For a good teacher, teaching is a sacred service and not a job. It is a service to humanity. Teachers are the builders of generations that would be the future leaders of the country. Hence teachers are also nation builders and should be equally recognised by the people and Government. All teachers, right from Primary Section to the Higher Secondary classes, (not only Government Schools) should be provided with facilities such as medical benefits because they are at par with soldiers who also serve the country. The army protects the country while teachers build the country. Their contributions are equal and they should be equally treated and recognised!

Sadly, the private school teachers retire from service empty handed. They have no retirement benefits or old age allowance and are deprived of proper medical care which they are badly in need of! After dedicating their entire life to teaching they are left high and dry at the most crucial time of their lives. At the very least teachers deserve free medical service. Many teachers who are unmarried and have

no caretaker in their old age suffer the most. Is it not the duty of the Government to stand by the builders of the nation at that critical juncture of their lives?

Hence merely delivering long speeches about teachers contribution to the society, and awarding a few teachers are not sufficient to observe 'Teacher's Day.' Just as teachers are advised to be innovative and adopt creative teaching techniques, the Government too should consider giving better facilities for every teacher whether in the Government or private sector so that they should not feel insecure and frustrated after superannuation.

A teacher has no colour, caste or tribe! For a teacher all students are equal and all are treated without prejudice. Similarly when teachers are selected for 'Teachers Day Award' that should be because the teacher is deserving of the award irrespective of his/her community. So who is the best judge of a teacher's talent? The school authorities? The governing body? Honestly speaking students are the best judges of a teacher's talents. They are the ones who spend the most time with the teacher and can certify how good and efficient or incapable of teaching a teacher is. Sadly this practice is not adopted in our state. Fancy qualifications and degrees are mere ornaments but do not make the teacher a true mentor and counsellor apart from teaching students their subject. Such teachers actually deserve recognition!

Several efficient, retired private school teachers who are still alive have gone into the sunset without being recognised despite their sincerest services to the students. They have retired with nothing. Can such teachers also be recognised by the Government on the auspicious Teachers' Day?

Teachers' Day celebrations will be meaningful only when each and every teacher, irrespective is treated equally by the Government with uniformity of pay scale, medical allowance, death cum retirement benefit, old age allowances etc. That will be the best observance of Teachers' Day. When there is job security many intellectuals will prefer teaching as their future profession. This will enrich the teaching community, and the country as a whole will be highly benefited.

(The writer is Retd. Principal, Govt. Girls' Higher Secondary School Shillong).

## Wayanad tragedy: Who is responsible for the heart-breaking landslides?

By Sunita Narain

In this age of climate change, the lessons from Wayanad are clear: Learn and change, or perish!

Who and what is responsible for the heart-breaking landslides that hit Wayanad district and took so many lives? The question is important even as weeks have passed and our attention has shifted to other devastating disasters. I have explained in previous writings how climate change plays a role in such not so natural disasters but not entirely. This already vulnerable region of the Western Ghats had been made more prone to disasters because of human activities. But then the other question, which frankly haunts me, is: Why do people who live in these fragile regions end up opposing conservation efforts? They know that they are cutting that proverbial tree branch that they are sitting on! So, what can be done?

Let's first understand the developmental activities in Wayanad. My colleagues at Down To Earth, Rohini Krishnamurthy and Pulaha Roy, have investigated this and found that this disaster was waiting to happen. The landslide occurred near Mundakkai, a ward of Velerimala village. I am pointing this out because this village was identified as an ecologically sensitive area in the 2013 report by the K Kasturirangan committee. I was a member of this committee, set up by the Union environment ministry to come up with an "all-round and holistic approach for sustainable and equitable development" for the Western Ghats. It recommended that all such villages where over 20 per cent of the area was ecologically sensitive should have strict controls on developmental activities that would make the area more vulnerable. This is why it recommended against allowing destructive activities, in particular mining and stone quarries, in these areas.

In November 2013, the ministry accepted this report and issued a directive under Section 5 of the Environment Protection Act, demarcating a large area (60,000 square km) as ecologically sensitive and banning certain activities, including mining and stone quarrying. However, Kerala asked for an amendment, citing the finding of its own committee, which had argued that an entire village could not be demarcated as ecologically sensitive because it had other activities that should not be stopped. Now look at the implications of this. Pulaha superimposed the satellite imagery of quarrying sites in Wayanad on the map of the 13 villages identified by the Kasturirangan report for protection as ecologically sensitive areas. He found 15 quarrying sites across these 13 villages. One village, Noolpuzha, has six quarrying sites, all in the area demarcated as "forest". And it gets worse. Rohini found, to

her horror, that in 2017, Kerala amended its minor mineral concession rules and permitted the use of explosives anywhere beyond 50 metres of a residential building or in forest land or hill slopes. This literally means blasting in one's backyard and creating conditions to destabilise the hills. Why are we then surprised that when extreme rain hits the region, it leaves behind this scale of devastation? The Wayanad landslide is a human-made disaster. The question is: What do we do? In these areas, people are against protection as laid down first by the Madhav Gadgil committee and then the Kasturirangan committee. I saw this when I travelled through the region. People were out on the streets, shouting slogans against policies that would promote conservation. You may argue that they are swayed by vested interests. But the fact is, they believed that if the region was declared "ecologically sensitive", governments would take over their plantations; there would be restrictions on the way they practised agriculture. It was partly because of the way we have done conservation through flats and committees, but also because banning certain activities like quarrying would mean loss of livelihoods for them.

We must keep these in mind while drafting our future policies. We have to change the way we manage our environment because of climate risks, and if we want to succeed in this, we will have to change the way we practise conservation. Currently, it is about what cannot be done — it is based on the premise that people are the biotic pressure and so activities detrimental to the ecology must be banned. This may be right, but it is also a fact that in India, our forests and other ecologically sensitive areas are the habitats of people — not just wilderness areas. To protect these areas, we need conservation that is inclusive and provides communities with tangible incentives to be partners in the efforts.

This is why the Kasturirangan report recommended a green-growth package for villages demarcated as ecologically sensitive — from debt for nature swaps to payment of ecological services where trees could not be cut or destructive development needed to be banned. People would get paid for conservation. But it is also important that we evolve development strategies built on green livelihoods — from sustainable plantations of coffee or tea to eco-tourism. We need to learn how to do conservation in people's lands and with their involvement. In this age of climate change, the lessons from Wayanad are clear: Learn and change, or perish. (The writer is Director General, Centre for Science & Environment, New Delhi and an environmental activist)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Water-related issues and suggestions

Editor,

The state's capital Shillong has been hit particularly hard by the water crisis with multiple local media reports suggesting that people are now being forced to ration water.

For the ones who can afford it, purchasing water from tankers still remains an easier resort, but for the majority, the only option is resorting to alternative, often unhygienic, sources. This includes local streams and rivulets where effective effluent treatment does not exist.

Even Sohra, once the world's wettest place, has been suffering. As per the report, a water loss of 20.5 percent takes place pre-consumption in the process of water getting treated and then transmitted to the main reservoir. Following that, the measure of unaccounted-for water — or water that has been produced and is wasted even before it reaches the consumer — is steep where losses are more than 50 percent. This means that in most situations, leakages and siphoning go largely untraced.

The long-term consequences of the water crisis are concerning for Meghalaya, which could not only

have severe implications for agriculture and biodiversity but impact the overall socio-economic fabric of the state.

Currently, residents are also battling severe power crisis due to insufficient rainfall and receding reservoir levels, with power cuts in the state ranging from 8-10 hours daily.

Some positive suggestions to the Government of Meghalaya regarding this are imperative. Implementing efficient water management practices, such as rainwater harvesting and watershed management, can help replenish water sources. Investing in water treatment systems and improving irrigation techniques can reduce wastage and pollution. Raising awareness about water conservation among the public and encouraging responsible water use is vital. Additionally, policies that promote sustainable water allocation and management are essential for long-term solutions.

Pollution control & better sewage treatment - Without proper sanitation, the water becomes polluted and unsafe to drink. Hence addressing pollution, measuring and monitoring water quality is essential. Besides, improving the sewage systems in specific areas can prevent water scarcity from becoming any worse.

Awareness & Education - Education is critical to solve

the water crisis. To cope with future water scarcity, it is necessary to radically reform all forms of consumption, from individual use to the supply chains of large companies. For the first time a label proves the economic profitability of solutions that protect the environment. The Solar Impulse Foundation is selecting 1,000 solutions that protect the environment in a profitable way and awarding them the Solar Impulse Efficient Solutions Label.

Reclaimed water - Rainwater harvesting and recycled wastewater also allow to reduce scarcity and ease pressures on groundwater and other natural water bodies. Groundwater recharge, that allows water moving from surface water to groundwater, is a well-known process to prevent water scarcity.

Sustainable water management - Improving water infrastructure must be a priority, as water conservation and efficiency are key components of sustainable water management. Solar desalination and smart irrigation systems are great examples of clean technology for water efficiency and control. That obviously applies even more to the agriculture and farming sector - the largest consumer of water.

Yours etc.,  
Susana Kharmujai,  
Royal Global University,  
Dept of Journalism &  
Mass communication  
Via email

#### Defending the eastern skies: Drone warfare

Editor,

The drone market in the United States is estimated to be around \$6 billion and the pilots who operate this swarm technology do not care about the legal ramifications. Now to witness the use of drones in our own backyards is appalling. The drone attacks in Manipur are not only a cause of concern for the state but for the upper echelons at the Prime Minister's Office. Where did such high end technology fall into the enemy camp? Or were they armed by foreign intelligence agencies to create a proxy war? Whatever the reasons, it has serious implications for our national security, with the Eastern Air Command having permanent air bases including forward air bases here.

The article released by the Perspectives on Terrorism, "Taking Fourth-Generation Warfare to the Skies? An Empirical Exploration of Non-State Actors' Use of Weaponized Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs- 'Drones')" shows how the enemy has become resourceful and adaptable.

The Modi leadership should start gearing up to resolve the crisis to bring some semblance of order in Manipur. In 2023 the

Indian Air Force (Eastern Air Command) conducted its annual command level exercise 'Poorvi Akash' which tested its air assets capability in the same state of operational readiness and having air defence systems could provide a strong level of defence against aerial threats.

India's defence deals with the Israelis go back to Operation Blue Star and the back-and-forth agreement was even mentioned in an exclusive report by Al Jazeera - 'Israel-Palestine conflict - India exports rockets, explosives to Israel amid Gaza war, documents reveal.' If so, why not employ microwave weapon for drones or an Integrated Drone Detection and Interdiction System which could offer some protection for civilian zones. Currently employed on the northern borders this would be a fundamental change for the Northeastern part of India.

The book, "Conflict: The Evolution of Warfare from 1945 to Ukraine," by Andrew Roberts and David H. Petraeus is a study as to why leaders and commanders regularly fail to read the writing on the wall.

Yours etc.,  
Christopher Gatphoh,  
Shillong-10

#### Three teachers

Editor,  
India won zero gold, one

silver, and five bronze medals in the Paris Olympics. Vinesh Phogat could have won a gold medal for India, but she was disqualified in the finals for exceeding the stipulated weight by 100 grams, and as per the rule, she got no medal. Interestingly, she was within the stipulated weight during her journey to the finals, where she defeated Tokyo Olympics champion Yui Susaki. Her being denied a silver was as tragic as the way she, along with other wrestlers, were treated by law enforcing authorities when they were protesting peacefully against the sexual misconduct of the then president of the Indian Wrestling Federation.

However, her relentless struggle from childhood, her solidarity and fight along with other wrestlers who were wronged; her remaining undefeated in the Paris Olympics is worth more than an Olympic gold medal. The fighter in her is an inspiration for the people of our country and for the wrestlers in particular. She is a role model for all of us. She did not retreat in her fight to safeguard democratic principles. She is also a role model for young wrestlers. They can learn from her how to stay on the wrestling mat with dignity.

The result has come in no time. Neha Sangwan stayed up all night to make a garland of currency notes to welcome her idol, Vinesh

Phogat. After a week, the youngster gave an even bigger gift to the champion wrestler by winning the Under-17 World title in the 57 kg category. Neha hails from Balai, the village of Vinesh in Haryana. On winning the title, she said, "It's a huge thing for me, and this title is for Vinesh didi and all the women wrestlers. Vinesh didi remains an inspiration for all of us."

Vinesh Phogat is not just a wrestler but a real fighter for a larger cause. She showed us how to peacefully protest against injustice. She, along with Bajrang Punia and Sakshi Malik, raised a storm of relentless peaceful protests on the streets of New Delhi. Vinesh joined in the protests at the cost of her preparation for the Olympics. She gave top priority to the struggle to banish toxic sexism from the wrestling arena.

Now, let us shift the spotlight from Vinesh Phogat to two extraordinary mothers. Neeraj Chopra's javelin earned India's lone silver in the Paris Olympics. He got a gold medal in the Tokyo Olympics. But had to be satisfied with a silver because Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem created a new Olympic record with his gigantic throw and got the gold in the process. These two javelin throwers got gold and silver for their respective countries by using perfect techniques, muscle, nerve, and lung power. But their mothers

got the real gold medals by displaying the power of their hearts.

When asked about her son's loss to Pakistan's Arshad Nadeem, Neeraj's mother, Saroj Devi, said, "The one who got the gold is also like our son." Arshad's mother, Razia Parveen, also highlights the eternal truth. The truth is that all of us have descended from one African woman, and therefore, we all are brothers and sisters. On Neeraj Chopra, Razia Parveen said, "He is also like my son. He is Nadeem's friend and also his brother. Wins and losses are part of the sport. May god bless him. May he win medals. They are like brothers. I have prayed for Neeraj, too."

These two mothers' love echo in the song, "Imagine there's no country/ It isn't hard to do/ Nothing to kill or die for/ And no religion, too/ Imagine all the people/ Livin' in peace". Eternal peace blooms when love transcends man-made boundaries of countries and religions.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

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"You never stop learning. If you have a teacher, you never stop being a student."

— Elisabeth Rohm

## The Shillong Times

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### Poverty and growth

THE growth of business conglomerates like the Ambanis and Adanis should not be confused to signify an overall growth for the nation or the well-being of its people. While India's rich wallow in wealth, tens of crores of poor are under-nourished and struggling in their lives. A reason why the claim that India is set to become the world's third largest economy in another three years is taken with a pinch of salt. The realities on the ground tell a grim tale. This sentiment is also reflected in the observations from the World Bank this week, which cited that India's global trade in goods and services has been declining in terms of GDP percentage in the last 10 years. India is losing out even to small nations like Bangladesh and Vietnam as low-cost manufacturing hubs.

India's share in global exports of apparel, leather, textiles and footwear grew from less than one per cent to 4.5 per cent from 2002 to 2013. Instead of further growing, this declined to 3.5 per cent by 2022. By contrast, Bangladesh's share grew to 5.1 per cent and Vietnam's to 5.9 per cent by 2022. It is also true that India gained majorly in sectors like pharmaceuticals, due mainly to the reputation that some private sector entities gained in recent years. However, in labour-intensive sectors like garments, Bangladesh and Vietnam could do better than India in exports. Vietnam recently overtook China to become the largest exporter of readymade garments to the US, a field in which Bangladesh too has been having high stakes. Growth in such sectors also means creation of job opportunities to millions, especially women. The World Bank points out that direct employment related to exports fell in India from a peak of 9.5 per cent of total domestic employment in 2012 to 6.5 per cent in 2020. India's export sectors are increasingly capital intensive, though, and unable to absorb the millions of jobless people, it has noted.

A nation does not grow in economic terms if it simply produces and consumes. Export boosts economic growth and, at the ground level, creates jobs both in the industrial and agricultural sectors. Manpower is necessary to produce things especially in agriculture and the SME sectors. Vietnam has a population of less than 10 crore, but the value of its total annual exports is of the order of nearly \$360 billion, while India with its population bulge of 1.4 billion registers an annual export valued only at \$780 billion. Manpower is under-utilized here. The economic growth for the West is based on its technological excellence. Alternatively, for nations like India, use of manpower in productive sectors is important. It helps people fill their belly and simultaneously ensures economic growth.

## Education in a crisis: What are teachers teaching and students learning?

By Patricia Mukhim

The state of education in Meghalaya is the common topic of discussion today. The falling standards, poor learning outcomes especially in schools beyond Shillong and the continued rise in drop-out rates; poor teaching quality are common topics of discussion. However, as with all other issues, it ends with discussions only. Parents as major stakeholders dare not build solidarities to initiate discussions on this critical topic to at the very least draw the attention of the drivers of education in the state and urge them to find solutions since the future of their children rests on a sound education system.

How much children learn is tested only in the marks they get. But what other aspects of their lives? Is education only about earning marks through rote learning? Clearly the gap between what's taught and what's learnt and registers in the cognitive domain is huge. But how is that gap measured more accurately so that the problem can be addressed? Examinations are not the only way to measure a student's mental and emotional progress. Perhaps there are other areas that students excel in that are not measured.

Technology has disrupted our lives and children, particularly adolescents, are most affected by social media and the bombardment by YouTube channels with their 24x7 news and entertainment contents. They distract not just children but adults too. To be a teacher in such a disruptive world means one has to be extra sensitive and innovative to be able to see things from the students' perspective and to humbly engage with students to help them navigate a very complex scenario. Teaching has never been a cake-walk; now it includes a deep-dive into a dark, dangerous hole where one can only grope in that darkness, for every student has a different perspective on life, depending on the family circumstances he/she comes from. Each child comes with the baggage of what he/she experiences at home. Trying to deconstruct those early learned impulses is a lot of grunt work. No wonder teachers are fatigued by the end of the day and really need to go back to a family that can be motivating; not where they also have to deal with domestic crises and above all think of making ends meet with their paltry salaries.

The words teaching-learning are now standard educational vocabulary. So too the word 'experiential' learning is ubiquitous in school/college and university prospectuses. But what does experiential really mean and does it happen in the classroom or the campus? Experiential learning is to learn from experience; it is to comprehend what we are learning instead of com-

mitting stuff to memory or didactic learning which is top-down and patronising – which is how most of us were taught. Teaching-learning in short means that teachers themselves learn while teaching. Besides the educational content, teachers also learn from the responses of students or the lack of it and what they feel about a particular topic. They learn why some students readily grasp a lesson and why others cannot. Teachers also learn that not all kids learn at the same pace. Each one has a different mental make-up and understanding what makes each student tick is what teachers should learn during teaching.

ness to question and seek answers. Our students even at the university level are averse to asking questions. That's partly due to social conditioning. Asking questions from teachers/elders is construed as impudence when that is the bases for teaching-learning. Who knows if students could come up with interesting questions that could trigger more discovery and involve digging deeper into a chapter! Would that not be more interesting than a staid classroom where a teacher lectures even while the student's mind is wandering elsewhere and is not in the classroom. Mere physical presence does not necessarily

Learning and teaching are interconnected processes and both are integral to the education system.

Learning means acquiring knowledge, skills, or understanding through study, experience, or by being taught. It is a personal and active process and involves the individual's effort to comprehend what is written in the text and to internalize new information along with that learning because that is how teachers add to the learning content.

I am sure teachers will scoff at this and call it an outsider's view with no experience of classroom teaching but trust me I have walked the thorny path and know where the shoe pinches.

Learning and teaching are interconnected processes and both are integral to the education system. Learning means acquiring knowledge, skills, or understanding through study, experience, or by being taught. It is a personal and active process and involves the individual's effort to comprehend what is written in the text and to internalize new information along with that learning because that is how teachers add to the learning content. On the other hand, teaching is the act of imparting knowledge, skills and helping others understand a topic of discussion. It means teachers facilitate learning by using what they know from being subject matter experts; provide guidance, instruction, and support to learners. While the teacher learns from the dynamics in the classroom she is also imparting what she knows beyond the text book and her own experiences in a way that students can connect to real life experiences. That's why teaching needs to be nuanced. Learning and teaching are complementary as they work together to enable students to gather knowledge even while it adds to their personal growth.

What then is hampering learning in our schools? Since learning requires the active engagement of the learner we also notice that many students are passive, quiet and not mentally present. They don't exhibit curiosity; much less the willing-

mean the student is learning anything.

Our education system does not teach critical thinking. We do not have classrooms where problems are posed and students are asked to engage and to try and find solutions to the problem. We have little or no opportunity for classroom discussions on issues that impinge on our lives even if they happen some distance away. How many classrooms discussed the Wayanad landslide that killed over 300 people? What were the reasons for the landslide and what lessons can we draw from that environmental catastrophe which could happen closer home with all the illegal quarrying happening at a frenetic pace in Meghalaya? This is one way of making students feel responsible for environment conservation and calling out destructive development models that could endanger their futures.

How many schools are discussing the Kolkata rape and murder case? Should co-educational schools and colleges in particular not initiate discussions on rape so that students can verbalise their emotions on these critical issues that are occurring with such frequency in this country? Why do teachers avoid hot-button topics? Is it because the issues are complex and they are not prepared to handle strong feelings and opinions that the discussion could trigger? Actually a discussion of hot-button topics in the classroom can be guided instead of them happening outside among peers. Of course, the space for safe and respectful dialogues is much needed in our educational institutions. In a place like

Meghalaya where othering is common and there is a history of ethnic conflicts, of communal overtones, of hate, the classroom should be the place where issues are deliberated. Is it not because students are not taught to dialogue that they become belligerent street fighters in their adult lives?

Adolescents are creatures of emotions. Can the classroom not have space to discuss in a particular period – what issues trouble them the most today? Many will not speak out so teachers can ask them to write out their points anonymously and those can be discussed in the classroom. Such discussions can delve deeper into the problem using questions such as 'who, why, where, when, what and how?' Group discussions are so important to get students to open up to one another and where different perspectives are respected. At the end of the discussions there can be space for action components – what can be done in each circumstance to bring about a resolution to the problem.

Most of us are illiterate about conflict management and resolution because we were never taught this important life skill in school or college. So when we look around us today we find different groups with different grouses all using the same pressure tactics which is to be aggressive and defiant – where shouting is used as a power equation. So, he who shouts the loudest feels he is the most powerful. But it doesn't work like that.

It is a tragedy that in Meghalaya the Government appears to be more focussed on building infrastructure; not building minds. The affluent are educating their children outside the state and country. Someone should do a survey to find out how many children of politicians and bureaucrats actually study in Meghalaya. And if they are not studying here, is it because the educational institutions, barring those in Shillong, are below par? How can we have a government that is not paying attention to educational outcomes? Survey after survey by the Annual Status of Education Report (ASER) has shown the poor learning outcomes in our rural areas but there have been no interventions worth the name.

In all countries people put education as a priority while voting. In Meghalaya education is the last priority. Perhaps this is diabolical because politicians don't want questioning citizens who can hold them accountable. They prefer school drop-outs to become their camp followers who with a small fee will shout for them during elections. What a tragedy indeed that the educated and well-placed in Meghalaya will not even lift a finger to question why education is in a deep mess in the State!

## Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Cars, and Car Washers... "Our engineers burned the midnight oil to produce this car," said the MD as he showed me into his factory in the outskirts of the city, "and after the lockdown, we thought this was just the car for your highly strained pocket!"

"And this car will cost less than a lakh?" I asked surprised.

"Less than fifty thousand!" said the beaming managing director as he took me to the workshop area, "There's it! The cheap car the whole country wants!" "It's beautiful!" I chorled.

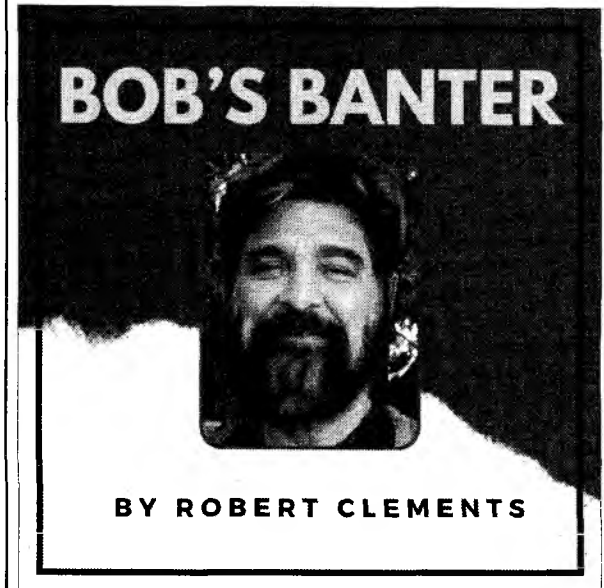
"The paint we've used is the latest in oven finish technology," said the MD

burn in people who lead and look after our welfare, and if we find no engine, throw them out; they are as useless as fancy cars that you cannot drive.

And now let me move from engineless cars to our car washers: An early morning activity is of cars being washed. Millions of gallons of water I am sure, is used by watchmen, pump men, man servants and maid servants to get their sahibs or memsaabs car looking spic and span!

But is that car of yours really washed?

Go out and have a look my dear friend and you're going to be in for a rude shock. There right across your bonnet is the brown



proudly. "The gloss will retain its sheen even after a month."

"There must be somewhere you have cut costs to price a model so low?" I whispered in disbelief.

"Safety belts with imported buckles!" continued the MD.

"Superb!" I said in awe.

"No nonsense seats that will wear out the toughest butt, before wearing itself out!"

"Unbelievable!" I exclaimed.

"Fibre glass bumpers that will not damage the car in front!"

"Nor the car behind!" I shouted with glee.

"Headlights with screw-on-bulbs!"

"Brilliant!"

"Tinted glasses!"

"Awesome!"

The managing director of the automobile company looked at me with unconcealed pride. "This is what the nation has been crying for!" he said. "Our shares will hit the roof!"

"You will be listed on the New York exchange too," I said.

"People will praise us for being thrifty but nifty," he said, "they will now have money left to put in their banks!"

"Yes," I shouted.

"We'll teach a new global philosophy, that cheap is cool!" laughed the MD as he gave me a high five. "Will you mention this in your newspaper column?"

"Of course," I said.

"Let's go to my office for some champagne!"

"Let's take the car for a spin," I said eagerly.

"A what?" asked the puzzled managing director.

"For a drive," I explained pleasantly.

"It can't be driven," said the MD slowly. "For that you'll have to install an engine."

"It doesn't have an engine?" I asked incredulously.

"What do you expect for fifty thousand rupees?" shouted the MD as he pushed me out of the workshop and onto the road outside. "A car with an engine?"

And as you chuckle, think about how we ourselves are fooled: "Are we fooled by political rulers who have no engine, which means no interest for the country? Policemen who sit in police stations, not willing to note down FIRs? Priests in religious places with no engine of spirituality in them? Corporate executives who do not have the growth of the company on their agenda?"

Are we being fooled everyday with outer fancy work and no engines?

Look for the engine, the zeal and passion that should

slush that the bus splashed across from yonder pothole. Near the fender is a black sticky stuff that you know came from the nullah your brave car waded through last week. And those hub caps!

Car wash or eye wash? We look out of the window and see these car washers round the car and assume our car is cleaned. And that my dear reader is happening in all walks of life in our country: Thousands of municipal workers report for work every day and sign the muster roll and we take it for granted that we have a clean city. Do we? Look around you at the garbage piled up at the filth and dirt and ask yourself who is fooling whom. We elect representatives to municipal councils, state assemblies and into Parliament, but whom do they represent, themselves or us? We employ policemen, but those lazy and callous money makers sit behind old British era desks steadfastly refusing as I mentioned before to register FIRs of assaulted women!

Car wash or eye wash? We have all heard the story of the Emperor's New Clothes. How the emperor was deceived into believing that his royal tailors were indeed making him a fancy suit when in actual fact they were doing nothing. They fooled him into believing that the fabric was so fine that it could not be seen. The emperor, fool that he was, was finally draped by the tailors in the actually non-existent clothes and thinking that he was wearing a suit of the finest kind walked down the road. The people, his subjects watched as their foolish emperor walked naked. No one had the courage to tell the emperor that he had been fooled. Finally, it was a little boy in the crowd who suddenly shouted "The Emperor is naked, the emperor is naked."

The rest of the world are shouting that we are naked, but we strut around thinking our country is draped in silken finery, when actually we are naked; rapacious, communalism and authoritarianism exists. Filth, muck, grime, sludge and foul matter are steadily getting ingrained into the delicate fabric of our country, as the car washers, our politicians, our police and leaders, fool us into believing we are clean.

So dear readers as you look at your car today, let it remind you of an engineless state we are in, and also likewise when you look at your unwashed car...

The Author conducts a Writers and Speakers Course for schools, colleges and corporates. For more details call him on 9892572883 or send a message to bobsbanter@gmail.com

### Letters to the Editor

#### Theatre an integral part of Arts & Culture

Editor,

Even while we appreciate the State Government's effort to tap the abundant talent available among the youth in particular and the public in general in our state and to streamline them towards productive ventures for personal as well as for the larger interest of the state through such schemes like PRIME and CM ELEVATE, we deeply regret that the talent to act and perform through theatre has not been given the recognition it deserves. We would like to bring to the attention of the Government that there is a lot of talent in the performing arts like acting, especially among students which is wasted once they have passed out from their respective schools because of the absence of institutions to cultivate and enhance these talents and one of the reasons being the lack of adequate government support.

As of now, theatre is a non-commercial activity in our state, but it is a stepping stone to commercial ventures like movies and commercial advertisements in the State as well as at the national and even international level. Theatre is also a powerful medium to create awareness on issues relating to social, political, health and other fields as well. The FOREVER YOUNG together with the MAITSHAPHRANG had been staging several Street and Stage plays in the past both in Khasi and English. We had performed two Street plays 'Ka Drama jong ka Phan Nonglat' and 'La thaw ne La Pynthaw,' and two plays, 'Phi Vote Phi Rai - 1 & 2', one on Doordarshan Kendra Shillong and another on local cable channels. The other stage plays posted on YouTube are 'Papa Shano Phi Don' and 'Buum la Uba Jap' both musical and in Khasi and an English musical play 'Juliet and Romeo'. We are ready to stage our next musical play in English titled, 'After Ayodhya, it's Conscience and Man' and an application for financial

assistance has been put up to the State Government before a screening for interested artistes can be advertised.

As a group involved in theatre, we are ready to take up the responsibility to nurture this talent to the next level, but the support of the State Government especially in terms of finance is vital because even though theatre is not a profit-making activity for now in our State, the expenditure involved in staging a play is quite high. We are confident that with time theatre production will become more professional and able to generate revenue to sustain itself.

Yours etc.,  
Michael N. Syiem  
Via email

#### Blind man's story touched my heart

Editor,

I recently read Salil Grewali's letters titled "Blind Man Selling Kwai-Cigarette" (ST September 3, 2024). It discussed the plight

of a poor blind man selling betel nuts and a single packet of cigarettes in a plastic bag. After reading the letter we learned that many people were able to trace his small hut in a village in Mawngap, where he lives with his wife, who is also blind. Their condition is heartbreaking.

Mr. Grewali has done a remarkable job by bringing this blind man's struggles to light through this daily. However, I find it hard to understand how the local MLA or MDC could have overlooked such a situation in their constituency. Surely, they must have visited this blind man's rundown hut to seek votes, but why did they never think of helping this deserving couple by providing some form of livelihood or support through government schemes, such as those for people with disabilities?

While there are many poor people like this blind man who struggle daily to survive, what stood out to me is that there are very few people – if any – like Salil Grewali. He is filled with genuine love and compassion for the poor, without any discrimination. He also

cares deeply for poverty-stricken farmers, and that shines through his letters to the editor frequently.

Mr. Grewali has inspired readers like me to reach out to those in need and help them in any way possible – unlike some political leaders who only take photos with the poor to gain more votes. Truly, angels walk among us, and I saw one in Salil Grewali. May God bless him with more love and strength in his noble efforts, and may he inspire all of us to open our eyes and hearts to all those in need.

Yours etc.,  
Jonathan Albert Khyriem  
Shillong-2

#### More stringent laws needed to deal with rape & molestation

Editor,

Through your esteemed newspaper I would like to draw the attention of the Government of India and other State Governments to

consider more stringent laws to curb the ever-increasing cases of molestation and rape some of which see the light of day through the media but many remain unreported and hence the increase in such cases. The prevailing law under the POCSO Acts remains ineffective as thousands of cases are still pending in the different courts of the country and piling dust on the criminal's files.

Hence more stringent laws are necessary to get quick and instant justice for the victims. It is observed that many probes are conducted which take time and the matter remains unsolved for years and sometimes the criminal goes scot free. Hence the POCSO Act should have more powers to deliver justice to the victims.

Yours etc.,  
S L Singhania,  
Via email

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"Fear not for the future, weep not  
for the past."

— Percy Bysshe Shelley

## The Shillong Times

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### Heights of intolerance

IN new India even a student's tiffin box is becoming a subject of controversy merely because the boy's mother packed non-veg biryani for him to take to school. This incident happened in Amroha, Uttar Pradesh where a 7-year old boy was expelled for bringing non-veg food. In the digital age, the video of the boy's mother having an altercation with the school principal has gone viral. The video showed the principal making derogatory remarks when the student's mother questioned the reason for her child's expulsion on Thursday. As can be expected the boy is a Muslim and this is yet another instance of Islamophobia. While the authorities are said to be investigating the incident it is also common knowledge that in Uttar Pradesh and other North Indian states intolerance for Muslims is par for the course and the new model of showing them their place is to bulldoze their homes on the pretext that they have committed some crime. The bulldozing happens even before the law can decide whether the person is actually guilty of the crime.

In the nearly 4.30 minute video the principal was unrelenting in his stance and instead stated that the school was against educating students who bring non-vegetarian food to school. He aggravated the situation by saying that the school will not teach students who will demolish temples when they grow up. What's worse is that the principal accused the boy's family of converting others through such non-veg food. The question that arises is how did India, a country that was born in the cradle of diversity in terms of race and secularism where religion is concerned turn into a country that is now vehemently promoting a majoritarian culture and threatening to impose a single religion and a uniform civil code.

Closer home in the north-eastern state of Assam there is currently a targeted move to deprive the so-called "Miya" Muslims (Bengali speaking Muslims) of their religious rights. Assam Chief Minister, Himanta Biswa Sarma has been painting the Bengali-speaking Muslim as 'Bangladeshi.' Union Home Minister Amit Shah used the derogatory term "termites" to define the so-called illegal immigrants from Bangladesh. Do we wonder then why there is such a strong anti-India feeling in Bangladesh today. When a neighbouring country with sovereign rights is constantly belittled there is bound to be a feeling of resentment which accumulates with time and blows up when it can no longer be contained. Sheikh Hasina's closeness to India – a country that has never let Bangladesh forget that it was created out of India's magnanimity is seen by the ordinary Bangladeshi as a needless patronage. Intolerance extracts a heavy price. Those who feel subjugated will fight back and its only a matter of time before they too raise their voices and claim their rights. India needs to reclaim its secular spirit and resist all forms of religious intolerance and majoritarianism if it is to surge ahead as a strong and vibrant democracy.

# Artificial intelligence (AI): Potentials and concerns

By Deba Prasad Misra & Dr. Arunav Barua

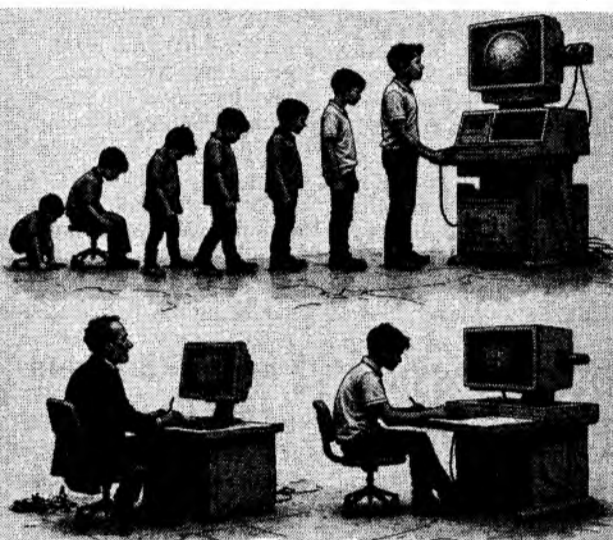
can be seen replete in their work. AI may give you the material but never a style of your own.

Vinci, or even music that would surpass Beethoven's. It is claimed that Einstein had quoted; 'Technology would

*"Man's need to save time and effort is perhaps the main reason why such drastic and sudden mutation of the computer has prevailed. Here though, we will not discuss the computer per se but the phenomenon of the internet. The internet from its early days of simplicity mutated also as the computer had."*

The worrying trend that is slowly being observed is that AI is slowly infiltrating upon the human faculty of

advance to a stage which would create a generation of idiots. Do we find parallels in present day society?



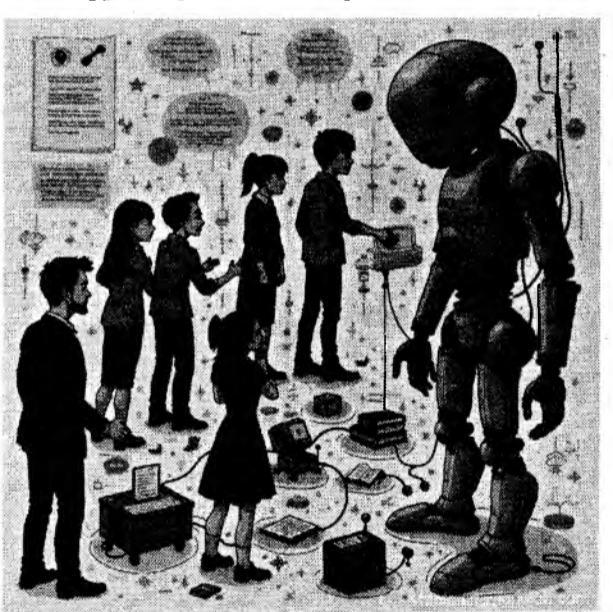
creation. People who worked in the creative fields are slowly becoming redundant because better users of the computer suddenly discover

Without having to write a single line, without having to actually think to write, what can we expect the Gen Z to gain as students? This

*AI is interactive, i.e., it can be used to respond to voice commands and this is a development that may replace the teacher. If a machine can explain the required lesson in a manner programmed by these expert programmers, respond to student queries in a perfected accent and more accurately than the teacher, what use is the teacher in this scheme of things?*

with glee that they can write 'better' than even the likes of Shakespeare or make art more appealing than Da

phenomenon has other, more concerning effects. Let us look at teaching as a profession in the context



socio-economic development of the State at a time when the Member of Parliament of 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency is not affiliated to any political party of the country. It is an open book that the Member of Parliament who was sent thrice to the Lok Sabha from 1 Shillong Parliamentary constituency had wasted precious 15 years doing nothing. I wish the current Member of Parliament, Lok Sabha well and hope that he would take initiatives and facilitate in bringing about important infrastructure projects in the State.

Yours etc.,  
VK Lyngdoh  
Via email

### Documents stolen from a car

Editor  
Today Near ICICI Bank, Opposite to Secretariat Building, I had parked my car and gone for a walk for half an hour or so. I returned

to my car at around 8:30 am only to find that the front left car window had been smashed into bits and my office bag which contained LIC policy documents and a few cheques had been stolen. Thankfully my wallet and mobile were with me. I have filed an FIR at the Sardar Thana, Shillong and the police have been very cooperative.

Since the bag did not contain anything valuable for the miscreants, according to the police they might discard the documents or the entire bag anywhere. If anyone finds a dark brown bag with the LIC logo anywhere, please let me know. As mentioned, that bag contained very important documents of mine. My contact details are 9436101247, 8787765471. Today Near ICICI Bank, Opposite to Secretariat Building, I had parked my car and gone for a walk for half an hour or so. I returned to my car at around 8:30 am only to realise the front left car window has been smashed into bits and my Office Bag which contained LIC policy documents and a few cheques

of classroom teaching. Now, it is normal to use power-point presentations (PPTs) as teaching materials. But while PPTs are very helpful, does it really add to the quality of the teacher? Now, AI can imitate the human voice and it can be programmed to speak in the accent of the person after his voice has been recorded for a few minutes. So, with an AI edit of some person of repute, we can programme the computer to reproduce the voice of the person in question, to speak what we key in. Classroom teaching requires a true educator's acumen, AI can and 'may' replace the teacher if looked at from a perspective we now give you. AI is interactive, i.e., it can be used to respond to voice commands and this is a development that may replace the teacher. If a machine can explain the required lesson in a manner programmed by these expert programmers, respond to student queries in a perfected accent and more accurately than the teacher, what use is the teacher in this scheme of things?

We now come to the element we had discussed earlier- the element called 'style'. Like a true artist, all true educators have a style which makes them unique. The student imbibes these myriad styles of all the teachers he/she has encountered in life and gains from the interaction that thus transpires. As our education is meant for knowledge, employment and humanity, so also classroom teaching can fulfil the criteria. We may imagine a world where just before we enter the classroom, we as teachers may have to type in a password which brings us to a portal with the prompt; 'Prove that you are not a robot!' Though stated humorously, as long as it is important to prove that we are not 'robots', perhaps the human element; this humanity that we are discussing, will be retained and that will be the reason why any machine or software will never be able to replace the classroom teacher. This is also a time of reflection, of deep thinking, about how much we can let the machines do our work for us because it is easy.

The present generation takes great pride in the fact that they can use AI with expertise, but is this actual accumulation of talent or a waste, because you know deep inside that it was not you who created whatever you have claimed to have created, but a machine programmed with a few prompts. We end with a hope that Einstein's saying is not a prophetic element and with a conclusion that AI or any other technology will never replace the human and humane elements of creation. Artificial Intelligence or AI cannot replace 'guru' in the real sense of the term.

## Tourism industry in Meghalaya – Challenges and opportunities

By Brave Well Mawthoh

The tourism industry plays a pivotal role in a country's economic growth and development. Its far-reaching impact can be felt both directly and indirectly. Its significance is evident through its contribution to various channels such as foreign exchange earnings, infrastructure investment, economic stimulation, employment and income, tax revenues, and sectoral impacts. At the local level, investment in tourist sites can provide community members with jobs and income generation opportunities. Ecotourism and rural tourism are increasingly popular ventures that preserve both human and animal habitats. Tourism, being a labour-intensive industry, presents a promising opportunity for employment generation.

Meghalaya, a land of unique and mesmerizing beauty, is renowned for its pristine rivers and unspoiled natural environment that

ous potential tourist sites: Garo Hills and Jaintia Hills, for instance, have numerous potential tourist sites which can attract visitors. Many of the tourist sites in these two regions remain unexplored and untapped.

It is nothing sort of blowing the gaff that tourism activities in the state have taken a back seat due to poor infrastructural development. Different tourist sites have carved a swath of temptation to visit the state. Nonetheless, the long journey to the tourist sites, accompanied by frequent encounters with heavy traffic, discourages both domestic and foreign tourists from visiting the state. Factors such as a comfortable stay, good experiences, nostalgic memories, and reasonable prices prompt tourists to revisit the place and induce them to recommend family members and friends to visit. At the top of the pile, the prosperity of tourism



offer a healing balm to the mind and soul. The lush green hills and the breathtaking view from the plateau leave an indelible impression. The waterfalls and streams ignite the imagination, while the geologically rich and mysterious caves promise a thrilling and exhilarant experience. Its rich and diverse culture, comprising three major tribes, adds a unique charm to this enchanting land, enriching the experience for all who visit. A recent study by Deepthi Singh and Qamar Alam underscores the long-run impact of the tourism industry in India. It spotlights the positive impact of foreign tourist inflows, government expenditures, and investment in tourism industries in the long run. They also detailed some crucial statistics that reflect sanguine prospects for the industry. A percentage increase in tourism expenditures by the government, investment in tourism industries, and foreign tourist arrivals will lead to an uptick of about 8.457%, 2.538%, and 2.44%, respectively, in the country's GDP in the long run. The contribution of the Travel and Tourism sector to global GDP in 2023 was 9.1%, and it accounted for about 10.5% of all jobs (334 million). For pan India, the contribution towards GDP is 6.5% and accounts for 8.9% (42.94 million) of all jobs. A study by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) suggests a positive relationship between tourism and GDP growth. While there is no conclusive evidence of a causal relationship between the two, a few studies hinted at a long-run economic growth effect, offering hope for the future of Meghalaya's economy.

The tourism industry of Meghalaya is valued at Rs 1,600 crore (approx. 191 million), and as per the government's projection, it is expected to surge to 12,000 crore (approx. 1.5 billion) by 2028. In 2023, about 15 lakh domestic and foreign tourists visited the state, and the number is projected to increase to 20 lakh in 2028. Unsurprisingly, the contribution of tourism to the state's GSDP is merely 4.1%, and it accounts for about 2.87% of the total employment. Among many others, one plausible reason could be that most of the tourist sites are clustered in the district of East Khasi Hills, even though the entire region of the state has vari-

depends upon the existence of social and political stability. Tourist inflow is highly sensitive to violence and instability. Any such perceived incident drives tourists to cancel their plans to visit the state.

In addition, the government should bring about a structure to monitor and regulate the prices of all tourism service providers such as hotels, restaurants, tourist operators, and transportation services. Low crime rates and religious and communal harmony are also important aspects to look closely at. The local populace should be sensitized about the significance of tourism and its manifold potentialities. As evident recently, any untoward incident disrupting the tourism industry came home to roost with declining tourist footfalls. To capitalize on the immense potentiality of tourism, we need to turn our attitude towards people outside the state on its head, and the time has come for us to do away with our xenophobic disposition. Efforts should be made to promote local cuisine and culinary tourism, hence doing away with 'Maggi noodles tourism'. A recent study conducted by Mehraj Din Wani and others in Kashmir Valley highlights the contribution of local food to sustainable tourism. Consumption of local food by tourists positively impacts economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability.

Tourism offers an excellent opportunity for employment and income generation. It generates the benefits of both backward and forward linkages. The government and the citizenry must step up to the plate and ensure we do not misstep. Tourism activities, if not managed sustainably, lead to environmental degradation, which is primarily due to over-exploitation of tourism resources. Even though there is no conclusive evidence of tourism's positive or negative effect on environmental pollution, sustainable economic growth and development require prudent public policy and government efforts to promote socially and environmentally responsible tourism. Community participation, involvement of the local population, institutions, and stakeholders is critical for the proper management and sustainability of tourism activities.

(The writer is Assistant Professor, Don Bosco College, Tura)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Weird election

Editor,  
After analyzing the data of the election to the 18th Lok Sabha from 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency, it is observed that the Voice of the Peoples' Party (VPP) made inroads into UDP's bastion and garnered 45.42% of the voters of the said party, 27.35% of NPP's votes, 7.8% of INC's and 1.36% from other parties. In absolute terms VPP got 2,59,378 votes from UDP's pocket, 1,56,209 from NPP, 44,511 from INC and 7,795 from other parties. The data in respect of Shillong shows that the VPP got 20,816 of the UDP, 7,221 of INC and 5,924 of the NPP's votes in the city. This is not a "historic" election but a "weird" one where VPP increased its vote share by 14,000% in Jaintia Hills when compared with what the party got in the 2023 Legislative Assembly election, 1,150% in Ri Bhoi, 191% in East Khasi Hills, 1,126% in West Khasi Hills, 3,026% in South West Khasi Hills and 4,410% in Eastern

West Khasi Hills. Overall in 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency the VPP's vote share went up by 462 Percent when compared with what it got in the 2023 Legislative Assembly election. In Mawlai it increased by 24%, Mawryngkneng by 106%, North Shillong 39% and Nongkrem by 55% respectively over the last Meghalaya Legislative Assembly election in 2023.

Another interesting data set is the performance of the Indian National Congress and the United Democratic Party in the 17th and 18th Lok Sabha. From the data set of the Lok Sabha election held in 2019 and 2024 as posted on the portal of the Election Commission of India, an analysis of the results of these two data sets of the Lok Sabha elections it is found that the support base of Indian National Congress (INC) has substantially eroded in the 18th Lok Sabha when compared with the 17th Lok Sabha and is to the tune of 52.76% in 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency. It eroded 108.36% in Jaintia region, 69.66% in Ri Bhoi,

149.88% in East Khasi Hills, 246.06% in Eastern West Khasi Hills, 49.37% in West Khasi Hills and 112.14% in South West Khasi Hills. In the case of the United Democratic Party (UDP), it is found that its support base has been drastically reduced to the tune of 83.41% in 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency. In the Jaintia region the support base eroded by 726.5% and by 887% in Ri Bhoi, 777% in East Khasi Hills, 110% in Eastern West Khasi Hills, 1059% in West Khasi Hills and 88.4% in South West Khasi Hills when compared with the result of the 17th Lok Sabha from 1 Shillong Parliamentary constituency.

Late Brington Buhai Lyngdoh a veteran politician of Meghalaya was once asked "Balei u paidbah u shongshit election?" (Why is the public ebullient during elections?) He swiftly replied, "Ba ka dei ka election!" (Because it is an election!) Electors of 1 Shillong Parliamentary Constituency will have to wait and watch how things pan out in five years' time especially with regard to

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

# 4 breakthroughs that are changing our understanding of dreams



People have pondered whether dreams have a purpose throughout human history. Modern scientists are fascinated with this question too. For a long time the science of dreams has oscillated between fringe research and the mainstream. But creative study designs and new technology are transforming it into an exciting and serious research niche. Here are four recent breakthroughs that may pave the way for a greater understanding of dreaming.

## Lucid dreams

In 2021 an international study showed that two-way communication between a lucid dreamer and a researcher in the lab was possible. In 2024, another study, built on this by training lucid dreamers to control a virtual car from within their dreams. The 12 dreamers in the experiment made slight muscle twitches, which sent a signal to a computer to make the virtual vehicle move forwards or turn. Signals were sent back to the dreamer to inform them of obstacles to

try and avoid. Some could move the car well, but others, no matter how hard they tried, could not. While fascinating, it is still unknown how such technology could be used in everyday life. And the small sample of this study, in part owing to the rarity of skilled lucid dreamers, limit the conclusions we can take from it. But the findings suggest that it may be possible (at least with practice) for some people to make decisions from inside a dream and communicate them to the outside world.

## Why do we dream?

Sleep and dreams researcher Mark Blagrove from Swansea University thinks dreams were meant to be shared socially and evolved in humans to enhance emotional intelligence and empathy. Since 2016, Blagrove has collaborated with artist Julia Lockheart in a dream discussion and illustration group. An audience member is invited to share a recent dream. Blagrove leads the discussion, while Lockheart sketches an interpretation of the dream onto the pages of Sigmund Freud's

book *The Interpretation of Dreams*. His 2019 research paper showed that discussing a dream in this way can lead to increased empathy between dream sharer and listeners. Blagrove argues this could have been valuable to ancestral survival in forming significant connections with others. Other theories about why we dream have begun to emerge in recent years too, and some were discussed at a panel in June 2024 at the International Association for the Study of Dreams (IASD) annual conference. For example, the embodied cognition theory of dreaming, which proposes that dreams prepare us for the cognitive actions of ordinary waking life. It hasn't been tested yet but shows a growing scientific interest in the adaptive purpose of dreams.

## Insights from long dream series

Michael Schredl of the University of Mannheim in Germany is arguably the most prolific dream researcher today, having published hundreds of articles and books since his career began in the 1990s. He has been keeping a dream journal since the early 1980s. At the IASD conference, he gave a keynote talk analysing over 12,000 of his dreams. Overall, the patterns seemed to support the continuity hypothesis of dreaming - that our dreams are influenced by events and concerns that are happening in our waking lives. Schredl believes he is one of the first people to look at weather patterns in dreams. He noticed a steady decline over the years of ice, snow and hail in his dreams. Interestingly, this was similar to the documented declining number of "ice days" (days when the temperature was below 0°C for 24 hours) in Germany since he has been keeping a dream journal. He joked that perhaps the global warming effects are showing up in dreams too, but this could also be influenced by waking concerns about such things. Another interesting pattern was references to money in dreams. When the Deutsche Mark was the prevailing currency, it occasionally showed up in his dreams over the years, but when the German currency changed to the Euro in 2002, the number of Deutsche Mark references were replaced by references to the Euro. Long dream series such as this are rare, but they can show how our intertwined dream content is with our waking lives.

## Dream recall

Some people are better at remembering their dreams than others, recalling dreams more frequently and in more detail. For a long time, researchers have tried to determine the reasons and mechanisms for this difference. They've looked into factors including personality and attitude towards dreams, general memory ability, and the small physiological signals that happen during certain sleep stages. So far, one of the most consistent predictors of more frequent dream recall has been a positive attitude towards dreaming; if you think dreams are important, you're probably more motivated to try and remember them more often. In 2022 French researcher Salomé Blain and their colleagues investigated the role of attention in dream recall, a cognitive skill which is closely connected to memory. While their participants' ability to recall dreams did not seem linked to working memory - which temporarily holds information for immediate use - participants with low dream recall were better at ignoring distracting stimuli, and vice versa. They compared low and high dream recallers in their ability to distinguish whether two melodies (which were both played in the same ear) were different, while a distracting melody was played in the opposite ear. This suggests that people who are good at remembering dreams may be worse at filtering out irrelevant and distracting information, hence they may notice more of what's happening in their mind while sleeping. However, dream recall is a learnable skill. For example, keeping a dream journal can significantly improve dream recall, especially for people who already have quite low dream recollection. (*The Conversation*)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 8, 2024

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Sun opposite Saturn on your solar return chart which will bring mixed results for you. There may be some misunderstanding among family members. And your health could pose some problems. You will be receiving some good monetary benefits this year. And will also take some strict and important decisions in your job. You need to maintain good relations with your bosses otherwise you may lose your job. You also need to keep your expenses under check. In partnership or business, you need to keep watch on the activities and behavior of your partner. Otherwise you may face a fraud or scam later on. The behavior and stubbornness of your partner may be a cause of some worry for you. Yet you will manage to keep him/her happy. Money will be spent in the activities of children such as their studies, career and marriage.

This week for you'

**Aries:** (March 21 - April 20) This phase will give you wonderful results. A lot of excitement, pleasure, romance is on the cards. You focus on having fun, romance, and expressing yourself creatively. Your romantic affair gives you a big boost of confidence. Moreover your personal magnetism runs high to be admired and adored. You express true feelings, ideas and plans without being afraid of consequences. You enjoy every moment, whatever it brings and follow your intuition to feel more integrated. You achieve great success in competitive situations. Domestic relationships and the home environment tend to be harmonious and peaceful. Strong chances of finalization of a property related matter. Monetary transactions are beneficial in land related matters.

**Taurus:** (April 21 - May 21) This period may put on lot of pressure on you. A positive and creative approach brings gain and resolution in old conflicts and work situations. You need to view professional and business problems from a balanced perspective. Learn from past experience and get on with your life rather than repeat old patterns. Emotive issues can crop up. However later on dust will settle down and you will look up at life with lot of hope. This is a time to do what you can to build trust in your family life and a strong foundation within yourself. You might make short trips, visiting friends and relatives. It's a great time to open up conversations with loved ones, when it comes to matters related to love and romance.

**Gemini:** (May 22 - June 21) The planetary configuration promises an excellent phase. You can charm many with your strong personality and soft approach. With inner strength and hard work, you can transform a breakdown at work into a breakthrough. You gain the trust and confidence of people in authority. It's time to let go of obsolete patterns and routines and have a new vision for the future. Your mystical and enigmatic personality attracts some interesting people around you. You will spend on clothes, furniture, and entertainment, the areas of life where you are most likely to express your appreciation of the fine things in life.

**Cancer:** (June 22 - July 22) Money and domestic issues will take a centre stage as you grapple with these issues. Your main concentration will be to make domestic relationships and the home environment harmonious and peaceful. You are proud of your ideas, and very good at expressing them with ease. This will enable you to make progress at work. You make face a setback or face some obstacles as far as finances are concerned. This is a time when you need to act with prudence and focus on your priorities. You are more likely to pay closer attention to your physical appearance and mannerisms, aiming to improve and enhance your attractiveness.

**Leo:** (July 23 - August 23) Your courage, confidence will keep your hopes alive. You will need to attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people at work. On the other hand, enhanced energy and a renewed feeling of confidence favors you at this time. Take advantage of this and utilize your energy prudently. You are highly motivated to make money this enhances much energy for new money-making projects. Romantic matters come to the fore this week and the single will find that they are drawn towards someone in their social circle. Activities related to communication such as journalism, literature and fine arts are prominent this week.

**Virgo:** (August 24 - September 22) You can look forward to an exciting week. There is increased creative energy within you which provides the necessary dynamism to complete your projects with ease. You might play with various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in

more than one source for monetary gain this time however make sure that you read the finer print. However, financial pressure will be there as you spend large sums of money on homemaking, house repairs, re-decorating and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to professional world ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued in order to enhance career prospects or social standing. Relationships take on a fun tone now. Friends and lovers take priority for most of the time. Health reads fine.

**Libra:** (September 23 - October 23) Travel, contacts and communications are the key words. Opportunities and invitations from overseas take you on an unplanned journey. Visitors, friends and family make this a happy time as an event in family is celebrated. You are full of hope and enthusiasm as you make new beginnings at work and home. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You express your feelings to your beloved and will be happy to find that they are reciprocated. Your health or that of someone close will cause some anxious moments.

**Scorpio:** (October 24 - November 22) An action oriented week keeps you busy. Public relations work, interpersonal relations and other such endeavors are highlighted now. There will be a multitude of tasks for you to handle both at work and at home. It is more about how you express yourself than the specifics of what you are saying that helps sway others to your point of view. This is a good time to do some financial planning and strategizing. You will also show aggression in your dealings but make sure that this does not get out of hand. Your friends and well wishers would be supportive.

**Sagittarius:** (November 23 - December 21) This is a mixed period for you where you will have to deal with emotional disturbances. There is likely to be more activity, movement, contact, and communications with co-workers now. It is best to go ahead with your work and avoid confrontations or arguments. Think twice before you speak. Financial prosperity or social success may come through your business associate at this time. You are inclined to learn new work skills, or to improve your skills and output in terms of work. Children will bring joy and happiness. Pay attention to your health and do not neglect or overlook minor ailments.

**Capricorn:** (December 22 - January 20) This is an excellent week where communications, romantic affair and fun activities flourish. You can expect something new at this time. You would be able to make use of your talent and communication skills and impress people around you. This brings some new opportunities. Your career prospects improve as you bring about changes in your work style and interact in more positive way with your colleagues. Your charm makes you the center of attraction as you find yourself back on the social whirl. Family life will be very harmonious. Romance is in the air and you enjoy the time spent with your beloved. For the unattached a roaring affair is in the offing.

**Aquarius:** (January 21 - February 18) New associations will boost your career in a big way. You plan in an unorthodox way and get appreciation from your business associates. At the work place your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. You have many overseas opportunities to boost your security and comfort. You are likely to travel and engage in a variety of activities and meet new people. You may be assigned to complete a task and travel overseas. A lot of travel, meeting with influential people will boost your moral also. Your family also cheers you up and you have a holiday or spend time with them. You extend your hospitality to family and friends.

**Pisces:** (February 19 - March 20) A change or betterment in career is strongly indicated this also brings better financial prospects. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers. Let others know they can depend on you. People notice and admire you for your pleasant and cheerful personality and this brings new job opportunities or assignments. You will have the ability to build up financial reserves and resources, for this placement can bring a good deal of success in all monetary pursuits. Obstacles in your life may be overcome by bravery, self-assertion, and tirelessness. Romance is very much on the cards. It's time to let your lover know what you want and what has been making you especially happy. W

# Is chocolate milk a good recovery drink after workout?

Whether you enjoy chocolate milk regularly, as a weekend treat, or as an occasional dose of childhood nostalgia, it probably wouldn't be the first option you think of for post-workout recovery.

Unless you're on TikTok, perhaps. According to many people on the social media platform, chocolate milk is not only delicious, but it offers benefits comparable to sports drinks after a workout. So is there any evidence to support this? Let's take a look.

## Rehydrating after a workout is important

Water accounts for somewhere between 50% and 60% of our body weight. Water has many important functions in the body, including helping to keep our body at the right temperature through sweating.

We lose water naturally from our bodies when we sweat, as well as through our breathing and when we go to the toilet. So it's important to stay hydrated to replenish the water we lose.

When we don't, we become dehydrated, which can put a strain on our bodies. Signs and symptoms of dehydration can range from thirst and dizziness to low blood pressure and confusion.

Athletes, because of their higher levels of exertion, lose more water through sweating and from respiration (when their breathing rate gets faster). If they're training or competing in hot or humid environments they will sweat even more.

Dehydration impacts athletes' performance and like for all of us, can affect their health.

So finding ways to ensure athletes rehydrate quickly during and after they train or compete is important. Fortunately, sports scientists and dietitians have done research looking at the composition of different fluids to understand which ones rehydrate athletes most effectively.

## The beverage hydration index

The best hydrating drinks are those the body retains the most of once they've been consumed. By doing studies where they give people different drinks in standardised conditions, scientists have been able to determine how various options stack up.

To this end, they've developed something called the beverage hydration index, which measures to what degree different fluids hydrate a person compared to still water.

According to this index beverages with similar fluid retention to still water include sparkling water, sports drinks, cola, diet cola, tea, coffee, and beer below 4% alcohol. That said, alcohol is probably best avoided when recovering from exercise.

Beverages with superior fluid retention to still water include milk (both full-fat and skim), soy milk, orange juice and oral rehydration solutions.

This body of research indicates that when it comes to rehydration after exercise, unflavoured milk (full fat, skim or soy) is better than sports drinks.

## But what about chocolate milk?

A small study looked at the effects of chocolate milk compared to plain milk on rehydration and exercise performance in futsal players (futsal is similar to soccer but played on a court indoors). The researchers found no difference in rehydration between the two.

But rehydration isn't the only thing athletes look for in sports drinks. In the same study, drinking chocolate milk after play (referred to as the recovery period) increased the time it took for the futsal players to become exhausted in further exercise (a shuttle run test) four hours later.

This was also shown in a review of several clinical trials. The analysis found that, compared to different placebos (such as water) or other drinks containing fat, protein and carbohydrates, chocolate milk lengthened the time to exhaustion during exercise.

## What's in chocolate milk?

Milk contains protein, carbohydrates and electrolytes, each of which can affect hydration, performance, or both.

Protein is important for building muscle, which is beneficial for performance. The electrolytes in milk (including sodium and potassium) help to replace electrolytes lost through sweating, so can also be good for performance, and aid hydration.

Compared to regular milk, chocolate milk contains added sugar. This provides extra carbohydrates, which are likewise beneficial for performance. Carbohydrates provide an immediate source of energy for athletes' working muscles, where they're stored as glycogen. This might contribute to the edge chocolate milk appears to have over plain milk in terms of athletic endurance.

Coffee-flavoured milk has an additional advantage. It contains caffeine, which can improve athletic performance by reducing the perceived effort that goes into exercise.

One study showed that a frappe-type drink prepared with filtered coffee, skim milk and sugar led to better muscle glycogen levels after exercise compared to plain milk with an equivalent amount of sugar added.

## So what's the verdict?

Evidence shows chocolate milk can rehydrate better than water or sports drinks after exercise. But there isn't evidence to suggest it can rehydrate better than plain milk. Chocolate milk does appear to improve athletic endurance compared to plain milk though.

Ultimately, the best drink for athletes to consume to rehydrate is the one they're most likely to drink. (*The Conversation*)

"Natural forces within us are the true healers of disease."

—Hippocrates

## The Shillong Times

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### Confused saffron

WHEN assembly elections in a set of states are approaching and the campaign having started in Jammu Kashmir and Haryana, the BJP seems to be unsure of its steps on the electioneering front. At the high point of the campaign, Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself would be missing, as he has lined up a visit to the United States. An alliance between the Congress and the National Conference of the Abdullahs in Jammu Kashmir is causing some jitters in the BJP camp there. Haryana, which was a gone case in the last assembly polls itself, raises fresh question marks on the BJP this time. It had managed to retain power there by allying with a new political entity in 2019, as the party's government headed by Manoharlal Khattar failed to impress the people. Even in this poll, the BJP is accused of seeking to whip up passions on religious issues, as is its wont, to win the polls there. Cow vigilantes there have killed two innocent persons, one on the alleged ground that he consumed beef, and the other for similar reasons. The second however happened to be a Hindu Brahmin, who was mistaken to be Muslim. In Maharashtra, the BJP is not sure of retaining power along with its ally, the rebel Shiv Sena; a reason why the EC is allegedly being pressurised by the Centre to hold back the announcement of the poll date. Even in the last assembly polls, the BJP failed to retain power there as the ally Shiv Sena ditched it.

Overall, the mood is dispirited within the BJP ranks. For years, Modi has been the party's mascot. With a perceived fall in his popular support as was also evident in the last parliament polls even in Varanasi, the BJP is not exactly crestfallen, but confused. The party had failed to build an organisational bulwark for it in the last ten years of dominance of the political spectrum while, alternatively, it relied almost fully on the charisma of Modi. A 'silent' Amit Shah in the last five years after his tough performance as party chief, and a new president in the form of JP Nadda who failed to build a stature for himself and an organizational heft for the party, have brought the BJP to its present plight. The RSS, the ideological mentor for the BJP, is mindful of this drift and keen on remedial steps if only to ensure retention of power for the Hindutva enterprise. Its Palakkad conclave might have taken decisions on a way forward in this respect, but this is shrouded in secrecy. Instead, it is beating around the bush to divert attention from the core issues of the day.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Police inefficiency or intentional lapse?

Editor,  
The news of bail being granted to the accused in connection with the murder of an innocent non-tribal labourer at Mawlai, Mawroh is a testimony of the sordid criminal justice system prevailing in Meghalaya for decades. The accused was released on bail not on evidence of innocence but due to utter failure of the investigating agency to file the charge-sheet within the stipulated period. Does it mean that the accused was arrested without any evidence and as such no charge could be framed against him? Or there was evidence of culpability against the accused but the investigating agency deliberately preferred to 'go slow' for obvious reasons? Is the progress of such cases of heinous crimes not monitored by the higher-ups in the police department or by the State Home Ministry to ensure that a charge sheet is filed within the stipulated time? From the chronology of events in the instant murder case, it is obvious that the arrest was a mere eye-wash rather than an attempt to punish the culprit's and deliver justice to the victim's family. This case will go into oblivion like scores of other similar unresolved cases of murder and other violent acts perpetrated against non-tribals in Meghalaya where

getting justice was and still is a far cry for them.

Your etc.,  
D. Bhattacharjee  
Shillong-1

#### Concerns regarding the quality of films on Hello Meghalaya OTT platform

Editor,  
I am writing to express my concerns regarding the current state of the Hello Meghalaya OTT platform, which launched almost two months ago with the aim of promoting local cinema. While the platform had the potential to be a transformative space for our film industry, it has, unfortunately, fallen short of expectations. The quality of films streaming on the platform is disappointing, with little distinction between older and newer releases. This not only raises questions about the overall development of filmmaking in Meghalaya but also suggests that we have a significant journey ahead to improve both the content and its presentation. What is especially troubling is the absence of films by some of our state's most respected filmmakers—directors like Pradip Kurbah, Dominic Sangma, and Wanphrang Diengdoh, whose work has garnered recognition at both national and international levels. Instead of showcasing these acclaimed

# By Tradition, Multiple Marriages Were a Norm

By H H Mohrmen

Now that monogamy is the rule, people believe that a couple marrying for a lifetime is a tradition in the Khasi and Jaintia culture. It is also believed that couples seldom divorce as a wedded pair remains committed to each other throughout their lives. The truth is that the idea of "till death do us part," or that two people should remain committed to each other for their entire lives, is an influence from outside cultures. In the past, people in the area married multiple times, and it was an accepted norm. Marrying multiple times was intricately embedded in different layers of the culture. Let's take Jowai as a case in point to study and understand this aspect of tradition. Jowai still has rich traditions with stories that accompany the traditions. So first, one must understand Jowai's one important characteristic.

#### The Pohchnong - The Old Jowai

For those who are unaware, Jowai comprises two regions: the old Jowai, called Pohchnong, and the new Jowai, called Pohskur. Pohchnong is where the first settlers of the area lived; it was the place from where Jowai originated. Evidence of this is the existence of a place that used to be a market, and to this day, the place is known as lawongpiah (law means market). Adjacent to it is a place called Pohdaikhoo (a place where rice was sold). This area must have been a market place when Jowai was just the Pohchnong area. According to tradition, the entire area known as Pohchnong is the only part of the town mentioned in the oral narratives. It is also the only segment of the town which finds mention in the story of the four divine women who first settled in Jowai. To this day, the majority of people who follow Niamtre live in this part of the town and hence the place is still rich in cultures and traditions and the oral stories are still being narrated from time to time.

#### Pohskur or Mission Compound

Pohskur developed later, and the name has a connection with the Welsh missionaries who arrived in the area. One might ask, why "Pohskur" or "Skur"? In Jowai, if someone wants to know another's religious affiliation, they would not ask if they are Christian; they would ask, "Are you skur or chnong?" Skur is a term used for Christians, and Chnong

refers to those who still follow the Niamtre religion. Chnong also means village, though it's unclear why followers of Niamtre are called "ki chnong," we have some idea why and how Christians are called ki Skur.

How did the area come to be known as Pohskur, and why are Christians called "ki Skur"? Christians in Jowai are called "ki Skur" because when the Welsh missionaries entered villages where Niamtre people lived, they started schools and encouraged parents to send their children to these schools. This likely led to the term "ki skur" because the first interaction of the missionaries with the people was through school. Meanwhile, Niamtre people are called "ki chnong" maybe because they live in the older parts of the village.

Pohskur was once the outskirts of old Jowai, as confirmed by the presence of ossuaries and cremation grounds of different clans in and around the Mission Compound area. For instance, the ossuary of the Soo kphoh clan is located at Mission Compound, while those of the Passah, Chhalla, and Laloo clans are in the Chutwaku area. Cremation grounds are located in the Tre diefling and Khimusniang area. Another cremation ground is located in the outskirts of Dulong locality. By tradition cremation grounds and ossuaries were always established outside the village. Moolikso is a place where the final rites of those who died unnatural deaths is performed and it is also located at the outskirts of the chnong.

The area now known as Mission Compound or Pohskur is where the Welsh missionaries first settled. It was the first extension of the chnong Jowai after the missionaries' intervention and later on other localities in Jowai came up. When the missionaries gained converts, these new converts were excommunicated by their relatives and had to move to where the missionaries lived in Pohskur (Dr Nigel Jenkin, 1995 Gwalia in Khasia). The place where the first Christians converts moved to is called Pohskur till today.

#### Cohabitation Was the Norm

In the past, solemnizing marriages with weddings was rare. The common way of entering into wedlock was

cohabitation, or "ia chong," where the couple decided to live together and then informed their relatives. Both families would then meet at the woman's house for a ceremony called "pyneche kurim." In Nangbah village, a special rice cake called "tpu pyneche," made of red rice, sticky rice, and jaggery, is shared during the ceremony. Kiad Pyche or alcohol is also part of the tradition. Traditionally, even Christian weddings were rare. Most couples chose to live together without any ceremony, which was another accepted norm for entering into marriage.

#### One Life Partner was a Special Status

Just two or three generations ago, it was rare for someone to have only one husband or wife. Having many spouses or marrying several times was normal. This is especially true before the arrival of missionaries in the region. The idea that a couple should remain committed to only one partner for life came from Western influence. For example, my grandmother on my father's side (men) married twice and her four children were from her two husbands. My great-grandmother on my mother's side (beipun) also had two daughters and one son from two husbands. It was not a taboo to marry multiple times, and there was no stigma attached to those who married twice or thrice in their lives.

In fact, those who married only once earned a special status in society and were called "ki kynsai." The "Ki Kynsai or the chong sati" (never married) also have a special place which means there is a special place for them in ancestor veneration ceremony, and there were special ceremonies when the person who did not marry or chong sati is cremated. In the Behdienkhlam festival, when "ka siang ka pha/ka siang ka phur is offered to the ancestor called ki Synggia ki saret, a special plate is offered for the "ki kynsai or ki chong sati." The cremation grounds, ossuaries, and even the "thaw thang sati" (cremation grounds for the "chong sati") had to be located outside the human settlement.

#### Thang Sati: Final rites for those who never married

Apart from the ossuaries, an important but lesser-known element of tradition

is the "ki thaw thang sati." These are neglected landmarks of Jowai which people tend to ignore. There are four remnants of this tradition in Jowai: one is the "thaw thang sati" of the Dkhar clan which is part of the Children's Park near the Deputy Commissioner's office, another is that of the Laloo or lawchibidi clan opposite of the District Veterinary office, in Mynthong, and two more near Jrisaleif playground. The other two are thaw thang sati of the Passah and the Chhalla clan. These are special areas meant for the unique cremation ceremony which is no longer practiced.

#### The Concept of "Ka Thang Sati"

Initially, I thought the tradition of "ka thang sati" among the War and Pnar people was similar to the Hindu practice where widows would jump into their husband's funeral pyre. However, the term "sati" has a different meaning in the Khasi and Jaintia context. It refers to virginity or purity.

The "thang sati" is a special cremation for people who did not marry. The cremation takes place at a designated "thaw thang sati" and at the specially designated spot there is a single dolmen, "mooknor" or "mawkynthei," but without a mnhir or "moopynieih." In Nongtalang, this practice is called "thang kno/knor" and involves burning a wooden stool called "knor/knot" along with the body of the woman who died without marrying.

#### Divorce was the norm

Divorce was common in the past, and there is a process in place and the couple has to follow the process if they decide to divorce. The tradition is called "pyleit san chyieih" or "e chipiah" in Pnar, where "chipiah" refers to half of a whole; symbolizing the breaking of a relationship. A piece of betel nut, pan leaf, and half a coin were used in the process. The divorce process can be initiated by either of the parties and it is finalized in the presence of the Pator, who would then ask the Sangot to make public and announce the separation throughout the village when the process is completed.

#### Till Death Do Us Part

The idea of staying committed to one person for life is a Western influence. In the past, marrying several times was normal, and there was no stigma attached to it. In fact those who married only once were given a special status in society.

## SEBI Chairperson must go now

By Jagdish Rattanani

It is time to end the misery of the SEBI Chairperson Ms. Madhabi Puri Buch. It is time to ask her to go, if she has not sent in her resignation already. Indeed, it is in her interest that she quits and faces an impartial inquiry rather than continue to sit at the helm of what is a critical regulatory institution and see herself and the institution undermined in the way SEBI has never been before. There are those defending her conduct, but only half-heartedly, calling the allegations a game of politics or of vested interests. But it should be clear at this stage of the ballooning scandal that none of these defences cut ice.

We have reached a stage where SEBI has been robbed of the confidence and moral standing it needs to function and carry out even the most basic of regulatory functions. The preamble of The SEBI Act, 1992, lays down its charter: "... to protect the interests of investors in securities and to promote the development of, and to regulate the securities market and for matters connected therewith or incidental thereto." This is a task beyond SEBI under the current circumstances. It can be safely said that the Chairperson of SEBI has brought SEBI to its knees.

It is irrelevant if the charges against her will be proven and if she will eventually be

the way she allegedly has without political cover. This is what amplifies the power of people in some key positions, enlarges their sphere of influence and lends a sense of adventurism, a gung-ho-ism and an arrogance that we see come crashing down every once in a while.

Who can, after all, question the all-powerful Chairperson of SEBI? Five years ago, the question was different: Who can question the all-powerful, Chairperson of ICICI Bank? That was Ms. Chanda Kochhar, refusing to quit till the bank could hold on no more and sacked her ("termination for cause") in the light of the findings against her recorded by the Justice B N Srikrishna Committee.

Interestingly, both cases emerge from managers with roots in ICICI Bank. Buch and Kochhar rose at ICICI Bank under K V Kamath, the man who brought aggression to what was an easy-going project finance company in the public sector, and saw it become at one point the largest private sector bank of the nation (since then beaten by HDFC bank). Those were the days Kamath and ICICI fantasised about becoming a top global bank. Aggressive, business methods brought a new sense of energy, quick growth but also practices that many would question. It turned key personnel into

*"The officers surely know what they are talking about. To anyone who knows how the Indian system works, it takes a lot of courage and gumption to get together to speak against the powerful. Ms. Buch, untouched despite the entanglement cited with Adani-related funds and the Hindenburg allegations, is reckoned to be close to the powers that be. That the officers have managed to protest against such a person is only an indicator of the extent of the rot that has forced them to speak up at the risk of being targeted."*

found guilty or not. There is already enough in the air that raises questions that will not be easily dismissed. The external pressure is compounded by an internal revolt in SEBI that instead of being taken seriously, given that it points to an alleged toxic culture, is being countered with sorry and laughable explanations. To say, as SEBI insiders from the establishment have suggested, that class 'A' officers of SEBI were misled by external elements, is to insult the entire SEBI workforce.

The officers surely know what they are talking about. To anyone who knows how the Indian system works, it takes a lot of courage and gumption to get together to speak against the powerful. Ms. Buch, untouched despite the entanglement cited with Adani-related funds and the Hindenburg allegations, is reckoned to be close to the powers that be. That the officers have managed to protest against such a person is only an indicator of the extent of the rot that has forced them to speak up at the risk of being targeted. Protests are rare in a culture that is hierarchical, top-driven, boss-obsessed in the public sector, and dissent-killing in the private sector. SEBI seems like a hybrid -- it has brought the worst of both worlds to the workplace.

From a political lens, it is critical that the BJP stops defending Ms. Buch and gives in to a full-fledged inquiry. Political strategists of the BJP will see that the political cost of allowing her to continue grows with each passing day that she sits in the saddle. That, however, is a limited question of the BJP soiling its image, then managing its woes and responding to fallouts from the rottenness of the cronyism that it has delivered. The larger question is of where India stands today and how key institutions are undermined under this kind of leadership.

It is undeniable that Ms. Buch could not have worked

millionaires and delivered the managers of the kind Kochhar and Buch (and many others unnamed) turned out to be. Buch joined ICICI Bank in 1989. In 2006, she joined ICICI Securities and led it as the CEO from 2009 to 2011. The company was later delisted with many questions asked of ICICI Bank and SEBI's conduct in the process. SEBI was accused of favouring ICICI, allowing in effect a violation of rules by ICICI to go unpunished.

The other common connection is Hindustan Unilever Ltd., the company that claims to have managers with high integrity. Unilever is noted for keeping up values over its 100-year growth journey in India. Here lies the story of two people who feature in the Kochhar and Buch cases. M K Sharma, former vice chairman of Unilever, unabashedly defended Chanda Kochhar, when the allegations against her first surfaced. Dhaval Buch, the husband of Madhabi Puri Buch, rose to be the executive director at Unilever. Unilever is of course not involved in any of this, but two of its senior-most people post-retirement are embroiled in situations that raise questions at least on quality of judgment if not more.

Generally speaking, SEBI has in many ways been unable to keep its independence from the government, unlike the RBI, which has at least attempted to strike an independent chord. Yet, the RBI man on the SEBI board, like others, has kept his silence so far. SEBI and RBI are both statutory bodies. The RBI url is rbi.org.in; SEBI's, url is sebi.gov.in -- one at least proclaims to be separate from the government while the other headlines itself as a part of the government, or so, it seems. And there hangs many a tale!

(The writer is a journalist and faculty member at SPJIMR. Views are personal) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (e-mail: editor@thebillionpress.org)

tural ambassador for our state, helping to elevate Meghalaya's cinema to new heights. I hope this issue is taken seriously, as the future of our local film industry depends on how we choose to present it to the world.

Yours etc.,  
Damang Kharbuli  
Shillong-3

#### Aadhaar vis-a-vis Meghalaya!

Editor,  
Just last month, social activist, GM Sangma of South Garo Hills district has broached a very pertinent matter relating to the controversial enactment of the Aadhaar regimen in South Garo Hills district in particular and Meghalaya in general. In this context, this petitioner had shot a letter to the Deputy Commissioner of his district concerning how manifold government departments in South Garo Hills are denying the citizens their respective social benefits like issuance of job cards, school admissions, opening of bank accounts and much else for not possessing Aadhaar cards. Additionally, Sangma has gone on record stating that such officially created obstacles have landed the hoi polloi in the welter of obfuscation as the enforcement of Aadhaar, Sangma emphasized, is diametrically in contravention of the Supreme Court ruling and Aadhaar Act that has in absolute terms exempted Megha-

laya, Assam and Jammu & Kashmir for the domain of Aadhaar enrolment! Hence, Sangma has urged the DC in question to circulate statutory guidelines to all existing government departments not to turn down assigned societal beneficiary schemes/services to anyone who does not own an Aadhaar authentication, but to instead accept alternative identifications like EPIC, birth certificate and other reliable authentic documents.

Taking all things into consideration, Sangma must be unequivocally complimented for bringing to the fore such a pivotal question which has had far reaching consequences on the society at large. Perhaps, the said complainant must have been keenly aware of the Notification circulated by the Central government, Ministry of Finance (Department of Revenue) vide Notification No.37/2017 F.370133/6/2017-TPL dated 11.5.2017, denoting therein that Meghalaya has been exempted from the purview of Aadhaar ecosystem.

Conversely, such sense of foreboding amongst the Hyniewtrep society has evidently tempered substantively thereby empowering the powers that be to coerce us into Aadhaar compulsion, willy-nilly. Thus, even for obtaining cooking gas cylinders the distributing agencies are bidding the applicants to produce an Aadhaar card. And tribal students are bulldozed to undergo Aadhaar biomet-

ric authentication process for receiving their entitled scholarship funds; I, for one, am bemused as to why the Khasi Students' Union which have avowedly been championing the grievances of their fellow kindreds are maintaining an inarticulate stance over the students' disgruntlement on scholarships!

It may perhaps be in fitness of things to recall that when late Rev. PBM Basaiwmoit, a prominent personality and a minority rights activist of Meghalaya, was alive I was given to understand that he was largely instrumental in resolutely contending against the enforcement of Aadhaar in Meghalaya, forewarning us of the imperceivable designs of Aadhaar regimes. Regrettably, post his demise on February 9, 2022, that unwavering spirit of righteousness has seemingly petered out amongst us. Perhaps, late Basaiwmoit must have taken into cognizance the caveat of some far-sighted intelligentsia, who had opined that opting for Aadhaar could veritably turn us into a dog under an electronic leash! In fine, Basaiwmoit's apprehension may perchance ring true in the fullness of time.

Yours etc.,  
Jerome K Diengdoh,  
Shillong-2

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

*"The ballot is stronger than the bullet."*  
—Abraham Lincoln

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**CAG Must Respond**

THE MDA Government is now in the habit of contesting everything that the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) points out to. From the debt burden to drop in GST collection. Following the Government clarification, the Opposition parties are expected to counter what the Government has dished out. Finally, the VPP had the audacity to question how the CAG report can be contested. The VPP has stated that the CAG is a constitutional authority and is mandated to study the financial matters of every state and also that of the central government. Every CAG report is tabled on the floor of the House and its contents debated. It's a different matter that the Government of Meghalaya has over the decades paid scant attention to CAG reports and no attempts are made to clean up the accounting mess simply because the CAG has no punitive powers. The audit report, in brief, contains a narration of cases involving financial irregularities, losses, frauds, wasteful expenditure and comments thereon and the accuracy of budgeting control of expenditure, savings etc. The CAG provides "audit paras" criticizing public expenditures of individual departments and the 'paras' are developed during post-event scrutiny by the CAG staff and detailed discussions with the senior staff of the department concerned. The finalized 'paras' are then brought before Parliament or State Assemblies where the concerned Parliamentary Committee/Public Accounts Committee of the State Assembly that deals with the affairs of a particular ministry or department disposes of each 'para'.

In the recently released audit report, apart from pointing to the growing debt burden the CAG also remarked that the Fiscal Deficit of the State ranged between 1,103.77 crore to Rs 2793.15 crore over the past five years with an increasing trend. Consistent and increasing Fiscal Deficit shows the State's growing dependency on borrowings to sustain its financial operations. The outstanding liabilities reached Rs 18,422.32 crore; increased by Rs 2961.23 crore compared to the previous year. Out of the total outstanding public debt of Rs 14,637.12 crore an amount of Rs 1592.12 crore (including interest) is payable by 2023-24 and an amount of Rs 6504.89 crore (including interest) is payable between 2024-25 and 2026-27. The question is where will the money for debt servicing come from if not from more borrowings? Then there is the case of expenditure without legislative approval in 2022-23 running into 574.74 crore with the bulk of this amount of Rs 550 crore spent on Administration of Electricity Acts and Rules, Power Department Services etc. The CAG has observed that expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of the State without legislative approval as mandated by the Constitution infringes on constitutional stipulations. This undermines fiscal discipline and the ability of the Government to control the total budget and subsequently to manage risks. Above all this affects the Government's ability to effectively allocate resources to strategic policy priorities such as Education and Health which receive scant attention.

Surrender of funds amounting to Rs 1018.95 crore at the end of March 2023 suggests poor budget-making. However, what should make the people of Meghalaya sit up and take notice is the under-utilisation of grants in Education where only 44% was utilised and Social Welfare which utilised only 41% of the grants. The CAG observes that this under-utilisation of grants in the above two Departments would significantly impact the educational opportunities and well-being of the people. Now it is for the people of Meghalaya to read the CAG Report meticulously and not be fooled by attempts to obfuscate the Report.

**Letters to the Editor**

**Kudos to SRCC**

Editor,  
Through your esteemed daily, I would like to share my experience at the event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Shillong Records Collection Centre (SRCC), held at St. Anthony's College on Saturday, September 7 last.

Recently, I came across an article about (L) Bah L. Gilbert Shullai, the architect of SRCC, which piqued my curiosity about his contributions. Attending the event gave me the opportunity to witness first-hand the remarkable preservation of his extensive collection, which includes correspondence, old newspaper clippings, photographs, and his own writings and books. The collection also includes personal notes and exchanges with various personalities, each with its own story to tell, inspiring not only his contemporaries but also future generations.

The legacy of Bah Shullai and his contributions to the SRCC have left an indelible mark, and it was an honour to witness such an important part of our cultural heritage.

Yours etc,  
P. Zepuh Gangmei  
NEHU, Shillong.

**Urgent attention needed to resolve acute traffic jams in Shillong**

Editor,  
I am writing to draw attention to an increasingly concerning issue affecting the daily lives of Shillong residents—severe traffic jams that have become a persistent problem in our city. Over the

past few months, the traffic congestion in Shillong has worsened significantly. Key areas, particularly around the main market, educational institutions, and major intersections, are experiencing constant gridlocks that not only disrupt the flow of traffic but also impact public safety and the overall quality of life.

Major traffic jam problem areas include: The City Center. The areas around Police Bazar and Laitumkhrah experience constant gridlock, with traffic moving at a crawl during busy hours.

Major Crossings: Intersections such as the ones near Shillong Civil Hospital and the one at Mawlai leading to the University area often see heavy traffic congestion, leading to delays and accidents.

Parking Issues: Limited parking space in central areas further compounds the problem, forcing vehicles to park haphazardly and obstruct traffic flow. Addressing these issues requires various approaches. Improved road infrastructure, better traffic management strategies, and enhanced public transportation options could be effective measures to alleviate congestion. Additionally, public awareness campaigns could help promote more responsible driving and parking habits.

I urge the relevant authorities and stakeholders to take immediate action to address these concerns. Enhanced collaboration between city planners, traffic authorities, and the community could pave the way for a more efficient and less stressful traffic experience in Shillong.

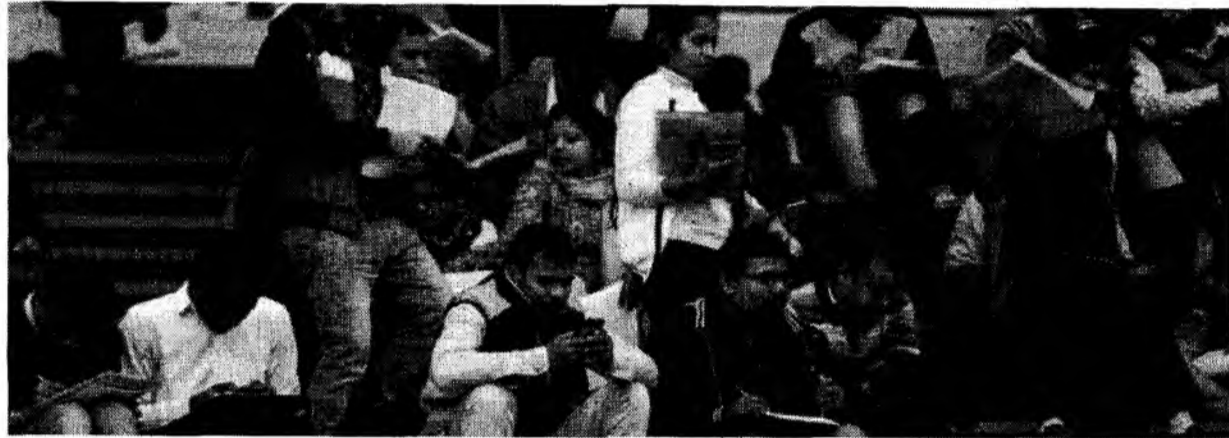
I hope this issue receives the focus it deserves, and I look forward to seeing posi-

**The inadequacy of measures of unemployment**

By Veronica Pala

The labour force of a country or state is a measure of the supply of labour. It consists of the economically active population, that is, persons who are working and persons who are unemployed. Unemployed persons are those who are not working but either making tangible efforts to seek work or being available for work. The unemployment rate is the percentage of those who are seeking or available for work out of the labour force. The Government of India through the National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) conducts the Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) annually since 2017-18. Prior to that, the Employment and Unemploy-

ment Surveys were conducted in quinquennial rounds till 2011-12. The annual reports and the Quarterly Bulletins of PLFS as well as the reports of earlier surveys are available in the official website of the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation ([www.mospi.gov.in](http://www.mospi.gov.in)). One needs to understand the various approaches used to estimate the unemployment rates in order to be able to decipher the figures published in the official reports.



(i) Usual status (ps+ss) approach: In this approach, the estimates of unemployment rates are based on usual status considering principal and subsidiary statuses together. Usual principal status means the activity status (working, unemployed or not in the labour force) in which a person is reported to be for the major part of the year preceding the survey. Usual subsidiary status means the reported status for a lesser part of the year, i.e. less than 180 days but at least 30 days, not necessarily for a continuous period. The labour force includes all those who are working in a principal as well as subsidiary capacity

the week but sought or was available for work at least for 1 hour during the week. In other words, if a usually unemployed person worked for at least 1 hour on any day during the 7 days preceding the date of survey, that person is considered as working and not unemployed in the current weekly status.

It is no wonder that estimates based on the three approaches are very similar. Considering that most of the poor and unemployed cannot afford to remain unemployed for long, and therefore, they would work in any kind of job that they could find, the official unemployment rates based on any of the approaches can be considered as an underestimate of the extent of unemployment. Hence unemployment in developing countries tends to be low. This fact notwithstanding, let me present here some of the results from the latest available survey, the PLFS of July 2022- June 2023. The PLFS is a nationally representative sample survey based on a stratified multi-stage sampling design. Estimates on labour force participation rates, worker- population

ratios, unemployment rates and various other parameters at the national as well as state levels have been validated and usually comparable to those obtained from census surveys. At the district level and for certain population subgroups, estimates need to be interpreted with caution if the sample size is too low. For example, estimates for Scheduled Castes in Meghalaya may not be reliable. The number of households actually surveyed in PLFS 2022-23 was 101,655 in the entire country, 55,844 households in the rural areas and 45,811 households in

are double-edged swords, the qualitative message from these numbers is that unemployment rate in Meghalaya is much higher than the all India average.

Further, a far more widespread problem that the state is facing is that of under-employment. Under-employed workers tend to work less hours, earn less income or use their occupational skills incompletely; in other words, they carry out an activity which is less productive than they could and would like to do. They are in an 'inadequate employment situation'. Unemployment statistics, defined as a situation of a total lack of work, do not cover such workers. The measure-

ment of underemployment was discussed at the 16th and 19th International Conferences of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in 1998 and 2013 respectively. The ICLS is hosted by the International Labour Organisation every five years. Time-related underemployment is the only component of underemployment to date that has been agreed on and properly defined within the international community of labour statisticians. The Indian PLFS includes questions about the duration of employment and whether the respondent worker is available for additional hours of work. These pertain to time-related underemployment only. However, the concept of underemployment reflects under utilization of the productive capacity of the labour force and has many facets. To some extent it can be gauged from the wages or earnings data and the occupations in which workers are engaged relative to their education level. That would be a topic for another discussion.

(The writer teaches Economics at North Eastern Hill University)

West Bengal as Bangladeshis and therefore, not Indians. The vulnerability of Muslims increases many folds if they are Bengali speaking. Even a Chief Minister is now giving hate speeches against Bengali Muslims.

The Chief Minister of Assam said that he would take sides against "Miya Muslims" — a discriminatory euphemism for the minority Bengali Muslim community — and would not let them "go to Upper Assam." The Supreme Court should take suo-motu cognisance of the matter as this will destroy trust between communities, as happened between Meiteis and Kuki-Zos in Manipur.

Samirul Islam, the chairman of the West Bengal Migrant Workers' Development Board, rightly pointed out the heinous plot to target Bengali speaking workers. He said, "It has become a threat for migrant workers from Bengal to work in BJP-ruled states. Speaking Bengali in states like BJP-run Haryana or Odisha is dangerous as aggressive groups like cow vigilantes consider them Bangladeshis."

Those who are instigating people to hate Bengalis are totally opposed to the spirit of India's renaissance. They want to go back to the days of sati and untouchability. Therefore, they hate Bengalis, as Bengalis gave the light of renaissance to the rest of India. This design needs to be rooted out to safeguard India's unity and progress.

In this context, we need to listen to the call given by Kamala Harris. On every campaign for the election of the US president, she says, "We're not going back." This is a more appropriate slogan for our country now.

Ram Mohan Roy is the maker of modern India. He had a life-long crusade for women's right to inheritance and property and against sati, casteism, and superstitions. The orthodox condemned him and organised a social boycott against him. As it was then, so it is now. Dabholkar, Pansare, Kalburgi, and Gauri Lankesh were killed in the 21st century for running with the torch of Raja Ram Mohan Roy. The same force is now on the prowl to attack Bengali speaking workers. Interestingly, like them, some Bengalis too describe Raja Ram Mohan Roy as a stooge of the British. But they themselves are self-haters and take great pleasure in fault-finding in anything Bengali. They, like some orthodox, regressive groups, are completely averse to Bengal's syncretic culture.

This culture has been crafted by the likes of Sri Chaitanya, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Lalon Fakir, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Sri Ramakrishna, Tagore, Kazi Najrul Islam, and many more stalwarts.

We need to peacefully fight an ideological battle, not only to safeguard the minorities but also to reclaim the progress that we have so far achieved. We need to say that we are not going back from the spirit of India's renaissance, the essence of our freedom struggle, and the ideals of our Constitution to the dark ages of orthodoxy and sati.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

**NESAC User Interaction Meet 2024: Transforming NE Region Spatially**

By Maitphang Syiem

"There are no passengers on spaceship earth. We are all crew." - Marshall McLuhan. It's indeed something to ponder upon! And why so? Logically, Physically and Philosophically we are all connected to this wonderful spaceship called Earth and narrowing it to the vital Bio-geographic Zone of the Indian Sub-continent which is the NE-Region, all the NE states have a collective responsibility to sustain its biological diversity, peaceful coexistence, cultural diversity etc. It's completely a unique region which has never failed to enthral and has left everyone mesmerised. Undoubtedly the NE region's spatial attributes are indeed special.

Perhaps one should try to comprehend why NE-Spatial is really Special and to get that, one should look from a Spatial context. Meghalaya has always been a happening place for many reasons and the pioneers perhaps have had the farsightedness to set up a station here in order to answer all those questions as to why NE Region is uniquely special. Hence the North East Space Application Centre was jointly set up by the DoS and NEC on September 5, 2000 but prior to this, initial work had started in the late 90's and had a humble beginning at MeSEB (erstwhile MeECL) Guest House as amusingly narrated by one of the prominent ISRO scientist, Dr. R.R. Navalgund who was instrumental in bringing this centre.

In retrospect, the founding pioneers of INCOSPAR (erstwhile ISRO) have meticulously laid the foundations which have created a ripple effect all over in this domain and that effect is also seen with the materialising of NESAC for the NE Region. In a way we are fortunate to have such a centre uniquely stationed at Nongstder, Ri Bhoi District, Meghalaya which ever since its inception and nearing its 25 years of existence has become a spatial power hub fuelling Space based applications for the benefit of the NE Region. The kind of activities undertaken also substantiate the philosophical context of what Dr Vikram Sarabhai said, "But we are convinced that if we are to play a meaningful role nationally, and in the community of nations, we must be second to none in the application of advanced technologies to the real problems of man and society, and NESAC has exclusively exhibited its competencies in nation building by bringing solutions to the problems of man and society specifically to the NE Region."

It is interesting and thought provoking to ponder upon a question cum suggestion by a prominent scientist who beguilingly asked at the meet that post-mortem (Post-Disaster activity) is undoubtedly important but the need of the hour is Predictive Analytics, therefore the takeaway is that solutions should be tailored specific to the NE Region with forecasting or now-casting capabilities in near real time or perhaps on real time basis.

On a general note perhaps because of the lack of awareness we find that many activities have gaps of effective and efficient decision implementation because of inadequate data insights and decisions based on simple generalisation and in a fast growing and globalised era generalisation is unsuitable. Hence in this context NESAC has a big role to play in supporting the NE States in terms of real time data and predictive analytics and for that matter the ongoing activities on this aspect are commendable. Another major part is with Education, in particular with STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics). It is delightful to see that an Outreach Facility has been established at NESAC premises and the young ignited youths of the NE region should capitalise on this for the benefit of the Region and for nation building.

To conclude let us once again be reminded of the words of Dr. Vikram Sarabhai "The development of the nation is intimately linked with understanding and application of science and technology by its people." This should also resonate for the NE Region. Opportunities to apply space-based applications by the people of this region through various mediums provided by the Department of Space and NESAC is a way forward.

(The writer is a space aficionado and Geo-spatial expert)

the narrative.

On the other hand, paradigm shifts are seen in the Indian Space Ecosystem. Reforms such as Indian Space Policy 2023 and National Geo-spatial Policy 2022 initiated by the Government of India have opened the entire ecosystem and unveiled opportunities for individuals and budding space tech startups to participate and contribute to nation building and also to the GDP of the country. A joint report by EY and the Indian Space Association (ISpA) an apex body of space-based company associations in the country have projected that the Indian Space Economy will reach \$13 billion by 2025. It's a positive sign that the Government of India has set up IN-SPACe an autonomous agency under the ambit of Department of Space and initiated such policies paving a way for private players to contribute, innovate, generate and also create employment opportunities for many young ignited minds.

The NeUIM 2024 meet also witnessed the participation of non-government entities such as SATSURE, Xovian, Thazal Geospatial Analytics, SUHORA, SkyServe, IGIS, Capella Space, Vassar Labs GalaxyEye Space, Trimble Systems, NeoGeoInfo, ESRI etc., showcasing space technological avenues specific to the NE Region. If one would study the bio-geographical zones, of the Indian Sub-continent, North-East India is regarded as one of the biological diversity hotspots and has many essential life support areas. At the same time due to the geographical setup the entire NE Region has challenges when it comes to natural and anthropogenic disasters coupled with the burgeoning Climate Change issues and it's about time that if not deliberated the NE Region will have a localised climatic fever which will disrupt the natural cycles, forests, public health, food chains, economy and livelihoods. One has to have insights on the challenges and the effective way to understand the impending problems is through space based applications. NESAC has demonstrated capabilities in many areas and has helped NE States department and agencies to build scientific capabilities to understand those challenges lying ahead.

It is interesting and thought provoking to ponder upon a question cum suggestion by a prominent scientist who beguilingly asked at the meet that post-mortem (Post-Disaster activity) is undoubtedly important but the need of the hour is Predictive Analytics, therefore the takeaway is that solutions should be tailored specific to the NE Region with forecasting or now-casting capabilities in near real time or perhaps on real time basis. On a general note perhaps because of the lack of awareness we find that many activities have gaps of effective and efficient decision implementation because of inadequate data insights and decisions based on simple generalisation and in a fast growing and globalised era generalisation is unsuitable. Hence in this context NESAC has a big role to play in supporting the NE States in terms of real time data and predictive analytics and for that matter the ongoing activities on this aspect are commendable. Another major part is with Education, in particular with STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics). It is delightful to see that an Outreach Facility has been established at NESAC premises and the young ignited youths of the NE region should capitalise on this for the benefit of the Region and for nation building.

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(The writer is a space aficionado and Geo-spatial expert)

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"If you are not willing to risk the unusual,  
you will have to settle for the ordinary."

— Jim Rohn

## The Shillong Times

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### Battle for the Presidency

THE United States heading for the presidential polls to install the next President in January, sees the famed Debates starting Tuesday there. Vice President Kamala Harris is edging herself forward in popularity charts to narrowly outwit her Republican rival, former president Donald Trump in latest opinion polls. If she wins, America will have the first female president, an honour the previous contestant Hillary Clinton missed when Trump rode to victory in the 2017 polls. Kamala's growth graph was from the post of Attorney General of California and later as its Democrat Senator followed by her selection as VP by present President, Joe Biden. Her mixed parentage - mother Indian, father African—should be an added electoral strength. The beauty of the United States is its open-minded approach, where expatriates of all hues are allowed to become citizens and eventually run for high posts in government. The UK took a leaf from the US to install Rishi Sunak of Indian-Punjabi parentage as its prime minister. The Indian society is still not mature enough to follow suit though Sonia Gandhi with her Italian origin functioned ably as Congress president and guided the party's government from behind the scenes. She was mindful of the Indian mindset.

Admittedly, the core of American society consists of immigrants, largely from Europe, who gained the upper hand over the native tribes. Slaves shipped from Africa gained social status over centuries of campaigns by rights activists and governmental initiatives encouraged by the church. Politics there is not linked to religion though. It gained steam on its own from the very start. The absolute domination of Whites ended and a new era started there when Chicago Senator Barack Obama with his indomitable energy won the Presidency in 2009 and continued for another term till 2016. Kamala, if she wins, will give a further push to this phenomenon, giving a chance for a President with Indian ancestry to preside over the destiny of the world's top power from the White House. The feel-good factor need not necessarily turn into any advantage for India. The President implements collective policy formulations and has less voice of his/her own though he/she leads the nation from the front.

Joe Biden is past his prime. At age 81, he over-stretched his ambitions. With poor popular support, he edged out of the party nomination race for presidential polls this time though a President can run for one more term. Kamala Harris is 59. Donald Trump is not young either, but even at age 78, he retains some firepower. Reason why the Republicans thought it fit to re-field him for another term yet again, despite his defeat in the 2021 polls. As of now, between Trump and Kamala Harris, who will finally win is a million dollar question.

# Legacy of the Supreme Court of India and its 75th year celebrations

By Jaivardhan Goyal

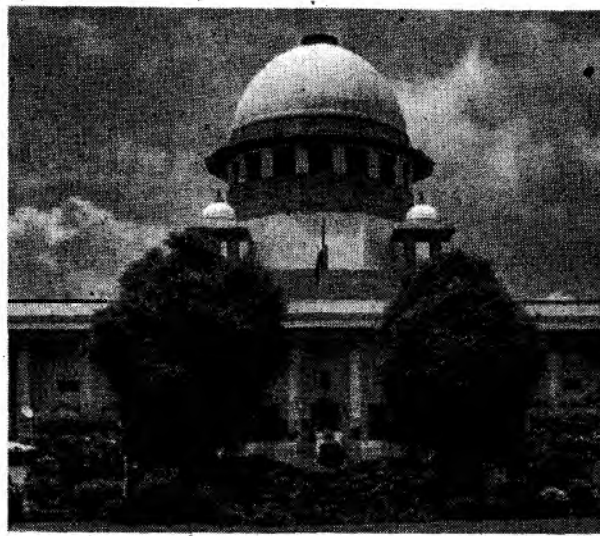
On September 2, 2024, President Droupadi Murmu unveiled the new flag and insignia of the Supreme Court of India as the institution gears up to commemorate its 75th anniversary on January 28th 2025. The inscription "Yato Dharmastato Jayah," which means "Where there is Dharma, there is Victory," reflects the commitment to righteousness. The establishment of the Supreme Court of India was a defining moment in the country's post-independence history, replacing the Federal Court of India as the highest court of appeal. Justice Hare Lal Jekisundh Kania served as the first Chief Justice of independent India and the court has evolved as decades have passed by.

In the history of our nation's jurisprudence, the Hon'ble Supreme Court has finely carved out a legacy pivotal to the fabric of legal and constitutional doctrine. The first judgment of A.K Gopalan vs the State of Madras in 1950, upheld the provisions concerning preventive detention, which served not only as adjudication on the matter at hand but as a foundational stone for the interpretation and expansion of the fundamental rights enshrined in our Constitution. The Court's decision in Golaknath vs the State of Punjab has a significant mark in our legal history, setting a precedent for the inviolability of fundamental rights against constitutional amendments. This doctrine matured in the landmark judgment of Keshavanand Bharti vs. the State of Kerala, where the Supreme Court asserted its sovereign authority to strike down constitutional amendments that breach the "basic structure," which is important in preserving the fundamental essence of our Constitution.

The introduction of Public Interest Litigations (P.L.L.s) in the 1980s marked an evolution: extending the locus standi to any public-spirited person(s) advocating for the marginalised or those who are incapable of representing themselves. This broadened access to justice highlighted the Court's transition from an adversarial model to a custodian of public welfare and justice which is associated with the visionary jurisprudence of Justice P.N. Bhagwati. Further broadening the legal horizon, the

Supreme Court's interpretation of Article 21 has been remarkable, covering a wide range of rights from education and healthcare to a clean environment and even the right to sleep, thereby guaranteeing quality of life. The Vishaka Guidelines, laid down in Vishaka vs the State of Rajasthan, is an example of the Court's proactive role in strengthening legal mechanisms against sexual harassment in the workplace until the Parliament enacted the POSH Act 2013.

The Supreme Court has



asserted its dynamic role in transforming societal norms and constitutional jurisprudence—be it through the guarantee of privacy, including data protection in Justice K.S. Puttaswamy (Retd.) vs. Union of India, declaring the practice of "Triple Talaq" in Shayara Bano vs. Union of India as unconstitutional, the decriminalisation of consensual same-sex relations in Navtej Singh Johar vs. Union of India, or the assertion of gender equality and religious freedom in the Sabarimala Temple entry case. Remarkably, in M. Siddiq (D) Thr—Lrs. vs. Mahant Suresh Das & Ors., the Supreme Court navigated through the religious and cultural sentiment to adjudicate upon a matter of deep sensitivity, steering the country towards peace while upholding the primary principles of secularism and communal harmony. The recent suo-motu cognisance of the Supreme Court in the R.G. Kar Medical College rape case gives out the message to the society at large that justice never dies. Thus,

the Supreme Court has solidified its role as the guardian of the Constitution and as a medium of progressive societal transformation.

As stated in Article 50 of the Constitution, the principle of separation of powers crystallises the imperative of judicial independence. To maintain the principle of separation of powers, the Supreme Court of India also serves as a critical mechanism of checks and balances. This is particularly evident in landmark cases such as Indira Gandhi vs

is the prevalence of judicial vacancies, which adds to the delays in resolution of pending litigations. It is noticeable that the ideal of easy access to justice for the marginalised sectors of our society is a notion far removed from their reality, which sets a narrative wherein justice appears to be a privilege reserved for the rich. In light of these concerns, the apex judiciary must undertake urgent reforms.

The pivotal role of technology in modernising the judicial process cannot be overlooked. The adoption of virtual hearings stands as a crucial innovation to curb the current backlog of cases. Additionally, there is a dire need to expand legal aid initiatives and community outreach programmes. Such programmes are essential in facilitating access to justice for the marginalised, bringing us closer to the ideal of equitable legal representation for all societal sections. Lastly, integrating comprehensive legal education at all educational levels, highlighted by the principle of 'law for everyone', is important. This approach will not only broaden the spread of legal knowledge across the populace but also foster public's understanding and engagement with our judicial system. These suggested reforms are beneficial and essential for restoring faith in our justice system and realising that justice should be an inalienable right, accessible to all.

In light of emerging challenges, the Supreme Court's role as the guardian of Indian democracy is paramount. The Court must continue to uphold the rights of citizens, maintain the principles of freedom, and resist any attempts to undermine democratic institutions. The Supreme Court will further solidify its position as a safeguard against authoritarianism and a defender of India's democratic principles. By enhancing accountability, embracing technology, expanding access to justice, engaging with international law, and upholding democratic values, the Supreme Court would continue to serve as a symbol of justice for future generations.

*(The author is a first-year law student at Dr. Ram Manohar Lohiya National Law University, Lucknow. Views and opinions expressed are personal.)*

## Decoding Power Dynamics: Comparative Analysis on Article 371A and the Sixth Schedule

By Kenneth Nongsiej

The Constitution of India, one of the lengthiest constitutions in the world, reflects the country's commitment to addressing the needs of its diverse population. Among its provisions, special attention is given to safeguarding the unique identities and rights of various regional and tribal communities. This is especially evident in the North-Eastern states, home to diverse ethnic groups with distinct cultural, social, and political characteristics.

Two key constitutional provisions, Article 371A, related to Nagaland, and the Sixth Schedule, which applies to tribal areas in Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura, and Mizoram, aim to protect the rights and identities of these communities. In Meghalaya, debates have recently centred around which of these two provisions better serves to protect the state's Indigenous tribes or the Jaitbynriew.

### Special Provisions for Nagaland

Added to the Constitution in 1962, Article 371A grants Nagaland significant autonomy. It gives the Nagaland Legislative Assembly the power to make decisions on key areas such as religious or social practices, Naga customary law, land ownership, and the administration of justice based on tribal customs. Central laws passed by the Indian Parliament can only be applied in Nagaland if the state assembly agrees through a resolution passed by the legislature.

This provision ensures that the state can govern according to its customs and traditions, preserving its cultural heritage with minimal interference from the central government.

### Autonomous Governance for the Schedules areas

The Sixth Schedule, adopted in 1949 by the Constituent Assembly, establishes a dual governance system through autonomous district councils (ADCs). This framework operates on two levels: the state government and the autonomous councils, allowing for local self-governance. The ADCs are empowered with legislative, executive, and judicial powers and can make or codify laws that are related to social customs, land ownership, marriage, and inheritance, but they remain subject to the oversight of the state's governor. Central laws can be applied at the discretion of the President of India. However, this system has led to some uncertainty in Meghalaya regarding the registration of migrant workers, with questions arising about whether they should register with the State's Labour Department or the Khasi Hills Autonomous Councils. These councils hold legislative, executive, and judicial powers over local matters like social customs, inheritance of property, marriage, and divorce. However, they remain under the oversight of the state's governor, and central laws can be applied in these areas at the discretion of the President of India.

### Status of the Land Transfer Act if the Sixth Schedule is Replaced with Article 371A

The Meghalaya Transfer of Land (Regulation) Act, 1971, is a key piece of legislation designed to safeguard the land interests of the tribes in Meghalaya. This Act was enacted by the State Legislature, rather than by the Autonomous District Councils (ADCs). A relevant question arises as to whether this Land Transfer Act would remain in effect if the Sixth Schedule were replaced by Article 371A of the Constitution.

The answer is affirmative. Even if Article 371A were to replace the Sixth Schedule, the State Legislature would retain its authority under the Act to regulate land ownership and transfer. Furthermore, the State government would continue to have the ability to enact legislation that reinforces and protects the traditional land systems of the tribal communities within the state. This ensures that the unique land rights and practices of Meghalaya's tribes are preserved, regardless of constitutional adjustments.

**Applicability of Central Laws**  
One key difference be-

tween Article 371A and the Sixth Schedule is how central laws are applied. For example, in Nagaland, the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act, 1957 does not apply due to protections for Naga land and resources. However, this Act is applicable in the Sixth Schedule areas, such as in Meghalaya, where the state government and ADCs do not have the power to exempt themselves from central laws. Traditional mining methods, which are important to local communities, lack legislative protection in these areas.

Similarly, Nagaland has the power to decide whether to implement new criminal laws like the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS), the revised Criminal Procedure Code, through a resolution of its state assembly. In contrast, in Sixth Schedule areas, the BNSS is generally applied in spirit, though the legal system remains complex with some cases tried by local ADC courts and others by regular courts.

### Amending the Provisions

The procedure for amending Article 371A and the Sixth Schedule are identical, requiring a special majority under Article 368 of the Constitution of India. Amendments must be passed by both houses of Parliament with a majority of the total membership of each house, and by at least two-thirds of the members present and voting. To amend these provisions, an amendment bill must be introduced in either house of Parliament, debated, and passed by the required majority in each house. Once both houses pass the bill, it is sent to the President for assent. Currently, amending or repealing these provisions would be challenging due to the NDA government's position. However, if the government had secured four hundred seats in Parliament and a majority in the Rajya Sabha, such changes would have been possible.

### Key Differences in Autonomy

While both Article 371A and the Sixth Schedule aim to protect tribal identities and provide autonomy, they differ significantly in scope. Article 371A offers Nagaland far greater independence, with the state government holding significant powers to decide the application of central laws. This ensures a high degree of self-governance, allowing Nagaland to preserve its cultural and social traditions.

On the other hand, the Sixth Schedule provides a more regulated framework. ADCs manage local governance, but their powers are subject to the oversight of both the centre and state the former through the governor and latter the state governments. While ADCs can create laws on local matters, the authority to apply or exempt central laws remains with the President, making it a more controlled form of autonomy.

Both Article 371A and the Sixth Schedule play crucial roles in protecting and promoting the rights of Indigenous communities in the North-Eastern states. While Article 371A grants Nagaland greater independence, the Sixth Schedule provides a structured form of local governance with more centralized oversight.

In Meghalaya, the debate continues over whether Article 371A or the Sixth Schedule better serves to protect the Jaitbynriew. Given the central government's reluctance to extend provisions like the Inner Line Permit (ILP) to Meghalaya, securing the level of autonomy enjoyed by Nagaland could be challenging. However, with strong leadership and political will, it is possible for the state to push for greater self-governance.

Ultimately, the Constitution derives its power from "We the People," and it is the people of Meghalaya who will shape the future of governance in the state. Empowering local leaders and advocating for these changes may pave the way for greater autonomy in protecting the state's indigenous heritage.

### Letters to the Editor

#### Multifaceted Value of an MBA

Editor,  
With the Common Admission Test (CAT) registration deadline approaching, I find myself reflecting on the reasons that drive so many of us to pursue an MBA degree. My own background in engineering gave me a strong technical foundation, but the world of business offers its own fascinating narrative through products, pricing, markets, and strategies that shape the global economy.

For those aiming to make their mark in the corporate sector, an MBA serves as a bridge between technical expertise and business acumen. It equips professionals with the skills to solve complex problems, develop effective strategies, and drive significant business impact.

In my consulting work, for example, we facilitated a global OEM company transition into a subscription-based model known as Equipment-as-a-Service (EaaS). Instead of selling equipment outright, this model involves leasing it, ensuring a steady revenue stream and enhancing customer engagement. By integrating IoT and AI technologies, we enable real-time monitoring and continuous improvement of the equipment. This demonstrates how MBA-trained professionals drive innovation and solve complex business problems effectively.

However, the value of an MBA extends far beyond the conventional corporate career path. An MBA equips aspiring entrepreneurs with the knowledge and skills needed

to launch and scale their own businesses. Exposure to various aspects of business management—finance, marketing, operations, and strategy—provides a holistic understanding crucial for starting and growing a venture. For instance, Vineeta Singh, an IIM Ahmedabad alumna, exemplifies this perfectly through her venture—Sugar Cosmetics, which had modest beginnings but has grown into a major player in the Indian beauty market, valued at Rs 4,000 crores. Singh's success is attributed to her deep understanding of the Indian market and her ability to create products tailored to Indian women's preferences, coupled with innovative digital marketing strategies.

While it is true that many people achieve success in these areas without formal business education. However, my time at IIM Bangalore has enlightened me about the profound impact an MBA can have. The program provided me with valuable knowledge and skills and expanded my horizons in ways I had not earlier anticipated.

Those from Meghalaya exploring career paths through an MBA can unlock opportunities that might once have seemed distant. As CAT registrations come to a close, I encourage prospective students—to consider not only the career benefits of an MBA degree but also the broader impact it can have on personal and professional growth.

Yours etc.,  
Graciel Joe Kharmawong,  
IIM Bangalore  
Alumnus of St. Mary's,  
Via email

#### Death of societal conscience

Editor,  
Release of all the arrested persons accused of murdering three innocent non-tribals in Ichamati and Shillong a few months back on identical grounds i.e failure to file charge sheet within the mandatory time frame by the investigating officers appears nothing but scenes from a well scripted drama in which the Government, administration and law enforcing agencies have performed their roles to near perfection as protagonists. The conscience of civil society, as spectators of the theatre, never got stirred and remained aloof ignoring the presence of the murderers in their homes or immediate neighbourhood. There is no point putting the blame on the law enforcers or the persons at the helm for their lack of neutrality and righteousness because after all, they have also come from the same inert society.

Yours etc.,  
N.K. Kehar,  
Shillong-3

#### Has the Govt. turned a blind eye to drugs menace?

Editor,  
It is an appalling fact to note that in the past two-three months, Shillong's new epidemic, drugs, has crippled civil society. Localities are reporting cases of petty to major thefts on a regular basis, that too with such events occurring in

broad daylight now. What is even more appalling is that the heart of the problem lies in the regions of Polo, Oakland and Bihar Road—areas where some of the top politicians, bureaucrats and legal dignitaries officially reside, including the Chief Minister.

In fact, there are dens of drugs in extremely close vicinity to the Chief Minister's Bungalow, where peddlers and consumers have been sighted regularly. This begs the question whether the government has willingly turned a blind eye to this drug menace? When top politicians and officers with all their trained and glorified security aren't able to do anything about the drug menace, despite the problem taking place in close proximity of their residences, is there still any excuse they have to trot out?

In fact, this has gone to the extent that the police now refuse to take action against such drug consumers and peddlers. The narrative they put across is that arresting them would mean increasing liability on the police, given the sheer number of drug users, and hence, even if they take them to the police station, all they can do is threaten them and eventually let them go with a warning.

Civil security has come under great threat at this point. With daylight break-ins, regular cases of petty thefts and chain snatching practices, Shillong is becoming an extremely unsafe place and so far, the Government has chosen not to do anything about it. A crack-down on drugs is the need of the hour if civilian faith and trust is to be restored on the government for its efforts on curbing this extremely critical drug menace.

Yours etc.,  
Patrick Kurbah,  
Via email

#### Traffic Police please restore discipline on the roads

Editor,  
I write this letter as a frustrated citizen overwhelmed by the regular traffic jam. In Shillong, people do not obey traffic rules nor road safety norms. There is no traffic discipline. So, no matter what action is taken by the authorities to ease the traffic flow in the city it will only go in vain. Even if you build flyovers, underground roads, sky-walks, bicycle lanes, more parking spaces, widen the roads, bring school buses, special buses, taxis or even aeroplanes there will be no change if we are not willing to change our attitudes and driving behavior.

People here park their cars everywhere even in the middle of the road be it private or public vehicles. Cars do not follow their own lanes, overtaking even when there is traffic jam, especially the two wheelers that overtake by crossing the line and switching lanes thereby causing obstruction to vehicles coming from the opposite direction. Sometimes these vehicles are pushed to the footpath which is very dangerous for pedestrians. One example is the way to Upper Shillong from Anjalee petrol pump. There are many vehicles going to Upper Shillong that do not follow their own lanes. They overtake and either take abrupt turns before reach-

ing Rilbung or go straight to Upper Shillong. What is more frustrating is that even the traffic personnel do not take action. Sometimes these vehicles that overtake cause obstruction to those who are taking a right turn to Jhalupara- Mawprem side and create chaos at the junction.

Also everyday in the morning at Rilbung junction before the traffic personnel arrive, vehicles going to Jhalupara- Mawprem side take a shortcut at the junction thereby causing a bottleneck like situation for those cars coming from Upper Shillong and proceeding towards Anjalee petrol pump. Traffic rules should be strictly implemented and unless we follow traffic rules obediently there will never be any change in the traffic scenario in Shillong. The only solution to ease traffic problem at this moment is to create awareness on road traffic rules and safety among all drivers be it private or public vehicles cars and people should be penalized with heavy fines as per rules. Only then there will be responsible driving habits among all. I am sure when we all learn to drive responsibly there will be lot of changes in the traffic scenario; more so it will help to alleviate traffic congestion to a large extent.

"Be the change you wish to see in the world". Mahatma Gandhi

Yours etc.,  
S.Lyngdoh,  
Via email

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*"Respect is one of the greatest expressions of love."*

—Don Miguel Ruiz

**The Shillong Times**

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**Meghalaya's dynastic politics**

IN a society known for its matrilineal traditions it is facile to state that women who have been offered to lead the Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (MSCPCR) have refused to take on that mantle as stated by Social Welfare Minister Paul Lyngdoh. Many questions arise here. One, the Government should have a search and selection committee to look for the best candidates who can shoulder this responsibility and discharge the duties mandated by the office with the fairness, sincerity and empathy needed. This list should be submitted to the government and after the interview process is done the person most fit to hold the post should be appointed. But the MDA Government will have none of this. It insists on appointing people who lean towards the government and are therefore not likely to cross swords with the Government should the occasion arise. Political appointees are by nature hand-picked and have therefore surrendered their right to act independently in the interest of the office they hold – in this case to uphold the rights of minor children and to make sure that the Protection of Children from Sexual Offences (PoCSO) Act is implemented in letter and spirit.

This appointment has raised the hackles of some political parties who have accused the MDA Government of nepotism with several members of the family being paid out of the state's exchequer. Is this a fair and transparent appointment? The Social Welfare Minister has vouched that Agatha Sangma is well qualified to hold that post. Well, having appointed her he has to also hold the brief for her. To be fair, Agatha Sangma holds a degree in Law but so do many others not connected to the Government who could have held that position and discharged their duties admirably, with empathy and with no strings attached.

Also, what is enigmatic here is why the appointee to this particular position always has to be a woman when that is not stipulated in the Act. Can a male person not have the passion and commitment to work to protect the rights of children in this State? The Act says that the Commission shall consist of (a) a Chairperson who is a person of eminence and has done outstanding work for promoting the welfare of children; and (b) six members, out of which at least two shall be women. The appointees should be persons of eminence, ability, integrity, standing and experience in (i) education (ii) child health, care, welfare or child development; (iii) juvenile justice or care of neglected or marginally children or children with disabilities; (iv) elimination of child labour or children in distress; (v) child psychology or sociology; and (vi) law relating to children. Dynastic politics must not be allowed to raise its ugly head in Meghalaya.

**Financial Reforms Imperative for Meghalaya**

By Rudi Warjri

One of the titillating and easily memorized lines when I was studying Statistics in the past was, "Statistics is like a bikini; what it reveals is interesting but what it hides is more important." Important to a discerning observer no doubt; but means nothing to the majority who have no time for dry and boring numbers. The bikini analogy however can be applied to the latest Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report about Meghalaya as well as the subsequent counter statement by the Government Meghalaya. It's nothing

of economic growth has been served. Since 1991 India has been registering a rising growth rate. It happened because of reforms. India integrated itself with the global economy through a process of liberalization. Reforms took place in the mainstay of the economy which was the industrial sector, financial sector, tax and fiscal reforms and foreign exchange or external sector reforms. Within the industrial sector was

The CAG report also published about the debt Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) ratio of the State and warned that Meghalaya may fall into a debt trap. The rebuttal by the State Government was that debt is a public financial instrument to boost growth used by all countries. Very true. The truth would be also clearer if the data like revenue earnings of the State and the grants and soft loan from the Centre and other

of the SPUs in Meghalaya? The amount of loss by the SPUs in 2022-23 was more than Rs 4,000 crore. No reforms mean more subsidies to the SPUs. If GoM believes that it is rich enough to continue with the subsidies then please enjoy the party. In other words, is the continuance of the existing policy in tandem or in contradiction to the \$ 10 billion economy goal? The CAG report has already recommended the liquidation of Meghalaya Electronics Development Corporation and Meghalaya Bamboo Chips Ltd. Begin



ing surprising! In the past another Government of India (GoI) agency NITI Aayog had been regularly coming out with data about Meghalaya on poverty, health, education etc., which was never accepted by the Government of Meghalaya (GoM).

It would therefore help readers that GoM should post a more elaborate and updated fact sheet or data of its own on the GoM website which is not restricted only to area, population or literacy rate. Data about students graduating each year and how many have been employed. Data on tourism footfalls, earnings by hotels and homestays, since tourism has become both a service as well as an industry. It should put out data on agriculture, industries and other allied services.

An earth-shaking watershed in the annals of India's political economy was the economic reforms of 1991. It was a pragmatic and philosophical shift of sorts. Among several international as well as national concatenation of reasons it was also a foreign exchange crisis. India pledged part of its gold reserves to the Bank of England to secure a US \$ 405 million loan. India also availed an emergency loan of \$ 2.2 billion from the International Monetary Fund by pledging 67 tons of gold reserves as collateral security. In 2024 the gold stored in the vault of the Bank of England was brought back to India because the purpose

of the disinvestment of sick Government Public Sector Undertakings (PSUs). Thenceforth successive Governments in India have been trying to impress that they were more reformist than their predecessor.

About Meghalaya, as per the CAG reports, 15 of the 17 State Public Sector Enterprises (SPSEs) accrued losses. Among them are Meghalaya Power Distribution Corporation Ltd (MePDCL), Mawmlyh Cherra Cements Ltd (MCCL), Meghalaya Government Construction Corporation Ltd (MGCCCL), Meghalaya Transport Corporation (MTC), Meghalaya Infrastructure Development Corporation (MIDFCL), Meghalaya Mineral Development Corporation Ltd (MMDCL), Meghalaya Tourism Development Corporation Ltd (MTDC). Seven of these 15 SPSEs had their equity completely destroyed by cumulative losses and their net worth was negative. Two of the SPSEs made a paltry profit while the rest were categorized as loss making SPSEs. The audit observation is that SPSEs should be told to file timely financial statements, analyse the cause of losses and take action. They were told to update the finance accounts and make corrections to the mechanism of documenting the funding granted. The CAG report also pointed to non-submission of 454 utilisation certificates worth almost Rs 3500 crore.

agencies as well as the repayment schedules are revealed. And most importantly how much the economy of Meghalaya revolves around the Central based and funded schemes which in my view is at least 70%.

The reality is that India had to adopt state socialism after independence since there was no industrial base at all. The private sector was practically non-existent. For example, building the steel industry was fundamental to the growth of any country like in the capitalist United States or then communist Soviet Union (now known as Russia and other countries). Hence the Government of India launched the four steel PSUs at Bhilai, Durgapur, Rourkela and Bokaro and there was mushrooming of PSUs spreading to all the sectors of the economy. It was also the failure of most PSUs that prompted the Government to make a course correction in 1991. Over the years the public centric purpose of the PSUs had been subverted and distorted. They became more institutions of favouritism and nepotism or employing politicians who have lost elections. The changes of 1991 came like a ton of bricks that said, "Change or Perish," and the then political leaders and political class in India saw the writings on the wall. This is more so after witnessing the spectacular growth of China.

Why do we need reforms

with these two. GoM has already been engaging consultants everywhere. Why not use consultants for liquidation of sick SPUs? The Rs 4000 crore loss could have been used for many other pressing demands in education and health.

Cynically speaking, looking at the lack of political will or too many conflicting priorities, the talk of Viksit Bharat for India by 2047 and \$ 10 billion economy for Meghalaya by 2028 reminds me of the story between Birbal mantri and Emperor Akbar. Birbal mantri was known for his sharp wit and ideas that endeared him to the Emperor. Birbal was badly in need of a horse but couldn't afford to buy one. He had a sudden brainwave of a bright idea. In one of the court jesting sessions at the Emperor's court he volunteered that he could make a horse talk. The perplexed Emperor asked how that could be done and how much time was needed. Birbal said seven years. So the Emperor got Birbal a horse. Later after the court session, other mantris gathered around Birbal and asked him if he had gone insane because how could he make a horse talk? Birbal responded, "You guys have no idea." Birbal added that in seven years either the horse would die, he himself would die or the Emperor would die. Similarly, by then like Aache din, Viksit Bharat or \$ 10 billion economy goal would have been replaced by other sexy slogans. I do however have a vested interest in being proved wrong!

**India fails to take full advantage of China+ strategy by maintaining barriers Sitharaman has to push to encourage Chinese supply chains for investment**

By Subrata Majumder

Going by the statements of India's External Affairs Minister, S Jaishankar, the Narendra Modi Government is going hot with China on diplomacy. But at the same time, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is soft on the issue of allowing Chinese investments in India. The economic survey of 2023-24 presented before this year's budget underlines the need for Chinese investment.

There are several reasons behind this new look towards Chinese investment as an economic partner. FDI flow in India is at a plateau despite the fact that it has the highest growth in global GDP. FDI in India dropped consecutively for 2 years. In 2022-23, it fell by 22 percent and dropped further by 3 percent in 2023-24.

India made sparkling growth in the electronic and automobile sectors. But, the growth relied more on imports. China has been the biggest supplier of components and parts for the development of these industries. In other words, if China falters in supplying critical components, these industries are unlikely to spur growth.

to shift factories to India due to discrimination policy. This is despite the fact that USA and western assemblers viewed India a better destination for manufacture of the supply chain than China. Even though India is lagging behind China in critical components manufacture, they preferred India for long term benefits.

Manufacturing in India, which plummeted during the COVID period, made a significant growth post COVID. It surged to 9.9 percent growth in 2023-24, against a fall by 2.3 percent in the preceding year.

This gave a point of inspiration for a second thought to policy makers to the Make in India programme and shifted focus on supply chain manufacturing. The aim was to be embedded in the stream of global supply chain manufacturing.

The Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme was overhauled and expanded, embracing a large number of industries with more doses of incentives. The expanded PLI worked well. Eventually, manufacturing boomed.



Why has India lost the FDI potential, despite the fastest growth in GDP? Among the several reasons, the noteworthy one was India's lacklustre approach to China+1 strategy. India failed to reap the benefits of China+1 strategy, due to its discriminatory policy towards China. China+1 became the pivot for a new global FDI landscape after COVID 19.

China+1 strategy instilled inspiration to foreign investors in China to shift to ASEAN. Eventually, during 2021-2023, FDI in ASEAN increased by over 8 percent. The trigger in investment was driven by huge USA and China investment. Bulk of the USA investment was shifted from China to ASEAN. USA investment increased by a whopping 109 percent during the period, followed by China. Singapore was the key player to allure USA investment from China. USA investment in Singapore boomed by over 60 percent during 2020-2023. This demonstrates a major shift of USA investment from China to ASEAN.

In contrast, USA investment in India slipped from a high end in 2021-22. It slipped from US \$ 10 billion in 2021-22 to US \$ 4 billion in 2023-24, a marked fall in US investment in India. Many suspected USA's downturn in investment was India's failure to reap benefits from China+1 strategy.

Why has China+1 strategy emerged as a game changer in the global FDI landscape and India failed to catch up with the global trend?

The USA and western assemblers vowed to shift to India from China. USA investment in India made an uninterrupted growth during 4 years ending 2022. But the US investment plunged thereafter. Reason, much of the US investment, which represented shifting from China under China+1, shifted to ASEAN rather than to India.

The main factor discouraging US investors to shift from China to India was their failure to encourage the Chinese supply chain manufacturers

This caught the Chinese attention for a new partnership with India for supply chain development in the country. Global Times - the noted Chinese media - raised high hopes for partnership with Indian counterparts to manufacture supply chains, instead of intensifying competition. It said, "with the implementation of Make in India, the country's needs for industrial chain support have increased, especially in technology and capital intensive products. This offers a new market and collaborator prospect for the China manufacturing sector".

It focused on a IIFT (Indian Institute of Foreign Trade) study in April 2023, which said "Chinese imports boost Indian manufacturing and exports in key sectors."

Even though an outcry was raised for a wide trade deficit with China, Global Times suggested localization of Chinese companies in India would be a better solution, instead of raising investment barriers against China.

For example, it noted that in the rapid growth of smartphone manufacturing in India, only a small percentage of components are procured domestically. China continues to be the biggest supplier of components and parts. Given this template, Global Times opined for manufacturing partnership with India. It is a better deal to reduce imports dependence.

Apple's slow pace of entry in India is another case in point. Currently, only 14 percent of Apple's global production of iPhone has been shifted to India. Global Times argued that despite Apple's efforts to encourage its suppliers to shift to India, discriminatory investment regulations and trade have dissuaded many Chinese component suppliers from shifting to India.

To this end, a complementary partnership with China to manufacture critical components will be a better option to develop the supply chain industry than relying more on imports. (IPA Service)

**Letters to the Editor**

**State can rely on Centre's assistance**

Editor, The editorial "CAG Must Respond" (ST September 10, 2024) made interesting reading. According to the data of Reserve Bank of India Table 171: State wise composition of outstanding liabilities at the end of March for which data is available from 2005 to 2023 for all the states in the country, the growth of outstanding liabilities of the Government of Meghalaya in 2017 over 2013 was 75.87% which translates to an annual average growth rate of 15.17% between 2013-2017 while the growth rate of internal debt in 2017 over 2013 was 70.32% which works out to an annual average growth rate of 14.06%. This was a period led by the Congress government in Meghalaya.

Now let us see what the data of the Reserve Bank of India says for the period 2018 to 2022. The growth rate of outstanding liabilities of the government of Meghalaya in 2022 over 2018 is 55.17% that is equivalent to an annual

average growth rate of 11.03% between 2018-2022 while the growth rate of the internal debt in 2022 over 2018 was 80.08% between 2018 and 2022 which works out to an annual average growth rate of 16.01%. This was a period led by the NPP government in Meghalaya.

The best source of data on outstanding liabilities is from the Reserve Bank of India as far as monetary accounting is concerned because it has proper records. I agree with the caption of the editorial "CAG Must Respond". But the problem is even if CAG responds it is a powerless body which is only advisory in nature. So as long as the Government of India is alive and for that matter governments do not die unlike mortals, why should the states worry about their outstanding liabilities? Since the mother is alive, she will come and rescue her children because there is the Reserve Bank of India. It is a fact that most of the states in India and not necessarily only Meghalaya do not attempt to clean up the accounting mess unlike a private business firm which does its accounting every night and is frugal in

spending.

Yours etc; VK Lyngdoh. Via email

**Unregulated School Fees: A Conundrum to the Common Man**

Editor, With admissions for the academic session 2025 around the corner, schools in Shillong city have started issuing forms for admission. However, the plight of the common man doesn't seem to end, as school fees continue to soar exorbitantly high. The middle class, with limited options, has to scour schools to find one that fits their budget without compromising on quality education. Considering education is a way to a better life, the race for parents to send their wards to good schools is tiring and challenging. The inflation in education has remained higher than consumer price inflation. The government's empathy to address the issue is nowhere to be seen. Failing to put a cap on school fees and regulate them is the need of

the hour. The lack of effective policies and regulations has allowed schools to increase fees without fear of government intervention.

The astronomical rise in school fees has made it challenging for middle-class families to send their children to reputed schools, often forcing parents to compromise on their children's education. The government's failure to take concrete measures to regulate schools has further added to the woes of the current situation. Schools, notably a place of diversity, should give fair representation to children from all social and economic backgrounds. However, the ground reality shows a different picture, where the rich and mighty get to avail the best education for their wards.

I urge the local authorities to impose regulations on school fees to ensure that quality education remains accessible to all, particularly the middle class, who are currently caught in this financial strain. By implementing transparent fee structures, capping school fees, and providing subsidies, we can alleviate the burden and re-establish education as an opportunity for growth and

advancement, not an unattainable dream.

It is imperative to ensure that education doesn't become a luxury reserved only for the privileged few. The society as a whole must advocate for middle-class families and ensure equitable access to quality education for all children.

I hope this letter resonates with the readers and sparks a much-needed conversation about the state of education in the country.

Yours etc., Rahul Chettri Shillong -1

**Raising age limit for state exams**

Editor, I commend the state government for previously raising the age limit for state examinations from 27 to 32 years. However, I would like to draw attention to the disparity between the age limits set by our state and those established by other neighbouring states.

For instance, the Assam Public Service Commission allows an upper age limit of 38 years for general candidates, while the Manipur Public Service Commission

and Arunachal Pradesh Public Service Commission set it at 38 and 35 years respectively. Similarly, the Tripura Public Service Commission has an upper age limit of 35 years. These limits are considerably higher than those set by the Meghalaya Public Service Commission, which stands at 32 years for general candidates, and 37 years for SC/ST candidates.

Given the challenges many of us faced during the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted our ability to prepare for and participate in various examinations, I respectfully request the state government to consider further extending the age limits. Specifically, I propose an increase to 37 years for general candidates and 42 years for SC/ST candidates.

I urge the relevant authorities to consider this adjustment for the benefit of all aspiring candidates who have been adversely affected.

Yours etc., A Sarki, Shillong

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

"Where ignorance is our master, there is no possibility of real peace."

— Dalai Lama

The Shillong Times

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End of a red era

THE demise of Sitaram Yechury, an outstanding Communist leader, has come as a deep shock to the Leftist movement. In CPIM circles. He has been a household name for the past two decades, during which time he mostly towered over other red leaders even as his JNU colleague Prakash Karat remained as another important figure in the CPIM. His death due to pneumonia came after weeks of hospitalization during which hopes about an improvement in his health were fading. He leaves behind a vacuum which would be difficult to fill for the party. Those like Karat are around but are past the 75 age limit the party has informally set for senior hands holding positions.

Yechuri's main strength was his communication and PR skills, which he effectively used in spreading the party's messages through the English media and in maintaining good relations with the leaderships of non-BJP political establishments, mainly the Congress. He was often seen as an adviser to Sonia Gandhi during times of tough political challenges to the grand old party. His organisational skills were questionable though. The party under his stewardship lost its support base heavily across states, principally in West Bengal and Tripura. Except in Kerala, the party is now near zero and competed with NOTA in polls in the northern Hindi belt, the mainstay of national politics. In his own Telugu states, the party under him could make no headway also as regional satraps ruled the roost there. Yechury's advocacy of Secularism as a political creed was an outstanding feature of his public pushes. Yet, he and the Left gained little from such campaigns, as was reflected in the voting trends even in Muslim dominated areas where the party put up candidates. The Modi era in politics ran parallel to Yechury's leadership of the CPIM - a time when the Hindutva campaign gained a lot of steam and undercut the Left prospects across even states where it once held a substantial base.

What should not go unnoticed about Yechury is his clean image. Though he never held power other than in his role as Rajya Sabha member, he headed a political establishment that ran governments. Yet, all along, he retained an image that was without blemish as a politician and party leader. Causes were important to him and he was never ready for compromise vis-a-vis his convictions. In today's politics, Yechury and several of his comrades have been a rare phenomenon by virtue of their clean public life. The decision by his family to donate the senior leader's body to AIIMS, New Delhi, for research and teaching purposes is in keeping with his great sense of social commitment. His memory of a selfless politician will live on.

How much do we care about mental health?

By Patricia Mukhim

The news of death by suicide of 21-year old Bimlesh Kumar from Uttar Pradesh's Ballia district and studying at IIT-Guwahati on September 9, just a day before World Suicide Prevention Day, observed on September 10, comes as a rude shock. Bimlesh Kumar a 3rd year B.Tech student was pursuing his Computer Science and Engineering programme at IIT-Guwahati. He was found dead inside his hostel room. This is the second such incident in the campus within a span of a month. In August this year Soumya, a female M.Tech student was found hanging in her room. Some students have spoken to the media on condition of anonymity that academic pressure is pushing them round the bend. Students had failed due to low attendance, even though they excelled in their exams. The student said in his batch at least 200 students failed due to low attendance. Students have complained that a toxic environment has been created by the institution which demands 75% attendance rules across all courses. Failure to meet with this would result in mandatory extension of the course into the next semester. In the past too students had died of suicide in IIT-G. The question is whether any steps are taken by the Institution to remedy the causes that lead to suicide.

At that level of study, students also have projects and internships with different institutions they are placed with, to add to their experiential learning. The stress they face in trying to maintain attendance with those other responsibilities leads to burn-out, stress, anxiety and depression. Sometimes they wonder what they really signed up for and whether it was worth it. From listening to students air their views anonymously it would seem that they attend classes merely to fulfil the attendance requirement rather than to be fully engaged with what's happening in the classroom. In such a situation the student while being physically present in the classroom is not invested in what is being discussed because his attention is elsewhere. Psychiatrists would say that such mindless presence in the classroom could detract from the ability to think critically, which is a much-needed skill for someone in the field of engineering.

If we have to be upfront as parents, we have to admit that in India parental pressure on children to pursue engineering or medicine is

overwhelming. No parent enjoys the prospect of their child/children taking up the Arts as if there are no job opportunities in those streams. This has happened over several generations. Doctor parents want their children to follow their profession whether or not they have the aptitude for it. So too parents that are engineers. Some parents who could not achieve their goals in life want their children to fulfil those goals. Just imagine the pressure on the young minds.

Going through the World Health Organisation literature on mental health one learnt that globally, one in seven 10-19-year-olds experience a mental disorder, accounting for 13% of the global burden of disease in this age group. Depression, anxiety and behavioural disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds. The consequences of failing to address adolescent mental health conditions extend to adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.

We grew up learning that adolescence is a period of storm and stress with hormones running riot. The physical, emotional and social changes especially for those battling poverty even while sitting in the same classroom with other mates that come from affluent families can be very daunting. Children coming from families with drunken fathers who turn violent and abuse them or their mother can make adolescents vulnerable to mental health problems. What is needed is the facility - the space to protect adolescents from adversity; to promote socio-emotional learning and psychological well-being, and ensuring access to mental health care which are critical for their health and well-being during adolescence and into adulthood. But where is that space in Meghalaya?

Meghalaya is a state that is reporting very high drug use but with not a single government run facility for de-addiction and rehabilitation. The only known rehab centres are Sanker Nursing Home and Kripa Foundation. But these two cannot accommodate the growing numbers of addicts. And it is not as if these young people have simply got into

that supportive environment at home? And are our school environments really able to provide that much needed support to adolescents with mental health disorders? Are teachers trained to recognise the signs? Is there enough time in the classroom for personal care and attention? In most families where parents are not educated, symptoms such as anxiety, depression, eating disorders and mood swings are considered normal. It's also a fact that among students, anxiety, depression, and eating disorders are extremely common. What is of concern is the mental health research conducted by the Sapien Labs Centre for the Human Brain and Mind, over 50% of youth in the 18-24 age group have poor mental health. The report is based on information collected from 1,06,427 respondents using the Mental Health Quotient which is calculated by analysing 47 aspects of mental feeling. The study showed that 51 percent of youth were distressed or struggling in 2023. Shailendra Swaminathan, Director of Sapien Labs Centre for the Human Brain and Mind, is the author of the study says that data on mental health is scarce because of the stigma associated with it. He is of the view that the current policy is to treat mental health ailments through crisis intervention but what is needed is a preventive approach.

When mental illness of which depression is a major factor leads to suicide it is just so tragic yet this is happening with such frequency in India in engineering institutes and coaching centres. There is an urgent need for us adults to refocus our lenses and allow the young some freedom to choose their paths in life. Let them choose what brings them happiness. They have a right to it. Why drive them around the bend? Will life not be a little bit easier if parents and children can have more conversations and share their deepest concerns with each other instead of turning the home into a battleground day after day? A child that finds comfort and solace at home is less likely to seek succour from social media and turn their mobile phones into their partners.

Most of us parents have gone through life not knowing how mental health issues take a toll on our children. We can at least learn from literature and from talking to experts in their field. Who knows we ourselves might be carrying our own unresolved mental weight!

Mental health includes adopting healthy sleep patterns; exercising regularly; developing coping, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills; and learning to manage emotions. Protective and supportive environments in the family, at school and in the wider community are important. But how many of our families are able to provide

accurate way to predict the result of the election. Hence the editor is right it is "a million-dollar question" as to who will win the election on November 5, as voters in the US go to polls to elect their next President. Though Trump is older than Harris, in politics age is immaterial as long as you have the "fire power." Here I recall what the late Brington Buhai Lyngdoh said when asked by a scribe in Chumoukdima, Nagaland in 1998, "Sir, when will you retire?" Lyngdoh replied "Politicians never retire but simply fade away." The big question now is - will the result mean a second Donald Trump term or America's first woman President?

I want to remind everyone that there are laws against animal cruelty. This letter serves as a warning to the person responsible. If the attacks on these strays continue, I won't hesitate to take legal action. We need to be a community that cares for all its members - human and animal alike. Let's choose kindness over cruelty.

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Narendra Modi gov't has abdicated its responsibility for ruling Manipur

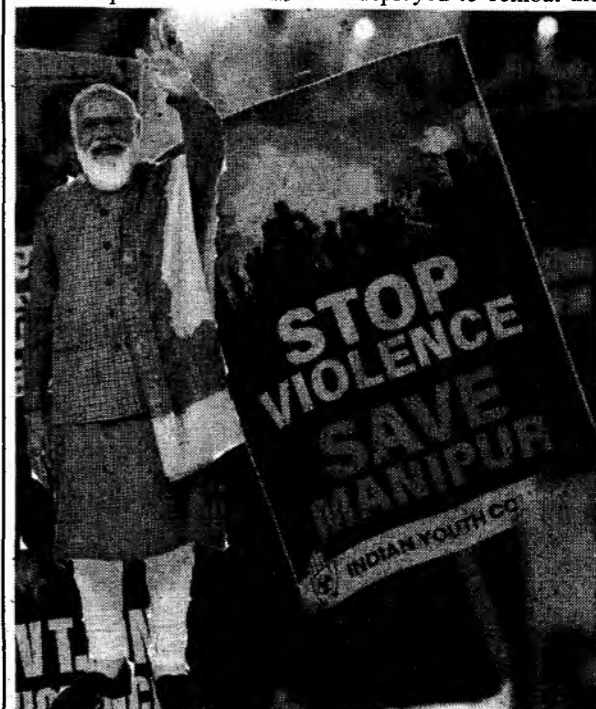
In the last 16 months 250 people have been killed

By P. Sudhir

It has been sixteen months since the ethnic conflict erupted in Manipur. Over 250 people have been killed and many more injured during the violence and 60,000 people remained displaced and living as refugees.

The central government and the BJP state government have abjectly failed to address the basic issues, which led to the conflict and allowed the situation to develop where there has

tants has heightened fears that external forces are getting involved in the conflict which will affect national security. The demand for scrapping the Suspension of Operation agreement with the Kuki militant groups, which is also demanded by chief minister N Biren Singh, will open the way for a renewed insurgency in the hill areas which can lead to the army having to be deployed to combat the



been a hardening of the ethnic divide. There are nearly 60,000 central police forces deployed mainly to create a buffer zone between the Kuki-dominated hill areas

insurgency. What began with the demand of ST status for the Meitei community and the backlash from the Kuki-Zo community was exacerbated by the partisan role of

The Modi government and the central BJP leadership, despite knowing fully well the divisive role of the chief minister, has chosen to stick with him. At the political level, the BJP and the RSS prefer to stoke the flames of Meitei extremist chauvinism as seen by the fact that the founder of the extremist outfit Arambai Tenggo, L Sanajaoba, was made a Rajya Sabha MP. The long impasse has only strengthened the hands of extremists in both communities.

and the valley where Meiteis dominate. There has been a significant deterioration in the situation in the last fortnight. On September 1, two persons were killed and nine injured in a drone attack in Kouitruk in Imphal West district, which is Meitei-dominated. It is believed that some Kuki militants were behind this attack, as also a rocket attack in another area. On September 6, five people were killed in Jiribam district, including three armed militants. Two days later, a retired army personnel of Kuki origin was beaten to death when he crossed the buffer zone to a Meitei area in Imphal West. The reality is that one community cannot enter into the other's territory.

This latest eruption of violence has led to large-scale protests by students in Imphal and other districts. The students are demanding the removal of the security advisor and the director general of police. They want the Suspension of Operation (SoO) agreement with Kuki militants annulled and transfer of the Unified Command control to the state government. The clashes with the police have led to the imposition of curfew in Imphal East and Imphal West districts and a ban on internet and mobile data services.

The failure to deal with the political issues through negotiations and dialogue with both sides has led to an undue reliance on the security forces to maintain law and order and a divided peace. This has placed the central police forces, particularly the Assam Rifles, in an unenviable position. With the Meitei politicians and groups demanding the withdrawal of the Assam Rifles and other central forces, the use of drones and rockets by Kuki mili-

What began with the demand of ST status for the Meitei community and the backlash from the Kuki-Zo community was exacerbated by the partisan role of chief minister Biren Singh, who is patronising certain extremist Meitei organisations. Recently, there was an expose of an audio file, which was submitted to the judicial commission enquiring into the riots. The audio file shows the chief minister at his official residence making remarks which are partisan and talks how he has shielded those who looted thousands of arms from the state police armoury. It is Biren Singh's refusal to adopt an impartial approach as chief minister, which is the root cause for the problem. The Modi government and the central BJP leadership, despite knowing fully well the divisive role of the chief minister, has chosen to stick with him. At the political level, the BJP and the RSS prefer to stoke the flames of Meitei extremist chauvinism as seen by the fact that the founder of the extremist outfit Arambai Tenggo, L Sanajaoba, was made a Rajya Sabha MP. The long impasse has only strengthened the hands of extremists in both communities. The abandonment of the centre's responsibility towards Manipur is made all the more stark by the fact that Prime Minister Narendra Modi has not thought it fit to visit Manipur even once in the past sixteen months. What is required is, for the central government to directly intervene and start the process of political negotiations with major ethnic groups and to create conditions for peace and normalcy, where the rights of citizens of all communities are safeguarded. If the festering sore in Manipur is not excised, it will have wide ranging repercussions for the North-East. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Justice denied through endless waits for a verdict

Editor, The phrase 'justice delayed is justice denied' is demonstrated every single day in our country where it takes years, nay decades to wait for court rulings. The victim and the family do not really see the perpetrator punished. Blame it on the lackadaisical attitude of the police and the investigating team or the delay in pronouncement of the verdict, the fact of the matter lies in the truth that there is often no justice at all. As common people and victims that fall prey to heinous crimes, the trauma they are made to go through can be felt and understood only by them. In a country like ours, it is indeed a very long wait before justice can actually be delivered. At times the punishment is not even commensurate to the crime committed. What can we look forward to from the judiciary? The law will take its own course while the victims are sufferers. Can we then not work on our own individual minds and morality? Can we not train our sons and daughters to follow the path of righteousness and our sons in particular to respect women's bodies and understand the boundaries they cannot cross? We should start from home, nurture

them well from their tender years and inculcate in them the spirit of compassion and empathy. Until then, it may not be wrong to say that loss of honour, loss of life, loss of integrity, loss of human dignity is what the victims are made to live with or even die of.

Yours etc., Jennifer Dkhar, Via email

Separation of powers imperative

Editor, It will be a mockery of justice if the executive blurs the line of the separation of power and assumes the role of the judiciary for the sake of instant justice. In the book, 'Alice in Wonderland', Lewis Carroll beautifully described it through the mouth of a mouse. The mouse narrated how a cur called Fury, serving as judge and jury, condemned it to death. Let us recall the nonsensical trial in the poem, 'The Mouse's Tale'. Fury said to a mouse that he met in the house, "Let us both go to law: I will prosecute you. Come, I'll take no denial; we must have a trial; for really this morning I've nothing to do." Said the mouse to the cur, "Such a trial, dear sir, with no jury or judge, would be wasting our breath." "I'll be judge, I'll be jury," said cunning old Fury: "I'll try the whole cause, and condemn you to death." The same kind of situa-

tion emerged as if straight from the pages of Alice in Wonderland. It was when some constructions were being razed to the ground by bulldozers. What was the reason for their demolition when those constructions were neither unauthorised nor encroachment on public roads? Those demolitions had deliberately been executed by the administration to punish some accused before the beginning or completion of the trial. Long live 'The Mouse's Tale'!

It is better late than never. The same thing can be said about the recent Supreme Court observation. After many houses were bulldozed for such a reason, the Supreme Court, at last, on September 2, questioned the bulldozing of homes and private properties of persons accused of crimes or even their relatives by States as a possible act of public retribution, saying the law does not permit the destruction of the family shelters of even convicts.

Justice B.R. Gavai asked, "How can anybody's home be demolished because he is an accused in a case? The law does not permit that... Can it happen even if a person is a convict?" The question is so obvious that a small child can answer it without any difficulty. First, no punitive action can be taken against an accused until the person is proven guilty. This is the reason why it is said that a person is innocent until proven guilty. It will be ludicrous to buy

the logic of the cur called Fury. How can "I'll take no denial" of an accused and "We must have a trial" exist simultaneously?

Now, what if the person is a convict? Even in this case, the executive cannot add more punishment to what was given by the judiciary. Moreover, can a wife be punished for the crime committed by her husband? Should the administration destroy the future of innocent children by destroying their homes if their father is a criminal? Rather, it is the duty of the state to ensure that the innocent family members of a convict may not suffer humiliation and are not forced to adopt illegal means for survival.

Yours etc., Sujit De, Kolkata

Who will be the next US President?

Editor, The editorial "Battle for the Presidency" (ST September 11, 2024) made interesting reading. Election is a super complex topic more so when the race is close. It is hard to predict the winner even though Kamala Harris is leading national polls 3 percentage points over Donald Trump (44%) with a promise of her "new way forward". The National Poll is a useful guide as to how popular the candidate is across the United States but they are not necessarily an

accurate way to predict the result of the election. Hence the editor is right it is "a million-dollar question" as to who will win the election on November 5, as voters in the US go to polls to elect their next President. Though Trump is older than Harris, in politics age is immaterial as long as you have the "fire power." Here I recall what the late Brington Buhai Lyngdoh said when asked by a scribe in Chumoukdima, Nagaland in 1998, "Sir, when will you retire?" Lyngdoh replied "Politicians never retire but simply fade away." The big question now is - will the result mean a second Donald Trump term or America's first woman President?

Yours etc., VK Lyngdoh, Via email

Concern over animal cruelty

Editor, I'm writing in response to your recent "Shillong Jottings" piece about the neglect of animals. I'd like to share my own troubling experience with animal cruelty in our community. For a while now, I've been feeding some stray dogs near my home. These dogs are gentle and shy, often waiting quietly at our gate for food. However, things took an ugly turn recently. It started when a neighbour's grandson threw stones at these dogs. Naturally, the dogs barked in self-defence,

though they were more interested in their food than causing trouble. Since then, this neighbour has been ruthlessly attacking these innocent animals, seemingly intent on harming them. We even have CCTV footage of these attacks, which our local dorbar (community council) has access to.

This neighbour has demanded that I stop feeding the strays, but I refuse. There's no law against helping hungry, helpless animals. Things got really weird when he called us at midnight, bragging about watching CCTV footage of me feeding the dogs. I mean, don't we have better things to worry about? Our area has had thefts and break-ins, but instead of using the CCTV to catch actual criminals, this guy is obsessed with whether or not I'm feeding some harmless dogs.

I want to remind everyone that there are laws against animal cruelty. This letter serves as a warning to the person responsible. If the attacks on these strays continue, I won't hesitate to take legal action. We need to be a community that cares for all its members - human and animal alike. Let's choose kindness over cruelty.

Yours etc., Jonathan Albert Khyriem, Shillong-2

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"Success is where preparation and opportunity meet."

— Bobby Unser

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVII No. 35 SHILLONG, SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 14, 2024

### Loss of food sovereignty

THE attempt by a Hindu radical group to traverse the entire country to reinforce the ban on cow slaughter is fraught with untold consequences. The group travelled to Arunachal Pradesh but was met with stiff resistance there by the All Arunachal Pradesh Students' Union (AAPSU). The AAPSU has made it clear that no one from outside the state can come to dictate their choice of food. In Nagaland, civil society groups have written to the State Government not to allow such groups to enter the State and spread their Hindutva agenda there. The Government too has decided not to give permission for such groups to spread their radical views which impinge on the eating habits of tribals. This group has declared upfront that it would engage in a country-wide campaign to elevate the cow to the status of "Rashtra Mata" or the mother of the nation and to move cow protection from the state list to the central list in the Constitution so that India becomes free of cow slaughter.

This move has far reaching consequences for the tribals of North East India whose main source of protein is beef and until a few years ago, beef was the cheapest meat. Its price shot up after the brouhaha over banning cow slaughter and much of the sale and transportation of cows became an underground activity since Assam has banned cow slaughter and all cows are transported via that state. The gau rakshak (cow protection) group is scheduled to have a mass awareness programme in Shillong on October 2 and it was supposed to have addressed a press conference at the Shillong Press Club on September 12 which for some reason did not materialise. Meanwhile the Thma U Rangli U Juki (TUR) a political group and the Hyniewtrep Youth Council (HYC) have threatened to have a beef party should the group come to Shillong on the assigned date.

The larger implications of such actions by a Hindu radical group is that the liberal space is closing in and people's food choices are sought to be controlled by a majoritarian mandate. This is not what the minority tribals had signed up for when they made a pact with India through the Instrument of Accession. At the time they were assured that minority rights would be respected and their cultural ethos which includes their food habits would be sacrosanct. Since 2014, however the people of North East India are realising that they are gradually losing their rights over religion when Sunday is being violated and official meetings are scheduled on this day. And now comes the intrusion into their kitchens which is a sacred space. The North Eastern states have to make common cause on this matter if they are to resist further intrusions into the other aspects of their cultural moorings.

## From leaked tapes to drone attacks: Crimes are those that the powerless commit

By Haoginlen Chongloi

Three weeks ago, TheWire published a series of news reports related to the leaked audiotapes purportedly belonging to the Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh who the Kukis accused of hatching communal conspiracy and launching a state-sponsored terror against them. The audio purportedly appears to have been recorded in a meeting where Singh was speaking on the violence. The report prepared by Sangeeta Baroah Pisharoty mentions how Singh, the state chief minister who also holds the Home portfolio, goes against the advice and instructions of the Union Home Minister, Amit Shah over the use of bombs, among others, by state forces against Kuki armed men.

The explosive revelation by TheWire has caught the attention of the masses and concerned citizens. However, within no time the matter has subsided and soon disappeared from the scene. While the authenticity of the tape is yet to be ascertained, the nature of violence lasting 16 months where several accounts implicate the state authority, demands a little more space, time and attention. A revelation which expects cognizance from legal and law enforcing agencies is still missing. Demanding prosecution of Singh and for speedy political settlement, the Kuki-Zo ethnic group organized a mass rally all across Kuki towns and in New Delhi. Beyond receiving coverage in the media, New Delhi seems to be least

within 24 hours of the protest rally, a heavy gunfight broke out in Koutruk of Kangpokpi-Imphal border between armed Kuki and Meitei men. The incident led to the death of a Meitei woman and left nine others injured. The Meitei group accused the Kuki group of deploying drones against civilians whereas the Kuki group vehemently denied the charges. In the meantime, the state government instituted a five-member committee to 'critically examine and study' the nature of drones and find ways and means to counter such, if proven right. By virtue of its power, the state government has successfully drawn the attention of the population from the leaked tapes to drones. With the purported 'drone attacks' making national headlines, the leaked audio tapes implicating state authorities in the violence has been lost in the noise.

The issue of 'drone attacks' has become another goldmine for broadcast media channels to raise their Television Rating Points. News anchor Arnab Goswami, chief of the Republic TV, glibly pointed to the involvement of 'foreign hands' in the violence and described it as an 'attack on India'. He did this by showing printed pho-

tos of crude rockets which he claims were fired by Kukis against Meiteis. However, TheQuint debunked the photos as misinformation and made it clear that it has nothing to do with Manipur violence. The picture of rockets on display which Goswami presents to the nations originally belongs to the armed militants based in Gaza, not in Manipur. However, the show has done enough harm already. Social media handlers shared Goswami's videos in 'bits and parts' and the experience has been unimaginable. It turned an ethnic conflict in the cornermost region of the country into a national conflict; a practicing journalist with no moral or ethical responsibility employs this method to stay relevant by manufacturing an atmosphere of fear,

the bandwagon of racial profiling against Kukis even before he became the state chief minister. Now, he defends the looting of 6000 automatic rifles and live bullet rounds counting in terms of lakhs, acquired the latest mine-proof Kalyani military vehicles, and the latest being the acquisition of Medium Machine Guns (MMG) basically meant for Indian military; all for use against Indian citizens whom he called 'illegal immigrants' and 'narco-terrorists.' Chomsky's 'media-mind control' finds its place here again. By creating a climate of fear and hate against Kukis, Singh managed to wield enormous influence over the Meitei population which could be somewhere around 20 lakh people; commands 40-50 legislators, who hold the state's

marked a great return from a near 'disastrous exit' to 'a man fighting United States and China,' as concluded by 'yellow' prime time shows. In fact, it was the valley-based secessionist groups such as the UNLF, PLA, PREPAK and KYKL with their bases in Myanmar, China and Bangladesh who were responsible for fanning the present violence. However, the media have made every Indian believe that Kukis who never had any secessionist intent in the last 70 years are colluding with foreign agents.

In fact, drones have been used for surveillance by both conflicting parties since the early months of the conflict. Campaigns and donations to purchase drones were a common and an open affair among Kukis and Meiteis. Presently, none could ascertain who had an edge over the possession and use of drones in combat, or whether previous casualties were inflicted by drone attacks. The death of a woman in what is purported to be a drone attack, if proven true, signifies an alarming state of what the state could experience in the near future. But before drawing hasty conclusions there are pertinent questions one must consider: if the victim happens to be a Kuki will prime time channels show similar enthusiasm over the matter? Are there similar enquiries initiated over the death of Kuki women in Imphal, or will the state government constitute a committee to ascertain the cause and circumstances leading to such killings if victims belong to a tribal community?

Now, the state government formed a five-member panel to critically examine and study the use of drones leading to the death of a Meitei woman. If the government is serious about the use of drones, it should not be limited to a particular incident alone. It should also constitute a panel to find out if any tribal women and children ever got killed or injured by aerial bombs dropped by Meitei militants and state forces against Kukis. Once the drone issue gets over, it may focus on other killings committed by state forces and militant groups against innocent women and children. In doing so, the powerless minorities should not always remain at the receiving end when the powerful violate the rule of law. Justice should not be selective. It's 16 months now that crimes are defined and the penalty determined by those controlling the state machinery. The Manipur state government's intervention in the crisis and its selective justice, once again justifies the Kuki demand for Separate Administration.

(Haoginlen Chongloi is an independent researcher. He is interested in northeast history, ethnic relations and tribal studies)



danger and anger.

The state government's complicity in the violence; the nature of central intervention and the way the fourth pillar of democracy presents the conflict reminds us of the famous lines of Noam Chomsky who reportedly said: 'for the powerful, crimes are those that others commit.' For over 16 months now, the Kukis stood against the majority community, aided and abetted by the state government. The state government on the other hand doesn't deny or shy away from the allegations but insists that non-indigenous communities - a reference to Kukis - be stripped of the benefits the state provides. Even before the conflict broke out, N Biren Singh habitually described Kukis as 'illegal immigrants' and 'narco-terrorists.' This happened under the watchful eyes of the government and its various agencies. By failing to take cognizance of such offenses, Manipur shows the path of a serious identity crisis we Indians are going to witness in the near future. It's going to be a case of who is the greater or lesser Indian.

Evidently, the state chief minister has been leading

most important positions in the state machinery. For a small state like Manipur, he undoubtedly is untouchable. Hence New Delhi has to bend its principles. The recent leaked tapes where he himself stated how he started the 'operations' could have landed him under intense scrutiny in a land where the rule of law prevails. But this didn't happen.

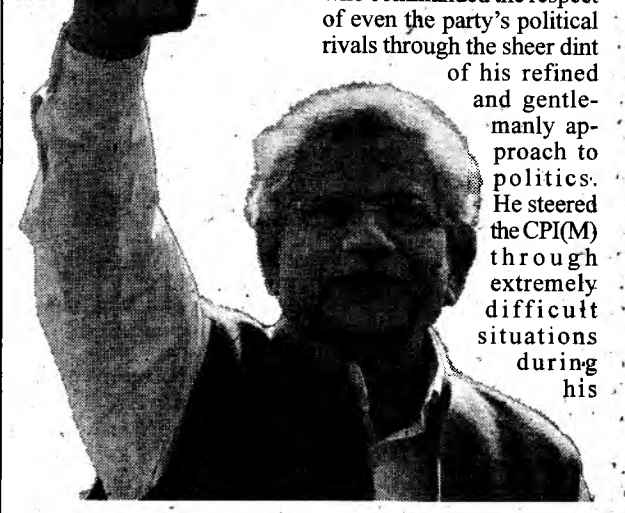
At the time when Singh was battling a credibility crisis, the 'drone war' came which completely redirected the course of discussion from leaked tapes to drone attacks. In fact, the gunfight at Koutruk reshaped Singh's image as a leader against all forces. The Kuki Inpi and other Kuki organizations have vehemently objected to the involvement of foreign hands and denied the use of drones in the attack. It stated that the gunfight broke after Kuki volunteers intercepted Meitei armed men who apparently were on their way to lay an ambush. Whatever the truth is, nobody cares. In the face of media bombardment at state and national level, the voice of a tribe with a population just over five lakhs with no platform for effective defense has to lose the battle. For Singh, it

## Country loses an illustrious son in Yechury's untimely demise Architect of opposition alliance, a brilliant tactician and ideologue

By P. Sreekumar

There is a saying in Malayalam that death is a clown who lacks a sense of the stage. The adage has been proved yet again in the sad and untimely passing away of Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)) general secretary Sitaram Yechury.

An epoch has come to a close with Yechury's exit from the political scene, which he strode like a colossus. The end has come at a time when his presence was most needed. The battle



against the forces of communalism which he led from the front along with leaders

and cutting across political barriers. As a mark of respect, CPI(M) offices in the State flew the party flag at half mast. CPI(M) workers raised a black flag in front of the party's headquarters at AKG Centre in the State capital. Leading those who paid rich tributes to the departed communist leader were Governor Arif Mohammed Khan and Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan. In his condolence message, the Governor referred to Yechury's unflinching commitment to democracy and people's welfare. Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan remembered him as a veteran communist leader who commanded the respect of even the party's political rivals through the sheer dint of his refined and gentlemanly approach to politics. He steered the CPI(M) through extremely difficult situations during his

nine-year term as the general secretary, adding that it was a personal loss for him, too.

"The country owes him a deep debt of gratitude for ensuring, along with other political party leaders, that the attempts by the fascist forces to usher in an authoritarian regime were comprehensively defeated. Not only that, Comrade Yechury also saw to it that the nation now has a viable alternative which is strong enough to ensure that India remains a democratic and secular country playing its assigned role in the comity of nations and inspiring other countries to thwart the machinations of authoritarian forces."

of other political parties is only half won.

It would be no exaggeration to say that Yechury played a pivotal role in arresting the ominous march of the communal forces in the recently-held Lok Sabha elections. If the INDIA alliance has managed to score a decisive victory by forcing the BJP to fall below the simple majority mark, it is due, to a great extent, to the tireless efforts and signal contributions made by comrade Yechury.

The country owes him a deep debt of gratitude for ensuring, along with other political party leaders, that the attempts by the fascist forces to usher in an authoritarian regime were comprehensively defeated. Not only that, Comrade Yechury also saw to it that the nation now has a viable alternative which is strong enough to ensure that India remains a democratic and secular country playing its assigned role in the comity of nations and inspiring other countries to thwart the machinations of authoritarian forces.

Yechury had a soft corner for Kerala. Comrades in Kerala fondly recall that he shared a very close bond with the people of the State and especially Kannur ever since the district hosted the 23rd party congress. The ties became closer when he participated in the Martyrs Day celebrations at Karivelur in 2022 and Kavumbai in 2023. He was also active in the recent Lok Sabha election campaign. Mention must also be made of his special friendship with veteran CPI(M) leader V S Achuthanandan, whom he described as the Fidel Castro of India.

His demise has touched off a wave of sorrow, shock and disbelief across the State

Leader of the Opposition V D Sathesan described him as an astute politician unshackled by ideological fetters. Yechury also realized the paramount need to have an understanding with like-minded parties, including the Congress to frustrate the designs of the BJP-RSS regime.

CPI State secretary Binoy Viswom fondly recalled his decades-long political and personal association with Yechury. He was an avid reader and a brilliant conversationalist. The hallmark of his character was pleasantness. He was also a Marxist intellectual who succeeded in marrying ideology and practical politics with effortless ease, Viswom recalled. It goes without saying that the country and its politics are poorer for the passing away of Yechury. He belongs to the select breed of politicians who could speak the language of the man on the street. A multifaceted personality, Yechury cannot be tied down to any particular label. In his ability to explain even the most complex of matters, he was second only to the redoubtable EMS, who saw the immense talent in young Yechury and played a big role in his ascent to national politics.

He was also a past master in building coalitions and bringing disparate ideological strands together. His USP was his ability to form lasting friendships with political rivals and earn their respect. Leaders like him are no longer made. India will remember for ever his great contributions to enriching the country's political discourse and firming up the concept of democracy and secularism. A Red Salute to him. Rest In Peace, comrade. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Show empathy for those enslaved by addiction

Editor,

I am writing this with the hope of touching, if not everyone's mind and heart but at least a single soul. Addiction, mainly substance abuse has flooded our streets and robbed the lives of both the young and old. It is like a generational curse that has entered almost every household and like death, affects both the rich and poor. While not just certain, extra measures must be taken to eradicate its cause. I would like to emphasize something that society has forgotten. We don't condone addiction but we should also not condemn someone in the grip of substance abuse. Every person has flaws but given the right support, they have the potential for a detour to start things over; start things right. What breaks my heart is in witnessing how people easily discriminate instead of uplifting one another. The irony is how health care workers in treatment centres and small organisations treat such people - with utterly no respect and indirectly telling them that they can never

change so why bother trying? There are some though, that choose to be chained by such influence over and over again. Now each to his own, but again there are many who are trying really hard to face themselves in the mirror or even wake up to face another day. Trust me! Speaking from experience, our support can change them - despite and in spite of the addiction.

Yesterday I cried on seeing my best friend who has been sober for 3 years though still dependent on prescribed medication to be able to lead a normal life. He's trying day in and day out to reduce his medication so that he can finally embrace a life free of medicines. He needed aid for treatment of some other illness but yet again because of his medical history he was suspected, disrespected, shamed, questioned and doubted even more. Well, he's not the only one but their voices can never be heard because they are considered taboo to begin with.

But they need help, so if we think that we are not like them and are better than them then shouldn't we be the ones acting with empathy? Yes! Our tone and choice of words do matter! If a single drop of blood can make a huge difference, so can a single smile, a kind gesture, a non-judgemental

attitude. Imagine one single person can contribute so much to the world. If you're reading this I hope it starts with you!

Yours etc.,  
Aletheia Hitgallut.  
Via email

#### Reckless two-wheeler riders and violation of no entry

Editor,

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the STP for their recent efforts in cracking down on tinted glass violations, as reported in The Shillong Times dated September 7, 2024. This initiative is greatly appreciated by many citizens, including myself, as it enhances public safety and helps uphold traffic regulations across the city.

However, I would like to bring to your attention several other pressing traffic issues that require immediate action.

Reckless Driving by Two-Wheelers: There has been a growing concern over the reckless driving of two-wheeler riders, commonly referred to as "street hawk" or "Chapri riders." These riders not only create a nuisance

on the roads but also pose a severe risk to pedestrians as well as four wheelers. The recent accident in front of Don Bosco Technical School (DBTS) is a glaring example of the dangers posed by such reckless riding. The fate of the young boy involved in the accident remains unknown, raising concerns about the safety of pedestrians in our city.

We are also left questioning whether any action has been taken against the rider responsible for the accident. While the installation of CCTV cameras around the city is commendable, I have doubts about their effectiveness in such situations. If a reckless rider strikes a pedestrian and flees without a visible/altered registration plate or sometimes without a registered number plate, will the cameras be able to track them down? I have personally observed two-wheelers passing by traffic officers without any apparent fear of consequences, which further undermines public confidence in these surveillance systems.

I urge you to address this issue by not only enforcing stricter penalties for such reckless behavior but also ensuring that the presence of CCTV cameras and traffic officers genuinely deters such violations.

Violation of No Entry

and One-Way Rules on Don Bosco - Stephen Hall - Gold Gym Road.

Another critical issue is the blatant disregard for No Entry and One-Way rules by both two- and four-wheelers on the road stretching from Don Bosco, via Stephen Hall, to Gold Gym. This road is permanently designated as a One-Way route, yet many vehicles, particularly two-wheelers, frequently violate these rules. The road is especially hazardous due to its blind curves, where drivers tend to speed up, assuming no oncoming traffic. These violations create a dangerous situation for law-abiding road users who may not expect oncoming vehicles in a One-Way zone.

No Entry Violations at Jacob's Ladder Road.

Additionally, I would like to highlight that many two-wheelers are blatantly flouting the No Entry rule at Jacob's Ladder Road, even during broad daylight. The frequent violations raise a serious question: who is going to catch them? This lack of enforcement emboldens reckless behavior, putting everyone at risk. It is crucial to ensure that these rules are enforced consistently, not just at select times or locations.

Suggested Solution: Auto-Fine System Based on Camera Records.

To address these issues effectively, I suggest introducing an automated fine system based on camera records, similar to the systems already in place in many other states. This system could automatically issue fines via SMS directly to the registered owner of the offending vehicle. Such a system would not only improve compliance with traffic rules but also reduce the need for constant manual enforcement, making our roads safer for everyone.

I sincerely hope that the Shillong Traffic Police will take these concerns seriously and implement the necessary measures to address them. The safety of pedestrians, drivers, and all road users should remain our collective priority. By combining technology with stricter enforcement, we can create a safer environment for everyone in Shillong.

Thank you for your attention to these matters. I trust that the necessary steps will be taken to address these concerns and prevent any further incidents.

Yours etc.,  
P Majaw,  
Shillong-1

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# The Moon surprisingly had recent volcanic activity



Volcanoes were erupting on the Moon as recently as 120 million years ago, evidence collected by a Chinese spacecraft suggests. Until the last few years, scientists had thought volcanic activity ended on the Moon around 2 billion years ago.

The findings, published in Science, come from analysis of lunar rock and soil delivered to Earth by China's Chang'e 5 spacecraft in 2020. While these results are difficult to reconcile with the accepted history of lunar volcanism, it's possible some areas of the Moon's interior were more enriched in radioactive elements that generate the heat that drives volcanic activity.

The region where Chang'e 5 landed, called Oceanus Procellarum, may be one such area where rocks were enriched in these heat-producing elements.

Volcanism is a major way in

which all rocky planetary bodies lose their heat.

The rocky bodies in our Solar System are Earth, Venus, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter's satellite Io, and Earth's satellite, the Moon.

All available evidence suggests that Venus is currently volcanically active. On Mars, we can date the ages of formation of large lava flows by counting the numbers of impact craters on these flows.

This crater-counting technique relies on the fact that craters form randomly and uniformly across planetary surfaces, so highly cratered terrains are considered older. The results suggest that Mars, which is half the size of Earth, is volcanically active every few million years.

This is expected, because larger bodies conserve heat better than smaller ones. On this basis Mercury, which is a third of Earth's size, and our Moon, a quarter the

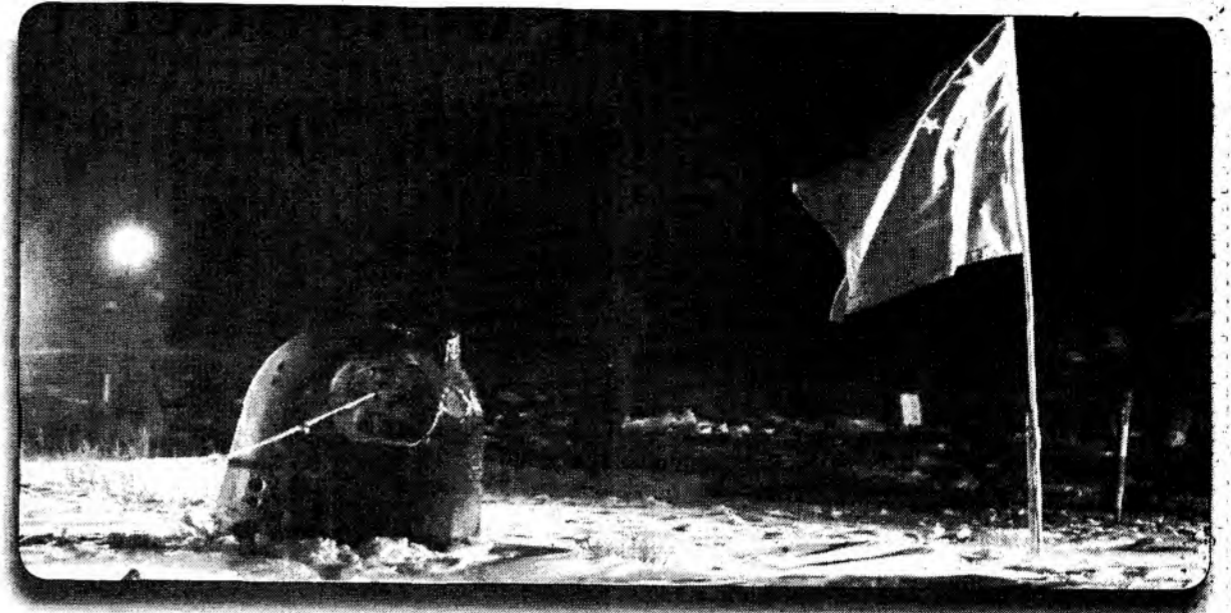
size of Earth, should have been volcanically dead for about 2 billion years.

The same should be true of Io, which is similar in size to our Moon. However, tidal forces generated by gravitational interactions with Jupiter give Io an additional, strong heat source. Io is very volcanically active as a result.

### The Moon's dark areas

Most eruptions on the Moon took place near the edges of giant depressions formed early in the Moon's history by asteroid impacts. Lava flooded the interiors of these basins to form the dark areas on the Moon's near side. These areas are called maria (singular mare), the Latin for seas, because the flat sheets of lava were mistaken for expanses of water by early observers.

Analyses of the composition and age of samples returned from



China's Chang'e 5 return capsule touched down on Earth on December 17 2020. (X)

these mare areas by the six Apollo missions and three Soviet robotic probes were consistent with the belief there had been no geologically recent volcanic activity on the Moon.

This understanding persisted until very high-resolution images of the lunar surface from the US Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter mission became available following the mission's launch in 2009. Counts of the numbers of very small impact craters revealed a lack of craters in some volcanic areas with unusual surface textures, named irregular mare patches (IMPs).

The simplest explanation for this was that these IMPs were young, typically about 100 million years old. This is 20 times younger than the 2 billion-year youngest age that had been expected.

In an attempt to reconcile these observations with the accepted history of lunar volcanism, it was pointed out that the lack of any atmosphere on the Moon would make eruptions there significantly different from those on Earth.

The lack of confining pressure would have allowed erupting lavas to release almost all of the gaseous compounds dissolved in them, al-

lowing some lava flows to contain very large numbers of gas bubbles - to the extent of being a foam.

Meteoroid impacts into this soft foam would produce much smaller craters than in solid rock, thus causing the crater-counting method to give ages that were too young.

This issue has seen much debate, and the best way to resolve it is the return of samples to Earth for detailed laboratory analysis.

Chang'e 5 brought back samples from a very large lava flow which was already known, from crater-counting, to be relatively young in geological terms.

Initial analyses of many fragments of the lava were consistent with the long-accepted theory that lunar volcanism stopped 2 billion years ago. However, closer examination of the Chinese samples, as described in the new Science paper, focused on some of the smallest fragments - the majority from rock shattered and melted into droplets by meteoroid impacts. Three of these 3,000 droplets were identified from their detailed chemistry as volcanic in origin, and are only 120 million years old - very similar to the young ages inferred for IMPs elsewhere

on the Moon.

### Lunar eruptions

Lunar eruptions should have involved high lava fountains like those commonly seen erupting in Hawaii, for example. While most of these droplets would have accumulated into lava flows, some would have been thrown out for tens of kilometres to other parts of the Moon's surface.

The three "volcanic droplets" identified in the Chang'e 5 sample were probably not erupted from the same vent as the bulk of the rock and soil delivered to Earth.

This would explain why these droplets are much younger than the lava flow at Chang'e 5's landing site.

These three glassy droplets are the first physical evidence we have for anomalously recent volcanic activity on the Moon. There would have to have been much higher concentrations of heat-producing radioactive elements in some areas than others for volcanic activity to have occurred as recently as the new results imply. So, these findings could prompt a major revision in our understanding of how the Moon developed. (The Conversation)

## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 15, 2024

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Venus trine Jupiter on your solar return chart ensures an excellent year ahead. You will be in a position of strength and will call the shots. In business and trade you will bring new methods into practice and this will bring you profits this year. You will focus on your business/profession and get favorable results. You will be transparent and fair in your partnership/business dealings. You will invest in shares, land or building etc. You will make good financial gains. Those who want to go abroad for higher studies/job can do so. Those in politics, media, academics and social service will get good name and fame. Your love life is going to be very good. You will get numerous opportunities to interact with the opposite sex. And will also enjoy all the attention that you get. A very charming and lovable person is likely to enter in your life. You can decide to get married. You will keep travelling due to work. And also make trips along with your family.

'This week for you'

**Aries :** (March 21 - April 20) You would express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with people. With luck on your side, your focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. Your hobbies, leisure time, moments spent with children, all come into focus. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and well being. There are strong chances of a pilgrimage and you may visit a holy place.

**Taurus :** (April 21 - May 21) Good fortune at work opens new horizons for expansion and growth. You might be a bit of a showman at this time. It's a great time to make improvements to your regular routine. Your self-esteem and ego are tied up in the work you do. This phase highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. New beginnings are in store, whether this means a fresh start in existing relationships or new ones altogether. An established business concern flourishes and partnerships may expand into triangular collaborations. You may visit and spend a lot of time in the company of your beloved one. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency.

**Gemini :** (May 22 - June 21) The planetary configuration this week brings communication, creativity and authority. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you. This is a good time to promote harmony and goodwill on the job front. You still good team spirit and you are more tactful with your co-workers and this brings harmony and a joyous atmosphere at the work place. You spend quality time with your beloved and go on fun trips, shopping and short journeys. Avoid conflicts with family members. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you.

**Cancer :** (June 22 - July 22) This period brings good financial returns as you communicate well with co workers. You would exchange ideas with your beloved. Along the same lines, do not keep yourself away from people, enjoy the feeling of togetherness. You have been highly motivated to make more money and improve your financial status. You will be able to finalize a property related issue and this brings monetary gains. Your domestic life takes top priority and you devote time with them to boost your feeling of stability and support within the family. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships.

**Leo :** (July 23 - August 23) As the planetary configuration boosts your self-confidence you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently and boldly. Take advantage of your courage and go ahead towards achieving desired goals. Your thinking is more creative than usual. You are filled with new ideas and would be very good in expressing them to others. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. You give a new approach to communication projects. You may be especially focused on pleasing your partner and together you may do some redecorating. You might also enjoy analyzing different health or nutrition programs.

**Virgo :** (August 24 - September 22) There will be enhanced sensitivity in your relationships. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental. You would work in association of likeminded people and this brings confidence and you use

your best talents and co-relate all activities related to business, work and growth opportunities in the world of competition. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering during this phase. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

**Libra :** (September 23 - October 23) This period brings good-luck for people in love as they spend great time together and listen to the inner feelings of each other. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes may come. Your family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. An overseas trip is on cards. This is a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

**Scorpio :** (October 24 - November 22) Good financial returns are foretold at this time. You might have a more materialistic view of life and are more attracted to objects and possessions that give you a sense of comfort and status. You would also lean towards extravagance. You will be able to make good use of your talents, work experience and would incorporate creativity into your work and projects in hand. You may visit religious places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities or a structured exercise routine.

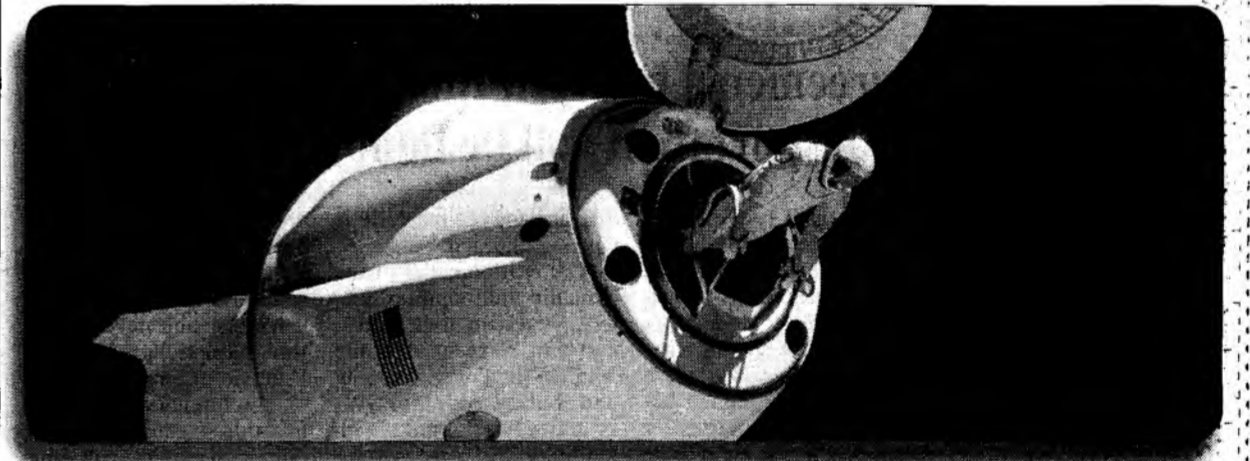
**Sagittarius :** (November 23 - December 21) You resolve an important issue that has been causing stress for some time. You also give a new approach to handling money and personal resources or new sources of income. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings as your continuous efforts will bring fruitful results. Avoid confrontations and arguments at the work place, as this would spoil time and energy and bring no results. You have more work, less time so go ahead to meet challenges and complete the desired task. There may be a development of romance at your work place.

**Capricorn :** (December 22 - January 20) The planetary configuration during this period will promote your luck in service and work related areas. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval. Try to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach when meeting people. It is advisable to be prudent in matters of career. Avoid hasty and rash decision when it comes to change. Give the matter a new thought and consideration as it deserves more time to materialize a deal. At home, change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

**Aquarius :** (January 21 - February 18) This period bodes well for good luck in family and with people you care for. Sharing your philosophical interests with a romantic partner may be especially appealing to you. You will have the ability to build on financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on the cards. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers and this brings favorable results. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and will enhance your reputation and public standing. You may feel restless at times; eat healthy food. Yoga and meditation are recommended at this time to alleviate stress.

**Pisces :** (February 19 - March 20) There would be more cooperation and harmony in relationships. You are patient, laborious and clever with material aspects and manage finances and business ventures with ingenuity and success. You tackle a multitude of domestic and work related issues and handle all matters successfully. The ability to express and communicate your ideas is extremely important to you this time. Surprises surrounding intimate matters, shared finances and resources and financial support may be in store. You might pay attention to various ways to increase personal funds, resulting in more than one avenue for monetary gain. There will be a fluctuation in energy levels before a balance is achieved.

## A billionaire & an engineer complete the first-ever private spacewalk



Two astronauts have carried out the first-ever commercial spacewalk, using new less-bulky spacesuits designed by SpaceX.

Tech billionaire Jared Isaacman (who also funded the mission) and SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis together spent almost half an hour outside their spacecraft at an altitude of some 700 km, further from Earth than any human since the Apollo Moon landings.

The brief jaunt into the void is a significant milestone for commercial spaceflight, with the spacecraft, suits and the overall mission all being SpaceX productions.

### What's so interesting about the mission?

The Polaris Dawn mission stands out for several reasons. In terms of science and technology, the highlight is the test of new spacesuits for extravehicular activity (or EVA). A spacesuit that allows an astronaut to leave their vessel is a small spacecraft in its own right, and interest in new, modern suits is growing as NASA's planned Artemis missions to the Moon approach.

The mission is travelling around Earth in a highly elliptical orbit, which means its altitude ranges from 192 km way out to 1,400 km. The orbit is taking astronauts through regions of high radiation, including the South Atlantic Anomaly, and may allow for testing of the new suits under these extreme conditions.

Polaris Dawn also carries 36 different experiments, many studying the effects of spaceflight on the human body.

Polaris Dawn is the first of three missions Isaacman plans with SpaceX, which he says will "serve the bigger purpose of opening up space for everyone and making humankind a multiplanetary species". The second may aim to boost the Hubble Space Telescope's orbit and prolong its life, while the third may use SpaceX's reusable Starship rocket (which is currently in the early stages of testing).

### Commercial spaceflight on the way up

Perhaps the most significant thing about Polaris Dawn is what it suggests about the future of spaceflight. This is a commercial mission, operated by SpaceX using its own technology without the involvement of government space agencies.

It is not the "space tourism" we have seen from the likes of Blue Origin, sending rich people on sub-orbital joyrides. While the SpaceX mission is funded via private wealth, it is making a genuine contribution to scientific knowledge - and to the future of spaceflight.

One crucial feature of government space programmes has been the rigorous training and selection process for astronauts, ensuring those who make it to space know exactly what they are doing. SpaceX is continuing this

high level of professionalism, with four extremely well-qualified and prepared astronauts participating in Polaris Dawn.

The Polaris Dawn spacewalk comes as two NASA astronauts are stranded on the International Space Station due to problems with the Starliner space vehicle, which Boeing built for the US space agency at great expense. It is now expected the pair will be rescued next February by a SpaceX vehicle (developed for far less money than Boeing's).

### For all humankind?

The rise of non-government space flight has its critics, who say commercial imperatives and private control have no place in what should be a purely scientific endeavour. SpaceX (with its controversial owner Elon Musk) has also faced criticisms over environmental concerns and treatment of staff. However, the huge improvements in space technology and reductions in cost that have occurred in recent years are largely due to commercial involvement. When humanity returns to the Moon - and if we one day travel to Mars and beyond - private companies will play an essential role. And while Polaris Dawn is clearly a passion project for Isaacman, it's not a vanity project. It will have real benefits in terms of science and technology - and that's good news for all future human endeavours, in space and here on Earth. (The Conversation)

*"Time flies over us, but leaves its shadow behind."*

—Nathaniel Hawthorne

## The Shillong Times

Vol No: LXVII No. 37 SHILLONG, MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 16, 2024

### Kejriwal's postures

THE surprise announcement from AAP founder Arvind Kejriwal to resign from the Delhi Chief Minister's post is a welcome gesture. His image has been tainted on account of the charges levelled against him and his former deputy chief minister Manish Sisodia – that they had conspired to tweak the Delhi government's liquor policy and derived financial benefits from a hidden deal. The Supreme Court granted him bail two days ago and questioned the manner in which he was denied bail for the past six months. Kejriwal's declaration is that he would now occupy the exalted post only if and after he gets the people's verdict to remain in power. Sisodia, who is out on bail after a period of incarceration, too has taken a similar stand. Even granted that Kejriwal hesitated to resign as CM despite his arrest, his present decision is in keeping with the good traditions of democracy. Assembly polls are due there in a few months' time.

The Delhi Excise Policy case registered by the central investigation agencies raised doubts about the integrity of Kejriwal, Sisodia and the AAP itself. Kejriwal's argument that the BJP-led central government was trying to fix him cannot be taken at face value. There is no smoke without a fire. Yet, fact is also that the Modi establishment has been misusing the central agencies to target its political rivals while the corrupt in the BJP, and those that are siding with it, are either given a long rope or the cases against them are soft-pedalled. Investigations against business sharks who committed grave financial fraud have also been dragging. Several opposition chief ministers have been framed in recent times in corruption cases, while Prime Minister Narendra Modi is cohabiting with tainted Chandrababu Naidu.

The Delhi liquor scam could not have been "invented" due solely to political rivalry. However, fact is also that commissions from liquor barons are a main source of income for all ruling parties across states, and the BJP is no exception. Yet, Kejriwal should have been mindful of the fact that his party was formed with the express purpose of fighting corruption in the establishment. It is understandable that politics is a different ball game and far removed from social activism. Huge funds are required to fight every election. Since Kejriwal set his eyes beyond Delhi, won power for his party in Punjab and sought to win polls in Haryana, Goa etc, he might have adopted unacceptable means to raise funds for the party. No one has yet certified him to be corrupt. His government, through repeated terms in Delhi, did a good job and took care of the common man. All these however cannot exonerate him from guilt, unless the court passes such a verdict.

# Murder at the border, smuggling & revenue leakage

By H H Mohrmen

The murder of a high-ranking Bangladeshi politician inside the country's borders is startling, but it also opens a can of worms that afflicts not only the borders but the state as a whole. This murder cannot be viewed in isolation; it sheds light on the rot present at the border, which is connected to other illegal activities throughout the state. The incident helps us see the larger picture, linking the border to various unlawful operations across Meghalaya.

Meghalaya shares a lengthy 443 km border with Bangladesh, and it is an open secret that this is a highly porous border. It is also an accepted fact that due to the challenging terrain, it is nearly impossible to monitor the border effectively. The porous nature of the border was further exposed by the recent murder of a high-profile Bangladeshi politician within Indian territory. That the murder happened despite the government imposing curfew in all the border villages raises more questions that need answers.

### Manning the border: A balancing act for the BSF

Beyond the region's difficult topography, the people living on both sides of the border share the same ethnic backgrounds and cultures. These cross-border communities regularly visit one another for occasions such as sickness, bereavements, weddings, and even church services, assemblies, and meetings. This shared culture adds to the difficulty of securing the border. It's unrealistic to expect these communities to obtain passports and visas for such visits, so certain arrangements have been made to ease cross-border movement for social purposes, albeit unofficially.

Dawki, a border port, has been a legal route for exporting goods from India to Bangladesh since independence, but it's also widely known that smuggling occurs on both sides. Despite both governments opening border haunts to facilitate trade between the two countries, especially among people living along the border, illegal trade remains a source of livelihood for many on either side of the border.

### Cattle smuggling and illegal trade at the border

Like international borders worldwide, this one has become a hub for smuggling. During Japan's electronics boom, all the electronic goods in Meghalaya came from Bangladesh. Even second-hand or used clothes made their way into the state from Bangladesh. Today, people still refer to second-hand clothes as "Sula Bangla" or "clothes from Bangladesh." It is only later that they are called second-hand clothes.

Although the smuggling continues, the products have changed: puffed rice, biscuits, chips, fish, and even gram are now smuggled from Bangladesh to India. In return, items such as bidis, Indian-made foreign liquor, and sugar are smuggled from Meghalaya to Bangladesh.

In recent times, cattle and buffaloes have become the most sought-after goods, making cattle smuggling a lucrative business for people on both sides of the border. Local media frequently reports cases of smugglers paying herders ₹2,000 to guide cows across the border. Smugglers even compensate landowners whose property is used for the passage of these cattle. This relatively recent phenomenon of cattle smuggling on the India-Bangladesh border has grown into a thriving business.

It's easy to point fingers at the border patrol forces when such incidents occur, but the question that needs answering is - Is guarding the border solely the responsibility of the BSF? As already mentioned, securing the border is a tightrope walk for the BSF on a daily basis.

### Controlling smuggling: More than just the BSF's responsibility

The responsibility for preventing smuggling doesn't end with the BSF; other agencies must also ensure that illegal goods don't reach the border. It requires coordinated efforts from all the forces in the state to curb illegal trade. Smuggled goods don't simply appear at the border; they are transported from elsewhere. What are the state police and the transport department doing to prevent this? How do these goods reach the border undetected? And is the transport department effectively ensuring that only trucks carrying legal goods travel on the highways?

### Has the Transport Department failed the State?

The Transport Department has weigh-bridges and checkpoints at several locations, particularly at the entry and exit points to the State, yet these government agencies have failed to stop trucks carrying illegal consignments. The press has reported that sugar was transported by trucks without being caught by the Police or Transport officials before reaching the border.

What about goods being transported into India? There have been reports of areca nuts (betel nuts) from Burma/Myanmar entering the state via Assam, and these trucks travel through many highways. Why haven't these trucks been intercepted and their consignments confiscated by the Transport De-

partment? How is it that, despite the large government machinery in operation, the trucks and illegal consignments reach the state undetected?

While the illegal transport of coal from Meghalaya continues, overloaded trucks carrying boulders and limestone on the state's highways also go unchecked. These activities lead to significant revenue loss for the state exchequer and it cannot happen without the knowledge of those in the helm of power. The question is: who benefits from this illegality? In the last MDA regime, the blame was on the "high levels," but today, there is no more "high level," as everything is concentrated in one center of power within the government.

### Murder at the border

The discovery of the body of Bangladeshi politician Ishaque Ali Panna more than 1 km inside Indian Territory is not surprising. Initially, the BSF denied that anyone could enter the country, especially with the border villages under night curfew. The BSF stated that the India-Bangladesh border in Meghalaya is fully secured and denied reports of illegal entry by Bangladeshis. However, two or three days later, Panna's body was found 1.2 or 1.3 kilometers inside Indian Territory in Dona village, East Jaintia Hills district. Panna, an ally of the deposed Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, had reportedly fled to Meghalaya to save his life after a mob burned down his home.

Many questions arise regarding the murder of the politician within the country's territory. Why did he attempt to cross via Dona village? Those in the know are aware that the usual entry and exit points are elsewhere, as the terrain on this side of the border is difficult to traverse. Dona and other villages along the East Jaintia Hills border are more commonly used for cattle smuggling, not human crossing. Panna may have been given bad advice or even betrayed by those he trusted with his life. If his intention was to seek asylum in India, then Dona was not a safe route, as it's not known for human crossings.

Initial reports, citing family sources, suggested that he died of a heart attack while climbing the steep terrain. But the pertinent question is: who informed the family about his death? This becomes more significant in light of reports that Panna carried a large sum of Indian rupees, which was not found when Indian forces recovered his body. The postmortem revealed that Panna had been

strangled, confirming murder. The missing money may well be connected to his killing. The unfortunate incident left many questions unanswered, and the family may never get answers because the murder happened in the wrong place.

### No man's land, no man's responsibility

The person or persons who planned this escapade did their research thoroughly and perhaps had already planned how it would end. They knew that because the murder happened inside Indian Territory, it would be difficult for Bangladesh law agencies to pursue the case, even if they were interested. Moreover, as Panna is now an enemy of the people and the state in Bangladesh, it's doubtful whether the Bangladesh government is keen on investigating his death. The interim government is busy reforming the important agencies of the government; therefore, it is no surprise that the case is shoved under the carpet.

On the other hand, even though the murder occurred in India, neither the government of Meghalaya nor the central government may be inclined to follow up on the case, given their already overwhelming backlog of unsolved crimes. Now that the deceased's body has been handed over to the family, the case may simply fade away, buried alongside the deceased person's body.

### Smuggling and revenue loss

The murder reveals more than just border issues; it exposes the larger picture of smuggling and the transportation of illegal goods, which often goes undetected. The illegal transportation has obviously caused a leakage in government revenue collection. Now the question we need to ask is: Who benefits from the illegal transportation of goods? Who benefits from the illegal transportation of coal and overloaded dumper trucks carrying limestone along the national highways? Are people wrong to suspect wrongdoing when a senior politician in the ruling dispensation, who often identifies himself as a businessman rather than a political leader, is overseeing the function of the Department, and that too for the second consecutive term? Aren't the above evidences enough to fuel speculation about the wrongdoing within the Transport Department? With all the illegal activities happening, are people wrong to guess that there is more going on in the Department than meets the eye?

How much more blatant wrongdoing will the MDA Government indulge in without any accountability. How much more will the state be looted of its resources by one or two political families?

Disturbing optics at Chief Justice's Ganesh Pooja plant doubts in people's mind

## Occupants of high offices have to be mindful of the impact of their actions

By K Raveendran

Narendra Modi is not a friend of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud; nor is he a family member of the CJI. Had Modi fulfilled either of the conditions, his presence at the Ganesh Pooja organized by the Chief Justice would have been fine. Considering that the CJI is also a private person, there is nothing wrong with his performing the pooja, but inviting the prime minister for the event is the height of indiscretion on the part of the CJI, surpassed only by Modi's acceptance of the invitation.

The BJP has defended Modi's attendance as a cultural gesture rather than any kind of political engagement. However, the optics of the Prime Minister participating in such an event have inevitably been compared to his role in the Ram Mandir consecration at Ayodhya. The symbolism of Modi's presence in both contexts raises questions about the potential for these events to influence political dynamics and perceptions.

The presence of a sitting Prime Minister at a religious ceremony hosted by the Chief Justice is unprecedented. On one hand, it can be seen as an attempt to bridge the gap between the political and judicial spheres through shared cultural practices. On the other, it risks undermining the neutrality and independence that are cornerstones of the judiciary's role in a democracy.

Senior legal experts and commentators have expressed concerns regarding this event. They argue that inviting a high-profile political figure like Modi could be perceived as compromising the Chief Justice's impartiality. The judicial system relies heavily on public perception of its neutrality; thus, any action that might suggest otherwise can have far-reaching consequences.

Activist advocate Indira Jaising, criticised the visit on social media, claiming it compromised the independence of the judiciary. She went to the extent of calling upon the Supreme Court Bar Association to condemn the event, asserting that such public displays blur the lines between the judiciary and the executive. Prashant Bhushan described the development as a "bad signal" about judiciary's responsibility to safeguard citizens' fundamental rights and ensure the government adheres to the Constitution. He further cited a 'Code of Conduct for Judges', which required a judge to practice a degree of aloofness consistent with the

dignity of the office and implied that the CJI's conduct was 'unbecoming of the high office he occupies and the public esteem in which that office is held'.

The BJP's justification of Modi's attendance as a cultural engagement simply fails to make the grade. While cultural engagement is an integral part of Indian society, the context of the event and the roles involved are crucial. The Chief Justice, by virtue of his position, represents the judiciary, which is expected to maintain a certain distance from political influences. Modi, as the head of the government, represents the executive branch. Their intersection at such an event could be seen as a tacit endorsement or endorsement of mutual interests, whether intended or not. It is essential for both the judiciary and the executive to maintain a clear distinction between their roles and responsibilities to uphold the principles of democracy and fairness.

Uddhav Thackeray's Shiv Sena has used the development to take potshots at both the CJI and the prime minister. Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Raut asserted it created doubts in the minds of people about the impartiality of the judiciary. Thackeray's Sena has every reason to feel upset as a bench headed by the Chief Justice is hearing the crucial case in which it has challenged the Maharashtra Speaker's decision to recognize the faction led by chief minister Eknath Shinde.

In fact, Raut has asked the CJI to recuse himself from the case as PM is a party to the case as BJP is a partner in the Eknath Shinde government. "Our case of Maharashtra... the hearing is going on before CJI Chandrachud, so we have doubts if we will get justice because the PM is the other party in the case. The Chief Justice should distance himself from this case because his relation with the other party in the case is openly visible. Will CJI Chandrachud be able to give us justice in such a situation?" Raut wondered.

The Ganesh Pooja controversy has thus an unseemly context. It is crucial for public figures to be mindful of the implications of their actions. The separation of powers and the independence of institutions are fundamental to the functioning of a democratic society. Ensuring that these principles are upheld requires careful consideration of the optics and potential consequences of high-profile engagements. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### CAG Reports prove we are in a debt trap

Editor,  
The news report dated headlined "CAG reveals: State seeks new loan to liquidate debt" (ST Sep 15, 2024) is disturbing. The textbook definition of a debt trap is when you take new loans to pay off old loans. That's a different situation from taking loans to build capital assets. By that headline, the State of Meghalaya has in fact entered into the debt trap. So, the people of the State must be made aware what collaterals are provided against all these loans? Is it our natural resources, or our human resources? Does the collateral involve loss of autonomy over our natural resources or does it involve the guarantee of the government that must be made good through new loans or through rising cost of public facilities or even through taxation, which ultimately means that the citizens are the collateral since they must bear the burden of the debt?  
Now is the time for the

Opposition to raise the issue of what is the collateral for all these loans, as has also been demanded by the HC.

Those who deny that the State has entered a debt trap must first provide their own definition of a debt trap, before justifying their denial of it. Will they respond to this specific news report? Or will they just imagine that it doesn't exist?

Yours etc.,  
Kitor H. Blah,  
Shillong

#### Lone BJP Minister, AL Hek's controversial membership drive launch

Editor,  
A L Hek, the sole BJP Minister in the Meghalaya Government and in-charge of the party's membership drive, visited Bokadol village under Tikrikilla constituency on Sunday, September 8, 2024, to launch the membership drive. Despite requests from local party workers to reschedule the event, Hek insisted on launching the drive on a Sunday, causing inconvenience to many.

As a result, several core workers are upset with his behaviour, citing disregard for their concerns and priorities. This move has raised questions about Hek's leadership style and his commitment to the well-being of party workers. After launching the membership program in Tikrikilla constituency on Sunday, A.L. Hek, along with State President Rickman Momin, hastily left the meeting venue without engaging in meaningful discussions with party workers. This abrupt departure raised eyebrows among the members, who felt that the senior leader should have spent more time interacting with them.

Further, Messrs Hek and Momin proceeded to have lunch at the residence of the local NPP MLA Jimmy D. Sangma, which has sparked controversy among party workers. Traditionally, senior leaders, especially those from the central leadership, make it a point to have meals at the homes of booth committee members as a gesture of solidarity and to strengthen grassroots connections.

Hek's decision to deviate from this practice has left many members feeling disap-

pointed and questioning his commitment to the party's grassroots workers. This incident has raised concerns about the leadership's priorities and their willingness to engage with the party's rank and file.

There is a growing consensus among party members that AL Hek should be relieved of his ministerial responsibilities, citing his perceived arrogance and disconnect from the grassroots. Instead, many are advocating for a humble and dedicated leader like Sanbor Shullai to be appointed as minister.

Shullai, known for his down-to-earth approach and commitment to the party's ideals, is seen as a more suitable candidate to represent the BJP in the state government. His appointment is expected to boost the party's morale and help reconnect with the people. The BJP's central and state leadership is urged to take immediate action and address the concerns of party workers to prevent further erosion of trust and confidence.

Yours etc.,  
Roseph N. Marak  
Village Bokadol,  
Tikrikilla

#### Railways a cheap means of transportation for goods

Editor,

Apropos of the news item, "Govt says absence of goods trains leads to price rise" (ST September 14, 2024), there are four factors that transportation of goods via railways holds multiple advantages over goods transport via roadways.

Capacity: The load capacity of trains is much higher than lorries or trucks. A single wagon of a freight train in India can carry about 50-70 tonnes. A single goods train will have around 57 wagons which means a single freight train is capable of carrying around 3900 tonnes.

Distance: Freight trains can carry bulk commodities over long distances. Freight trains are specially designed to transport high cargo volumes over long distances while road transport is for smaller loads and shorter distances.

Speed and time: Trains can reach much faster than an automobile travelling on road as road transport is dependent

on road traffic, weather and other factors. Even though there is significant loading and unloading time for goods transport via rail, it is still considered faster than road transport.

Cost: The cost of transporting goods over long distances via rail is less than the cost of transporting goods via road. Goods transport via rail is cheaper because freight trains can carry bulk commodities and feature lower fuel consumption.

Coming to the price rise in Meghalaya. Out of 21 commodities listed in the Dashboard of the Meghalaya Civil Supplies Department, the prices of seven food items namely rice, wheat, gram dal, onion, potatoes, tomatoes have shot up by 35, 20, 17, 32, 79, 87, and 91 percent respectively for these commodities as on 23.8.2024 over the base price on 03.06.2023. The prices of edible oils have decreased by 8, 15, 16 and 18 percent in respect of mustard, palm, soya and sunflower oil respectively. The prices of atta, masoor dal, moong dal, urad dal, gur, milk, sugar and tea have been stable. Therefore, it is felt that the Civil Supplies Department has to strictly monitor the prices

of the commodities for the benefit of the consumers. The Department may also kindly ensure that prices of all 21 commodities are reflected on the Dashboard on a weekly basis to determine the price movement of such commodities and the need for control so as to benefit the consumers at large. It may also kindly look into areas such as "trade and transport margins" and ensure that it is kept at a reasonable rate according to actual prevailing market prices so that the wholesalers and retailers do not exploit the consumers and make commodities inflationary.

Price control in economics are restrictions imposed by governments to ensure that goods and services remain affordable. They are also used to create a fair market that is accessible by all. The point of price controls is to help curb inflation and to create a balance in the market. But price control can be both good and bad. They help make certain goods and services, such as food, housing, and medication, more affordable to consumers. They can also help corporations by eliminating monopolies and opening up

the market for more competition. But price controls can also have a negative effect, as they may lead to shortages, underground markets, and a decrease in the quality of goods and services available on the market. The bottom line. Unlike the free market, where prices are dictated by supply and demand, price control sets minimum and maximum prices for goods and services. Governments and supporters of price controls say that these policies are necessary for consumers and suppliers. By enacting price control policies, consumers can afford essential goods and services and smaller producers can remain profitable. But critics say that over time, price controls can have the opposite effect, leading to an imbalance between supply and demand, decreased competition, and illegal markets.

Yours etc;  
VK Lyngdoh,  
Via email

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

"The affairs of the world will go on forever.  
Do not delay the practice of meditation."

— Milarepa

## The Shillong Times

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### Waste Management in a Quandary

A stand-alone Report of the CAG on Solid Waste Management in the urban areas of Meghalaya raises several questions of the efficiency of the system. Rural Meghalaya including tourist destinations have no waste management systems in place. What's interesting is the analysis of the financial resources allocated for solid waste management in urban Meghalaya over a period of five years. The bulk of resources were received from the Asian Development Bank's external funded project of North Eastern Regional Capital Cities Development Investment Programme (NERCCDIP) which is for a period of ten years only and for specific activities. Hence this was a finite source of funds and as usual there are no sustainable action plans for the future. The audit survey found that the Municipal Boards were unable to meet even the operational costs of collection and disposal of municipal waste due to poor collection of user charges. Without any significant budgetary support from the State Government and inadequate resources generated by the Boards, the solid waste management in Meghalaya remains a challenge.

The CAG has recommended that necessary steps be taken to augment financial resources of the Municipal Boards particularly the system of collection of user charges and strengthening their administrative capacity by recruiting the required manpower and providing adequate training to improve their efficiency and effectiveness in solid waste collection, transportation and processing. A survey carried out in 26 Dorbar Shnong under Mawlai and Umpling census towns to ascertain collection of user charges in their areas found that in 15 Dorbar Shnong the user charges ranged from Rs 40 to Rs 130 per household. Three Dorbar Shnong have outsourced the waste collection to a Self Help Group (SHG) that was collecting household waste on payment basis from individual households. In the rest of the Dorbar Shnong no user charges were collected. In the absence of a legal framework in the form of by-laws to govern the function of traditional institutions, waste collection was carried out as an informal and unorganised activity. User charges were decided in an ad-hoc and unscientific manner.

The CAG survey pointed to some best practices from Sikkim where the Gangtok Municipal Corporation (GMC) engaged 22 NGOs to organise door to door collection of solid waste from households. A part of the collection was shared with the GMC. It is high time that drastic steps are taken to collect reasonable user charges for waste collection and for the traditional institutions of Meghalaya to evolve into modern governance bodies that are self-reliant and are able to inform the public that they have to pay for the waste they generate which requires to go through several processes so that it does not affect the environment. Hospital waste and plastic waste continue to be the problem areas with no facilities yet to tackle such waste. The Survey has indicted the State Pollution Control Board for its failure to inventorise e-waste generation as required by the E-Waste Management Rules 2016. In all, therefore, waste management remains a great challenge in Meghalaya with no solution in sight!

### Letters to the Editor

#### Cultural imposition on traditional diet

Editor  
Anti cow slaughtering campaign initiated or motivated by certain cultural or religious beliefs for Banning cow slaughter and beef eating in (Meghalaya) can have significant social and political ramifications. Implementing such measures in a diverse nation could disrupt communal harmony and peace.

In a secular country, where the government is expected to maintain neutrality towards various religions and cultures, allowing such campaigning steps that affects specific dietary practices can create tensions. Indigenous Tribal communities, who traditionally consume beef as part of their diet, view such an act as an infringement on their cultural and dietary rights. This could lead to feelings of alienation and resentment, potentially inciting conflict and chaos in this tranquil region.

The disruption could be further worsened by economic impacts. In our region where cattle rearing is a primary livelihood, such enactment could threaten the economic stability of local farmers and traders. This might lead to protests or unrest, impacting broader social cohesion.

The diverse fabric of the nation is crucial for main-

taining peace and harmony. Balancing religious or cultural beliefs with the rights of individuals is essential for preserving the secular principles of the country.

Yours etc.,  
D S Khongwir  
Shillong

#### Blind man deserves government attention immediately

Editor,  
I would like to draw attention to the urgent need for government support for families like the one recently brought to light in a letter by Sali Gewali captioned, "Blind Man Selling Kwai-Cigarettes." (ST September 3, 2024). Gewali's letter about the blind man, Teilanbok Mawblei, and his blind wife opened the eyes of many, including mine. After reading that letter, my friends and I began collecting contributions to help the couple. On September 15, we visited their home in Mawngap, which is in very poor condition, and handed over the money collected. The couple was overjoyed and expressed deep gratitude to Gewali for bringing their suffering to the public's attention. They never thought that someone would one day speak up for them and that so much help would come

their way. We also learned that the local MLA had visited the family and provided groceries, which was a wonderful gesture. However, after spending time with the blind man and his blind wife, it became clear that one-time donations are not enough. Their situation remains dire, and they have no guarantee of financial stability. Being 100% blind, they cannot always depend on selling small items like kwai and cigarettes, and their future remains uncertain.

What will happen to them and others like them when the donations stop? The government must implement policies to provide steady support for families that are completely unable to earn a living due to disabilities or other severe physical challenges. While community efforts are appreciable, long-term welfare and rehabilitation programs are a must for such vulnerable families.

Sali Gewali's letter did an excellent job of drawing attention to this issue, but it is the Government's duty to ensure that people like this blind couple do not continue to suffer as if no one cares. There should be a sense of humanity in Government departments also. I hope the local MLA will raise this issue with the Social Welfare Minister immediately. The Government should find long-term solutions, such as providing regular financial aid and housing support, for fami-

Beef politics in India is nothing new, and this is not the first time the issue has caused frustration for the indigenous communities of Meghalaya and the North East. In 2015, Thma U Rangli-Juki (TUR) organized a beef festival to greet BJP president Amit Shah during his maiden visit to the state. The message of the protest, led by Angela Rangad, a senior member of TUR, was for "the BJP and its affiliates not to impose their ideas on people whose food and cultural habits are different." I was also part of the protest, and the beef never tasted better than on that day. Although we tried to march to the venue where Amit Shah was addressing BJP workers, we were prevented by the police from doing so. This time around, TUR is once again calling for a beef festival to protest the plans of a Hindu group led by Bramachari Muktanandan, who is organizing the 'Gau Dhwaaj Shapana Bharat Yatra' on October 2 in Shillong to declare the cow the 'Mother of the Nation.' If the last beef festival was any indication, I am confident that this time, too, both the meat and the festival will be memorable.

As for the intention of declaring the cow the 'Mother of the Nation' and imposing a ban on its consumption, it is ironic that a culture which once treated beef as a special dish for people of high status is now making such a demand. The book Ancient India: In Historical Outline by D.N. Jha is an important work in this regard, as it describes the significance of cattle to the ancient Vedic people—an Indo-Aryan group that migrated from Central Asia to the subcontinent around 3,500 years ago, displacing the original indigenous population of North India (the ancient Dravidians, who had built the Indus Valley Civilization).

The Indo-Aryans came as a semi-nomadic people for whom cattle were the chief source of wealth, with the term for a wealthy person being gomat. As a result, cattle became a source of inter-tribal warfare, and the word for battle came to be known as gavishti, which literally means 'a search for cows.' Cattle were also important for establishing lineages. People who lived in the same cowshed belonged to the same gotra, a term that later indicated descent from a common ancestor and thus an exogamous clan unit. At that point, the cow was not yet considered sacred or political, and both oxen and cows were slaughtered for food, with beef in particular being a delicacy offered to guests, who were described as goghna or 'cow-killer.' In addition to cows, goats and sheep were domesticated for both milk and meat, as evidenced by the

discovery of charred bones of cattle and other animals at several archaeological sites. The fact that the ancient Vedic people consumed beef is also confirmed by Romila Thapar in her book History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300, where she states that "the eating of beef was reserved for specific occasions, such as rituals or when welcoming a guest or a person of high status."

The eating of beef was defended and supported by sages in literature as well. In the Shatapatha Brahmana (Brahmanas are ancient Hindu texts that contain prose commentaries attached to the four Vedas, the oldest Hindu sacred texts), there is a reference to Yajnavalkya, a great Hindu sage, giving a spirited argument for eating beef. He expressed the difficulty of forsaking beef, saying, "I, for one, eat it, provided it is tender (amsala)." He also indicated how the aroma of beef was believed to be an ailment for spirits. The 1918 book Yajnavalkya Smriti with The Commentary of Vijnanesvara Called the Mitakasa and Notes from the Gloss of Balambhatta, Book I: The Acharya Adhyaya, translated by Rai Bahadur Srisa Chandra Vidyarnava, mentions under Chapter V (which addresses the duties of a household) the 'beef offering to the honored guest' and the 'annual feast on beef.' Both these sections contain passages from Yajnavalkya. In her book The Hindus: An Alternative History, Wendy Doniger mentions that the Brahmanas state "a bull or cow should be killed when a guest arrives, a cow should be sacrificed to Mitra and Varuna, and a sterile cow to the Maruts," and that "twenty-one sterile cows should be sacrificed in the horse sacrifice." She also refers to the Asyalayana-grihya-sutra, a dharma-sutra from the third century BCE, which specifies that "the meat of milk cows and oxen may be eaten, and the meat of oxen is fit for sacrifice."

So, while today eating beef is considered sacrilege, it was not so in the past. The changed attitude could have emerged from the growing importance of cattle to an agricultural society. Myths and religious sanctions were thereafter created to elevate its status as sacred and inviolable, especially among the upper castes. For example, the four ages of Hindu mythology—Satya Yuga, Treta Yuga, Dwapara Yuga, and Kali Yuga—are often analogized to the four legs of Dharma, visualized as a cow standing on four legs, gradually losing its legs as the ages progress from Satya Yuga to Kali Yuga. Thus, the

cow, which was once a special delicacy, became an object of reverence. Among the Khasi, the cow also has a special place. The sacrifice of a cow was an important component of the rituals practiced when a woman dies, known as ka masi pnysum. Portions of the lower jaw of the cow are kept to be placed afterwards in the mawshieng, or bone receptacle. Pieces of the sacrificed animal, i.e., the cow, are kept inside a small basket (ka shang), which is hung over the head of the corpse. Betel nut, a jar of water, and a dish containing food are placed near the head as offerings, given each morning and evening until the body is removed from the house. This practice is called di ja miet ja step. Guns are fired, drums are beaten, and flutes (sharati) are played during each night the corpse remains in the house. This description, as given in P.R.T. Gurdon's book The Khasis, shows that the cow's position was not unlike the position of other animals the Khasi kept for food and sacrifice. The kind of reverence that Hindus have for the animal is not found among the Khasi. What is interesting about the sacrifice of a cow during the event of death is that it is also found among the indigenous Bonda people of Orissa. Numbering less than 20,000, they are an Austro-asiatic-speaking people, many of whom have, to this day, maintained their distance from the mainstream community. Although they follow a patrilineal system, women enjoy a high position in their society, holding several vital roles both at the familial and community levels. It is a common practice for a Bonda girl to marry a boy who is five to ten years younger than her. The girl looks after her husband, who, in turn, cares for her when she grows old.

This suggests that, in the past, the Bonda might very well have been following a matrilineal culture. As they came into contact with other groups (such as the ancient Dravidians), they likely adopted patrilineal customs but still retained the privileged position of women in their society. The Bonda are part of the larger Munda group, who were part of the ancient migration of Austro-asiatic people that came from the east. This migration also brought the Khasi people. It is highly possible, based on the dates, that some of these groups continued westward, mixing with the local population and giving rise to the Munda population, with the Bonda being one of the sub-groups. Therefore, the more favorable position of women and the sacrifice of a cow

which are either displayed on Government buildings or public walls. Observers though are left wondering about the stories behind the art. Those familiar with the cultural significance of the State can connect with them; others are left wondering what the stories behind the art are. Unfortunately, not much is available online. However, the tech-savvy ones might click a picture and ask AI to analyse the visuals based on their intelligence. The story behind the paintings are not mentioned in the visuals. Although they say a picture speaks a thousand words, culturally significant tales need to be specific and presented as they are and not left to be assumed based on one's interpretation. A suggestion for the artists is to include a QR code at the bottom of the painting, so people can scan and read more about it. Meghalaya is blessed with a plethora of folk tales and this could be a great way to share them with the world.

So while the Government of Meghalaya is trying its best to beautify the city in various ways through art and the artists work with dedication to come out with interesting paintings and impressive murals, some appreciate the efforts of the government and the artists while others choose to deface these artworks by rubbing lime on the walls or spitting the walls with red kwai saliva. The same can be seen outside the walls of Sein

# Beef politics: How sacred is the cow?

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

discovery of charred bones of cattle and other animals at several archaeological sites. The fact that the ancient Vedic people consumed beef is also confirmed by Romila Thapar in her book History of Early India: From the Origins to AD 1300, where she states that "the eating of beef was reserved for specific occasions, such as rituals or when welcoming a guest or a person of high status."

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cow, which was once a special delicacy, became an object of reverence. Among the Khasi, the cow also has a special place. The sacrifice of a cow was an important component of the rituals practiced when a woman dies, known as ka masi pnysum. Portions of the lower jaw of the cow are kept to be placed afterwards in the mawshieng, or bone receptacle. Pieces of the sacrificed animal, i.e., the cow, are kept inside a small basket (ka shang), which is hung over the head of the corpse. Betel nut, a jar of water, and a dish containing food are placed near the head as offerings, given each morning and evening until the body is removed from the house. This practice is called di ja miet ja step. Guns are fired, drums are beaten, and flutes (sharati) are played during each night the corpse remains in the house. This description, as given in P.R.T. Gurdon's book The Khasis, shows that the cow's position was not unlike the position of other animals the Khasi kept for food and sacrifice. The kind of reverence that Hindus have for the animal is not found among the Khasi. What is interesting about the sacrifice of a cow during the event of death is that it is also found among the indigenous Bonda people of Orissa. Numbering less than 20,000, they are an Austro-asiatic-speaking people, many of whom have, to this day, maintained their distance from the mainstream community. Although they follow a patrilineal system, women enjoy a high position in their society, holding several vital roles both at the familial and community levels. It is a common practice for a Bonda girl to marry a boy who is five to ten years younger than her. The girl looks after her husband, who, in turn, cares for her when she grows old.

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#### Red & white spray painters in town!

Editor,  
One of the best initiatives of the Government of Meghalaya is in acknowledging the talents of the artists of the state in various forms. Several locations in Shillong city are beautified with murals that primarily focus on the state's cultural heritage. These paintings are displayed at several locations and are admired and praised by many. Often, on-lookers pause to appreciate the beauty of these paintings,

on the death of a community member are vestiges of a very ancient culture brought by Austro-asiatic speaking people to the subcontinent. In this culture, the cow was, and still is, an important animal for food, but not for worship. This practice is much older than when Hindus decided to stop eating beef.

Now, there are some Khasi groups who follow indigenous faiths and don't eat beef. It is very possible that this practice arose due to the influence of Hinduism from the neighboring plains, likely during the time of Shankaradeva or later. Otherwise, understanding the indigenous origin of reverence for the cow among this group is difficult for several reasons. Firstly, the Khasi don't consume dairy products, and drinking the milk of a cow or goat is considered taboo. This suggests that, even if they kept cattle, they did not use them for milk, which is a key utility of cows among Hindus but absent among the Khasi. Secondly, except in a few favourable locations, the most common agricultural practice is jhum (shifting cultivation), where cattle do not play a significant role. Instead, pigs and poultry have traditionally been more important to the Khasi people.

Therefore, it seems unusual that an animal, which has little importance beyond its use for meat, would be revered in a manner similar to how Hindus revere the cow, despite the lack of cultural conditions that exist among the latter. Most likely, the practice of not eating beef started with some Khasi people who were influenced by neighboring cultures, meaning it was not indigenous but introduced from outside. It is also possible that a non-Khasi group, which later assimilated into Khasi society by adopting their matrilineal culture and language, brought this prohibition with them. This wouldn't be surprising, as the Khasi have always interacted and exchanged ideas with neighboring indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Hindus once ate beef, but no longer do so today. This change is part of their cultural evolution, which should be respected. However, the culture of indigenous groups, like the Khasi, who do not follow these food prohibitions, should also be respected. Any attempt to impose such restrictions on them will only create animosity between indigenous and non-indigenous communities, at a time when unity is of utmost importance. Live and let live—otherwise, the cycle of animosity will continue. I don't believe anyone wants that!

*(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)*

Jaijitia at the Jeep Stand. On January 24th, 2023, when I saw the paintings being shamelessly rubbed with lime, I uploaded them on my social media pages. They caught the attention of Meghalaya's own RJ Nicky, who has been spearheading the 'My Shillong, My Pride campaign' single-handedly for years now. The following morning, he headed to the location and cleaned the lime off the paintings all by himself. Fast forward to the present, and the paintings are once again being defaced with white lime and red paint by the "White and Red Painters of Town."

Now, who do we hold accountable for this? What is the least that kwai (betel nut) consumers can do? Do they need to be educated that spitting on walls and in public spaces is unhealthy and defaces the beauty of such space? Should we school them in an awareness programme? Do they even have a sense of civic responsibility? What can be done about this? RJ Nicky did his part once, he might clean it for the second and third time, but for how long can he keep doing this?

Yours etc.,  
Emidao Shylla  
Shillong-2

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

### Resuscitating education brainpower replaces horsepower!

## Fighting for the futures of our children

By Dilip Mukerjee

THE FIRST WONDER OF THE WORLD IS THE MIND OF A CHILD! The First Blunder of Governance is being Blind to the Child! The status quo of our education system lacks any status! What and where are the problems for our educators, students, and mandarins in governance?

1. Information Overload: causing tremendous confusion and panic. 2. Low Speed of Information Processing: causing unaffordable delays. 3. Poor Retention and Recall: Memory Logjam! Learning is sabotaged! There is no learning without memory! 4. Frozen Status Quo: Inability to break from the pack! Nothing grows in ice! 5. Inability to Adapt to Competitive Challenges: Famine of Ideas! Unable to use adversity as an asset; lack of self-efficacy! 6. Inability to Read and Comprehend Fast, Deep, Wide, and with Varied Extensivity: poor knowledge gathering and sense-making skills, inadequate translation into action! 7. Poor Idea Generation Capabilities: Brain Block! Stuck in a rut! The status quo has no status! 8. Poor Articulation Skills: lack of eloquence in expressing thoughts, leading to low communication and high confusion! 9. Meagre Knowledge of The Human Brain, and How to Use It to Learn HOW TO LEARN, Fast! 10. Inability to Convert Ideas into Action, and to Move Ahead from Stress to Strength to Success!

Our KEY Leadership Challenge is to build adaptive organisations, with Learning Leaders, and Leading Learners, those with an ingrained ability to make sense of the changing environment, and then rapidly translate these insights into action. Our education system has become defunct! At best, our individuals with power and authority are ever busy but not productive!

What needs to be done? Fix the System, not the symptoms! As things stand, they are giving credence to the reality that we are the only example of a species that has been gifted with an organ it does not know how to use. Then Learn! Learn HOW to Learn! Stop stipulating and start stimulating!

We should be Championing Children, Fighting for their Futures, instead of racing full-speed to nowhere! The idiosyncrasy of being stuck in Capacity Building has checkmated Capacity Building! Capacity is inadequate without Capability! OUR NATION HAS A GIGANTIC CAPACITY, YET BECAUSE OF LOW LITERACY LEVELS AMONGST THE MAJORITY, MOST OF OUR POPULATION IS STILL LANGUISHING WITH LOW CAPABILITY, IN THE STONE AGE! The Stone Age did not end because of having run out of stones! It did so because of superior thinking!

Innovation is the Bridge to the Future, but our architects of destinies fail to note that the choice today is Innovate or Evaporate! How do they sleep with a clear conscience when our children and their families are being short-changed?

LEARNING IS LIBERATION! EDUCATION IS OXYGEN! This being our sacred reality, why then are our institutions not burning for learning? Why are our so-called 'teacher training' edifices not bad, but hopeless? Training is for cats and dogs! Our teachers need to be encultured in Learning and Development! Learning HOW to Learn, so as to advance with exponential success.

Capability Building involves the acquisition of new competencies, the improvement of existing skills, and the cultivation of a mind-state that embraces continuous learning and improvement. Briefly, the top five Creative Capability Building Strategies comprise: • Modelling from the top down • Building from the ground up • Engaging a critical mass of people • Embracing remote technology • Making relevant, continuous small changes for raising standards and competencies. The most sacred of all professions is to be a teacher, a good and great teacher! In this sense, teachers are the custodians taking care of our children's destinies. They should thus be recognised and respected as our Guardians of the Future, instead of being taken for granted, or worse, panoramically ignored for their worth and value! This is the abysmal failure of governance! Good teachers need

every benefit the States can accord them!  
So what should our Learning Leaders and Leading Learners, our Brain-Force presiding over the prospects of our children do? They should be Statesmen-Leaders, who: • Show up: his or her presence is crucial for a full-fledged following to be created; • Speak up: the words frame the agenda, shape the issues, create the path to the Vision; • Look up: in humility, to receive the highest wisdom, and grace, going forward; • Team up: at a local and a global level, to manifest a sacred synergy for the greatest good; • Lift up: the hearts of the homeless, the hands of the helpless, the hopes of humanity; • NEVER Give up! press on, with perfect persistence and indefatigable determination.  
When was the last time our political representatives visited their constituencies to check on the condition of the government schools in their areas? Are the impoverished students all receiving their midday meals?  
To be relevant in the manifold contexts of the emerging world, and to be globally competent, we need to possess cutting-edge skills that enable us to: 1. Investigate the world beyond any immediate environment, framing significant problems and conducting well-crafted and context-appropriate research. 2. Recognise perspectives, others' and our own, articulating and explaining such perspectives eloquently, thoughtfully and respectfully. 3. Communicate ideas effectively with diverse audiences, bridging geographic, linguistic, ideological, and cultural barriers. 4. Act to improve conditions, viewing ourselves as transformative players in a volatile, uncertain, complex, turbulent, and ambiguous world, and participating reflectively. Beware and Be Aware! The skills that help you be successful at one stage in your career and at one point in time are often a hindrance in the next stage. At the same time, in order to move to the next stage in your career you need to constantly be learning new skills. In business, this is the process of creative destruction, where you develop a new and better product that eliminates the need for your current product. In this process you are doing the same with your career.  
So what must be done in terms of becoming skilled? We need to act on a CURED framework: CROSS-SKILLING: learners need to advance beyond their existing roles UP-SKILLING: to stay relevant to changes and evolutions in systems and processes RE-SKILLING: to remain relevant and up-to-date with any changes in our fields of work EXPERT-SKILLING: going in deep so as to become continually proficient across domains DE-SKILLING: allowing learners to focus more on a specific area instead of gaining half-hearted knowledge about multiple fields or areas without having expertise.  
These skills need to be complemented by competencies in Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Strategic Thinking, Systems Thinking, and Design Thinking. The future calls upon our leaders to create and cultivate Millennium Minds: Unbeatable, Invincible, Unassailable, who need to be imbued with a Passion to Learn, the Humility to Unlearn, and the Urgency to Relearn.  
The DNA of the Statesman-Leader is manifested in the DNA of the citizenry, its portals of governance, its corridors of business power, and its institutions of education. Such a leader is working toward a mind-state that will make the context a force in an uncertain world. Such leaders never hide when things shift, they push harder. They are not afraid to learn when new skills become necessary. They are not afraid to see opportunities where others only see chaos. We need Soul-Smart Learning Leadership, where our orchestrators of destinies act with vision, passion, discipline, and conscience...for the greatest good of all! I look forward to lauding and applauding this reality when it happens!  
(The writer is a thought leader, breakthrough catalyst, innovation strategist & designer of a learning ecosystem and innovative landscape for nations, communities, organisations and institutions. He is also internationally featured keynote speaker, accomplished author & corporate consultant)

"If everyone is thinking alike, then somebody isn't thinking."

—George S. Patton

The Shillong Times

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Feudalistic bureaucracy

A decision by the Andhra Pradesh government deserves special attention. It has stopped the system of Sub-Registrars sitting on an elevated platform and attending to the people's issues. Calling it a "feudal and outdated," system, the government has ruled that these officials must sit at the floor level on par with the others. This is one small step in a nation where the vestiges of the British Raj combined with the feudal systems run riot. The aim of every official today is not to serve the people, but to lord over them. Elected representatives of the people who govern states under the democratic system for the past over 75 years have been reticent about changing the archaic systems or are comfortable with the ugly scenarios around them. They show no nerve to discipline the systems while every segment of the population is sought to be organised under different banners or are unionised with the sole purpose of protecting and promoting their sectarian interests.

A government performs at different levels, but its writ spans across all spectrums of human life in a specified land mass. All governments are duty-bound to ensure law and order, pay salaries to its employees, find resources to run the government, manage the finances, initiate the development process and guard the boundaries or borders. However, good governments do more. They seek to reform the society and clean up the Augean stables to make life easier for its people. Reforms are a periodic requirement to every system. Unfortunately, however, there's a deficit in this process here. Lack of good, visionary leadership is the principal reason. The five years of a government passes in a jiffy. What it did or did not do during this period should be subjected to public scrutiny, which too is non-existent.

India practises a system of oligarchy – small segments of the society well-entrenched in power at all levels and officials ruling the roost – all in the guise of democracy. The overbearing nature of several arms of the establishment is spectacular. The characteristics of the British Raj or the rule of the royals were entirely different from that of a democracy as we conceive of it. Yet, situations of officials throwing their weight around are commonplace. By doing so, they cock a snook at the society. Almost every senior official tends to sport his designation on his vehicle, which is ludicrous. His power should be exercised solely in his office. The Supreme Court had in 2013 cried a halt to officials keeping red beacon lights on their vehicles. A free for all is neither in good taste nor acceptable. Narendra Modi as Prime Minister did too little in the last over a decade to clean up the systems. Andhra Pradesh deserves praise for taking a small step forward.

Letters to the Editor

Condemning Agatha Sangma's appointment as Chairperson, Meghalaya SCPCR

I write to express my deep concern over the recent appointment of Agatha Sangma as the Chairperson of the Meghalaya State Commission for Protection of Child Rights (SCPCR). This decision, approved by the state cabinet, represents a glaring abuse of power by the Sangma family and reflects a troubling pattern of political patronage that has become endemic in Meghalaya.

Agatha Sangma, despite her credentials as a former Union Minister and Lok Sabha MP, lacks the expertise required to effectively lead a Commission that is tasked with safeguarding the rights of Meghalaya's children. Her background in environmental management, while commendable, does not align with the core responsibilities of protecting child rights, which require specialised knowledge in child welfare and social work. More troubling is the revelation that her brother, James Sangma, had written to Chief Minister Conrad Sangma (younger sibling) to advocate for her appointment to this influential post. Such a brazen display of nepotism

is an affront to the principles of fair governance. The people of Meghalaya deserve better. Agatha Sangma's appointment, coming on the heels of her defeat in the Lok Sabha elections, further highlights the Sangma family's grip on power. Similarly, James Sangma's appointment as Chairman of the Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation (MIDC) with Category A+ privileges, after his own electoral defeat, is yet another example of this family's opportunistic manoeuvres to maintain political influence and privileges at all costs.

It is disheartening that while vital services like healthcare, education, and rural development remain underfunded, political appointments like these are made without transparent and competitive processes. The people of Meghalaya are watching their state's institutions being misused for political gain, and this will only erode trust in governance further.

The issue here is not just about one appointment but about a broader system of political favouritism that undermines merit-based appointments. It is imperative that the state government put an end to this unethical practice. Political appointees should be selected based on qualifications, not family connections. The current approach is not only undemocratic but also a grave disservice to the people of

Every year, Unitarians in Meghalaya and Assam celebrate their church anniversary on September 18. In the past, during such occasions, only the local aspects of the church's history, which began in 1887, were typically discussed. This inadvertently leaves out the broader history of the Church, which can actually be traced back to early Christianity which was also diverse in its beliefs and practices.

The Many Sects and Different Christology

The earliest Christian church, founded in Jerusalem, was led by the apostles, particularly James the Just, and was centered on the teachings of Jesus and his apostles. They met in homes for prayer, breaking bread, and teaching. Early Christians saw themselves as part of the Jewish tradition but believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They continued to worship in Jewish temples and synagogues while also developing new practices around the Eucharist (the Lord's Supper).

In the early Christian period, several sects and movements emerged as the new faith spread across the Roman Empire and beyond. These groups often had differing interpretations of doctrine, theology, and practice. Some of the key early Christian sects included the Jewish Christians, who were the earliest followers of Jesus and saw Christianity as a continuation of Judaism. They adhered to Jewish law and customs while accepting Jesus as the Messiah.

Gnosticism was a broad and diverse movement that emphasized esoteric knowledge (gnosis) as the key to salvation. Gnostics had a dualistic view of the world, seeing it as a battle between good (the spiritual realm) and evil (the material realm). They believed that Jesus came to impart secret knowledge that would allow people to escape the material world.

Marcionism, founded by Marcion of Sinope in the 2nd century, taught that the God of the Old Testament was a separate and inferior deity compared to the God of the New Testament. Marcion rejected the Hebrew Bible and its God, focusing instead on the teachings of Paul and a revised version of Luke's Gospel.

The Pauline Christians, followers of Paul the Apostle, emphasized faith in Jesus Christ over the strict observance of Jewish law. His teachings became the foundation of much of modern Christian theology. Paul preached that salvation comes through faith in Jesus Christ, not by adhering to Jewish law, and he advocated for the inclusion of Gentiles

this state who deserve leaders with the right skills, integrity, and experience to protect their interests, especially when it comes to the welfare of children.

I urge the people of Meghalaya to demand transparency and merit in all appointments, particularly in key institutions like the SCPCR, and to hold those in power accountable for their actions. Let us not allow the state's future to be determined by family dynasties but by individuals truly committed to the service of Meghalaya.

Yours etc.,  
Khlur Basan  
Shillong – 5

Trump's Safety in Question: When will Political Violence End?

Violence has no place in American politics nor in any country's politics. Yet, once again, we confront the possibility of another attempt on Donald Trump's life. On Sunday, the FBI announced that it was investigating what appeared to be an assassination attempt while the former president was playing golf at Trump International Golf Course in West Palm Beach.

Details of the incident began to emerge on Sunday evening, and we were relieved to quickly learn that

(non-Jews) in the Christian community.

Arianism, although it emerged slightly later (in the 4th century), had roots in early debates about the nature of Christ. Founded by Arius, a priest from Alexandria, Arianism argued that Jesus, while divine, was not co-eternal with God the Father. Arians believed that Jesus was a created being and not equal to God the Father, a view opposed by the orthodox belief in the Trinity. Arianism was a major controversy in the early church, leading to the Council of Nicea in 325, where it was condemned as heretical.

The Arian Controversy and the Nicene Creed

The disagreements over Christological models came to a head in the early 4th century in what became known as the Arian controversy. This was the most intense and consequential theological dispute in early Christianity, led by two protagonists: Arius (c. 250–336) and Athanasius (c. 293–373). Both were learned, self-confident, and unyielding. Both were from Alexandria—Arius a distinguished churchman and scholar, and Athanasius a brilliant theologian.

Arius's Christology was a mixture of adoptionism and logos theology. His basic notion was that the Son came into being through the will of the Father; therefore, the Son had a beginning. Although the Son existed before all eternity, he was not eternal, and Father and Son were not of the same essence. In Jesus, who suffered pain and wept, the logos became human.

Athanasius, on the other hand, believed that God had to become human so that humans could become divine. At the heart of Athanasius's Christology was a religious rather than speculative concern. This led him to conclude that the divine nature in Jesus was identical to that of the Father, and that Father and Son shared the same substance. He insisted on the need for the Nicene homoousios to express the Son's unity with the Father.

The controversy not only deeply agitated and bitterly divided the Christian community, but it also threatened the political stability of the Roman Empire. Eager for a resolution, Emperor Constantine convened and presided over the Council of Nicea, which formulated the Nicene Creed, affirming the Athanasian position.

According to his biographer Eusebius of Caesarea, Constantine sought to reconcile the two sides by suggesting the use of the word homoousios, which was ac-

cepted by all in attendance, with the exception of Arius and two Libyan bishops. The Western bishops, who, like most of the bishops in attendance, had not given much thought to the issue, were not troubled by Constantine's term, which they understood as equivalent to the Latin word substantia, used by Tertullian to describe the two substances of Jesus.

The Nicene Creed states that Jesus is "eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, one in Being with the Father."

From Nicea to Chalcedon

The decision in favor of the Athanasian view at Nicea did not immediately end the controversy. For more than a century, the church wavered. The Council of Ariminum (359) all but reversed Nicea, and the emperor in Constantinople turned the Athanasian majority into a minority. Constantine himself leaned toward Arianism later in his reign, and his eventual successor, his son Constantius, was openly Arian. The Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon were milestones in the history of Christology. The key terms at the center of those turbulent controversies were homoousios ("of the same substance") or "of the same essence" and homoiousios ("of like essence").

These great debates did not involve only theologians and churchmen. The common people were also caught up in the arguments, even demonstrating in the streets with banners and chants in support of one side or the other. The Arians, moreover, engaged the public in a relentless fight against the main supporters of the Nicene decision.

The Origin of Unitarianism

The Unitarian movement has its roots in the post-Reformation period, arising in response to the doctrinal disputes of the time, particularly concerning the nature of God and the Trinity. Unitarianism, which rejects the traditional Christian doctrine of the Trinity, emphasizes the unity of God and the humanity of Jesus.

The Protestant Reformation of the 16th century sparked widespread theological debate, leading to the questioning of many established doctrines of the Catholic Church. Early Unitarians were influenced by Renaissance humanism, which emphasized a return to the original texts of the Bible and critical thinking. They argued that the doctrine of the Trinity was a later development and not part of the original Christian message.

One of the most important figures in the early development of Unitarianism was Michael Servetus (1511–1553), a Spanish physician and theologian. In his book *On the Errors of the Trinity* (1531), Servetus rejected the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, arguing for the unity of God and seeing Jesus as a human being who was divinely inspired.

Fausto Sozzini (also known as Faustus Socinus, 1539–1604), an Italian theologian, was another key figure. He fled to Poland, where he became a leader among the Polish Brethren, a group of radical reformers who rejected the Trinity and predestination. Sozzini's ideas laid the theological foundation for later Unitarian movements.

In Transylvania (modern-day Romania), Unitarianism took root under the leadership of Ferenc David (1510–1579). David was initially a Calvinist but later embraced anti-Trinitarian views. In 1568, with the support of the Unitarian-leaning king, John Sigismund Zápolya, Transylvania became the first place in the world to legally recognize Unitarianism alongside other Christian denominations.

In England, Unitarianism emerged more slowly, influenced by the growing rationalism of the Enlightenment and religious toleration. One of the earliest advocates of Unitarianism in England was John Biddle (1615–1662), often called the "Father of English Unitarianism." Joseph Priestly (24 March 1733–6 February 1804) credited with independent discovery of oxygen was also a Unitarian minister.

By the late 18th and early 19th centuries, Unitarianism spread to America, particularly in New England, where it became a major theological force. William Ellery Channing (1780–1842), whose sermon "Unitarian Christianity" delivered in 1819 became a defining statement of American Unitarian beliefs, emphasized the moral teachings of Jesus, the unity of God, and the importance of reason and individual conscience in religion.

Unitarianism in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills and Karbi Anglong

In these hills, Unitarianism was founded by Hajom Kissor Singh Nongbri, who, in search of his spiritual home, found solace in Unitarian beliefs. It was through an American minister in Kolkata that he was introduced to Unitarianism. From him, Singh was able to get his hands on Unitarian Christianity, which had a great influence on his beliefs. This led to the founding of the Unitarian Church in Jowai on September 18, 1887. The story of Unitarianism is the saga of a free spirit in search of a spiritual home.

Bob's Banter

By Robert Clements

Press 'Pause'... it's been nearly a year since I walked into a plane to Goa, sat next to someone who was busy on her laptop, and then heard her say, "We both are speakers for the same event you know!"

Ridima Wali, the same leadership consultant and communication coach it is, who's written this very powerful article on 'Pause' and with her permission I'm reproducing it for you:

"When was the last time you truly stepped away from your work not just physically, but mentally?"

Ever found yourself staring blankly at your screen after hours of work, feeling like your productivity is slipping away? You are not alone. In our grind to succeed, we often forget the power of the pause. Breaks can boost productivity, but it's not just about the duration of the break; it's about how you spend it.

While 97% of people default to scrolling through social media, research from the Harvard Business Review suggests that this habit can lead to emotional exhaustion rather than replenishment.

Science suggests that our brains aren't designed for constant focus. Short breaks allow us to reset our mental energy, boosting creativity and cognitive function. That's why even micro-breaks, as short as five minutes, can dramatically improve performance. So, what can you do during a break?

- Take a walk to clear your mind, stretch to relieve tension, or practice mindfulness

tion of stillness — to have some intentionality about how we're carrying ourselves in a given moment — and to focus on what is within our control.

For instance, you might physically slow down by sitting, slowly walking, or even lying down, she said. You might reduce external stimuli in your environment by lowering the lights and turning down the music.

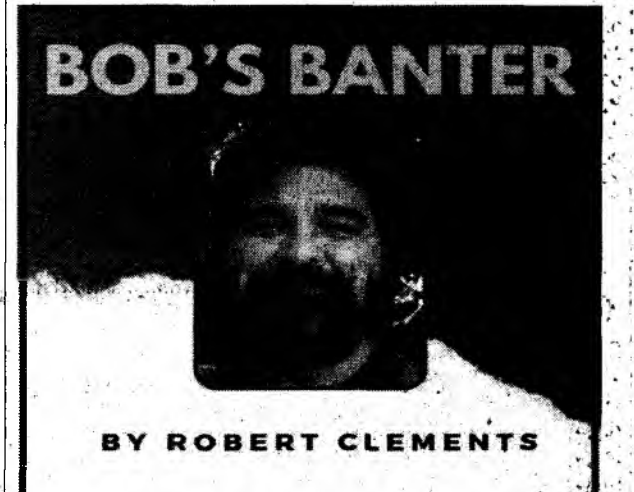
Stillness is powerful. Being still is like replenishing the stores. It allows us time and space to self-reflect and actually hear our thoughts.

It also soothes our nervous system. Stillness produces the anti-stress fix by allowing us some chill time without totally checking out and being numb to our experience.

Stillness looks different at different moments and in different situations, and our ultimate "best" still moments are when we turn off the stimuli around us, such as the television, the radio and oh yes, our phones. We should shut our eyes to calm our thoughts and focus our attention on one thing. Do try and make the moment "as basic and simple as possible."

Here are some ways to practice stillness

1. Breathe  
Taking slow, deep breaths which induces the parasympathetic system and slows your heart rate.
2. Practice when you need it  
Practice stillness anywhere, when the moment



to reduce stress. Hydrate, enjoy a healthy snack or unwind with your favourite song.

- Avoid staring at your screen to prevent eye strain. These small actions help you return to work refreshed and focused. Life is like a symphony, and in every great composition, the pauses between the notes are just as important as the notes themselves.

As you navigate the demands of work and life, remember to take those moments to pause. Sometimes, it's in the stillness that the most profound insights emerge.

Thank you, Ridima, for your powerful insights into the value of taking a pause from whatever we are doing, and stressing never to use that 'pause' period to delve into our phones, which we were under the false assumption, provided us moments of tranquility.

Being a lover of classical music, I realise like how she pointed out, it's the pauses that contribute towards a great composition. So true, because that pause before a rising crescendo, makes that next moment magnificent.

Even the scriptures talk about 'being still'.

I end with this lovely poem by Elizabeth Cheney which used to hang in my childhood home:

Said the Robin to the Sparrow/ "I should really like to know,/ Why these anxious human beings/ Rush around and worry so?"/ Said the Sparrow to the Robin/ "Friend, I think that it must be/ That they have no Heavenly Father/ Such as cares for you and me."

Press pause to prove the birds wrong!  
How do we press 'pause'?  
How do we cultivate the habit of stillness?  
Remember, you can even cultivate stillness while walking on a busy street, even while chaos swirls all around you.  
Some spots could even include the airport and mall. The key is to create an inten-

hits you regardless of where you are.

Sometimes, try practising stillness even in your office in the middle of the day. Lock the door and put up a "do not disturb" sign, taking a few minutes for yourself.

This also allows your workspace to not only represent the hustle and bustle of work, but now when you enter your office you have a calming, relaxing experience to draw from and remember.

3. Schedule stillness  
If you aren't creating stillness spontaneously, try to schedule it and keep this time sacred, she said. Or set an alarm on your phone.

Make it a priority and let others know in your life so that they can honour this time you are setting aside for yourself.

4. Find a favourite spot  
Again, you can experience stillness anywhere. But it can help to start at a favourite place. This might be outdoors, such as a park or bench, or at home, in complete silence, she said.

5. Listen to soft music  
Sometimes, people are afraid of being alone with their thoughts. This is when creating more structure is helpful. One way is by listening to soft, slow music. Music is also great when silence becomes deafening.

6. Repeat calming phrases  
Repeating calming phrases can give your stillness structure. Like saying, "I am calm and still."

"I can create stillness."  
But finally, remember the poem of the Robin and the Sparrow, and realise that there is a heavenly Father, who cares for you and me, and who, with that thought, can give you a meaningful, 'pause' whenever you need it!

(The Author conducts a Writers and Speakers Course for schools, colleges and corporates. For more details call him on 9892572883 or send a message to bobsbanter@gmail.com)

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

"Resilience is, of course, necessary for a warrior. But a lack of empathy isn't."

— Phil Klay

## The Shillong Times

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### Farmers' markets an imperative

THE Voice of People Party (VPP) is following a script to place itself in a favourable position in the forthcoming District Council elections and protesting against price rise is bound to resonate with the people, meaning the voters, particularly the hapless low income group that is most afflicted by the Meghalaya-centric inflation. Pockets of the low and middle class citizens are most hurt by the random rise in prices of essentials necessary for a simple meal that can barely provide all the nutrition needed. Think fruits and they are out of the poor person's menu so where does the necessary nutrition of Vitamin C, iron and potassium come from? Even local fruits such as bananas and pineapples are hardly affordable these days.

So the VPP has identified at least three reasons for the price escalation in essentials namely – the toll gates on the highways; the middlemen and the long route to Shillong post the ban on trucks crossing the Umiam bridge. On the last point about the Umiam Bridge, this is a legacy issue since past governments never bothered to think of alternative routes and never envisioned that the Umiam bridge could at some point crumble under the weight of overloaded coal trucks that traversed on it for decades. And that if the Umiam bridge collapses there would be a major communication crisis. The MDA Government is ostensibly planning on an alternative route but when that would materialise is anyone's guess, considering that the National Highways and Infrastructure Development Corporation Ltd (NHIDCL) has already stated upfront that completing any road project in Meghalaya is fraught due to roadblocks set up by different Dorbar Shnong and pressure groups. Surprisingly the VPP shot down the reason given by the Food and Civil Supplies Minister that the absence of railways added to the price escalation of essentials which also included building materials. So, is the VPP also on the same page with the Khasi Students Union on the issue of not wanting railways to come to Meghalaya? In that case, when will the VPP graduate from a street fighter to a political party with statesmanship qualities necessary to drive this state into a growth trajectory.

Pressure groups have their own agenda so should a political party rely on the support of such groups that are the reason for price rise because these groups collect tolls and taxes from trucks carrying fish, fruit and vegetables along the highways and even when they land at Shillong? It's pointless for the VPP to beat around the bush without addressing the key reason for price rise which is the hafta collected by sundry groups from trucks bringing goods to Shillong. True, the lengthy route through the Shillong bypass also results in more fuel used and therefore an increase in carriage cost. As far as giving local farmers their due, what is important is for the Government to set up a farmer's market in Shillong and its outskirts so that middlemen are eliminated and the public get their money's worth of vegetables and fruits and the farmers too are not exploited. A farmer's market is the need of the hour!

#### Letters to the Editor

### Concerns over new selection law mandating oral exam

Editor,  
I am writing to express my concern regarding the recently notified selection law that mandates oral exam for all subjects. While oral assessments have their merit, relying solely on this method raises issues of fairness and inclusivity. Not all students perform equally well in oral examination due to factors such as anxiety or linguistic limitations. This could disproportionately affect those who excel in written formats or prefer a more balanced approach.

I urge the concerned authority to reconsider this decision and adopt a more comprehensive evaluation system that includes both written and oral exams to ensure fair opportunities for all the students

Yours etc.,  
Souvik Paul  
Class 10,  
Via email

### Beware, drug traffickers are destroying our society

Editor,  
If we think our neighborhood is safe from the scourge of drugs, we're sadly mistaken. It is no joke that Meghalaya now has a staggering 3 lakh drug addicts. During a casual walk along Jhalupara Trenching Ground Road around 7 AM, I spotted a group of boys injecting drugs, utterly detached from reality. This seemed to be part of their daily routine. Nearby, other boys from the same group were shouting and brawling, every sentence punctuated by filthy slurs. Three days later, around 5 PM, I witnessed a similar scene—a different group of addicts either injecting drugs or selling them, wrapped in small paper packets, in a secluded corner. These activities weren't confined to just one spot; they were happening in several locations around the same area.

The problem extends far beyond Trenching Ground Road. Almost every nook and cranny, including be-

If the KHADC and JHADC elections were to be held today, VPP (Voice of the People Party) would be a favourite for many to get a majority on its own and subsequently govern. The support (and if you like, love) that the party has generated for itself is nothing short of a phenomenon. This is an outcome of the 'empathy' that the party has been able to generate with the voters. VPP is able to sell itself as the only party that understands the problems and pain of the grassroots. It has also positioned itself as the

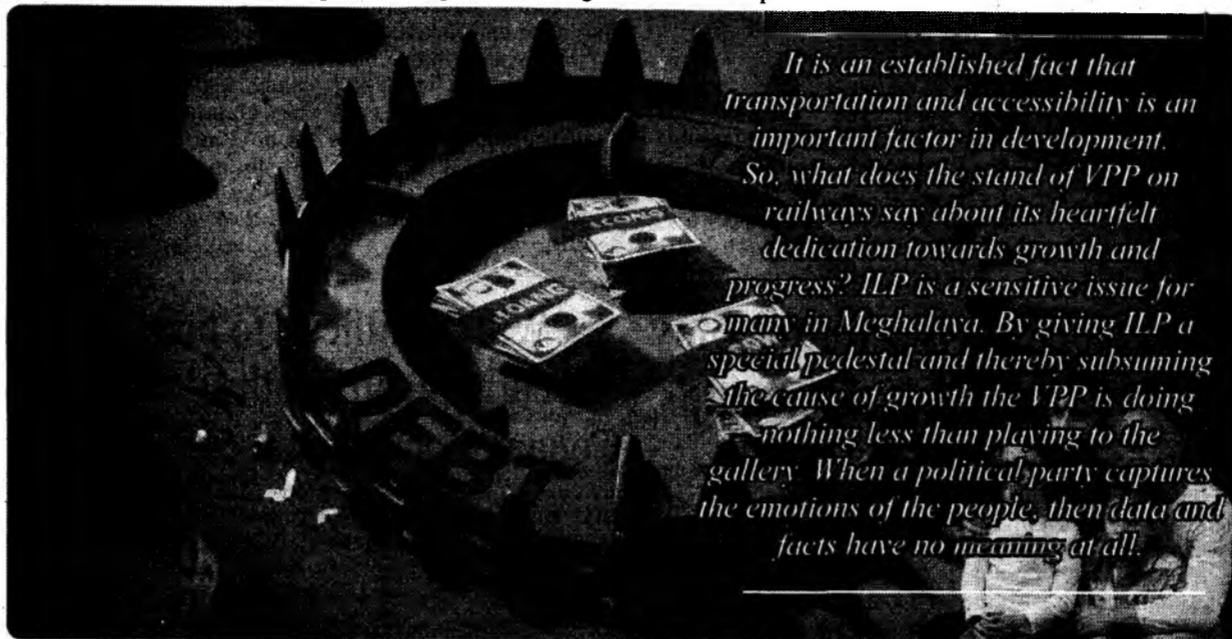
the other parts of north-east India are moving ahead with rail connectivity networks. Once these networks become fully operational, the benefits which the other states will enjoy in terms of transportation of people and goods will be manifold. Meghalaya then will be a mere spectator, all thanks to its politicians and society at large.

**Local economy**  
Meghalaya has been quipping a lot about how its local economy is not in the position to produce enough

**Loans**  
With every passing year there is a growing concern that Meghalaya is going to end up in a debt trap. But data tells us that Meghalaya is already in a mini-debt trap. This happens when a state borrows new loans to repay old loans. When this happens in continuity over time then the state falls into a debt trap which is irreversible. Then the only way out is a bail-out package by the central government. When the CAG report talks about

through potent interventions rather than just giving a clarion call.

In fact, none of the political parties are mobilizing their mammoth support bases to rally a movement against drugs. By the way, if 3 lakh people are addicted to drugs and other forms of substance abuse then effectively 12 lakh people are indirectly affected by it. Drug addiction is basically a family problem and it impacts all members. Now, 12 lakh means that one-third of Meghalaya's population are directly or indirectly impacted by drugs.



*It is an established fact that transportation and accessibility is an important factor in development. So, what does the stand of VPP on railways say about its heartfelt dedication towards growth and progress? ILP is a sensitive issue for many in Meghalaya. By giving ILP a special pedestal and thereby subsuming the cause of growth the VPP is doing nothing less than playing to the gallery. When a political party captures the emotions of the people, then data and facts have no meaning at all!*

only party that has feasible and viable solutions to the developmental problems of Meghalaya. This is a kind of political cocktail that would sweep anyone off their feet. But, is there a problem with the narrative of VPP? The devil lies in the details.

**Railways**  
The position of VPP on the issue of railways was as expected. The party has explicitly supported the demand for ILP. In such a situation it has no room to maneuver on the matter of railways; else they would invite opposition from the pressure groups. Hence, it is not a surprise that VPP refused to accept the correlation between price rise and the absence of rail network penetration into Meghalaya. It is an established fact that transportation and accessibility is an important factor in development. So, what does the stand of VPP on railways say about its heartfelt dedication towards growth and progress? ILP is a sensitive issue for many in Meghalaya. By giving ILP a special pedestal and thereby subsuming the cause of growth the VPP is doing nothing less than playing to the gallery. When a political party captures the emotions of the people, then data and facts have no meaning at all. While Meghalaya continues to be emotional about railways,

and hence, a lot of eatables and consumables are to be brought in from outside the state. These are brought in through trucks and other smaller commercial vehicles which are an expensive proposition as they do not possess the advantages of economies of scale (bringing goods in bulk and thereby reducing costs). Railways continue to be a pipe dream and hence the focus has to shift towards the local economy. All political parties will empathize with the poor on the issue of price rise for political mileage, but in reality no one seems serious about addressing the root causes of the problem. Even VPP is not offering tangible solutions. For instance, price rise is the diagnosis. But, what are the symptoms? The main symptom is the poor state of the local economy. Needed are interventions that would push the major growth sectors of the local economy such as agriculture and small businesses. This will generate employment. Plus in the equation of demand and supply the increase in the quantity of goods will automatically bring the prices down. But, we are in a sad place where, for example, fishery schemes meant for commercial production are rather being used for setting up ponds just for fish-gambling. No wonder the local economy is in shambles.

the five-year time clock of loans repayment it is basically warning that if in five years things do not improve Meghalaya will fall into an irreversible debt trap. But, there are two angles to it. First, if the loans are invested in productive infrastructure like roads, bridges, etc., then the loans become good as the returns would come in, in the future. Second, if the loans are invested for unproductive purposes then they turn bad as they generate no returns. For example, if a family takes a loan to invest in a local taxi then it is good as it generates revenue, but, if the loan is used to buy rice and vegetables then the family is in deep trouble. VPP, TMC and Congress need to ask MDA 2.0 where the loans are invested. Is it for productive or unproductive purposes? Without having the facts, all doubts raised are just casting aspersions. Now, will they ask?

**Drugs**  
Equating the menace of drugs with the issue of corruption is problematic. It is difficult to believe that VPP does not realize that drugs are not a political problem but a societal one. But, picking corruption helps as it raises eyebrows and captures the attention of people. It would be better if VPP's empathy is directed towards locally solving the problem

#### Reservation

How many government jobs are there annually in Meghalaya? Statistics tells us that it is around 3000 per annum. VPP is within its rights to highlight the reservation issue. But whether it will come to fruition or not remains to be seen. Now there is a talk by the party to revive the issue. Amidst all this, VPP is losing out on an opportunity to drive the local economy through entrepreneurship and small businesses by engaging the youth in productive employment. Their MLAs could have used the MLA scheme to collectively invest in some venture rather than distributing it piece-meal. It is an opportunity for the four VPP constituencies to show how development can be done through collective action. Real empathy is in bigger investments as they bring better returns. Does the Party have the capacity to do it in future?

Today, VPP has the image of a trouble shooter and the harbinger of justice in the eyes of the voters. For the sake of the people, let us hope that they can live up to the expectations and deliver. But, as history has shown time and again; in politics, no one is innocent and all is not true.

(The writer teaches at NEHU; email – blyngdoh@gmail.com)

## Changing perception of the cow in Indian society

By VK Lyngdoh

Dwijendra Narayan Jha, who died at the age of 81 years, was professor at the History Department, Delhi University. He specialized in ancient and medieval history. In his book "The Myth of the Holy Cow", he alleged that cows formed part of the diet in ancient India. Cattle were neither inviolable nor as revered in ancient times as they were later. Quoting from the Vedas the oldest religious text in the world and the Upanishads, he alleged that cattle were offered as sacrifice to various deities and that hardly any prayer was complete without animal sacrifice. Jha received death threats over his book. He discussed the events surrounding the publication in the introduction to the book saying, "Shortly afterwards, I began to get threats from unidentified callers asking me not to go ahead with the publication. Undeterred by all this Matrix Books, a new enterprising publishing house based in Delhi, mustered enough courage to publish the book promptly in the first week of August 2001. But some right-wing politicians and groups of religious fanatics, without reading a single page, termed it 'blasphemous', demanded my arrest and succeeded in obtaining a court order restraining the circulation of the book, and a self-appointed custodian of 'Hinduism' even sentenced me to death. The book was therefore published abroad by Verso (London)."

Jha's argument about beef eating during the Vedic period is supported by several types of evidence. References in the Rigveda and other Vedic texts mention the slaughter of cattle for rituals and feasts. For example, the Rigveda mentions the sacrifice of bulls and cows in various hymns. Archaeological evidence also prove that cows were slaughtered and eaten. Excavations at sites like Hastinapur and Atranjikhara have revealed cattle bones with cut marks, indicating that cattle were slaughtered and consumed. Literary sources: Ancient Indian epics like the Mahabharata and Ramayana also contain references to the consumption of beef.

In the Mahabharata, for instance, there are descriptions of feasts where beef was served. Historical accounts by foreign travellers and historians, such as Megasthenes and Al-Biruni, mention the consumption of beef in ancient India. Some Brahmanical texts, like the Dharma sutras and the Manusmriti, contain rules about the consumption of meat, including beef, under certain circumstances. These pieces of evidence collectively support the view that beef eating was not uncommon during the Vedic period and that cow sanctity evolved over time.

The reasons behind consuming beef during that period are attributed to the fact that cattle were often sacrificed in religious rituals and ceremonies. These sacrifices were believed to please the gods and ensure prosperity and wellbeing. Offering beef to guests was considered a mark of respect and hospitality. It was customary to serve the best food, including beef, to honour visitors. Beef was a valuable source of nutrition, providing essential proteins and fats.

In a society where agriculture and animal husbandry were central, cattle were an important food source. As far as economic utility is concerned, cattle were not only a source of food but also played a crucial role in agriculture and transportation. However, when cattle became unproductive, they were often slaughtered for meat. The consumption of

beef was integrated into the cultural and social practices of the time. Feasts and communal meals often included beef, reflecting its acceptance in society. These reasons highlight the multifaceted role of cattle in Vedic society, encompassing religious, social, economic, and nutritional dimensions.

During the Vedic period, beef played a significant role in various rituals and ceremonies. Some of the key aspects include cows and bulls being sacrificed in religious rituals to please the gods. These sacrifices were believed to ensure prosperity, fertility, and wellbeing of the community. The Rigveda, one of the oldest Vedic texts, contains hymns that mention the sacrifice of cattle. Madhyaparka ceremony was a ritual of hospitality where a special meal, often including beef, was offered to honoured guests, such as priests or dignitaries. The offering of beef in this context was a mark of respect and high regard. In various Yajnas, or fire sacrifices, cattle were offered to the deities. The meat from these sacrifices was then consumed by the participants, including priests and householders. These rituals were central to Vedic religious practices and were believed to maintain cosmic order.

In some instances, cattle were sacrificed during funerary rites to accompany the deceased into the afterlife. This practice was meant to provide sustenance and support for the departed soul on its journey. Beyond their practical use, cattle held symbolic significance in Vedic rituals. They were seen as embodiments of wealth and prosperity, and their sacrifice was thought to release spiritual energy that benefited the community. These rituals highlight the integral role of cattle in Vedic society, both as a source of sustenance and as a key element of religious and social practices.

The perception about cows in Indian society has evolved significantly over time, influenced by various religious, cultural and socio-political factors. After the Vedic period, the importance of non-violence (ahimsa) began to grow, particularly with the rise of Jainism and Buddhism. These religions emphasized compassion towards all living beings, including animals, which contributed to a shift in attitudes towards cattle. During the later Vedic period and the subsequent Brahmanical period, texts like the Manusmriti began to emphasize the sanctity of the cow. The cow came to be seen as a symbol of wealth, fertility, and religious purity. By the medieval period, the cow had become a central symbol in Hinduism. The Bhakti movement, which emphasized devotion to personal gods, further reinforced the cow's secret status. Stories and legends about the cow's divine nature became widespread.

During British colonial rule, the cow became a symbol of resistance and identity for many Hindus. Cow protection gained momentum, advocating for prevention of cows from being slaughtered. This period saw the cow being increasingly associated with Hindu identity and nationalism. In contemporary India, the cow remains a potent symbol of religious and cultural identity. Cow protection laws have been enacted in many states, and the cow continues to be revered in Hindu rituals and festivals. These changes reflect a complex interplay of religious teachings, cultural practices, and socio-political movements that have shaped the perception of cows over millennia.

hind parked vehicles, in and around the slummy residential areas of the Cantonment, as well as Mawbah, Naspatihari/Nongsophoh Cantonment Area, have become a haven for addicts hiding away to indulge in their dangerous habits. Again, one would be mistaken to think that these secluded corners are far from the watchful gaze of police outposts. A distraught resident laments, "Lots of drug deals happen less than 150 to 250 meters from the Jhalupara police outpost. In other words, drug peddling is happening right under the nose of the police station."

Upon inquiry, one learns more details that only send a chill down the spine. Drug addicts and sub-distributors come from distant places to procure their supplies. Many of the peddlers are addicts themselves, operating under the wings of distributors. Locals believe that hardcore suppliers, with a sinister network across the town, have been residing in the area below Trenching Road, adjacent to Nongsophoh (Naspatihari), for over two decades.

A resident, Deepak Wahlang, laments how these traffickers use young people as

"runners", taking advantage of Shillong's narrow lanes and crowded streets to evade the law. In some cases, they even set up shops disguised as street vendors or kiosks, hiding their illegal trade behind legitimate businesses. It's a classic case of hiding in plain sight.

A nagging concern is why some suspected drug dealers are allowed to live in slummy huts and shanties, lacking proper sanitation and hygiene, under the Cantonment Board's jurisdiction. Despite multiple arrests of key drug kingpins, they have returned with a vengeance, resuming their nefarious trade and employing their relatives and fellow addicts to peddle narcotics. In fact, they are also the ones who spread their dangerous tentacles throughout the neighbourhoods and other parts of town. It's no surprise that people come from as far as Ri Bhoi, Jowai, and Lad Rymbai to purchase drugs, often through intermediaries. Another major factor that draws so many youths into drug use and peddling is "unemployment," as it offers the promise of quick money.

What's revolting is how some women traffickers

cleverly "weaponize the law" against anyone brave enough to call them out. They're quick to play the "victimhood" card and much more. In fact, they allegedly managed to outsmart even the vigilant Dorbar Shnong members.

A senior lawyer in the neighborhood fervently argues, "Why is the Cantonment Board turning a blind eye to those using this area as a springboard to spread the drug menace, not just in the neighborhood but across the town and beyond? These traffickers have devastated countless young lives and families." Moreover, Defence land is understandably a protected place where the authority is expected to be more vigilant. In view of the overt rise of this menace, many concerned residents believe that the Dorbar Shnong should be empowered to check and verify the antecedents and backgrounds of those who rent residential units in these sensitive zones. This is a crucial step before initiating any serious efforts to combat the drug menace.

A police officer, speaking on condition of anonymity, expressed his frustration: "Besides long formality and

the shortage of manpower to eradicate this evil, what really troubles us in the police force is the NDPS Act, which allows addicts or sellers caught with certain amounts of drugs to be let off easily. We arrest them today, but they're out tomorrow, back to business the next day. Isn't it extremely demoralizing?" I fully support the police officer. This loophole is being heavily exploited to keep peddlers out of jail. Even hardcore dealers, with the help of expert lawyers, spin tales of innocence too quickly and easily. Addicts are often treated leniently, so peddlers pretend to be addicts themselves, giving jurisprudence the slip! Let me conclude the malaise with the words of Shakespeare: "O judgment, thou art fled to brutish beasts, and men have lost their reason!"

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwali,  
& Waiki Kyndiah,  
Shillong-2

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**"Mastering others is strength.  
Mastering yourself is true power."**

—Lao Tzu

The Shillong Times

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### Regional disparities

INDIA's economic growth is the growth that its states achieve both independently and collectively. Several factors contribute to each state's growth, including mainly local-level initiatives and central support in terms of infra development. The new working paper prepared by the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister has, overall, stated the obvious – that the western and southern states performed better while the northern and eastern sectors suffered overall. This has been the case for the past few decades, principally after the Economic Liberalization of the early 1990s. The report notes that Sikkim, among the north-eastern states performed better than the other sister states. Among the poor performers is Meghalaya.

Significantly, among the weak performers are Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, the heartland of the Hindi belt, where population explosion on the one hand and poor law and order on the other make a mess of life. The unbridled growth of the Muslim population in these two states and a matching failure on the part of the establishment to make use of the manpower of the large army of youths in productive sectors worsened the scenario. Fact is also that most governments are under-performing. Uttar Pradesh could not majorly grow even as the BJP government is having repeated innings there by way of a so-called "double-engine sarkar." Neither could Bihar show any substantial growth despite the long rule of Nitish Kumar. So is West Bengal, which majorly let down the eastern sector by recording a fall in its growth graph. Odisha stood out and made commendable strides in the recent years.

It is a travesty of fate that the eastern metropolis began its fall ever since the 1960s, while the western metropolis grew by leaps and mounts. Mumbai principally fed the entire Maharashtra and raised the state's status while Kolkata let down the state and the East. The reasons are obvious – trade union militancy driving away industries and undercutting industrial activities there for several decades. Mamata Banerjee sought to change the 'red' image of the state, but she revelled in her government's fight against the Centre, upsetting the economic apprearance. The growth of Gujarat was encouraged initially by a spill-over from Mumbai, followed by favourable industrial climate and of late major support from the central government. Delhi and contiguous Haryana state formed into another growth centre. The major growth of the national capital since the 1980s acted positively on Haryana more and less on Uttar Pradesh. The high growth of both Telangana and Karnataka is thanks mainly to their buoyant IT sector while Tamil Nadu showed all-round progress both in industrial growth and agricultural development. A big state like Madhya Pradesh does not figure majorly in the growth graph despite several years of BJP rule there and due to lack of industrialisation.

## Meghalaya Public Communication Policy 2024: A Critique

By Patricia Mukhim

The Meghalaya Public Communication Policy (MPCP) 2024 that was out recently has kicked up a storm with some terming it an infringement on the Right to Freedom of Expression. The Preamble to the Policy says, "At its core the MPCP is dedicated to fostering trust and transparency between the government and its citizens, recognising the imperative need for uniform communication policy across all government departments to ensure clarity and consistency in information. Central to the approach is the principle that the government serves as the primary source of information on its activities, decisions and policies, featuring the values of transparency, accessibility and accountability. The policy is also the proactive response to the prevalent challenges of misinformation and disinformation in today's rapidly evolving information landscape. Through concerted efforts to combat misinformation and disinformation, the aim of the Policy is to empower citizens with accurate information, thereby fostering informed participation in the governance process. Moreover, the Policy prioritizes coherence in communication strategies, with a keen focus on enhancing public engagement and facilitating the effective implementation of government policies."

This Preamble presupposes that the Government reserves to itself the entire right to disseminate information without any interface between those running the government and the media which is the fourth pillar of democracy in case this has been forgotten by those enunciating the Policy. Today the Government uses its own news dissemination channels which are one-way, non-participatory channels. Such official press releases preclude journalists from asking questions from the right quarters – namely those who make policies. The media has a duty to inform the public about the policy but also its likely impacts both positive and negative. It's not as if all policies initiated by the Government are beyond criticism. It is the duty of the media to critique such policies objectively, leaving out the officialese so that the public are able to make sense of the policy beyond the jargons and thereby make an informed decision as to whether a public policy is actually people friendly or is

merely a cover up for more government spending with no visible outcomes.

Let's not fool ourselves that the Government is open to giving out information on superfluous public spending. We get such information from the Comptroller and Auditor General every year. Then we have the Government trying to cover up the financial improprieties such as the non-submission of utilisation certificates (UCs) for money spent by several departments over the years. Without the UCs how does the public know where the money has gone? Has the Government ever responded to such audit observations? Without the media questioning it, would the Government be ready and willing to give out information that puts it in the dock?

We are well aware that the bureaucracy, the political class and even the legislature guard information regarding even the most mundane subjects with astonishing zeal. It takes a lot for journalists to break this iron curtain of the official non-cooperation. No wonder the Right to Information Act was passed. But even with this, there is a general reticence. It is a gigantic effort to get answers to queries on Government profligacy and misgovernment.

The follows a paragraph called 'Guiding Principles' which claims that the MPCP is aimed at "Ensuring Informed Citizenship." It states that citizens must be adequately and accurately informed about government activities, programs and policies thereby upholding their inherent right to communication.

What is troubling is para 3.2 of the Policy - "Government as the Source of Information." It says, "Government shall be the unequivocal source of information, fostering transparency and trust by making it explicitly clear that all information regarding Government activities and decisions originate from official sources." Does this mean that the role of media shall be to simply dish out releases without the right to seek clarification from the concerned minister/bureaucrat on issues that could impinge on the public? The media is the bridge between Government and citizens. They question the Government through the media. In this case it appears that the

Government wants to eliminate the media and connect directly with the public. Is this about promoting the CM Connect programme? Are all members of the public – which means the entire population of Meghalaya – able to raise questions at these CM-Connect programmes? Aren't the members of the public invited there hand-picked? In Ri Bhoi recently when there was a CM Connect programme people said that they were not allowed to ask questions. So, what is the definition of 'transparency' and 'trust' here?

That this policy was drafted by an idealist can be gauged from the paragraph that says – Government shall be readily accessible to the public for soliciting feedback on Government decisions and activities and be responsive to such feedback, promptly addressing the needs and concerns of the public. May we ask which platform the Government will use to answer thousands of questions on a daily basis from aggrieved citizens? How practical is this?

On the point 'Policy-Driven Governance,' the overall objectives of the MPCP as laid out here is to formulate public policies derived from public consultations. How genuine is this intent? Name one policy that the Government of Meghalaya has formulated after due public consultation other than the Social Audit Act and the Right to Information Act?

On the point of – Combating Misinformation and Disinformation – the Policy says "Strategies will be developed to counter misinformation by promptly providing factual information and addressing the sources of disinformation." Clearly those who drafted this Policy have not made a distinction between misinformation and disinformation.

Misinformation can happen unintentionally because we misheard something or did not remember details of the communication we relayed. So often we tell our friends something we heard on TV or saw on social media that wasn't really true. If anyone of us is spreading information that is wrong because we never fact-checked and didn't know it was wrong we are misinforming. But disinformation is intentionally crafted information that

is designed to deliberately mislead people with manipulative narratives or facts or propaganda. There is a lot of disinformation spread on social media by camp followers of political parties across the board. Can the Government check all that disinformation campaign or is the target of the Government only media persons? Disinformation is created by agent provocateurs and those with nefarious motives. Hence there is a sharp difference between misinformation and disinformation. While the Government can have a policy to deal with disinformation which could in a fragile situation lead to violence and bloodshed, it can counter misinformation with factual information.

The most troubling part of the Policy however is the notification dated September 16, 2024. The first part of the notification is innocuous in that it urges all those involved in disseminating news on social media to register themselves with the Directorate of Information and Public Relations (DIPR). It is the following paragraph that is disturbing as it lends itself to misinterpretation. It says, "Any individual or organisation not accredited or empanelled with DIPR, who disseminates news on social media platforms within the State of Meghalaya without completing this registration will be deemed in violation of the MPCP 2024 and action in accordance with law will be pursued. This notification aims to ensure that no individual posts content that is against the interests of the state, public order, decency, morality or involves defamation of any institution or individual or that is likely to incite the commission of any offence."

In the above clause what is it that can be construed to be against the interests of the state or public order? Sometimes a public protest by civil society groups against certain injustices and wrong policies could be misconstrued to go against the interests of the state. This clause lends itself to arbitrary action by the state. As far as decency, morality and defamation are concerned there are laws to deal with such.

What requires some oversight however is the proliferation of YouTubers who are a law unto themselves and do not observe media ethics. Members of the journalistic fraternity need to debate this point and come up with suggestions on how to deal with licentiousness in the garb of journalism.

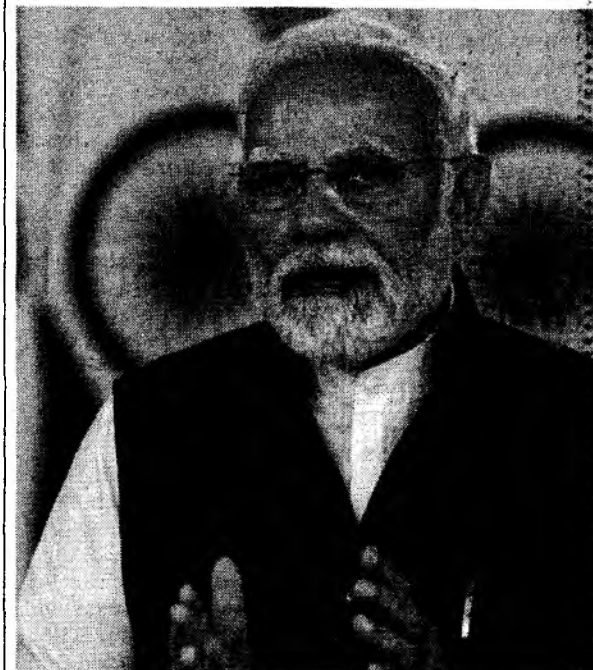
India isolates itself completely from BRIC partners on Israel occupation issue

### Skipping vote on UNGA call for end to Israel's unlawful presence is a big shame

By Nitya Chakraborty

What is happening to Indian foreign policy during the third term of Prime Minister Narendra Modi? Is India a vassal state to the United States in 2024 disconnecting all its political links with the country's BRICS partners? On September 18, a day after our PM's 74th birthday and completion of 100 days of the third term Prime Minister, India abstained in the UN General Assembly on a resolution demanding that Israel end its unlawful

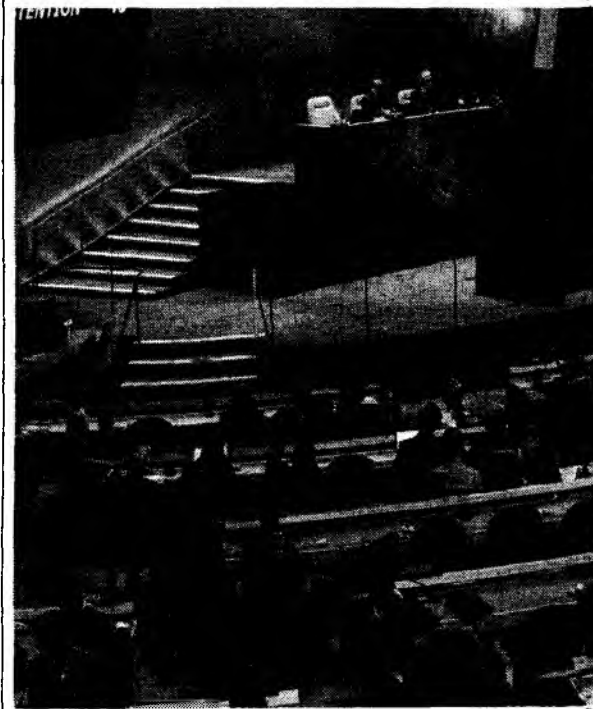
(SCO). In more than eleven months since the Israel-Palestine war started on October 7 last year, there have been many attempts at the level of the United Nations to stop the hostilities leading to destruction of the Gaza area. The death toll is nearly 40,000. All the members of the BRICS except India took leading positions in demanding immediate end of atrocities by Israel and end of its occupation illegally



presence in the occupied Palestinian territory without delay within 12 months.

The 193 member UN general assembly adopted the resolution after 124 members including most of the developing countries and BRICS members excluding India supported the motion while 14 members including the US and Israel voted against and 43 members including India abstained. What was significant was that even Japan, a

of the Palestine territory. South Africa has officially demanded that the International Court of Justice declare Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a criminal and Israel be asked to end its occupation. The Brazilian President gave full support to the move of the South African president. Finally, the ICJ issued its order to Israel for the end of its atrocities but the Israel government is not abiding by the ICJ or-



QUAD member just like India, voted in favour of the resolution saying that Israel settlement activities undermine the advancement of a two state resolution.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be attending the four nation QUAD summit in the USA on September 21- the first day of his three day visit to the USA. This is the only summit hosted by President Joe Biden, our Prime Minister is attending with big enthusiasm. Of the four partners, USA which is the mentor of Israel voted against the resolution, but Japan supported and two other members India and Australia abstained. India and Australia are in the same group, but Australia is a rich nation tied to the western interests while India, known for many years as the champion of global south has driven itself to such a position in the international fora that the biggest functioning democracy of the world is isolated from the proactive members of the BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

der. The UNGA resolution passed on September 18 assumes special significance in that context.

A QUAD meeting will be held on September 21 to be attended by all the four heads of the governments. It will be of interest to monitor the Indian PM's views on the global issues including Israel occupation of Gaza. The SCO meeting is scheduled in Islamabad on October 15 and 16 while the BRICS meeting will be held in Russia hosted by President Putin on October 22 to 24 next in which Chinese president Xi Jinping will be attending. This meeting will be of great interest. PM Narendra Modi is not attending the SCO meet as far as indications are available as of now. It is possible that he will be attending the coming BRICS summit. But at BRICS, he will be attending with a diminished stature as he has already delinked himself from the global south in his eagerness to be closer to the United States in its Indo-Pacific strategy. (IPA Service)

#### Letters to the Editor

### Does the State alone reserve the right to be wrong?

Editor,  
The Meghalaya Public Communication Policy, 2024 has all the markings of a totalitarian state. The Policy claims that its central principle is that "Government serves as the primary source of information on its activities, decisions and policies, featuring the values of transparency, accessibility and accountability." How cute that the State has awarded itself with the character certificate of being transparent, accessible and accountable? Well, what if we the people do not believe that the ones in power embody these values? What, then? I personally do not believe so and one of the reasons is that during the COVID crisis, every YouTuber and independent outlet were barred from spreading any negative information on the COVID vaccine, because it contradicted the State and the experts. The State deprived the people who refused the vaccine of livelihood until the High Court intervened. But in April of this year, AstraZeneca admitted in a UK Court that their vaccine Covishield can lead to conditions associated with blood clot formation, heart attacks and brain haemorrhages. Can the State be punished for being dead wrong? Where is the accountability here? None.  
Point 5.13 speaks about

effective crisis communication. But the issue is not about effective communication by the State. The issue is that the State can be wrong, even if it disseminates its information effectively. So, this is where independent thinkers and reporters come in. But this policy aims to make rules and policy for private outlets by forcing them to register under the DIPR and then to abide by the State's broad and debatable criteria of public order, decency, morality or defamation.

The question is, who will define the criteria of public order, decency, morality and defamation? If the State itself defines these, then the State is accountable only to itself. Hence the reason why I say that this policy has the markings of a totalitarian state.

So, the real and practical principle of this policy is that only the State reserves the right to be wrong, and individuals and private outlets do not share that right. This itself has defeated the values that this policy claims to espouse, i.e. accountability and transparency. The reason why Article 19(1)(a) was enshrined in the Constitution is because we do not place the State above the Individual. The power resides in the people, not the State.

Yours etc.,  
Kitdor H. Blah,  
Shillong

### Nepotism must end now!

Editor  
The letter by Khlur Basan on the evils of nepotism (ST

Sept 18, 2024) urging the people of Meghalaya not to allow family dynasties and nepotism to trample over the position of individuals who are deserving and qualified for the posts of Chairperson of SPCPR is timely. This principle should be applied not only for this particular post but in any field in order to get the best brains and effective results, be it education, health and sanitation, roads, etc. To compromise with quality and exchange deserving and qualified persons for those who are underqualified is not only ethically wrong but also harmful for the well-being of the population in general and the stakeholders in particular.

Come to think of it, this substitution of deserving by non-deserving candidates is not a new thing. It has been happening for decades now and has only got worse with every passing day. The Government that has been elected by the people and is meant to serve the people completely sidelines those who had voted for them and prioritises themselves before others. This should not have been allowed to happen and should have been nipped in the bud. As it was never checked this unprincipled act of those in power has only continued to the point of causing hazards to all.

Nepotism should be called out. We cannot allow this to continue and to pave a rickety and shaky future for our children. The young must see that merit matters and political connections cannot always

win the day. We must start adopting these principles now and not procrastinate before it is too late.

Yours etc.,  
Jennifer Dkhar,  
Via email

### Why this incarceration?

Editor,  
Umar Khalid has completed four years in jail without trial. He was arrested under the UAPA on September 14, 2020, in connection with the Delhi riots. Recently, the Supreme Court has ruled that courts cannot decline bail, even under the special anti-terror law UAPA, and other offences, once the accused satisfies his prima facie innocence.

But Umar Khalid and 11 others are still languishing in jail. On this, academic and activist Yogendra Yadav rightly observed, "These four years are a stain on our judicial system and India's Constitution." Khalid is accused of making two speeches that instigated protestors to block roads. A documentary, "Prisoner No. 626710 is Present", on him has shown his controversial speech in Maharashtra in 2020 in its entirety.

It is reported that he urged the people in that speech to use Gandhian means to oppose the new citizenship laws, which sparked fears of disenfranchisement. If it is true, then it means that Mahatma Gandhi could have faced the UAPA had he still been alive.

Citing data from the Na-

tional Crime Records Bureau, the People's Union of Civil Liberties, in its draft report, pointed out that out of 8,371 persons arrested under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) between 2015 and 2020, only 235 were convicted. The high rate of acquittal (97.2%) showed that prosecution under the UAPA did not have merit in the huge majority of cases.

We need to listen to Nobel laureate economist Amartya Sen. He said, "We need at this time, when the nation is being divided, between Hindus and Muslims by forces of political opportunism, and our unity is being destroyed, a powerful voice."

He recalled the time during the British regime and said, "Under British rule, Indians were often arrested and imprisoned without trial, and some were kept in prison for a long time....As a young man, I had hoped that as India became independent, this unjust system, in use in colonial India, would stop. This has not, alas, happened, and the unsupportable practice of arresting and keeping accused human beings in prison without trying them has continued in free and democratic India."

On keeping Umar Khalid in jail without trial, Amartya Sen said, "Many of those who are thinking boldly and being brave politically are suffering at the hands of the government, without any trial for their so-called offence. They are often praised from outside the country. Like, we have heard forcefully from Professor (Noam) Chomsky. He has wanted

honour for Umar Khalid, who is in jail without trial. But such honour is often rare in this country."

It may be recalled that a section of electronic media started kangaroo courts on their prime time TV debate and labelled JNU research scholars Kanhaiya Kumar, Umar Khalid, and Anirban Bhattacharya as members of "tukde-tukde gang" when they had been charged with a seditious case of raising anti-India slogans in February, 2016. A new Hindi slogan "tukde-tukde gang" was coined and popularised to describe them. Those TV shows went against the rule of law by giving their verdict even before the start of the trial.

A kangaroo court judgement on a sub justice matter can lead to a disastrous consequence. Kanhaiya Kumar suffered physical assaults at the hands of some lawyers in a court premise. There was a gun attack on Umar Khalid outside the Constitution Club in the heart of our capital in 2018.

Investigative journalism is one thing, but under its guise, the practice of giving a verdict on a sub justice matter is another. The latter is totally unacceptable.

How long should Umar Khalid be in jail awaiting trial without bail?

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

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*"There is no scriptural basis for segregation."*

— Billy Graham

## The Shillong Times

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### Drug addiction a societal crisis

EVERY single day there are reports of break-ins across Shillong; chain snatching in the Fourth Furlong and Polo areas and other forms of theft especially of four wheelers in different parts of the city that are being attributed to substance abusers. With about three lakh drug dependent youth, things are looking pretty grim for Meghalaya. It is possible that the sample survey has not captured the complete picture and the number of addicts is well beyond the Government figures. Roughly substance abusers make up about one-tenth of the population which is a crisis that the State should be looking at more intently and also allocate resources for rehabilitation of addicts. However, before diving deeper into this issue of drug addiction in Meghalaya we need to clearly understand the difference between the terms drug abuse and drug addiction. Someone who consumes illegal drugs is a drug abuser but not necessarily an addict. A drug addict is someone who is dependent on drugs and will try every possible resource to abuse drugs. A drug addict is also someone whose quality of life is now severely hindered and may need immediate medical assistance and psycho-social rehabilitation to recover and lead a normal healthy life.

With the rising number of addicts in the State, Meghalaya needs a robust plan on how to contain this problem. This could only be done with the help of a detailed study on the kinds of drugs being abused, the age-group of addicts, the district/s with the highest consumptions and the availability of de-addiction centres. The State level survey for Substance Use in Meghalaya makes it clear that a sizable population is addicted to drugs. However, there is a large gap between the demand for treatment and treatment services available. A state-level treatment programme is the need of the hour. But a more critical need at this juncture is to have more government-aided de-addiction and detoxification centres for inpatient treatment as well as outpatient clinics with proper access to medicines, doctors and psychiatrists. Detoxification programs are crucial as they prepare a person for treatment in a safe, controlled environment where withdrawal symptoms and any physical or mental health complications can be managed. Detox can happen in a hospital setting or as a first step to the inpatient or outpatient rehabilitation process. Going through detox is a crucial step in recovery, and it's these first few weeks that are most critical because they are when the risk of relapse is highest. However, detoxification is not equivalent to treatment and should not be solely relied upon for recovery.

Time and again, it is proven that prevention is better than cure. Prevention programmes about drug abuse need to be carried out in schools, colleges, churches and localities within the Dorbar Shnong. In a State where a sizable population are Christians, the churches have a major role to play in setting up family clinics and counselling centres. Actually families and schools/colleges need to also counsel young adolescents on how to deal with stress and disappointments because that's one reason for drug use.

## Reasonable restriction on tourist vehicles from outside the state: A constitutional perspective

By Kenneth Nongsiej

With its serene landscapes and natural beauty, Meghalaya has become one of India's most favoured tourist destinations. The state is blessed with various natural wonders, from the Living Root bridge, waterfalls, crystal clear rivers and caves, drawing visitors across the country and beyond. This surge in tourism has been a boon to the local economy, providing livelihoods to an estimated 50,000 people. The tourism sector now contributes approximately 4.1% to the state's Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP), according to the Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2023.

In recent years, especially after the global pandemic, the state has witnessed a rapid rise in the number of tourists. As reported by CNBC TV18 (News Web Portal) on November 26, 2023, the number of tourists increased from 7 lakh in 2013 to 12.7 lakh in 2023. Despite this growth, concerns about the impact of tourist vehicles from outside the state have arisen, leading to debates over imposing restrictions on these vehicles, particularly by adopting a model similar to that of Sikkim, where tourist vehicles from outside the state are limited to designated areas.

This article will explore the issues raised by local tourist drivers, examine the constitutional provisions related to these restrictions, and propose a balanced approach that protects the rights of all stakeholders while also meeting the socio-economic needs of the state's residents. It also raises the question of "Whether people would be open to implementing a similar policy in Sikkim" or "Whether it would lead to inconvenience for the tourists if implemented".

### Concerns Raised by Local Tourist Drivers

The local tourism sector, particularly taxi drivers, has been vocal about the challenges posed by the influx of tourist vehicles from outside Meghalaya. The All Khasi Meghalaya Tourist Taxi Association (AKMTTA) has raised the issue that approximately 3,500 vehicles enter the state with tourists, of which around 2,400 come from outside. The unregulated entry of these vehicles has led to fierce competition for local drivers, who are finding it increasingly difficult to secure passengers and earn a livelihood.

Local tourist taxi operators argue that the unchecked entry of out-of-state vehicles negatively impacts their daily income, as tourists tend to prefer hiring vehicles from neighbouring states for the entirety of their trip. This situation not only undermines the livelihood of local drivers but also disrupts the economic balance in the tourism sector.

Given the genuine concerns of local drivers, the question arises: Can the state government impose restric-

tions on vehicles from outside the state without violating the provisions of the Constitution of India? To answer this question, we must first examine the constitutional framework governing such matters.

### Constitutional Provisions

The Preamble of the Constitution of India intends a society where social, economic, and political justice is secured to all citizens. To achieve this vision, the framers of the Constitution included various fundamental rights, under Part III, Article 19 of the Constitution guarantees several rights, including the freedom of movement throughout the territory of India (Article 19(1)(d)) and the freedom to practice any profession, or to carry on any occupation, trade, or business (Article 19(1)(g)).

However, these rights are not absolute. The Constitution permits the imposition of "reasonable restrictions" on these freedoms in the interest of the general public or protection of the interests of any Scheduled Tribe, under Articles 19(5) and 19(6). This means that while citizens have the right to move freely, settle and engage in trade in any part of the territory of India, this right can be curtailed if there is a legitimate public interest that necessitates such restrictions.

In the context of restricting tourist vehicles from outside the state, one could argue that such a restriction infringes upon the rights of drivers from other states, as they too are citizens of India and enjoy the freedom to travel and work across state borders. If Meghalaya were to impose such restrictions, it could potentially lead to reciprocal measures being implemented by neighbouring states, further complicating the issue.

At the same time, it is important to note that the Constitution justifies special protections for the interests of Scheduled Tribes, which constitute a significant portion of Meghalaya's population. The Sixth Schedule of the Constitution grants autonomy to tribal areas in Meghalaya, allowing them to govern certain aspects of their economic and social affairs. Additionally, Article 19(6) permits the state to impose reasonable restrictions on the right to engage in any occupation in order to protect the interests of the "general public". This provision could be invoked to justify restrictions on tourist vehicles from outside the state if it is demonstrated that such restrictions are necessary to protect the socio-economic interests of the local tribal population.

### The Sikkim Model: A Case for Meghalaya?

Sikkim has implemented a model where tourist vehicles from outside the state are restricted from entering certain designated areas. Instead, tourists are required to hire

local taxis to travel to these destinations. This model has been praised for ensuring that local drivers benefit from the influx of tourists, while still allowing visitors to explore the state. Could Meghalaya adopt a similar model to address the concerns of local drivers?

There are merits to this approach. By restricting tourist vehicles from outside the state to certain entry points or designated parking areas, and requiring tourists to use local taxis to reach popular destinations, the state could ensure that local drivers have a fair share of the tourism economy. This would help alleviate the financial pressures faced by local drivers while still providing a positive experience for tourists.

However, implementing such a model in Meghalaya would require careful planning and coordination. For one, the state would need to ensure that adequate transportation infrastructure is in place to accommodate the increased demand for local taxis. Additionally, it would be necessary to establish clear guidelines and regulations to prevent confusion or inconvenience for tourists.

### Legal Considerations and Challenges

While the Sikkim model provides a potential solution, its implementation in Meghalaya would need to pass the test of "reasonable restrictions" under the Constitution. Any restriction on tourist vehicles from outside the state would need to be carefully crafted to ensure that it does not disproportionately infringe on the rights of drivers from other states.

In the case of State of Gujarat v. Mirzapur Moti Kureshi Kassab Jamat it was held that a restriction imposed for the purpose of achieving any of the objects laid down in Part IV of the Indian Constitution may be regarded as reasonable.

When it comes to restricting tourist vehicles, the state would need to demonstrate that the restriction is necessary to protect the socio-economic interests of local drivers and that no less restrictive alternatives are available. Article 38 under Part IV of the Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution grants the state the power to promote the welfare of the people and secure socio-economic justice.

### Air Connectivity Long-term Solution

While the debate over restricting tourist vehicles continues, it is important to consider the broader context of transportation infrastructure in Meghalaya. The state's relatively limited air has contributed to the reliance on road transport for tourists. Most tourists travelling to Meghalaya arrive via neighbouring states, particularly Assam, which serves as a major entry point.

Improving air connectivity to Meghalaya could provide a more sustainable long-term solution to the issue. If tourists were able to fly directly into Meghalaya, they would be less likely to use vehicles from neighbouring states. This would reduce the pressure on local drivers and create more opportunities for the local tourism sector to thrive. However, while trying to resolve these issues, it is important to keep in mind that local drivers should not take advantage of the situation by charging high fees from the passengers.

The Meghalaya Tourism Policy 2023 highlights the need for improved connectivity as a key priority for the state's tourism sector. By investing in infrastructure development, the state can create a more balanced and equitable tourism economy that benefits both locals and visitors.

### Way Forward Striking a Balance

The issue of restricting tourist vehicles from outside the state is a complex one that requires a meaningful approach. On one hand, the state must protect the socio-economic interests of its local drivers, who are an integral part of the tourism industry. On the other hand, it must ensure that any restrictions imposed are consistent with the constitutional rights of all citizens and do not unduly hinder the flow of tourism, which is vital to the state's economy.

A potential solution lies in implementing a system where tourist vehicles from outside the state are allowed to bring tourists to the hotel, but from the hotel, local taxis should be used for transportation to tourist destinations. This would ensure that local drivers benefit from the influx of tourists without infringing on the rights of drivers from other states. However, if these restrictions are in place, there must be a mechanism with the aid of technology to provide a portal to book the tourist cab with a fixed fare rate set by the government, ensuring uniformity and preventing tourist cab drivers from taking advantage of the fare.

Additionally, the state should prioritise improving air quality to reduce the reliance on road transport. By doing so, Meghalaya can create a more sustainable and inclusive tourism sector that provides economic opportunities for its people while preserving the natural beauty and cultural heritage that make it such a sought-after destination.

In conclusion, the key to resolving this issue lies in striking a balance between the rights of local drivers and the broader interests of the tourism sector. By adopting a thoughtful and measured approach, Meghalaya can ensure that its tourism industry continues to thrive while providing socio-economic justice to its people.

## Dr Yunus may mention Hasina's extradition at his UN address on Sept 27

### India is losing the perception battle on Bangladesh in international forum

By Nitya Chakraborty

The interim Government of Bangladesh headed by Dr. Muhammad Yunus is doing all the preparatory work for officially demanding the extradition from India of the ousted Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina as early as possible. Indications suggest that Dr. Yunus may mention this demand at his address to the United Nations General Assembly in New York on September 27. Dr. Yunus will be in the USA from September 24 to 27 while the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will be there from September 21 to 23. So there is no possibility of any bilateral meeting between PM Modi and Dr. Yunus in New York this time.

The Bangladesh interim head has a hectic programme in New York during those four days. Apart from addressing the UN general assembly, he will be having

The demand for extradition will be done officially as the trial starts.

Significantly, a UN fact finding mission is also working and collecting facts in cooperation with the interim government agencies. They are mainly looking at human rights violations. They are supposed to look after such violations even after August 5 when Sheikh Hasina abdicated her Prime Minister position and fled to India.

The US officials team led by Donald Lu, assistant secretary of state in charge of South Asia had talks with the interim government last week about the action plan of the interim government. The team was apprised of the interim government's position about the need for extradition of Sheikh Hasina from India and putting her on trial in Dhaka.

So that way, the Bangla-



bilateral meetings with the government heads of a large number of nations to explain to them the present situation in Bangladesh and the future

desi interim government is getting itself fully prepared to prepare a foolproof demand for extradition and this will be publicized in

*"Sources say that the main focus of his UN address will be to give a background of the mass movement led by the students and how it was a battle for democracy and protection for human rights. Dr. Yunus is also expected to indicate the short-term action plan of the interim government to restore democratic rights and also tackle the ailing economy."*

plans of the interim administration. Dr. Yunus will have a very significant meeting with the Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif. He will also have talks with the Nepalese Prime Minister K P S Oli and the US secretary of state Antony Blinken.

Sources say that the main focus of his UN address will be to give a background of the mass movement led by the students and how it was a battle for democracy and protection for human rights. Dr. Yunus is also expected to indicate the short-term action plan of the interim government to restore democratic rights and also tackle the ailing economy. He will then appeal for international assistance to rebuild the Bangladesh economy.

Dr. Yunus will be meeting the World Bank president and the European Commission head separately for discussions on assistance. He is scheduled to have a meeting with the UN secretary general and the UN High Commissioner for refugees. His discussion with the UN official for refugees assumes significance in the context of the presence of Rohingyas in Bangladesh, especially in Chittagong district which has a border close to Myanmar.

Taking into account the visit of Dr. Muhammad Yunus to New York and his meeting with the US secretary of state Antony Blinken, the Bangladesh administration has done spade work on the issue of seeking extradition of Sheikh Hasina. Prosecutors of the International Crimes Tribunal have already been appointed and they have started their work in full force. The relevant documents for the trial of the designated political leaders and officials aligned with the Awami League government are being collected and the prosecutors are preparing to put the accused to trial.

international gatherings like the UN general assembly. Next week, the interim head Dr. Md. Yunus himself will be doing that through his address at the UN general assembly and important bilateral meetings.

As against this concerted move and campaign of Bangladesh to explain its position in which India's position will be shown in a negative light, what is Prime Minister Narendra Modi doing in New York? In his three days from September 21 to 23, the first day, he will be busy with the QUAD summit, which will have bilateral meetings with the three other heads including the President of USA, and Prime Ministers of Australia and Japan. On September 22, he will be addressing the Indian diaspora in Long Islands and will have a meeting with the CEOs. He will also address the UN's special summit in the future. So far, there is no programme of meeting with any other South Asian government heads.

The Prime Minister has made a big mistake by not addressing the country session of the UN general assembly as that is the forum where the head of governments spell out their country's policies. Bangladesh interim head Dr. Yunus will be explaining the situation in Bangladesh and his government's programme in his address. India's role will come up for scrutiny in his address. His one sided version will go unchallenged as Dr. Jaishankar who has been assigned by the Prime Minister to represent him on September 28, is no match to Dr. Md. Yunus. India's position will not reach the heads of the governments attending the UN. India is steadily losing the perception battle on Bangladesh. And for it to happen, the Prime Minister's Office has to take the blame. (IPA Service)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Stop this noise pollution

Editor,

I am a college student residing near the Hindu Mission at Lower Mawprem, Shillong, and I also provide tuition to Class 10 students who are preparing for the upcoming SLC examination. I am writing to urgently draw the attention of the Deputy Commissioner to the increasing disturbances and noise pollution caused by the parking of vehicles and frequent events held at the Hindu Mission. The constant "honking noise" and regular commotion from this location have severely impacted our ability to concentrate on our studies, and I believe it is crucial for the local authorities to address these concerns.

Constant honking throughout the day has become unbearable as there are innumerable vehicles coming and going. It is puzzling why these vehicles need to honk inside the premises where there is no traffic congestion. To make matters worse, the number of vehicles continues to increase daily.

by loud music, firecrackers, and revellers dancing, sometimes late into the night. Some gatherings feature offensive songs, particularly during Durga Puja. While we respect the temple, the management allows all kinds of Bollywood songs and undesirable dances in the premises. We struggle to understand this contradiction. Last year, the situation escalated to the point where the police had to intervene to control intoxicated revellers during Durga Puja. I think this year will also be the same kind of noise to disturb us during Durga puja. Until three years ago, we often found empty beer and alcohol bottles discarded along the pavement leading to the Hindu Mission. This is very shameful.

The district authorities should seriously consider banning such disruptive activities in residential areas, as they are not only a nuisance but also detrimental to the academic pursuits of students.

The education and future of the children is more important than noisy parties and the commercial use of parking spaces. Many students are preparing for competitive exams, and the current environment is making it increasingly challenging for us to maintain focus.

I sincerely hope the district authorities will take prompt action by banning such kinds of noise pollution and ensure

that our neighbourhood remains a peaceful and conducive place both for learning and living purposes.

Yours etc.,  
A concerned college student  
Name withheld on request,  
Shillong-2

#### Tribute to SBI Laitumkhrh Branch Staff

Editor,

I have been banking with the Laitumkhrh Branch of State Bank of India for more than 20 years. I can proudly say that this branch is one of the most efficient, spacious and customer friendly branches not only in Meghalaya but also in the whole country. I have done banking with other branches and other banks too but the services rendered in this SBI branch is unparalleled. The person in the Digital section namely, Lionelson Shabong is very professional and efficient at his job. An issue with my internet banking which couldn't be resolved for more than a decade was solved within a day by Shabong. The service manager is also very smart and diligent in dealing with the customers. The lady at the KYC counter is also very efficient and customer friendly. The ever approachable manager is exemplary

in leading the branch. Kudos to team SBI Laitumkhrh Branch.

Yours etc.,  
S T Singh,  
Shillong-3

#### Economic performance of North Eastern States a major concern

Editor,

The editorial "Regional disparities" (ST 20th September 2024) made interesting reading. According to the paper series of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister "Relative Economic Performance of Indian States: 1960-61 to 2023-24," in 1980-81 Sikkim's per capita income was below the national average. It has achieved remarkable growth, especially over the last two decades. Its relative per capita income surged from around 99.7 percent of the national average in 2000-01 to 319.1 percent in 2023-24.

Assam, which initially had a per capita income slightly above the national average (102.9 percent in 1960-61), experienced a decline in its relative per capita income and reached 61.2 percent in 2010-11. Since then, Assam's rela-

tive per capita income touched 73.7 percent in 2023-24. In 1960-61 Manipur's per capita income was below the national average and recorded 50.3 percent in 1970-71 it went up to 60.2 percent. A decade later in 1980-81 it reached 77.5% and its relative per capita income declined to 66.0 percent in 2022-23.

Meghalaya's relative per capita income stood at 74.4 percent in 1980-81 it climbed up to 77.1 percent in 1990-91, a decade later to 88.4 percent in 2000-01, 81 percent in 2010-11, 71.3 percent in 2020-21 and slightly up to 74.3 percent in 2023-24. Mizoram's relative per capita income in 1980-81 recorded 70.4 percent, it went up to 78.9 percent in 1990-91 and shot up to 111.7 percent during 2000-01, a decade later in 2010-11 it tumbled to 94.3 percent and again shot up to 136.4 percent in 2020-21 and it went down to 126.9 percent in 2022-23.

Nagaland's relative per capita income was 75.5 percent in 1970-71, a decade later it was down to 74.4 percent in 1980-81, it recorded 88 percent in 1990-91, 106.5 percent in 2000-01, 102.9 percent in 2010-11 and slipped to 84.9 percent in 2020-21 and 85.1 percent in 2022-23. The relative per capita income of Tripura was 81.4 percent in 1960-61, 79.3 percent in 1970-71, 71.4 per-

Yours etc,  
VK Lyngdoh  
Via email

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

# How can you support your child dealing with weight issues?

Weight fluctuation and change in body composition with growth is a normal part of development. Apart from the first year of life, teenage years experience the most rapid increase in growth and development.

Your health-care provider will consider your child's weight status as part of a holistic assessment considering age, sex, and stage of growth.

Not all children with high weight will have health consequences.

However, as children get older excess body fat may have health complications including sleep apnoea (where breathing stops and starts during sleep), bone or joint problems, liver disease, high blood pressure or cholesterol, or insulin resistance (pre-diabetes).

If you notice changes in your child or adolescent's health - such as dark patches around the neck or under arms (which indicate insulin resistance), headaches, trouble sleeping or joint pain - speak with your general practitioner (GP).

## What will your GP do?

Your GP can investigate if there is a health impact related to excess weight. They may check blood pressure, and do a blood test to check liver health, cholesterol levels and blood sugar levels.

High weight is often related to mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, or eating disorders.

Your GP can help assess and manage these conditions.

A GP with experience in weight management can provide appropriate support and referrals to local support depending on your area.

An accredited practising dietitian experienced in paediatric health, for example, can help develop healthy meal routines for the family.

## Changes that involve the whole family

Initial treatments for weight-related health will depend on your child's age. They usually involve a whole-of-family approach to improving health behaviours, such as:

- healthy dietary changes such as offering a variety of fruits and vegetables of different colours and types, and limiting sugary drinks and foods high in salt, fat and sugar
- limiting screen time (aiming for no more than two hours a day of non-education screen time for children aged five to 17)
- improving sleep habits (aiming for 9-11 hours a night for children aged six to 12, and 8-10 hours a night for teens)
- increasing physical activity (aiming for one hour of energetic play or vigorous activity a day).

Most children and adolescents will have improved physical and mental health and wellbeing after behaviour-changing interventions. This might include



## How you can support your child

Parents are important role models for children and have a key role in supporting the whole family to live a healthy lifestyle.

Start healthy habits. Make healthy eating and enjoyable exercise part of daily life.

Avoid making negative comments about your own or your child's body - and ask others to do the same. If you hear a negative comment about your child's weight, try to re-frame this into a positive message. For example, "growing bodies are strong bodies".

Be aware of bullying. Some children with a higher weight experience teasing or bullying related to their body size. This can occur from peers at school, teachers, parents and even health professionals. Ask your child if they are teased or bullied about their body and take appropriate action.

Finally, keep in mind that different treatments may work differently for different people. If you find a treatment approach is not working for your child or your family, return to your health care provider to discuss other options.

Children and families with weight concerns should be treated with respect and dignity at all times. If you don't feel your health provider is doing so, consider changing. (*The Conversation*)

improved eating behaviours, fewer symptoms of depression, and better self-esteem and body image.

## Options for adolescents

Sometimes weight loss may be recommended for adolescents with significant excess weight and associated complications.

As children get older, they will be included in the treatment decision making-process.

A range of prescriptive diets have been trialled with adolescents, including very low energy diets.

A recent trial shows specific diets can stabilise weight and improve physical and mental health of adolescents. The trial included 141 adolescents with obesity-associated complications and compared intermittent and continuous energy restriction.

Improvements were found in weight, insulin resistance and liver function after one year for both groups. Symptoms of depression, eating disorders and binge eating reduced following four-weeks of a very low energy diet, followed by a transition to intermittent or continuous energy restriction, which was maintained for one year.

However, any prescribed diet should only be used under medical and dietary supervision.

New generation medications (such as Wegovy) are now available to adolescents with severe obesity

to be used alongside behavioural therapy. These can help with weight loss and reduce risk of future health complications.

Bariatric surgery may be an option for older teens with significant health complications.

If you are thinking about using medications or having surgery, discuss the risks and benefits with your doctor.

## Watch for signs of disordered eating

Children and adolescents with higher body weight may attempt to lose weight on their own. Unfortunately, most publicly available information is not tailored to the needs of growing children, can be unsustainable and may lead to disordered eating behaviours.

Social media is loaded with unhelpful weight loss, diet and exercise messages, and often promotes unattainable body image ideals. Talk to your children about what they see on social media to help them recognise which social media content is beneficial.

If you notice your child is losing weight quickly, hiding food or eating in secret, binge eating (eating a lot of food and feeling they cannot stop), vomiting after eating, overexercising to burn off calories or skipping regular meals to try and lose weight, discuss this with your doctor.

These could be signs of an eating disorder.



## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 22, 2024

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Moon trine Mercury on your solar return chart which will bring exceptional results. It is going to be a great year in terms of achievements. You will face challenges but will get success. Money inflow will be continuous. Your enemies will be active but will not be able to harm your interests. And you will defeat them with your courage, wisdom and cleverness. Your work will start getting completed. And will get good profits from your business/trade. Students will perform well in exams/interviews. And will be suitably rewarded. In terms of popularity, respect, name and fame the graph will be upwards. You will get promotion in your job and could also get posted to desired place. Your bosses and superiors will be satisfied with your work and you could be given an important responsibility.

### 'This week for you'

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)** This period brings glamour in your life as you make changes in your grooming as well as in your lifestyle. You express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with unapproachable people in higher position. You focus on having fun, enjoying sports and expressing yourself efficiently. You may feel a bit defeated by situations at home and at work. Allow space and time for things to change on their own. You maintain a fitness routine and a healthy diet program. This is a good time to build your skills, to get organized, and to attend to your health and fitness routine.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)** The planetary configuration brings success and good fortune at work and opens new horizons for expansion. This phase also highlights friendship, love, romance and children in your life. It's a favorable time to open up conversations with loved ones, as intimate moments are most appealing both of you. This is a favorable time to go for higher learning and joining new courses to improve your professional skills and efficiency. Your heart and head pull you in different direction when personal and family related decisions are to be taken. You are more inclined to take pride in your intellectual accomplishments and in your ability to socialize and make connections. Activities related to communications such as journalism, literature, speaking, etc., would figure more prominently.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)** There will be heightened communication, creativity and authority in your life. Concentrating on listening, connecting, communicating and learning is your best bet at this time. You spend time with your beloved and enjoy the quality time spent as well as the activities that you do together. You may redecorate your home, especially your living room, and add decorations to give a new look to your room. This is a good time to promote harmony and good relations with family members. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel the part of whole, as this brings new opportunities and bring monetary gains. You have good team spirit and you are more tactful and obliging with your co-workers which in turn brings harmony at your work place.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)** You show strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the doors to new romantic relationships. Your head rules because you have been highly motivated to make more money and improve your financial status. Monetary transactions bring gains in property related issues. This is a favorable time for learning something new, feeling at ease in social situations, taking care of the details of daily life. You are brilliant at dealing effectively with difficult projects at work. Communications and business associates from overseas bring good news and offer lucrative opportunities. Take care of your health and adopt a routine of regular walk and exercise.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)** This phase brings power, influence and authority. You turn things around in the business dealings in your favor. You are noble and generous in family situations. Personal relationships may be dreamy and transitory and commitments are made and promises are honored. You would maintain balance in the head and heart also in professional and personal matters. Its right time to concentrate on your career prospects and professional skills as a promotion or up-gradation in work area is likely to present itself. You have more energy for work and your daily routines tend to speed up now. Perhaps you have a larger workload than usual.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)** There is a boost in your confidence as you handle conversations, seminars adroitly and express yourself more specifically about the subject. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth considering. You have to positively use your talents and efficiency. Be careful when expressing feelings and emotions others can misunderstand you. It might be hard for

you to work with others in a harmonious manner, and disputes with co-workers are possible. If you feel especially angry, frustrated or restless, it would be great to find little more work and things to do so that you can channel excess energy constructively. Health and energy need to be conserved through a busy time at home and work. Obey traffic rules and exercise care while on the road.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)** There is a burst of good-luck in the sphere of love and romance. You spend great time and listen to the inner feelings of your loved one. You might spend a lot of time in short frequent trips, communicating with people and visiting friends and relatives. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor is especially strong. Your thoughts turn to children, pleasures, or romance during this expressive period. You might enjoy researching speculative ventures now. You especially enjoy games that involve competing with others on a mental level. You might just find that this is a period when you are at your most gracious—as long as you are truly listening instead of reacting. An overseas or long distance journey is on cards.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)** You exhibit sensitivity in your relationships as you feel they are more important to you than many other things. You are more receptive and gentle on a romantic level, and tend to be sentimental and emotional with your loved ones. You may be especially focused on pleasing your beloved and may discover new facets to your love life. You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would insert your creativity into your work and projects in hand. You have more opportunities to improve relations with relatives and friends in your immediate environment. You may visit religious places and there are strong chances of pilgrimage. You are full of energy and indulge in sports and other physical activities.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)** You build new associations and there are beginnings in work areas as new opportunities and changes may come. You would improve your romantic and love life by bringing more sincerity, cooperation and humanity as unusual attractions and dreams could feature this time. You may explore new infrastructure and improve office as this brings more efficiency and continuity on your work. Family would be more supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony and pleasant interactions to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You tend to entertain others with your conversation and your sense of humor. The desire for some form of recognition is going to be fulfilled. Financial success is stronger than any other time enhanced now.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)** As the week brings more stability in relations and professional life; you have tendency to compromise and adjust and take a soft approach while dealing with people at work and home. You give a new approach to communications, projects, learning and self-expression. You may be especially focused on pleasing your family and are especially fond of family life. It's a passionate time, although you are unlikely to be displaying a whole lot of self-discipline. You would work in association of senior colleagues and people in authority and learn many more things at work place, which boosts your confidence and you use your best talents and co-relate all activities to upward the business and work opportunities. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet program to rejuvenate energy.

**quarius: (January 21 - February 18)** The ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. You or your parents may finalize a marriage proposal. Sharing your interests and communication with loved one may be especially appealing and you might spend a lot of time in meeting friends and loved to you. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding ones. Cooperation and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are more attractive when you show your responsible, managerial, ambitious, and constant side in your personal and professional relations. You could be stressed while meeting people's expectations and approval.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)** You exhibit wisdom and knowledge in your behavior and cooperation and harmony in personal relationships. People are attracted to you for your intelligent mind. Your social life is enviable as you interact with important people in authority. You resolve an important domestic issue that has been causing problems in relations for some time. Centering within and witnessing inner truth and outer reflection is the best meditation this week. Cooperation and a focus on harmony and understanding benefit you professionally and enhance your reputation and public standing. You are strong and masterful while turning things around in a positive direction at work.

# Instagram announces removal of beauty filters but the damage is done

Meta has announced third-party augmented reality (AR) filters will no longer be available on its apps as of January 2025. This means more than two million user-made filters offered across WhatsApp, Facebook and, most notably, Instagram will disappear. Filters have become a mainstay feature on Instagram. The most viral of these - which often involve beautifying the user's appearance - are created by users themselves via the Meta Spark Studio.

But the use of beautifying AR filters has long been connected to worsened mental health and body image problems in young women. In theory, the removal of the vast majority of Instagram filters should signal a turning point for unrealistic beauty standards. However, the removal comes far too late, and the move is more likely to instead push filter use underground. Much like the newly announced teen accounts for Instagram, retracting and altering technologies years after the use has been encouraged offers little more than a band-aid approach.

## Why remove them?

Meta rarely volunteers information about technologies and business practises beyond what is absolutely necessary. This case is no different. Meta has previously demonstrated it is unmotivated by user harm, even when its own leaked internal research indicates the use of Instagram and filters contributes to worse mental health for young women.

So, why wait until now to remove a popular (but controversial) technology? Officially, Meta states it intends to "prioritise investments in other company priorities".

Most likely, AR filters are yet another casualty of the artificial intelligence (AI) boom. In April, Meta pledged to invest between US\$35-40 billion in the technology, and is pulling AR technology in-house.

Filters will not be going away altogether on Instagram. First-party filters created by Meta will continue to be available. The offering

of filters available on Instagram's official account (140 at present) is insignificant compared to the library of millions of filters created by third-parties.

Instagram's official filters also offer less diverse types of AR experiences, and its account does not feature any beautifying filters.

## The end of beauty filters?

Meta removed filters once before in 2019, though the ban only applied to "surgery" filters and was reversed at Mark Zuckerberg's request after a fleeting implementation. Informally named for their ability to mimic the effects of cosmetic surgery, surgery filters are the most popular type of Instagram filter.

They are also the most controversial, with users seeking surgery and "tweakments" to mimic their filtered image. In a research, it was found when analysing the design of the beautifying Instagram filters, 87% of the filters sampled shrank the user's nose and 90% made the user's lips larger.

The removal of third party filters will see these types of sophisticated and realistic beautifying filters gone from Meta platforms.

However, this is hardly cause for celebration. When analysing the media coverage of the first filter ban, it was found that users were upset with surgery filters being removed and intended to find ways to access them regardless.

Now, after having access to AR filters on Instagram for seven years, users are even more habituated to their presence. They also have many more alternatives to access a version of the technology inside another app. This is of concern for a few reasons.

## Watermarking and photo literacy

When posting with a filter on Instagram, a watermark that links to the filter and its creator appears on the image.

This watermark is important to assist users in determining whether someone's appearance is altered

or not. Some users get around the watermarking by downloading their filtered photo, and re-uploading it so their filtered appearance is more difficult to detect.

By removing popular beauty filters from Instagram, this "covert" practice will become the default way for users to post with these filters on the platform.

Forcing users into covert filter use adds another thorn to the already prickly case of visual literacy.

Young women and girls feel inadequate compared to edited and filtered images online (including their own).

Some newer TikTok filters, such as the viral "Bold Glamour" filter, use AI technology (AI-AR) which merges the user's face with the beauty filter, trained on a database of "ideal" images. By contrast, standard AR filters overlay a set design (akin to a mask) and contour the user's features to match. The result of these new AI-AR filters is a hyper-realistic, and yet totally unachievable beauty standard.

The removal of beauty filters on Instagram will not stop their use. Instead, it will drive users to other platforms to access filters. Like Bold Glamour, these filters will be more sophisticated and harder to detect when they are re-posted cross platform, without the benefit of having the watermark indicator.

Only 34% of Australian adults feel confident in their media literacy skills. Those with less developed digital visual literacies increasingly find it difficult to ascertain the difference between edited and unedited images. Add to this the rapid increase in generative AI images, and we are entering unprecedented territory. While the removal of beautifying filters at a more pivotal time may have been meaningful, the genie is out of the bottle. By Instagram removing its already hugely popular beautifying filters now (and the watermarking that goes along with it), the problems associated with filter use on Instagram will not go away, but simply become harder to manage. (*The Conversation*)

**"Take care of your body. It's the only place you have to live."**

—Jim Rohn

## The Shillong Times

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### Atishi in the saddle

IN the murky world of politics, another woman leader - Atishi - has become the Chief Minister of Delhi. Situations conspired to catapult the Delhi education minister to the top slot after long-time chief minister Arvind Kejriwal ended up in the Liquor Scam, was jailed, and released on bail after six months with the court specifically asking him not to "enter" the CM's office. Atishi's brief however is for five months only as Delhi is set for assembly polls in February. She could even be the next CM. This is a proud moment for women. They have had fewer opportunities in politics to lead from the front. In the past 77 years of Independence, only 17 women could become chief ministers.

Delhi has the credit to anoint as many as three women leaders to this position; the others being Sheila Dikshit and Sushma Swaraj of the Congress and the BJP respectively. Both Sheila and Sushma made major marks in politics, but the first ended up in a major corruption case vis a vis the CWG scam and the other went on to become the Leader of Opposition in Parliament and external affairs minister. Women power came to the fore principally from the time of Indira Gandhi as Prime Minister. Sucheta Kripalani, Nandini Satpathy, Jayalalitha, Mehbooba Mufti, Uma Bharti, Mayawati, Vasundhara Raje, Rabri Devi and Anandiben Patel are among the prominent former CMs. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is holding the fort repeatedly. There was a President - Pratibha Patil -- and a crop of women governors. They have all acquitted themselves well.

The field of politics however remains male-dominated. Yet, Indira Gandhi towered over others, so much so she had been described as the only 'man' in her cabinet dominated by docile ministers. Jayalalitha repeatedly became chief minister and was a tower of strength for many years in Tamil Nadu. Mayawati was strong as chief minister though she hailed from an ordinary background; and the story goes that she had a habit of removing her chappals and beating up officials who, literally, crossed her way. Having lost her electoral support in UP, Mayawati is today a shadow of her former self. Sonia Gandhi as Congress chief and UPA parliamentary party leader had excelled mostly by her deafening silence. Sonia was the central power behind the UPA I and II, though she never held even a ministerial post; and Manmohan Singh as prime minister often danced to her tune. Woman power is bound to come to the fore in all fields of public life, including politics, sooner than later. The promised 33 percent reservation is expected to be granted to women in parliament and state legislatures with effect from the next parliament polls in 2029. Local bodies already have such a provision.

# It Is Not About Lineage Only

By HH Mohrmen

A surname, clan, or the name following the first and second names of a person may not hold as much significance in other cultures as it does for the people where the matrilineal family system is followed. Recently, this issue has become a hot topic in the community, with opponents of the tradition debating its relevance in today's world, while the majority still support the lineage system. The debate between proponents of the matrilineal system and those advocating for a shift to a patriarchal system has led to numerous papers and articles justifying both sides.

In this publication, many articles have explained the importance of the clan in matrilineal society, but not many delve deeply into the fundamentals that define the clan within this system. In this article, the intention is to show that a clan is not just a surname that follows an individual's name; it is more than just the second or third part of a name that identifies a person. The clan is, in fact, a major part of a person's identity. Unlike cultures that follow a patriarchal lineage system, the surname in the matrilineal system is the core aspect that defines a person's identity. It is the part of one's name that marks the uniqueness of the individual.

**The genesis of every clan**  
It all begins with the stories of the lawbei and Thawlang. In the matrilineal culture, every clan has its own story of how it originated. If a clan doesn't know its lawbei story, it likely means this knowledge was lost along the way. In many cases, the progenitor story also reveals the existence of various sub-clans that are part of the same clan. Even new clans, where the tradition of tangjai (accepting a new lineage) has recently been performed, must have a story about the Khasi man who married a non-Khasi woman and how their union created a new Khasi clan.

Some examples of progenitor stories still told in the Jaintia Hills include those of Ka Bon, Ka Tein, Ka Wet, and Ka Doh, the great ancestors of the grand Sookpoh Khatar Wymai clan of Jowai.

The story of the half-human, half-divine female ancestress also tells us how Jowai was founded. In many cases, the lawbei of a clan possesses supernatural powers or experiences extraordinary events. The tragic story of the Talang Basiah tells us about the progenitors of the Talang and Lyngdoh clans of Nongtalang. Then there is the story of Ki Rymbai Bah Khla, which begins with a woman miraculously saved by a tiger—hence, they are called Ki Rymbai Bah Khla, meaning "the Rymbai carried by the Tiger." The Pasah and Shadap Passah clans trace their origin to Ka Bor Kupli and their Thawlang, U Tale, who lived in the Kupli River. There is also the story of Ka lawchibidi/lawchibijai, the great ancestor of the Lamin, Laloo, Diengdoh, Pariong, Mangar, Syngai, and other clans. There are many more stories about how clans began, but space allows us to mention only a few.

The most important lesson for understanding the matrilineal system and the significance of the clan is to learn about the progenitor stories, as they form the genesis of the clans. Unfortunately, many clans have lost these stories, and as a result, they fail to understand the importance of the clan and why lineage is passed through the mother.

**"By thy clan, thou shall be known"**

Traditionally, when two or more people meet, the first question they ask is about health, and the second is about the clan to which each person belongs. This demonstrates the importance of the clan—it is second only to health. Furthermore, a person is not only identified by their clan; the significance of the clan is also highlighted by the fact that appointments to traditional offices are based on clans. This is not a class system or any kind of hierarchy but a responsibility designated to certain clans in an egalitarian society. Regardless of their clan, all community members are considered equal. People often mistake

"Lyngdoh" for a clan name when, in fact, it refers to a traditional priestly office, and one Lyngdoh is not related to another. Certain clans hold the office of Lyngdoh in one raid, while other clans may hold it in a different area. For example, the Sookpoh clan holds the office of Langdoh in Raid Jowai, while the Talang clan traditionally occupies the Lyngdoh office in Nongtalang. Lyngdoh is not a clan name; different clans occupy the Lyngdoh office in different regions, so two Lyngdohs from different raids are not related because they do not belong to the same clan. The traditional office of the Lyngdoh may not be as significant today as it used to be, but other traditional offices are still important.

Similarly, certain clans occupy the office of Myntri (minister) in one hima (traditional state), while other clans hold the office in another hima. In Jaintia Hills, some clans are eligible to contest for the office of Doloi (chief) in one eleka (territory), while others are entitled to the office in other eleka. Tradition dictates that appointments to these traditional offices are based solely on clans.

**Life begins and ends with the clan**

Traditionally, the clan is both the beginning and the end of an individual's life. One's life begins with rites of passage in the clan and ends in the clan's ossuary. By tradition, the clan is the center of a person's religious life. All religious activities are conducted through the clan to which the individual belongs. In Jowai, while traditional religion may not have specific places of worship like churches or mosques, it does have the lungblai or Kmai lung, the common house for those of the same clan. The lungblai is where all rites of passage are performed—naming, weddings, cremation, and even offerings to ancestors, which can only be done at the Kmai lung or lungblai. The clan plays a pivotal role in a person's life, as even their mortal remains are kept in the clan's common house before cremation and the clan's ossuary till

eternity.  
**Clan as the Basis of "Tipkur Tipkha"**

Tipkur (knowing and respecting your maternal clan) and Tipkha (knowing and respecting your paternal relatives) is one of the cardinal principles of the Hynfiew Trep society. In Khasi-Pnar society, relationships extend beyond the immediate family to include the broader clan. One's relations extend not only to one's maternal clan but also to the paternal relatives and sub-clans. In marriage, the relationship is not limited to the couple's immediate families but extends to the entire clan to which the bride or groom belongs.

**The matrilineal dilemma**

Some argue that maternal lineage is no longer relevant and that we cling to the tradition merely because it is unique. Critics say that the matrilineal system is unsuited to modern society and does not help the tribe grow economically. However, patriarchal societies have their shortcomings too—high divorce rates and poverty exist in many patriarchal societies as well.

In the modern Hynfiewtrep community, as society changes, there is often confusion about the roles of the father and the maternal uncle in the family. No doubt there are shortcomings in the matrilineal system too, and these should be examined. The matrilineal system has not failed us; rather, we have failed the system. The dilemma arises because we have lost the stories, and in the process, we have lost the culture and traditions. As a tribe, we have lost our connection with our cultural roots.

It is however encouraging to see clans organizing themselves and the two Autonomous District Councils (ADCs) are also working on this issue. Hopefully, the system will evolve and adapt with time. The need of the hour is to rediscover and perhaps even reinvent the tradition—without forgetting the fundamentals—to suit a changing society. One must remember that the clan is not just the second or third part of an individual's name; it represents the stories and traditions that are intrinsic to society.

## Pager, Walkie-Talkie blasts signal new technological warfare in Middle East

### Israeli actions a high-stakes gamble with far-reaching consequences

By MA Hossain

The recent explosion of thousands of pagers across Lebanon is an alarming development that bears the hallmarks of Israeli involvement, potentially signaling an imminent military escalation between Israel and Hezbollah. This tension has been mounting since Hezbollah's recent engagement with Israeli forces, a direct response to Israel's intensified military actions against Gaza following the deadly October 7 Hamas-led attack. The strategic aim behind targeting Lebanon's pagers is clear: to cripple Hezbollah's internal communications, a vital component of its military operations.

Hezbollah, in recent years, has shifted away from using mobile phones for communication, suspecting Israeli intelligence had compromised them, leading to the identification and targeted killing of key Hezbollah figures. By attacking the pager network, Israel is likely attempting to exploit this new vulnerability, seeking to erode Hezbollah's capacity to coordinate in the event of a military escalation. In doing so, Israel may be looking to gain the upper hand in its broader regional strategy, one that involves neutralizing Hezbollah's influence while simultaneously suppressing Hamas in Gaza.

Although the immediate death toll from the pager blasts stood at nine and may rise as some of the 2,800 wounded remain in critical condition, the broader implications of these explosions are even more concerning. Lebanon's healthcare system, already strained, is at risk of being overwhelmed. Should Israel proceed with a broader military assault, the combination of military and civilian casualties would push Lebanon's medical infrastructure to its breaking point. This potential strain on medical services would not only hinder the country's ability to treat injured fighters but also result in a humanitarian crisis as civilian casualties mount.

From a broader geopolitical perspective, Israel's actions could be seen as a high-stakes gamble. Engaging Hezbollah in the north would open up a third front for Israeli forces, in addition to their operations in Gaza and the West Bank. On the surface, this would seem like a risky move, overextending Israeli resources and complicating its military strategy. However, for the embattled Netanyahu government, this escalation could serve a crucial political purpose. Netanyahu's administration has been under significant internal and international pressure, with the ongoing conflicts providing a unifying national cause. A multi-front war may enable Netanyahu to consolidate political power, deflect criticism, and rally domestic support under the guise of national security.

One of the most perilous elements of this potential Israeli-Hezbollah conflict is the role that technology plays in modern warfare. The use of advanced technological warfare, such as this pager attack, points to a broader trend where non-conventional military strategies are employed to weaken enemies before the physical battle even begins. In targeting Hezbollah's communication infrastructure, Israel is attempting to debilitate its ability to respond effectively to a potential ground or aerial assault.

This confrontation also carries significant regional consequences. Hezbollah's close ties to Iran have long made it a key player in the Middle East's delicate balance of power. While Iran has largely refrained from direct involvement in the current conflict between Hamas and Israel, its role as Hezbollah's primary backer places it squarely in the middle of any

Israeli action against Lebanon. Many observers view Hezbollah as a proxy for Iranian interests, a strategic arm that allows Tehran to project power and influence without direct military engagement. This connection raises the stakes considerably. Should the conflict escalate further, Iran may be drawn into the fray, igniting a broader regional war.

Israel's actions in recent weeks suggest it may be seeking to provoke precisely this outcome. Beyond the pager blasts in Lebanon, Israel has conducted airstrikes on Iranian assets in Syria, most notably its mission in Damascus, and assassinated key Hamas figures within Iran's borders. These actions reflect a broader Israeli strategy of targeting Iranian interests throughout the region, raising concerns that the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah could quickly morph into a much larger war involving Iran.

The international community, particularly the West, has thus far shown little inclination to restrain Israel's aggressive tactics. The United States, Israel's staunch ally, has signalled its continued support for Israeli military operations, despite growing international condemnation of the humanitarian toll in Gaza. This unwavering backing from the U.S. emboldens Israel to push the envelope, confident that Washington will not intervene to halt its escalatory actions. In effect, the lack of meaningful opposition from Western powers gives Israel a free hand to pursue its strategic objectives, even if those actions risk plunging the region into further chaos.

One of the key questions now is whether this latest episode—the pager blasts and the potential for further military action—will trigger a broader conflict that engulfs Lebanon and beyond. While Hezbollah's response has been measured so far, limited to sporadic exchanges of fire along the border, the potential for a full-blown war remains high. If Hezbollah perceives Israel's actions as an existential threat, it may feel compelled to escalate, drawing in its regional allies, including Iran, and transforming the conflict into a multi-front war with devastating consequences for the entire Middle East.

The situation is further complicated by the fact that Israel's military operations are not taking place in a vacuum. The ongoing conflict in Gaza, coupled with unrest in the West Bank, has already stretched Israeli military resources thin. Engaging Hezbollah in Lebanon would add a third significant front to an already complex and volatile situation. Yet, for Netanyahu, this may be a calculated risk worth taking. The Israeli government has long viewed Hezbollah as a major threat, and with the country already in a state of war, now may be seen as the opportune moment to deal a decisive blow to its northern adversary.

The explosion of thousands of pagers across Lebanon is a significant and dangerous development that underscores the fragility of the current geopolitical landscape in the Middle East. Israel's actions, likely aimed at degrading Hezbollah's communication capabilities, have the potential to ignite a wider conflict that could draw in regional powers like Iran and destabilize the region further. With the international community largely standing on the sidelines, the potential for further escalation remains high, and the human cost of such a conflict could be devastating for both Lebanon and Israel. (IPA Service) (By arrangement with the Arabian Post)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Improving Content Quality on Hello Meghalaya

Editor,  
I am writing in response to Damang Kharbuli's recent letter highlighting the poor quality of content available on Hello Meghalaya. I fully support his concerns and wish to emphasize the urgent need for improvement. It is deeply troubling to see that the content on Hello Meghalaya, particularly its films and short films, often resemble low-quality home videos. This is particularly disappointing given the rich heritage of exceptional films from our region that deserve broader recognition and appreciation. Classic films like "Manik Raitong", "I Mei Jong Nga", and "Ka Mon Bajwat" should be prominently featured on the platform. Additionally, the absence of acclaimed works by distinguished filmmakers such as Pradip Kurbah and Dominic Sangma points to a concerning lack of commitment to showcasing high-quality content. The omission of these significant films raises serious questions about Hello Meghalaya's dedication to providing top-tier content. With numerous streaming options available today, it is astonishing that our government-run OTT platform fails to include renowned filmmakers or classic works. This oversight suggests a troubling preference for connections over quality, undermining the platform's credibility and inclusivity. The recent announce-

ment of the Autumn Festival program further underscores the neglect of local cinema. Although the festival will showcase a variety of music and literature events, there is a conspicuous absence of cinema. The omission of a film festival or similar event from the three-month-long program reflects a clear lack of commitment to supporting and promoting local filmmaking.

Moreover, the exclusion of National Award-winning films such as Manik Raitong (1984), Ri (2014), Onaatah (2015), Maama (2017), and Iewduh (2019) is particularly troubling. These films have received national acclaim and should be showcased to celebrate our state's cinematic achievements. Instead, the platform's focus on inferior content reflects a troubling bias that hinders the growth and development of our local film industry.

Furthermore, the overall content on Hello Meghalaya, including short films and music videos, lacks engagement and interest. The platform should consider producing original content such as web series and films that capture the audience's attention, similar to what other major platforms are doing. There is a significant opportunity for more filmmakers and stories to emerge from our region, but this will only be possible if the government-run platform is genuinely committed to its mission. There is a growing concern that the platform might fade away after the current government's term ends if it does not demonstrate a long-term vision.

For Hello Meghalaya to be truly effective, it must go beyond merely hosting content to ensuring that it meets high technical and artistic standards. Without a clear vision for the future, the platform risks becoming a tool for promoting current government initiatives rather than genuinely advancing our cultural and artistic heritage.

A thriving cinema culture cannot be nurtured without proper support and platforms. The current approach, which prioritizes subpar content over high-quality films, stifles the potential of our filmmakers. It is imperative that the government takes immediate action to address this issue and provide a fair and supportive platform for all filmmakers.

Yours etc.,  
Stepborne K Ryndem  
Shillong-17

#### Should hawking be allowed in front of hospital premises?

Editor,  
It never fails to amuse me how our little town is run. We, the Khasis are rich in culture and are more than adequately informed about what is happening around us, and we are well known for our compassion and our eagerness to help everybody we can. As much as I am proud of how we are evolving as a generation I am equally peeved by the Khasi men and women who sell food on the road in front of Nazareth Hospital. Does the Shngong have no sympathy for the

sick or the nurses and doctors who work in the Hospital? How can the Shngong allow these hawkers to sit on the road and obstruct the movement of cars and ambulances that need to enter or exit the Hospital premises? We call ourselves westernized and modern, hip and current yet we act like donkeys when it comes to issues such as common sense.

How does the Shngong not see the vulnerability of lives plagued by ill health? Because of the presence of these hawkers on the road the tight lane in front of Nazareth Hospital is constantly at bottlenecks. Have we forgotten that we are modern and hip? Have we forgotten that we are moderately westernized? I understand that without the intervention of the Shngong and the Municipal Board the Nazareth Administration can do nothing about the hawkers.

I am glad that I got this opportunity to rant about this matter publicly but who will inform the proper authority? Look at the vendors along the Bara Bazaar road. Why is nobody bothered about the dilapidated sections of our society? Why is there no law to curb such nonsense? If the hawkers and vendors so much as want to fight for their rights to occupation then why doesn't the Shngong and the Municipal Board organize a meeting and set up proper places of business for these aspiring hard workers? Such businesses belong next to a tourist destination, not a hospital. Would the Chief Minister stay quiet if there

were such hawkers in front of the Secretariat building? In this context, the Hospital deserves more credit than the Chief Minister's Office and yet we continue to wait in our cars and ambulances for no fault of ours. I sincerely think Shillong and the Khasis are beyond repair and redemption. We are a festering race bent on mindless unity and decayed pride, our leaders included.

Yours etc.,  
Jasper Elias  
Via email

#### Urgent road repair needed between Mawpun-Umyngka to Kynton Lai Mer

Editor,  
I am writing to express my deep concern regarding the deplorable condition of the road from Mawpun, Umyngka to Kynton Lai-Mer. Despite repeated complaints from residents, the situation has worsened over time, and the road has become nearly impassable, causing immense hardship to those who use it daily.

The contractor assigned to maintain this road has, on several occasions, simply filled the numerous potholes and rough patches with stones and mud. Unfortunately, this makeshift solution lasts only a few days, after which the road deteriorates once again, leaving the people of this area stranded in poor conditions. This repeated cycle of temporary fixes shows a clear lack of proper planning and long-term vision on the part of the authorities and the

contractor.

The poor condition of this road has led to frequent accidents, damage to vehicles, and undue stress to commuters, including school-going children, the elderly, and working professionals. During the dry season, the dust clouds become unbearable, infiltrating homes and shops, affecting the health of residents, especially children, the elderly, and those with respiratory issues. When it rains, the road turns into a muddy, slippery mess, making it even more dangerous for vehicles and pedestrians. This situation is unacceptable and reflects a clear disregard for the welfare of the community.

I urge the concerned authorities and the responsible contractor to take immediate action to repair this road properly by using suitable materials and ensuring that the work is of a standard that lasts. The people of this area deserve better infrastructure that supports, rather than hinders, their daily lives. A proper and long-lasting solution is not only a necessity but also a fundamental right for those who rely on this road.

I hope that the MLA and Dorbar Shngong will bring this issue to light and help facilitate positive action from the authorities.

Yours etc.,  
Ridalin  
Upper Shillong, Shillong

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

“While we are postponing, life speeds by.”

— Lucius Annaeus Seneca

The Shillong Times

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Land: A Contentious Issue

TRADITION is not always good, virtuous or innocent. It is often used by vested interests to create an aura of untouchability and question-ability vis a vis customs and traditions even while they make capital out of the secrecy and ambiguity that surrounds them. Land ownership among the Khasis has been this black hole which has been left to be managed by the custodians of tradition namely the Sordar Shnong, Rangbah Shnong, Wahadadar and the Syiems. Each of these categories has a vested interest in exercising control over land. Today no one knows for sure if Meghalaya actually has 24,249 sq kms of land under its control. How can any state claim to have a definite control over its geography when it has not conducted a cadastral survey ever and nor has it made land registration compulsory. Buying and selling of land requires that only the Rangbah Shnong/Sordar Shnong be present with the buyer and seller and the transaction is complete. The buyer and seller of land/property pay a percentage to the Shnong and the deed is signed and sealed.

Land registration becomes compulsory only when a bank loan is needed and the land is duly assessed for its market value for which banks will provide a certain percentage of loan for house building purposes and mortgage the documents until the loan is cleared. This is a fair enough process. In Meghalaya however, land registration at the Office of the Sub-Registrar is a time-consuming process. It can take months at times. Why should this be so in the age of technology? Why is the physical presence of the person registering the land/property needed? Actually, online transactions reduce human contact and also corruption. Elsewhere, land registration is completed in a day.

In Meghalaya compulsory registration of land has become imperative because of the huge demand for land acquisition for roads and high-ways construction purposes. Land acquisition in Meghalaya has always been a shady business hence the post-acquisition process is always a complex one as land-owners change their decisions and begin to demand more money than the amount agreed upon initially. The National Highways Infrastructure Development and Constructions Limited (NHIDCL) is finding it a tough call to construct roads in Meghalaya. The latest bottle-neck has come in the form of the protest by land owners in Diengpasoh along the Shillong-bypass where the Guwahati-Shillong-Silchar expressway is proposed to be constructed. At other times, the Dorbar Shnong suddenly change their tune and change the alignment of the road even after due diligence has been followed by the construction company such as geological testing of the feasibility of the terrain along which the highway is to be built. All this happens because there is no legal sanctity in the land transaction. Once land is acquired the Dorbar Shnong/Elaka should have no say in the matter. Actually the Meghalaya High Court should take cognisance of such hindrances to development and save the day else Meghalaya will never have a single highway in the next 50 years, given the kind of roadblocks that the so-called traditional institutions pose. And all this is because there is a land mafia at work which colludes with the traditional institutions. This has got to stop!

Lessons Meghalaya can learn from Mexico

By Bhogtoram Mawroh

Recently, I was given the opportunity by my employers, the North East Society for Agroecology Support (NES-FAS) and the Rome-based Indigenous Partnership for Agrobiodiversity and Food Sovereignty (TIP), to attend a workshop in Mexico on indigenous peoples’ issues. The workshop, organized at the Universidad Intercultural Maya de Quintana Roo (in Cancun), focused on reaching a consensual definition and identifying principles on ‘inter-culturality’ and the ‘inter-cultural co-creation of knowledge,’ with the goal of developing principles, methodologies, and experiments in a multicultural way to capture both the wisdom of traditional communities and the rigor of contemporary knowledge. Francisco J. Rosado May, the host and a Yucatec Maya professor, is eager to start PhD courses on intercultural co-creation of knowledge.

This gathering brought together scholars and practitioners working on indigenous peoples’ issues from different parts of the world, including myself and another participant from India. The group that participated in the discussion was not composed solely of members of indigenous communities. I shared my room with an American Jewish post-doctoral scholar who had spent the last few years working in Guatemala with the Maya indigenous community. Members from a couple of UN agencies were also present to document the process and participate in the discussion.

The program consisted of a two-day discussion combined with a field visit to the farm of a Maya knowledge holder, Miguel Ku Balam, who had traveled to Rome to receive a certificate from the FAO’s director recognizing the Yucatec Milpa Maya (a form of shifting cultivation characterized by the Three Sisters principle—corn, beans, and squash) as one of the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) sites. These are agroecosystems, 80 in number globally, inhabited by communities (in many cases, by indigenous peoples) that are ‘characterized by remarkable agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge, invaluable cultures and landscapes, sustainably managed by farmers, herders, fisherfolk, and forest people in ways that contribute to their livelihoods and food security.’ The recognition brought significant attention to the Milpa and to Miguel, who is an ardent practitioner and promoter of this ancient Maya farming system. However, Miguel is not content with merely conserving tradition; he is constantly experimenting to enhance its existing strengths. One way he is doing this is by developing novel corn varieties, one of which has become quite well-known. This corn variety is called Nal Balam. Miguel is truly an extraordinary person and an exemplar for other farmers throughout the world who seek not just to preserve their traditions but also to add more value to them.

The discussions that took place before and after the

meeting with Miguel were very intense. The participants debated every point with great articulation and passion. While there were disagreements, those expressing alternative viewpoints did so by referring to their own experiences working with indigenous peoples. At one point, it seemed that there would be no consensus. However, in the final moments of the meeting, Francisco was able to bring together the different viewpoints into an acceptable format. This document is currently being reviewed by a select committee chosen from among the participants before being submitted to the UN agencies. Once the UN has gathered additional input from scholars and practitioners around the world, it will share the final version with different countries for their feedback. Once all parties have agreed on the final draft, it will be presented for adoption and ratification. When that happens, NES-FAS will be acknowledged as one of the contributors to the emerging international protocol.

What really impressed me about the whole experience was how knowledgeable and passionate everyone was about the welfare of indigenous peoples. This concern was not expressed in a paternalistic attitude, where indigenous people were treated as an inferior or backward group needing salvation from the outside. Instead, the concern was informed by deep solidarity with indigenous peoples’ experiences and a respect for their agency. As mentioned above, while the discussion included indigenous scholars and practitioners, it also featured many non-indigenous participants who immensely enriched the conversation. There were Canadian, Americans, French, and other nationalities, but they all spoke in Spanish with each other. The other Indian participant and I were the odd ones out, so they made an effort to speak in English for our sake. Quite a few had also learned local indigenous languages. It was very clear that they were fully immersed in the local culture and had great respect for it. The highlight of their careers was the long struggle they had waged for the rights of indigenous communities, even though many of them were not indigenous themselves.

This has parallels in India as well. The fight against casteism and communalism has often been led by individuals from the privileged groups against whom the struggle was targeted. When it comes to the rights of minorities in the country, the role of B.R. Ambedkar is immense. Much of this support came from his loved ones, including his second wife, Savita Ambedkar (formerly Sharada Krishnarao Kabir), who was born into a Brahmin family. The care and support Savita Ambedkar provided to her husband in his activities were acknowledged by B.R. Ambedkar in his book Buddha and His Dhamma, where he mentioned how

her care rekindled the “dying flame” and helped him complete the book.

While it cannot be denied that the non-indigenous population, especially the settler population, has committed immense atrocities against indigenous peoples and dispossessed them of their ancestral territories, many people now fighting for indigenous rights also belong to the non-indigenous population. Such commitments are not based on a “white savior complex”—a term used by one participant’s partner to criticize him. He promptly ended the relationship and is now happily in love with a Guatemalan. In the Indian context, this is akin to one partner from an upper-caste Brahmin couple criticizing the other for associating with a Muslim, with the criticized person eventually marrying a Muslim. Mixing, in fact, is the crucible in which humanity and the various ethnic groups found today in the world were born. The Khasi are a good example of this. Genetic evidence has shown that at least 70% of the present-day Khasi population can trace their ancestry to a non-Khasi great-grandparent. In many cases, both the maternal and paternal lines are non-Khasi. However, over time, these individuals have been assimilated into the community after adopting the Khasi language and matrilineal culture—two foundations of Khasi identity. I personally believe that we should advocate for more mixed marriages, as they will enrich our culture and generate progressive ideas that will advance the community. If there is one lesson I can take from my experience in Mexico, it is that indigenous and non-indigenous peoples working together is the only way to fight for the repatriation of indigenous rights. This lesson is of great importance to Meghalaya as well.

In Meghalaya, we have a long-settled non-indigenous population whose presence has been steadily declining over the years. From nearly 20% of the population in the 1970s, they now make up just over 10%, and the trend suggests this exodus will continue. Many people may not know, or may have chosen to forget, that the non-indigenous population played an important role in securing Meghalaya’s statehood. They were at the forefront, supporting the indigenous leadership in making the demand. Their role in building various institutions of the state, especially in education and the public sector, is immense and cannot be forgotten. However, they have long been victims of false propaganda.

The claim of uncontrolled illegal immigration is a popular one across the political spectrum, but it is not based on facts. There is no evidence that illegal immigration, or even legal migration, is occurring at a level that threatens the demographic dominance of the indigenous peoples in the state. Such claims would only be true if one assumed that

false information was being reported as part of a high-level conspiracy against Meghalaya and its indigenous population. Meanwhile, many problems afflicting the state that could be addressed are hamstrung by the paranoia that has been cultivated over many years.

Both the issues of Assam tourist vehicles taking business away from local taxis and the rise in the price of essential commodities (raised in the Assembly) could be tackled by the introduction of railways. Tourists would be able to come to Shillong directly, allowing prices of essential commodities to come down. Trains would also put an end to the illegal extortion that happens along the highway, for which some people were arrested last year. The introduction of railways will also allow us to remove our dependence on Assam which can no longer intimidate us, as seen in the recent threat of All Assam United Motor Transport Association (AAUMTA) to stop plying of commercial vehicles, carrying daily essentials from entering Meghalaya.

Removing this paranoia would also undermine the legitimacy of many groups that are illegally extorting money in the name of protecting the jaidbyrniew. In a recent story about the fall in the state’s GST collection, one trader mentioned that when sales are visibly higher, certain groups and individuals immediately appear, demanding money. Last year, a few members of such groups were arrested for demanding money from shops, and recently, a few more were arrested. These factors contribute to the rise in the prices of essential commodities and create an unfavorable business environment in the state. Political parties will no longer be able to emotionally blackmail the public in the name of the jaidbyrniew, and they will have to come up with actual solutions to solve real problems. In the meantime, the lies have contributed to a steady outmigration of the non-indigenous population from the state. Many leave with sadness and bitterness, feeling betrayed by the people they served throughout their lives. I know a few of them, including one whom I consider the best teacher I have ever studied under. His departure, with a broken heart, represents a significant loss not only for the teaching fraternity but for the state as a whole. We need people like him to stay.

My experience in Mexico has taught me that if we want to build a better society, it must be based on mutual respect and a desire to work together for the common good of all. For this, we need the support of both indigenous and non-indigenous populations. Our state is a good example of how living with paranoia has not benefited us—it has left us at the bottom of everything in the country. We need to work together, and that is the only way we can build a just and fair society for all.

(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)

High - Speed corridor linking Guwahati - Shillong - Silchar

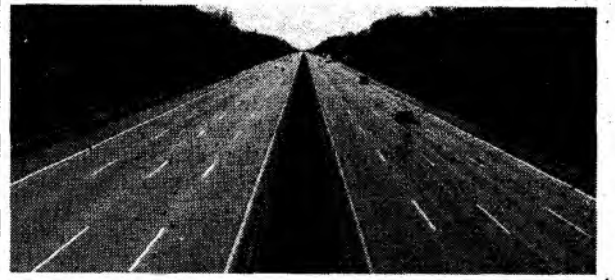
By VK Lyngdoh

A High-Speed Road Corridor is a type of roadway designed to allow vehicles to travel at higher speeds with minimal disruption. These corridors are typically access-controlled, meaning entry and exit points are limited to reduce traffic interference. They often have multiple lanes, usually at least four, but can go up to six or more lanes depending on route and traffic needs. The primary goals of high-speed road corridors are to:

- 1. Enhance connectivity between major cities and regions.
2. Improve logistics efficiency by reducing travel time and congestion.
3. Boost economic growth

of local congestion,” the government note said. In this connection the Surface Transport Ministry has identified 20 proposed corridors that will be approved by December 2024. These include the 783 km long Kharagpur-Cuttack-Visakhapatnam corridor; the 281 km Guwahati-Shillong-Silchar corridor passing through Assam and Meghalaya; the 68 km long Bhavnagar-Bharuch corridor in Gujarat; and the 335 km Mangaluru-Bengaluru corridor in Karnataka, among others.

Will the High-Speed Corridor along the Guwahati-Shillong-Silchar route miss the opportunity given the fact that the proposed



by facilitating faster movement of goods and people

The Narendra Modi Government on August 2, 2024 approved eight important National High-Speed Road Corridor Projects of length 936 km at a total cost of Rs. 50,655 Crore to improve logistics efficiency, reduce congestion and enhance connectivity across the country. The projects include the six-lane Agra-Gwalior National High Speed Corridor, four-lane Kharagpur-Moregram National High Speed Corridor, four-lane Tharad - Deesa - Mehsana - Ahmedabad National High-Speed Corridor, four-lane Ayodhya Ring Road, five-lane section between Pathalgaon and Gumla of Raipur-Ranchi National Highspeed Corridor, six-lane Kanpur Ring Road, four-lane Northern Guwahati Bypass and Widening/Improvement of Existing Guwahati Bypass and eight-lane elevated Nashik Phata - Khed Corridor near Pune. In its statement, the government said, “Infrastructure development is the foundation for a country’s economic prosperity and is critical for improving the quality of life of its citizens. Every rupee spent on infrastructure development has a multiplier effect of about 2.5-3.0 times on the GDP.” The government’s statement also says that total capital investment in National Highways including private investment has increased by 6 times from Rs. 50,000 crores in 2013-14 to about Rs. 3.1 Lakh crore in 2023-24. “Further, the Government has adopted a corridor-based highway infrastructure development approach with focus on ensuring consistent standards, user convenience and logistics efficiency, as compared to the earlier project-based development approach, focused on addressing stretch-

corridor of 281 Km identified by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways will be approved by December 2024 and given the fact that Diengpasoh village, located along the 27.5 km to 30 km stretch of the proposed road, has expressed its unwillingness to part with its land? Also the three villages in West Jaintia Hills — Mookyndor, Lad Mukhla, and Mukhla Mission declined to provide land for the corridor. This project is seen as a solution to the current travel difficulties, often faced by passengers heading towards Silchar and other Northeastern states; where road conditions and frequent landslides on the Ratacherra stretch during the monsoon season create major disruptions. NHIDCL has informed that the lack of proper land records in Meghalaya is complicating the situation, as land ownership matters must be resolved between the State Government and local landowners. This is a fact as there is no cadastral survey in Meghalaya, in spite of the fact that late Brington Buhai Lyngdoh had called for Cadastral Survey in the 70s but which was opposed vehemently. Instead the issue was politicised and rumours spread that the government of Meghalaya will collect land revenue once the cadastral survey is done which is a blatant lie.

According to the news report in The Shillong Times dated September 8, 2024 it seems that, “The NHIDCL is in constant contact with the district commissioners, who are working to convince people to part with their land for the project.” “Time” does not wait for anyone and the moot question is whether the Revenue Department of Meghalaya can sort out the problem of land acquisition in three months’ time or risk missing the project

Letters to the Editor

Why this reckless dumping of soil in forests?

Editor, We are made aware at every opportunity of the importance of our environment, and the initiatives the Government is taking every day to safeguard our environment. However, the upgradation of the road from Golf Links, Mawroh to the ISBT has created an opportunity for illegal dumping of soil from anywhere. An opening in the boundary wall of the road has resulted in trucks dumping soil throughout the day and even at night in the forest, thereby suffocating and killing the standing trees. I call upon concerned citizens and organisations to take up this issue with the State authorities. We should all join hands to save one of the few last remaining patches of green cover in our city.

Yours etc., Dr. Sandi Syiem, SANKER Nursing Home Via email

Traffic policing disaster

Editor, A drive that should at most culminate within 1.5 hours from Shillong to Jowai, however can take up to 3 hours thanks to the “no-action with empty promises” by the state PWD to repair this vital highway. In all of this is the hype of a ten billion dollar dream that should be connected to a fast moving economic corridor but now lies in abject chaos. A truck turned turtle on Saturday morning leaving commuters and transporters stuck for over 6 hours. It took longer for someone to take control of the situation. The highway patrol cars with their traffic cops were ‘invisible’ at critical junctions. But the most abominable part is the pathetic attitude of the State Government which is dragging its feet in repairing the entire highway. How can a State move forward when the highways are in a sorry state and basic regulations are absent. If critical infrastructure is not adequately developed then everything would come to a standstill. But will the

State Government authorities ever address this? And when? As usual it will be a cosmetic repair before elections and six months down the line the roads are in an abysmal situation. Do we have to approach the courts for everything under the ambit of governance.

Yours etc., Dominic S. Wankhar, Via email

Orwellian state

Editor, Today, George Orwell’s 1984 resonates louder than ever. This novel struck a chord against the rising powers of totalitarianism. Meghalaya’s Communication Policy 2024 does have its own pros and cons. This aspect was recently debated at the 1st Media meet, organised by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, in an effort to understand if the Policy would lead to a dystopian future? Indeed, the rise of influencers and self-styled journalists is increasing and news and content is being created at a frenetic pace, enabling us to get information on our smartphones even before we can digest one piece of news. Sadly what we

call news also includes fake reports and analyses. The trouble afflicting this state is the lack of dialogue and open forum discussions on whether such policies can be held to standards of accountability. Overall, we do not have an oversight committee to red flag what’s wrong with news dissemination which is now happening with big corporate houses tightening their grip on media organisations. In 2024, as per the World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders (RSF) India stood at a dismal 159 out of 180 countries. This also reflects our collective failure to understand why media freedom is important for a progressive society. Additionally, years ago, the government set up a Centralised Monitoring System (CMS) to strengthen the national security structure of the country. The CMS could monitor text messages, social-media engagement, phone calls on landlines and mobile phones. The book, ‘Pegasus: The Story of the World’s Most Dangerous Spyware’ by Laurent Richard and Sandrine Rigaud reflects on how strong cyber-surveillance tools could

sometimes be detrimental to democracy and human rights.

Yours etc., Christopher Gatphoh, Shillong-10

Urgent reforms needed to prevent misuse & ensure fair access

Editor, The Nongpoh Town Shopping Complex in Nongpoh, constructed under the Meghalaya Urban Development Authority (MUDA), and the Polo Market Complex in Shillong, under the Shillong Municipal Board, were envisioned to provide local entrepreneurs with affordable commercial spaces and to invigorate local commerce. Unfortunately, both these complexes have failed to live up to expectations. Despite being completed long ago, a significant number of shops remain vacant. Even more troubling is the discovery that many of these shops have been “booked” by individuals with political connections or influence, yet remain unopened

and unused, causing harm to both the local markets and aspiring business owners.

This situation reflects not just mismanagement but also a systemic failure to fulfil the promises of economic development and inclusivity for the people. Shopkeepers currently operating in the Nongpoh and Polo complexes have voiced their concerns, stating that the empty shops surrounding their businesses create a lifeless environment, affecting footfalls and their ability to sustain themselves. Furthermore, potential applicants eager to open shops in these locations are unable to do so, as many of these spaces have already been “occupied” on paper by those with higher-level connections, yet remain untouched.

This practice of booking shops without utilizing them is both unethical and unjust. MUDA, the Shillong Municipal Board, and the Government of Meghalaya should have introduced strict rules and regulations to prevent such exploitation. A key regulation that must be enforced is the automatic cancellation of bookings for shops that

remain unopened and unused for a specified period. These spaces should then be reallocated to individuals who genuinely want to establish and operate businesses, particularly those from the common public who are struggling to find opportunities to earn a livelihood.

Allowing these public assets to remain under-utilized or monopolized by a select few is a gross misuse of resources and a betrayal of the very purpose for which these complexes were constructed. These shopping complexes were built to serve the people, promote local businesses, and create jobs—not to become private holdings for the well-connected.

The MUDA and SMB must take immediate corrective action. A thorough review should be conducted of all shops in these complexes that remain unused for extended periods, and those bookings should be cancelled. Transparent and fair processes must be introduced to ensure that deserving entrepreneurs and business owners—especially those who lack political connections—can access these

spaces and contribute to the local economy.

The Government must also step in to ensure that such rules are enforced and that public assets are utilized effectively. Failure to act will not only continue to suppress economic growth but will also foster public mistrust in both the authorities and the system. The Nongpoh Town Shopping Complex and Polo Market can either be examples of progress or symbols of corruption and inefficiency, depending on whether action is taken.

Now is the time for MUDA, the SMB and the Government of Meghalaya to act decisively. Public resources must be used for the greater good, and real opportunities for economic empowerment must be made available to all—not just the privileged few.

Yours etc., W. Khyndeit, Shillong

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

"Peace is not only better than war, but infinitely more arduous."

—George Bernard Shaw

The Shillong Times

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Red rule in Sri Lanka

THE political landscape of Sri Lanka has turned red for the first time in the island nation's history. All eyes are on the leader of the Marxist Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) Anura Kumara Dissanayake, sworn-in as President on Sunday at the head of the National People's Power (NPP) government. India will keep its fingers crossed for now, as JVP ever since its formation had been set against India and ideologically attracted to China. Dissanayake's soft corner for China was well-known. In the present regional context, this should be a matter of concern to India. Yet, the new president's first assertion after he took office is that he "intends to foster balanced relationships with both China and India," and that Sri Lanka under him won't be aligned to any side.

India had sensed what was in the making in Sri Lanka when the popularity of the JVP-led alliance rose phenomenally from a less than four per cent support in the previous polls to about 50 per cent in recent opinion surveys. The alliance campaigned against dynastic politics, the huge corruption in government and system flaws in the context of the 2022 economic meltdown, which continued to make life miserable for the common man. Notably, the alliance draws its support from the ordinary Sinhalese in the south, while the Tamils and Muslims based in the northern sector remain in the rival political camp. The JVP organised violent protests against the government in 1971 and against the India-Sri Lanka Accord on LTTE in the 1987-90 period.

Having been mindful of all these, India sought to build bridges with the JVP in recent months. Anura Dissanayake headed the party's delegation to New Delhi for the first time in January last on an invitation from the central government. There, however, was a limit to diplomacy in view of the JVP's marked ideological and anti-India orientations. However, Dissanayake has said Sri Lanka would require India's support in developing its IT sector. Expectations are that he would grow beyond his ideological moorings and be pragmatic in matters of foreign relations. He would need India as much as China and the wider world, if his leadership should work to the advantage of the nation and its people. He seems to understand as much. The LTTE is dormant. It should be his endeavour to do justice to the minority Tamils and Muslims if only to create the right conditions for economic growth, peace and stability. For global Communists, this is an inspiring moment as they were generally on retreat from most of their bases. Lazy Indian Communist leaders have major lessons to learn from their Lankan comrades on how to build a mass base.

Nothing festive about this festive season

By Deepa Majumdar

This essay is dedicated to Abhaya's grieving parents - who are admirable for their dignity, resilience, and integrity. May the world's prayers console them in their hour of grief.

Autumn is usually a festive season for Bengal and India. From Ganesh Chaturthi, Dussehra and Durga Puja, to Lakshmi Puja, Kali Puja, and Diwali - autumn is usually a time of joy that culminates in Christmas. For the Yuletide of December is a crescendo that completes our felicity. Nature herself rejoices, as the searing heat of summer crosses the bridge of autumn, to give way to the cool of winter. So do we, when we gather together to worship, make merry, and enjoy the autumnal abundance of life.

Given this background, it seems normal that the West Bengal Chief Minister (CM), Mamata Banerjee would attempt to move public focus away from protests - towards the upcoming Durga Puja festivities. But is it? Or, is it a heartless ploy to preserve power - sugar-coated as benevolent advice for the protesting public? Given the recent gruesome rape and murder of a junior medical trainee (now renamed Abhaya) at R. G. Kar hospital on Aug 9, 2024, and the disgusting details of conspiracy and neglect that have enshrouded this harrowing case - there is little to be festive about. If anything, this is a season of sorrow. For many, this is the CM's attempt to distract an irate public. She comes across as insensitive - as Abhaya's sorrowing mother has said. Here are her words of anguish:

"Durga Puja is celebrated in my house too; my daughter used to handle it herself. But Durga Puja will never be celebrated in my house again. The light in my home is out... How can I ask people to return to the festival? Let her [CM] return our daughter first. If such an incident had happened in the Chief Minister's family, would she have said this?"

The horror of rape lies, not in numbers, although numbers add to this horror. It lies in the very act itself. Lest we become complacent, let us not forget that even a single case of rape is one too many. To the person raped, the statistical gaze is cold and clinical. It treats victims as numbers.

August 2024 has been a sinister month for India. It has witnessed one too many cases of rape. The grue-

some death of Abhaya has shaken the nation. A promising young doctor, and a gift to her parents, neighbors, colleagues, and patients - she was an angel who fed stray animals and shared her tiffin with colleagues. We shudder at the torment she suffered. But she was not the only victim. She was one of several, of whom, some have died. This does not diminish the excruciating horror of her pain and untimely death, but merely highlights the intensity of India's rape crisis. Before Abhaya's death, a nurse in Uttarakhhand was raped and killed, her face mutilated beyond recognition, and her body recovered on Aug 8. After this, on August 12th, a teenaged girl in Muzaffarpur was gang-raped and murdered. On August 12-13th, another teenaged girl was gang-raped in Dehradun, by a bus driver and his four associates. Within ten days of Abhaya's tragic death, four cases of rape were reported in India. August, therefore, should be observed as a "Stop Rape" month.

Not just women and girls - but even minors and elderly ladies have been subjected to rape in contemporary India. Many victims have been infant girls, of whom, some have died as a result of rape. Indeed, what kind of a monster rapes an infant girl? I have no answer, except to cite Aristotle, who says - man, when perfected, is the best of all animals, but the worst, when severed from law and justice. In Feb 2024, a trans-identified male was sentenced to death by a Mumbai court for raping and torturing a three-months old infant girl. In July 2024, a five-month old baby girl was allegedly raped by a forty-year old male in Andhra Pradesh. Not even the elderly have been spared India's sadistic masculinity. In August 2024, a seventy-year old woman was raped during an attempted robbery in Kerala.

If this sounds nightmarish, imagine how much worse the reality must be. For, rape in India is hugely underreported. Of those reported, conviction rates are abysmally low. The true figures, therefore, must be far worse.

All nations are self-contradictory. But the internal contradictions of the Indian civilization are extreme. In this same civilization, where the Eternal Feminine is worshipped annually, and the pantheon of Hindu Goddess-

es propitiated and welcomed to shower their benediction upon Earth - the same Eternal Feminine, which incarnates itself in every feminine form, is also assaulted in that same bodily form. Objectified, vilified, and humiliated simply for being physically female - the living Goddess is desecrated daily - through rape, sexual assault, molestation, "Eve-teasing," female feticide, domestic violence, acid attacks, dowry deaths, etc. In this same nation, where little girls are worshipped by monks during Kumari Puja - infant girls are also raped, tormented, and killed with impunity.

Given these contradictions, what is the meaning and purpose of Mother Durga? A leonine Goddess astride a lion - She is mesmerizing. Her ten arms, a grand deca-symbol of Shakti - She evokes awe with every nuance of her visage. The opposite of worldly power, Her strength (Shakti) exceeds the sum total of all moral virtues put together. Born from the luminous sphere of divine Incandescence - or the combined energies of the gods, including the trinitarian Brahma-Vishnu-Shiva - Durga incarnated in this phenomenal world in order to redeem it. Described in the Chandī (1-81) as "most beautiful among all beautiful things in the world," Durga is the "Redeemer of Sorrow." As the infusion of the eternal into the temporal, omnipresent-omnipotent Durga comes to unify. Cowering at her feet is the buffalo-demon, Mahisura, who conquered the gods and ruled them. When I was a child, Mahisura was, for me, far more menacing than Durga's lion with its flashing teeth.

But still more menacing is the patriarchal Mahisura of contemporary India. Where is this buffalo-demon? In all who engage in sadistic cruelty - especially those who abuse women and children - an ominous omnibus of pimps, rapists (especially gang-rapists), violent in-laws, those who beat women, and other abusers abhorred by virtuous men and women alike. Where is the supernatural might of Durga? In the virginal, cosmic-acosmic strength of righteous forms of feminism (not all feminism is righteous) - a dispassionate strength, full of might because it is non-violent and free of hatred. Indeed, Durga's visage expresses a regal

might - the kind of effortless strength that can never arise from anger or hatred.

On Aug 9, 2024, it was this living Durga who was tormented, raped, and murdered in the body of Abhaya. The same may be said of every case of rape in India and elsewhere. Given these tragedies, what would Mother Durga expect of us in 2024? Chances are, She would expect us to mourn Abhaya and others, instead of celebrating Durga Puja. She would ask us to propitiate Her through introspection, mass penance, collective mourning, and the resolve to remove the stain of India's rape crisis, and its main cause - an intransigent patriarchal mindset that expresses itself individually, collectively, and systemically.

For all its negative verses on women, the Manusmriti has a few positive ones, like 3.56-58:

The deities delight in places where women are revered, but where women are not revered, all rights are fruitless. Where the women of the family are miserable, the family is soon destroyed, but it always thrives where the women are not miserable. Homes that are cursed by women of the family who have not been treated with due reverence are completely destroyed, as if struck down by witchcraft.

To this, I would add - where women are abused and dishonored, auspiciousness fades, paving the way for rack and ruin. India is aiming at becoming the third largest economy in the world. But if the current abuse against women continues, it will bring in its trail grave inauspiciousness that includes economic rack and ruin. I would say the same of America, where the rape rate is higher than in India.

If we want to please the great Goddess, we should spend this puja season engaging in introspection, self-purification, service of rape survivors, and collective penance on behalf of remorseless rapists who are incapable of penance. We should spend it mourning all who have died through sexual violence and rape - especially infant girls and those like Abhaya and Nirbhaya, who have suffered extreme sadism, on top of the sadism of rape. We should spend this puja season exorcising and exorcizing the patriarchal Mahisura from within ourselves and from India. Above all, we should spend it serving rape survivors and victims, and their sorrowing families.

Leftist Anura Kumara Dissanayake sworn in as 9th Sri Lankan President

Amidst big celebrations on streets, Rajapaksa family leaves for USA

By Arun Kumar Shrivastav

Anura Kumara Dissanayake was sworn in as the ninth President of Sri Lanka in the first election since his economic collapse in 2022, marking a historic moment as the country's first leftist head of state. The 55-year-old Dissanayake is the leader of the Marxist-leaning Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (JVP) party.

The swearing-in ceremony at the Presidential Secretariat in Colombo was administered by Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya.

Dissanayake, the son of a labourer and the first from his alma mater to attend university, has led a political movement from 3% support to winning the 2024 Sri Lanka Presidential Election.

The result was finalized Sunday evening after Sri Lanka's first-ever presidential run-off, as second preference votes were counted, following both Dissanayake and Samagi Jana Sandhanaya candidate Sajith Premadasa falling short of the required vote percentage.

"The dream we have nurtured for centuries is finally coming true. This achievement is not the result of any single person's work, but the collective effort of hundreds of thousands of you. Your commitment has brought us this far, and for that, I am deeply grateful. This victory belongs to all of us," Dissanayake said in a post on X after the final result was announced by the Lankan Election Commission on Sunday.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated the newly appointed Sri Lankan President on X, who promptly replied to him. Indian High Commissioner in Sri Lanka Santosh Jha was one of the first diplomats to meet him.

Chinese President Xi Jinping also sent a congratulatory message to President Dissanayake, emphasizing traditional relationship and cooperation. The key take-away from the Sri Lanka Presidential election is the rejection of the 75-year-old incumbent President Ranil Wickremesinghe and 38-year-old Namal Rajapaksa. Both represented the old breed of politicians seen responsible for corruption and the current economic stress.

While Namal himself is a young leader, he is the son of Mahinda Rajapaksa who has served Sri Lanka both as President and Prime Minister. The Rajapaksa family has had their grip on the country's politics for most of

the past two decades. Early Sunday morning when early trends showed Dissanayake winning and he facing a substantial defeat, Namal along with his wife and two children reportedly left the country for Dubai en route to the US.

The popular mandate for Dissanayake spilled on the streets as large crowds wearing red shirts and holding red flags took out victory marches in different parts of the island nation. Communist leaders in India shared the joy of the left victory.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) Polit Bureau shared a statement, saying, "The Communist Party of India (Marxist) congratulates the people of Sri Lanka for voting decisively in the presidential elections held after their massive struggle, Aragalaya... We are confident that President Anura Dissanayake would lead the country on the path of socio-economic development, progress and welfare, ensuring the rights of the minorities. We wish him all the very best in his endeavour."

As far as the interest of the Tamil minority is concerned, Dissanayake is unlikely to diverge from the policies followed by the successive governments in the past. A Sri Lanka watcher shared on X, "Sri Lanka's new President is the leader of the chauvinist JVP (under coalition NNP) which despite rhetoric doesn't recognize rights of Tamils and won't investigate atrocities by Sri Lanka's military. Leftism is just cover when it's racist." In a quick and significant development, Air Vice Marshal (Retired) Sampath Thuyacontha was appointed as the new Secretary of Defence. He was blacklisted by the Sri Lanka Air Force last year for supporting the National People's Power (NPP).

Soon after being sworn in, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake began appointing officials. The first appointment letter was handed over to Dr. Nandika Sanath Kumanayaka, who has been appointed as the Secretary to the President.

The National People's Power, known as Jathika Jana Balawegaya, is a socialist political alliance in Sri Lanka. Founded in 2019 by Anura Kumara Dissanayake, the leader of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna, it comprises 28 political parties and various organizations. (IPA Service)

Letters to the Editor

Help us make Umden more accessible

We write to draw attention to a pressing issue that affects not only the residents of Umden but also the burgeoning tourism sector in our beautiful state of Meghalaya. The recent recognition of Diwon-Umden as the Eri Silk Village, along with accolades that it is one of the best tourism villages alongside Mawphlang, is a testament to the hard work of our local weavers and the rich cultural heritage we possess. However, the dream of sustaining this momentum is being jeopardized by the deplorable condition of the roads connecting Nongpoh to Umden.

Despite being a mere 19 kilometers apart, the journey currently takes an hour due to the deteriorating state of the road. Travelers often find themselves navigating a perilous path, filled with deep potholes that not only pose risks to vehicles but also to the safety of passengers. It is disheartening to witness a route that should ideally take 25-30 minutes extend into an uncomfortable and time-consuming ordeal.

The impact of these poor road conditions is profound. With the inflow of tourists from across the state, country, and even the globe - eager to learn about the traditional methods of dyeing, weaving, and designing Eri silk - the inability to provide easy access is a significant setback. Local weavers depend on these visitors for their livelihoods; a decrease in tourist traffic has immediate repercussions for their income and the community's economic health.

Further, it is important to consider the long-term implications. The tourism sector is a vital part of our economy, and with awards and recognitions come increased expectations. Yet, if visitors face discomfort and uncertainty due to road conditions, they may choose to explore other destinations instead. The dwindling number of tourists not only affects local businesses but also undermines the community's efforts to preserve its rich cultural heritage.

A well-maintained road network is crucial for economic growth and connectivity. The current situation is unsustainable, and it is imperative that we advocate for urgent infrastructure improvement. The Government

must prioritize the construction and maintenance of a reliable road from Nongpoh to Umden to ensure easy access to this cultural gem.

To conclude, while we celebrate the achievements of our Eri silk village, we must also address the challenges that threaten its future. Let us unite in calling for better roads, which are not just pathways but the backbone of our economy and a bridge to our cultural heritage.

Yours etc.,  
Iba Mallai, (On behalf of the concerned citizens of Umden)  
Via email

The best religion is serving the needy with compassion

We never know where life or destiny will lead us. Tomorrow always remains a mystery, as does the path we will walk, the people we will meet, and the difference we might make in someone's life. I certainly had no idea that meeting a blind man in the bustling streets of Shillong that fateful day would, in some small way, bring a ray of sunshine to his life.

Thank God for that deep, unspoken push within that

inspired me to write about the plight of Bah Mawblei, the blind man from Mawngap. What moved me most was seeing that, instead of sitting on the roadside begging like so many others, he navigated through the crowd with nothing but a simple stick for guidance, shouting "kwait and cigarettes," which he carried in a small plastic bag in his other hand. The sight was truly heart-touching, something I could not ignore!

Can we, for a moment, imagine being completely blind, even for just two days? Can we picture walking through a world "without light", where every step is uncertain and every sound unfamiliar? For most of us, that short visualization would be enough to understand the unimaginable hardship blindness brings.

Now, just consider the reality of Bah Mawblei's daily life. He is completely "uncertain" of his next meal, unsure of what tomorrow holds, and facing a constant battle for survival in a world that often overlooks him. If those of us who are healthy and well-off don't help, then who will?

Yes, something remarkable happened after the publication of my letter in The

Shillong Times on September 3, 2024. Many kind-hearted individuals, moved by the blind man's story, rushed to visit Bah Mawblei and his blind wife in their dilapidated hut in Mawngap. All credit goes to The Shillong Times for making this possible. I can barely describe the outpouring of empathy people felt for this couple living in such difficult conditions. Visitors arrived with groceries, clothes, and money. I believe they didn't just offer material support; they brought with them empathy, compassion, and love, which no money can ever truly quantify.

Among those who reached out was the local MLA, Matthew B. Kurbah. Not only did he visit the family, but he also arrived with a generous amount of food and financial assistance. I was deeply touched when Bah Kurbah personally called me to thank me for bringing the blind man's struggles to light. Over the phone, he informed me that both the run-down houses - the blind man's and his sister's - would be repaired and renovated. He even mentioned adding verandas, which would provide them with much-needed comfort.

I cannot express my

gratitude in words for two heartfelt letters - "Blind man story touched my heart" (ST, September 5) by Jonathan Albert Khyriem and "Blindman deserves Government's attention immediately" (ST, September 17) by John Nongspung. Reading them made me feel even more humbled. They remind me of the tremendous power in our "collective empathy." One act of compassion can ripple through a community, inspiring others to act. Every small gesture, whether writing a letter to raise awareness, visiting someone in need, or offering a meal - has the potential to transform lives, including our own. In touching the life of another, we may well reshape our own destiny.

From my personal experience, in helping the needy like this blind man, we are not just aiding an individual in need. We are, in fact, allowing ourselves to evolve into more compassionate beings. Let us never forget that tomorrow, any one of us could find ourselves in Bah Mawblei's place, totally dependent on the mercy of strangers for survival.

It is only through acts of selfless giving and compassion, without "expectation or discrimination", that we serve God better than the ritu-

als of religion. This is what allows us to grasp the real purpose of life - our connection to one another and a deeper understanding of our "shared humanity" in this vast universe. I believe that our material possessions and worldly achievements pale in comparison to the growth of our souls as we evolve into truly compassionate human beings. And so, at times, I find myself on my knees, praying that we may continue to serve the needy more, and more, and more.

Yours etc.,  
Salil Gwalli,  
Shillong

One nation, one election

Apropos of the front-page news, "TMC laps up Centre's move; UDP and VPP undecided" (ST September 19, 2024) Charles Pyngrupe, Member of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly and former Speaker of Meghalaya has rightly welcomed the Centre's one nation, one election move. The country has to save resources, reduce pressure on administrative machinery in conducting elections around the year and save public money. Frequent

elections create an atmosphere of uncertainty and impact policy decisions. Holding simultaneous elections would bring enhanced certainty in policy making. The High-Level Committee headed by the former President of India, Ram Nath Kovind is hundred percent correct that "One Nation One Election" ensures ease and convenience to voters, avoids voter fatigue, and facilitates greater voter turnout." The Union Cabinet has done well in accepting the recommendations of the High-Level Committee headed by the former President of India. It is heartening that the Union Information and Broadcasting Minister Ashwini Vaishnav said that the "government believes in creating a consensus on items which affect democracy and the nation in the long run. This is a subject, a topic that will strengthen our nation."

Yours etc;  
VK Lyngdoh  
Via email

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

"The brighter you are, the more  
you have to learn."

—Don Herold

## The Shillong Times

Vol No. LXVII No. 47 SHILLONG, THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 26, 2024

### Deep-end of Technology

THE news of a 10-year old girl taking her own life after her sister refused to give her the mobile phone reveals the present crisis that societies and governments seem ill-equipped to deal with. There are questions but no ready answers. Research by psychiatrists show that almost a quarter of young people are so dependent on their smartphones that it has become an addiction. Not much research on this topic is available in India but a study from King's College London, says such addictive behaviour means that youngsters become "panicky" or "upset" if they are denied constant access. The youngsters also cannot control the amount of time they spend on the phone. The study warns that such addictions have "serious consequences" for mental health. The research, published in BMC Psychiatry, analysed 41 studies involving 42,000 young people in an investigation into "problematic smartphone usage." The study found 23% had behaviour that was consistent with an addiction - such as anxiety over not being able to use their phone, not being able to moderate the time spent and using mobiles so much that it was detrimental to other activities.

The study says that such addictive behaviour could be linked to other problems such as stress, a depressed mood, lack of sleep and reduced achievement in school. But smartphones are here to stay and there is need to understand the prevalence of problematic smartphone usage. Psychiatrists say they are unsure whether it is the smartphone that can be addictive or the apps that people use but they say there is need for public awareness around smartphone use in children and young people, and parents should be aware of how much time their children spend on their phones. There are other studies which suggest that there is need for further investigation as to whether smartphone use is the problem or whether other reasons drive children to the smartphone to find their comfort there. Needless to say, the human brain today is wired to seek a constant high and smartphones with their range of apps and entertainment provide the human brain with a constant dopamine feed. Not getting a smartphone means depriving the brain of dopamine hence a depressed state.

Today teachers complain of sudden fall in grades of students and attribute that to mobile phone addiction and inability to concentrate on their studies. Smartphone addiction also means reduced sleep time which plays havoc with the body's circadian rhythm. If sleep is meant to repair the human system then cumulative lack of sleep can take a heavy toll on the productivity of the person. Technology is good as long as it does not control us but that is hardly the case. Smartphone users across ages are constantly checking their phones to see how many likes they have got for a post. Even at the dining table individuals are busy checking their phones instead of having a family conversation. How much more technology will affect the human mind is difficult to predict and there seems to be no solution in sight to de-addict the brain from the smartphone. Add to this the addiction to other substances too and we have a crisis looming large but without solutions.

# Unification is not homogenisation

By Justice (Retd) Sanjib Banerjee

I was unenthusiastic when I first received a written invitation and thereafter a phone call from a senior official in the law department of the Union Ministry of Law and Justice asking me to express my views on the "one nation one vote" idea being canvassed by the present dispensation in the Centre. I agreed to make a presentation after a further phone call with a request on behalf of the chairperson of the committee established for this purpose but I was sceptical and always knew that there would be scant space or regard for a divergent opinion.

I was pleasantly surprised at the courtesy and respect accorded to me as a protocol officer escorted me in a government car to the venue of the meeting late last winter at one of those remodelled bungalows off the central mall near what we grew up calling the Raj Path. The chairperson of the committee, former President Ramnath Kovind, heard me patiently for nearly an hour, including my reading out some Articles from a copy of the Constitution of India that I carried with me. When I finished, the chairperson asked me if I would pen my thoughts. I replied that I would if written queries were forwarded to me. That was the end of that.

From the body language and the expressions on the faces of some of the senior officials present at the meeting, I could gauge that my opinion made no difference to them. It appeared as if they had to go through the motions to record at least one contrary view. I refer to that meeting, not for the mood or the lavish vegetarian spread laid out at the end of it; rather, I would like to mention a minor incident that occurred after the meeting. As the law secretary escorted me back to the car and I got into it, there was a mild tap on the window on the other side. I stretched to roll the window down. One of the law ministry minions addressed me in Bengali to tell me that many had been invited to such meetings but I was the first one to offer an opposing opinion.

I had ventured to ask at the very outset of the meeting why it was necessary to even think of simultaneously holding the Lok Sabha and State Legislative Assembly elections. I received the broad response that that election was an expensive affair and that repeated elections in states result in a kind of paralysis in policy implementation and decision-making, and thus impede development and progress. From what I have read elsewhere, these arguments form the primary planks on which the idea is founded.

There exist many phenomena that the framers of our Constitution could not conceive. For one, it may never have occurred to them that regional parties

would mushroom over the next century and even hold sway. They may also have been unable to perceive that some governments with immense majorities in Parliament could dare think of cornering certain institutions designed to enjoy a degree of autonomy and could pack these institutions that were apparently immune to political interference with party acolytes.

Our governance at the Centre is fashioned on the Westminster model. But we have also replicated the same paradigm for State governments. The authority to legislate and, consequently, the areas of governance are clearly delineated in the Constitution and it is, generally, not possible for one to usurp the legislative or functional jurisdiction of the other. This double Westminster system is somewhat unique and stands to be undermined under the proposed simultaneous election process.

The comparable provisions, in Article 85 for the Union and Article 174 for the States, underwent a bit of a tweak in the very first constitutional amendment in 1951. However, the part pertaining to the dissolution of the Lok Sabha in the Centre and the legislative assemblies in the States remained unaltered. Ordinarily, both the President and the Governor would dissolve the Lok Sabha or the relevant State assembly, respectively, upon advice from the appropriate political government. Nonetheless, when the numbers thrown up by any election make it impossible for a government to be formed despite opportunities being afforded to the various political parties by the President or the Governor, as the case may be, the President or the Governor may exercise the power of dissolution without any advice in such regard being available. This most crucial function must be diligently and honestly discharged by an otherwise only titular head of government. The Constitution did not conceive that persons in such high office would owe allegiance to any political party or become mere puppets at the end of strings controlled elsewhere.

The first great apprehension about simultaneous elections at the Centre and the States relates to the fear that the task of allowing government formation may not be diligently or honestly undertaken and may become abjectly subject to the partisan considerations of those who control the strings at the end of which Governors in States stand. This outcome would strike a devastating blow to the fair democratic process built into the election system.

At any rate, several amendments must be made

to the Constitution to provide for simultaneous elections and it would be undemocratic to not allow States to have their say or rush into them without a fair degree of political consensus. Several previous irrational amendments bulldozed through Parliament have taken a long time and considerable cost to be undone.

The argument that elections are hugely expensive and that the exercise involves a large number of public officials down the line is also devoid of any merit. For a start, if it is necessary to incur expenses to form governments at the Centre and the States as per the will of the people, so be it. More importantly, the excuse about costs is somewhat specious in today's India and much less relevant than it was in the India of the previous century. Further, simultaneous elections would not guarantee the continuation of the governments for their full tenures. The remedy suggested by the committee to this eventuality is to hold mid-term elections but the tenure of those elected in the mid-term polls would end with the original term. If expenses were really the concern, why incur more spending by curbing the tenures of those elected in mid-term polls and having more elections than is necessary under the present system? Also, having elections for the Lok Sabha and for the state assemblies at different times would lead to less disruption by way of public servants being displaced from their posts to conduct the elections.

The contention of decision-making paralysis or lack of policy implementation is equally fallacious. The formation of a stable government does not necessarily lead to effective decision-making or clear policies or their implementation. Sometimes, as experience has taught us, a less stable government may introduce and institute better policies that are acceptable all around and make decisions that appeal to a larger spectrum of the political firmament. Indeed, there may be no nexus between simultaneous elections and more effective policy implementation or better decision-making. These results depend on the quality of the government of the day and the efficacy of its leadership.

Elections held over the last few decades have established that national subjects and local issues may be quite disparate. By and large, voting in most constituencies in the Lok Sabha polls is guided by national anxieties even though grave local matters may sometimes overwhelm larger national concerns in some pockets or constituencies. Under the simultaneous elections exercise, the local

worries may become drowned and the real will of the people may be lost in the misadventure because most of the electorate is still not educated enough to confidently strike different buttons in different machines during simultaneous polls.

Before 1947, "India that is Bharat" as described in the opening Article of the lex suprema that is the Constitution was never one country or under common governance or ever part of the same kingdom. The most delectable Kerala dish may be unpalatable to a Manipuri; the colourful headgear of a Rajasthani may be found offensive at a religious function in Meghalaya; and, several courteous traditions in one part of the country may seem impolite in other corners. Nevertheless, all of them together comprise the diversity that is celebrated as India. Practices, concerns and even idiosyncrasies may differ within the same communities, let alone across vast tracts of our beautiful country. This discreteness must be respected and even nourished and never thrown into one hotchpot of commonality. The "one nation one vote" scheme may obliterate the last dregs of federalism that still flourish in our quasi-federal republic.

History tells us that tables do turn. Myopic considerations and immediate prospects of advantages could lead to the present scenario being perceived as a long-term continuum. However, the shoe may pinch when it is on the other foot. Homogenisation in the garb of unification and tinkering with institutions that ought to have been left independent may hurt in many ways than can presently be envisioned. Strong regional forces may then even become an impediment to unity.

Several institutional corrections are necessary in the nation's administration but diluting the democratic framework is certainly not one of them. For nearly two decades now, reforms have not been undertaken in the organisation of the police to bifurcate the law enforcement machinery from the investigation wing despite the mandate of the Supreme Court being binding under the Constitution. Once uncaged, the parrot will flaunt its talents for the public good. There is also a crying need to insulate the bureaucracy from the constant threat of transfers and undesirable postings based on misguided political whims. These brilliant administrators should be allowed to function, certainly in compliance with the policies framed by the elected representatives, but implemented only through impartial agencies.

(The author is former Chief Justice of Meghalaya High Court. This article is published by arrangement with The Telegraph)

## Dire State of Mobile Connectivity in Shillong: A Call to Accountability

By Dushyant Wadhwan

I returned to Shillong a month ago, having spent three long years as a "corporate maddo" in Delhi. I was filled with excitement at the thought of once again enjoying life in my hometown. Yet, to my dismay, that excitement quickly dissipated. Upon arriving, I discovered that Shillong had remained largely unchanged, save for the rather unremarkable opening of a Shoppers Stop—a small development, I suppose, but a development nonetheless. Perhaps a modest step in the right direction? However, a far more pressing concern soon revealed itself: the woeful state of mobile internet connectivity. In Delhi, specifically in Vasant Kunj where I resided, the mobile internet was nothing short of a technological marvel. The service was so reliable that I scarcely needed to rely on a fixed-line connection. The Airtel 5G network consistently delivered speeds of approximately 200 Mbps, while Jio's self-proclaimed, "true 5G experience" achieved dizzying heights of 600 to 800 Mbps. Now, I understand that mobile connectivity varies based on location.

Since my return to Shillong, in the 4th Furlong area, mobile internet—be it Jio or Airtel—has been nothing short of abysmal. Forget 5G; even basic 3G connectivity is a challenge. The

pricing structures in regions where infrastructure clearly lags behind.

My aunt who has been residing in the 4th Furlong area, has observed these connectivity issues persisting for over four months. Her experiences reflect a broader problem that many in the community are facing. The need for accountability from telecom providers in smaller towns and rural areas is becoming increasingly critical. As consumers, we invest not only our money but also our trust in these companies, expecting them to deliver the promised services reliably. However, the persistent issues with connectivity in places like Shillong, particularly in the 4th Furlong area, highlight a troubling lack of transparency and responsiveness from service providers.

In cities like Delhi, competition among telecom companies often leads to improvements in service quality, but this does not appear to extend to Shillong. Customers here are frequently left in the lurch, paying the same high prices as in bigger cities while receiving far inferior service. This disparity raises questions about the fairness of pricing structures and the commitment of these companies to customer satisfaction. Telecom providers must be held

**"The frustration of paying for services that one is unable to fully utilize cannot be overstated. In my case, I am paying a substantial 999 for a 3GB/day plan, which, on paper, seems like a fair deal. However, the reality of Shillong's poor connectivity renders this expense almost meaningless."**

connection is so poor that heaven forbid if the weather is cloudy or if there's a power outage—it becomes virtually non-existent. It almost feels like a deliberate ploy to save costs: reduce internet speeds or, better yet, don't provide a connection at all, while still demanding exorbitant fees for those so-called services. Both Jio and Airtel have recently implemented a 25% increase in their mobile recharge tariffs. For instance, Jio's widely used 239 monthly plan, which previously offered 1.5GB of daily data, has now been raised to 299—a noticeable 25% hike. Yet when it comes to actually utilizing those services, we are barely able to make use of the allotted data. We are currently made to pay Rs 999 for a 3GB/day pack, valid for 84 days. When you break it down, that's 333 for every 1GB, or 4 per day for each GB of data. Now, one might argue that this seems insignificant at first glance, but considering the woeful state of connectivity, we are left wondering what exactly we are paying for? It almost feels like service providers are deliberately reducing the quality of internet service in regions like Shillong while charging the same, if not higher, prices.

The frustration of paying for services that one is unable to fully utilize cannot be overstated. In my case, I am paying a substantial 999 for a 3GB/day plan, which, on paper, seems like a fair deal. However, the reality of Shillong's poor connectivity renders this expense almost meaningless. What use is 3GB of data per day when the internet barely functions, particularly in areas like 4th Furlong? Whether it's Jio or Airtel, both providers have consistently failed to deliver even basic 4G speeds, let alone the promised 5G service. This situation is made worse by the recent 25% tariff hike, which feels unjustifiable when the service itself remains subpar. It's infuriating to pay for a service that you can rarely enjoy, raising questions about the fairness of these telecom companies'

accountable for their services, especially in regions where they enjoy limited competition. There should be clear channels for customer feedback, transparent reporting on service issues, and tangible commitments to improve connectivity.

A greater focus on accountability will not only enhance customer trust but also ensure that individuals in rural and smaller towns receive the reliable internet access they deserve in today's digital landscape. In places like Shillong, where connectivity has been historically weak, the struggles faced by residents are compounded by rising service costs that do not reflect the quality of service delivered. In light of the pressing connectivity issues that have become all too apparent, it is imperative to call upon service providers to take decisive action. The importance of reliable internet access cannot be overstated, particularly in our increasingly digital age, where the ability to connect online is no longer a luxury but a necessity. With the rise of remote work, online education, and essential services that rely on seamless internet connectivity, the implications of inadequate service are far-reaching.

Service providers must not only acknowledge these issues but actively work towards rectifying them. Investments in infrastructure, transparent communication regarding service updates, and improved customer support are essential steps in addressing the current shortfalls. By prioritizing these changes, telecom companies can build trust with their customers and ensure that even those in smaller towns and rural areas are not left behind in this digital era. To conclude, the responsibility lies with telecom providers to enhance their services, ensuring that all consumers—regardless of their location—have access to the reliable internet they need. A commitment to accountability and improvement is crucial for fostering a more equitable digital landscape that benefits everyone.

Letters to the Editor

### The Digital Plague

Editor,

The recent tragedy in Thangshalai village, where a ten-year-old girl took her own life after being denied access to a mobile phone, is a chilling testament to the insidious grip technology has on our younger generation. This heart-wrenching incident is not an isolated case, but a symptom of a far more pervasive and dangerous epidemic sweeping through our society.

The truth that prevails today is that technology, particularly mobile devices and social media, has become a toxic force in the lives of our children. What was once touted as a tool for connection and progress has morphed into a digital parasite, slowly eroding the mental health, social skills, and resilience of an entire generation. And now, we're seeing the horrifying consequences of this unchecked digital invasion in the most vulnerable members of society - children.

The fact that a child so young could be driven to

such an extreme act over a mere device is a scathing indictment of how deeply technology has warped our children's sense of reality and self-worth. We've created a world where young minds equate digital presence with existence itself, where the fear of missing out has become so crippling that it can drive a child to the unthinkable.

This addiction - for that's what it is - has robbed our youth of the simple joys of childhood. Gone are the days of carefree play in the outdoors, of face-to-face interactions that build genuine social skills, of the patience and perseverance that come from real-world experiences. Instead, we've handed our children digital pacifiers, instant gratification machines that short-circuit their developing brains and leave them ill-equipped to handle the slightest frustration or delay.

This isn't about bad parenting or kids being too sensitive. It's about a systemic failure to recognize and address the addictive nature of our devices and platforms. The apps we use daily aren't just products; they're carefully crafted dopamine slot machines, designed to keep us scrolling, tapping, and craving more. And if

we, as adults, struggle with this, imagine the impact on a developing mind.

We must wake up to the harsh reality that technology is rewiring our children's brains, and not for the better. Studies have shown alarming links between excessive screen time and increased rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among young people. The dopamine-driven feedback loops of likes, shares, and notifications are creating a generation of digital junkies, constantly craving the next hit of virtual validation.

Moreover, this technology addiction is stunting crucial developmental skills. Critical thinking, emotional intelligence, and the ability to form deep, meaningful relationships are all casualties in this digital onslaught. We're raising a generation that may be tech-savvy but is woefully unprepared for the complexities of real-world interactions and challenges.

The time for half-measures and moderation is long past. We need a radical re-evaluation of technology's role in our children's lives. This means:

1. Implementing strict regulations on smartphone

and social media usage for minors.

2. Investing in alternative, non-digital activities and spaces for youth engagement.

3. Educating parents and teachers about the real dangers of excessive technology use.

4. Promoting digital detox programs in schools and communities.

5. Holding tech companies accountable for their predatory practices targeting young users.

The tragedy in Thangshalai village should serve as a final, urgent wake-up call. We cannot afford to lose more young lives to this digital plague. It's time to reclaim our children's childhoods, to nurture their minds and spirits in the real world, not the virtual one.

As a society, we must have the courage to stand against the tide of technological dependency. Our children's lives and futures are at stake. The path forward won't be easy, but it's one we must take if we hope to salvage the well-being and potential of an entire generation.

We have to steer society towards a healthier, more balanced future. The life we save

might not just be a child's - it could be the future of human connection itself. The time for action is now, before we lose any more innocent lives to the all-consuming maw of the digital world.

Yours etc.,

wPaul Melvyn Pathaw  
Serampore College,  
West Bengal

### Urgent need for experienced traffic management at Mawlai Petrol Pump

Editor,  
I wish to draw attention to the growing problem of traffic mismanagement at Mawlai Pump, and Lad Weiking area. The traffic personnel currently employed seem to be from the Home Guards or inexperienced traffic police who lack the necessary experience to handle the congestion in this critical junction effectively. As a result, there have been extended delays, stretching from Mawlong all the way to Mawlai Petrol Pump. On Monday, I was stuck in traffic at 5:30 PM near NARI Mawlong and only managed to cross

Mawlai Pump Petrol Pump by 7:30 PM. Astonishingly, after passing this area, the traffic cleared completely, indicating that the congestion is concentrated solely due to poor traffic control at Mawlai Petrol Pump. Taxi drivers frequently overtake recklessly, further worsening the situation, which the current traffic personnel seem unable to handle.

This issue persists, particularly on Mondays and Fridays, but it affects other days as well. The Police Traffic department must take note of this situation and deploy experienced traffic police to manage this critical bottleneck. By doing so, they can ensure smoother traffic flow and prevent unnecessary delays and frustration for daily commuters.

I urge the Police Traffic department to consider deploying more experienced personnel who can ensure safe and efficient traffic movement in the Mawlai Petrol Pump area.

Yours etc.,  
A Sarki,  
Shillong

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

"The ideal attitude is to be physically loose and mentally tight."

— Arthur Ashe

The Shillong Times

SHILLONG, FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2024

Growth, ground realities

THE promise is that India would transform into a developed nation by Year 2047 — when it completes 100 years of self-rule, past the 89 years of the British Raj and exploitation of its abundant resources.

At present, it remains the present about 7 per cent annual rate of growth, "we could likely beat Germany and Japan," and emerge as the world's third largest economy after the US and China.

The Economic Raj, dumped in the early 1990s, followed the Economic Liberalization push by Rao and his team. It now back with a bang. For instance, those who want to make a small investment even in the form of a harmless 'home stay' in tourism

Growing concerns for the safety of pedestrians

On August 18, I raised a concern about pedestrian safety from Jhalupara taxi stand to Chakbari Lumsdangiri Police Station. I appreciate that my concerns were published in both the edition and Shillong Jotting section of the newspaper.

This issue isn't limited to Jhalupara-Chakbari; other areas of Shillong face similar challenges. If citizens voice their concerns and urge concerned MLAs and Ministers to act, our representatives may fulfil their duties of protecting children and improve public safety.

work. Good footpaths promote pedestrian movement. All these would be helpful not only for the public but also for the environment. Additionally, here are other key priorities that would further benefit Shillong: Designated Hawker Zones: Creating dedicated spaces for hawkers, away from main walkways, will keep footpaths clear and maintain smoother traffic flow.

Over-protectionism kills enterprise Editor, The demand for restriction of tourist vehicles in Meghalaya is an indicator that various protectionist measures that had been granted to the tribal people after attainment of statehood, half a century ago, have miserably failed to make the beneficiaries confident and self-reliant.

We Are a Broken Society: Any Doubts?

By Patricia Mukhim

The Khasi people's favourite pastime is to go into a reverie of the past. Our songs glorify that distant past which most of us are unsure was indeed 'glorious.' We never tire of singing praises about ourselves as the "jait-byriew tip brierw tip brierw" meaning we are pious souls that know our duties towards fellow humans and towards God.

The Niam Khasi, Niam Tre attribute the present confusion, corruption and everything wrong with society and governance today to the fact that the Khasis have turned away from their faith and are worshipping a foreign God hence they are a confused lot. They believe that Christians in government and politics have actually queered up the pitch and that they would be better custodians of the economy.

The rural-urban brokenness: healthcare vacuum For the average urbanite life begins and ends in Shillong. Jowai, Tura, Nongstoin or Mairang. Shillongites are the most privileged. Barring the ubiquitous traffic jams and the lack of pedestrianised spaces, life is liveable for the Shillongite.

and from transportation of forest products. This tax is public money meant to improve the markets and other public spaces. But since the money is not audited by the Comptroller and Auditor General, we the general public don't get to know of the financial transactions at the Syiem's office.

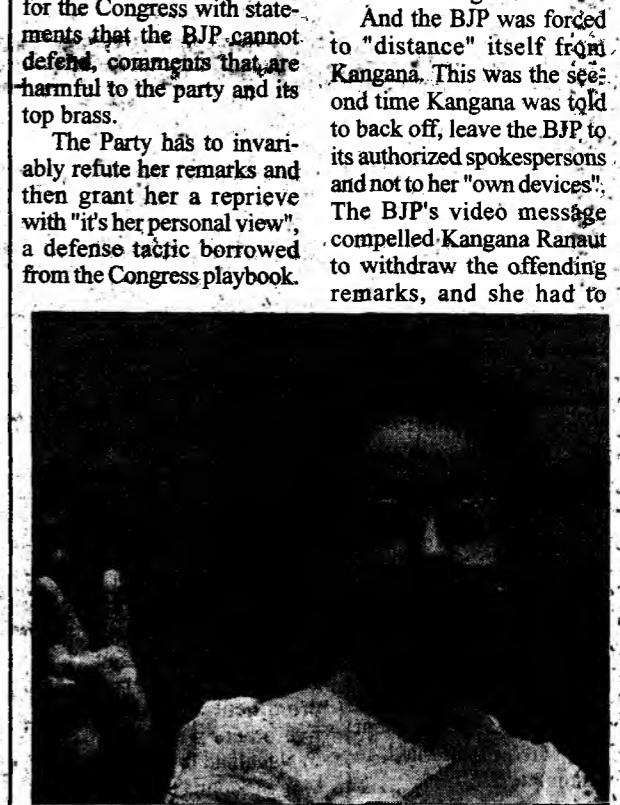
The District Councils should have enunciated the powers and responsibilities of the traditional heads beginning from the Syiems, the Myntris, down to the Sordars and Rangbah Shnong. If this is not put down in black and white and if misuse of public funds is not checked we will soon have a society whose assets are gobbled up by the super-rich even while ordinary mortals don't even have a roof over their heads.

Women broken by unplanned childbirth Our young women in the villages are enslaved by their child-bearing and child rearing duties. It's almost as if the only responsibility they have is to produce children. A good number of women still give birth to seven; eight or ten kids without any plans for their future and how those kids can face a future that is so challenging.

BJP clueless on how to deal with Lok Sabha member 'queen' Kangana Ranaut

By Sushil Kutty

BJP's Mandi MP, actor Kangana Ranaut, is a raw nerve in the BJP's thick skin and a bundle of apprehension for party president JP Nadda, who cannot seem to decide whether she is not open to being disciplined or indispensable.



Kangana is obsessed with farmers. With Sikh farmers in particular and farmers in general. She wants the 3 farm laws that Prime Minister Narendra Modi had withdrawn returned to life with a vengeance, why?

That is a pending question, which the BJP refuses to address. Kangana's repeated remarks on farmers, and on the three farm laws demand clarification. Now, Kangana has asked for a reinstatement of the "three farm laws" and it could lead to another sprawling farmers' agitation. It is not always that BJP spokespersons rebut with alacrity than when it concerns the three farm laws.

There were no 'ifs' and 'buts' there and the Congress reacted with "wrath", calling Ranaut "habitually controversial" and mentally unstable. "Some people are accustomed to creating controversy, and the BJP benefits from her statements. She talks about farmers, Punjab, the Emergency, and Rahul Gandhi. There are other MPs who never make such remarks," a Congress leader said.

opponents' arguments that his government is a stooge of the BJP. This does not bode well for the long-term sustainability of the Party, especially in Meghalaya and the Khasi Hills region. At the same time, the Swami leading this cow yatra, Shankaracharya Avimukteshwaranand Saraswati, gained notoriety when he criticized the inauguration of the Ram Temple, claiming it was incomplete.

Meghalaya CM's response ambivalent

The response given by Chief Minister Conrad Sangma regarding the cow yatra—that the decision to allow it or not rests with the district administration—may cost him in the future. By not taking responsibility, he is trying to keep all sides happy, but he risks losing significant support.

concerns on irregularities of NTECC issuance by KHADC Editor, Presently significant concerns have arisen regarding the process of obtaining Non Tribal Employee Clearance Certificates (NTECC) from the Khasi Hills Autonomous District Council (KHADC).

When the employers and labourers approach the District Council to inquire about the delay, they are directed to meet with the Licensing Officer. It is here that the situation becomes more concerning. The employer and labourer are allegedly asked to pay additional fees, which are not documented in any official paperwork.

Concerns on irregularities of NTECC issuance by KHADC

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

**"The only thing that overcomes hard luck is hard work."**

—Harry Golden

## The Shillong Times

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### MPSC Imbroglio

THE statement by Rajya Sabha MP, WR Kharlukhi that he would resign his seat if his wife who is a member of the Meghalaya Public Service Commission (MPSC) was found to be involved in any manner in the controversies surrounding the Commission in recent times. This clarification comes after the Khasi Students' Union (KSU) met the Governor, C H Vijayashankar a day before, asking for his intervention to bring transparency in the functioning of the Commission.

In August this year the MPSC responding to public demand to make public the marks of the candidates who have qualified in the Preliminary exams, stated that the Commission is under no obligation to display the marks secured by such candidates. MPSC secretary, Ashish Mankin Sangma had issued a public notice stating that public disclosure of marks for the Meghalaya Civil Service (Preliminary) examination has been strongly objected to by aggrieved candidates due to potential infringement of their Right to Privacy which is their Fundamental Right guaranteed under Article 21 of the Constitution of India. The public notice further stated that the public disclosure of examination marks without the explicit consent of the candidates is not only unnecessary but also disproportionate as it may subject the candidates to unwarranted scrutiny and potential prejudice, which might have detrimental effect on their personal and professional lives and that it contravenes the principle of individual dignity.

The MPSC then said that it would enable a process through which candidates can view their own marks through an OTP-based system. Out of the several hundred candidates who sat for the Meghalaya Civil Services preliminary examination only six candidates wrote to the Commission objecting to their marks being made public. The question is why only these six candidates should have a problem with marks being made public? Is it because they fear that their marks were not up to scratch? The KSU had demanded that the MPSC should make public the marks of the 580 candidates who were in the original list as well as those of the 62 additional candidates. The fact that 62 additional candidates were selected after reassessment of the OMR answer sheets of the preliminary examinations held in November 2023 should actually raise many questions and no amount of justification by the MPSC can clear the doubts prevailing in the minds of the candidates who were earlier selected and of those who were not selected. The KSU is correct in alleging that the reassessment was done with a malafide intention to accommodate candidates with political connections.

Never has the MPSC been known to conduct a free and fair examination to the civil services since its inception and this ambiguity has to stop now. It is important that the public demand that an independent judicial enquiry be conducted into the affairs of the MPSC and its functioning. Why in the first place should a Commission meant to conduct exams and select individuals for employment in different levels of the state government have members with political connections? Enough is enough!

# Leadership with prescriptive perspectives on Meghalaya

By Dilip Mukerjee

An invincible destiny is shaped by being assertive with choice, not by surrendering to chance.

Our leaders in every domain must plant seeds of inspiration and aspiration: they must be able to put our hopes to work. Meghalaya has evolved across the span of over five decades into a booby-trapped enclave of volatile passions and temptations, but the citizenry at large yearns for transcendence, to be uplifted by stainless ideals that release them from the exhaustions of daily life.

We need a new human, and a manifesto of a new humanity, one humanity ... not the minority marching on, and the rest left abandoned. Everything rises and falls on leadership, especially the precepts of servant-leadership.

Servant-Leadership is an expression coined by Robert Greenleaf. In his words: "The servant-leader is servant first...it begins with the natural feeling that one wants to serve, to serve first. Then conscious choice brings one to aspire to lead. He or she is sharply different from the person who is leader first, perhaps because of the need to assuage an unusual power drive or to acquire material possessions. For such, it will be a later choice to serve — after leadership is established. The leader-first and the servant-first are two extreme types. Between them there are shadings and blends that are part of the infinite variety of human nature."

We need to ask whether those served grow as persons and if they, while being served, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? Furthermore, we need to concern ourselves towards the least privileged in society, whether they will benefit, or, at least, that they not be further deprived. The concept of traditional autocratic and hierarchical modes of leadership are being phased out. Focus must shift to the arena of workers and the enhancement of their personal growth. Through teamwork and community, institutions and governance regimes can become paragons of societal excellence; with uncompromising high standards of ethics, care and compassion, the servant as leader becomes an example of a spiritual guide on the river of life.

So we can surmise that: Servant-Leadership is a philosophy and set of practices that enriches the lives of individuals, builds better institutions of learning and organisations of business, and all-round better governance of societies. It ultimately creates a more just and caring world, one that

can transition from poverty to prosperity, and from harm to harmony. This is precisely what is needed in Meghalaya. Urgently!

We need people of pristine conscience, and consciousness, of immaculate vision, who, with direct experiential perception, can exhibit a lucidity of mind to do the greatest good across all sections of society.

Today's volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous, novel, turbulent, and often dangerous world demands that we acquire a range of skills needed to navigate the new challenge spaces, with mastery in:

**Vision:** to set a clear direction and destination, with adaptive agility and deep focus, in order to engender transitions from hope to fulfillment.

**Velocity:** to think ahead, decide with clear intent, and act swiftly with definiteness of purpose towards garnering winning outcomes for the citizenry en masse.

**Values:** to be driven by conscience, with character, attitude, and beliefs, and to exercise integrity in actions towards all.

**Vibrancy:** to be imbued with energy born out of a sense of aliveness, to be purposefully engaged in the dynamics of crafting a life with meaning.

Our people, across every sector of the State, are significantly impoverished, uneducated, and in dire need of beyond-basic healthcare facilities in their rural locales. We cannot build lives on the misery we inflict on others. We cannot justify the existence of savagery against any member of the human race. In enclaves of desolation and wretchedness, our chieftains in business, education, and governance need to act from the precepts of a healing and helping ministry. If we fail in our endeavours to uplift lives and livelihoods, we are no better than asking which lunatic should run the asylum!

We need leaders who move from entrenched differences to common goals. Such men and women should be able to bring opposing groups to common ground, resulting in solid plans built on diverse wisdom. If these ideals are pursued, our State will preside and rule with a talismanic effect on future generations.

After more than five decades, we are still gasping our way with faded expectations. Perhaps it is a lack of confidence at every level, a failure of imagination, an absence of a will to win... selflessly! Imagination al-

lows us to place ourselves in the shoes of others, with empathy, affinity, and rapport. And confidence comes from having goals, taking risks, holding on to our convictions, and building up a small arsenal of successes... and failures. Our failures tell us that it is possible to survive and move on. Our successes reveal that it is possible to prevail in the future. Both these experiences are vital in helping reassure us that in the end, all will be well.

But do our leaders know a crucial truth, that no single member of any confederation is mighty, none is adequate, standing alone. Each is necessary to all, all are necessary to each? Only then can we execute and realise relevant and liberating strategies. What is needed is a sound intellectual framework for making exemplary decisions, and the ability to keep away greed from corroding that framework.

But do we have leaders? In the truest sense? With vision, passion, integrity, trustworthiness, curiosity, and daring? Can they make a positive and disproportionate impact upon the world? Or are they merely politicians with power and authority, but a glaring absence of leadership? Servant-Leadership, and Statesman-Leadership? Do they have the trinity of qualities that distinguish them with distinction, comprising:

• Wisdom tempered by humility

• Justice tempered by empathy

• Reason tempered by compassion?

The human individual is equipped to learn and to go on learning prodigiously, from birth to death! This is what sets him or her apart from all other known forms of life. Man is a learning animal, and the essence of the species is encoded in that simple term. Yet our beleaguered State of Meghalaya is in a State of Disrepair, with the lowest education level across the nation! Where thus are our Learning Leaders and Leading Learners? Are those posing in positions of prominence content with the lives of children born and unborn, being compromised, or worse, embezzled by the mandarins perched in institutions of education... but not of learning?

Perhaps we have the wrong people on the proverbial bus? Since it appears to be substantially difficult to get the wrong people off the bus, should we not focus instead on getting the right people ON the bus? Those who wake up every day and

are compulsively driven to do the best they can because it is simply a part of their DNA?

Educational apathy, in our demolished educational system, and insouciance in governance, in our broken society, are both masquerading as organisms 'being busy doing what is needed', but with an advance at full-speed to nowhere! They constitute a morally blinkered 'egosystem' and must be confronted by due diligence audits that are invigorated by the agenda of a new Age! We need to bear in mind that: incompetence + incompetence = incompetence!

The best I can conjecture at this point is that sometimes it takes an overwhelming breakdown to have an undeniable breakthrough. Am I being too optimistic?

All of us should ask ourselves two pivotal questions, daily:

• The Morning Question: What good shall I do this day?

• The Evening Question: What good have I done today?

These two questions should strike our consciousness, and our conscience.

If our leaders (in name) wish to avoid the path that leads to apathy and mediocrity, at some point they are going to have to step outside their comfort zone. It is our actions that define us, not our intentions. If they remain standing still, camouflaged away from urgent ideals, busy collecting and not connecting, stipulating and not stimulating, then their path to progress is opaque and... frightening.

To avoid aimlessness, we have to stand for something. Our leaders need to metamorphose from wishful thinking to wilful doing. To gain momentum, they have to get up and get started... with persistence and pertinacity! They need to stop looking for angels and start looking for angels; perspectives and prescriptions that are designed to propagate the greatest good, for all our people. Fear should not stop them in any way for failure shows us the way, by showing us what isn't the way.

Leaders in name, beware the 'Seven Deadly Sins': aimlessness, boredom, comfort, delusion, ego, fear, and guardedness. The seeds of tomorrow's brilliance are planted in the soil of today's activity. It is action that creates impact, not knowledge alone. Move from a state of 'inaction' to one of being 'in action'! Bon voyage!

(The author is a visionary thought leader, breakthrough catalyst, innovation strategist and designer of learning eco-systems)

## Wake up to workplace stress and toxicity

By Lekha Rattanani

Long hours, stress and burnout in the workplace is well known. But after two recent deaths, the work culture taking root in India needs to be urgently addressed. The case in July of a young Pune-based chartered accountant who was literally worked to death and the more recent suicide of a software engineer in Chennai after reportedly struggling with depression and work pressure for months have revealed the true nature of thriving companies. Here we see examples of businesses that present as modern-day growth beacons on the outside but on the inside are essentially sweatshops built on the hard labour of those who do not have a voice in the system - the talented youth of India.

Last week, Karthikeyan, 38, was found wrapped in live wire at his Chennai home by his wife Jayarani who had returned from a trip. He left his two children with their maternal grandparents before electrocuting himself, according to reports. Family members spoke of work pressure causing depression, for which he was under treatment for the last two months. Karthikeyan was in a new job after leaving a software firm operating from Chennai, where he had worked for 15 years.

In July, Anna Sebastian Perayil, 26, collapsed after suffering what clearly is a case of toxic work culture.

ponential growth trajectory by rising from a very different ethos and background. It has played a key role in driving the country's economy forward. It held its own especially during the pandemic, delivering with speed and efficiency by turning its vast workforce into a work from home army which now worked even longer hours since they didn't have to travel to the workplace. The widespread transition to telecommuting also allowed companies to give up expensive rented space increasing profits.

As life returned to normal and offices filled up, many in the IT sector have been able to keep remote work going. However, the hours employees put in have not decreased, and the stress is growing. A study earlier this year titled "Burying the Burnout: Decoding the Health Challenges of India's Tech Geniuses" found that 43% of Indian techno-professionals experience health concerns directly stemming from their work. Long working hours emerged as a significant contributor to these health issues with over 50% tech professionals working an average of 52.5 hours per week, surpassing the national average of 46.7 hours a week (this still places India among the countries with the longest working hours). The study by 'Onsurity', an employee healthcare plat-

**"In July, Anna Sebastian Perayil, 26, collapsed after suffering what clearly is a case of toxic work culture. This is the story of the horrors of what appears to be a normalised modern-day, sleep-deprived work culture, recounted in all its shocking detail by her mother. Anna passed the CA qualifying examinations with distinction, but four months into her job with Ernst & Young, the chartered accountant collapsed."**

This is the story of the horrors of what appears to be a normalised modern-day, sleep-deprived work culture, recounted in all its shocking detail by her mother. Anna passed the CA qualifying examinations with distinction, but four months into her job with Ernst & Young, the chartered accountant collapsed.

In a letter to Ernst & Young India chairman Rajiv Memani, Anna's mother Anita Augustine placed on record that everyone in the company knew that she was being put under a manager marked for unprofessionalism. She wrote: "Anna, in fact, had received several warnings regarding her manager from colleagues: Her manager would often reschedule meetings during cricket matches and assign her work at the end of the day, adding to her stress. At an office party, a senior leader even joked that she would have a tough time working under her manager, which, unfortunately, became a reality she could not escape." This is particularly damning because it shows that EY knew, tolerated and perhaps even encouraged this manner of working, raising new questions on the lack of professionalism at a company considered one of the global "big four" of accounting firms. Should India allow these companies to have this free run? Why should the Chairman not be held to account for what has gone wrong? How many inquiries are on? And what has EY done in the matter so far, other than speaking about its commitment to "nurturing a harmonious workplace"?

While EY is a global firm, India's home-grown technology sector has seen an expo-

form and the 'Knowledge Chamber of Commerce and Industry' says repercussions of such prolonged working hours are severe. More than half the respondents reported, experiencing adverse health effects including acidity, gut problems, back and neck pain, erratic sleep cycles and eyesight related issues. Mental health concerns were also prevalent with 45% of tech professionals disclosing struggles with stress, anxiety and depression.

Such reports may not have caused much worry earlier. But not anymore as the shock and outpouring of criticism have left the government with no option other than to sit up, notice and act. The union labour ministry has announced an investigation into the case of Anna Perayil and the work culture at EY that affected her health and ultimately took her life. Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman finds herself in a slug out with opposition parties for suggesting that educational institutions and parents should help children build inner strength to face challenges and solve problems at work rather than crumble under them.

At a time like this, the harm caused by the words of NR Narayana Murthy, co-founder of tech giant Infosys, must come to mind. He had famously asked that the youth of India work 70-hour weeks to help increase national productivity. We can see that sweatshops do not increase productivity; they kill innocent citizens.

(The writer is the Managing Editor of The Billion Press) (Syndicate: The Billion Press) (Email: editor@thebillionpress.org)

### Letters to the Editor

#### Threat to our vulnerable common resources from traditional institutions

Editor,  
The letter to the editor by Dr Sandi Syiem (ST 24 Sept, 2024), about deforestation activities in and around Sanker Sanatorium, carries with it a sense of deja vu. Not so long ago the Syiem of Myllem, (commonly referred to as U Syiem U kmie), the traditional guardian of the 'ki khun ki hajar' (subjects), and his myntris had tried to demarcate and partition for selling, plots within the forest under discussion. They tried to do this under the fig leaf of tradition claiming that the area belongs to the Syiem clan. Surprisingly most educated persons of the Syiem clan challenged this claim; it raised suspicion to the Syiem clan. Surprisingly most educated persons of the Syiem clan challenged this claim; it raised suspicion to the Syiem clan. Surprisingly most educated persons of the Syiem clan challenged this claim; it raised suspicion to the Syiem clan.

of the Syiem of Myllem and his Myntris. For this action on behalf of the people of Shillong we owe a big thank you to Bah Ardent.

Gullible people that we are, we dared to assume that the lungs of Shillong had been saved. Little did we realize that the Syiem of Hima Myllem and his myntris, like the traditional Thlen of the Khasis, had simply gone into hibernation waiting for the appropriate time to awaken and strike. From Dr Sandi Syiem's letter it seems they believe that the time has arrived to once again gobble up the assets of the community. Intrigued by Dr Sandi's accusations, mentioned above, some of us had gone to the site to verify the same. What we found were trees being felled; being towed away and dumpers entering the forest to dump more earth so as to kill more trees. We asked the loggers as to who had directed them to do what they were doing and the answers we got were totally confusing. No written order was shown. Some claimed that the Syiem had sent them. Others that the order had come from the myntris. Classical mafia defense tactics when challenged! More intriguing is the absence of the Forest Department and the KHADC to protect this Khlaw Adong.

A little more digging

showed that this Khlaw Adong is not the only community asset being abused by the Syiem and his Myntris. Iewduh is one of the largest community asset of the Khasis entrusted to the Syiem for safe keeping but look at what it has become. Every shopkeeper in Iewduh pays rent to the Syiem yet no one knows what is the total revenue earned by the Hima from the thousands of shops there or how it is spent. This is public money and in this age when accountability and transparency have become catchwords of governance, Hima Myllem has firmly shut its door against all cries for transparency.

Secondly, Iewduh masquerades as a bazaar in the day and turns into a den of thieves once the sun sets. Woe betide the foolish person who dares enter Iewduh once its dark. So the pride of the Hima Myllem has been turned into a centre for crime! Nearly all of us get our eatables be it meat, fish or greens from this market, yet all the above is sold in the most unhygienic conditions ever. With no other market available, the common man is forced to eat from such filth. U Khun U Hajar is now treated as u ksew u miaw. Any attempt to modernize or repair needs the approval of the myntri. It is they who will decide on the contractor and the price. Sicilian crime

syndicates don't differ much from the manner in which Iewduh is managed by the Syiem and his myntris.

Today a concerned citizen, worried about the soiled condition of Iewduh or a citizen having some work regarding his property under Hima Myllem; or anyone who wishes to submit his plea/request/complaint to the Syiem of Myllem has to approach the Syiem for redressal at his Durbar Office at Mawkhar. Here a type of tariff has to be paid. It's called 'Ka Bai Burum Syiem' ("Paying obeisance" to the King) and it can range from Rs 1000 to Rs 5000. No receipts are given but the amount paid determines how fast the file moves. How can such arbitrary transactions be allowed which even the excuse of tradition cannot condone for it has never existed before. But without receipts how does anyone prove anything?

It is here that the rule of law must prevail and this can only come as a suo-moto action from the Meghalaya High Court. The Court should order an inquiry into the matter. In the name of tradition all such subversive money earning activities have carried on for decades without any accountability. The Syiemship is a public institution under the purview of the Indian Constitution. It cannot act as a non-state, stand-alone

institution beyond the ambit of the RTI and the CAG.

Yours etc.,  
DS Lyngdoh,  
Via email

#### Growth data interesting

Editor,  
The editorial "Growth, ground realities" (ST September 27, 2024) was interesting. If we examine the data of India, China, USA, Germany, Japan and UK on Disposable Income, GDP and Per Capita GDP as provided by the Economic Times of India, State Council Information Office of People's Republic of China, World Population Review, World Bank and Investopedia, the "amount you have to spend or save as you wish" (Disposable Income) in India is \$2,485, China \$5,487, USA \$51147, Germany \$38,971, Japan \$28,872 and the United Kingdom \$33,049.

In the 1st Q 2024 the GDP is \$3.94 trillion in India, \$18.53T in China, \$28.78T in USA, \$4.59T in Germany, \$4.11T in Japan and \$3.5T in United Kingdom while the per capita GDP of these countries is \$2,730, \$13,140, \$85,370, \$54,290, \$33,140 and \$51,070 respectively. These figures of countries which are in the list of "Top 20 Economies of the world" drive home the argument

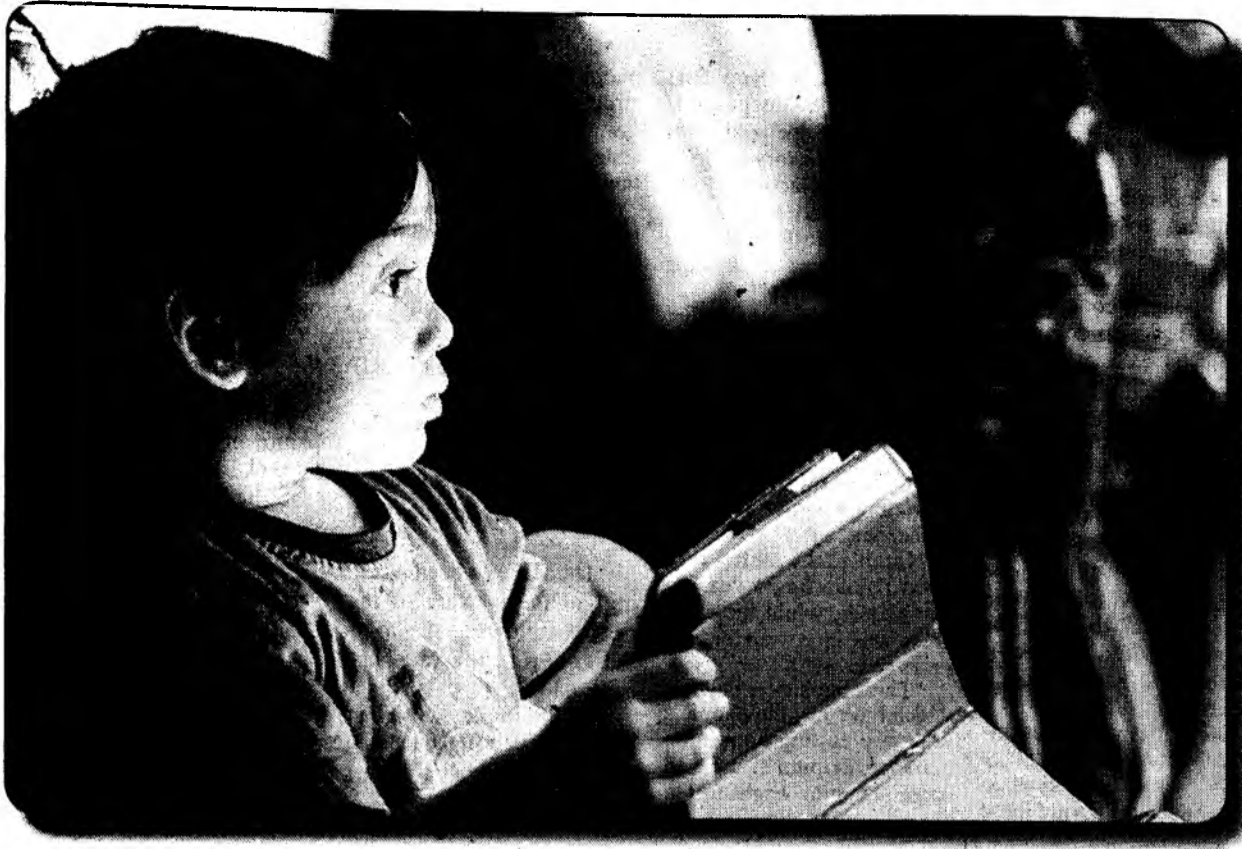
of Raghuram Rajan that the path to becoming a developed nation is still challenging for our country. Hence the former Governor of Reserve Bank also rightly emphasized on improving ease of doing business as being crucial for driving growth, especially by reducing bureaucratic hurdles and the fear of regulatory raids.

One must not forget that the "businessman's tool is an incentive and an economic value while the tool of a bureaucrat is fear and fear of the unknown." Unless these twin objectives are achieved India's dream of a developed economy will remain a pipe-dream. If India is to become developed the per capita income alone will not suffice because it is an average income per person. In fact, disposable income or the "amount you have to spend or save as you wish," will determine a developed India. Raghuram Rajan has raised a very pertinent question - "from where are we going to generate that growth to become a developed nation by 2047?"

Yours etc;  
VK Lyngdoh,  
Via email

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# Kids using tablet prone to more outbursts of anger, frustration



The number of children who own their own tablet has increased from seven per cent in 2013 to 44 per cent in 2020.

In the United States, tablet use has become nearly universal, with 93 per cent of parents reporting that their two- to four-year-old uses a mobile device.

Tablets and mobile devices can be connected to the internet and allow users unlimited access to tailored content thanks to personalized algorithms.

For this reason, these devices can be highly engaging for young children. However, they offer few opportunities for children to develop important emotion regulation skills, including the ability to manage strong emotions like anger and frustration.

The early childhood years are foundational for the development of emotion regulation skills. More challenging, less well-regulated children also tend to be exposed to more screen time by parents.

For this reason, it remains important to answer the following question: does children's tablet use contribute to poor emotional regulation, or do poorly regulated children spend more time on tablets?

## Tablet use and emotional regulation

Over the course of three years, researchers longitudinally studied a sample of 315 children at the ages of 3.5, 4.5 and 5.5 years in Nova Scotia. Parents reported

how much time their child spent using tablets on average every day, and reported how frequently their child expressed anger and frustration in the context of their daily routines.

Children in the sample spend on average 55 minutes (0.92 hours) per day using tablets at age 3.5, 57 minutes (0.95 hours) per day using tablets at 4.5, and 60 (one hour) per day using tablets at age 5.5.

It was found that for every 73 minutes (1.22 hours) increase in tablet use at the age of 3.5 years, there was a significant increase in expressions of anger and frustration at age 4.5. Children who expressed anger and frustration more frequently at age 4.5 then increased their tablet time at age 5.5 by 17 minutes (0.28 hours).

The study's rigorous design also allowed the researchers to compare each child to themselves over time.

That means they served as their own baseline control, which prevents other factors such as pre-existing individual differences (such as child sex and temperament) or differences in the quality of the family environment or socio-economic status from confounding the analyses.

## Kids' tablet use

Because of their small size, tablets can be transported to restaurants or brought along for car or bus rides to

keep children busy or manage boredom and emotional outbursts. Indeed, parents report using screen media as a calming tool to help manage young children's emotional outbursts. This strategy may be an effective short-term solution, but is likely to backfire in the long run.

In addition, very young children can operate tablets on their own, which can lead parents to use mobile devices to keep children busy. As such, child tablet use is likely to offer immediate gratification to children while remaining a solitary activity.

For these reasons, three-year-olds who spend more hours using tablets may forfeit opportunities to engage in activities - such as interactions with caregivers or free play with other children - that are essential for rehearsing and eventually mastering self-regulation. By the age of four, more frequent expression of anger also contributed to increases in tablet use, suggesting that early childhood tablet use could contribute to a vicious cycle over time.

The study is not without limitations. First, the study was conducted during the pandemic with a convenience sample of 315 children with low levels

of socioeconomic risk. Replications on more diverse and vulnerable samples post-pandemic are needed to confirm these results.

Future studies could examine the roles of screen media content and context of use on children. For instance, using tablets for e-book reading versus using a tablet to watch videos on YouTube may have different effects on children. Furthermore, the co-use of tablets, with caregivers may offer more opportunities for social interactions, which may contribute to child learning outcomes.

## Takeaways for parents and caregivers

The results indicate that parents should closely monitor tablet use in the early preschool years. Parents should also avoid using tablets as a digital calming tool, especially with children who may be having trouble regulating their emotions and behaviour.

Finally, to improve emotional regulation skills, parents can ensure that children have sufficient opportunities to engage in activities that promote the development of emotion. (*The Conversation*)



## 'Star - Gazing'

By Pt. Ajai Bhambi

Sunday, SEPTEMBER 29, 2024

### 'Birthday Forecast'

Moon semi-square Mars on your solar return chart which will bring mixed fortunes for you. You will be imaginative and creative and will like to implement new ideas. But people will not show interest and you will have problems in getting the desired results. Even your bosses will expect a lot from you and will not be satisfied with your performance. You may also think of a possible job change or closer of a business which is bringing continued losses. You will have to work very hard to earn money and meet your daily needs. Yet, things will improve and you may enter into a new business and find a good job. You will be fortunate in matters of love and romance. And can get married to a person of your choice with family support. You will also make new investments after taking all precautions. You will share good equations with family/friends who will keep supporting.

### 'This week for you'

**Aries: (March 21 - April 20)** This phase brings excellent results. You would express your views, terms and conditions without hesitation and deal with many issues bravely and successfully. You attempt difficult tasks, resolve complicated issues and connect with people. In your interactions make sure that you avoid conflicts. Your social life may be restricted to work and family obligations. Look at present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you. You need to conserve health and energy and deal with practical details and finances. Chances of a pilgrimage as you realize that you cannot control or plan too much as the unexpected is expected. Give yourself a fitness routine and healthy diet program.

**Taurus: (April 21 - May 21)** An established business concern flourishes and partnership may expand into triangular collaborations. Success and good fortune at work open new horizons for expansion. Look at the present situations from a higher perspective to realize what is happening around you and act accordingly. Your domestic life takes on top priority and your support family members and feel comfortable and secure this week. You have every chance to boost your feeling of stability and support with family. You may visit and spend a lot of time in company of your beloved one. Intimacy and warmth are powerful stimulants for you at this time. You may redecorate your home and add to the interiors to feel rejuvenated.

**Gemini: (May 22 - June 21)** This period brings a phase where you can win the trust of people in authority. This is the right time to participate in current events and share views, ideas and feelings with people around you to feel a part of the whole, as this brings new opportunities and monetary gains. Avoid making compromises with your own truths, values and priorities. Your strong spirit supports you through the changes. This is a period in which you can successfully use charm, and your sense of humor to make peace with others. You can improve your love life by bringing more affection, love and a feeling of togetherness. Unusual attractions and dreams could feature now as you spend time with your beloved.

**Cancer: (June 22 - July 22)** This week brings mixed results. On the professional front, it would be better to let go of the past and make a new beginning as something greater awaits you. You may feel professionally unstable and emotionally insecure. Avoid indulging in any arguments and confrontations especially with people in authority. Financially a good week, you earn well and your communication skills are impressive. Communicate, listen to others, express yourself, and get everything done in your favor. Talk to your beloved one and don't keep yourself away from people, enjoy the feeling of togetherness. There is strength in your feelings of love and the power of attraction, which may open the door to new romantic relationships.

**Leo: (July 23 - August 23)** New horizons open up for you and this boosts your self-confidence and you meet difficult tasks and resolve work related issues confidently and bravely. Take advantage of your courage and go ahead to achieve desired goals. You may be able to finalize a property related issue and this brings financial gains. Also you have been highly motivated to make money and this brings positive results if you use your communications skills. Your domestic life takes priority as you discuss future plans and enjoy moments spent together. You might spend time in making short trips meeting friends and loved ones. You may feel restless at times; eat health food, yoga and meditation recommended.

**Virgo: (August 24 - September 22)** This is going to be an exciting time. You are most likely to express your views in an intellectual and unconventional manner. This brings success and reward in overseas related matters. You will get success in overseas projects and earn well from these associations. You enjoy good moments with your beloved, your romantic affair and pleasure-seeking activities gives you big boost of confidence. The unattached can look forward to meeting

someone who catches their eye. However this also brings financial pressure as you incur expenses on traveling, trips and family activities. Your communication abilities will largely be applied to further professional ambitions where knowledge and education are pursued. Brisk walk and timely eating would be helpful.

**Libra: (September 23 - October 23)** This period brings mixed results for you. You will face obstacles at work and could get embroiled in controversies. Be wary of those who entice you with seemingly attractive ideas. Business expansion and new professional opportunities are worth putting off for the time being as projects could get stalled. The desire for some form of recognition is strong. Financial success on the other hand is enhanced now. You may have a difference of opinion with spouse and health of some of the family member may suffer. Try to give moral support and help. However, people in love will have a great time as they listen to the inner feelings for each other.

**Scorpio: (October 24 - November 22)** The planetary configuration brings good results particularly at the work place. You may explore new technology and improve office infrastructure as this brings more efficiency and creativity in your work. There are chances of new associations and beginnings as new opportunities and changes are on cards. You handle conversations, seminars, meetings and express yourself more specifically about the subject. This is an excellent time to make some financial investments and speculations and adopt new strategies in financial matters. Your association with like-minded people favorably turns things around. Your loved one would be supportive as this is the best time to bring more harmony to your relationships and feel more comfortable. You may visit holy places and strong feelings towards religion are enhanced.

**Sagittarius: (November 23 - December 21)** You will be able to make best use of your talents, work experience and would add creativity to your work and projects in hand. This is the best time to use your higher education and skills to promote your career prospects. Strong chances of up-gradation and new responsibilities could come up. Concentrate on the work at hand and you may need to work more and put in extra hours. Avoid confrontations and arguments at the work place, as this would spoil time and energy and brings no results. You have more work, less time so go ahead and meet challenges to complete the desired task. There may be a romantic development at your work place. Listen to your heart and express your feelings to your beloved.

**Capricorn: (December 22 - January 20)** The planetary configuration promotes your luck. New ideas and attitude to resolve issues would be beneficial. You will meet with appreciation even from unexpected quarters. Your professional prospects improve as you communicate well and interact in more positive way. You exhibit leadership qualities as you lead from the front. On the domestic front, try to compromise in family related matters. Change your priorities and support your spouse with love and affection. You will be in demand on the social front. You may visit religious places. This is an especially spiritual time for you—a time when you renew your energy and consider what things are important to you.

**Aquarius: (January 21 - February 18)** This phase brings good luck and appreciation in property and land related matters. This is the best time to resolve land and property related issues as this brings good returns. On the professional front, you have to be careful to meet desired success. Express your views and conditions clearly when it comes to business and financial dealings. Avoid any conflicts and confrontations. Children do you proud as they make progress in their chosen field. You can improve your love life by being more proactive. Some of you may fall in love with an intellectual person of a much younger age. Give yourself a new fitness routine and healthy diet programme to rejuvenate energy.

**Pisces: (February 19 - March 20)** You tackle work related issues and handle all legal matters successfully. People in law, justice and related fields will have great time as they use their talents and skills to meet desired success. Sports, competitive exams and fighting spirit come to the fore. You will have the ability to build up financial and monetary pursuits and good returns from overseas business are on cards. Differences and discordant tendencies between people you love could crop up. You have to be very careful and try to be friendly, cooperative and helpful to resolve the issues. You may find frequent changes and mood variation in your loved ones. Your style of communication boosts your magnetic powers and this brings favorable results in your romantic life. You need to conserve health and energy.

# Climate change may force us to live with invasive species

Invasive species are often looked upon with suspicion.

From non-native "weeds" to insects and aquatic invaders, introduced (or non-native) species continue to be misunderstood - and consequently often mismanaged.

Stated plainly, the vast majority of intentionally or unintentionally introduced species are not a threat to native ecosystems.

Governments and conservation organizations spend an enormous amount of their time and funding targeting the control of invasive species. Yet, most introduced species removal efforts are ineffective, time-consuming and usually unsuccessful in the long term.

Certainly, some invasive species - such as the zebra mussel or the emerald ash borer - can pose a threat to native habitats and efforts to control their spread are worthwhile. However, the vast majority of introduced species pose no danger at all to native ecosystems and in some cases can even provide new benefits.

Simply put, an over-fixation on demonizing "invasive" species, and controlling their spread, is ultimately futile and limits our understanding.

## Unspoken positives

Contemporary conservation practice is complex and biased against introduced species with a focus on maintaining ecosystems as they were. This policy and practice, while well-meaning, is leading us to underestimate the positive roles that introduced species can play in maintaining ecosystem resiliency.

At worst, these policies can even have unintended negative consequences for our ecosystems.

For example, herbicide treatments designed to cull invasive plants have affected butterfly populations by unintentionally killing off native plants. What's more, some invasive species can aid local ecosystems by helping to filter the air and water of contaminants, and some introduced species can be more drought-tolerant than native species in a world of increasingly human-modified climate extremes.

More fundamentally, "fortress" conservation policies are likely ultimately futile. Introduced plants are here to stay and are already highly adapted to local habitats, making their eradication challenging and perhaps even counter-productive to overall ecosystem health.

Increasing evidence suggests that some introduced species may even be more likely to adapt to certain climate extremes than native plants in that area.

Finally, introduced plants often differ in their characteristics from native plants, meaning they can provide new roles or replace the roles formerly served by native plants. For example, the introduced Siberian elm has adapted well to river areas that are now too dry for native elms. The introduced elm has been found to contribute similar roles in the community, like photo-

synthesis and providing wildlife habitats.

All this means that introduced plants could be well-placed to support, or even buffer, current ecosystems as they undergo transitions due to climate change.

## Moving forward

The reality is that the role of introduced plants in ecological communities is complex, and in a changing climate, we need to rethink the complete eradication of introduced plants in our landscapes.

To move the needle on this challenge, scientists need to better understand cases where introduced plants have the potential to contribute to our ecosystems. Through regular study, monitoring and a holistic ecosystem-wide viewpoint, we can prioritize which introduced plants we need to try to remove and which we may be able to leave. Or, indeed, whether supplemental additions of native (or introduced) species may be needed in a particular case.

Subjectively, we as a society need to decide how to weigh the relative importance of competing aspects of ecosystem functions over others.

In the deciduous forests of the eastern United States, introduced shrub and liana species have increased carbon sequestration, although they've also reduced the abundance of flowering plants.

In another example, the introduced humulus japonicus vine in river habitats in southern France reduced vine diversity but increased height of the plants, resulting in more photosynthesis.

How we weigh the various pros and cons is as much a cultural and philosophical question as it is purely scientific.

## Managing introduced plants

It is not suggested that introduced plants do not have negative impacts on our ecosystems. Nor that we should abandon our efforts to mitigate serious problems caused by some introduced species or that governments should stop trying to prevent potentially harmful species from entering their jurisdictions.

Rather, conservation practitioners and policymakers are urged to organize and prioritize the management and restoration of habitats based on the net benefit (or harm) of a species to an ecological community, instead of on the origin of the species.

Restoration plans could also better consider the potential ramifications of introduced species removal on the community. For example, legumes which are a source of high quality pollen for bees and nitrogen for the plant community, are often removed in tallgrass prairies.

In this changing climate, we need a more inclusive view of biological diversity that includes all species. What if some of our introduced plants are part of the solution and not the problem? (*The Conversation*)

"I think everything you do in life is a learning experience."

—Emeraude Toubia

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Modi's Mann Ki Baat

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi's Mann Ki Baat has completed 10 years of its uninterrupted engagement with people from all walks of life principally through the medium of All India Radio. No other prime minister had ever engaged the public in a direct, regular communication as Modi has. This has helped him reach out to even the poor in far-flung villages where radio programmes are still a craze. All India Radio maintains a high degree of professionalism while simultaneously disseminating information and entertaining its audience with a regular fare of well-packaged cultural programmes. Modi tapped on this huge potential to reach out to the common man – and this gave him good dividends in terms of popularity and personal appeal, which eventually translated into votes for him and the BJP-led alliance.

Modi's speeches are a far cry from the intellectual depth of Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, who engaged the literate millions through his writings as in the Discovery of India. Both Nehru and Modi spoke about the past and present; and Modi came up with little, barring anecdotes on the life and times of the ordinary, yet extraordinary people, while he also made it a point to sing paeans on community leaders and social reformers of the past. He demonstrates his empathy with the disadvantaged sections, be it the tribals, the Dalits or their leaders of yore, with the obvious intent of endearing these sections of the people to him. Wooing is a main endeavour of every successful politician though the plight of all these poor might never have changed for the better in any significant way. Modi, through his radio programme, appealed less to the intelligentsia or even the educated and well-informed segments of the society. He hardly spoke on the growth story, possibly because there is nothing exceptional to cite on any front other than the highway sector development under his 10-year-term. He also avoided, as is his wont, controversial topics and made no attempt to present his own mind on such matters. Nor did he speak affirmatively on issues like the farmer agitation, the stir against CAA etc. To that extent, his treatment of subjects has been superficial; and this has become a character of his Mann Ki Baat – it lacked depth.

To be fair, if Modi's speeches are turned into a book it would have much less of an appeal compared to the writings of Jawaharlal Nehru. Nehru's indulgences were of a high order. Through his writings, Nehru projected a grand vision for India. With his eminent upbringing and western education, the first prime minister built strong foundations for Independent India and shaped its destiny. As prime minister, took this growth trajectory forward and provided a much-needed stability to the nation through his repeated terms in power.

Letters to the Editor

Non-recognition of Khasi language

Editor, On September 23rd, 2024 there was an interesting panel discussion on "Why Khasi language remained unrecognized?" on the Shillong times YouTube channel, ably anchored by Dr Mousumi Chakraborty and the selected panelists were the enviable experts of the concerned subject matter. The focal point of this discourse was the inordinate delay on granting of recognition of the Khasi language by the official Language Commission under the 8th schedule of the Indian Constitution. It is, without an iota of doubt, very disheartening and emotional that notwithstanding multi-pronged approaches adopted by the Khasi Authors' Society (KAS) and NGOs to launch various overreaching movements for accreditation of language, the same has hitherto gone off on the tangent. Notably, the KAS, in a class of its own, along with its associated members and some NGOs, had launched a demonstration in Delhi to demonstrate its righteous demands for inclusion of Khasi language, this agitation has reportedly caught nation-wide attention. In

a word, this estimable plus unwavering spirit of the KAS can't go unappreciated. But on the flip side, I, for one, would like to invite KAS to objectively make a soul-searching effort to nip in the bud the existing fault-lines that pervade the holistic welfare of Khasi literature preceding its approbation under the 8th Schedule. Incidentally in this panel discussion, one of the public commentators has aptly observed "Nepotism in teaching job is one of the reasons Khasi language reaches nowhere". Additionally, the bestowing of Meghalaya literary awards annually are also fraught with controversy given that notable books are being sidetracked, but compositions of lesser literary values are being awarded. Mentionably, the selection committee for conferring this presentation are reportedly the selected members from the KAS and academic circles of the Khasi department of NEHU! And to top it all, the manner of selection of books in the academic course for students pursuing Khasi literature has self-evidently raised eyebrows in the public domain. Oddly, there are instances galore where several qualitative literary works in Khasi which have earned commendable accolades

A Culture Shock To Remember

By HH Mohrmen

An individual's identity is not just defined by their appearance, name, or education; it is also deeply influenced by the upbringing and culture they experience. Culture shapes not only how a person lives their life but also their worldview. The traits and perceptions people hold about life and various issues are largely influenced by the culture they belong to. Culture plays a crucial role in shaping the lives of individuals and the communities they are part of. Culture is the representation of the collective behavior and characteristics that are unique to a group of people.

**No Man is an Island**  
People around the world have distinct cultures and ways of life, which differ significantly from one another. An individual's life is thus influenced by the culture of the place where they are born and raised. No man is an island; each of us is shaped by the culture of the area we grew up in. The African has a saying, "it takes the whole village to raise a child."

When a people living in a distant place visit a region where the culture is different, they naturally encounter some conflict. The food might be different from what they are used to, the language may be unfamiliar, and the way of life may vary greatly. In such situations, one can feel out of place or awkward when encountering a lifestyle different from their own. The challenge of adapting to a new way of life, communicating a foreign language, and eating different kinds of food can be overwhelming.

**Blindly Grabbing the Opportunity**  
When an opportunity to study abroad presented itself early on, I seized it without much thought—why wouldn't I? Without even giving it a second thought, I decided to embark on a one-year training program in a foreign country. I was young and naive and I didn't try to understand the place I was headed for. On hindsight I also realized that, unlike the present where information is available at our fingertips, even if I had wanted to research the destination or the journey, there wasn't much I could have done in 1989, living in Jowai. The entire Jaintia hills district had only one library serving the entire region, and it wasn't well-stocked with resources.

It is also true that at that time, my only interest was in traveling abroad. I didn't consider the challenges I might face living in a different culture. I had no prior experience of traveling abroad,

and in fact even within the country, I had only visited a few cities, mostly on guided study tours. This trip was a new and unguided journey for me.

**Preparation (or lack thereof) to Travel Abroad**  
I had never studied in private schools; having attended government schools through high school then continued and completed my education at a government college. I spent a year studying science at St. Anthony's College in Shillong before realizing that studying science wasn't for me. I had never studied outside the state, and my knowledge of the world beyond was limited to what I learned in geography lessons and from reproducing maps during exams.

My knowledge of Great Britain in particular was limited to what I had heard, as Shillong was often called the "Scotland of the East." I knew about sheep and wool from commercial geography lessons. My interest in poetry introduced me to William Wordsworth, the Lake District, and the Daffodils. The Beatles sparked my interest in Liverpool and the Cavern Club, while my love for English literature familiarized me with Big Ben, the Tower Bridge, the Thames, the Royal Family, and Buckingham Palace. That was the extent of my knowledge about the country before I embarked on my journey to the UK.

**Birds of a Feather Flock Together**  
I didn't have many friends, and even those that I had were not equipped to advise me on how to prepare for life in another country. They had barely finished high school and had never left their hometowns. The farthest they had traveled was to Shillong or Guwahati. Jowai, in the late eighties, had a population of just over twenty-eight thousand, a few high schools, and only one college. A small-town boy who could barely speak English and knew nothing about the outside world, I embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime journey to the UK with no preparation.

**The Culture Shock Began in My Own Country**  
My culture shock began the day I boarded my first flight to Calcutta for my student visa interview at the British Embassy. On hindsight, the incident in Calcutta was a prelude to the cultural shock I would later experience.

During my visit to Calcutta for the visa interview, Sheba Travels, which ar-

anged my visa and travel, had someone waiting for me at the British Airways office near Russell Street. He was supposed to take me to the Consulate and assist with the interview process. However, I went directly to the British Consulate at Ho Chi Minh Street, which was not far from Russell Street, while the agent waited for me at the Airways office. The poor man must have been beside himself, thinking I was lost in Calcutta. The confusion was my fault; I hadn't paid close attention to the instructions and ended up losing the agent. I had the British part correct but my mistake was instead of going to the Airways office, I went straight to the Consulate.

**When Ignorance is Bliss**  
Fortunately, I had my passport and all the necessary documents with me, and since I already had an appointment for the interview, I was allowed to enter the Consulate. Meanwhile, the agent, unaware of my whereabouts, informed Sheba Travels in Shillong of the situation. Back then, communication could only be done via landline, and long-distance calls, known as trunk calls. Even those were challenging due to limited connections.

Arrangements were made for me to stay at the Meghalaya House on Russell Street, a place familiar to me from a previous excursion with the team from the Kiang Nangbah College, Jowai. In the evening, my relatives from Jowai and Shillong called Meghalaya House, and they were relieved to hear that I was safe and had completed my interview successfully.

**The Interview that wasn't really an Interview**  
At the visa office, the young British officer, likely in his forties, asked me several questions that I struggled to answer. Having been educated in government schools and colleges, I could barely speak English, and this was the first time I had ever heard a native English speaker. The man must have been frustrated, as he had to repeat his questions several times for me to understand. Fortunately for me, he couldn't deny me a visa because I already had full sponsorship for my studies and living expenses in the UK. Perhaps he didn't see me as a threat to his country (immigration policies were less strict then), so he concluded the interview. But before letting me go, he said, "I don't know how you'll manage to study in England when you can barely understand Eng-

lish." To which I confidently replied, "I'll try." I was glad I could at least understand that.

lish. To which I confidently replied, "I'll try." I was glad I could at least understand that.

The beginning of the voyage

When the day of travel approached, friends and neighbours came to bid me goodbye and on the day I left home some members of the church came in a bus to Guwahati airport to see me off. My international flight was from Delhi to Heathrow and in Delhi I was helped by my cousin Dr Rica who was then studying medicine at the Lady Hardinge Medical College, Delhi and Judy Pariat who accompanied us from Jowai.

I was supposed to study at Manchester and if people asked me I would not even be able to locate it on the map. Some may call it over-optimistic but it was really a blind trust that something good is waiting for me on the other side of the horizon which took me to Heathrow. Looking back I realized that trusting something good will happen has helped me embark on a new journey, charter unknown territories and embrace the challenges in my life.

The funny part of the journey was, during the eight hours air trip, I did not use the restroom to ease myself because I was not able to locate the toilet. Yet that was not the funniest and the most challenging part of the journey for me.

When the menu was presented to me, I could not even decide which food to order. A simple task as ordering food in the aircraft was also a big challenge for me. I didn't know anything that was in the menu, though the image of the food looked sumptuous, but it was all Greek to me even if it was written in English.

Now if I don't want to starve, I would have to eat some way or the other. I randomly picked any item on the menu and fortunately guess work came to my rescue. I selected the item in the menu by swirling my forefingers round and if the tips of the two fingers touched then it would be the bull's-eye and I would select the item. We started in the evening on a British Airways flight from Delhi, so it was dinner to begin with. And it was a guesswork dinner for I don't even know what I was actually ordering, but it served me well because I quite liked the food.

The rest of my journey would need another column. But that's how life it. It offers us surprises that we need to be willing to accept and embrace.

Rabies-A serious public health issue

By Dr. Sagarika Borah

Every year, September 28 is celebrated as "World Rabies Day" to create awareness among people about the impact of Rabies on humans and animals and to control it globally. Rabies is one of the oldest and the most terrifying zoonotic (transmits from animals to humans) disease that spread by mostly dog bites which kills 59000 people worldwide yearly. It is a serious public health issue prevalent in 150 countries in the world and predominant in Africa and Asia affecting mainly poor rural people. One third of the global rabies cases exist in India alone resulting about 20,000 deaths in a year. WHO reported that about one rabies death occurs in every 15 minute and over 40% of these deaths happens in children aged less than 15 years. Almost 99% human rabies cases are caused by dog bites. In India, the number of dog bite cases increased from 2.18 million in 2022 to 2.75 million in 2023.

The Lyssavirus, causative agent of rabies, remains in saliva of infected animals. All mammals are susceptible to rabies and can transmit the

The main aim of post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) is to eliminate or neutralize the rabies virus at the bite site, thereby preventing its entry into the nervous system. PEP vaccination should be initiated as soon as possible following exposure and should be accompanied by appropriate wound care. Pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) is also another way to prevent the human rabies but it is not currently included in India's national immunization schedule.

Studies have shown that not only general public is not aware about rabies prevention, but even health-care workers (HCWs) are not aware. Due to lack of knowledge, individuals often choose to use ineffective and harmful remedies instead of seeking proper PEP after animal bites. It is reported that a significant percentage of animal bite victims, ranging from 64.2% to 80%, rely on household preparations like chilli, lime, kerosene, turmeric, herbal medicines, and homemade oils for wound treatment. So, awareness empowers people to save themselves by seek-



disease including cats, other domestic animals but rarely monkeys. Rabies spreads to people and animals via saliva, usually through bites, scratches, or direct contact with mucosa (e.g. eyes, mouth, or open wounds).

The incubation period for rabies is usually 2-3 months but may vary from one week to one year, depending on factors such as the site of virus entry and the viral load. Initial symptoms of rabies include fever, pain, nausea and unusual or unexplained tingling, itching or burning sensations at the wound site. As the virus moves to the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord), neurological symptoms develop which results in furious form of rabies with hyperactivity, excitable behaviour, hallucinations, lack of coordination and hydrophobia (fear of water). Death occurs after a few days due to cardio-respiratory arrest. About two-thirds of people suffer from furious rabies. Others have paralytic rabies in which muscles gradually become paralyzed, starting from the wound site, then coma develops and eventually death occurs. The paralytic form of rabies is often misdiagnosed, contributing to the under-reporting of the disease. Once clinical symptoms appear, rabies is fatal in 100% of cases.

Though rabies is fatal, it can be prevented completely through timely immunization, even after exposure to the infectious agent. People continue to die of rabies because of negligence and limited awareness about the disease, no control in dogs and lack of basic medical care, such as post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) following an exposure. The best ways to prevent rabies include mass dog vaccination, post-exposure prophylaxis (PEP) and awareness among people. Mass dog vaccination is the most cost-effective way to prevent the spread of rabies to humans as it stops transmission at its source. While a variety of animal species can host rabies, dogs serve as the main reservoir hosts, being responsible for transmitting the infection in the majority of human cases worldwide. It is reported that vaccination of 70% of dog populations is sufficient to stop transmission of the disease between dogs and from dogs to humans.

ing the care they need with an understanding of how to prevent rabies in animals, where to suspect rabies, and what to do in case of a bite.

**Integrated bite case management (IBCM)**  
Dog bites, licks and scratches are common, but not all dogs are rabid. Even in areas where canine rabies is endemic, most of these exposures are not from rabid animals. Integrated bite case management, or IBCM is a way to determine whether a dog bite is likely to constitute exposure to rabies or not and therefore if post-exposure prophylaxis is, or is not, indicated. IBCM provides a strategy for countries to reduce human treatment costs for rabies, as they concurrently reduce transmission risk through control of rabies in dog populations.

The world is united with a goal to eliminate human rabies deaths by 2030. In February 2015, the World Health Organization (WHO), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the World Organisation for Animal Health (OIE) and the Global Alliance for Rabies Control (GARC) united to launch the End Rabies Now campaign, which proposed a goal of zero human rabies deaths by 2030, worldwide. In December 2015, a global conference of international stakeholders endorsed the vision of zero human rabies deaths by 2030, or Zero by 30.

**National plan to eliminate rabies**  
Aligned with the global objective of eliminating human deaths caused by dog mediated rabies by 2030 (Zero by 30), India introduced its National Action Plan for the Elimination of dog-mediated Rabies (NAPRE) in 2021. The government has issued a directive for human rabies to be made a notifiable disease in all states, which is a vital landmark in establishing effective reporting and surveillance systems. Subsequently, it will enhance the availability of diagnostic services and vaccines while allowing for the adaptation of rabies control policies to identify and address any existing gaps.

(The writers serves at ICAR-KVK, West Garo Hills; Email: sagadikaborah31@gmail.com)

in his car. The principal of the government-run Torani primary school had allegedly kept the body of the Class 1 girl in the car throughout the day and later dumped it in the school compound in Singvad taluka. The incident happened on September 19 but came into national news on September 22.

Even a government-run school failed to ensure the safety of its students. Where should parents go for their children's education? On whom should parents have trust when even the principal of the school turned out to be a threat to students' safety? Is not the safety of a girl student at a school as important as that of a female trainee doctor at a hospital?

Now, where is the demand for President's Rule or the resignation of the Chief Minister? Is it only reserved for a "single engine" government like West Bengal? This is nothing but a political tunnel vision that obstructs the views of gender atrocities happening in some states, including those ruled by the BJP.

Yours etc.,  
Sujit De,  
Kolkata

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

from the literary intelligentsia in the field of Khasi language, are being cold-shouldered for inclusion in the school, college and university syllabus, thereby unarguably depriving students from widening their literary knowledge and instead ending up being frogs in a well! And conversely more than one book produced by those in the influential orbit are incorporated for study at the academic levels. If such favoritism trends breed in our society, then how can we see any beckoning light at the end of the longish and dark tunnel?

Yours etc.,  
Name withheld on request,  
Via email

On custodial deaths

Editor, Any custodial death always raises a question about whether it has deliberately been orchestrated to stop the accused from exposing some powerful culprits. Therefore, the custodial death of one of the convicts of a gang-rape case in Assam's Dhing area is not above suspicion. One of three people accused of raping a 14-year-old girl in Dhing, central Assam, a handcuffed Tafajjil Islam, reportedly drowned while

trying to escape from police custody on August 24. His father has filed a petition in the high court seeking a judicial probe into the custodial death of his son. He also claimed that the arrest of his son was a case of mistaken identity based on the wrong photograph of one of the accused that went viral on social media.

The petitioner's counsel, argued that the gang rape accused, and the deceased were namesakes. He also said the petitioner was not provided with the post-mortem report.

In May this year, the Supreme Court expressed concern over custodial deaths and extrajudicial killings in Assam. The court was hearing a petition that cited 80 cases of "fake encounters" since May 2021, which resulted in 28 deaths and 48 injuries.

Now, another custodial death happened under another "double engine" government on September 23. According to the official report, Akshay Shinde, the accused of sexually assaulting two girls at a school in Badlapur, Maharashtra, snatched the revolver from one of the policemen, and he died in retaliatory firing by police.

The Bombay High Court expressed serious concerns over the custodial death of the accused. The court asked,

"Why was he shot in the head and not in the legs or arms first?" Justice Prithviraj Chavan observed, "He wasn't a heavily built or strong man. This raises serious doubts. This cannot be termed as an encounter."

I wonder how the people would have reacted had an accused in a case like the RG Kar Hospital case, died in custody in Kolkata. They would certainly have smelt a rat had the same thing happened in Bengal. Indeed, a question on custodial death must loudly be raised. But why is there a deafening silence on those two custodial deaths now?

There is an intense protest against the rape-murder at the RG Kar Hospital, Kolkata. No doubt, this must be appreciated. But one percent of its intensity has not been found in the demand for justice for the rape-murder victims of Rudrapur in Uttarakhand, Muzaffarpur in Bihar, and Kolhapur in Maharashtra, though all these incidents happened in August this year.

On September 19, another such incident happened in another "double engine" government. A school principal in Gujarat's Dahod was arrested on the charge of sexually assaulting and killing a six-year-old girl student of his school while giving her a lift on the way to school